

# **MEMORIALIZING, ALLEGORY AND THE REWRITING OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

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**SALEM.**  
**1847.**  
**N. HAWTHORNE**  
**Sur<sup>y</sup>.**

'Hawthorne's stencil used when he was the customs surveyor in Salem',  
(*A Descriptive Guide To The Exhibition Commemorating The Death Of  
Nathaniel Hawthorne 1804-1864*, The Grolier Club, New York, October  
20 - December 5 1964, p 6).



## ***THESIS ABSTRACT***

The thesis uses Hawthorne's interest in a scene of filial ambiguity, namely Samuel Johnson's penance, to argue that Hawthorne's (re-) writing is characterised by a subversion of origins (both metaphysical and cultural). Complementing this argument, the thesis also attempts to show, with reference to texts by J. Hillis Miller, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul de Man and Maurice Blanchot, how deconstruction can offer new and important insights into Hawthorne's writing. Having outlined other important critical approaches (New Critical and New Historical) the thesis claims that, with its heightened sensitivity to the use of tropes, deconstruction is a particularly useful critical tool when it comes to reading Hawthorne. The thesis pays particularly close attention to two theoretical texts: Miller's *Hawthorne and History: Defacing It* and Lyotard's 'Rewriting Modernity' and attempts to extend Miller's analysis (the only deconstructive text which refers directly to Hawthorne). This involves two movements. Firstly the thesis extends Miller's analysis by showing how it is echoed in the writings of de Man, Blanchot, and Lyotard. Secondly, the thesis refers to a wider selection of writings from Hawthorne's corpus (including writings from *Twice-told Tales*, *Mosses From An Old Manse*, *The Snow-Image*, 'Alice Doane's Appeal', *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Marble Faun*, *Our Old Home*, the final 'unfinished' manuscripts and diary and notebook entries). Using insights from these texts the thesis argues that Hawthorne rejects the idea that history involves the storing up of facts for future retrieval (a project which is aligned with memorialising). Hawthorne, it is argued, subverts this sense of memorialising by repeatedly drawing attention to an instability that contaminates each and every historical happening.

**ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR WORKS BY HAWTHORNE (WORKS ARE LISTED ALPHABETICALLY).**

- ACM - *The American Claimant Manuscripts, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XII*, edited by Edward H. Davidson, Claude M. Simpson and L. Neal Smith (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977).
- AN - *The American Notebooks, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume VIII*, edited by Claude M. Simpson, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972).
- BS - *Biographical Stories For Children* [1842], collected in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *True Stories From History And Biography, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume VI*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972).
- Ch - 'Chiefly About War Matters. By A Peaceable Man.' [1862] in *Miscellaneous Prose And Verse, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XXIII*, edited by Thomas Woodson, Claude M. Simpson, L. Neal Smith (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994).
- EL - *The Elixir of Life Manuscripts, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XIII*, edited by Edward H. Davidson, Claude M. Simpson and L. Neal Smith (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977).
- EN - *The English Notebooks 1853-1856, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XXI*, edited by Thomas Woodson and Bill Ellis, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997).



HSG - *The House Of The Seven Gables* [1851], Edited with an Introduction by Milton R. Stern (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

FIN - *The French And Italian Notebooks, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XIV*, Edited by Thomas Woodson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).

MF- *The Marble Faun* [1860], With an Introduction and Notes by Richard H. Brodhead, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

OOH - *Our Old Home: A Series Of English Sketches* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1863).

SL - *The Scarlet Letter* [1850] in *The Scarlet Letter And Selected Tales*, Edited with an Introduction by Thomas E. Connolly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

T&S - *Tales And Sketches*. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Library of America, 1982)

U - 'Uttoxeter' - 'Special Appendix: Original 1857 'Uttoxeter'' in *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume V*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970) pp 481 - 487.

#### **OTHER ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT:**

DI - *Hawthorne and History: Defacing It*, J. Hillis Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991).

RM - 'Rewriting Modernity', Jean-François Lyotard, in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).



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## PREFACE

Hawthorne 'is infinitely too fond of allegory' wrote Edgar Allan Poe in 1847.<sup>1</sup> Poe's criticism was reiterated in differing ways by Henry James in 1879, Yvor Winters in 1938 and in the New Critical view of Hawthorne that was prevalent in the mid twentieth century United States.<sup>2</sup> In more recent times, however, there have been a number of more positive evaluations of Hawthorne's allegory.<sup>3</sup> It will become apparent in sections II and III of the introduction, that important differences of opinion as to the significance of Hawthorne's allegory can be discerned in these reappraisals. The 'rewriting' in the title of the thesis, then, partly refers to these reappraisals and re-evaluations. However, the sense of the word that I really want to emphasize describes Hawthorne's own style of writing. This sense derives from Jean-François Lyotard's 'Rewriting Modernity.'<sup>4</sup> In 'Rewriting Modernity' Lyotard connects rewriting with Freud's

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<sup>1</sup> 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne' (*Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book*, Nov.1847), collected in G.R. Thompson, ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays And Reviews*, (New York: Library of America, 1984), p 587.

<sup>2</sup>See Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879), (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956), Yvor Winters, *Maule's Curse: Seven Studies In The History Of American Obscurantism*, (New York: New Directions, 1938) - particularly 'Maule's Curse, or Hawthorne and the Problem of Allegory', R.P. Blackmur, Afterword to 'The Celestial Railroad and Other Stories' (1963) in *Outsider at the Heart of Things: Essays by R.P. Blackmur*, ed. James T. Jones, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), Charles Feidelson Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) and F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).

<sup>3</sup>See J. Hillis Miller, *Hawthorne and History: Defacing It*, Donald E. Pease *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), G. R. Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne's Provincial Tales*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> 'Rewriting Modernity' is a modified text of a paper given at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and Madison in April 1986. Other works by Lyotard that I have drawn on, either



sense of working through. 'I recall' he says:

that in working through, the only guiding thread at one's disposal consists in sentiment or, better, in listening to a sentiment. A fragment of a sentence, a scrap of information, a word come along. They are immediately linked with another 'unit'. No reasoning, no argument, no mediation. By proceeding in this way, one slowly approaches a scene, the scene of something. One describes it. One does not know what it is. One is sure only that it refers to some past, both furthest and nearest past, both one's own past and others' past. This lost time is not represented like in a picture, it is not even presented. It is what presents the elements of a picture, an impossible picture. Rewriting means registering these elements (RM 31).

The importance of this passage to my thesis will become apparent. The passage, I argue, has particular relevance to Hawthorne's style of writing. The scene that one approaches, says Lyotard, refers to 'both one's own and others' past'. Yet this scene cannot be represented; it is never even really present. Whatever connects one's own past to others' past, then, has no

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directly or indirectly, include *The Postmodern Condition*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press / Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), *Just Gaming*, (with Jean-Loup Thébaud), tr. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press / Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), *The Differend*, tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press/Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988), *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, tr. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1990), *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, translations edited by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (London: Turnaround, 1992) and *postmodern fables* tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). See also Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).



content, and has no form either. It is rather, suggests Lyotard, akin to a sentiment, a sentiment that can only be evoked by a certain postmodern rewriting.<sup>5</sup> 'It is clear' continues Lyotard:

that this rewriting provides no knowledge of the past. ...The result is not the definition of a past element. On the contrary, it presupposes that the past itself is the actor or agent that gives to the mind the elements with which the scene will be constructed.

But this scene in its turn in no way claims faithfully to represent the supposed 'primal scene' (RM 31).

Freud associated the 'primal scene' with a crime at the origin. A real or imaginary scene of sexual intercourse between parents is 'interpreted by the child as an act of violence by the father'.<sup>6</sup> The difference between the primal scene and the scene that Lyotard describes lies in the fact that the latter can never be interpreted. 'The essence of the event: that *there* is 'comes before' *what* there is' says Lyotard in *Heidegger and 'the jews'*.<sup>7</sup> This is why Lyotard turns to Freud's sense of deferred action. 'Lyotard', writes Bill Readings in *Introducing Lyotard: Art And Politics*, 'thinks the anachronistic temporality of history by analogy with Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, in which the event occurs both too soon and too late. It

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<sup>5</sup> It is not simply anachronistic to associate Nathaniel Hawthorne (who was born in 1804 and died in 1864) with Lyotard's sense of the postmodern. Lyotard's writing on postmodernism has been distinguished by an insistence that the term should not be used to describe a period of twentieth century history. So, for instance, he associates sixteenth century essayist Montaigne with the postmodern (See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p81).

<sup>6</sup>J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language Of Psycho-Analysis* [1973], With an Introduction by Daniel Lagache, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books And The Institute Of Psycho-Analysis, 1988), p 335.

<sup>7</sup>Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, p 16.



occurs too soon to be understood, and is understood too late to be recovered'.<sup>8</sup> The 'primal scene', then, is akin to an event which is always missing. There never really was an act of violence at the origin. There never really was an Oedipal 'primal father'.<sup>9</sup>

Rewriting means registering the absence of this centre, and as I have already suggested, the term has a particular relevance to my analysis of Hawthorne's writing. The thesis will focus on a particular 'scene' which, for at least twenty-six years, was dear to Hawthorne: Samuel Johnson's penance in Uttoxeter market-place. Having described Hawthorne's interest in this scene in the first section of the introduction it will reappear like a leitmotif at various point throughout the thesis before I return to it at the end of the concluding chapter. The thesis will ultimately focus on two of Hawthorne's works: 'Alice Doane's Appeal' (1835) and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). In the third section of this introduction I introduce readings of the two texts, readings which I shall go on to question later in the thesis. For one reason or another no recent work on Hawthorne's tales seems to ignore 'Alice Doane's Appeal'. I have been attracted to the story because it deals with issues of memorializing and rewriting in very obvious ways, but I shall say more about it in the third section of the introduction and, in the concluding chapter, I shall present my own reading of the piece. In Chapter 3, the longest chapter in the thesis, I present a

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<sup>8</sup> Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art And Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) p 59. For other introductions to Lyotard's writing see D. Carroll, *Paraesthetics* (London: Methuen, 1987) and Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the event*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). See also Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Judging Lyotard*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>9</sup>For Freud's use of the term 'primal father' see *Totem and Taboo* [1912-13], *The Penguin Freud Library* 13, (London: Penguin Books, 1990). See also "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" [1918], *The Penguin Freud Library* 9, (London: Penguin Books, 1990) for the 'primal scene' and *Nachträglichkeit*.



reading of *The Scarlet Letter*, a reading for which I prepare in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on a range of Hawthorne's writing including tales, sketches (with a particular reference to those collected in *Our Old Home*) and romances (including the final unfinished works). The introduction itself, as I have intimated, will be divided into three sections. In the first section I will give an account of Hawthorne's rather vexed relationship with Johnson's Uttoxeter penance before making some initial comments about connections between this and the themes of memorializing and allegory. In the second section I will introduce a number of post-structuralist writers (Lyotard, Miller, Blanchot, de Man) whose work, and this will become apparent as the thesis continues, can make an important contribution to Hawthorne studies. In the final section I will introduce (with a particular focus on *The Scarlet Letter* and 'Alice Doane's Appeal') the two dominant strains in twentieth century Hawthorne studies: New Criticism and New Historicism. I will begin to argue, and this argument runs throughout the thesis (sometimes obviously, sometimes obliquely), that a post-structuralist reading of Hawthorne is more faithful to the writer's own style.



## INTRODUCTION

# THE HISTORICAL 'OBJECT': MEMORIALIZING, ALLEGORY AND THE REWRITING OF SAMUEL JOHNSON'S PENANCE

### *I*

Between 1853 and 1857 Hawthorne was American Consul in Liverpool. In the summer of 1855 he visits Lichfield, a cathedral city in Staffordshire, and sees a statue of Dr. Johnson.<sup>10</sup> On the statue's pedestal are three bas-reliefs, one of which Hawthorne finds, so he said in a July 1855 diary entry, 'somewhat touching and effective' (EN 221). It shows, he says:

Johnson doing penance at Uttoxeter, the wind and rain beating hard against him, very sad and woe-begone, while some market people and children gaze in his face, and behind are two old people with clasped hands, praying for him. I think these last must be the spirits of his father and mother; though, in queer proximity, there are dead and living ducks (EN 221).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson Monument (1838), by Richard Cockle Lucas. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Staffordshire*, in Nikolaus Pevsner, and Judy Nairn, eds., *The Buildings of England*, (Penguin Books, 1974), p 194.

<sup>11</sup>For recent articles on Hawthorne and Johnson's penance see J.D.C. Masheck, 'Samuel Johnson's Uttoxeter Penance in the Writings of Hawthorne,' *Hermathena*, CXI (1971), O. M. Brack Jr., 'Hawthorne and Johnson at Uttoxeter,' in Robert G. Collmer and Jack W. Herring, eds., *American Bypaths: Essays in Honor of E. Hudson Long*, (Waco: Baylor



The first reference to this incident was made by Boswell in 1791.<sup>12</sup> The Reverend Richard Warner gives another, fuller, account of the incident in *Tour Through The Northern Counties* (1802):

During the last visit which the Doctor made to Lichfield, the friends with whom he was staying missed him one morning at the breakfast table. On inquiry after him of the servants, they understood he had set off from Lichfield at a very early hour, without mentioning to any of the family whither he was going. The day passed without the return of the illustrious guest, and the party began to be very uneasy on his account, when, just before the supper-hour, the door opened and the Doctor stalked into the room. A solemn silence of a few minutes ensued, nobody daring to enquire the cause of his absence, which was at length relieved by Johnson addressing the lady of the house in the following manner: 'Madam, I beg your pardon for the abruptness of my departure from your house this morning, but I was constrained to it by my conscience. Fifty years ago Madam, on this day, I committed a breach of filial piety, which has ever since lain heavy on my mind

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University Press, 1980) and Judy Schaaf Anhorn, "Literary Reputation and the Essays of *Our Old Home*", *Studies in the Novel*, (Denton, Texas) 1991 Spring, 23:1, 152-66.

<sup>12</sup> To Henry White, a young clergyman, with whom he now formed an intimacy, so as to talk to him with great freedom, [Johnson] mentioned that he could not in general accuse himself of being an undutiful son. ... 'Once, indeed, (said he,) I was disobedient; I refused to attend my father to Uttoxeter Market. Pride was the source of that refusal, and the remembrance of it was painful. A few years ago, I desired to atone for this fault; I went to Uttoxeter in very bad weather, and stood for a considerable time bareheaded in the rain, on the spot where my father's stall used to stand. In contrition I stood, and I hope the penance was expiatory' (James Boswell, *The Life Of Samuel Johnson*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp 333 - 334).

and has not till this day been expiated. My father you recollect, was a bookseller, and had long been in the habit of attending Uttoxeter market, and opening a stall for the sale of his books during the day. Confined to his bed by indisposition he requested me, this time fifty years ago, to visit the market and attend the stall in his place. But Madam, my pride prevented me from doing my duty, and I gave my father a refusal. To do away with the sin of this disobedience, I this day went in a postchaise to Uttoxeter, and going into the market at the time of high business uncovered my head and stood with it bare an hour before the stall which my father had formerly used, exposed to the sneers of the standers-by and the inclemency of the weather; a penance by which I trust I have propitiated heaven for this only instance, I believe, of contumacy toward my father'.<sup>13</sup>

This is almost an inversion of the 'primal scene' (it is Oedipus at Colonus, one might say). The son remembers his father as a father, rather than as the omnipotent 'primal father'. This sense of fragility is not simply confined to the content of the memory; it also extends to the form that the memory takes. Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* appeared seven years after the death of its subject and Warner's reference to the incident appeared nineteen years after Johnson's death. So, at the very least one can say that the two accounts were the result of a certain amount of imaginative reconstruction. Finally, of course, one can never know if the incident ever really happened at all. However, by the time Hawthorne wrote about Johnson's penance it was apparent that, in any case, it had a life of its own. It is possible that Hawthorne saw Thomas Carlyle's reference to the incident in a review of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* which first

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<sup>13</sup> Reverend Richard Warner, *Tour Through The Northern Counties* (Bath: 1802), vol. i. p 105, as cited in G. Birkbeck Hill, ed., *Johnsonian Miscellanies Vol II*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, MDCCCXCVII), pp 426 - 427.



appeared in 1832.<sup>14</sup> Having cited Warner's account Carlyle wrote:

Who does not figure to himself this spectacle, amid the 'rainy weather, and the sneers,' or wonder, 'of the bystanders'? The memory of old Michael Johnson, rising from the far distance; sad beckoning in the 'moonlight of memory:' how he had toiled faithfully hither and thither; patiently among the lowest of the low; been buffeted and beaten down, yet ever risen again, ever tried it anew - And oh, when the wearied old man, as Bookseller, or Hawker, or Tinker, or whatsoever it was that fate had reduced him to, begged help of *thee* for one day, - how savage, diabolic, was that mean Vanity, which answered No! He sleeps now; after life's fitful fever, he sleeps well: but thou, O Merciless, how now wilt thou still the sting of that remembrance? - The picture of Samuel Johnson standing bareheaded in the market there, is one of the grandest and saddest we can paint. Repentance! Repentance! He proclaims, as with passionate sobs: but only to the ear of Heaven, if Heaven will give him audience: the earthly ear and heart, that should have heard it, are now closed, unresponsive forever.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Boswell's Life Of Johnson' [first published in *Fraser's Magazine* No.28, 1832] in Thomas Carlyle, *Critical And Miscellaneous Essays: Collected And Republished Vol. III* [1839], (London: Chapman And Hall, LD, 1969) p 126. Hawthorne withdrew *Carlyle's Miscellanies* on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1838 and July 25<sup>th</sup> 1838. It is possible that the 1832 review was included in one of these volumes. Certainly, Hawthorne's first known reference to the incident comes three months later in an October 1838 entry notebook entry (AN 180). However, it is not really possible to say when Hawthorne first came across a reference to Johnson's penance. In the 1863 'Lichfield and Uttoxeter' Hawthorne says that he became 'acquainted' with Samuel Johnson 'at a very early period of my life, through the good offices of Mr. Boswell' (OOH 139) so it is quite possible that he was aware of the incident from a very early age.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Boswell's Life Of Johnson', p 126.

One could almost say that, standing in Uttoxeter market-place, Johnson became a monument. Identical to himself, his gesture appears to have been made with eternity in mind. Much of Carlyle's sentiment seems to reappear when Hawthorne discusses the event. However, Hawthorne was troubled by this sense of certainty. Hawthorne subtly challenges the veracity of the original event, Johnson's act of remembrance, by questioning his own act of remembrance. Yet, in a strange way, one could say that he did this because he was so faithful to the event and as the thesis unfolds it will become apparent that this questioning was central to Hawthorne's writing.

Hawthorne's first reference to Johnson's penance can be found in an 1838 diary entry (AN 180). In the 1842 *Biographical Stories For Children* he actually retells the story in his own words.<sup>16</sup> In 1855, apparently inspired by the Lichfield bas-relief, he makes his one and only visit to Uttoxeter. The visit is not an unqualified success. 'I spent I know not how many hours in Uttoxeter' writes Hawthorne in his diary entry, 'and, to say the truth, was heartily tired of it; my penance being a great deal longer than Dr. Johnson's' (EN 228/229). However, one thing seem to particularly rile him. 'It was my impression' he says:

that the market-place of Uttoxeter lay around the church; and if I remember the incident aright, Johnson mentions that his father's bookstall had stood in the market-place, close by the church. But this is not the case. The church has a street, of ordinary width, passing around it; while the market-place, though near at hand, is not really contiguous

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<sup>16</sup>See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Biographical Stories For Children* (1842), collected in *True Stories From History And Biography, The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume VI*, (Ohio State University Press, 1972), pp 213 - 284.



with the church, nor would there probably be much of the bustle of the market about this edifice, now-a-days. Still a minute's walk would bring a person from the centre of the market-place to the door of the church; and Michael Johnson may very well have had the stall in the angle of the tower and body of it; - not now, indeed, because there is an iron railing around it...The market-place is rather spacious, and is surrounded by houses and shops, some old, with red-tiled roofs, other with a pretense of newness, but probably as old as the rest. Unless it were by the church, I could not fix on any one spot more than another, likely to have been the spot where Johnson stood to do his penance (EN 227).

In 1857, parts of the 1855 diary entry appeared in 'Uttoxeter', a sketch published in *The Keepsake*.<sup>17</sup> 'How strange and stupid it is' Hawthorne wrote in 'Uttoxeter' (in a paragraph which appears to have been copied, with one or two alterations, from the 1855 diary entry):

that tradition should not have marked and kept in mind the very place! How shameful (nothing less than that) that there should be no local memorial of this incident, as beautiful and touching a passage as can be cited out of any human life - no inscription of it, almost as sacred as a verse of Scripture, on the wall of the church; no statue of the venerable and illustrious penitent, in the market-place, to throw a wholesome awe over its traffic, its earthliness, its selfishness! Such a statue, if the piety of man did not raise it, might almost have been expected to grow up out of the pavement, of its own accord,

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<sup>17</sup> 'Uttoxeter', first published in *The Keepsake* (London, 1857), pp 108-113, and in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, XIV (April 1857), pp 639-641. See 'Special Appendix: Original 1857 'Uttoxeter'' in, *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume V*.

on the spot that had been watered by Johnson's remorseful tears, and by the rain that dript from him (U 484).

In 1852, Hawthorne's wife (Sophia) wrote to her sister Elizabeth Peabody: 'Mr Fields writes from England that 15000 copies of the Scarlet Letter have been sold in England!!!!!! that Mr Hawthorne's books are even peddled about the streets. His popularity there is immense'.<sup>18</sup> Hawthorne's reputation can be gauged in the Preface to a history of Uttoxeter which was apparently written as a direct result of his visit to the town. 'The history of Uttoxeter', writes Francis Redfern in *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter* (1865):

now for the first time submitted to the public, owes its existence to the visit paid to the town a few years ago by that distinguished author, Nathaniel Hawthorn [sic], who, out of admiration for the genius of Dr. Samuel Johnson, came into Staffordshire to visit the places at Lichfield rendered memorable by circumstances in the Doctor's life, and to see the spot - interesting above all others in connection with his name - which he consecrated by his penance and tears at Uttoxeter. In this latter object he was unsuccessful, for no one was able to point out the spot. It had not been described in books, and he returned, lamenting that place had not been permanently marked by a fitting memorial. The visit to Uttoxeter of so remarkable a person, from a distance of three thousand miles, for such a purpose, and the appearance shortly afterwards of an article from his talented pen, created an anxiety in the town to recover a knowledge of so deeply interesting a site. The desired information was not, however, elicited, although the matter became a subject of

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<sup>18</sup>Cited in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks 1853-1856*, p 709.



discussion in the press.<sup>19</sup>

Redfern returns to the incident later in the work. 'A confession and contrition more touching never fell from the lips of a great and venerable man', he says of Johnson's penance.<sup>20</sup> 'Is it any wonder', Redfern continues:

that distinguished writers should so frequently notice the circumstance? Or that any one should even visit Uttoxeter to try to see the spot consecrated by Johnson's tears? Scarcely, however, would one think that a gentleman who lived three thousand miles away, although happening to be in England, would come to Uttoxeter for such a purpose. Yet, so it has been. No less noted a person than Nathaniel Hawthorn, of America, author of *Twice told Tales* and *Transformation*<sup>21</sup>, visited Uttoxeter in 1857 [in fact it was in 1855], to see the spot where this remarkable incident took place. It appears nearly all concern, locally, about the place had passed out of people's minds, until this eminent foreigner, after seeing Uttoxeter for the intention stated, wrote a description of his visit for one of the annuals, and which was copied into the local papers, and perused with great eagerness. The production, as might be expected from so vivid a pen, was the occasion

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<sup>19</sup> Francis Redfern, Preface to *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter: With Notices Of Places In Its Neighbourhood*, (London: J.Russell Smith, 36, Soho Square; Uttoxeter: Published By The Author; Derby: L. Jewitt, 'Telegraph' Office, Wardwick, 1865), pp vii - viii.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Redfern, *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter*, p 106.

<sup>21</sup> '[The] English edition of *The Marble Faun* was published under the title *Transformation* in February 1860, and the American edition with the current title appeared in early March. [A] Postscript was added in response to readers' clamors for a more resolved ending in a new printing in mid-March' (Notes to Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, With an Introduction and Notes by Richard H. Brodhead, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p 484.

of several letters appearing in a local paper, but without finding out, as they were intended to do, the place where the Doctor stood.<sup>22</sup>

‘I made enquiries myself amongst old people then’, Redfern continues, ‘which resulted, about two years afterwards, in the place being discovered’.<sup>23</sup> ‘[Any] doubt as to the actual spot where Doctor Johnson relieved his mind of the burdening sense of guilt, for refusing to comply with the lawful requirement of his father, when a boy, may be considered at an end’.<sup>24</sup> I shall return to Redfern’s discovery in the concluding chapter.

In 1886 a new, revised, edition of the Redfern’s work was published.<sup>25</sup> ‘In bringing the story of Doctor Johnson’s penance to a conclusion’, says Redfern in the new edition:

it must not be omitted to name that a memorial thereof has at length been fixed in Uttoxeter Market Place in the north side of the conduit where it is visible to all who pass that way. It is a facsimile, in Portland cement, of the cartoon on the north side of Johnson’s monument at Lichfield, and was executed by Mr. P. Squagtrae, of Birmingham. The undertaking originated with the Rev. H. Abud, vicar and rural dean,

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Redfern, *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter*, pp 106 - 107.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Redfern, *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter*, p 112.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Redfern, *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter*, p 115.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Redfern, *History And Antiquities Of The Town And Neighbourhood Of Uttoxeter, With Notices Of Adjoining Places*, Second Edition, (Hanley: Allbut And Daniel, Percy Street Printing Works. London: Simpkin, Marshall And Co., And Published For The Author, Uttoxeter, 1886).



and the monies were collected by Mr. F.T. Fearn.<sup>26</sup>

This isn't the conclusion of the story at all, however. On Friday July 31<sup>st</sup> 1857 Hawthorne notes that while visiting an art exhibition in Manchester a young man<sup>27</sup> (described as 'a traveler for a publishing firm'):

introduced conversation by talking of Uttoxeter, and my description of it in the Keepsake.

He said that the article had caused a good deal of pique among the good people of Uttoxeter, on account of the ignorance which I attribute to them as to the circumstance which connects Johnson to the town. The spot where Johnson stood can, it appears, still be pointed out; it is on one side of the market-place, and not in the neighbourhood of the church.<sup>28</sup> I forget whether I recorded, at the time, that an Uttoxeter newspaper was sent me, containing a proposal that a statue or memorial should be erected on the spot. It

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<sup>26</sup> Francis Redfern, *History And Antiquities Of The Town And Neighbourhood Of Uttoxeter, With Notices Of Adjoining Places*, pp 174 - 175. Nikolaus Pevsner refers to the stone 'conduit' as 'the classical 'Weighing Machine' of 1854 by Thomas Fradgely. It has, he continues, 'four pediments and a stone dome' (Nikolaus Pevsner *Staffordshire*, in Nikolaus Pevsner and Judy Nairn, eds., *The Buildings of England*, (Penguin Books, 1974), p 290). Hawthorne would have seen the 'stone conduit' without, of course, the bas-relief. The bas-relief is on one side of a construction which one could describe as an ornate hut.

<sup>27</sup> Might this be the same young man that Hawthorne had met in the 'Nag's Head' in Uttoxeter when he visited the town in the summer of 1855? 'There was a young man', Hawthorne noted in his diary:

in the public room who seemed to be an artizan from Manchester, and we had some talk together - a shrewd, humorous man; of good information, and making up his own ideas about matters; - loyal, too, I thought, and not caring about changes in church and state (EN 228).

<sup>28</sup> If Redfern suggests that he 'discovered' the exact spot 'two years' after the publication of Hawthorne's 'Uttoxeter' then one can presume that the debate went on, for Redfern at least, until 1859.

would gratify me exceedingly if such a result should come from my pious pilgrimage thither.<sup>29</sup>

However, Hawthorne rewrote 'Uttoxeter' for the 1863 *Our Old Home*, a work that is subtitled 'A Series Of English Sketches'. The 1857 sketch was extended to include material about Lichfield itself - and consequently renamed 'Lichfield and Uttoxeter'. A significant emendation was also made to the original passages on Uttoxeter relating to his discovery that his visit and the subsequent article appeared to have resulted in plans to erect a memorial to Johnson's penance. The revision is a little strange:

Long after my visit to Uttoxeter, I was told that there were individuals in the town who could have shown me the exact, indubitable spot where Johnson performed his penance. I was assured, moreover, that sufficient interest was felt in the subject to have induced certain local discussions as to the expediency of erecting a memorial. With all deference to my polite informant, I surmise that there is a mistake, and decline, without further and precise evidence, giving credit to either of the above statements. The inhabitants know nothing, as a matter of general interest, about the penance, and care nothing for the scene of it (OOH 155/156).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See *The English Notebooks 1853-1856*, pp 354-355, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sunday, Old Trafford.

<sup>30</sup> Although Redfern's *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter* was published in 1865 (and apparently completed in 1864 (see p 283)) he nevertheless appears not to have seen the 1863 *Our Old Home*. He refers to it, however, in the 1886 second edition of *History And Antiquities Of The Town And Neighbourhood Of Uttoxeter*. He appears to believe that Hawthorne had his work in mind when he made the above cited comments. 'I know', he writes:

that Mr. Hawthorn in his collected papers entitled *Our Old Home*, which comprises



Obviously one can never really know why Hawthorne rewrote the 1857 sketch in this way. Yet I will argue that this rewriting exemplifies Hawthorne's attitude to remembering. As with Lyotard, for Hawthorne remembering can never escape an ambivalent double-bind. 'One tries to remember', says Lyotard, 'and this is probably a good way of forgetting again' (RM 29). Hawthorne, I argue, never really wanted to be taken literally. For Hawthorne, I argue, Johnson's penance was only ever meant to evoke something else (for this reason Hawthorne's attitude to allegory is very important in this thesis). A monument, I will argue, would betray this 'something else'. Hawthorne was interested in aesthetic feeling which is connected to a disjunction between any event and a 'something' which exceeds it. 'The reader', Hawthorne writes in the 1863 *Our Old Home* version:

will possibly be scandalized to learn what was the first, and indeed, the only important affair that I attended to, after coming so far to indulge a solemn and high emotion, and standing now on the very spot where my pious errand should have been consummated. I stepped into one of the rustic hostleries and got my dinner... And as regards my lack of sentiment in eating my dinner, - it was the wisest thing that I had done all day. A sensible man had better not let himself be betrayed into these attempts to realize the

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the paper about his visit to Uttoxeter, disputes what is said in the first edition of this book on this point; but the very indifferent way in which he made inquiries about the object of his special visit to the town, clearly shows that whilst we may be attracted by the charm of his writing and the beauty of his sentiments, little reliance can be placed upon what he merely imagined respecting the identity of the site of Doctor Johnson's penance (p 171).

As he died in 1864 and the first edition of Redfern's book was published in 1865 the only way that Hawthorne could possibly have known about Redfern's findings is if they appeared in some other form first (i.e. in a newspaper article). I've found no evidence of this, however.

things which he has dreamed about, and which, when they cease to be purely ideal in his mind, will have lost the truest of their truth, the loftiest and profoundest part of their power over his sympathies. Facts, as we really find them, whatever poetry they may involve, are covered with a stony excrescence of prose, resembling the crust on a beautiful sea-shell, and they never show their most delicate and divinest colors until we shall have dissolved away their grosser actualities by steeping them long in a powerful menstruum of thought. And seeking to actualize them again, we do but renew the crust. If this were otherwise, - if the moral sublimity of a great fact depended in any degree on its garb of external circumstances, things which change and decay, - it could not itself be immortal and ubiquitous, and only a brief period of time and a little neighborhood would be spiritually nourished by its grandeur and beauty (OOH 153/154).

Moral sublimity cannot be attached to any particular time and place. On the contrary, it is 'immortal' and 'ubiquitous'. Moral sublimity, Hawthorne implies, can not be reduced to any particular sentiment (Johnson's remorse, for instance). On the contrary, it is a universal feeling (but I shall say more about this in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). It just so happens, Hawthorne seems to say, that the moral sublime can only ever be sensed in the particular - but that certainly does not mean that it is reducible to any specific particularity. On the contrary, the moral sublime is related to a sense that 'our' common predicament is and always will be isolation. Paradoxically, then, the universal can only be sensed in its absence. The 1863 'Lichfield and Uttoxeter' ends with this passage:

Just think of the absurd little town, knowing nothing of the only memorable incident



which ever happened within its boundaries since the old Britons built it, this sad and lovely story, which consecrates the spot (for I found it holy to my contemplation again, as soon as it lay behind me) in the heart of a stranger from three thousand miles over the sea! It but confirms what I have been saying, that sublime and beautiful facts are best understood when etherealized by distance (OOH 157).

There is a sense, then, in which Hawthorne can only feel at home in a place when he is not actually there. It as if Hawthorne is suggesting that the ‘sublime and the beautiful’ can not be reduced to the status of a ‘fact’. They always seem to be absent when one supposedly confronts ‘the thing itself’. This sense was already apparent in the earlier sketch. The conclusion of the 1857 article, which was omitted from the 1863 version, anticipates his strange reaction to the news that a memorial had actually been erected:

But, personally, I had no right to find fault with these good people [i.e. the people of Uttoxeter]; for I myself had felt little or no impression from the scene; and my experience has been similar in many another spot, even of far deeper consecration than Uttoxeter. At Stratford-on-Avon - even at Westminster Abbey, on my first visit - I was as little moved as any stone of the pavement. These visits to the identical scenes of poetical or historical interest inevitably cause an encounter and a shock of the Actual with the Ideal, in which the latter - unless stronger than in my own case - is very apt to be overpowered. My emotions always come before, or afterwards; and I cannot help envying those happier tourists, who can time and tune themselves so accurately, that their raptures (as I presume from their printed descriptions) are sure to gush up just on the very spot, and precisely

at the right moment! (U 485) .

Too soon or too late ('I forgot', Hawthorne writes in 'Uttoxeter', 'until it was too late, to snatch the opportunity to repent some of my own sins' (U 485)). This, I argue, explains Hawthorne's ambivalent attitude to the memorial at Uttoxeter. Hawthorne was attracted to the story of Johnson's penance precisely because it emphasized a permanent disjunction, a disjunction which memorials claim to abolish. By uniting perspectives a memorial erases the moral sublime. Yet, here, Hawthorne also implies that this is true in all times and all places. Earlier I suggested that Johnson's gesture itself resembled a monumental representation. Yet, and I shall develop this further at the end of Chapter 1, Hawthorne implies that the sense of disjunction would have affected Johnson's gesture itself. Johnson's act of remembering, one could say, may not have been all that it seemed. It, too, may have been contaminated by a certain kind of uncertainty. This may also explain why Hawthorne, publically at least, appeared to behave rather unreasonably to the people of Uttoxeter. It as if he suspected that an unacceptable nostalgia motivated the proposal for a monument. Almost by definition, a monument not only remembers that which is absent, it also suggests that the absent thing was once present. Monuments, then, can lead one to believe that order and certainty ruled in the past. Yet, I have been arguing that what attracted Hawthorne to Johnson's penance was the fact that it was saturated by uncertainty (I shall return to this in the concluding chapter).

## II

One can, then, align Hawthorne with Lyotard's disparaging remarks about 'historical



knowledge', in "Rewriting Modernity". 'If,' says Lyotard:

it is true that historical knowledge demands that its object be isolated and withdrawn from any libidinal investment come from the historian, then it is certain that the only result of this way of 'putting down' [*rédigier*] history would be to 'put it down' [*réduire*]. I'm invoking here the two meanings said simultaneously by the Latin *redigere* and the English 'putting down' - to write down and to repress. Just as the English *writing down* suggests both inscription or recording and discredit (RM 29/30).

By invoking the 'putting down' and the '*writing down*' of history it is as if Lyotard suggests that historical knowledge does not show enough respect to the past. As I have noted Lyotard's favoured response to the past lies in what he calls 'rewriting'. This rewriting remembers that a certain kind of uncertainty is, and always has been, the rule. It seems to me that this rewriting is precisely what Hawthorne was practicing in the revisions of his trip to Utttoxeter. Hawthorne was repeatedly trying to evoke a ubiquitous feeling. In this respect he shares Lyotard's sense of the past. 'One can say of what has gone' writes Lyotard, 'that it is there, alive, lively. Not present like an object, if an object can ever be present, but present like an *aura*, a gentle breeze, an allusion' (RM 31). The 'object' of historical knowledge, one might imagine, was once present. Yet Lyotard implies that in truth the past was never present. Nothing ever is. The past is akin to a universal sense of uncertainty, a sense which can be alluded to, but not described. Like Lyotard, J. Hillis Miller outlines his hostility to the idea of a historical object in what I believe to be the best book on Hawthorne that has been written to date: *Hawthorne and History: Defacing It*. 'History', he writes, '[does not] remain safely stored up in traces, texts, memorials,

records, vestiges, or material artifacts that can then later on be deciphered by future generations as the means of access to the original happening as it really happened' (DI 113/114). Hawthorne, Miller implies, would have agreed with this proposition and it will be worth looking at this argument in more detail to develop a basis for my later arguments about the relationship, and the distinction between, memorializing and allegory. It will become apparent that this distinction is akin to the difference between an 'object' and an 'allusion'. Section two of the introduction will proceed to connect Lyotard's position, as outlined in 'Rewriting Modernity' (what I consider to be one of his most lucid pieces of work), with Miller's arguments. This, in turn, will lead to the introduction of two other writers whose significance to the thesis will become apparent: Maurice Blanchot and Paul de Man.

Miller argues that Hawthorne could never manage to rid himself of the 'discrepancy between vehicle and meaning' (DI 54). Realistic vehicle and the allegorical meaning were incompatible to such an extent that Henry James, Miller says, thought that the 'discrepancy' between them was sometimes 'unintentionally ludicrous' (DI 54).<sup>31</sup> Yet Miller notes that the 'opposition between banal truth-telling and outrageous disembodied allegory ... was diagnosed by Hawthorne himself' (DI 58) and, moreover, turning to 'The Minister's Black Veil', Miller convincingly demonstrates that Hawthorne's failure to resolve this 'discrepancy' was, in fact, his 'triumph' (DI 120). The Reverend Mr. Hooper, central protagonist of 'The Minister's Black Veil', appears one Sunday morning to conduct the morning church service with a 'black veil' covering his face. One 'question', writes Miller:

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<sup>31</sup>See Henry James, *Hawthorne*.



obsesses all Hooper's parishioners. It obsesses the reader too. It is the one question worth asking and worth answering about this story. What does the minister's black veil *mean*?

It is...the one question neither Hooper nor Hawthorne will answer in so many words (DI 63).

The minister's gesture precipitates a kind of gradual emaciation of meaning. 'When he puts on the black veil', Miller says:

the Reverend Hooper is as if he were already dead. Or, rather, he seems already to have withdrawn to that realm where signs cannot reach, for which 'death' is one name. Or, rather, it is as if the simple act of putting on the black veil had revealed the unverifiable possibility that each of us already dwells in that realm, both as we are for other people and even as we are for ourselves. The black veil reveals in these effects the possibility that unveiling, apocalyptic or otherwise, is impossible (DI 93).

Each of us, Hillis Miller says, may, possibly, live in a 'realm where signs cannot reach' and 'unveiling', the aim of hermeneutic activity, is, Miller suggests, an impossibility. If unveiling can only ever take place in language and yet language is always necessarily one step away from that which is 'outside' meaning, then the opposition between that which is veiled and that which is unveiled is redundant. When one lifts a veil - one is destined to discover one more veil. Alternatively, one could say that a veil is as naked as anything else. 'The black veil', Miller writes, 'cannot be lifted because it is not a veil at all, at least in the sense that a veil implies some

secret behind it' (DI 93). 'In all his work', Miller writes, 'Hawthorne remains fascinated by the discrepancy between ideological value and material base' (DI 88). 'The Minister's Black Veil', Miller says, demonstrates that this 'discrepancy' is the fundamental condition of existence. 'The Minister's Black Veil', Miller argues, insists on a 'radical separation', '[a] separation...between any sign whatsoever and a meaning that is...wholly unreachable. Such a meaning is the radical other of a sign that appears to gesture towards it and at the same time permanently veils it' (DI 115).

In 'The Minister's Black Veil', Miller argues, Hawthorne demonstrated that the 'disjunction' between 'realism and allegory' - that is to say, between a sign and its unreachable meaning - is 'necessary and universal'. 'It is an essential feature of any historical happening anywhere' Miller says (DI 119). The 'distinction between realistic and allegorical narratives disappears in a sign [the black veil] that is at once blankly realistic and at the same time absolutely allegorical, that is, a sign for the failure of allegory' (DI 120). 'Realism and allegory', Miller says 'come to the same thing'. 'Both', he says, 'are enigmatic and ultimately indecipherable narrative expressions of a strange kind of outside that resides inside and contaminates that inside. This 'outside' can by no procedures of language be given an other than enigmatic expression'(DI 55). Yet language is all we have, so to speak. It is as if all historical happenings are caught in a double-bind. In this sense all historical happenings are like the 'black veil'. Like the 'black veil', historical happenings lack something. They too are saturated by the 'radically other'.

Note also that Miller refers to 'indcipherable narrative expressions'. An 'indcipherable narrative expression' is very different from the kind of hermeneutic certainty that Lyotard



associates with the narratives of modernity. The 'narrative as such', Lyotard writes:

can be considered to be a technical apparatus giving people the means to store, order and retrieve units of information, i.e. events. More precisely, narratives are like temporal filters whose function is to transform the emotive charge linked to the event into sequences of information capable of giving rise to something like meaning.<sup>32</sup>

Yet Lyotard disputes the validity of this 'technical apparatus'. '[Any] narrative whatsoever begins in the middle of things and...its so-called 'end' is an arbitrary cut in the infinite sequence of data' he writes in *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*.<sup>33</sup> In 'Rewriting Modernity' Lyotard turns to Freud's sense of 'working through' because, he suggests, it is not compatible with narrative closure. 'The story of Oedipus', Lyotard writes, 'provided Freud with the model for this'. 'In destiny', he says, 'the beginning and end of the story rhyme with one another' (RM 26/27). Oedipus, of course, refuses to accept his 'destiny'. '[He] starts', says Lyotard:

searching for the cause of the evil, a sin that would be at the origin of the plague the city is suffering. The patient on the couch appears to be involved in an entirely similar enquiry. Like in a detective novel, the case is examined, witnesses called, information gathered. And so what I would call a second-order plot is woven, which deploys its own story above the plot in which destiny is fulfilled, and whose aim is to remedy that destiny...We know how misleading in its turn rewriting thus understood can be. The trap

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<sup>32</sup> 'Time Today' in Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p 63.

<sup>33</sup> Lyotard, *Peregrinations*, p 2.

resides in the fact that the enquiry into the origins of destiny is itself part of that destiny, and that the question of the beginning of the plot is posed at the end of the plot because it merely constitutes its end (RM 27).

Freud realised this and so, Lyotard agrees, 'on the older side of psychoanalysis' he moved away from the idea that the psychoanalytic cure should end when one remembers a crime that one imagines to be at the origin of one's suffering. Freud 'opens himself...to the idea that the process of the cure could be, must be, interminable', he writes (RM 30). 'If we understand "rewriting modernity"...:

like seeking out, designating and naming the hidden facts that one imagines to be the source of the ills that ail one, i.e. as a simple process of remembering, one cannot fail to perpetrate the crime, and perpetrate it anew instead of putting an end to it. Far from really rewriting it, supposing that to be possible, all one is doing is writing again, and making real, modernity itself. The point being that writing it is always rewriting it. Modernity is written, inscribes itself on itself, in a perpetual rewriting (RM 28).

Rewriting is connected to an awareness that the writing process is perpetual. Modernity, on the other hand, claims to break free of the past. It consists 'in the gesture...of starting the clock from zero, wiping the slate clean, the gesture which inaugurates in one go the beginning of the new age and the new periodization' (RM 26). For Lyotard, however, some undefinable 'thing' always exceeds and undermines any attempt to inaugurate the beginning of a new age. Rewriting never catches up with itself, so to speak, its effects can never be exhausted. In this sense one can align



it with Miller's description of 'The Minister's Black Veil'. 'Something certainly happens in the community of Milford when Hooper appears in his veil', says Miller:

But what happens...is unpredictable. The effect is incommensurate with its cause. What happens is not 'caused' according to some model of physical causality. It depends on how the proffered sign is read, and the sign does not authorize any single reading. If an historical happening is neither a representation nor in itself representable, neither is it a cause nor a result in the ordinary senses of these terms. It is not an element in a complex involving a measurable correspondence between cause and effect (DI 115).

This conclusion is echoed in a quotation which Miller introduces. Miller cites Maurice Blanchot's *L'Écriture du désastre*:

Ce qui arrive par l'écriture n'est pas de l'ordre de ce qui arrive. Mais alors qui te permet de prétendre qu'il arriverait jamais quelque chose comme l'écriture? Ou bien l'écriture ne serait-elle pas telle qu'elle n'aurait jamais besoin d'advenir? (DI 46).<sup>34</sup>

Like writing, what happens, as Miller says, 'is unpredictable'. In which case one could say that

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<sup>34</sup> See Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) p 102-103. The passage reads as follows in the current English translation:

What happens through writing is not of the order of things that happen. But in that case, who permits you to claim that anything like writing ever does happen? Or is it that writing is not such that it need ever happen? (*The Writing of the Disaster*, translated by Anne Smock, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) p 62.

‘nothing ever happens’ (i.e. no event ever really ‘finishes’). Or, alternatively one could say, with Miller, that ‘something certainly happens’ - but ‘what happens is unpredictable’. Events just cannot be ‘put down’. They will not lie down and die.

Blanchot’s *L’Ecriture du désastre* may also be an influence on Lyotard. Both writers have written about the attempt to annihilate the European Jews in the 1940s. Lyotard has argued that “‘Auschwitz’ can be taken as a paradigmatic name for the tragic ‘incompletion’ of modernity”.<sup>35</sup> Lyotard has what he calls the ‘great narratives’ of Western Modernity in mind here. ‘The ‘metanarratives’ I was concerned with in *The Postmodern Conditon*’, Lyotard wrote in 1984:

are those which have marked modernity: the progressive emancipation of reason and freedom, the progressive or catastrophic emancipation of labour...the enrichment of all humanity through the progress of capitalist technoscience, and even - if we include Christianity itself in modernity (in opposition to the classicism of antiquity) - the salvation of creatures through the conversion of souls to the Christian narrative of martyred love. Hegel’s philosophy totalises all of these narratives and, in this sense, is itself a distillation of speculative modernity.<sup>36</sup>

These ‘second-order plots’ no longer have any ‘credibility’<sup>37</sup> because, Lyotard suggests, it has become apparent that, despite their inflated claims, they cannot take account of everything - and

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Apostil On Narratives: To Samuel Cassin, London, February 6, 1984’, in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, p 29.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Apostil On Narratives: To Samuel Cassin, London, February 6, 1984’, p 30.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Apostil On Narratives: To Samuel Cassin, London, February 6, 1984’, p 31.



Auschwitz, Lyotard says, has become a 'paradigmatic name'<sup>38</sup> for something which escapes these narratives. Maurice Blanchot has made the same point, and he too focuses on Hegel's philosophy of history. '*The unknown name, alien to naming*', writes Blanchot, with Hegel in mind:

*The holocaust, the absolute event of history - which is a date in history - that utter-burn where all history took fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up, where the gift, which knows nothing of forgiveness or of consent, shattered without giving place to anything that can be affirmed, that can be denied - gift of very passivity, gift of what cannot be given. How can it be preserved, even by thought? How can thought be made the keeper of the holocaust where all was lost, including guardian thought? In the mortal intensity, the fleeing silence of the countless cry.*<sup>39</sup>

The 'holocaust', Blanchot suggests, evokes the 'outside' of history. In relation to this 'outside' 'silence' and a 'cry' become indistinguishable: nothing hears them. 'Guardian thought' is caught in a double bind. In citing 'the holocaust' 'guardian thought' evokes its own limit, an 'outside' which it cannot reach, and yet at the same time this 'outside' can only be evoked by - and in - 'guardian thought'. '*The unknown name, alien to naming*' says Blanchot of 'the holocaust'. 'The holocaust' has a name - and yet this name is a trace of a nameless 'something' which the name cannot possess, a 'something' which cannot be reduced to 'Meaning'. In this sense one can align 'the holocaust' with Miller's description of the minister's black veil as a 'sign that is at once blankly realistic and at the same time absolutely allegorical, that is, a sign for the failure

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<sup>38</sup> 'Apostil On Narratives: To Samuel Cassin, London, February 6, 1984', p 30.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, p 47.

of allegory'. A 'name' which is '*alien to naming*' is akin to 'a sign for the failure of allegory' in that they both evoke an unassimilable 'outside'. Lyotard makes a similar point in *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (1988). "The jews", he argues, are the 'irremissable in the West's movement of remission and pardon'.<sup>40</sup> 'The jews', one could say, are the condition for 'naming'. Paradoxically, then, when 'the jews' are named they are forgotten.<sup>41</sup>

For both Blanchot and Lyotard the holocaust exemplifies a double-bind. Blanchot suggests that the '*holocaust*' is both '*the absolute event of history*' and also simply '*a date in history*'. The holocaust is akin to '*the absolute event of history*' because it is obvious that it will never be redeemed by the dénouement of a modern narrative. On the other hand, it is also obvious after the holocaust that this isn't an exceptional predicament. On the contrary, this is the rule. In that case it is simply '*a date in history*'. The absence of redemption is true of every event. Lyotard often refers, sometimes obliquely, to a passage from Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen zum Oedipus*:

At such a moment [the decline of tragedy, the moment of Oedipus], man forgets both himself and the God, and undoubtedly in pious wisdom, he turns away like a betrayer - At the extreme limit of distress, ...man forgets himself because he is entirely in the moment; [he forgets] the God because he is nothing but time, and both are unfaithful, time because at that moment it spins on itself and beginning and end no longer let

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<sup>40</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, p 22.

<sup>41</sup> Explaining his use of the lower case Lyotard writes that:

What is most real about real Jews is that Europe does not know what to do with them: Christians demand their conversion; monarchs expel them; republics assimilate them; Nazis exterminate them. 'The jews' are the object of a dismissal with which Jews, in particular, are afflicted in reality (*Heidegger and 'the jews'*, p 3).



themselves be rhymed in it at all.<sup>42</sup>

Irredeemable unintelligibility, then, was the rule over two thousand years before the holocaust. It has always been and always will be the rule, one could say. As with the Reverend Hooper, there is no final unveiling for Oedipus. There can be no harmonious resolution. One is destined to always see through a glass darkly. 'Death', the 'radical other', the 'outside' and, most importantly for this thesis, the 'absolutely allegorical', all these terms, Miller argues, evoke that unassimilable mark which 'contaminates' every last detail and prevents this narrative closure. 'One tries to remember', writes Lyotard, 'and this is probably a good way of forgetting again' (RM 29). This is the double-bind which rewriting is continually responding to and, I argue, the double-bind that Hawthorne was always responding to as well.

Miller's account of Hawthorne was anticipated, to a certain degree, in Michael Davitt Bell's *The Development Of American Romance: The Sacrifice Of Relation* (1980).<sup>43</sup> 'Hawthorne', Bell wrote, 'apparently adopts the allegorical mode in order to turn it against allegorical intentions'.<sup>44</sup> More recently, G. R. Thompson has echoed the contention in *The Art Of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne's Provincial Tales* (1993). 'In my view', he writes, 'Hawthorne deploys allegory and typology *against* themselves...Thus we have 'negative' allegory'.<sup>45</sup> Miller, Bell and Thompson all evoke what one could call the 'counter-allegorical' tendencies in Hawthorne's writing.

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<sup>42</sup> Lyotard, *Peregrinations*, pp 2 - 3.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development Of American Romance: The Sacrifice Of Relation*, (Chicago, Ill.: University Of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>44</sup> Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development Of American Romance*, p 134.

<sup>45</sup> G. R. Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence*, p 14.

However, in this thesis it will be argued that Hawthorne actually used the term ‘allegory’ to evoke these ‘counter-allegorical’ tendencies. Obviously, this is rather confusing. However, apart from Hawthorne’s own use of the term, there is another precedent for associating what Miller calls the ‘absolutely allegorical’ with ‘allegory’: Paul de Man’s ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’ (1969). ‘Allegory’, de Man writes:

designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognised as a non-self.<sup>46</sup>

De Man proceeds to align allegory with ‘irony’. Irony, he says, ‘comes closer to the pattern of factual experience and recaptures some of the factiousness of human existence as a succession of isolated moments lived by a divided self’.<sup>47</sup> ‘The act of irony’, de Man suggests, ‘reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality’.<sup>48</sup> However, de Man argues that ‘the two modes [allegory and irony]...are the two faces of the same fundamental experience of time...Both are determined by an authentic experience of temporality which, seen

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<sup>46</sup> ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, in Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971), Second Edition, Revised, Introduction by Wlad Godzich, *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 7, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p 207.

<sup>47</sup> Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, p 226.

<sup>48</sup> de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, p 222.

from the point of view of the self engaged in the world, is a negative one'.<sup>49</sup> Allegory and irony, de Man suggest, refer one to some kind of 'negativity'. For the 'allegorical sign' this 'negativity' appears to lie on the outside of its borders. '[It] remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it' de Man writes.<sup>50</sup> In other words the allegorical sign refers to a sign that precedes it and so on ad infinitum. As a consequence allegory implies an 'unreachable anteriority'.<sup>51</sup> In the 'act of irony' the negativity appears to originate from inside the sign. Commenting on some works of Baudelaire, de Man writes that they:

grow shorter and shorter and always climax in the single brief moment of a final *pointe*. This is the instant at which the two selves, the empirical as well as the ironic, are simultaneously present, juxtaposed within the same moment but as two irreconcilable and disjointed beings.<sup>52</sup>

As with allegory, irony suggests that the 'present' can only be defined in the negative as an unreachable 'outside'. The 'temporal void that [irony] reveals is the same void we encountered', writes de Man, 'when we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority'.<sup>53</sup> Caught in a double bind Hawthorne's allegory, it will be argued, refuses to forget this 'unreachable

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<sup>49</sup>de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', p 226.

<sup>50</sup>de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', p 207.

<sup>51</sup>de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', p 222.

<sup>52</sup>de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', p 226.

<sup>53</sup>de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', p 222.



anteriority’.

In this sense Hawthorne’s allegory can be aligned with Miller’s extended sense of ‘reading’ which, he explains:

means not just reading literary works, but reading historical documents, works of art, material artifacts, cultural signs of all sorts. Such signs [that] are transmitted from the past and permeate our lives today in ever-renewed memorial acts of reading that make history (DI 128).

Every ‘act of reading’ is also an ‘ever-renewed memorial’. Acts of reading are always already part of ‘the past’. They can never know their own significance because they are contaminated by the ‘radically other’ and this is a trap which cannot be escaped from. For this reason a ‘correct’ reading is always also a ‘mis-reading’. One cannot escape this double-bind. This uncertainty, then, is the very impetus which impels one to keep reading. Reading in Miller’s ‘extended sense’ can be described as the difficult task of maintaining a sense of uncertainty. One recalls a remark in Hawthorne’s notebooks: ‘To personify If - But - And -Though - &c.’ (AN 242). It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that the only permanent things are doubts. Miller’s ‘extended sense’ of ‘reading’ and Lyotard’s ‘rewriting’ both evoke an ‘unreachable anteriority’, an ‘unreachable anteriority’ which one could associate with an endless indecipherable narrative. This sense of an ‘unreachable anteriority’ is essential to an understanding of Hawthorne’s writing.

### III

De Man's sense of an 'unreachable anteriority' can be distinguished from the most influential early account of Hawthorne and allegory. Between 1842 and 1847 Edgar Allan Poe wrote a series of reviews of Hawthorne.<sup>54</sup> These reviews gave Hawthorne's writing a higher profile than it had ever had before. However, if in 1842 Poe was, for the most part, almost fulsome in his appreciation of Hawthorne's short stories and sketches, by 1847 his reservations had become much more apparent. '[It] remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it' de Man wrote and this, for Poe, was basically the problem. In a 1839 review Poe had described allegory as an 'indefensible species of writing' with 'gross demerits' which he related to its association with 'an undercurrent of meaning'.<sup>55</sup> In other words, Poe objected to the fact that the allegorical sign was not identical to itself. This disingenuousness meant that 'allegory' rendered 'a vital injury...to the most vitally important point in fiction - that of earnestness or verisimilitude', Poe argued in the 1847 review of Hawthorne.<sup>56</sup> By 'earnestness or verisimilitude' Poe was not referring to what in the twentieth century has become known as 'classic realism'. Rather, Poe meant that, to put it bluntly, a work of fiction should

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<sup>54</sup> See 'Review of *Twice-told Tales*', (*Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1842), 'Review of *Twice-told Tales*, (*Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1842), 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne', (*Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book*, Nov.1847). See also remarks in 'The Literati of New York City', (*Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1846) and 'Marginalia', (*Democratic Review*, December 1844). All of these pieces are collected in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays And Reviews*, ed. G.R. Thompson. The best account of the relationship between Poe and Hawthorne is to be found in G.R. Thompson's *The Art of Authorial Presence*.

<sup>55</sup>See 'Review of Baron de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine: A Miniature Romance*', (*Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1839) in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays And Reviews*, ed., G. R. Thompson, p.257.

<sup>56</sup>Poe, 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne,' p 583.

mean what it says. If, as in allegory, a work of fiction broke this rule by evoking an 'outside' then it was fatally flawed, Poe argued. Indeed, in the 1847 review of Hawthorne Poe argues that the 'brief prose tale', the short story in other words, was the best mode of fiction because it alone could 'avail itself of the immense benefit of *totality*.'<sup>57</sup> 'A skillful artist', he argued:

having deliberately conceived a certain *single effect* to be wrought...then invents such incidents...then combines such events, and discusses them in such a tone as may best serve him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very first sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then in his very first step he has committed a blunder. ...By such means...a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred sense of art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.<sup>58</sup>

For Poe then, the 'skillful' artist' should build up toward a '*single effect*' which, in contrast to de Man's 'allegorical sign', would be a self-identical totality.

In saying this Poe anticipated the 'symbolism' of the New Critics. F.O. Matthiessen, in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941), Charles Feidelson Jr., in *Symbolism and American Literature* (1953) and Richard Chase, in *The American Novel And Its Tradition* (1957) associated symbolism with a unique American literary tradition. Echoing Poe once again the New Critics argued that Hawthorne's allegorical tendencies undermined 'symbolism'. 'Allegory', wrote Charles Feidelson Jr., 'was the brake Hawthorne

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<sup>57</sup>Poe, 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne,' p 585/586.

<sup>58</sup>Poe, 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne,' p 586.



applied to his sensibility.’<sup>59</sup> In ‘The Rhetoric Of Temporality’ de Man argues that the word ‘symbolic’ was used by the New Critics in order to evoke ‘the priority conferred on the initial moment of sensory perception’.<sup>60</sup> ‘The usual meaning of the word ‘symbol’’, wrote Richard Chase in *The American Novel And Its Tradition*:

*is something that stands for something else.* Yet as ‘symbol’ is used in technical literary criticism, it means *an autonomous linguistic fusion of meanings*...a poetic symbol not only *means* something, it *is* something - namely, an autonomous truth which has been discovered in the process by which the symbol emerged in the context of the poem. If it still permits us to think of it as an ordinary symbol - as something that stands for something else - we see that it does not point to anything easy to express. Rather, it suggests several meanings.<sup>61</sup>

The initial moment of sensory perception, then, is beyond meaning. It simply ‘*is*’. A profusion of meanings will be associated with the ‘poetic symbol’ but none of them will be able to fasten themselves on to it, as it were. With the ‘symbol’, then, one is at the limit of language. While de Man’s allegorical sign always refers ‘to another sign that precedes it’ the New Critics’ ‘symbol’ crosses over to the other side, as it were, that is to say to ‘reality’, and can therefore be described as an ‘autonomous truth’.

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<sup>59</sup> Charles Feidelson Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature*, pp 14 - 15.

<sup>60</sup> de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, p 193.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Chase, *The American Novel And Its Tradition*, pp 80 - 82

Recent New Historicist appraisals of Hawthorne have, more often than not, complained that, as Charles Swann says in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution*, the New Critics were 'a-historical'.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*, Donald E. Pease, with an explicit reference to Paul de Man, has associated 'French poststructuralism' with the symbolism of the New Critics.<sup>63</sup> Both 'French poststructuralism' and New Criticism, Pease argues, '[separate] the past off from the present...reducing each moment into an abstract discontinuity'.<sup>64</sup> This thesis, however, has already demonstrated the fundamental distinction between post structuralist allegory and New Critical symbolism. Where the latter evokes a totality which could readily be described as a present separated from the past, post structuralist allegory endlessly defers one to, in de Man's terms, an 'unreachable anteriority'. Moreover, for a post structuralist this 'unreachable anteriority' is 'the past' - the irrevocable past.

Nevertheless, in *Visionary Compacts* Pease outlines his own account of Hawthorne's allegory. Hawthorne, Pease argues, used allegory to challenge a post-revolutionary nineteenth century

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p 1. See also Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, The Nation and The Continent*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), Jonathan Arac, 'The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*' in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts* and 'New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon' in *Revisionary Interventions Into The American Canon*, ed., Donald E. Pease, (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1994) and Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy Of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia And Everyday Life*, (Chicago & London: The University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 42.

<sup>64</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 43.

United States of America which had forgotten its 'cultural past'.<sup>65</sup> '[Allegory]' he writes, 'transfigures actual persons, places and things into exemplary forms, cultural resources whose mold can be recast for future cultural use'.<sup>66</sup> However, Pease says:

[members] of a community do not demand that each member remain one allegorical signification. Through the exchange and transformation of allegories, individuals produce new possibilities and add them to the communal store. The change in significations demanded through conflicting understandings of one another's allegories deepens the relations among members of a community.<sup>67</sup>

Pease has *The Scarlet Letter* in mind. 'What remains remarkable about Hawthorne's romance', he says:

inheres in its attention not to the antagonism between the Puritan community and Hester Prynne, but to the ways in which her private action required careful evaluation and reevaluation by an entire community, and to the means whereby her personal life became the basis for the community's restoration of its public life.<sup>68</sup>

In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne rejects 'privacy'. 'Privacy', writes Pease, 'protects people

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<sup>65</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 53.

<sup>66</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 65.

<sup>67</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 101.

<sup>68</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 83.



from taxing social obligations'.<sup>69</sup> 'In our time', says Pease, 'the private individual' finds solace in 'the discipline of psychoanalysis'.<sup>70</sup> In a footnote Pease advises the reader to see Georg Lukács' 'The Ideology of Modernism' for 'an account of psychoanalysis as a producer of privacy in the modern world'.<sup>71</sup> In 'The Ideology of Modernism' Lukacs argues that 'modernist literature' has an 'obsession with psychopathology'.<sup>72</sup> 'This obsession with the pathological is not only to be found in literature' writes Lukács. 'Freudian psychoanalysis is its most obvious expression'.<sup>73</sup> Lukács goes on to suggest his favoured 'literature of realism' manages to escape from this 'obsession with the pathological'. 'The literature of realism', Lukács writes:

displays the contradictions within society and within the individual in the context of a dialectical unity. Here, individuals embodying violent and extraordinary passions are still within the range of a socially normal typology (Shakespeare, Balzac, Stendhal). For, in this literature, the average man is simply a dimmer reflection of the contradictions always existing in man and society; eccentricity is a socially-conditioned distortion.<sup>74</sup>

Lukács' description of the literature of realism is entirely compatible with Pease's account of

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<sup>69</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 100.

<sup>70</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 100.

<sup>71</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 283, Note 12.

<sup>72</sup> 'The Ideology Of Modernism' in Georg Lukács, *The Meaning Of Contemporary Realism*, translated from the German by John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press Limited, 1963) p 36.

<sup>73</sup> Georg Lukács, 'The Ideology Of Modernism', p 30.

<sup>74</sup> Georg Lukács, 'The Ideology Of Modernism', pp 30 - 31.

Hawthorne's allegory. For Pease too, individual and community are in a never-ending dialectical relationship with one another. There is a constant movement from the particular to the universal, a movement which, however, never comes to a standstill in a final unity. Realist literature, Lukács argues, has a 'clear sense of *perspective*...[and this] enables the artist to choose between the important and the superficial, the crucial and the episodic'.<sup>75</sup> Pease makes a similar point in relation to Hawthorne and 'romance'. Before citing Hawthorne's remarks from the famous description of the 'medium most suitable for a romance-writer' in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter* (SL 65/66) Pease describes an 'aura' that, he says, 'deepens the impressions persons, places and things make upon one another, making them appear vivid as opposed to evanescent'.<sup>76</sup> This 'aura' is the equivalent to Lukács 'sense of *perspective*'. Associating it with the 'vivid' Pease distances 'romance' from the 'superficial'. The 'aura' of 'romance', Pease argues, is important because it is shot through with mediation. In taking this position Pease challenges the New Critics once again. The New Critics associated romance with the totally unmediated 'symbolism'.<sup>77</sup> For Pease, on the other hand, one could say that the mediated experience is of the essence of romance. Later in the thesis I will take issue with both the New Critics and the New Historicists by arguing that Hawthorne associated romance with an absence of meaning

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<sup>75</sup> Georg Lukács, 'The Ideology Of Modernism', p 33.

<sup>76</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 63.

<sup>77</sup>For introductions to the debates surrounding 'romance', 'symbolism' and the New Critics, all of which are to a greater or lesser extent informed by New Historicism, see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1987), Robert Clark, 'American Romance' in *Encyclopedia Of Literature And Criticism*, eds., Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall and John Peck, (London: Routledge, 1991), Philip Fisher, 'American Literary and Cultural Studies since the Civil War' in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation Of English And American Literary Studies*, eds., Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992) and John McWilliams, 'The Rationale for 'The American Romance'' in *Revisionary Interventions Into The American Canon*, ed., Pease.

which can not be presented in either mediated or unmediated form.

To distinguish Pease's allegory from de Man's sense of allegory one can say, then, with Lukács in mind, that Pease's preferred literary mode is 'realism'. By saying this one can also connect Pease's account of Hawthorne to Charles Swann's *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, the most influential British text in this area. Swann associates Hawthorne with Raymond Williams' definition of realism in *The Long Revolution* (1960) as a 'principled and organized selection'<sup>78</sup>, a definition which one can align with Lukács' sense of a realism with a 'clear sense of *perspective*'. Williams, in fact, shares basic reservations about psychoanalytic theory with Lukács and Pease. In *The Long Revolution* he objects to the way in which 'Freudian theory assumes a basic division between individual and society'.<sup>79</sup> 'In the highest realism', Williams argues, 'society is seen in fundamentally personal terms, and persons, through relationships, in fundamentally social terms'.<sup>80</sup> Williams' position is reflected in Swann's account of Hawthorne's 'Alice Doane's Appeal' (1835), a story I will be examining in detail in the concluding chapter. The story, Swann explains, is a rewriting of a tale which was originally intended to be part of *Seven Tales of My Native Land*, 'Hawthorne's first attempt to get a coherent collection of his tales into print',<sup>81</sup> a failed attempt which apparently dates from around 1827. 'Alice Doane's Appeal', then, is a rewriting of a tale which was written about eight years earlier and Swann suggests that the story dramatizes the transformation which Hawthorne underwent on his way to reaching his mature

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<sup>78</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p 276.

<sup>79</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p 78.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p 287.

<sup>81</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 18.



writing style. Swann argues that in the 1835 version Hawthorne ‘dismantles [the original ‘Alice Doane’ story] so that writer and reader can see what went wrong and why’.<sup>82</sup> The ‘Alice Doane’ story is story of ‘incestuous desires’, he says, and ‘had been designed to horrify’.<sup>83</sup> Swann, in fact, aligns it with Poe’s ‘The Fall Of The House Of Usher’ (1839) describing it as a ‘Gothic ‘Tale of Terror’’.<sup>84</sup> The ‘*single effect*’ that the story intended to convey, then, would be a combination of horror and terror. However, Swann argues that Hawthorne turns ‘towards a real understanding of history and its significance’<sup>85</sup> by adding an account of the 1692 Salem witch executions. The sketch, Swann says citing Raymond Williams, ‘offers the reader ‘a principled and organized selection’ of the historical world’.<sup>86</sup>

Swann emphasizes a reference to Gallows Hill, Salem at the conclusion of ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’. There ‘is nothing on its barren summit’, says Hawthorne:

no relic of old, nor lettered stone of later days, to assist the imagination in appealing to the heart. We build the memorial column on the height which our fathers made sacred with their blood, poured out in a holy cause. And here in dark, funereal stone, should rise another monument, sadly commemorative of the errors of an earlier race, and not to be

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<sup>82</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 42.

<sup>83</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 42.

<sup>84</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 26. See ‘The Fall Of The House Of Usher’, (*Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* 1839) collected in Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall Of The House Of Usher And Other Writings*, Edited with an Introduction by David Galloway, (London: Penguin Books, 1967, (Reprinted 1987)).

<sup>85</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 35.

<sup>86</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 39.

cast down, while the human heart has one infirmity that may result in crime (T&S 216).

‘The allusion to the Bunker Hill monument and thus to the American Revolution is not there by accident’, writes Swann.<sup>87</sup> By juxtaposing it with the suggestion for a memorial to the executions in 1692 Salem Swann says that Hawthorne ‘warns against’:

the uncritical celebration of half a history...the Revolution did not redeem Americans from the tragic realm of history - that redemption must come from confronting the past as a whole, by escaping from false because partial versions of the past.<sup>88</sup>

While agreeing with Swann that Hawthorne was challenging the Bunker Hill monument I will argue in the conclusion that one should not necessarily take the proposal for a monument to the 1692 witch executions at face value. Lyotard’s remarks on historical periodization are relevant here. ‘Periodization’, he says:

is a way of placing events in a diachrony, and diachrony is ruled by the principle of revolution...[modernity] is obliged to mark, to date, the end of one period and the beginning of the next. Since one is inaugurating an age reputed to be entirely new, it is right to set the clock to the new time, to start it from zero again. In Christianity, Cartesianism or Jacobinism, this same gesture designates a Year One, that of revelation and redemption in the one case, of rebirth and renewal in the second, or again of

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<sup>87</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 41.

<sup>88</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp 41 - 42.

revolution and reappropriation of liberties (RM 25/26).

So right in many ways, Swann is nevertheless still loyal to the idea of 'redemption', an idea which Hawthorne himself had no time for.

Swann's attitude to memorializing is echoed by Donald Pease in his reading of *The Scarlet Letter*. 'In revealing the scarlet letter to the community rather than Hester alone' says Pease:

[the] minister discloses the letter as what founds the community's relations...In dying, Arthur demands that a memory of this sign accompany each transaction within the community. So translated, the scarlet letter will be not a memory of his private self, but a memory of the communal relation he spent himself to secure.<sup>89</sup>

Renouncing his illegitimate, 'private' relationship with Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale 'spends' his life in order to 'secure' the 'communal relation'. 'His death after the revelation of the scarlet letter on his breast secures an unforgettable quality to the scene' writes Pease.<sup>90</sup> In saying this Pease makes an implicit reference to Walter Benjamin's 'The Storyteller: Reflections On The Works Of Nikolai Leskov' (1936).<sup>91</sup> 'Dying' wrote Benjamin:

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<sup>89</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 106.

<sup>90</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 106.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections On The Works Of Nikolai Leskov' (1936) in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt, Translated by Harry Zohn, (London: Fontana Press, 1992). Pease makes an explicit reference to Benjamin's essay, an essay which is more about storytelling in general than Nikolai Leskov in particular, when he connects the 'aura' to Hawthorne's 'romance'. Pease does not mention that in another 1936 essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical



was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one. ... In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not died. ... Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs. It is, however, characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life - and this is the stuff that stories are made of - first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end - unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it - suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him.<sup>92</sup>

In the twentieth century, Benjamin implies, the process of dying exemplifies a universal 'solitude'.<sup>93</sup> However, Benjamin argues that in the past death was associated with precisely the opposite, with 'public process' and he connects this, as Pease does, with 'the unforgettable'. Pease makes the connection clear when he remarks that 'allegories confer a depth of potential significance, capable of instilling a sense of antiquity, a quality of 'time immemorial,' in the social bond'.<sup>94</sup> By revealing the scarlet letter Arthur Dimmesdale 'founds' the 'community's

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Reproduction' in Benjamin's *Illuminations*, Benjamin uses the term 'aura' in a different way.

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p 93.

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p 99.

<sup>94</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 101.

relation', Pease argues, by evoking this quality of 'time immemorial'. However, in saying this Pease inadvertently aligns himself with Walter Benjamin's own definition of 'symbolism'. 'The measure of time for the experience of the symbol is the mystical instant' wrote Benjamin in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1928).<sup>95</sup> In the 'symbol', he continued, 'destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption'.<sup>96</sup> This definition of 'symbolism' is applicable to Swann's 'realism' and Pease's allegory. Both of these terms are connected to a sense that redemption can be found in a mystical instant, a self-identical totality which is insulated from the vicissitudes of time. In *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin distinguishes allegory from symbolism by connecting the former with the 'category of time'.<sup>97</sup> This contention is echoed by de Man in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality'. '[In] the world of allegory...time is the originary constitutive category', he writes.<sup>98</sup> In the world of allegory, de Man argues, one never reaches a foundation. Indeed, de Man has argued that 'death' itself is simply one more sign. 'Death', he writes, 'is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament'.<sup>99</sup> In 'Defacing It: Hawthorne and History' Miller refers to de Man's remark commenting that:

death is indeed a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, the predicament of being

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<sup>95</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928)], Translated by John Osborne, (Verso, 1994).

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p 166.

<sup>97</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p 166.

<sup>98</sup> Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p 207.

<sup>99</sup> 'Autobiography As De-Facement', in Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p 81.

able to posit or project names freely...but unable to validate those names by any direct experience of what is named. The positing itself erects a barrier or veil (DI 99).

The double-bind, once again. One has to name. One has no choice. Yet one must never forget that one can never have 'any direct experience of what is named'. This could not be more different than the situation that Benjamin evokes in 'The Storyteller'. Benjamin argues that when one dies one crosses over to the other side, as it were, as 'the unforgettable emerges'. At this point, Benjamin says, 'a man's...real life...first assumes transmissible form'. In other words, as he dies he passes on 'the unforgettable'. Pease echoes this contention in his account of the revelation of the scarlet letter. 'Arthur demands that a memory of this sign accompany each transaction within the community', he says. Pease's 'community', then, would ritually unite around a 'sign' which, one could add, is no different from a symbol.

A similar sense of communal ritual also manifests itself in the way in which Swann describes 'Alice Doane's Appeal'. Swann argues that the original 'Alice Doane' story was intended to 'frighten his audience'.<sup>100</sup> However, 'in his second attempt on his audience's feelings' (the description of the Salem executions), Hawthorne 'no longer tries to frighten his audience but to move them by suggesting that man's inhumanity to man should make countless thousands mourn', says Swann.<sup>101</sup> Swann is attempting to distance himself from Poe and the New Critics by rejecting their sense of an unmediated '*single effect*'. He attempts to do this by evoking a sense of 'mourning' which involves the 'audience's feelings' but crucially also involves what

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<sup>100</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 21.

<sup>101</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 21.



Swann calls an 'understanding of history'.<sup>102</sup> 'Feeling' and 'understanding' are intertwined in 'mourning', Swann implies, and this can be distinguished from Poe's '*single effect*' which one could associate with an incomprehensible feeling of fear. Yet what Swann does not do is actually ask whether Poe and the New Critics are right to suggest that one could really experience an unmediated '*single effect*'. The point being that although 'fear' and 'mourning' are two different feelings they do, nevertheless, have one fundamental thing in common. Both assume that 'feeling' and 'understanding' can be fused into a totality. Swann, in fact, echoes the New Critics when he suggests that a monument to those executed in 1692 would be 'a positive symbol of the society that would build it - its recognition of human needs and deficiencies'.<sup>103</sup> Lyotard has suggested that Poe's 'The Philosophy of Composition' is an attempt at 'computing the effects' of one of his 'works of art'.<sup>104</sup> However much sympathy one has with Swann's position one has to say that he too assumes that one can 'compute the effects' of a 'work of art' and, of course, that he too is (wrongly) assuming that Hawthorne believed this. Yet, I argue in this thesis that Hawthorne rejected totality and consequently, rejected the ritualized mnemotechnique which is memorialising. Swann and Pease offer two complementary arguments. Swann argues that Hawthorne believed that one's 'feelings' should be attached to an 'understanding of history'. Pease argues that Hawthorne believed that one ought to surrender one's 'private self' in favour of a 'communal relation'. Everything, they suggest, should be transparent. Later in the thesis I will offer my own readings of both 'Alice Doane's Appeal' and *The Scarlet Letter*. In these readings I will argue that Hawthorne had a sense of something like a 'private self', something

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<sup>102</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 42.

<sup>103</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp 42 - 43.

<sup>104</sup> Lyotard, *Peregrinations*, p 22. See also Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition' (*Graham's Magazine*, April 1846), in *Poe: Essays and Reviews*, ed., G.R. Thompson.

like a 'feeling', which could exist without conflicting with - indeed could actually complement - both an 'understanding of history' and a 'communal relation'. But I shall return to this, and connect it to Hawthorne's sense of the allegory, in the following chapters. For the time being, one can simply say that, as Lyotard suggests, there is no such thing as a self-identical 'object'. Allegory, then, is akin to repeatedly rewriting this absence.

# WRETCHED SIMULACRUM: ALLEGORY AND THE PRIMAL FATHER

As American consul in Liverpool during the 1850s Hawthorne was obliged to attend civic banquets. 'It has often perplexed me', Hawthorne wrote describing one of these occasions:

to imagine how an Englishman will be able to reconcile himself to any future state of existence from which the earthly institution of dinner shall be excluded. Even if he fails to take his appetite along with him (which it seems hardly possible to believe, since this endowment is so essential to his composition), the immortal day must still admit an interim of two or three hours during which he will be conscious of a slight distaste, at all events, if not absolute repugnance, to merely spiritual nourishment. The idea of dinner has so imbedded itself among [an Englishman's] highest and deepest characteristics, so illuminated itself with intellect and softened itself with the kindest emotions of his heart, so linked itself with Church and State, and grown so majestic with long hereditary customs and ceremonies, that by taking it utterly away, Death, instead of putting the final touch to his perfection, would leave him infinitely less complete than we have already known him.

He could not be roundly happy. Paradise, among all its enjoyments, would lack one daily felicity which his sombre little island possessed. Perhaps it is not irreverent to conjecture



that a provision may have been made, in this particular, for the Englishman's exceptional necessities (OOH 342).

This chapter is separated into three sections. In the first section I develop the idea of a 'final touch'. I argue that the 'final touch' is always missing in Hawthorne's allegory. The 'idea of dinner', Hawthorne says in *Our Old Home*, is akin to a 'final touch'. Through this ritual the Englishman reaches 'perfection'. It synthesises even the apparently conflicting 'intellect' and 'heart'. Even if the Englishman were to enter Paradise, Hawthorne implies, he would still insist on his symbolic dinner in order to define his separate identity. The Englishman's Englishness must always take priority. In Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, one recalls, the 'primal horde' unite by killing the primal father and eating his corpse. The 'primal horde', then, treat the primal father both as an 'object' and as an 'outsider'. In the second section of this chapter I argue Hawthorne believed that something similar was at stake in the obsessive attempts of the English to define their identity against an outside. In this second section I will go on to argue that Hawthorne associated America with a different open-ended kind of identity, an open-ended identity that one can associate with allegory rather than symbolism. Yet, I argue, Hawthorne also discerned this allegory in certain aspects of English life. In, for instance, the excess of obscure symbols that he found on his travels in England. Hawthorne believed, I argue, that the circulation of simulacra was a healthy mode of cultural exchange, an open-ended cultural exchange which challenges the idea of fixed border. It could take place in any nation state (including England) which accepted its mutability. In the final section I argue that this is partly what attracted Hawthorne to Samuel Johnson's penance. His writings on the incident highlight a dissatisfaction with symbolism which I argue, is characteristically Hawthornian.

The passage from *Our Old Home* can be traced back to 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom Serpent' (1843) and 'The Christmas Banquet' (1844) (I discuss the significance of the asterisk below). The two tales were anthologised in *Mosses from an Old Manse* but are connected because they are subtitled 'From The Unpublished *Allegories Of The Heart*'. These are the only two extant works which relate to the *Allegories Of The Heart* and quite possibly Hawthorne was simply employing a romantic literary device by adding this title. In 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom Serpent' Hawthorne introduces Roderick Elliston. On seeing Elliston for the first time in five years George Herkimer 'remarked that [Elliston's] complexion had a greenish tinge over its sickly white, reminding him of a species of marble out of which he had once wrought a head of Envy, with her snaky locks' (T&S 781). Jorge-Luis Borges has commented on a relevant remark written by Hawthorne in the Notebooks, from the 1836:

One aesthetic error debased him: the Puritan desire to make a fable out of each imagining induced him to add morals and sometimes to falsify or deform them. ...'A snake taken into a man's stomach and nourished there from fifteen years to thirty-five, tormenting him most horribly.' That is enough, but Hawthorne considers himself obliged to add: 'A type of envy or some other evil passion'.<sup>1</sup>

Henry James, on the other hand, reproached Hawthorne for an excess of 'symbolism'. 'Hawthorne', James wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge-Luis Borges, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne' (1949), in *Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952*, trs. Ruth L. C. Simms, Introduction by James E. Irby, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p 51.

is perpetually looking for images which shall place themselves in picturesque correspondence with the spiritual facts with which he is concerned. ...But in such a process discretion is everything, and when the image becomes importunate it is in danger of seeming to stand for nothing more serious than itself.<sup>2</sup>

Borges reprimands Hawthorne for betraying his 'imaginings' by adding 'morals'. James, on the other hand, reprimands Hawthorne for betraying 'spiritual facts' with 'images'. Yet, as I argued in the Introduction, J Hillis Miller suggests that Hawthorne's writing shows that the 'disjunction' between 'realism and allegory' is not 'contingent' or 'accidental' but rather 'necessary and universal'. In other words Hawthorne searches for the 'discrepancy' between 'imaginings' and 'morals' or 'spiritual facts' and 'images'. As a consequence it is not possible for the reader of 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent' to know what Elliston's problem really is. Roderick Elliston is the 'victim', Hawthorne says, 'of a diseased fancy, or a horrible physical misfortune' (T&S 781). 'Some thought [he] was in an insipient stage of insanity...others prognosticated a general blight and gradual decline', Hawthorne says. One could 'learn nothing' from 'Roderick's own lips', he continues:

More than once, it is true, he had been heard to say, clutching his hands convulsively to his breast - 'It gnaws me! It gnaws me!' - but, by different auditors, a great diversity of explanation was assigned to this ominous expression. ...Was it sorrow? Was it merely the tooth of physical disease? Or...had he been guilty of some deed, which made his bosom prey to the deadlier fangs of remorse? There was plausible ground for each of

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<sup>2</sup> James, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 94.



these conjectures; but it must not be concealed that more than one elderly gentleman, the victim of good cheer and slothful habits, magisterially pronounced the secret of the whole matter to be Dyspepsia! (T&S 783/784).

One cannot be certain, then, if Elliston is possessed by 'Envy', whether he actually has a 'snake' in his 'stomach' or, after all, if he has merely been suffering from a serious bout of 'Dyspepsia'.

It is the discrepancy, then, which cannot be digested, so to speak. Explanations (both 'high' and 'low') are offered as to the origin of Roderick Elliston's problem, but none of them are either confirmed or denied by a narrator who appears to be as mystified as everyone else. Whenever an attempt is made to bring the matter to a head the 'bosom-serpent' somehow exceeds it.

Roderick's 'symptoms', Hawthorne says:

caused [his associates] endless perplexity. They knew not whether ill health were robbing his spirits of elasticity; or whether a canker of the mind was gradually eating, as such cankers do, from his moral system into the physical frame, which is but the shadow of the former (T&S 783).

These two options are mutually incompatible. Hawthorne suggests that the physical frame is always the 'shadow' of the 'moral system'. In which case the mind is the cause of the problem. On the other hand, if ill health is robbing Roderick's spirits of elasticity then his body is the cause of his symptoms. This is echoed in the footnote that the reader is directed toward by the

asterisk in the title: '[the] physical fact, to which it is here attempted to give a moral significance, has been known to occur in more than one instance' (T&S 781). An attempt has been made, the footnote says, to 'give a moral significance' to what otherwise would merely be a 'physical fact'. While the 'bosom-serpent' is a 'physical fact', Hawthorne suggests, the 'moral significance' is added afterwards. Moreover the 'physical fact' has been known 'to occur in more than one instance'. In which case 'physical fact' appears to take precedence over 'moral significance'. So, one can conclude that the 'physical fact' has occurred on more than one occasion with, apparently, no 'moral significance' whatsoever. Yet what does the reference to a 'physical fact' actually refer to? So far it has been assumed that it refers to the 'bosom-serpent' of the title. Yet, Hawthorne is, elsewhere, altogether less certain as to the actuality of the snake (Roderick's 'actual serpent - if a serpent there actually was in his bosom' he says at one point (T&S 789)). Hawthorne, apparently, gleaned all his 'information' about Roderick from 'an eminent medical gentleman' (T&S 783). Yet the reference to an authoritative source proves to be a red herring. Hawthorne appears to be none the wiser after his encounter. Roderick's symptoms appear to be shrouded in mystery.

This ambiguity is intensified by the positioning of the asterisk in the title of the piece ('Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent'). If taken literally, the 'physical fact' referred to in the footnote appears to refer to 'Egotism' rather than 'The Bosom-Serpent'. 'Egotism', of course, is associated with the psychological rather than the physical, but by associating it with the physical it is as if Hawthorne signals the fact that one of the main aims of this story is to trouble the opposition between idealism and materialism.

One can turn to Hawthorne's remarks on allegory in the 1851 'Preface to *Twice-told Tales*'. '[Even] in what purport to be pictures of actual life', Hawthorne says of his first published collection of tales, 'we have allegory, not always dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood, as to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver' (T&S 1152). Although Hawthorne suggests that allegory is taken into the 'reader's mind' he goes on to say that it can only be detected in the bodily trace of a fleeting 'shiver'. In other words allegory is diffused across the body as a kind of visceral sensation. Yet, Hawthorne says, allegory dresses itself in clothes made from 'flesh and blood'. If one undresses allegory, then, one finds nothing at all. Undressing allegory is not akin to the unveiling undertaken in a hermeneutic interpretation. On the contrary, one's body is revealed to be simply one more veil. Hawthorne imagines that one could take off one's body. The result would be that one would be left with nothing at all - and yet this 'nothing' would still be akin to one more veil. Here one recalls Miller's remark on the Reverend Hooper's black veil. The 'distinction', he writes, 'between realistic and allegorical narratives disappears in a sign that is at once blankly realistic and at the same time absolutely allegorical, that is, a sign for the failure of allegory'. Hawthorne simply uses the term allegory to evoke what Miller describes as the 'absolutely allegorical': an 'outside' which 'by no procedures of language can be given an other than enigmatic expression'. This, perhaps, explains why Hawthorne of 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent' apparently describes 'Egotism' as a 'physical fact'. 'Egotism', like the 'Bosom-Serpent', is a sign 'at once blankly realistic and at the same time absolutely allegorical'. Like every conceivable sign it contains within itself an 'outside' which 'by no procedures of language can be given an other than enigmatic expression'. 'Realism' and 'allegory', or, to save any confusion after noting Hawthorne's reference to the latter term in the 'Preface to *Twice-told Tales*', 'realism' and 'idealism' are the same, one can



say, in that neither the one nor the other can present this 'outside'. So, Roderick searches for a cure in Jeremy Taylor's *Ductor Dubitantium* (1660). The work, he says, is a 'bulky volume...full of cases of conscience' (T&S 792). While the latter characteristic might be associated with idealism, the former refers to the book in terms of its crude materialism. So, the cure, one could say, is itself contaminated.

Nevertheless, 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent' appears to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Roderick's 'symptoms' apparently started '[shortly] after [his] separation from his wife', and it transpires that Herkimer is the cousin of the woman in question. Roderick's has been estranged from Rosina for four years (T&S 783). When Rosina and Roderick meet, a meeting which is arranged by Herkimer, Rosina 'touched Roderick with her hand [a] tremor shivered through his frame', Hawthorne reports (T&S 793). '[It] is certain', Hawthorne continues, 'that Roderick Elliston sat up, like a man renewed, restored to his right mind, and rescued from the fiend, which had so miserably overcome him in the battlefield of his own breast' (T&S 793). Rosina, then, appears to be akin to a final touch which makes Roderick complete once again. Yet this is not where the story ends. In 'The Christmas Banquet: From the Unpublished *Allegories of the Heart*' Roderick unfolds 'a few sheets of manuscript' and proceeds to narrate a story to Rosina and her cousin which, he explains in a brief introduction, is about a 'being' who 'lacks the last inestimable touch of a divine creator' (T&S 849). Roderick apparently assumes that this final touch is desirable although it will become apparent that the story he goes on to tell implicitly challenges this contention.

Before continuing with 'The Christmas Banquet', it will be worth turning to 'Drowne's Wooden

Image'. In this tale Hawthorne developed the idea of a 'touch of a divine creator'. On completion of a wooden image Captain Hunnewell, who commissioned the piece from local carver Deacon Drowne as a figure-head for his docked ship, walks from his residence to the artist's studio. The people of the town are astonished to see a figure identical in every way to the carving, which has been the object of popular acclaim, walking by his side. "Drowne's wooden image has come to life!" a passer-by exclaims (T&S 940). The nature of the figure is unclear from the moment the reader is informed that it would be 'unmannerly' to eavesdrop on the absurdly jovial Captain Hunnewell as he apparently communicates a secret to Deacon Drowne, 'Captain Hunnewell...took Drowne by the button, and communicated his wishes in so low a tone, that it would be unmannerly to repeat what was evidently intended for the carver's private ear'(T&S 933). Hawthorne reports 'a rumor' that the wooden image had been copied from the real figure of 'a young Portuguese lady of rank' who had been put 'under the protection' of Captain Hunnewell (T&S 943/944). Yet the text tantalises in that it never finally confirms or denies the 'rumour'. 'This fair stranger must have been the original of Drowne's Wooden Image' Hawthorne concludes (T&S 944). Yet the unnecessary use of 'must', here, only adds to the sense of uncertainty. Moreover Hawthorne makes it quite clear that, though it would be the easiest thing in the world, he simply will not put an end to the ambiguity. In an absurd scene John Singleton Copley, an real-life eighteenth century American painter who came to be regarded as an accomplished artist who could be compared with Europeans without embarrassment, follows Captain Hunnewell and the 'image...or apparition, whichever it may be' (T&S 941) into Drowne's dock-side shop. He is just too late to make sense of the situation however. The carving, it seems, is still in the shop. There was 'no longer any motion in the life-like image, nor any real woman in the workshop'. However, Hawthorne continues:

Captain Hunnewell, too, had vanished. His hoarse, sea-breezy tones, however, were audible on the other side of a door that opened upon the water.

‘Sit down in the stern sheets my lady,’ said the gallant captain. ‘Come, bear a hand, you lubbers, and set us on board in the turning of a minute glass.’

And then was heard the stroke of oars (T&S 942).

The carving and the ‘Portuguese lady of rank’ could so easily have been placed side by side. For no discernible reason, and just when the reader might expect this to happen, a door separates them. Why has Captain Hunnewell been waiting in port for the figure-head only to leave it behind? Moreover the figure in the street had been observed to break her fan. The ‘elaborate delicacy of its workmanship’ gave way the reader is told (T&S 941). When Copley enters the shop he sees Drowne standing ‘beside his creation mending the beautiful fan, which by some accident was broken in her hand’ (T&S 942). Is this coincidence? Possibly yes, Possibly no. Finally, one simply can not decide whether the carver really brought his image to life or on the other hand if the rumours of ‘a Portugese lady of rank’ should be believed. The question as to her nature, that is to say whether she is real or unreal, is simply indeterminable. By maintaining this discrepancy Hawthorne challenges Poe’s sense of a single aesthetic ‘effect’. If for Poe, in a story like ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’, the final aesthetic effect transcends all that came before it, for Hawthorne transcendence is just out of reach. In fact, its absence haunts the tale from beginning to end.

So, Deacon Drowne is credited with surpassing all his other productions in carving the image of the ‘beautiful young lady’ out of wood. While visiting Drowne’s workshop fellow artist Copley



sees a figure representing General Wolfe, a figure which, Hawthorne says, has all the characteristic 'mechanical and wooden cleverness that so invariably distinguished the images'. As skilfully wrought as the symbol may be, Copley remarks, it somehow lacks that 'one other touch' that would make it 'a breathing and intelligent human creature' (T&S 935). Somehow, one fundamental thing always seems to be missing from Drowne's works. 'I know what you know', Drowne responds to Copley, 'the one touch, which you speak of as deficient, is the only one that would be truly valuable...without it, these works of mine are no better than worthless abortions' (T&S 936). Copley, of course, is astonished when he catches a glimpse of the new carving which Drowne is working on: 'Here is the divine, the life-giving touch' he says (T&S 933). How does this figure differ from Drowne's previous productions? 'Whether it was the monarch himself', Hawthorne had explained:

or some famous British admiral or general, the governor of the province, or perchance the favourite daughter of the ship-owner, there the image stood above the prow, decked out in gorgeous colours, magnificently gilded, and staring the whole world out of countenance, as if from an innate consciousness of its own superiority (T&S 940).

Captain Hunnewell apparently resembles one of these figures. 'He was stylishly dressed', Hawthorne writes, 'dressed in a blue broadcloth coat, with gold lace at the seams and button-holes, an embroidered scarlet waistcoat, a triangular hat, with a loop and broad binding of gold, and wore a silver-hilted hanger at his side'. 'But', Hawthorne continues, 'the good captain might have been arrayed in the robes of a prince or the rags of a beggar, without in either case attracting notice, while obscured by such a companion as now leaned on his arm' (T&S 940). When the

‘people in the street’ see Captain Hunnewell’s companion Hawthorne says that some of them ‘stood as if transfixed to wood or marble in astonishment’ (T&S 940). Drowne’s previous productions, then, along with Captain Hunnewell and the local populace, seemed to lack the ‘life-giving touch’. So what is it that distinguishes Drowne’s Wooden Image from everything else?

In part the astonishment created by the Captain’s companion is due to the fact that she seems to be identical to Drowne’s carving. However there is another reason for the general astonishment:

The broad gold chain upon the neck was identical with the one represented on the image, and glistened with the motion imparted by the rise and fall of the bosom which it decorated. A real diamond sparkled on her finger. In her right hand she bore a pearl and ebony fan, which she flourished with a fantastic and bewitching coquetry, that was likewise expressed in all her movements, as well as in the style of her beauty and the attire so well harmonized with it. The face, with its brilliant depth of complexion, had the same piquancy of mirthful mischief that was fixed upon the countenance of the image, but which was here varied and continually shifting, yet always essentially the same, like the sunny gleam upon a bubbling fountain (T&S 941).

It seems to be impossible to name the defining quality which sets the Captain’s companion apart - and yet this is her defining quality. She seem to be in constant movement, ‘continually shifting, yet always essentially the same’. The essential sameness, paradoxically, relates to her

inability to settle into a statuesque pose. She seems to withhold that something which would define her. Yet, this was also true of the carving which, Hawthorne reported, had a 'certain piquancy about the eyes and mouth which, of all expressions, would have seemed the most impossible to throw over a wooden countenance' (T&S 937). 'In the dark eyes, and around the voluptuous mouth', Hawthorne says when the carving is 'finished', 'there played a look made up of pride, coquetry, and a gleam of mirthfulness, which impressed Copley with the idea that the image was secretly enjoying the perplexed admiration of himself and all other beholders' (T&S 938/939). Copley cannot be certain, however, and neither can Hawthorne. The former is merely 'impressed' with an idea while Hawthorne can only say that 'there played a look...'. The truth about the image remains an enigma. Hence the significance of Hawthorne's references to the eyes and mouth. The eyes and mouth seem to be gateways that will grant passage from the outside to the inside of the body. However the enigmatic effect produced by the Captain's companion is, at the same time, diffused across a surface which seems to be in constant movement. When one is on the outside, then, an inside always seems to be just beyond reach. If one could enter the inside, however, then one would miss the seductive effects of the outside - and one cannot escape this double-bind.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida's remarks on 'double invagination' are relevant. '[Double] invagination', he writes,

constitutes the story of stories, the narrative of narrative...the apparently outer edge of an enclosure [*clôture*]...[and] makes no sign beyond itself, toward what is utterly *other*, without becoming double or dual, without making itself be 'represented', refolded, superimposed, *re-marked* within the enclosure, at least in what the structure produces as an effect of interiority. But it is precisely this structure-effect that is being deconstructed here (Extract from 'Living On: Border Lines' [1979], trs. James Hulbert, in *The Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p 268).

The 'outer edge of an enclosure' (*clôture* can also mean 'closure') can not actually touch the



The sense that Drowne's carving and the Captain's companion are identical is, it has been noted, reinforced by the broken fan. The Captain's companion is, Hawthorne notes, 'slightly vexed and flustered' by the attention that she receives from the 'people in the street'. 'She was', he continues, 'observed to flutter her fan with such vehement rapidity, that the elaborate delicacy of its workmanship gave way, and it remained broken in her hand' (T&S 941). In an attempt to cool down Captain Hunnewell's self-conscious companion flutters her fan at too great speed. The broken fan, then, is an external trace of interiority. A totalising symbol, it seems, runs the risk of 'overheating'. When Copley enters Drowne's workshop he sees the carver standing 'beside his creation, mending the beautiful fan, which by some accident was broken in her hand' (T&S 942). Both the Captain's companion and Drowne's carving, assuming they are different of course, are connected by a breakage which renders them incomplete. Yet even if they were identical there would still be a suggestion that the apparent totality was in fact split between an irreconcilable inside and outside.

In this way 'Drowne's Wooden Image' challenges Poe's sense of a single aesthetic effect - and Copley's sense of a 'life-giving touch' Hawthorne notes that Drowne's work lacked that 'deep

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'other', Derrida suggests. As soon as a narrative reaches the point of closure, the point at which it attempts to take a step forwards to draw a line under what came before, it too is, inevitably, drawn back into what came before. The step outside, that 'one other touch' in Copley's words, inevitably cancels itself and simply produces one more 'effect of interiority'. Yet, Derrida adds, 'it is precisely this structure-effect that is being deconstructed here'. In saying this Derrida turns this inside out once more. The 'effect of interiority', the inevitable outcome of the attempt to take the final step outside, is itself split open by that 'outside' *despite itself* as it were. If the closure of a narrative attempts to reach an outside it will inevitably fail, Derrida suggests. But that is only because it was always already part of that outside, of the 'utterly other', anyway. The whole story, the whole narrative, is already part of 'the story of stories, the narrative of narrative'. 'Double invagination' invokes an inescapable inside which is inevitably fissured by an untouchable outside.

quality...which bestows life upon the lifeless and warmth upon the cold' (T&S 934). Yet it has been argued that the 'deep quality' in question consists in a certain lifelessness. The problem with the 'staring admirals and kings' (T&S 938) and 'Britannia, Victory, and other ladies of the allegoric sisterhood' (T&S 934) that Drowne had produced up until his meeting with Captain Hunnewell is that they all had that final 'touch'. In 'staring the whole world out of countenance' these images seem to have the last word. Much later, in *Our Old Home*, Hawthorne seems to recall 'Drowne's Wooden Image' when he suggests that complete images may, in certain circumstances, be true to life anyway. Commenting on paintings of British naval heroes Hawthorne remarks:

Nine tenths of these distinguished admirals...if their faces tell the truth, must needs have been blockheads, and might have served better, one would imagine, as wooden figure-heads for their own ships than to direct any difficult and intricate scheme of action from the quarter-deck (OOH 258) .

'Drowne's Wooden Image' questions Copley's contention that the carving commissioned by Captain Hunnewell possesses a 'life-giving touch'. On the contrary, the remarkable nature of the work lies precisely in the fact that it does *not* possess the 'life-giving touch'.

So, in 'The Christmas Banquet' Roderick tells the story of, in his words, a 'being' who 'lacks the last inestimable touch of a divine creator'. In 'a certain old gentleman's last will and testament', Roderick explains, 'a considerable sum' was left 'establishing a fund, the interest of which was to be expended, annually forever, in preparing a Christmas Banquet for ten of the

most miserable persons that could be found' (T&S 850). One particular individual is 'invariably present' at these annual rituals (T&S 861). 'At each successive festival...Gervayse Hastings showed his face, gradually changing from the smooth beauty of his youth to the thoughtful comeliness of manhood, and thence to the bald impressive dignity of age' Roderick says (T&S 861). On every occasion the other guests at the banquet, miserable to the last, would wonder why Gervayse Hastings attended. "'Who is this impassive man' had been asked a hundred times. 'Has he suffered? Has he sinned? There are no traces of either. Then wherefore is he here?'" writes Hawthorne (T&S 861). The tale ends when an aged Gervayse Hastings is challenged by another guest to explain himself:

'You will not understand it', replied Gervayse Hastings, feebly, and with a singular inefficiency of pronunciation, and sometimes putting one word for another. 'None have understood it - not even those who experience the like. It is a chilliness - a want of earnestness - a feeling as if what should be my heart were a thing of vapor - a haunting perception of unreality!...All things - all persons...have been like shadows flickering on a wall. ...Neither have I myself any real existence, but am a shadow like the rest!' (T&S 866).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On Wednesday June 1<sup>st</sup> 1842 Hawthorne made a note, 'The human Heart to be allegorized as a cavern' (Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, p 237). The thoughts which follow evoke Dante's *Divine Comedy* but also, significantly, the allegory of the cave in Chapter 9 of Plato's *Republic*. This reference is alluded to at the beginning of 'The Christmas Banquet: From The *Unpublished Allegories Of The Heart*', as Roderick prefaces his story remarking that, 'My former sad experience...has gifted me with some degree of insight into the gloomy mystery of the human heart, through which I have wandered like one astray in a dark cavern, with his torch flickering fast to extinction'. The connections between the two *Allegories Of The Heart* and Plato's *Republic* would take extensive analysis. Suffice to say that Hawthorne appears to be attracted to the complex relationship, a relationship which can easily be oversimplified, between inside and outside in Plato's allegory of the cave.



There is something strange about Hastings pronunciation. He speaks with an 'inefficiency'; the essence, the import, of the words, is missing. It is as if they are like 'shadows flickering on the wall'. Gervayse Hastings, then, appears to be totally adrift in an inauthentic world.

A 'speculative clergyman' asks Hastings how he 'views' a 'future life'. 'I cannot conceive it earnestly enough to feel either hope or fear', Hastings replies (T&S 861). 'Death' itself, then, appears to be a humdrum affair for Hastings. At this moment a decisive event occurs. Every year the head of the table is occupied by a 'skeleton'. 'It was whispered' Roderick explains:

I know not with what truth, that the testator himself had once walked the visible world with the machinery of that same skeleton, and that it was one of the stipulations of his will, that he should be permitted to sit, from year to year, at the banquet which he had instituted (T&S 851).

Hawthorne goes on to explain that 'a wreath of cypress' (cypress being a traditional symbol of mourning) was 'held high by a skeleton-arm, protruding from within the black mantle' (T&S 851). The cypress wreath 'is a crown', one of the 'stewards' explains, 'not for the worthiest, but for the wofullest, when he shall prove his claim to it' (T&S 851). Immediately after Hastings says that he knows neither 'hope or fear' in respect of a 'future life', then:

the decayed ligaments of the skeleton gave way, and the dry bones fell together in a heap, thus causing the dusty wreath of cypresses to drop upon the table. The attention of the company thus being diverted, for a single instant, from Gervayse Hastings, they

perceived, on turning again towards him, that the old man had undergone a change. His shadow had ceased to flicker on the wall (T&S 866).

Perhaps Hastings has proved the 'wofullest'. But the wreath 'drops' to the table. It is as if the 'testator' lets the wreath fall out of his skeletal hand because it has lost its original meaning. How has this happened? At what appears to be the final banquet Roderick describes Gervayse Hastings as follows:

He threw a calm, inquiring glance around the table, as if to ascertain whether any guest had yet appeared, after so many unsuccessful banquets, who might impart to him the mystery - the deep, warm secret - the life within the life - which, manifested in joy or sorrow, is what gives substance to a world of shadows (T&S 863).

The 'testator's definition of existence', Hawthorne remarks earlier in the tale, had been 'death-in-life' (T&S 850). Even the 'testator's definition of existence', one can infer, even a philosophy of 'death-in-life', is akin to a 'substance' in a 'world of shadows'. The testator, so it seems, follows a positive rule. However strange he may have been, he has positive characteristics. One can say something about him, as it were, and this is precisely how he differs from Hastings. Hastings simply has no sense of being 'in-life'. A consequence of this appears to be a different relationship to death. The 'testator' appears to live on in death, that is until his 'dry bones' fall 'together in a heap'. When the end finally does arrive it arrives with violence. Yet, Gervayse Hastings' end is altogether different. The assembled company, after being 'diverted' for a 'single instant' by the collapse of the skeleton, turn towards Gervayse Hastings again. 'His shadow had

ceased to flicker on the wall' Hawthorne says. It is as if Gervayse Hastings was never fully present anyway ; he was a shadow. In contrast to Walter Benjamin's description of death in 'The Storyteller', Gervayse Hastings simply vanishes.<sup>5</sup> His death is the most imperceptible 'non-event'. 'His shadow had ceased to flicker on the wall' Hawthorne says. Death just happens, and with this insight the memorial banquet appears to come to an end. It is as if the testator has suddenly sensed, like Gervayse Hastings, the all pervasiveness of the inauthentic. Death itself, Hawthorne implies, is just one more veil.

In this sense 'The Christmas Banquet' echoes the 1832 'Roger Malvin's Burial'. Retreating from a scene of 'Indian Warfare' Reuben Bourne abandons the fatally wounded Roger Malvin in the 'wilderness'. Leaving a blood-stained handkerchief tied to the 'topmost branch' of an oak sapling to mark the spot he promises to return and bury Roger Malvin. With some difficulty he eventually returns to his home settlement and, after a period of recuperation, he leads Malvin's daughter Dorcas to believe that he had actually witnessed her father's death and, moreover, that he had buried him. 'All acknowledged that [Reuben] might worthily demand the hand of the fair maiden, to whose father he had been 'faithful unto death'; and...in the space of a few months, Reuben became the husband of Dorcas Malvin' (T&S 97). 'There was now in the breast of Reuben Bourne', he says, 'an incommunicable thought; something which he was to conceal most heedfully from her whom he most loved and trusted' (T&S 97). '[Concealment]', Hawthorne

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<sup>5</sup> 'He was so calm in dying', writes Blanchot in a fragmentary paragraph from *Le Pas Au-Delà*, 'that he seemed, before dying, already dead'(137). '[Dying]', he writes, '[is] the impossible in relation to us, that which we cannot take on freely nor suffer under coercion: dying, in the absence of present, in that lack of traces that it leaves, is too light to die, to constitute a dying' (125). See Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, [*Le Pas Au-Dela* (1973)], trs. Lycette Nelson, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).



explains:

had imparted to a justifiable act, much of the secret effect of guilt; and Reuben, while reason told him he had done right, experienced in no small degree, the mental horrors which punish the perpetrator of undiscovered crime. By a certain association of ideas, he at times almost imagined himself a murderer. For years, also, a thought would occasionally recur, which, though he perceived all its folly and extravagance, he had not power to banish from his mind; it was a haunting and torturing fancy, that his father-in-law was yet sitting at the foot of the rock, on the withered forest-leaves, alive, and waiting his pledged assistance. These mental deceptions, however, came and went, nor did he ever mistake them for realities; but in the calmest and clearest moods of his mind, he was conscious that he had a deep vow unredeemed, and that an unburied corpse was calling to him, out of the wilderness. Yet, such was the consequence of his prevarication, that he could not obey the call. ...There was, however, a continual impulse, a voice audible only to himself, commanding him to go forth and redeem his vow (T&S 98).

Eighteen years later Reuben, suffering 'declining prosperity', moves away from the settlement, with Dorcas and fifteen year old child Cyrus, to 'seek subsistence from the virgin bosom of the wilderness' (T&S 99). Five days into their journey Reuben muses on 'the strange influence':

that had led him away from his premeditated course, and so far into the depths of the wilderness. Unable to penetrate into the secret place of his soul, where his motives lay hidden, he believed that a supernatural voice had called him onward, and that a

supernatural power had obstructed his retreat. He trusted that it was Heaven's intent to afford him an opportunity of expiating his sin; he hoped that he might find the bones [of Roger Malvin], so long unburied; and that having laid the earth over them, peace would throw its sunlight into the sepulchre of his heart (T&S 103/104).

Hunting for game Reuben and Cyrus separate. Reuben fires into a 'thick veil of undergrowth' (T&S 104). 'A low moan, which told his success, and by which even animals can express their dying agony, was unheeded by Reuben Bourne', Hawthorne says (T&S 104). 'What were the recollections now breaking upon him?', he continues:

The thicket into which Reuben had fired, was near the summit of a swell of land, and was clustered around the base of a rock, which in the shape and smoothness of one of its surfaces, was not unlike a gigantic gravestone. As if reflected in a mirror, its likeness was in Reuben's memory. He even recognized the veins which seemed to form an inscription in forgotten characters, everything remained the same, except that a thick covert of bushes shrouded the lower part of the rock, and would have hidden Roger Malvin, had he still been sitting there. Yet, in the next moment, Reuben's eye was caught by another change, that time had effected, since he last stood, where he was now standing... The sapling, to which he had bound the blood-stained symbol of his vow, has increased and strengthened into an oak...a blight had apparently stricken the upper part of the oak, and the very topmost bough was withered, sapless, and utterly dead (T&S 104).

Reuben has shot and killed Cyrus. 'This broad rock', he says to Dorcas when she arrives:

'is the grave-stone of your near kindred. ... Your tears will fall at once over your father and your son.'

She heard him not. With one wild shriek, that seemed to force its way from the sufferer's inmost soul, she sank insensible by the side of her dead boy. At that moment, the withered topmost bough of the oak loosened itself, in the stilly air, and fell in soft, light fragments upon the rock, upon the leaves, upon Reuben, upon his wife and child, and upon Roger Malvin's bones. Then Reuben's heart was stricken, and the tears gushed out like water from a rock. The vow that the wounded youth had made, the blighted man had come to redeem. His sin was expiated, the curse was gone from him; and, in the hour, when he had first shed blood dearer to him than his own, a prayer, the first for years, went up to Heaven from the lips of Reuben Bourne (T&S 107).

Reuben Bourne sinned, then, because he did not return to bury Roger Malvin. Now, so it seems, he has 'come to redeem' himself. However, he has not redeemed himself yet. The story seems to end rather prematurely. Reuben Bourne's confession to Dorcas is also rather ambiguous. Reuben's 'guilt' had, after all, been based on a sense that he had not told his wife that her father remained unburied. Yet, by the end of the story he still hasn't really told her this. He suggests that her father did have a grave stone. There is as much of veiling about this conclusion as unveiling. The 'incommunicable thought' remains 'incommunicable', one could say. It is akin to 'the veins which seemed to form an inscription in forgotten characters' on the rock which marks the place where Roger Malvin died. This sense of permanently 'incommunicable thought'



is evoked by the reference to a 'topmost bough' which 'loosened itself, in the stilly air, and fell in soft, light fragments upon the rock, upon the leaves, upon Reuben, upon his wife and child, and upon Roger Malvin's bones'. The final touch is missing, one can say. In place of the 'blood-tainted symbol of [Reuben Bourne's] vow' (T&S 104) there is a sign of a permanently incommunicable thought.

At the of 'The Christmas Banquet' Roderick asks Rosina for her thoughts. 'Frankly', she replies with Gervayse Hastings in mind, 'your success is by no means complete. ...It is true, I have an idea of the character you endeavor to describe; but it is rather by dint of my own thought than your expression'. George Herkimer intervenes:

That is unavoidable...because the characteristics are all negative. ... Of such persons - and we do meet with these moral monsters now and then - it is difficult to conceive how they came to exist here, or what there is in them capable of existence hereafter. They seem to be on the outside of everything; and nothing wearies the soul more than an attempt to comprehend them within its grasp (T&S 866/867) .

'Someone who is really 'outside of everything'' Miller says of this passage, 'is also outside of language. Such a person remains cold, as distant, as unapproachable as ever even after the most extravagant efforts to tell his or her story' (DI, 57). If George Herkimer believed that by bringing Roderick and Rosina back together he had engineered the end of the story, as it were, in 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent' then in 'The Christmas Banquet' it is as if Roderick is suggesting even 'the most extravagant attempts' fail to bring a story to a close. Narrative

cannot 'filter out', remembering Lyotard's term, an element of uncertainty.

In 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent' Roderick tells George Herkimer of a 'story' which connects the origin of the 'bosom-serpent' to a fountain:

[A] snake...lurked in this fountain - pure innocent as it looks - ever since it was known to the first settlers. This insinuating personage once crept into the vitals of my great grandfather, and dwelt there many years, tormenting the old gentleman beyond endurance. In short, it is a family peculiarity. But, to tell you the truth, I have no faith in this idea of the snake's being an heir-loom (T&S 792/793).

When Roderick and Rosina are reunited Hawthorne writes that 'if report be trustworthy, [Herkimer] beheld a waving motion through the grass, and heard a tinkling sound, as if something had plunged into the fountain' (T&S 793). It is as if Herkimer controls the fountain. The Gothic family narrative has been terminated in an instant. After noting the 'report' Hawthorne adds, 'Be the truth as it might, it is certain that Roderick sat up, like a man renewed, restored to his right mind, and rescued from the fiend, which had so miserably overcome him in the battle-field of his own breast' (T&S 793). Yet, by now, the reader has been given every reason to suspect 'certainties'. The neat ending has already been undermined in 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent' - even before 'The Christmas Banquet'. Earlier Hawthorne had described Roderick sitting in the 'enclosure' at the 'rear' of the 'magnificent family residence':

Roderick was reclining on the margin of the fountain, which gushed into the flecked

sunshine with the same clear sparkle, and the same voice of airy quietude, as when trees of primeval growth flung their shadows across its bosom. How strange is the life of a fountain, born at every moment, yet of an age coeval with the rocks, and far surpassing the venerable antiquity of the forest! (T&S 792).

Hawthorne appears to be suggesting that ‘the new’ and ‘the ancient’ can be regarded as the same because they are both fundamentally finite. The image anticipates the reference to ‘shadows flickering on the wall’ in ‘The Christmas Banquet’. In the absence of an origin both the ‘very new’ and the ‘very old’ can be regarded as merely shadows. One recalls that, in ‘Drowne’s Wooden Image’, the ‘face’ of the Captain’s companion is described as ‘varied and continually shifting, yet always essentially the same, like the sunny gleam upon a bubbling fountain’. Where does this effect originate? On high, with the touch of the sun? Down below, in the earth, with the touch of the spring? The effect is not produced by either the fountain or the sun but, rather, by the difference between the two. It is in this discrepancy that the trace of a something that fractures any given totality can be sensed. Recalling Roderick Elliston’s comment on his ‘bosom-serpent’, the discrepancy, one can say, is ‘*sui generis*’ (T&S 792). It cannot be captured - or even touched by a ‘divine creator’. ‘The past, dismal as it seems, shall fling no gloom upon the future. To give it its due importance, we must think of it but as an anecdote in our Eternity!’ says Rosina at the end of ‘Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent’ (T&S 794). Yet Hawthorne suggests that ‘Eternity’ is precisely what is missing. So, in ‘The Christmas Banquet’ Roderick Elliston rejects Herkimer’s ‘cure’ in favour of an indecipherable narrative expression (or an indecipherable anecdotal expression, one could say).



## II

Earlier it was suggested that Hawthorne made oblique references to the 'Allegories of the Heart' in *Our Old Home*. To Englishmen, Hawthorne suggested, the 'idea of dinner' was akin to a 'final touch'. However, in *Our Old Home* Hawthorne goes on to suggest that things are different in America. 'We Americans', he wrote, 'lose some very agreeable titillations of the heart in consequence of our proud prerogative of caring no more about our President than for a man of straw, or a stuffed scarecrow standing in a cornfield' (OOH 358). 'The 'Englishman', he continues:

clothes our bare abstraction in flesh and blood, - at present in the flesh and blood of a woman, - and manages to combine love, awe, and intellectual reverence, all in one emotion, and to embody his mother, his wife, his children, the whole idea of kindred, in a single person, and make her the representative of his country and laws (OOH 358).

The monarch, then, represents 'England'; she gives England its final touch. However, it seems fair to say that Hawthorne is not necessarily being sincere when he suggests that Americans should envy the English. In the sketch that precedes 'Civic Banquets', 'Outside Glimpses Of English Poverty', Hawthorne had contrasted the 'proud and delightful emotions' that seemed to 'have affected all England' on the 'occasion' of a recent Royal wedding with a collective marriage of 'some poor English people' (OOH 338). The wedding of a 'confused crowd' is described by Hawthorne as one of the 'saddest sights I ever looked upon'. There was 'nothing virgin-like in the brides, nor hopeful or energetic in the bridegrooms' Hawthorne comments. The

clergyman, he continues:

addressed only small parts of the service to each individual pair, but so [managed] the larger portion as to include the whole company without the trouble of repetition. By this compendious contrivance, one would apprehend he came dangerously near making every man and woman the husband and wife of every other (OOH 339).

Yet, Hawthorne says in 'Civic Banquets' that Queen Victoria is the 'wife' of each Englishman. I think Hawthorne was aware of the implications of this remark and of the analogy that could be made. For Hawthorne, one could say, there was nothing 'virgin-like' about Queen Victoria. Queen Victoria, as each Englishmen's 'wife', appears to be, to borrow a phrase used by Lauren Berlant to describe the Statue of Liberty, a 'national prostitute'.<sup>6</sup> One can connect this to another incident described in *Our Old Home*. Hawthorne notes that the inhabitants of Lichfield, a small cathedral city, had 'an old fashioned way with them'. They tended 'to stare at the passing visitor, as if the railway had not quite accustomed them to the novelty of strange faces moving along their ancient sidewalks' (OOH 140). On several occasions 'old women' of the town curtesy to the 'stranger', and, he interprets this as a 'welcome on behalf of the inhabitants'. 'Yet', he comments, 'I wish, merely for the experiment's sake, that I could have emboldened myself to hold out...[a] sixpence to at least one of the old ladies' (OOH 140/141). Cruelly, Hawthorne is associating the 'old ladies' with prostitution. It as if Hawthorne is suggesting that the old ladies are behaving as if the public areas of Lichfield were their territory. In response to this Hawthorne imagines misinterpreting this and behaving himself as if the old ladies had been

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<sup>6</sup> Berlant, *The Anatomy Of National Fantasy*, p 27.

reduced to selling their bodies. Yet when Hawthorne imagines the ‘old ladies’ to be outsiders, as it were, that is to say when he imagines that the ‘old ladies’ do not possess the city, then his attitude to their greeting changes. ‘Positively’, he says, ‘coming from such humble sources, I took it all the more as welcome on behalf of the inhabitants, and would not have exchanged it for an invitation from the mayor and magistrates to a public dinner’ (OOH 140/141). Suddenly, it is as if each of the ‘old ladies’ is akin to Hawthorne’s ‘American President’.

Hawthorne’s American President, he implies in ‘Civic Banquets’, is not the ‘representative of his country and laws’. On the contrary, Americans care no more about their President, Hawthorne says, ‘than for a man of straw, or a stuffed scarecrow standing in a cornfield’. Hawthorne here obliquely refers to one of his final short stories: ‘Feathertop: A Moralised Legend’ (1852). Mother Rigby, one of the ‘most cunning and potent witches in New England’, decides to create a ‘scarecrow’ who ‘should represent a fine gentleman of the period, so far as the materials at hand would allow’ (T&S 1103/1104). The ‘strong-willed old bedlam’, Hawthorne says, ‘scowled and beckoned, and flung the energy of her purpose so forcibly at this poor combination of rotten wood, and musty straw, and ragged garments, that it was compelled to show itself a man, in spite of the reality of things’ (T&S 1108). Mother Rigby implores the scarecrow to suck at a pipe:

The more earnestly it applied its lips to the pipe, the more distinctly was its human likeness stamped among visible realities; the more sagacious grew its expression; the more lifelike its gestures and movements, and the more intelligible and audible its voice. Its garments too glistened so much brighter with an illusory magnificence (T&S 1112).



The implication seems to be that the more 'lifelike' the scarecrow becomes the more he falls victim to an 'illusory magnificence'. It is as if he is caught in a trap, one could say: the better he gets, the worse he gets. When Mother Rigby sends Feathertop off to 'town' there is 'general admiration' from the local people. Apparently certain of his superior breeding the local people make various guesses as to his origin - suggesting he has 'old Norman blood in his veins', that he is a 'Dutchman', a 'High German', a 'Turk...bred at the French court', and 'a Spaniard'. Yet Feathertop has a rude awakening when he glances into a mirror. He 'there beheld':

not the glittering mockery of his outside show, but a picture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stript of all witchcraft.

The wretched simulacrum! We almost pity him. He threw up his arms, with an expression of despair, that went further than any of his previous manifestations, towards vindicating his claims to be reckoned human. For perchance the only time, since this so often empty and deceptive life of mortals began its course, an Illusion had seen and fully recognized itself (T&S 1120/1121).

One recalls de Man's remark on allegory. Allegory, he says in 'The Rhetoric Of Temporality', 'prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognised as a non-self.' Feathertop is closest to being 'human', even if he isn't exactly 'human', when he cannot recognise himself as a totality. Feathertop comes closest to being a representative figure when he realises that he is not really himself - that he is a 'simulacrum'.

Like Feathertop, Hawthorne's 'President' is a 'simulacrum'. He too is representative because he knows that he does not really belong anywhere. The American President, as Hawthorne describes it, is akin to Hillis Miller's description of 'synecdoche', a trope, he says, which is 'vexed and obscure...squeezed as it is between metaphor and metonymy'. 'A synecdochic example', he continues, 'tends to be taken simultaneously as like the indeterminate whole of which it is a part and as merely one contingent part of a heterogenous whole' (DI 49). Unlike Queen Victoria, the President does not symbolise an unchanging national whole. Through the monarch, Hawthorne says, the Englishmen 'clothes our bare abstraction in flesh and blood'. Here he reworks the trope first used in the 1851 remarks on the *Twice-told Tales*. '[Even] in what purport to be pictures of actual life, we have allegory, not always so warmly dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood, to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver' Hawthorne wrote. Hawthorne's American President, then, is akin to allegory in that he is not so warmly dressed in his habiliments of flesh and blood. Hawthorne's American President has no particular embodiment. He is the allegorical representative of an open-ended state, a state that is aware that it is a 'simulacrum'.

In 'Civic Banquets' Hawthorne goes on to describe the English national anthem. 'To say the truth', he writes:

the spectacle struck me rather ludicrously, to see this party of stout middle-aged and elderly gentleman, in the fulness of meat and drink, their ample and ruddy faces glistening with wine, perspiration, and enthusiasm, rumbling out those strange old stanzas from the very bottom of their hearts and stomachs, which two organs, in the

English interior arrangement, lie closer than in ours (OOH 358/359).

Hawthorne is unable to take seriously the idea that these ‘stout middle-aged and elderly gentleman’ are the embodiment of an ‘English superiority’. In this sense one remembers Henry James saying that Hawthorne was occasionally ‘in danger of crossing the line that separates the sublime from its intimate neighbour’.<sup>7</sup> Yet Hawthorne, one could say in response, positively relishes in breaching the line that separates the sublime from the ridiculous. ‘I could not wonder at its universal acceptance and indestructible popularity’, he continues, describing the English anthem:

considering how inimitably it expresses the national faith and feeling as regards the inevitable righteousness of England, the Almighty’s consequent respect and partiality for that redoubtable little island, and his presumed readiness to strengthen its defence against the contumacious wickedness and knavery of all other principalities or republics...I determined to lend my own assistance in swelling the triumphant roar...[the] gentleman in my neighbourhood, by nods and gestures, evinced grave approbation of so suitable a tribute to English superiority; and we finished our stave and sat down in an extremely happy frame of mind (OOH 359).

‘Feelings’ and ‘understanding’ appear to have been fused as everybody sits down in ‘an extremely happy frame of mind’. But Hawthorne, of course, as an official representative of a republic, is outside of this totality. Like Gervayse Hastings, his ‘characteristics’ appear to be

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<sup>7</sup> James, *Hawthorne*, p 94.



‘all negative’.

This sense of ‘negative characteristics’ anticipates, of course, Henry James’s distinction between America and England. ‘One might enumerate the items of high civilisation as it exists in other countries which are absent from the texture of American life’, Henry James wrote in *Hawthorne* (1879), ‘until it should become a wonder to know what was left.’ ‘No state, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name’, he continued trying to give a flavour of the America of Hawthorne’s time:

No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country houses, nor personages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools - no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class - no Epsom, nor Ascot!<sup>8</sup>

Yet, James remarks, the American ‘knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains - that is his secret, his joke, as one may say’.<sup>9</sup> Yet for Hawthorne the list of ‘negative characteristics’ that precede James’ remarks about a ‘secret’ and a ‘joke’ would be closer to how he envisaged what an American culture, or any other culture, for that matter, should be like. For Hawthorne, all cultural artifacts are simulacra - and this is true in any country, including England. The best

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<sup>8</sup> James, *Hawthorne*, p 34.

<sup>9</sup> James, *Hawthorne*, p 35.

cultural artifacts, however, are those that appear to be aware that they are simulacra. In *Our Old Home* Hawthorne describes the ‘mountains of marble’ at Westminster Abbey, coming to the conclusion that the ‘monuments are ridiculous’ (OOH 290/293). Hawthorne had already scathingly commented that Nelson’s ‘most elevated object of ambition’ was to have a ‘tomb in Westminster Abbey’ (OOH 257/258). Yet Hawthorne is impressed with the fact that although he arrives at Westminster Abbey expecting to see the ‘tombs only of the illustrious’ he in fact ‘[reads] many names...that have now lost the reverence of mankind, if indeed they ever really possessed it’ (OOH 293). This, he says, makes Westminster Abbey ‘nonetheless solemn for the occasional absurdity’ (OOH 293). ‘The inscriptions and devices on the walls’, he says:

are rich with evidences of the fluctuating tastes, fashions, manners, opinions, prejudices, follies, wisdoms of the past, and thus they combine into a more truthful memorial of their dead times than any individual epitaph-maker ever meant to write (OOH 294).

The excess of memorials somehow creates a ‘truthful memorial’. The combination of memorials has the effect of drawing attention to a sense that each and every one of them is akin to a transient simulacra. The memorials, he says, have appeared over the ages by ‘as natural process as might cause mosses and ivy to cover the external edifice’ (OOH 293). I take it that Hawthorne is here praising Westminster Abbey because it seems to echo an excess in nature, a kind of textual excess which undermines any single identity.

The passage in *Our Old Home* echoes Hawthorne’s remarks in the third of the ‘Legends of the

Province-House': 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle' (1838). Hawthorne describes a ball that takes place in ante-revolutionary days at the Boston Province-House. 'Without much extravagance of eulogy', he writes:

the spectacle might even be termed splendid; for, according to the fashion of the times, the ladies shone in rich silks and satins, outspread over wide-projecting hoops; and the gentlemen glittered in gold embroidery, laid unsparingly upon the purple, or scarlet, or sky-blue velvet, which was the material of their coats and waistcoats. The latter article of dress was of great importance, since it enveloped the wearer's body nearly to the knees, and was perhaps bedizened with the amount of his whole year's income, in golden flowers and foliage. The altered taste of the present day - a taste symbolic of a deep change in the whole system of society - would look upon almost any of those gorgeous figures as ridiculous; although that evening the guests sought their reflections in the pier-glasses, and rejoiced to catch their own glitter amid the glittering crowd. What a pity that one of the stately mirrors has not preserved a picture of the scene, which, by the very traits which were so transitory, might have taught us much that would be worth knowing and remembering! (T&S 657).

The idea of seeing the 'fashions of the times' reflected in a mirror appeals to Hawthorne. The mirror, he implies, would add the final touch by making it apparent that everything it reflected was a simulacra. Problems arise, Hawthorne implies, when a society is not really aware of this



permanent state of transitoriness.<sup>10</sup> This is reflected in comments in the 1862 'Chiefly About War Matters'. 'We paid a visit', Hawthorne writes as he describes his various encounters with the on-going conflict:

to Fort Ellsworth, and from its ramparts (which have been heaped out of the muddy soil, within the last few months, and will require still a year or two to make them verdant) we had a beautiful view of the Potomac, a truly majestic river, and the surrounding country. The fortifications, so numerous in all this region, and now so unsightly with their bare, precipitous sides, will remain as historic monuments, grass-grown and picturesque memorials of an epoch of terror and suffering; they will serve to make our country dearer and more interesting to us, and afford fit soil for poetry to root itself in; for this is a plant

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<sup>10</sup> For this reason I think that Hawthorne's remarks about America in the Preface to *The Marble Faun* were not intended to be taken literally. 'Italy', Hawthorne wrote in the 1859 Preface,

as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall flowers, need Ruin to make them grow (MF 3).

America, he implies, does not have a past. Yet it should be apparent by now that any reference to a 'broad and simple daylight' in Hawthorne's writing should be treated with care. The Preface was written on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1859. On October 16<sup>th</sup> John Brown and eighteen followers 'descended on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry on the upper Potomac, seized it, and issued a proclamation to the slaves'. Hawthorne, of course, could not have known about this strange conjunction. Yet, I would argue that all the evidence suggests that it is more reasonable to take the views as expressed in the 1862 'Chiefly About War Matters' as more representative of Hawthorne's views.

which thrives best in spots where blood has been spilt long ago, and grows abundant clusters in old ditches, such as the moat around Fort Ellsworth will be, a century hence. It may seem to be paying dear for what many consider a worthless weed; but the more historical associations we can link with our localities, the richer will be the daily life that feeds upon the past, and the more valuable the things that have been long established; so that our children will be less prodigal than their fathers, in sacrificing good institutions to passionate impulses and impracticable theories. This herb of grace, let us hope, may be found in the old footprints of the war (Ch 418/419).

It is a sense of an excess of 'historical associations' which leads Hawthorne to express this 'hope'. It will become increasingly apparent that America, like any other country, is in a state of separation from itself. Like anywhere else, America's characteristics are all negative. As time passes it will become apparent, through association with other ruins, that the Civil War fortifications were never any more or less than simulacra. Nevertheless, Hawthorne preferred historical 'objects' to have an inbuilt sense of their own transience, as it were.

### III

This is, of course, what attracted Hawthorne to Samuel Johnson's penance. Hawthorne notes in *Our Old Home* that he had 'long ago' described Johnson's penance for 'the behoof of childish readers' (OOH 150). '[Fifty] years had passed away', he wrote in the 1842 *Biographical Stories For Children*, 'since young Sam Johnson had shown himself so hard-hearted toward his father'. 'Never - though [his father's] troubles had been over, so many years - had he forgiven himself

for inflicting such a pang upon his heart' he continued (BS 248). Hawthorne may well have had Rousseau's *Confessions* in mind when he wrote this story (Rousseau's works figure very prominently in the list of Hawthorne's withdrawals from the Salem Athenaeum between 1828 and 1850). In the *Confessions* Rousseau describes the 'memories of a crime and the unbearable weight of remorse which, even after forty years, still burdens my conscience'.<sup>11</sup> Peter Brooks tells the story in *Reading for the Plot*:

Rousseau has been serving as a lackey in the household of Mme de Vercellis...[when] he steals a pink and silver ribbon, which is found in his room. Asked where he got it, he lies and says that Marion, a young peasant girl serving as a cook, gave it to him. In doubt as to the truth, the Comte de la Roque...dismisses them both. Rousseau now goes on to image the probable future scenario of Marion's life: dismissed under the shadow of accusation, penniless, without recommendation or protection, what could become of her? Rousseau sketches with hypothetical certainty a career that would make her 'worse than myself,' that is, presumably a prostitute.<sup>12</sup>

'[In] my sleepless hours', Rousseau says, 'I see this poor girl coming to reproach me for my crimes, as if I had committed it only yesterday'<sup>13</sup> ('Never, never', Hawthorne said of Johnson, 'had he forgotten his father's sorrowful and upbraiding look'(BS 248)). '[Rousseau] tells us',

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trs. J. M. Cohen, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p 86 Book Two - 1728-1731.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading For The Plot: Design And Intention In Narrative*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984), p 30.

<sup>13</sup> Rousseau, *The Confessions*, p 88.



Brooks notes, that ‘the desire to deliver himself of the weight of this particular crime...contributed greatly to his decision to write his confessions’.<sup>14</sup> ‘He ends the account of the stolen ribbon’, Brooks continues, ‘with the statement that he will never speak of the matter again: a resolve which he will then break in the fourth reverie of the *Reveries d’un promeneur solitaire*.’<sup>15</sup> Rousseau, Brooks explains:

is always going back over the traces of conduct and interior disposition, not to reconcile them - which is impossible - but to confess their irreconcilability...In other words, the only ordering or solution to the problem in understanding Rousseau has set up here is more narrative. [Narrative] seems ever to imagine in advance the act of transmission, the moment of reading and understanding that it cannot itself ever know, since this act always comes after the writing, in a posthumous event.<sup>16</sup>

Brooks’ account echoes what J. Hillis Miller calls ‘indecipherable narrative expression’. Indeed, in the title of his book (*Reading for the Plot*) there is a sense that, rather than reading to uncover ‘the plot’, one is reading at the behest of ‘the plot’.

Brooks’ remarks can be related to Hawthorne’s description of Johnson’s penance. Hawthorne’s first reference to the incident is found in the 1838 *American Notebooks*:

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<sup>14</sup> Brooks, *Reading For The Plot*, p 30.

<sup>15</sup> Brooks, *Reading For The Plot*, p 31.

<sup>16</sup> Brooks, *Reading For The Plot*, pp 32/34.

Dr. Johnson's penance in Uttoxeter Market. A man who does penance in what might appear to lookers-on the most glorious and triumphal circumstances of his life. Each circumstance of the career of an apparently successful man to be a penance and torture to him on account of some fundamental error in early life (AN 180).

Hawthorne places the emphasis on the difference between the perspective of the 'successful man' and the 'lookers-on'. Where the latter see glory and triumph the former suffers with penance and torture. This is apparent in the *Biographical Studies For Children*. Hawthorne dramatises the differing perspective of the local people. 'I say, neighbor Hutchins, would ye like to know who this old gentleman is?' says a 'cattle-drover' who has recently returned from London:

'Aye, that I would,' replied neighbor Hutchins; 'for a queerer chap I never saw in my life! Somehow it makes me feel small to look at him. He's more than a common man.'

'You may well say so,' answered the cattle-drover. 'Why, that's the famous Doctor Samuel Johnson, who, they say, is the greatest and learnedest man in England' (BS 247).

Johnson's public remorse is misread by the observers (this is reflected in Hawthorne's description of him in 'Uttoxeter' as a 'venerable and illustrious penitent' (U 484)). In 'Uttoxeter' Hawthorne also appears to cast doubt over Johnson's own conviction about his own motives. 'The picturesqueness and full impressiveness of the story require', Hawthorne says:

that Johnson, doing his penance, should have been the very nucleus of the crowd - the mid-most man of the market-place - a central figure of Memory and Remorse, contrasting

with, and overpowering the sultry materialism around him. I am resolved, therefore, that the true site of his penance was in the middle of the market-place (U 483).

Yet the sketch concludes with Hawthorne admitting that his 'pilgrimage had not turned out a very successful one' (U 485). As I noted in the Preface Hawthorne regrets the fact that he cannot 'honestly fix on one spot rather than another, as likely to have been the holy site where Johnson stood to do his penance' (U 484). With this 'honesty' Hawthorne appears to cast doubt on Johnson's motives. If he is no longer sure that Johnson was positioned in the middle of the market-place then by implication he is no longer sure of Johnson's conviction.

This is even more apparent in the 1863 *Our Old Home* version which repeats the same trajectory of initial conviction followed by doubt. 'The picturesque arrangement and full impressiveness of the story', Hawthorne says (rewriting the paragraph cited above):

absolutely require that Johnson shall not have done his penance in a corner, ever so little retired, but shall have been the very nucleus of the crowd, - the midmost man of the market-place, - a central image of Memory and Remorse, contrasting with and overpowering the petty materialism around him. He himself, having the force to throw vitality and truth into what persons differently constituted might reckon a mere external ceremony, and an absurd one, could not have failed to see this necessity. I am resolved, therefore, that the true site of Dr. Johnson's penance was in the middle of the market-place (OOH 152).



So, one can conclude once one has reached the end of the piece, Johnson himself may have even thought that his conduct was an ‘absurd’ ‘external ceremony’. Johnson may have been aware that he - like every one else - could never really know his own motives. In any case, the least one can say is that Johnson could not control his own thoughts.

This is precisely what Hawthorne suggests when he seems to refer to Johnson’s penance in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester Prynne stands in the market-place before the assembled crowd. ‘[There] were intervals’, says Hawthorne:

when the whole scene, in which she was the most conspicuous object, seemed to vanish from her eyes, or, at least, glimmered indistinctly before them, like a mass of imperfectly shaped and spectral images. Her mind, and especially her memory, was preternaturally active, and kept bringing up other scenes than the roughly hewn little street of a little town, on the edge of the Western wilderness; other faces than were lowering upon her from beneath the brims of these steeple-crowned hats. Reminiscences, the most trifling and immaterial, passages of school-days, sports, childish quarrels, and the little domestic traits of her maiden years, came swarming back upon her, intermingled with recollections of whatever was gravest in her subsequent life; one picture precisely as vivid as another; as if all were of similar importance, or all alike a play...she saw again her native village, in Old England, and her paternal home; a decayed house of gray stone, with a poverty stricken aspect, but retaining a half-obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility. She saw her father’s face, with its bald brow, and reverend white beard, that flowed over the old fashioned Elizabethan ruff; her mother’s too, with the look of

heedful and anxious love which it always wore in her remembrance, and which, even since her death, had so often laid the impediment of a gentle remonstrance in her daughter's pathway (SL 84/85).

With this oblique reference to Johnson's penance Hawthorne suggests that personal memories cannot be obliterated by a kind of collective memory. My sense of collective memory derives from Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). 'The ghastliest sacrifices and pledges', writes Nietzsche:

[all] have their origin in that instinct which divined pain to be the strongest aid to mnemonics. ...We need only recount some of our ancient forms of punishment: stoning...breaking on the wheel...piercing with stakes; drawing and quartering, trampling to death with horses, boiling in oil or wine...the popular flaying alive, cutting out of flesh from the chest, smearing the victim in honey and leaving him in the sun, a prey to flies. By such methods the individual was finally taught to remember five or six 'I won'ts' which entitled him to participate in the benefits of society; and, indeed, with the aid of this sort of memory, people eventually 'came to their senses'. What an enormous price man had to pay for reason, seriousness, control over his emotions - those grand human prerogatives and cultural showpieces! How much blood and horror lies behind all 'good things'!<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy Of Morals: An Attack* [1887], in *The Birth Of Tragedy And The Genealogy Of Morals*, Translated by Francis Golffing (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p 194.

Nietzsche's account of collective memory based on ritual is anticipated (albeit in slightly less lurid fashion) in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne describes a 'scaffold' which, he says:

constituted a portion of the penal machine...[and] was held, in the old time, to be as effectual an agent in the promotion of good citizenship as the guillotine among the terrorists of France. It was, in short, the platform of the pillory; and above it rose the framework of that instrument of discipline, so fashioned to confine the human head in its tight grasp, and thus hold it up to the public gaze. The very ideal of ignominy was embodied and made manifest in this contrivance of wood and iron. There can be no outrage, methinks, against our common nature, - whatever be the delinquencies of the individual, - no outrage more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face in shame; as it was the essence of this punishment to do (SL 82/83).

Where Nietzsche sees 'pain' as 'the strongest aid to mnemonics' Hawthorne, sees 'shame'. I shall return to Hawthorne's attitude to 'shame' in Chapter Three. For both Hawthorne and Nietzsche the penal machine attempts to transform the subject into a self-identical object. The effects of this are demonstrated in the second scaffold scene. During 'lengthened vigils', Hawthorne says:

[Dimmesdale's] brain often reeled, and visions seemed to flit before him; perhaps seen doubtfully, and by a faint light of their own, in the remote dimness of the chamber, or more vividly, and close beside him, within the looking-glass. Now it was a herd of diabolic shapes, that grinned and mocked at the pale minister, and beckoned him away



with them; now a group of shining angels, who flew upward heavily, as sorrow laden, but grew more ethereal as they rose. Now came the dead friends of his youth, and his white-bearded father, with a saint-like frown, and his mother, turning her face away as she passed by. Ghost of a mother, - thinnest fantasy of a mother, - methinks she might have yet thrown a pitying glance at her son! (SL 165).

Again Hawthorne appears to make an oblique reference to Johnson's penance. In a kind of inversion of the first scaffold scene Dimmesdale decides that he may find a 'moment's peace' from these thoughts by climbing onto the platform on an 'obscure night of early May' (SL 166/167). '[While] standing on the scaffold, in this vain show of expiation', Hawthorne writes:

Mr. Dimmesdale was overcome with a great horror of mind, as if the universe were gazing at a scarlet token on his naked breast, right over his heart. ... Without any effort of his will, or power to restrain himself, he shrieked aloud; an outcry that went pealing through the night. ...

'It is done!' muttered the minister, covering his face with his hands. 'The whole town will awake, and hurry forth, and find me here!'

But it was not so. The shriek had perhaps sounded with a far greater power, to his own startled ears, than it actually possessed (SL 167).

It is as if Dimmesdale wants to become a self-identical object, then. He wants to escape his thoughts, as it were; but I shall return to this in chapter Three. In Uttoxeter market-place, Hawthorne suggests in the *Biographical Stories For Children*, Johnson too was subject too this

strange sense of solitude:

It was the busiest hour of the day. What with the hum of human voices, the lowing of cattle, the squeaking of pigs, and the laughter caused by the Merry Andrew, the market-place was in very great confusion. But the stranger seemed not to notice it, any more than if the silence of a desert were around him. He was wrapt in his own thoughts (BS 246/247).

In his discussion of the story of the stolen ribbon incident Brooks notes a ‘discrepancy’ between ‘the narrative of actions and narrative of internal dispositions’, ‘the inability’ he explains, ‘of either ever fully to coincide with or explain the other’.<sup>18</sup> ‘Inside’ and ‘outside’ will not coincide for Rousseau. Rousseau, Brooks says, is ‘[always] out of place’.<sup>19</sup>

The discrepancy can also manifest itself in temporal disjunction. Hawthorne takes care to evoke a precise moment in time in the *Biographical Stories For Children*. ‘There was a clock in the gray tower of the ancient church’, he writes, ‘and the hands on the dial-plate had now almost reached the hour of noon’ (BS 245). As the ‘clock struck twelve’ Johnson (apparently) has events of fifty years ago on his mind (BS 246). Hawthorne’s sense of temporal disjunction can be demonstrated by contrasting his position with that of Edgar Allen Poe. In the 1842 review of *Twice-told Tales* Poe had privileged the short story above other prose genres because allowed for a kind of temporal fusion. ‘In the brief tale’, writes Poe:

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<sup>18</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p 32.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p 32.

the author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences - resulting from weariness or interruption.<sup>20</sup>

The short story, then, is associated with a kind of ritualised time, a time akin to the 'two or three hours' that, Hawthorne said in *Our Old Home*, an Englishman invariably sets aside for dinner. In 'Rappaccini's Daughter: From the Writings of Aubépine' (first published in December 1844 before being collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*) Hawthorne implicitly challenges this sense of temporal unity. Miller has noted that:

in the admirable prefaces to his various collections of short stories and in the splendid comic piece of auto-analysis in the prefatory note to 'Rappaccini's Daughter: From the Writings of Aubépine'...Hawthorne yields to the desire many writers have no doubt felt, the desire to write their own reviews, to do justice to themselves at last. But Hawthorne cannot resist turning this chance to praise himself into the reverse, a devastating critique of his own shortcomings (DI 54/55).

'[If] the reader chance to take [M. de l' Aubépine's productions] in precisely the proper point of view', Hawthorne says, '[they] may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man; if otherwise, they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense' (T&S 975). So, Aubépine's productions measure up to Poe's criteria. They may amuse a 'leisure hour' if taken from the proper point of view. Yet the tale itself questions the editor's stance, and in so doing questions

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<sup>20</sup>Poe, 'Review of *Twice-told Tales*' [May 1842], p 572.



Poe's theory. Giovanni Guasconti has come from the 'more southern region of Italy' to pursue his studies at the University of Padua (T&S 976). He takes up lodgings in a room which overlooks an oasis of 'flowers and verdure' in the 'antique haunts' of Padua (T&S 985) and is delighted that 'in the heart of the barren city...he had the privilege of overlooking this spot of lovely and luxuriant vegetation' (T&S 981). The garden is tended by a Dr. Rappaccini and his daughter Beatrice. '[Many] a young man in Padua would give gold to be admitted among those flowers' 'old dame' Lisabetta tells Giovanni (T&S 989). Giovanni too finds himself drawn to Beatrice and eventually they have a series of meetings in the garden:

After the first interview a second was in the inevitable course of what we call fate. A third; a fourth; and a meeting with Beatrice in the garden was no longer an incident in Giovanni's daily life, but the whole space in which he might be said to live; for the anticipation of that ecstatic hour made up the remainder (T&S 994/995).

Like the reader that Poe imagined for his short stories, Giovanni appears to be entranced by Beatrice. Yet from the beginning Giovanni is troubled. Dr. Rappaccini, Hawthorne says, was a 'distrustful gardener' (T&S 979). There was, he says, 'no approach to intimacy between [Dr. Rappaccini] and these vegetable existences. On the contrary, he avoided their actual touch, or the direct inhaling of their odors, with a caution that impressed Giovanni most disagreeably' (T&S 979). Giovanni is also troubled when he first sees Beatrice:

[His] fancy must have grown morbid, while he looked down into the garden; for the impression which the fair stranger made upon him was as if here were another flower, the

human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they - more beautiful than the richest of them - but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask. As Beatrice came down the garden path, it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odor of several plants, which her father had most sedulously avoided (T&S 980) .

Nevertheless, the morning after Giovanni first set on the garden he is not so sure that there is anything out of the ordinary about the garden:

He was surprised, and a little ashamed, to find how real and matter-of-fact an affair it proved to be, in the first rays of the sun which gilded the dewdrops that hung upon leaf and blossom, and while giving a brighter beauty to each rare flower, brought everything within the limits of ordinary experience (T&S 981).

Yet, even when Giovanni does eventually become convinced that everything does exceed the limits of ordinary experience he still somehow feels unaffected, as if he is on the outside of it all. When Giovanni finally enters the garden and at last has an opportunity to meet Beatrice, for instance, Hawthorne writes that:

Passion will choose his own time to rush upon the scene, and lingers sluggishly behind, when an appropriate adjustment of events would seem to summon to summon his appearance. So it was with Giovanni. Day after day his pulses had throbbed with feverish blood at the improbable idea of an interview with Beatrice, and of standing with her, face to face, in this very garden, basking in the Oriental sunshine of her beauty, and

snatching from her full gaze the mystery which he deemed the riddle of his own existence. But now there was a singular and untimely equanimity within his breast (T&S 990) .

Somehow 'passion' and 'event' do not coincide. Giovanni, then, appears to be trapped in the disjointed, split time of deferred action. In this case understanding seems to come first while passion comes too late. Feeling and understanding, then, are not fused together as Poe suggested they should be in the short story.

This disjunction between feeling and understanding is linked to a sentiment which, I will argue in the next chapter, is characteristic of Hawthorne's mode of 'rewriting'. It is apparent in the 1835 sketch, 'My Visit To Niagara'. 'Oh, that I had never heard of Niagara till I beheld it!', writes Hawthorne:

Blessed were the wanderers of old, who heard its deep roar, sounding through the woods, as the summons to an unknown wonder, and approached its awful brink, in all the freshness of native feeling. Had its own mysterious voice been the first to warn me of its existence, then, indeed, I might have knelt down and worshiped. But I had come thither, haunted with a vision of foam and fury, and dizzy cliffs, and an ocean tumbling out of the sky - a scene, in short, which Nature had too much good taste and calm simplicity to realize. My mind had struggled to adapt these false conceptions to reality, and finding the effort vain, a wretched sense of disappointment weighed me down. I climbed the precipice, and threw myself on the earth - feeling that I was unworthy to look



at the Great Falls, and careless about beholding them again (T&S 246/247).

One can also detect this disappointment when in *Our Old Home*, Hawthorne describes an 'antique ceremony' which he experienced while attending the Lord Mayor's dinner at the Mansion House in London (OOH 372). A goblet, known as the 'loving-cup', is passed around the tables until, Hawthorne says, 'the whole company find themselves inextricably intertwined and entangled in one complicated chain of love' (OOH 372). 'When the cup came to my hands', he writes:

I examined it critically, both inside and out, and perceived it to be an antique and richly ornamented silver goblet, capable of holding about a quart of wine. Considering how much trouble we all expended in getting the cup to our lips, the guests appeared to content themselves with wonderfully moderate potations. In truth, nearly or quite the original quart of wine being still in the goblet, it seemed doubtful whether any of the company had more than barely touched the rim before passing it to their neighbors, - a degree of abstinence that might be accounted for by a fastidious repugnance to so many commixtures in one cup, or possibly by a disapprobation of the liquor. Being curious to know all about these important matters, with a view of recommending to my countrymen whatever they might usefully adopt, I drank an honest sip from the loving-cup, and had no occasion for another, - ascertaining it to be Claret of poor original quality, largely mingled with water, and spiced and sweetened. It was good enough, however, for a merely spectral or ceremonial drink, and could never have been intended for better purpose (OOH 37).

The ceremonial drink proves to be disappointing because it seemed to promise something more.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1863 'Lichfield and Uttoxeter' Hawthorne suggests that the reader may 'possibly be scandalized' to learn that his first act on arriving in Uttoxeter was to go and eat dinner (OOH 153). The pleasure Hawthorne derives from this meal is connected to the anomaly between it and the very reason he went to Uttoxeter in the first place. The dinner consisted of:

bacon and greens, some mutton-chops, juicier and more delectable than all America could serve up at the President's table, and a gooseberry pudding; a sufficient meal for six yeomen, and good enough for a prince, besides a pitcher of foaming ale, the whole at the pitiful small charge of eighteen-pence! (OOH 153).

Hawthorne's pleasure, then, is also connected to the fact that the quality and value of the meal were not guaranteed and so appear to come as something of a mild surprise. Unlike the ritual which one might expect at the President's table, or at the table of a prince, all of this is not necessarily to be expected. Indeed, the meal itself leads Hawthorne to have an unpredicted

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I have already noted that in 'Uttoxeter' Hawthorne writes that at 'Stratford-on-Avon - even at Westminster Abbey, on my first visit - I was as little moved as any stone of the pavement' (U 485). Although Hawthorne removes this passage from the 1863 'Lichfield and Uttoxeter' he does make a similar remark elsewhere in *Our Old Home*. After visiting Shakespeare's house in Stratford-upon-Avon, he writes,

I should consider it unfair to quit Shakespeare's house without the frank acknowledgment that I was conscious of not the slightest emotion while viewing it nor any quickening of the imagination. This has often happened to me on my visit to memorable places (OOH 114).

thought. 'The hospitable inn', he says:

was called the Nag's Head, and standing beside the market-place, was as likely as any other to have entertained old Michael Johnson in the days when he used to come hinder to sell books. He, perhaps, had dined on bacon and greens, and drunk his ale, and smoked his pipe, in the very room where I now sat, which was a low, ancient room, certainly much older than Queen Anne's time, with a red-brick floor, and a white-washed ceiling, traversed by bare, rough beams, the whole in the rudest fashion, but extremely neat. Neither did it lack ornament, the walls being hung with colored engravings of prize oxen and other pretty prints, and the mantel-piece adorned with earthen-ware figures of shepherdesses in the Arcadian taste of long ago. Michael Johnson's eyes might have rested on that selfsame earthen image, to examine which more closely I had just crossed the brick pavement of the room (OOH 154/155).

This is not akin to the totemic meal, the consumption of the primal father. Hawthorne implies that there is something, even in a meal, which cannot be consumed. It is almost as if this dinner is a negative ritual, a 'ritual' which paradoxically unites perspectives in their disjunction. In the next chapter I shall connect this to what Hawthorne referred to as 'sentiment'.



# A PECULIAR SENTIMENT: THE PRIMAL SCENE AND AN IMPOSSIBLE PICTURE

Hawthorne, wrote Jorge-Luis Borges, ‘thought...as women usually think’, ‘in images, in intuitions...not with a dialectical mechanism.’<sup>1</sup> With this remark in mind it is worth citing the passage with which I opened this thesis once again. ‘[A] fragment of a sentence’ writes Lyotard:

a scrap of information, a word come along. They are immediately linked with another ‘unit’. No reasoning, no argument, no mediation. By proceeding in this way, one slowly approaches a scene, the scene of something. One describes it. One does not know what it is. One is sure only that it refers to some past, both furthest and nearest past, both one’s own past and others’ past. This lost time is not represented like in a picture, it is not even presented. It is what presents the elements of a picture, an impossible picture. Rewriting means registering these elements (RM 31).

In sections I and II of this chapter I argue that Hawthorne insisted that one must take responsibility for the unpredicted - for that which does not appear to fit into any existing system. However extraordinary a ‘scene’ may appear to be, nevertheless, one has to reiterate that something, something which presents the scene, is missing. In other words one affirms each

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<sup>1</sup> Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, p 51.

scene but in doing so one insists that each scene can only ever be one more 'negative characteristic' - one more simulacrum. Section I concentrates on three tales ('Main-Street' (1849), 'The Ambitious Guest' (1835) and 'Ethan Brand: An Abortive Romance' (1850)) while section II focuses on the late romances. In section III I argue that Hawthorne found a sense of 'community in these solitary experiences, a sense of community based on an admission that 'our' common fate is irredeemable singularity. Finally, in section 4, I introduce two tales ('Lady Eleanore's Mantle' (1838) and 'Wakefield' (1835), which, I argue, demonstrate all of these themes while also preparing the way for *The Scarlet Letter* (which is the focus of the next chapter).

## I

For Hawthorne, then, every historical scene is haunted by a certain kind of incomprehensible otherness, an otherness which can only be intimated. This is apparent in 'Main-Street', a story that was anthologised in the 1852 collection, *The Snow-Image*. Hawthorne centres the tale around the idea that he is a showman with a historical 'puppet-show'. The exhibition will present the history of Main-Street from Naumkeag, the original Indian settlement, to nineteenth century Salem. 'Among those who came to Naumkeag were men of history and legend', the narrator says, 'you shall behold their life-like images, - their spectres, if you choose so to call them, - passing, encountering with a familiar nod, stopping to converse together, praying, bearing weapons, laboring or resting from their labors, in the Main-street' (T&S 1032). One can legitimately, the showman suggests, describe every single participant in his 'pictorial puppet-show' (T&S 1032) as a 'spectre'. However, the term 'spectre' has a particular significance in

relation to the Salem executions of 1692. This relationship is evoked by the narrator when he comes to describe these events. 'See that aged couple', says the showman narrator, 'John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth. ...They, or their spectral appearances, have stuck pins into the Afflicted Ones, and thrown them into deadly fainting-fits with a touch, or but a look' (T&S 1033). Michael Colacurcio remarks, on the subject of 'the matter of 1692', that otherwise reliable persons [reported] certain odd supra-natural sightings'. 'The 'spectres' or bodiless shapes', Colacurcio continues, 'of otherwise reputable citizens and church members could be 'witnessed' in the performance of actions that suggested an advanced and concentrated depravity, as if they had given themselves over to the Devil'. Yet, Hawthorne suggests that every single figure in the picture-show can be described as a 'spectre'. Every figure, he implies, is a copy of the original. From the beginning the show is subject to a series of interruptions:

[An] acidulous-looking gentleman in blue glasses, with bows of Berlin steel, who has taken a seat at the extremity of the front row, begins, at this early stage of the exhibition, to criticize.

'The whole affair is a manifest catch-penny,' observes he, scarcely under his breath. 'The trees look more like weeds in a garden, than a primitive forest: the Squaw Sachem and Wappacowet are stiff in their pasteboard joints; and the squirrels, the deer and the wolf, move with all the grace of a child's wooden monkey, sliding up and down a stick' (T&S 1025).

The critic believes the showman is deceiving his audience, swindling them with counterfeit goods. '[There] never was such impudence!', says the critic at one point, 'To hear his running



commentary, you would suppose that these miserable slips of painted pasteboard, with hardly the remotest outlines of the human figure, had all the character and expression of Michel Angelo's pictures' (T&S 1034). The show, the critic suggests, is full of counterfeit spectres, spectres which have no relationship to the original. Yet elsewhere Hawthorne implies that spectres without an original are all that one can ever have.

One recalls a remark in 'Rappacini's Daughter: From the Writings of Aubépine'. In the prefatory note the imaginary editor of 'Rappacini's Daughter' introduces Aubépine 'to the American public' (T&S 976). Aubépine, Hawthorne says, 'contents himself with...the faintest possible counterfeit of real life' (T&S 975). Aubépine does not content himself with an artificial copy of real life. He contents himself with the faintest possible counterfeit of real life'. In other words, a counterfeit that is somehow aware that it is a counterfeit is, paradoxically, the most 'real' thing. This is reflected in 'Feathertop'. Feathertop, one recalls, is described as 'an Illusion [which] had seen and fully recognized itself'. When Feathertop sees 'the sordid patchwork of his real composition' in a mirror he throws 'up his arms, with an expression of despair, that went further than any of his previous manifestations, towards vindicating his claim to be reckoned human' (T&S 1120/1121). In saying this Hawthorne contradicts criticisms of Mother Rigby's creation which he had made prior to its completion. It had, he then said:

only the thinnest vesture of human similitude about it, through which was evident the stiff, rickety, incongruous, faded, tattered, good-for-nothing patchwork of its substance, ready to sink in a heap upon the floor, as conscious of its own unworthiness to be erect.

Shall I confess the truth? At its present point of vivification, the scarecrow reminds me

of some of the lukewarm and abortive characters, composed of heterogenous materials, and used for the thousandth time, and never worth using, with which romance-writers (and myself, no doubt, among the rest) have so over-peopled the world of fiction (T&S 1108).

Yet by the end of the story, Hawthorne implies that ‘humans’ actually are akin to the ‘lukewarm and abortive characters’ of romance-writers. They are counterfeit.

In ‘The Ambitious Guest’ Hawthorne uses the term ‘token’ to describe a similar state of affairs. The tale takes place in a cottage situated ‘in the bleakest spot of all New-England...the Notch of the White Hills’ (T&S 299). The family that lives there ‘dwelt in a cold spot and a dangerous one; for a mountain towered above their heads, so steep, that the stones would often rumble down its sides, and startle them at midnight’ (T&S 299). The family offer food and lodging to travellers and on the night of the story a young man stays with them. ‘The secret of the young man’s character was, a high and abstracted ambition’, Hawthorne says. ‘He could have borne to live an undistinguished life, but not to be forgotten in the grave’ (T&S 301). Sitting around the fire the young man explains this to the family:

Were I to vanish from the earth to-morrow, none would know so much of me as you; that a nameless youth came up at nightfall, from the valley of the Saco, and opened his heart to you in the evening, and passed through the Notch, by sunrise, and was seen no more. Not a soul would ask - ‘Who was he? - Whither did the wanderer go?’ But, I cannot die till I have achieved my destiny. Then let Death come! I shall have built my monument!

...You think my ambition as nonsensical as I if I were to freeze myself to death on top of Mount Washington, only that people might spy on me from the country roundabout. And truly, that would be a noble pedestal for a man's statue! (T&S 302).

The young man's words prove to be prophetic. He, along with the family, are involved in a disaster that leads to them, literally, vanishing from the earth. 'Down came the whole side of the mountain, in a cataract of ruin', says Hawthorne (T&S 306). 'The victims', he explains:

rushed from their cottage, and sought refuge in what they deemed a safer spot - where, in contemplation of such an emergency, a sort of barrier had been reared. Alas! They had quitted their security, and fled right into the pathway of destruction. ...Just before it reached the house, the stream broke into two branches - shivered not a window there, but overwhelmed the whole vicinity, blocked up the road, and annihilated everything in its dreadful course. Long ere the thunder of the great Slide ceased to roar among the mountains, the mortal agony had been endured, and the victims were at peace. Their bodies were never found (T&S 306).

'There were circumstances', concludes Hawthorne:

which led some to suppose that a stranger had been received into the cottage on this awful night, and had shared the catastrophe of all its inmates. Others denied that there were sufficient grounds for such a conjecture. Wo, for the high-souled youth, with his dream of Earthly Immortality! His name and person utterly unknown; his history, his way



of life, his plans, a mystery never to be solved; his death and his existence, equally a doubt! Whose was the agony of that death-moment? (T&S 307).

It seems to me that with this final question Hawthorne does not simply mean to imply that the nameless youth endured agony in the 'death-moment'. He also evokes a sense in which human identity is paradoxically, an anthropomorphic projection. No human could ever experience the 'death-moment'. The 'death-moment', one could say, is nobody's.

Moments before the rock fall 'the good old grandam' of the family had spoken. '[The] old woman':

with an air of mystery, which drew the circle closer round the fire, informed them that she had provided her grave clothes some years before - a nice linen shroud, a cap with a muslin ruff, and everything of a finer sort than she had worn since her wedding day. But, this evening, an old superstition had strangely returned to her. It used to be said, in her younger days, that, if anything were amiss with a corpse, if only the ruff were not smooth, or the cap did not set right, the corpse, in the coffin and beneath the clods, would strive to put up its cold hands and arrange it. The bare thought made her nervous. ...'Now', continued the old woman, with singular earnestness, yet smiling strangely at her own folly, - 'I want one of you, my children - when your mother is drest, and in the coffin - I want one of you to hold a looking-glass over my face. Who knows but I may take a glimpse at myself, and see whether all's right?' (T&S 305).

In *Hawthorne and History: Defacing It* Miller notes the significance of ‘prosopopoeia’, a trope which he defines as ‘the ascription of a name, a face, and a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead’ (DI 74).<sup>2</sup> ‘A dead body’, he explains:

is normally taken as the model or form of that person’s departed soul, for example in the case of recumbent statues on tombs in medieval churches. We want to look the dead in the face, as in the ceremony of viewing the corpse, both to be sure that the dead are really dead and as a way of forming an image of what the dead must be like in the realm of death to which they have now crossed over. The custom of viewing the dead is a way of personifying death, giving it a face, and thereby giving ourselves the courage to face it (DI 76).

As far as one can surmise no ‘who’ is ever present in the ‘death-moment’. ‘We can never experience our own deaths as present events, though those would be the only deaths worth experiencing’, writes Miller (DI 91). The moment of one’s own death is always necessarily ‘lost time’. It happens in one’s absence. Miller argues that, in ‘The Minister’s Black Veil’, Hooper draws attention to the ubiquitous nature of prosopopoeia. The veil, Miller says:

interrupts the process whereby each of us interprets himself in the same way, for example

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<sup>2</sup>An example of this occurs in ‘The Great Stone Face’ (1850).’ The reader is told at the beginning’, writes Miller,

that on a near approach the face reveals itself to be ‘only a heap of ponderous gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another’ [T&S 1068], but that does not prevent the projection of a benign patriarchal presence into this heap of stones (DI 88).

when we look in the mirror: 'That is me there facing me from within the glass, the self I am for myself and the self I am for other people' (DI 74).

The self is never really present, Miller suggests. Something is missing, something that, in a sense, renders one dead already. 'I wonder how mariners feel,' says the stranger in 'The Ambitious Guest,' 'when the ship is sinking, and they unknown and undistinguished, are to be buried together in the ocean - that wide and nameless sepulchre' (T&S 306). It is almost as if Hawthorne is suggesting that the ship has always already sunk, so to speak. This universe is already a wide and nameless sepulchre. This explains why he uses the term 'token.' The morning after the catastrophe, Hawthorne says:

the light smoke was seen stealing from the cottage-chimney, up the mountain-side. Within, the fire was yet smouldering on the hearth, and the chairs in a circle round it, as if the inhabitants had but gone forth to view the devastation of the Slide, and would shortly return, to thank heaven for their miraculous escape. All had left separate tokens, by which those, who had known the family, were made to shed a tear for each (T&S 306).

All that remains of the group are a series of 'separate tokens'. It is as if Hawthorne suggests that the tokens are effective because they inadvertently remind one of a common vulnerability. The tokens are, then, akin to counterfeit memorials. They do not imply an eternal presence and, in this sense, they are more accurate than any great 'monument'.



So, in 'Main-Street' the showman presents an image from 'King Phillip's war'. '[Brave] Captain Gardner' is described 'reining his mettled steed...and looking so like the very soul and emblem of martial achievement'. The 'acidulous-looking' critic suggests that Captain Gardner 'looks' like 'the devil, though a very tame one and on a diminutive scale' whilst his horse 'looks like a pig'. The 'persecuted showman' loses 'all patience', for 'he had particularly prided himself on these figures of Captain Gardner and his horse':

'I see that there is no hope of pleasing you. Pray, sir, do me the favor to take back your money, and withdraw!' [says the showman]

'Not I' answers the unconscionable critic. 'I am just beginning to get interested in the matter. Come! Turn your crank, and grind out a few more of these fooleries!' (M&S 1042/1043).

'Main-Street' ends when the exhibition comes to a premature close: 'There! But what! How! The scene will not move. A wire is broken' says the showman (T&S 1050) 'I have only further to say', the showman says in conclusion:

that any lady or gentleman, who may feel dissatisfied with the evening's entertainment, shall receive back the admission fee at the door.

'Then give me mine,' cries the critic, stretching out his palm. 'I said that your exhibition would prove a humbug, and so it has turned out. So hand over my quarter!' (T&S 1050).

Both the showman and the critic assume that the entrance fee entitles one to see a representation

of 'real life'. Yet, one can say, all that one could ever see would be a series of counterfeits. At the assault on the fortress of the Narragansetts Captain Gardner probably did look more like a 'tame' 'devil' on a 'diminutive scale' than 'the very soul and emblem of martial achievement', and his horse may well have looked more like a 'pig' than the image of the 'mettled steed' evoked by the showman's description. The showman, however, does not re-present a replica of the original event. On the contrary, what he inevitably re-presents, better, what is inevitably *presented again*, is an opaqueness which can never be transcended - or transmuted into something of permanent 'value'. Circulation, Hawthorne suggests, never comes to an end. In which case one can say that although the critic asks for his money back what he actually receives is one more counterfeit token. The final picture in the exhibition is particularly apt, then:

The Main-street has vanished out of sight. In its stead appears a wintry waste of snow, with the sun just peering over it, cold and bright, and tinging the white expanse with the faintest and most ethereal rose-color. This is the Great Snow of 1717, famous for the mountain-drifts in which it buried the whole country. It would seem as if the street...were all at once obliterated, and resolved into a drearier pathlessness than when the forest covered it. The gigantic swells and billows of the snow have swept over each man's metes and bounds, and annihilated all the visible distinctions of human property. ...It may be, however, that matters are not so desperate as they appear. That vast icicle, glittering so cheerlessly in the sunshine, must be the spire of the meeting-house, incrusting with frozen sleet. Those great heaps, too, which we mistook for drifts, are houses buried up to their peaked roofs rounded by the depths of snow upon them. There, now, comes a gush of smoke from what I judge to be the chimney of the Ship Tavern - and another -

another - and another - from the chimneys of other dwellings, where fireside comfort, domestic peace, the sports of children, and the quietude of age, are living yet, in spite of the frozen crust above them (T&S 1049).

One cannot be certain as to what one has seen and yet, for this very reason, this is the most accurate of all the images. Possibly counterfeit, it simply claims to present the traces of those described as 'living yet'.

The showman, however, attempts to move on:

[It] is time to change the scene. Its dreary monotony shall not test your fortitude like one of our actual New England winters, which leave so large a blank - so melancholy a death-spot - in lives so brief that they ought to be all summer-time. Here, at least, I may claim to be ruler of the seasons. One turn of the crank shall melt away the snow from the Main-street, and show the trees in their full foliage, the rose-bushes in bloom, and a border of green grass along the side-walk. There! But what! How! The scene will not move. A wire is broken. The street continues buried beneath the snow, and the fate of Herculaneum and Pompeii has its parallel in this catastrophe (T&S 1049/1050).

In the notes for his 'Central Park' project Walter Benjamin remarks: '[the] concept of progress is to be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things "just go on" is the catastrophe. It is not that which is approaching but that which is'.<sup>3</sup> This premature ending is not the real catastrophe,

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Central Park', p 50.



one can infer. The real 'catastrophe' is that 'things "just go on"' without that final touch which would be akin to a mark of authenticity. Things have always already 'gone wrong', one could say. Yet, if things were ever to come right, as it were, if the 'plot' was to finally unravel, then this would be the real disaster. At that point one could forget the past, sacrificing it to the abyss of 'historical progress'. Yet, Hawthorne suggests, the same trace can be detected from the beginning to the end - and this trace cannot be presented in any shape or form; it can only be evoked in its absence.

In his reading of 'The Minister's Black Veil' Miller suggests that a final self-identical scene is an impossibility. Every historical happening, Miller argues, implicitly makes use of prosopopoeia. History is made up of a series of 'disruptive' mis-readings. Yet, because it is not possible to lift up the veil and to reveal that which is 'radically other', these 'disruptive' mis-readings cannot be avoided. The 'radical other' simply will not yield to meaning and in this sense meaning is always in 'error'. However, the 'radically other' will not yield to meaning *not* simply because it is on the 'outside' of meaning - beyond the reach of meaning. On the contrary, the 'radical other' will not yield to meaning because it is the condition which gives birth to meaning. Miller describes 'The Minister's Black Veil' as 'patiently neutral':

It says neither yes nor no to whatever hypothesis about it the reader proposes. The text offers neither confirmation nor disconfirmation of any speculative formulation about its meaning. ...In this the text is like the black veil itself. The performative efficacy of 'The Minister's Black Veil' lies in this similarity. It works. Like the veil, the story is a strange kind of efficacious speech act. It is a way of doing things with proffered signs.

But it does to undo, to take away foundation or authority from anything the reader can say of it (DI 106)<sup>4</sup>

‘The Minister’s Black Veil’ ‘works’ because it accepts a fundamental ‘loss’, a ‘loss’ which the story can never transmute - can never speculate on and profit from. Without this irredeemable loss the story would overheat. ‘The Minister’s Black Veil’, Miller says, ‘can promise the revelation that is to come, when all veils will be removed, but it cannot escape from the paradox of all apocalyptic texts’.

The apocalyptic promise is in this world always not quite yet fulfilled. No mortal can

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<sup>4</sup>One can align ‘The Minister’s Black Veil’ with Jacques Derrida’s account of ‘general economy’ (See Chapter Nine (1967), Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trs. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 1990). Alan Bass, English translator of Derrida’s ‘From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve’, comments,

[for] Derrida the deconstruction of metaphysics implies an endless confrontation with Hegelian concepts, and [a] move from a restricted, ‘speculative’ philosophical economy - in which there is nothing that cannot be made to make sense, in which there is nothing *other* than meaning - to a ‘general’ economy - which affirms that which exceeds meaning, the excess of meaning from which there can be no speculative profit (in Jacques Derrida, ‘Différance’ (1972), trs. Alan Bass, in *A Derrida Reader*, p 78, Footnote 12).

‘The Minister’s Black Veil’ affirms that which exceeds meaning, the excess of meaning from which there can be no speculative profit. Jacques Derrida has written that ‘what Hegel...*could never think* is a machine that would work’ (‘The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology’ (1968), Jacques Derrida, in *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), trs. Alan Bass, (University of Chicago, 1982) p 107). Lyotard glosses Derrida’s remark as follows, ‘Machines function through a loss. Speculation is a machine that gains, and it is therefore a deranged machine. The ‘thing’ only works by transmuting its wastes...into gains’ (‘Hegel Notice’ in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend* p 96.) ‘Speculation’ sees its own identity everywhere and, consequently, makes a profit from everything it encounters. It cannot think an outside that will not yield to its transmuting powers. It cannot think, in other words, of the ‘radically other’. ‘The Minister’s Black Veil’, on the other hand, ‘works’. It ‘works’ precisely because it does evoke the ‘radically other’.

experience his or her own death or what preceded his or her coming into the world. To be mortal is, paradoxically, to have no ascertainable beginning or end. A historical event is therefore both finite and at the same time unbounded. It is without borders that may be experienced (DI 117).

One is destined to repeat without end 'the linguistic error of personifying the absent, the inanimate, or the dead.' In which case there is no final scene in 'Main-Street'. 'Main-Street' works because it presents an endless series of counterfeits. At one point the 'remorseless critic' interrupts the narrator as he introduces the 1692 witchcraft incident, 'Turn your crank, I say...and grind it out, whatever it may be, without further preface!' (T&S 1043). The showman regards the incident as an exception to a show which, in general, is intended to be a harmonious whole:

Do all thy daily and accustomed business, Father Time, in this thoroughfare, which thy footsteps, for so many years, have now made dusty! But here, at last, thou leadest along a procession which, once witnessed, shall appear no more, and be remembered only as a hideous dream of thine, or a frenzy of the old brain (T&S 1043).

The critic implies that this dissonant image is typical of the picture show. It will simply mean one more turn of the 'crank'. Nothing could be further from the showman's view of his picture show. The 'little wheels and springs of my machinery have been well oiled' he announces as he introduces the exhibition:

Unless something should go wrong, - as, for instance, the misplacing of a picture,

whereby the people and events of one century might be thrust into the middle of another; or the breaking of a wire, which would bring the course of time to a sudden period...I flatter myself, ladies and gentleman, that the performance will elicit your generous approbation (T&S 1023).

Both the 'remorseless critic' and the 'showman' want a 'well oiled' machine to reach its destination with all speed. Yet, in saying 'grind it out', it is as if the critic inadvertently praises the exhibition. Despite the showman's intentions, the exhibition works precisely because of the friction it creates between itself and an 'outside' which can only be evoked. For this reason each different scene is also, at the same time, essentially the same in that it is counterfeit. So, the 'misplacing of a picture' is not a transgression at all: it is the norm. Every placing of a picture is also, at the same time, necessarily a misplacing of a picture. The showman's machine finally works, that is to say it is finally successful in its attempt to evoke the past, because it is broken.

This is also true of 'Ethan Brand: A Chapter From An Abortive Romance'. Once again Hawthorne describes a showman and his picture-show. The showman presents pictures, Hawthorne says, '[some] purported to be cities, public edifices, and ruined castles, in Europe; others represented Napoleon's battles and Nelson's sea fights' (T&S 1061). The 'pictures', Hawthorne says, 'were worn out...tattered, full of cracks and wrinkles, dingy with tobacco-smoke, and otherwise in a most pitiable condition'. The 'machine' refuses to be annulled by the pictures of European cities, public edifices, and ruined castles or Napoleon's battles and Nelson's sea-fights. It is as if the 'machine' has the same status as even these most exalted images in that it too simply evokes something which it cannot actually present. It, too, is counterfeit. In 'the



midst' of each picture, Hawthorne says, 'would be seen a gigantic, brown, hairy hand - which might have been mistaken for the Hand of Destiny, though in truth, it was only the showman's - pointing its forefinger to various scenes of the conflict' (T&S 1060/1061). Yet the tale suggests that the showman's hand is, in truth, of exactly the same indeterminable value as a 'Hand of Destiny' itself. Like the 'great hand of providence' the showman's hand is not in control of the plot; it is simply one more part in the story. One recalls a scene in *Our Old Home*. Hawthorne describes visiting a London exhibition devoted to Nelson's 'exploits.' 'We see' he writes, 'the frail, ardent man in all the most noted events of his career, from his encounter with a Polar bear to his death at Trafalgar, quivering here and there about the room like a blue lambent flame' (OOH 260). Nelson, Hawthorne suggests, was never really present to himself. As if to emphasise this he juxtaposes the famous scene of his death with an absurd, chance scene: an encounter with a Polar bear. It just happened, Hawthorne seems to say. It can not be erased from history and it has the same status as any other scene.

In 'Main-Street' a spectator at the exhibition (not the 'acidulous-looking' critic this time) 'interrupts' the showman:

'allow me to observe, that these historical personages could not possibly have met together in the Main-street. They might, and probably did, all visit our old town, at one time or another, but not simultaneously; and you have fallen into anachronisms that I positively shudder to think of' (T&S 1034).

The particular historical personages are all either too soon or too late, it is suggested. Yet this

is precisely why this aspect of the exhibition is accurate - why it 'works'. Anachronism splits open every historical happening, from the events on the Main-street to the showman's exhibition itself, in that each scene has to defer to another scene, and so on ad infinitum. In *Introducing Lyotard: Art And Politics*, Bill Readings describes 'anachronisms which cannot be reduced to the status of historical 'errors''. 'The time of inscription comes both *after* history and *before* it, since History is in a sense constituted by the possibility of being re-transcribed', he continues.<sup>5</sup> Like the interruption of the gentleman, no historical happening can know its own meaning. Each and every historical happening is always already rewritten.

In this sense one could regard the anachronisms in the exhibition as more signs of how successful it is in evoking the past. 'I should have given the crank one other turn', Hawthorne says, 'and have bought out the future, showing you who shall walk the Main-street tomorrow, and perchance, whose funeral shall pass through it!' (T&S 1050). 'Alas! My kind and gentle audience, you know not the extent of your misfortune' he continues:

The scenes to come were far better than the past...how would your interest have deepened, as, passing out of the cold shadow of antiquity, in my long and weary course, I should arrive within the limits of man's memory, and, leading you at last to the sunshine of the present, should give a reflex of the very life that is flitting past us! (T&S 1050).

Something is always missing (for this reason one imagines that even if the 'acidulous-looking'

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art And Politics*, pp 58 - 59.

critic had seen his own death he would still have, quite legitimately, asked for the return of his admission payment). A prediction is always too soon to actually be the predicted event. On the other hand the 'reflex', inevitably, would have come too late to capture the "real thing" (assuming, for one moment, that there ever is a "real thing"). Each historical happening is mistimed, always too soon and too late. One can not escape the disjointedness of the "it happens".

## II

Jean-François Lyotard aligns the desire to erase the discrepancy which is constitutive of the historical event with modernity. 'Modernity, modern temporality', he says:

comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. And not only to exceed itself in that way, but to resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability, such for example as is aimed at by the utopian project, but also by the straightforward political project implied in the grand narratives of emancipation (RM 25).

In his final unfinished romance Hawthorne describes a similar kind of project. In *The Elixir Of Life Manuscripts* Septimus cultivates a flower which apparently contains the essential ingredient for an 'elixir of life' (the drink, Hawthorne says, contains 'the secret of death'.(ELM 396)). However, the 'unaccountable being' Sybil shocks Septimus.

With one of those freaks of petulance to which she was so liable, she plucked the flower

from the soil...and flung it away with her whole force. Then, flitting away with sprite-like laughter ... [she] made her escape down the hill, looking back however, and clapping her hands as she saw Septimus standing stupified with horror at this sudden destruction of the gem which Nature had just offered him, and which he could not but suppose to have had a purport and potency, which the act of this wild girl had annihilated forever...[Sybil] nor any other could have suspected all the hopes, the immortal projects, that he connected with this strange flower; what study, what pains, what art, had been lavished there, what rich science; and now, in the moment of success, all was brought to naught by the freak of this girl (ELM 396/397).

Miller writes that ‘unannounced breaking in is essential to historical happenings’ (DI 112). It is precisely this sense of chance, however, that modern temporality attempts to annul. The scene appears to be a rewriting of an incident which Hawthorne documents in *Our Old Home*. Hawthorne describes a visit to Greenwich Fair with a friend:

Many persons were running races, hand in hand, down the declivities, especially that steepest one on the summit of which stands the world-central Observatory, and (as in the race of life) the partners were often male and female, and often caught a tumble together before reaching the bottom of the hill. Hereabouts we were pestered and haunted by two young girls, the eldest not more than thirteen, teasing us to buy matches (OOH 265/266).

When Standard time was introduced in 1883 the base position was, by international agreement, declared to be the Royal Greenwich observatory in London. Twenty-five or so years before this,



when Hawthorne visited the site, Greenwich was staking its claim. 'If all nations will consent to say so, the longitude of our great globe begins [at the site of Greenwich Observatory]' Hawthorne writes. 'I used to regulate my watch by the broad dial plate against the Observatory wall, and felt it pleasant to be standing at the very centre of Time and Space', he continues (T&S 249). Hawthorne, then, at 'the very centre of Time and Space', describes being 'pestered' and 'haunted' by the two young girls. The girls evoke something excessive, something which cannot be accounted for. They are off the radar, so to speak. Hawthorne finds the excessive nature of their propositioning 'teasing'.<sup>6</sup> The girls won't take no for an answer:

finding no market for their commodity, the taller one suddenly turned a somersault before our faces, and rolled heels over head from top to bottom of the hill on which we stood. Then, scrambling up the acclivity, the topsy-turvy trollop offered us her matches again, as demurely as if she had never flung aside her equilibrium (OOH 265/266).

Uncertainty surrounds the taller girl's sudden somersault and backward rolling. Hawthorne acknowledges his helpless predicament, 'dreading a repetition of the feat, we gave her sixpence

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<sup>6</sup>Propositioning is a relevant word here. Hawthorne first recorded this incident in *The English Notebooks*,

Two girls, perhaps twelve years old, followed and haunted us for [*seven lines excised*] ... [*one line excised*] what she hoped to accomplish by [*one-fifth line overmarked illegibly*] petticoats; and having no wish to see any more of her, I gave the girl a sixpence, enjoining her never to do so again (EN 436).

The editors of *The English Notebooks*, commenting on this passage among others, suggest that Sophia Hawthorne altered the original manuscripts suppressing 'accounts of sexual actions and bodily functions' (EN 739). It is possible, then, that Hawthorne and his companion were being propositioned.

and an admonition, and enjoined her never to do so any more' (OOH 265/266). The injunction for her 'never to do so any more' is a hopeless one, however. The taller girl has already evoked the 'outside' of the restricted economy<sup>7</sup>, an 'outside' which cannot be erased by an exchange. This 'outside' cannot be controlled by the mediating factors of a restricted economy - money and time, in this example. The unannounced breaking in that is essential to historical happenings always exceeds any prediction - whether it be calculated with reference to a financial contract or to the time of the Greenwich observatory. Events, Hawthorne suggests, are subject to the duplicity of a temporality that is always caught between the two stools of before and after. As if to emphasise this, Hawthorne, as I have noted, appears to rewrite the scene in *The Elixir Of Life Manuscripts*.

For Hawthorne, then, events are never identical to themselves. This is of significance when one remembers Hawthorne's unfinished romances. In the 1863 dedication to Franklin Pierce in *Our Old Home* (written after the outbreak of civil war) Hawthorne refers to an 'abortive project':

[the] Present, the Immediate, the Actual, has proved to potent for me. It takes away not only my scanty faculty, but even my desire for imaginative composition, and leaves me sadly content to scatter a thousand peaceful fantasies upon the hurricane that is sweeping us all along with it, possibly, into a Limbo where our nation and its polity may be as literally the fragments of a shattered dream as my unwritten romance (OOH viii).

Initially, then, America is implicitly aligned with 'romance'. Its current fragmented state -

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<sup>7</sup>See footnote 4 for definition of this term.

riven, of course, by the on-going Civil War - is associated with an 'unwritten romance'. So, Hawthorne implies, in a manner which appears to anticipate Richard Chase's *The American Novel And Its Tradition*, that the United States of America is analogous to a completed romance. But the passage continues:

But I have far better hopes for our dear country; and for my individual share of the catastrophe, I afflict myself little, or not at all, and shall easily find room for the abortive work on a certain ideal shelf, where are repositied many other shadowy volumes of mine, more in number, and very much superior in quality, to those which I have succeeded in rendering actual (OOH viii).

Hawthorne still aligns 'the catastrophe' that has befallen America - the Civil War, that is, - with his 'abortive work'. Yet now he suggests that the 'abortive work' - along with 'other shadowy volumes' - can be regarded as 'very much superior in quality, to those which I have succeeded in rendering actual'. In which case one can say that the 'abortive work' is, paradoxically, the most complete. 'Shadowy volumes', volumes which are aware that, after all, they are no more or less than simulacra, are 'very much superior in quality' he implies. So, it is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that the America never really was a dream-like totality. It was always already a simulacrum - and one cannot ruin something that is already a ruin. For this reason Hawthorne remains hopeful that another similar, national formation can re-emerge.

For Hawthorne, then, romance was 'abortive' by definition. It seems unreasonable, then, to criticise the final unfinished romances because they were unfinished. Yet this is what Yvor

Winters implied when he argued that in the 'four unfinished romances':

[we have] all the mannerisms of the allegorist, but we cannot discover the substance of his communication, nor is he himself aware of it so far as we can judge. We have the symbolic footprint, the symbolic spider, the symbolic elixirs and poisons, but we have not that of which they are symbolic.<sup>8</sup>

In response to Winters one could say that Hawthorne was aware that he was not aware of the substance of his communication. This is apparent in the recurrent interest in spiders in these final pieces. (I shall turn to the 'symbolic footprint' and the 'symbolic elixirs and poisons' in Chapter Three). In 'Grimshawe' the central protagonist keeps 'one single, enormous spider'. Hawthorne goes on to present a 'theory' that the 'grim Doctor':

was but a great fly which the spider had subtly entangled in his web. But, in truth, naturalists are acquainted with this spider, though it be a rare one. ...It is found in South America, its most hideous spread of legs covering a space nearly as large as a dinner plate, and radiating from a body as big as a door knob, which one conceives to be an agglomeration of sucked up poison, which the creature treasures through life, probably to expend it all, and life itself, on some worthy foe. ...It was a horror to think of this thing living; still more a horror to think of the foul catastrophe, the crushed out and wasted poison, that would follow the casual setting a foot upon him (ACM 350/351).

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<sup>8</sup> 'Maule's Curse, or Hawthorne and the Problem of Allegory' (From Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason*, (1938), in *Hawthorne: A Collection Of Critical Essays*, ed. A.N. Kaul, (A Spectrum Book, 1966), p 22).



Hawthorne insists, then, that what Winters calls a 'symbolic spider' is, in fact, just a spider. Indeed, this is typical of all of Hawthorne's writing. Hawthorne had, in fact, used this trope in 'Rappaccini's Daughter', describing a 'spider':

busily at work, hanging its web from the antique cornice of the apartment, crossing and re-crossing the artful system of interwoven lines, as vigorous and active a spider as ever dangled from an old ceiling. Giovanni bent towards the insect, and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artizan. Again Giovanni sent forth a breath. ...The spider made a convulsive gripe with his limbs, and hung dead across the window (T&S 1000).

Hawthorne suggests, then, that the spider is akin to an author - Giovanni is 'entangled' in its 'web'. However, the implication is that neither spider nor author transcend the narrative 'web'. They themselves can just as easily become caught in the narrative. It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that, as the web exceeds the spider, so the 'substance' of a 'communication' is always beyond any particular reading.

'We have the hushed, the tense and confidential manner, on the part of the narrator, of one who imparts a grave secret, but the words are inaudible', Winters said of the unfinished romances.<sup>9</sup> Yet Hawthorne parodies any attempt to remember 'grave secrets'. It has already been noted that Hawthorne relished subverting the distinction between the sublime and the ridiculous. So, in *The Elixir Of Life Manuscripts* the reader is presented with a manuscript which Septimus

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<sup>9</sup> Winters, 'Maule's Curse', p 22..

believed related to 'his great object of earthly immortality'(ELM 318/319). 'Eat no spiced meat', says one of the absurd 'Precious Maxims from an Unknown Intelligence'(ELM 321). Hawthorne dryly notes that 'however true' many of the things in the manuscript may be, none of them were particularly 'novel' or 'momentous' (ELM 317). This, of course, echoes the Postscript to *The Marble Faun*, added to a republication because, Hawthorne says, 'many readers...[demanded] further elucidations respecting the mysteries of the story' (MF 463). As G.R. Thompson says, Hawthorne offers these readers 'a mild authorial raspberry'.<sup>10</sup> In an imaginary interview with central protagonists Hilda and Kenyon, Hawthorne, 'the Author', asks if they could reveal Miriam's 'real name and rank' and 'precisely the nature of the trouble that led to all the direful consequences' (MF 466). Kenyon responds with 'an aspect of vast surprise':

Is it possible that you need to answer these questions? ...Have you not even surmised Miriam's name? Think awhile, and you will assuredly remember it. If not, I congratulate you most sincerely; for it indicates that your feelings have never been harrowed by one of the most dreadful and mysterious events that have occurred within the present century (MF 466/477).

The Postscript draws to a close with a question that has hovered over the text from the beginning. 'Did Donatello's ears resemble those of the Faun of Praxiteles?' asks the Author with 'intense earnestness' (MF 467). In other words, did Donatello have furry ears? "I know, but may not tell," replied Kenyon, smiling mysteriously. 'On that point, at all events, there shall be not one word of explanation"' (MF 467). As Hawthorne says, after one of Kenyon's earlier, equally

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<sup>10</sup> Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence*, p 210.

opaque responses: 'it is clear as a London fog' (MF 465).

This absurd Postscript to *The Marble Faun* is anticipated in one of the asides in *The Ancestral Footstep*. Hawthorne appears to be working out the 'plot' of his story. 'The life is not yet breathed into this plot', he writes:

Not a spark of passion as yet. How shall it be attained? The Lord of Braithwaite Hall shall be a wretched, dissipated, dishonorable fellow. ...What? What? What? A worshipper of the Sun? A cannibal? A ghoul? A vampire? A man who lives by sucking the blood of the young and beautiful? ...He has been poisoned by a Bologna sausage, and is being gnawed. ...Let the real difference between him and other people be very small - but pile upon it. Ye Heavens! A man with a mortal disease? - a leprosy? - a eunuch? - a cork leg? - golden touch? - a dead hand? - a false nose? - a glass eye? (ACM 264/265/266).

Passages such as this, which occur throughout the final romances, can be associated with the process of 'working through'. 'We know', says Lyotard in 'Rewriting Modernity:

that Freud especially stresses the rule of so-called 'freely floating attention' which the analyst is observe with respect to the patient. It consists in according the same attention to every element of the sentences proffered by the analysand, however tiny and futile it may appear (RM 30).

In working through, suggests Lyotard, one takes responsibility for the smallest detail. This would serve as a fine description of Hawthorne's way of writing. As Hawthorne says of Aubépine, he 'endeavours to create an interest by some less obvious peculiarity of the subject' (T&S 975).

### III

So in 'My Visit to Niagara' Hawthorne writes:

Gradually, and after much contemplation, I came to know, by my own feelings, that Niagara is indeed a wonder of the world, and not the less wonderful, because time and thought must be employed in comprehending it. Casting aside all preconceived notions, and preparation to be dire-struck or delighted, the beholder must stand beside it in the simplicity of his heart, suffering the mighty scene to work its own impression. Night after night, I dreamed of it, and was gladdened every morning by the consciousness of a growing capacity to enjoy it. Yet I will not pretend to the all-absorbing enthusiasm of some more fortunate spectators, nor deny, that very trifling causes would draw my eyes and thoughts away from the cataract (T&S 247).

This fondness for 'very trifling causes' is also apparent in a passage from *Our Old Home*. Hawthorne describes a tombstone (in a church near Leamington Spa) with the following inscription:



Poorly Lived,  
And poorly died,  
Poorly buried,  
And no one cried (OOH 67).

‘His name, as well as I could make out, was Treeo - John Treeo, I think, and he died in 1810 at the age of seventy-four’, writes Hawthorne (OOH 68). ‘The gravestone’, he continues:

is so overgrown with grass and weeds, so covered with unsightly lichens, and so crumbly with time and foul weather, that it is questionable whether anybody will ever be at the trouble of deciphering it again. But there is a quaint and sad kind of enjoyment in defeating (to such a slight degree as my pen may do it) the probabilities of oblivion for poor John Treeo, and asking a little sympathy for him, half a century after his death, and making him better and more widely known at least, than any slumberer in Lillington churchyard: he having been, as appearances go, the outcast of them all (OOH 68).

The ‘quaint and sad kind of enjoyment’, then, is connected to a sense of redeeming the obscure to a ‘slight degree’. It is as if Hawthorne sees his own fate, and the fate of others, reflected in John Treeo, ‘the outcast of them all’.

For Yvor Winters, of course, this interest in the trifling was a sign that Hawthorne’s communications lacked ‘substance’. In saying this he repeated Henry James’ criticisms. Describing the *American Notebooks*, for example, James writes that they:

read like a series of very pleasant, though rather dullish and decidedly formal, letters, addressed to himself by a man who, having suspicions that they might be opened in the post, should have determined to insert nothing compromising. ...[The picture of America the reader constructs from these Notebooks] is characterized by an extraordinary blankness - a curious paleness of colour and paucity of detail. Hawthorne...has a large and healthy appetite for detail, and one is, therefore, the more struck with the lightness of the diet to which his observation was condemned.<sup>11</sup>

James does not suggest that there was a lack of detail in the *American Notebooks*. On the contrary, Hawthorne 'has a large and healthy appetite for detail'. What troubles James, however, is that in his opinion, Hawthorne concerned himself with mere 'trifles'.<sup>12</sup> Nothing happens in these Notebooks, suggests James. '[Get] a bottle of visible ink' Poe advised Hawthorne in the 1847 review. Hawthorne, of course, was not averse to making similar remarks about himself. 'The book, if you would see anything in it' he says of the *Twice-Told Tales* in the 1851 'Preface', 'requires to be read in the clear, brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages' (T&S 1152). In this respect Miller's remarks on 'The Minister's Black Veil' are informative. 'The black veil is a black veil', he writes. 'Those flat historical notations in Hawthorne's notebooks, about which Henry James complained', he continues:

are, one might argue, the most successfully allegorical words he ever wrote.

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<sup>11</sup> James, *Hawthorne*, pp 33 - 34.

<sup>12</sup> James, *Hawthorne*, p 36.

Hawthorne's failure to express allegorical meanings in his novels and tales, their tendency to fade to blank pages in the sunlight, is their triumph. The distinction between realistic and allegorical narratives disappears in a sign that is at once blankly realistic and at the same time absolutely allegorical, that is, a sign for the failure of allegory (DI 120).

Like the spiders in the unfinished romances, the 'black veil' evokes an 'outside' which Miller is calling the 'absolutely allegorical'. There is no hidden meaning that is waiting to be uncovered; there are simply simulacra without originals. This is partly what is at stake in the idea of a man writing a letter to himself. 'James' figure...of a man writing a letter to himself has extraordinary comic resonance', comments Miller:

A letter to myself is always in a sense totally blank, since it conveys no information that both sender and receiver do not already have, both being the same person. But even a letter from myself to myself...is an 'open letter', liable to be 'opened in the post'. It therefore must be kept blank if I am to preserve my privacy. Either way, such a letter is blank, and such blankness, according to James, characterises Hawthorne's notebooks (DI 53).

Yet, Miller argues, this is not a privation but a triumph. Hawthorne's writing works as a cultural artifact because it evokes a shared sense of being 'outside of everything'. Miller elucidates on James' account of the Notebooks, 'They present senseless, uninterpreted factual detail, recorded in banal literalism...[as in the example of] a whole paragraph given to the following: 'The aromatic odor of peat-smoke, in the sunny autumnal air is very pleasant'' (DI 53). Perhaps

Hawthorne had this remark in mind when he described his visit to Greenwich, '[I] felt it pleasant to be standing at the very centre of Time and Space'. Here is Hawthorne, then, apparently 'at the very centre of Time and Space', and he finds it 'pleasant'! Indeed, one could say that Hawthorne preferred the 'aromatic odor of peat-smoke, in the sunny autumnal air'; he found this 'very pleasant.' Hawthorne, then, found a sense of 'community' in the obscure and the decentred.

This can be detected in his fondness for Salem, his home town. In the seventeenth century Salem was apparently intended to be a world central city (the name is an abbreviation of Jerusalem). 'We must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill' Winthrop reportedly said to the first settlers, 'the eyes of all people are upon us.'<sup>13</sup> By the turn of the nineteenth century, as Borges writes, 'the port of Salem ... [suffered] from two traits that were anomalous in America: it was a very old, but poor, city'.<sup>14</sup> '[So] far as its physical aspect is concerned' Hawthorne says of Salem in the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*:

with its flat unvaried surface, covered chiefly with wooden houses, few or none of which pretend to architectural beauty, its irregularity, which is neither picturesque or quaint, but only tame, - its long lazy street, lounging wearisomely through the whole extent of the peninsula, with Gallows Hill and New Guinea at the one end, and a view of the alms-house at the other, - such being the features of my native town, it would be quite as reasonable to form a sentimental attachment to a disarranged checkerboard. And yet,

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<sup>13</sup>Cited in Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History Of The United States Of America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), p 43.

<sup>14</sup>Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, p 48.



though invariably happiest elsewhere, there is within me a feeling for old Salem, which, in lack of a better phrase, I must be content to call affection (SL 40).

The very localness of Salem, the fact that it is similar to other places in its difference from them, this very particularity appears to prompt a universal feeling in Hawthorne.

This is, of course, what had attracted him to Johnson's Uttoxeter penance. As I noted in the introduction, Hawthorne does not seem to have greeted the news that a monument was to be erected there with the straightforward enthusiasm that one might have expected. His ambiguous response can be connected to the way in which he emphasises the limitations of the machine in 'Main-Street' and 'Ethan Brand'. In both stories he also refused to allow the mode of presentation to be forgotten. In 'Ethan Brand' Hawthorne aligns this with the Unpardonable Sin. At the conclusion of the show Joe, son of lime-burner Bartram, places his head inside the apparatus so that his 'visage' can be viewed through the lens. Ethan Brand watches him through the glasses - the spectator's end of the diorama - and when Joe realises this his expression, which had 'been overflowing with fun', changes to 'horror' (T&S 1061). The showman tells Ethan Brand that he makes the 'little man to be afraid', but then asks him to look again, now that Joe has gone, to see something 'very fine':

Ethan Brand gazed into the box for an instant, and then starting back, looked fixedly at the German. What had he seen? Nothing, apparently; for a curious youth, who had peeped in, almost at the same moment, beheld only a vacant space of canvass (T&S 1061).

That Ethan Brand apparently saw a 'vacant space of canvass', that one can never know exactly what Ethan Brand saw, that the curious youth peeped in at 'almost' the same moment - all this, Hawthorne implies, is connected to the Unpardonable Sin. 'Ah, Captain', says the showman to Ethan Brand, 'I find it to be a heavy matter in my show-box - this Unpardonable Sin! By my faith, Captain, it has wearied my shoulders this long day, to carry it over the mountain' (T&S 1061). One can align this with Herman Melville's remark, 'in certain moods, no man can weigh this world, without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance'.<sup>15</sup> Heavy, and yet invisible, the Unpardonable Sin is always in excess of, and always undermines, each and every perspective.

The problem with the monument to Johnson's penance, then, was that it erased exactly what it was meant to remember. Writing about Hawthorne, Jorge-Luis Borges associates allegory with 'a peculiar sentiment, an intimate process, a series of analogous states.'<sup>16</sup> What attracted Hawthorne to Johnson's penance was precisely this sense of a series of analogous states. In working though, Lyotard says, 'the only guiding thread at one's disposal consists in sentiment or, better, in listening to a sentiment' (RM 31). Presented with an endless series of simulacra one feels the same sentiment, a sentiment connected to the fact that one can only ever be presented with a series of 'negative characteristics'. Describing the *Twice-Told Tales* Hawthorne says, in the 1851 'Preface', they have 'the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade - the

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<sup>15</sup> Herman Melville, 'Hawthorne and His Mosses: By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont', (1850), anthologised in Herman Melville, *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces: 1839-1860*, Volume IX, The Writings Of Herman Melville, The Northwestern-Newberry Edition, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), p 243.

<sup>16</sup> Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, p 50.

coolness of a meditative habit' (T&S 1151). The tales are like simulacra, they somehow appear to be both present and absent. 'Instead of passion, there is sentiment', he continues (T&S 1152). As with Freud's 'working through', Hawthorne's 'meditative habit' is guided through an endless series of simulacra by sentiment, by listening to a sentiment. Hawthorne described his visit to Uttoxeter as 'one of the few purely sentimental pilgrimages that I ever undertook' (OOH 151). By fusing understanding and feeling into a totality a monument would betray this sentiment, this sense of a 'series of analogous states'. As with Benjamin's symbol, differing perspectives would be abolished in a 'mythical instant'. Yet Johnson's penance attracted Hawthorne precisely because he saw it as an exemplification of the dislocated nature of temporality and his attitude to the monument that was erected after his visit reflects this. 'The inhabitants [of Uttoxeter]', says Hawthorne:

know nothing, as a matter of general interest about the penance, and care nothing for the scene of it. ...If the site were ascertained, would not the pavement thereabouts be worn with reverential footsteps? Would not every town-born child be able to direct the pilgrim thither? (OOH 156).

The people of Uttoxeter have other things on their minds, Hawthorne suggests. However, even if the inhabitants did know about the incident they could still only testify to this by a collective absence, he implies. This absent presence would be discerned in the traces of their footsteps. This is echoed in the 1862 'Chiefly About War Matters'. Hawthorne describes a visit to a tavern in which in May 1861 a senior Northerner, Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, was shot dead by the Southern proprietor who himself 'was slain a moment afterwards' (Ch 417). 'The memorial-

hunters', he continues:

have completely cut away the original woodwork around the spot, with their pocket-knives; and the staircase, balustrade, and floor, as well as the adjacent doors and door-frames, have recently been renewed; the walls, moreover, are covered with new paper-hangings, the former having been torn off in tatters; and thus it becomes something of a metaphysical question whether the place of the murder actually exists (Ch 417).

The 'memorial-hunters' have, in a sense, created what one might call a 'negative memorial'. By dismantling the place of the murder it is as if they have unwittingly testified to the common predicament of being in an analogous state. The 'memorial-hunters' do not find a common sense of identity in the incident. On the contrary, a sense of identity in difference is reflected in their souvenirs. So, if the pavement around the site of Johnson's penance really was 'worn with reverential footsteps' this would only point the more insistently to the absence of common symbols. Hawthorne associated the penance with a sense that one only finds common ground with others when one accepts one's irredeemable singularity. A pavement worn by reverential footsteps, then, would evoke a common sense of being 'outside everything'.

#### IV

'Lady Eleanore's Mantle' can be regarded as one of Hawthorne's most lucid attempts at describing this sense of 'sentiment'. '[Rich] and high-born Lady Eleanore Rochcliffe' comes from England to stay with Colonel Shute, governor of the New England colony in the eighteenth



century. 'Lady Eleanore' says Hawthorne, 'was remarkable for a harsh unyielding pride, a haughty consciousness of her hereditary and personal advantages, which made her almost incapable of control' (T&S 654). To illustrate this, Hawthorne describes the scene of Lady Eleanore's arrival at the Boston Province-House. A 'crowd had gathered' he says:

A pale young man, with his black hair all in disorder, rushed from the throng, and prostrated himself ... thus offering his person as a footstool for Lady Eleanore Rochcliffe to tread upon. She held back an instant; yet with an expression as if doubting whether the young man were worthy to bear the weight of her footstep, rather than dissatisfied to receive such awful reverence from a fellow-mortal. ... She placed her foot upon the cowering form, and extended her hand to meet that of the Governor. There was a brief interval, during which Lady Eleanore retained this attitude; and never, surely, was there an apter emblem of aristocracy and hereditary pride, trampling on human sympathies and the kindred of nature, than these two figures presented at that moment (T&S 655/656).

This is a primal scene, then, a scene of domination. Among those who look on are Captain Langford, 'an English Officer', and Doctor Clarke, 'a physician, and a famous champion of the popular party' (T&S 655). 'Who is this insolent young fellow?' asks Captain Langford. 'His name is Jervase Helwyse' answered the Doctor:

'a youth of no birth or fortune, or other advantages, save the mind and soul that nature gave him; and being secretary to our colonial agent in London, it was his misfortune to meet this Lady Eleanore Rochcliffe. He loved her - and her scorn has driven him mad'

‘He was mad so to aspire’, observed the English officer.

‘It may be so’, said Doctor Clarke, frowning as he spoke. ‘But I tell you, sir, I could well nigh doubt the justice of this Heaven above us, if no signal humiliation overtake this lady.

She seeks to place herself above the sympathies of our common nature, which envelops all human souls. See, if that nature do not assert its claim over her in some mode that shall bring her level with the lowest!’ (T&S 656).

Doctor Clarke’s prophecy appears to be fulfilled. Soon after her arrival the Governor gives a ball in Lady Eleanore’s honour. Captain Langford encounters Doctor Clarke once again. ‘The Doctor stood...separated from Lady Eleanore...but eyeing her with such keen sagacity’:

that Captain Langford involuntarily gave him credit for the discovery of some deep secret.

‘You appear to be smitten, after all, with the charms of this queenly maiden’ said he...

‘God forbid!’ said Doctor Clark, with a grave smile... ‘Wo to those who shall be smitten by Lady Eleanore! But yonder stands the Governor - and I have a word or two for his private ear. Good night!’.

He accordingly advanced to Governor Shute, and advised him in so low a tone that none of the bystanders could catch a word of what he said... A very few moments afterwards, it was announced to the guests that an unforeseen circumstance rendered it necessary to put a premature end to the festival (T&S 660/661).

A few days after the ball, ‘Small-Pox’ breaks out in the community. A ‘blood-red flag’

Hawthorne says, 'fluttered in the tainted air, over the door of every dwelling into which the Small-Pox had entered' (T&S 662). 'Such a banner' he continues:

was long since wavering over the portal of the Province House; for thence, as was proved by tracking its footsteps back, had...this dreadful mischief issued. It had been traced back to a lady's luxurious chamber - to the proudest of the proud - to her that was so delicate, and hardly owned herself of earthly mould - to the haughty one, who took her stand above human sympathies - to Lady Eleanore! (T&S 662).

Indeed the precise origin of the 'mischief' is traced back to Lady Eleanore's 'mantle'. Noting that Lady Eleanore wears the garment at the ball, Hawthorne says that 'the gossips whispered [that it was] invested with magical properties, so as to lend a new and untried grace to her figure each time that she put it on' (T&S 657). Yet, Hawthorne explains after the outbreak of small-pox, the mantle was not all that it seemed. 'There remained no room for doubt' he says with a strange air of confidence:

that the contagion had lurked in that gorgeous mantle, which threw so strange a grace around her at the festival. Its fantastic splendor had been conceived in the delirious brain of a woman on her death-bed and was the toil of her stiffening fingers, which had interwoven fate and misery with its golden threads. This dark tale, whispered at first was now bruited far and wide (T&S 662/663).

The story ends when Jervase Helwyse takes the mantle from the dying Lady Eleanore. 'That

night' says Hawthorne:

a procession passed, by torch light, through the streets, bearing in the midst, the figure of a woman, enveloped with a richly embroidered mantle; while in advance stalked Jervase Helwyse. Arriving opposite the Province-House, the mob burned the effigy, and a strong wind came and swept away the ashes. It was said, that, from that very hour, the pestilence abated, as if its sway had some mysterious connection, from the first plague-stroke to the last, with Lady Eleanore's Mantle. ...There is a belief...that, in a certain chamber of [the Province-House], a female form may sometimes be discerned, shrinking into the darkest corner, and muffling her face within an embroidered mantle. Supposing the legend true, can this be other than the once proud Lady Eleanore? (T&S 666).

Yes, one seems obliged to answer. And yet... .

Jervase Helwyse 'snatched' the fatal mantle from Lady Eleanore as she lay on her death-bed 'and rushed from the chamber and house' (T&S 665). Prior to this a brief exchange had taken place between the two. 'The poor lunatic, it seems probable' Hawthorne had said, attempting to explain why Jervase Helwyse should seek an interview with the dying woman:

had cherished a delusion that his haughty mistress sat in state, unharmed herself by the pestilential influence, which, as by enchantment she scattered around her. He dreamed no doubt, that her beauty was not dimmed, but brightened into superhuman splendour (T&S 664).



‘Lady Eleanore! - Princess! - Queen of Death!’, cries Jervase Helwyse, as he enters her room:

The malice of his mental disease, the bitterness lurking at the bottom of his heart, mad as he was, for a blighted and ruined life, and love that had been paid with cruel scorn, awoke within the breast of Jervase Helwyse. He shook his finger at the wretched girl, and the chamber echoed, the curtains of the bed were shaken, with his outburst of insane merriment.

‘Another triumph for the Lady Eleanore!’ he cried. ‘All have been her victims! Who so worthy to be the final victim as herself?’ (T&S 665).

Lady Eleanore, Helwyse implies, is not really Lady Eleanore at all. She is contaminated with something utterly other. In which case the answer to the question which ends the story may not be a simple ‘yes’ after all. The ‘female form’ that ‘may sometimes be duskily discerned’ in a ‘certain chamber’ of the Province-House is not simply ‘the one proud Lady Eleanore’. Rather one could say that it is akin to a kind of shadow that undermines the story from the inside. Helwyse, of course, snatches the mantle, which is burned that night. This, one could say, somehow represents the essence of Lady Eleanore. Yet the ‘female form’ that appears in a certain chamber of the Province-House is seen muffling her face in an embroidered mantle. It is as if the attempt to destroy the mantle fails. Something about the mantle, something that is neither a presence or an absence, appears to be indestructible. The mantle, then, is akin to a sign of something utterly other, to a contagion that permeates the tale, so to speak.

Its unsettling effect is particularly apparent in respect of what Doctor Clarke calls ‘the

sympathies of our common nature'. Doctor Clarke, one recalls, had predicted that a 'signal humiliation' would 'overtake' Lady Eleanore. Just prior to Jervase Helwyse's entry into the dying Lady Eleanore's chamber, he meets Doctor Clarke in the Province-House (the 'duties' of his 'sad profession' led to the Doctor being there, Hawthorne says (T&S 664)). 'Why do you seek [Lady Eleanore]?' says Doctor Clarke to Jervase Helwyse:

Know ye not, that never come such a curse to our shores as this lovely Lady Eleanore?  
That her breath has filled the air with poison? - that she has shaken pestilence and death  
upon the land, from the folds of her accursed mantle? (T&S 664).

The predicted 'signal humiliation' has come to Lady Eleanore, then. Nature, recalling Clarke's words, seems to have made its claim over Lady Eleanore and brought her level with the lowest. Lady Eleanore herself seems to agree with the prognosis, 'I wrapt myself in PRIDE as in a MANTLE, and scorned the sympathies of nature', she says to Jervase Helwyse from her death-bed, 'and therefore has nature made this wretched body the medium of a dreadful sympathy' (T&S 665).

By the end of the tale, then, an analogy has been made between the burning of the mantle and the re-establishment of the 'sympathies of our common nature'. During the ball to mark Lady Eleanore's arrival she is approached by Jervase Hastings, who carries 'a chased silver goblet filled to the brim with wine' (T&S 658/659). 'Why do you haunt me thus?' she says to him:

'They tell me that I have done you harm'.

‘Heaven knows if that be so’, replied the young man solemnly. ‘But, Lady Eleanore, in requital of that harm, if such there be, and for your own earthly and heavenly welfare, I pray you take one sip of this holy wine, and then to pass the goblet round among the guests. And this shall be a symbol that you have not sought to withdraw yourself from the chain of human sympathies’...

While the bystanders were attempting to lead away the unfortunate young man, he broke from them, and with a wild, impassioned, earnestness, offered a new and equally strange petition to Lady Eleanore. ... ‘Cast [the mantle] from you! ...It may not yet be too late! Give the accursed garment to the flames!’ (T&S 659/660).

Lady Eleanore refuses both to sip the wine and cast away the ‘accursed garment’. She remains, along with the mantle, on the outside of the chain of human sympathies, one could say. The holy wine, then, appears to be the positive symbol of the chain of human sympathies. Likewise, the burning of the mantle would be a positive symbol of the chain. It would cure the contagion which Helwyse associates with the outside of the chain of human sympathies.

In the death-bed scene, Hawthorne implicitly challenges this position. On entering Lady Eleanore’s chamber Jervase Helwyse begins to distinguish a woman’s voice, ‘complaining dolefully of thirst’. ‘My throat! - my throat is scorched.’ murmurs Lady Eleanore, ‘A drop of water’ (T&S 665). Helwyse refuses to oblige the nameless ‘[heap] of diseased mortality’. Unlike the holy wine and the burning mantle, the scorched throat and the drop of water appear to stand for nothing more than themselves. If they symbolise anything, they symbolise ‘mortal infirmity’. They are akin to the ghostly image of the female form muffled in the embroidered

mantle. Helwyse refuses to oblige. It is as if Lady Eleanore's place outside the chain of human sympathies has become permanent.

However, an awareness of 'mortal infirmity' is precisely what has brought Lady Eleanore within the chain of human sympathies, Hawthorne implies. He had suggested this when he first mentioned the contagion. 'At first' he said:

unlike its ordinary course, the disease seemed to confine itself to the higher circles of society, selecting its victims from among the proud, the well-born and the wealthy, entering unabashed into stately chambers, and lying down with the slumberers in silken beds. ...But the disease, pursuing its onward progress, soon ceased to be exclusively a prerogative of aristocracy. Its red brand was no longer conferred like a noble's star, or an order of knighthood. It threaded its way through the narrow and crooked streets, and entered the low, mean, darksome dwellings and laid its hand upon the artisans and laboring classes of the town. It compelled rich and poor to feel themselves brethren, then (T&S 661).

Hawthorne suggests that a certain sickness is all that 'we' share (and in this respect it is significant that Doctor Clarke and Jervase Helwyse somehow remain free of the contagion). One only ever approaches the chain of human sympathy when one accepts the absent presence of a certain something that is absolutely other to meaning. This certain something can only be evoked in an endless series of unaccountable ghostly scenes; like the involuntary occurrence of the red brand (it will become apparent in the next chapter that this is an important precursor to *The*



*Scarlet Letter*) and the inexplicable appearance of a female form muffled in an embroidered mantle.

This sense of solitude that somehow runs through oneself and through others is also apparent in the 1835 sketch 'Wakefield'. Hawthorne tells the story of Wakefield, a man who:

under pretense of going a journey, took lodgings in the next street to his own house, and there, unheard of by his wife or friends, and without the shadow of a reason for such self-banishment, dwelt upwards of twenty years. During this period, he beheld his home every day, and frequently the forlorn Mrs. Wakefield. And so after great a gap in his matrimonial felicity - when his death reckoned certain, his estate settled, his name dismissed from memory, and his wife, long, long ago resigned to her autumnal widowhood - he entered the door one evening, quietly, as from a day's absence, and became a loving spouse till death (T&S 290).

The story, Hawthorne says, was 'told as truth' in some old magazine or newspaper' (T&S 290).

Having outlined the story in the opening paragraph Hawthorne writes:

If the reader choose, let him do his own meditation; or if he prefer to ramble with me through the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary, I bid him welcome; trusting that there will be a pervading spirit and a moral, even should we fail to find them, done up neatly, and condensed into the final sentence. Thought always has its efficacy, and every striking incident its moral (T&S 290/291).

Meditation on Wakefield's inexplicable behaviour will not be akin to aimless ramble. On the contrary, 'there will be a pervading spirit and a moral' though, Hawthorne suggests, one should not necessarily expect the latter to be akin to one of the ten commandments, a final sentence that one can take away with one like a lesson learned. What kind of 'moral' is Hawthorne referring to then? At the end of the sketch Hawthorne writes as follows:

[Wakefield] has left much food for thought, a portion of which shall lend its wisdom to a moral; and be shaped into a figure. Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to the fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe (T&S 298).

This 'moral' is not simply a rule, then, it is a 'figure'. This is why Hawthorne warns the reader against expecting to find a 'pervading spirit and a moral...done up neatly and condensed into the final sentence'. Figurative language defies any sense of automatic cause and effect. Do not take my morals literally, he says (and in the concluding chapter it will become apparent that this is a significant factor in 'Alice Doane's Appeal'. Hawthorne presents a moral with a built-in sense of negation. The tale itself, I would argue, invites the reader to challenge this moral. It invites the reader to accept that to be an 'Outcast of the Universe' is a common predicament.

Wakefield, then, has a series of inexplicable sensations. The morning after having taken lodgings in the street next to his own house Wakefield returns home. 'Habit', Hawthorne says:

for he is a man of habits - takes him by the hand, and guides him, wholly unaware, to his own door, where just at the critical moment, he is aroused by the critical scraping of his foot upon the step. Wakefield! Whither are you going? (T&S 293).

He hurries away, but then 'gathers courage to pause and look homeward':

but is perplexed with a sense of change about the familiar edifice, such as affects us all, when, after a separation of months or years, we again see some hill or lake, or work of art, with which we were friends, of old. In ordinary cases, this indescribable impression is caused by the comparison between our imperfect reminiscences and reality. In Wakefield, the magic of a single night has wrought a similar transformation, because in that brief period a great moral change has been effected. But this is a secret from himself (T&S 294).

The 'great moral change' appears to relate to a new sense of unpredictability. The indescribable impression, Hawthorne suggests, is caused when one compares 'imperfect' reminiscences and reality. As with deferred action, one is aware that one saw the particular thing in the past but only later does one realise that one never really fully comprehended it then. Hawthorne captures this state of affairs in one particular image. 'Now for a scene!,' he writes (T&S 295). After a ten year interlude Wakefield encounters his wife. 'Amid the throng of a London street', says Hawthorne:

[a] lean man and well conditioned woman are passing, a slight obstruction occurs, and

brings these two figures directly into contact. Their hands touch; the pressure of the crowd forces her bosom against his shoulder; they stand, face to face, staring into each other's eyes. After a ten years' separation, thus Wakefield meets his wife!

The throng eddies away, and carries them asunder. The sober widow, resuming her former pace, proceeds to church, but pauses in the portal, and throws a perplexed glance along the street. She passes in, however, opening her prayer-book as she goes. And the man? With so wild a face, that busy and selfish London stands to gaze after him, he hurries to his lodgings, bolts the door, and throws himself upon the bed. The latent feelings of years break out; his feeble mind acquires a brief energy from their strength; all the miserable strangeness of his life is revealed to him at a glance; and he cries out passionately - 'Wakefield! Wakefield! You are mad!' (T&S 296).

Wakefield can not turn the clock back. The horse has always already bolted, one could say. Even busy and selfish London appears to be unprepared for Wakefield's reaction to this meeting of bodies (a meeting which is like an incomprehensible sexual encounter, a kind of negative primal scene). It is as if Wakefield is akin to an absence at the very centre of things, an absence which can be associated with a sense that unpreparedness is a universal predicament.

'Would that I had a folio to write, instead of an article of a dozen pages!', says Hawthorne at one point, 'then might I exemplify how an influence, beyond our control, lays its strong hand on every deed which we do, and weaves its consequences into an iron tissue of necessity' (T&S 295). Yet the fact that Hawthorne is just writing an article of a dozen pages itself exemplifies the way an outside influence has effected his 'deed'. One has no choice. One is always subject to



an influence beyond one's control. However, Wakefield, Hawthorne suggests, refuses to accept the disjointed nature of time:

I conceive...that these twenty years would appear, in the retrospect, scarcely longer than the week to which Wakefield had at first limited his absence. He would look on the affair as no more than an interlude in the main business of his life. When after a little while or more, he would deem it time to re-enter his parlor, his wife would clap her hands for joy, on beholding the middle-aged Mr. Wakefield. Alas, what a mistake! Would Time but await the close of our favorite follies, we should be young men all of us, and till Doom's Day (T&S 297).

Time, Hawthorne suggests, is simply not interested in Wakefield's 'frolic'. 'One evening', Hawthorne continues,

In the twentieth year since he vanished, Wakefield is taking his customary walk towards the dwelling which he still calls his own. It is a gusty night of autumn, with frequent showers, that patter down upon the pavement, and are gone, before a man can put up his umbrella (T&S 297).

Hawthorne, then, hints at a strange sense of time. A time of events that happens in one's own absence. The time of deferred action; one is always too soon and too late. '[A] shower chances to fall', Hawthorne continues,

and is driven, by the unmannerly gust, full into Wakefield's face and bosom. He is quite penetrated with its autumnal chill. Shall he stand, wet and shivering here, when his own hearth has a good fire to warm him, and his own wife will run to fetch the grey coat and small-clothes, which doubtless, she has kept carefully in the closet of their bed-chamber? No! Wakefield is no such fool. He ascends the steps - heavily! - for twenty years have stiffened his legs, since he came down - but he knows it not. ...The door opens. ...This happy event - supposing it to be such - could only have occurred in an unpremeditated moment (T&S 297/298).

Wakefield's 'project' (T&S 293) comes to an end almost before he realises it. It is as if the door opens of its own accord. What makes Wakefield 'mad', one could say, is that he does not accept that he is 'mad'. He refuses to accept an indefinable otherness in the self. He refuses to accept, one could say, that, in a sense, like John Treeo, and like everyone else for that matter, he is 'the Outcast of the Universe'. Yet from the very beginning of Wakefield, Hawthorne has suggested that it is possible to affirm a discordant sense of temporality. 'In some old magazine or newspaper' Hawthorne says,

I recollect a story, told as truth, of a man - let us call him Wakefield - who absented himself for a long time, from his wife. ...To my own contemplations at least, it has often recurred. ...Whenever any subject so forcibly affects the mind, time is well spent thinking of it (T&S 290).

Hawthorne suggests that one should accept one's essentially passive relationship to involuntary

memories. One should accept, he implies, that lost time haunts every scene. In the next chapter, on *The Scarlet Letter*, I will argue that Hawthorne associated what he calls ‘the law of literary propriety’ with the affirmation of an endless series of incomprehensible scenes.

# ***THE SCARLET LETTER: THE LAW OF LITERARY PROPRIETY AND A STATE OF SEPARATION***

As I noted in the introduction, Lyotard repeatedly refers to a passage from Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen zum Oedipus*:

At the extreme limit of distress,...man forgets himself because he is entirely in the moment; [he forgets] the God because he is nothing but time, and both are unfaithful, time because at that moment it spins on itself and beginning and end no longer let themselves be rhymed in it at all.<sup>1</sup>

Time, Hölderlin suggests, refuses to yield to meaning. In section I of this chapter I argue, with a particular focus on Hawthorne and allegory, that this is what is at stake in the final scaffold scene of *The Scarlet Letter*. Each moment, Hölderlin implies, reiterates the absence of a universal law. In section II I connect this to the famous preface to *The Scarlet Letter*. I align this absence of a universal law with Lyotard's sense of 'rewriting'. The rewriting that characterises postmodernity, Lyotard says, 'is motivated by an intolerable suffering which places the subject in a state of separation from itself, at the same time as this state sustains that suffering in a repetitive way' (RM 33). Section III is the only section in which I depart from *The Scarlet Letter*

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<sup>1</sup> Lyotard, *Peregrinations*, pp 2 - 3.



altogether. After covering a wide range of material on memorializing and modernity I return to *The Scarlet Letter* in section IV and V. Both these sections outline the way in which *The Scarlet Letter* explores issues of rewriting and responsibility. Finally, section VI of this chapter, with Johnson's penance in mind, examines Hawthorne's reference to his Puritan ancestors in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*.

## I

'Dimmesdale, Leslie A. Fiedler writes In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960):

totters into the noonday public square to confess his fault before the whole community.

At that point Oedipus-Dimmesdale blends with the image of Doctor Johnson standing in the Uttoxeter market-place to make public amends against his father.<sup>2</sup>

Dimmesdale, like Samuel Johnson, 'does penance in what might appear to lookers-on the most glorious and triumphal circumstances of his life.' Hawthorne explains that at the end of Dimmesdale's 'Election Sermon' there had 'come to [Dimmesdale]...an epoch of life more brilliant and full of triumph than any previous one, or than any which could hereafter be' (SL 262). Yet immediately after this follows the revelation of the scarlet letter - Dimmesdale's 'death of triumphant ignominy before the people' (SL 269). Hawthorne begins the 'Conclusion' noting that '[after] many days, when time sufficed for the people to arrange their thoughts in reference

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<sup>2</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in The American Novel* (1960), (London: Paladin, 1970), p216. Mark Van Doren first noted a connection in *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, (William Sloane Associates, 1949).

to the foregoing scene, there was more than one account of what has been witnessed on the scaffold' (SL 270). 'Most of the spectators', he continued, 'testified to having seen, on the breast of the unhappy minister, a SCARLET LETTER - the very semblance of that worn by Hester Prynne - imprinted in the flesh' (SL 270). However, explains Hawthorne:

It is singular...that certain persons, who were spectators of the whole scene, and professed never once to have removed their eyes from the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, denied that there was any mark whatever on his breast, more than on a new-born infant's. Neither, by their report, had his dying words acknowledged, nor even remotely implied, any, the slightest connection, on his part, with the guilt for which Hester Prynne had so long worn the scarlet letter. According to these highly respectable witnesses, the minister, conscious that he was dying, - conscious also, that the reverence of the multitude placed him already among saints and angels, - had desired, by yielding up his breath in the arms of that fallen woman, to express to the world how utterly nugatory is the choicest of man's own righteousness. After exhausting life in his efforts for mankind's spiritual good, he had made the manner of his death a parable, in order to impress on his admirers the mighty and mournful lesson, that, in the view of Infinite Purity, we are all sinners alike. It was to teach them, that the holiest among us has but attained so far above his fellows as to discern the more clearly the Mercy which looks down, and repudiate more utterly the phantom of human merit, which would look aspiringly upward (SL 271).

According to these witnesses, then, Dimmesdale died in order to 'impress' a 'lesson' on the memory of those present. The account of 'highly respectable witnesses', one can surmise, was

most likely proffered by the 'train of venerable and majestic fathers...the Governor and magistrates, the old and wise men, the holy ministers, and all that were eminent and renowned', those who constituted the procession which was marshalled after Dimmesdale's 'Election Sermon' (SL 263). Hawthorne, however, has no time for this interpretation:

we must be allowed to consider this version of Mr. Dimmesdale's story as only an instance of that stubborn fidelity with which a man's friends - and especially a clergyman's - will sometimes uphold his character; when proofs, clear as the mid-day sunshine on the scarlet letter, establish him a false and sin-stained creature of the dust (SL 271).

Hawthorne, one can say after Melville, throws in Original Sin in order to 'strike the uneven balance'. Dimmesdale's death, he suggests simply did not make sense. As with Johnson's penance, Hawthorne insists that there is something in the scene which cannot be 'translated'. Dimmesdale's death, one could say, is one more scene in an indecipherable 'parable'.

This sense of an indecipherable parable can be discerned in a story that I referred to earlier in the thesis, 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844). Giovanni Guasconti is introduced to 'Signor Pietro Baglioni, professor of medicine in the University' (T&S 981). 'I have been reading an old classic author lately', Baglioni says to Giovanni:

and met with a story that strangely interested me. Possibly you may remember it. It is of an Indian prince, who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. She

was as lovely as the dawn, and gorgeous as the sunset; but what especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath - richer than the garden of Persian roses. Alexander, as was natural to a youthful conqueror, fell in love at first sight with this magnificent stranger. But a certain sage physician, happening to be present, discovered a terrible secret in regard to her ... this lovely woman ... had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them, that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath, she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison! - her embrace death! (T&S 996).

Not content with his insinuation Baglioni goes on to spell out the meaning of the fable, 'That old fable of the Indian woman has become truth, by the deep and deadly science of Rappaccini, and in the person of the lovely Beatrice!' (T&S 998). Hawthorne, however, has already noted that Baglioni may not necessarily be the neutral observer he claims to be. Giovanni, he says:

might have taken Baglioni's opinions with many grains of allowance, had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between [Baglioni] and Doctor Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage. If the reader be inclined to judge for himself, we refer him to certain black-letter tracts on both sides, preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua (T&S 982/983).

Baglioni tries to 'cure' Beatrice with an antidote to Dr. Raappaccini's poison. Yet Hawthorne says that the 'powerful antidote was death' to Beatrice because her 'earthly part' could only be



fed by a diet of 'poison' (T&S 1005). Baglioni's antidote was itself a poison to Beatrice, then. One recalls a remark that Hawthorne had made earlier in the tale: 'Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions' (T&S 987). Hawthorne ends the story with an unintelligible ambiguity. When Baglioni appears at the very end of the tale, after the death of Beatrice, he 'calls forth', Hawthorne says, 'in a tone of triumph mixed with horror... 'Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is *this* the upshot of your experiment?'' (T&S 1005). Baglioni simply acts out his role as 'sage physician' in the already written fable. Yet, in truth, Professor Baglioni and Dr. Rappaccini seem to be indistinguishable. One can not know who really poisoned Beatrice.

'Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world?', asks Hawthorne in 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (T&S 979). Even if the answer to this question were a 'yes', the story implies that something would still be missing. In a letter dated 24th March 1844 Hawthorne responded to his correspondent's view of the name given to newly born daughter Una. 'I do not agree with you that poetry ought not to be brought into common life', wrote Hawthorne. 'If flowers of Eden can be made to grow among my cabbages and squashes, it will please me so much the better; those excellent vegetables will be just as good to eat, and the flowers no less delightful to see and smell', he continued (L 22). Even if the flowers of Eden could be grown, Hawthorne suggests, they would still simply be another prosaic part of his garden. Something like Original Sin is all pervasive.

This is reflected in Hawthorne's description of the grounds of the Villa Borghese in *The Marble Faun*. 'The final charm', writes Hawthorne:

is bestowed by the Malaria. There is a piercing, thrilling, delicious kind of regret in the idea of so much beauty thrown away, or only half enjoyable at its half-development, in winter and early spring, and never to be dwelt amongst, as the home-scenery of any human being. For if you come hither in summer, and stray through these glades in the golden sunset, Fever walks arm in arm with you, and Death awaits you at the end of the dim vista. Thus the scene is like Eden in its loveliness; like Eden, too, in the fatal spell that removes it beyond the scope of man's actual possessions (MF 73).

Citing this passage Charles Feidelson Jr., in *Symbolism and American Literature*, argued that Hawthorne 'was unduly anxious about the freedom of symbolic meaning...[because] he had some inkling of how far that method could go'.<sup>3</sup> 'Baudelaire', he continues, 'stood at the end of the dim vista'.<sup>4</sup> Allegory, however, 'was the brake that Hawthorne applied to his sensibility'.<sup>5</sup> Yet I argue that Hawthorne affirmed indecipherable allegory because it took account of an inescapable limit, a 'fatal spell'.

This sense of ambiguity is reiterated in *The Scarlet Letter*. Roger Chillingworth talks to Arthur Dimmesdale as he examines 'a bundle of unsightly plants' (SL 151). 'I found them on a grave', Chillingworth says:

'which bore no tombstone, nor other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds

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<sup>3</sup>Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature*, p 16.

<sup>4</sup> Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature*, p 15.

<sup>5</sup> Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature*, pp 14 - 15.

that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime.'

'Perchance,' said Mr. Dimmesdale, 'he earnestly desired it, but could not.'

'And wherefore?' rejoined the physician. 'Wherefore not; since all the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make manifest an unspoken crime?' (SL 152).

Chillingworth suggests that confession will result in a return to a kind of original innocence. The 'black weeds' are somehow exceptional. Dimmesdale disputes the contention:

'That, good Sir, is but a fantasy of yours,' replied the minister. 'There can be, if I forebode aright, no power, short of the Divine mercy, to disclose, whether by uttered words, or by type or emblem, the secrets that may be buried with a human heart. The heart, making itself guilty of such secrets, must perforce hold them, until the day when all hidden things shall be revealed...these revelations, unless I greatly err, are meant merely to promote the intellectual satisfaction of all intelligent beings, who will stand waiting, on that day, to see the dark problem of this life made plain. A knowledge of men's hearts will be needful to the completest solution of that problem. And I conceive, moreover, that the hearts holding such miserable secrets as you speak of will yield them up, at that last day, not with reluctance, but with a joy unutterable' (SL 152).

Dimmesdale takes a position which one can call 'modern'. 'The ethics of...*pardon* [crowns the

modern exercise of reason]', Lyotard has said. 'Modern consciousness', he writes:

places its fate in the hands of a single just and good father. ...This characterization may appear too Christian. But over countless episodes, lay modernity maintains this temporal device, that of a 'great narrative'... which *promises* at the end to reconcile the subject with itself and the overcoming of its separation.<sup>6</sup>

Dimmesdale looks forward to a final 'pardon', to 'the day when all hidden things shall be revealed'. For Dimmesdale, then, Original Sin (as opposed to an 'original innocence') appears to be the rule. Yet he too imagines that alienation can be overcome. A sense of totality underlies the positions of both Chillingworth and Dimmesdale.

The fundamental compatibility of the two positions is demonstrated by the way that the two figures swap around, as it were, and seamlessly take up one another's position. 'Many, many a poor soul', Dimmesdale continues:

hath given its confidence to me, not only on the death-bed, but while strong in life, and fair in reputation. And ever, after such an outpouring, O, what a relief have I witnessed in those sinful brethren! even as in one who at last draws free air, after long stifling with his own polluted breath. How can it be otherwise? Why should a wretched man, guilty, we will say, of murder, prefer to keep the dead corpse buried in his own heart, rather than fling it forth at once, and let the universe take care of it (SL 153).

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<sup>6</sup> 'A Postmodern Fable', in Lyotard, *postmodern fables*, p 97.



Dimmesdale here anticipates his own final confession. A little later Hester Prynne meets Chillingworth in the forest. '[Thou] hast it at thy will to pardon', she says to him, 'Wilt thou give up that only privilege? Wilt thou reject that priceless benefit?' (SL 191) 'It is not granted me to pardon', replies Chillingworth:

I have no such power as thou tellest me of. My old faith, long forgotten, comes back to me, and explains all that we do, and all we suffer. By thy first step awry, thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has been a dark necessity. Ye that have wronged me are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands. It is our fate. Let the black flower blossom as it may! (SL 191/192).

Chillingworth now takes Dimmesdale's position. 'It is not granted me to pardon' he says, implicitly invoking the authority of a 'good father'. While events appear senseless now they are, nevertheless, destined to be transformed by the sense-making final 'pardon'. 'Let the black flower blossom as it may!' Chillingworth says, the implication being that whichever way the black flowers blossoms it nevertheless is destined to be redeemed.

After his encounter with Hester Prynne, Chillingworth 'betook himself again to his employment of gathering herbs' Hawthorne says (SL 193). 'Hester gazed after him a little while', he continues:

looking with a half-fantastic curiosity to see whether the tender grass of early spring

would not be blighted beneath him, and show the wavering track of his footsteps, sere and brown, across its cheerful verdure. She wondered what sort of herbs they were, which the old man was so sedulous to gather. Would not the earth, quickened to an evil purpose by the sympathy of his eye, greet him with poisonous shrubs, of species hitherto unknown, that would start up under his fingers? Or might it suffice him, that every wholesome growth should be converted into something deleterious and malignant at his touch? Did the sun, which shone so brightly everywhere else, really fall upon him? Or was there, as it rather seemed, a circle of ominous shadow moving along with his deformity, whichever way he turned himself? And whither was he now going? Would he not suddenly sink into the earth, leaving a barren and blasted spot, where, in due course of time, would be seen deadly nightshade, dogwood, henbane, and whatever else of vegetable wickedness the climate could produce, all flourishing with hideous luxuriance? Or would he spread bat's wings and flee away, looking so much the uglier, the higher he rose to heaven? (SL 193).

It is as if Hester Prynne is remembering that 'something, somehow like Original Sin', something which, Melville said, '[strikes] the uneven balance'. Something, Hawthorne suggests, can never be redeemed. The subject can never be reconciled with itself.

Jorge-Luis Borges refers to G. K. Chesterton's account of allegory, remarking that it is the 'best vindication [I know]'.<sup>7</sup> With Chesterton's account in mind, Borges turns to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. 'Beatrice', he writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, p 49.

is not an emblem of faith, a belaboured and arbitrary synonym of the word *faith*. The truth is that something - a peculiar sentiment, an intimate process, a series of analogous states - exists in the world that can be indicated by two symbols: one, quite insignificant, the sound of the word *faith*; the other, Beatrice, the glorious Beatrice who descended from Heaven and left her footprints in Hell to save Dante.<sup>8</sup>

The 'sound' of the word '*faith*', Borges suggests, evokes the 'radically other'. The 'quite insignificant...sound' evokes an 'outside' which cannot be reduced to meaning. 'Allegory', then, evokes an 'outside' which seems to be beyond the word and yet can only be evoked by the word. In an 'analogous' way traces of Beatrice can be found in both Heaven and Hell. Beatrice, Borges implies, is somehow in excess of everything. Commenting on the name of his newly born daughter in 1844 Hawthorne wrote: 'I like the name, not so much from any association with Spenser's heroine, as for its simple self - it is as simple as a name can be - as simple as a breath - it is merely inhaling a breath into one's heart, and emitting it again, and the name is spoken' (L 22). The name Una, then, refers one to Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*. Yet Hawthorne suggests that it also refers one to something that cannot be incorporated into any system of meaning, something that he likens to exhalation.

With this sense of a fundamental separation between the subject and itself in mind one can return to *The Elixir of Life Manuscripts*. Two stories-within-a-story are told in *The Elixir of Life Manuscripts* which connect a 'Bloody Footstep' to the 'elixir of life'. In the first story an English Baron discovers the elixir. However, this coincides with an unexpected eventuality. 'Blood,

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<sup>8</sup> Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, p 50.

blood, blood!', says Hawthorne. 'Where ever the poor Baron went, he left his track behind him' he continues (ELM 346). On the 'door-step' of his ancestral home, moreover, there was 'one crimson foot mark...which no rain could wash away' (ELM 346). Hawthorne reports that the Baron's 'crimson foot print was last seen on the edge of the quay, where a vessel had just sailed for parts beyond the seas, whence she never returned' (ELM 350). In the second 'Bloody Footstep' story Aunt Nashoba describes a 'Great Sagamore' who had appeared among an Indian tribe 'in the times of their great-grandfathers' (ELM 356). The English baron, then, appears to have turned up in North America. He too has discovered an elixir which renders him 'absolutely deathless' and, he too leaves a 'red track wherever he went' (ELM 357). Known as 'the Undying One' the Great Sagamore becomes chief of the tribe because he was regarded as 'the strongest, bravest, wisest man' (ELM 356/360). However, having grown tired of the Undying One, with all 'his wisdom and long experience', the tribe 'plotted against him' (ELM 357). After all else fails the tribe confront the Undying One who 'made no sort of resistance', when:

they built a great pile of wood about him, felling an acre of pitch-pine trees and heaping straw upon him, and set it on fire, and it burned three days and nights, while they danced about it in the cremation's blaze and smoke, and feasted, and rejoiced, because now they had got rid of the man that would never die, and that was too wise for any set of mere mortal men to hold their own with. The white ashes lay thick upon him, as he sat, and the charred brands had blackened him; but there he sat...in the middle of the most glowing embers, sitting upon the mighty trunk of a pine, which was all one live coal, and calmly smoking his pipe, as if the furnace heat was just the atmosphere he liked best (ELM 259/360).



The Undying One appears to be a self-identical totality. However, when he steps 'out of the fiery circle' the narrator notes that 'it was observed that bloody foot of his was still crimson and wet, though it should seem as if the fire might have dried it up'. After this incident the Undying One 'departed through the forest, never looking behind him, but leaving a bloody track' (EL 362). It is as if the Bloody Footstep haunts the Undying One. Even the 'Undying One', then, this ultimate 'primal father', is not a self-contained totality. In this respect what Maurice Blanchot has called 'Le Pas Au-Dela' is relevant.<sup>9</sup> The phrase translates as both the step beyond and the step not beyond ('Pas' meaning both step and negation). 'No doubt the most pertinent conception we can have of rewriting resides in this double gesture, forwards and backwards' says Lyotard (RM 30). Forwards and backwards: Lyotard associates 'rewriting' with a sense of simultaneous disclosure and non disclosure.

This sense of disclosure and non disclosure is reflected in Hawthorne's favoured explanation as to the 'origin' of the scarlet letter 'imprinted' on Dimmesdale's 'flesh' (SL 270). Hawthorne gives three 'explanations' as to its origin. 'The reader may choose among these theories' he says (SL 172). All three explanations, of course, at least agree on 'what had been witnessed on the scaffold'. Hawthorne insists that, unlike the 'highly respectable witnesses' in *The Scarlet Letter*, one should take responsibility for every event. Hawthorne, however, clearly favours one of the explanations. He introduces the third explanation by suggesting that this would be the 'choice' of those 'best able to appreciate the minister's peculiar sensibility, and the wonderful operation of his spirit upon the body' (SL 270). The reader is free to choose one of the other two 'theories' - with the proviso that the third theory is the best one. The reader is not really offered a 'choice'

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<sup>9</sup> See Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, (*Le Pas Au-Dela*).

at all, then.<sup>10</sup> The viewpoint favoured by Hawthorne is 'that the awful symbol was the effect of the ever active tooth of remorse, gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly, and at last manifesting Heaven's dreadful judgment by the visible presence of the letter' (SL 270). Yet this is not really a 'judgment' at all. Although Dimmesdale appears to have been turned inside out he still finishes up where he began, so to speak. The 'explanation' is not really an 'explanation' at all. One still does not know what 'Heaven's dreadful judgment' really is. '[Proofs], clear as the mid-day sunshine on the scarlet letter', says Hawthorne, 'establish [Dimmesdale] a false and sin-stained creature of the dust'. All the illumination imaginable only goes to reinforce the universality of Original Sin.

This is what is implied when Chillingworth addresses Dimmesdale as the latter is about to ascend the scaffold for the last time. 'Hadst thou sought the whole earth over...there was no place so secret, - no high place nor lowly place, where thou couldst have escaped me, - save on this very scaffold!' he says (SL 266). It is as if Chillingworth has been jolted, as he realises Dimmesdale is about to make a very public confession, into the realisation that were the whole world to know the truth it still would not really matter. Something would still be missing, something which takes away the sense even from an event which appears to be totally transparent. Even at the extreme limit of distress, Chillingworth has perhaps realised, nothing really happens: life goes on. There

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<sup>10</sup> In 'The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*' Jonathan Arac argues that 'in *The Scarlet Letter*... 'indeterminacy' functions as a closure', (Jonathon Arac, 'The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*', p 249). In response to this one could ask: what 'indeterminacy'? Sacvan Bercovitch, on the other hand, writes that 'the text elicits personal response in order to allow each of us to contribute to the expanding continuum of liberal reciprocity' (Sacvan Bercovitch, 'The A- Politics of Ambiguity in *The Scarlet Letter*', *New Literary History*, 19, (1988) p 641). In a different way, then, Bercovitch too mistakenly assumes that the text offers the reader a 'choice'.

can be no absolute transgression. The most extreme transgression does not break through to the 'other side', so to speak. '[There] is no 'perfect crime'', Lyotard writes:

no crime that could remain unknown forever. A secret would not be a 'real' secret if no-one knew it was a secret. For the crime to be perfect, it would have to be known to be perfect, and by that very fact it stops being perfect. To make the point differently...à la John Cage, there is no silence that is not heard as such, and therefore makes some noise. Basically the same plot weaves an intimacy between silence and sound, criminal and cop, unconscious and consciousness (RM 27/28).<sup>11</sup>

'What we did had a consecration of its own' Hester Prynne whispers to Arthur Dimmesdale (SL 212). This remark can be taken quite seriously. It is as if Hester Prynne is saying: we did not commit a 'perfect crime'. 'What they did' was not somehow on the 'outside' of what Lyotard calls the 'same plot'. One cannot transgress the 'law' - and yet at the same time one cannot know the 'law'.

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<sup>11</sup> Dupin, Poe's apparently infallible detective, 'is found [*se trouve*] on the circuit, in the circle of the restricted economy' Jacques Derrida says in 'Le Facteur de la vérité' - Derrida's analysis of Jacques Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter*, (Jacques Derrida, 'Le Facteur de la vérité', in *A Derrida Reader*, p 467). One recalls that Alan Bass writes that, for Derrida, in a restricted economy 'nothing...cannot be made to make sense'. The 'general' economy, on the other hand, 'affirms that which exceeds meaning, the excess of meaning from which there can be no speculative profit'. The 'general' economy, then, will not allow Dupin to have the last word, as it were. Indeed, 'cop' cannot be distinguished from a 'criminal' if he attempts to transcend 'destiny'. '[The] lack does not have its place in dissemination', Derrida argues in 'Le Facteur de la vérité'. One cannot transcend what Lyotard calls 'plot'. To do so would be to do the impossible - one would be committing the 'perfect crime'.

## II

‘Among many morals which press upon us from the poor minister’s miserable experience, we put only this into a sentence: - ‘Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!’, writes Hawthorne in the final chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* (T&S 271). It is as if Hawthorne says: Be true! Be true! Be true! Go with ‘it’ - and in any case, you have no choice in the matter. Whatever you do you cannot escape ‘the worst’, you cannot ‘know’ the law. ‘Be patient’, writes Maurice Blanchot:

A simple motto, very demanding. Patience has already withdrawn me not only from the will in me, but from my power to be patient: if I *can* be patient, then patience has not worn out in me that me to which I cling for self-preservation... [Patience] is the passivity of dying whereby an I that is no longer I, answers to the limitlessness of the disaster, to that which no present remembers.<sup>12</sup>

To be ‘patient’, says Blanchot, is akin to having (already) accepted that one is (already) dead, to having accepted that one can only ever have a passive relationship to ‘the law’.

Hawthorne demonstrates this in a self-conscious way when he draws attention to the ‘legitimacy’ of his text. ‘The authority which we have chiefly followed’, he writes in the ‘Conclusion’ of *The Scarlet Letter*, ‘a manuscript of old date, drawn up from verbal testimony of individuals, some of whom had known Hester Prynne, while others had heard the tale from contemporary witnesses -

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<sup>12</sup> Blanchot, *The Writing Of The Disaster*, p 14.



fully confirms the view taken in the foregoing pages' (SL 271) (In 'The Custom-House' Hawthorne, of course, describes the discovery of the Mr. Surveyor's Pue's manuscript). In 'The Custom-House' Hawthorne explains that the 'sketch has a certain propriety, of a kind always recognized in literature, as explaining how a large portion of the following pages came into my possession, and as offering proofs of the authenticity of a narrative therein contained' (SL 36). Hawthorne does not simply use a Gothic convention. He also draws attention to the fact that he is using a convention. By saying that the sketch has a 'certain propriety' Hawthorne suggests that the authority which he defers to is itself no more than literary convention. The 'proofs of the authenticity of a narrative therein contained', then, themselves have to turn to 'literature' for their final authority. 'Literary law' takes precedence. 'Literature', Hawthorne says referring to his time in the Custom-House, 'its exertions and objects, were now of little moment in my regard' (SL 56). 'Once in a great while', he continues:

the thoughts, that had seemed so vital and so active, yet had been put to rest so quietly, revived again. One of the most remarkable occasions, when the habit of bygone days awoke in me, was that which brings it within the law of literary propriety to offer the public the sketch which I am now writing (SL 58).

Hawthorne, then, connects 'vital' and 'active' 'thoughts' to 'the law of literary propriety'. In this sense the law of literary propriety can be aligned with Lyotard's description of Freud's 'working through':

Basically the rule states: do not prejudge, suspend judgment, give the same attention to

everything that happens as it happens. On his or her side the patient must respect the symmetrical rule: let speech run, give free rein to all the 'ideas', figures, scenes, names, sentences, as they come onto the tongue and the body, in their 'disorder', without selection or repression.

A rule of this sort obliges the mind to be 'patient', in a new sense: no longer that of passively and repetitively enduring the same ancient and actual passion, but of applying its own passibility, a same respondent or 'respons', to everything that comes upon the mind, to give itself as a passage to the events which come to it from a 'something' that it does not know. Freud calls this 'free association'. All it is is a way of linking one sentence with another without regard for the logical, ethical or aesthetic value of the link (RM 30/31).

Free association, then, involves taking responsibility for unannounced events, events which come to one from a 'something' that one does not know. The rule is that there is no rule. The same can be said of Hawthorne's 'law of literary propriety'. It consists in remembering that there is no rule. Or, to put it another way, Hawthorne suggests that the only rule is to listen to 'the thoughts' that 'I am now writing'.

Hawthorne reiterated this in the 'Preface' to *The House Of The Seven Gables* (1851). 'When a writer calls his work a Romance', says Hawthorne:

it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to the fashion and material, which he would have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be

writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former - while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart - has fairly a right to present the truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing and creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows in his picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially, to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime, even if he disregard this caution (HSG 1).

As a 'work of art' a romance must 'rigidly subject itself to laws' and these laws appear to be connected to a loyalty to the 'truth of the human heart'. One 'sins unpardonably' if one is disloyal to this 'truth'. It is as if Hawthorne is saying that one cannot really be disloyal to this 'truth' anyway - it is not possible to commit a 'literary crime' - so, as with the moral of *The Scarlet Letter*, one ought to simply 'go with it', one rewrites the same absence.

Hawthorne may have remembered remarks made by Edgar Allan Poe when he referred to the 'law of literary propriety'. After describing a 'kind of composition...usually designated as 'the natural'', Poe suggested that:

[it is] best exemplified, among English writers, in Addison, Irving and *Hawthorne*. The 'ease' which is so often spoken of as its distinguishing feature, it has been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone, as a point of really difficult attainment. This idea, however, must be received with some reservation.<sup>13</sup>

The 'natural' style, then, is apparently effortless. Hawthorne, Poe writes at the conclusion of the 1847 review:

has the purest style, the finest taste, the most available scholarship, the most delicate humor, the most touching pathos, the most radiant imagination, the most consummate ingenuity; and with these varied qualities he has done *well* as a mystic. But is there any one of these qualities which should prevent his doing doubly as well in a career of honest, upright, sensible, prehensible and comprehensible things?<sup>14</sup>

Hawthorne, Poe implies, needs to discipline his writing if his work is to reach the '*public eye*'.

Hawthorne, perhaps, had Poe in mind when he dramatised a conversation between his Puritan forefathers in 'The Custom-House':

'What is he?' murmurs one gray shadow of my forefathers to the other. 'A writer of storybooks! What kind of a business in life, - what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation, may that be? Why, the degenerate

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<sup>13</sup>Poe, 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne, p 581.

<sup>14</sup>Poe, 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne', p 587.



fellow might as well have been a fiddler!’ (SL 42).

In a similar way Poe promotes a mode of writing which, in contrast to Hawthorne’s ‘dreamy innuendo’, requires ‘care and skill’.<sup>15</sup> If Hawthorne responds to this in ‘The Custom-House’ he does not do so by suggesting that the creative process is a labour. On the contrary, Hawthorne rejects the sense of ownership, of propriety, which is implicit in the idea of production. Hawthorne, rather, emphasises the kind of ‘suffering’ which Lyotard associates with ‘postmodern rewriting.’

This can be connected to Poe’s suggestion, in the 1842 review, that Hawthorne plagiarised a passage of his work. ‘In ‘Howe’s Masquerade’, says Poe, ‘we observe something which resembles a plagiarism - but which *may be* a very flattering coincidence of thought’.<sup>16</sup> Poe cites the following passage from ‘Howe’s Masquerade’:

With a dark flush of wrath upon his brow, they saw the General draw his sword and advance to meet the figure in the cloak before the latter had stepped one pace upon the floor.

‘Villain, unmuffle yourself!’ cried he. ‘You pass no further!’

The figure, without blenching a hair’s breadth from the sword which was pointed at his breast, made a solemn pause and lowered the cape of the cloak from about his face, yet not sufficiently for the spectators to catch a glimpse of it. The sternness of his

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<sup>15</sup> Poe, ‘Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne’, p 586.

<sup>16</sup>Poe, ‘Review of *Twice-told Tales*’, p 585.

countenance gave place to a look of wild amazement, if not horror, while he recoiled several steps from the figure and let his sword fall upon the floor (T&S 637/638).

Poe says of the passage:

The idea here is, that the figure in the cloak is the phantom or reduplication of Sir William Howe; but in an article called 'William Wilson,' one of the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, we have not only the same idea, but the same idea similarly presented in several respects.<sup>17</sup>

Poe goes on to cite the relevant passage from his own tale. 'William Wilson' was in fact first published in 1839 and while 'Howe's Masquerade' did appear in the enlarged 1842 edition of *Twice-told Tales* (and this is what Poe was reviewing) it had actually first appeared in 1838. It seems likely, then, that this is no more than 'a very flattering coincidence of thought'. Yet, even here, Poe may not necessarily be accurate. Comparing the passage to his own 'William Wilson' Poe is confident that the figure in the cloak 'is the phantom or reduplication' of Sir William Howe. But is that what Hawthorne's text actually says? It seems rather that the passage is comparable with that moment in 'Ethan Brand: An Abortive Romance' when the eponymous protagonist gazes into the showman's picture machine to see the Unpardonable Sin. Ethan Brand may have seen 'a vacant space of canvass'. Finally, though, one can never know what he saw. A 'curious youth' peeped in 'almost' at the same moment. So, in 'Howe's Masquerade' Hawthorne is careful to present a scene in which only Sir William Howe can know what he saw.

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<sup>17</sup> Poe, 'Review of *Twice-told Tales*' (1842), p 576.

It is within the bounds of possibility, moreover, that he does not see a 'reduplication' of himself at all. Perhaps, for instance, he sees something like 'a vacant space of canvass'. This would be related to a sense that one can never see through to the other side, as it were. It is as if Sir William Howe has just discovered that prosopopoeia, 'the ascription of a name, a face, and a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead', is the rule. Hawthorne, then, draws attention to the repetition of difference. There can be no precise 'reduplication' anyway, he suggests. So, recalling Lyotard's sense of postmodernity one could say that, after all, the passage cited by Poe is a 'rewriting' of a kind.

Hawthorne, of course, suggests that *The Scarlet Letter* is a rewriting of an old manuscript. '[It] should be borne carefully in mind, that the main facts of [*The Scarlet Letter*] are authorised and authenticated by the document of Mr. Surveyor Pue',<sup>18</sup> Hawthorne writes. 'I must not be understood', he continues:

as affirming, that, in the dressing up of the tale, and imaging the motives and mode of passion that influenced the characters who figure in it, I have invariably confined myself within the limits of the old surveyor's half a dozen sheets of foolscap. On the contrary, I have allowed myself, as to such points, nearly or altogether as much license as if the facts had been entirely of my own invention. What I contend for is the authenticity of the

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<sup>18</sup>Jonathan Pue really was, as notes to editions of *The Scarlet Letter* invariably point out, a custom-house officer in eighteenth century Salem. However, might Hawthorne also have had Poe in mind when he introduced the name? The name would then resonate with Lyotard's sense of rewriting. A repetition with a difference, one could say. It is almost as if Hawthorne is burying the hatchet here. It is as if he is suggesting that, finally, he identifies with Poe because he was in a state of separation from himself.

outline (SL 63).

The problem with this reference to an 'outline' is that the question as to what authenticates Pue's manuscript or, for that matter, what authenticates this reference to Pue's manuscript, is conspicuous in its absence. Finally, one could say that Hawthorne's writing is always just an 'outline', an 'outline' that appeals to an absence of authority. 'The volume', writes Hawthorne after explaining how he lost his post in the Custom-House in a political reshuffle, 'may be considered as the POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF A DECAPITATED SURVEYOR' (SL 73). 'DECAPITATED' says Hawthorne in capital letters. The printed word, one notes, is 'in a state of separation from itself', it is in capitals and yet 'decapitated'. It also, of course, refers to Dicken's *The Posthumous Papers Of The Pickwick Club* (1836-7), taking the original and removing it from its 'context'. The whole phrase could, of course, be used to describe Mr. Surveyor Pue's 'lucubrations'. Hawthorne, moreover, has already suggested that Mr. Surveyor Pue was, in a sense, 'DECAPITATED'. 'I remembered to have read', writes Hawthorne:

in a newspaper of recent times, an account of the digging up of his remains in the little grave-yard of St. Peter's Church, during the renewal of the edifice. Nothing, if I rightly call to mind, was left of my respected predecessor, save an imperfect skeleton, and some fragments of apparel, and a wig of majestic frizzle; which, unlike the head that it once adorned, was in very satisfactory preservation. But, on examining [Pue's] papers...I found more traces of Mr. Pue's mental part, and the internal operations of his head, than the frizzled wig had contained of the venerable skull itself (SL 60).



Pue, then, has lost his head. The passing of time has left him unrecognisable. Yet, Hawthorne suggests, Pue was not really recognisable even when he was alive. Mr Pue's 'mental part' and the 'venerable skull itself' are both defined by the fact that they are in a state of separation from themselves. It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that, in truth, Pue's 'self' was never really present in a recognisable 'head'. Rather, Pue's 'self' is best evoked as an absence which haunts his 'papers' and haunts his 'majestic frizzle'. Pue's 'self' can be aligned with a wig. Somehow between the inside and outside, it has no centre - just countless curls which lead one to the same dead end. In a sense, then, Pue is 'DECAPITATED'. As in 'Howe's Masquerade', Hawthorne suggests that one's 'self' is never simply reflected in the mirror. Rather the 'self' can only be evoked in the signs of its absence. Hawthorne suggests this when he notes again that Pue's 'immortal wig...was buried with him but did not perish in the grave' (SL 63). Self-estrangement is interminable, he suggests.

'No longer seeking nor caring that my name should be blazoned abroad on title-pages', Hawthorne writes, describing his time in the Salem-Custom House:

I smiled to think that it had now another kind of vogue. The Custom-House marker imprinted it, with a stencil and black paint, on pepper-bags, and baskets of anatto, and cigar-boxes, and bales of all kinds of dutiable merchandise, in testimony that these commodities had paid the impost, and gone regularly through the office. Borne on such a queer vehicle of fame, a knowledge of my existence, so far as a name conveys it, was carried where it had never been before, and, I hope, will never go again (SL 58).

Yet in writing *The Scarlet Letter* the same fate has befallen Hawthorne again. It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that, as with his name, he cannot control the destination, and consequently the meaning, of this passage. In a sense, then, the only way to read this passage is to misread it, to remember that the passage is not, and never will be, identical to itself. In 'misreading' this passage one is accepting that, as Hillis Miller says, '[cultural signs] are transmitted from the past and permeate our lives today in ever-renewed memorial acts of reading that make history' (DI 127/128). That is to say, one is accepting that the 'present' is always already a memorial of itself, so to speak. 'Redemption', one could say, comes through acceptance of the fact that the irredeemable is all pervasive. In psychoanalytic terms, the 'cure' is an 'interminable' process.

### III

This sense of universal dislocation is connected to the 'pleasure' Hawthorne says he derived when he 'used to pick up Indian arrow-heads in the field near the Old Manse' (SL 59). In 'The Old Manse' Hawthorne describes a monument which commemorating a battle from the War of Independence. 'A humbler token of the fight', he writes:

yet a more interesting one than the granite obelisk...is the grave - marked by a small, moss-grown fragment of stone at the head, and another at the foot - the grave of two British soldiers, who were slain in the skirmish, and have ever since slept peacefully where [they were] buried (T&S 1127/1128).

Hawthorne turns away from the victors monument to a 'humbler token' (the grave of two men who were on the losing side). It is as if Hawthorne prefers this grave because it is more obvious that it is a 'token'. It is more obviously a sign of what Lyotard calls the 'furthest and nearest past'. 'Many strangers come in the summer-time to view the battle-ground', Hawthorne writes:

For my own part, I have never found my imagination much excited by this, or any other scene of historic celebrity; nor would the placid margin of the river have lost any of its charm for me, had men never fought and died there. There is a wilder interest in the tract of land...Here, in some unknown age, before the white man came, stood an Indian village, convenient to the river, whence its inhabitants must have drawn so large a part of their subsistence. The site is identified by the spear and arrow-heads, the chisel, and other implements of war, labor, and the chase, which the plough turns up from the soil. You see a splinter of stone, half hidden beneath a sod; it looks like nothing worthy of note; but, if you have faith enough to pick it up - behold a relic! Thoreau...first set me on the search; and I afterwards enriched myself with some very perfect specimens, so rudely wrought that it seemed almost as if chance had fashioned them. Their great charm consists in this rudeness, and in the individuality of each article, so different from the productions of civilized machinery, which shapes everything on one pattern. There is an exquisite delight, too, in picking up, for one's self, an arrow-head that was dropt centuries ago, and has never been handled since, and which we thus receive directly from the hand of the red hunter, who purposed to shoot it at his game, or at an enemy. Such an incident builds up again the Indian village, amid its encircling forest, and recalls to life the painted chiefs and warriors, the squaws at their household toil, and the children sporting among the

wigwams; while the little wind-rocked papoose swings from a branch of a tree (T&S 1129).

‘To become open to the ‘It happens that’ rather than to the ‘What happens,’ requires at the very least a high degree of refinement in the perception of small differences’ writes Lyotard.<sup>19</sup> In his attentiveness to what Lyotard calls the ‘It happens that’ Hawthorne, then, ‘rewrites’ the ‘past’. It as if the ‘incident’, in ‘building up again’ the Indian village, makes it contemporary with the monument to the War of Independence. Both are positioned together in a dislocated ‘past’. A ‘past’ in which the papoose - a word for a child - is at once long dead and yet still swings on the branch of a tree. Even monuments to the War of Independence, then, are rendered in a ‘state of separation from themselves’ by this ‘lost time’.

In ‘Snow-Flakes’, a sketch first published in 1838, Hawthorne pictures ‘snow-ball fights’ between ‘two rival schools’. ‘[When] some well contested and decisive victory has put a period to the war’, he writes:

both armies should unite to build a lofty monument of snow upon the battle-field, and crown it with the victor’s statue, hewn of the same frozen marble. In a few days or weeks thereafter, the passer-by would observe a shapeless mound upon the level common; and unmindful of the victory, would ask - ‘How came it there? Who reared it? And what means it?’ The shattered pedestal of many a battle-monument has provoked these questions, when none could answer (T&S 595).

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<sup>19</sup> Lyotard, *Peregrination*, p 18.



The 'shapeless mound' has value, then, in that it reminds one of the 'It happens', rather than the 'what means it?'. Like Hawthorne's imprinted name on Custom-House merchandise, things are 'carried where they have never been before'. In *Our Old Home* Hawthorne notes that the people of the English town of Boston:

have a Bunker Hill in the vicinity of their town; and (what could hardly be expected of an English community) seem proud to think that their neighbourhood has given name to our first and most widely celebrated and best remembered battle-field (OOH 187).

Hawthorne, then, draws attention to a disjointed sense of place. In *A Wonder Book: For Girls And Boys* (1852), Hawthorne describes a children's play-room, '[The] spacious play-room...was lumbered with all sorts of playthings, large and small... The biggest was a rocking-horse, that looked like a real pony; and there was a whole family of wooden, waxen, plaster and china-dolls, besides rag-babies; and blocks enough to build Bunker-Hill monument' (T&S 1112/1113). It is as if Hawthorne is redeeming the Bunker Hill monument<sup>20</sup> by making it obvious that it too is in

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<sup>20</sup> The monument commemorates a battle which the Americans technically lost. However, it was, Hawthorne says in 'Howe's Masquerade', a 'disastrous victory' for the British. It cost their army 224 lives and this was apparently considered to be an exorbitant number of casualties at the time. Hawthorne's attitude to the monument can, perhaps, be gauged from these comments in 'The New Adam and Eve' (1843). Adam and Eve wander around Boston. They have little sympathy for what they find until they come across the Bunker Hill monument, 'The solemn height of the monument, its deep simplicity, and the absence of any vulgar and practical use, all strengthen its effect upon Adam and Eve', Hawthorne says (T&S 759). He swiftly intervenes, however:

Could they guess that the green sward on which they stand so peacefully was once strewn with human corpses and purple with their blood, it would equally amaze them that one generation should perpetrate such carnage, and that a subsequent generation should triumphantly commemorate it (T&S 760).

a 'state of separation from itself'. In *Our Old Home* Hawthorne notes that '[it] is a good method of teaching a man how imperfectly cosmopolitan he is, to show him his country's flag occupying a place of dishonor in a foreign land' (OOH 285). Once again, then, Hawthorne points to the value of taking things out of 'context'.

In 'Main-Street' Hawthorne wonders what the native people would have thought if they had realised that their only trace in the future would be in 'a noble Museum, where, among countless curiosities of earth and sea, a few Indian arrow-heads shall be treasured up as memorials of a vanquished race!' (T&S 1024). The arrow-head allows one to identify with the 'vanquished race' in that they too can be taken 'out of context'. It points to a common fate that one could describe as not being able to control one's future. The same can be said of the 'arrow-head' in 'The Old-Manse'. In 'Drowne's Wooden Image' Hawthorne notes that '[one] of his productions, an Indian chief, gilded all over, stood during the better part of a century on the cupola of [Boston] Province House' (T&S 943). Hawthorne had referred to this production once before, in the 1838 *Legends of the Province-House*. Hawthorne describes the 'gilded Indian':

with his bow bent and his arrow in the string... The figure has kept this attitude for seventy years or more, ever since good Deacon Drowne, a cunning carver of wood, first stationed him on his long sentinel's watch over the city (T&S 626).

It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that, although the Indian figure is being 'carried where he has never been before', so to speak, nevertheless, like his arrow, he will never reach a final

destination. He will just have to keep waiting because, to cite Lyotard, he contains something 'unsuited to proffering' (RM 33). This universal condition is just more obvious in Deacon Drowne's production.

In 'A Book of Autographs' (1844) Hawthorne reads original letters from the time of the revolution. One letter, from General Schuyler (Feb. 22, 1780), presents an account of how an Indian tribe manufactured salt. 'The following sentence', says Hawthorne:

shows us an Indian woman and her son, practising their simple processes in the manufacture of salt, at a fire of wind-strewn boughs, the flame of which gleams duskily through the arches of the forest: - 'From a variety of information, I find the smallest quantity made by a squaw, with the assistance of one boy, with a kettle of about ten gallons capacity, is half a bushel per day; the greatest, with the same kettle, about two bushels.'

It is particularly interesting to find out anything as to the embryo, yet stationary arts of life among the red people, their manufactures, their agriculture, their domestic labors. It is partly the lack of this knowledge - the possession of which would establish a ground of sympathy on the part of civilized men - that makes the Indian race so shadowlike and unreal to our conception (T&S 968/969).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>In 'Sketches from Memory' (1835) Hawthorne, discussing an Indian myth which he will later incorporate into 'The Great Carbuncle' (1837), remarks that:

The habits and sentiments of that departed people were too distinct from those of their successors to find much real sympathy. It has often been a matter of regret to me that I was shut out from the most peculiar field of American literature by an inability to see any romance, or poetry, or grandeur, or beauty

Knowledge of the manufacture of salt points to a sense that one cannot predict the final destination of even those things which apparently seem to be the most mundane and forgettable. One can associate this with Hawthorne's reference to 'chance' in 'The Old Manse'. It is as if, says Hawthorne, 'chance' 'fashioned' the articles he discovered. The 'It happens that', one can say, is more easily forgotten in 'the productions of civilized machinery'. Shaping everything 'on one pattern' 'civilized machinery' privileges the 'What happens' at the expense of the 'It happens that'. It privileges meaning and forgets the conditions in which meaning is generated, conditions which are on the outside of meaning.

Yet Hawthorne does not indulge in the kind of nostalgia which suggests that the 'productions of civilized machinery' have somehow abolished the 'It happens'. In 'The Arched Window', chapter XI of the *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) for instance, describes Clifford, who, having spent thirty years in captivity, is apparently overwhelmed by the world he returns to. Sitting at an upstairs window, 'keeping himself in comparative obscurity by means of the curtain', Clifford, Hawthorne explains, 'had an opportunity of witnessing such a portion of the great world's movement, as might be supposed to roll through one of the retired streets of a not very populous city' (HSG 159). 'Things familiar to the youngest child that had begun its outlook at existence, seemed strange to him' writes Hawthorne (HSG 160). 'As regarded novelties, (among which, cabs and omnibuses were to be reckoned,) his mind', continues Hawthorne:

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in the Indian character, at least until such traits were pointed out by others  
(T&S 343).

Hawthorne regrets that he is unable to connect his sense of the 'moral sublime' to the 'Indian character'. Yet, as I demonstrate in this section, he may not have been being entirely fair to himself.



appeared to have lost its proper gripe and retentiveness. Twice or thrice, for example, during the sunny hours of the day, a water-cart went along by the Pyncheon-house, leaving a broad wake of moistened earth, instead of the white dust that had risen at a lady's lightest footfall; it was like a summer-shower, which the city-authorities had caught and tamed, and compelled it into the commonest routine of their convenience. With the water-cart Clifford could never grow familiar; it always affected him with just the same surprise as at first. His mind took an apparently sharp impression from it, but lost the recollection of this perambulatory shower, before its next reappearance, as completely as did the street itself, along which the heat so quickly strewed white dust again (HSG 160).

One might imagine that Hawthorne shares Donald Pease's hostility to 'modernism'. Yet this is not so. '[Modernism]', says Pease, 'in reducing each moment into an abstract discontinuity, reproduces endless novelty in place of change'.<sup>22</sup> 'Like the endless barrage of shocks modern man inherits,' says Pease (with Walter Benjamin in mind):

the 'new' places a wedge between an individual and his experience of himself. When received as a 'shock,' experience in the modern world surges up as a sheer discontinuity, an impulse without connection to anything else within the consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

Clifford, one might imagine, is overwhelmed by 'novelties' in just such a way. However, Hawthorne goes on to suggest that this 'shock' experience is not simply a unique inherent aspect

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<sup>22</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 43.

<sup>23</sup> Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 62.

of the 'modern world'. 'It was the same with the railroad', Hawthorne continues:

Clifford could hear the obstreperous howl of the steam-devil, and by leaning a little way from the arched window, could catch a glimpse of the trains of cars, flashing a brief transit across the extremity of the street. The idea of terrible energy, thus forced upon him, was new at every recurrence, and seemed to affect him as disagreeably, and with almost as much surprise, the hundredth time as the first (HSG 161).

Hawthorne then appears to contrast this 'novelty' with the 'antique fashions' which 'were dear' to Clifford, the 'most inveterate of conservatives' (HSG 161). Clifford, says Hawthorne,

loved the old rumbling and jolting carts... The butcher's cart, with its snowy canopy, was an acceptable object; so was the fish-cart, heralded by its horn; so, likewise, was the countryman's cart of vegetables...The baker's cart, with the harsh music of its bells, had a pleasant effect on Clifford, because, as few things else did, it jingled the very dissonance of yore. One afternoon, a scissor-grinder chanced to set his wheel a-going, under the Pyncheon-elm, and just in front of the arched window...Round went the busily revolving machinery, kept in motion by the scissor-grinder's foot, and wore away the hard steel against the hard stone, whence issued an intense and spiteful prolongation of a hiss, as fierce as those emitted by Satan and his compass. It was an ugly, little, venomous serpent of a noise, as ever did petty violence to Clifford's ears. But Clifford listened with rapturous delight. The sound, however disagreeable, had very brisk life in it, and together with the circle of curious children, watching the revolutions of the wheel, appeared to give

him a more vivid sense of active, bustling, and sunshiny existence, than he had attained in almost any other way. Nevertheless, its charm lay chiefly in the past; for the scissor-grinder's wheel had hissed in his childish ears (HSG 161/162).

The charm that Clifford finds in the dissonant sound is apparently connected to memories of childhood. Yet Hawthorne implies that Clifford is mistaken in believing that 'antique fashions' and 'novelties' are in opposition to one another. Hawthorne refuses to countenance the idea of time before 'alienation' in the 'modern world'. On the contrary, Clifford derives pleasure from 'the very dissonance of yore'. It is the dissonant sense of the 'It happens' which appealed to Clifford in his childhood, a dissonance which, Hawthorne suggests, is no less present in the 'obstreperous howl of the steam-devil' than in, say, the 'hiss' of scissor-grinding. The 'It happens', Hawthorne suggests, can never be transcended. 'It' is akin to a 'past' that can be located in any historical period.

#### IV

This sense of a 'something' which can never be presented is, of course, apparent in Hawthorne's definitions of 'romance'. 'The point of view in which this Tale comes under the Romantic definition', says Hawthorne in the Preface to *The House Of The Seven Gables*, 'lies in the attempt to connect a by-gone time with the very Present which is flitting away from us' (HSG 2). In a Romance, Hawthorne implies, the 'Present' is always already a 'by-gone time'. This sense that

all time is 'by-gone time' is apparent when Arthur Dimmesdale returns to the settlement after the forest meeting with Hester Prynne. It is as if Dimmesdale has realised that it is absurd to embody the past in a symbol and can now see that the 'present' and the 'past' are not, in fact, discrete entities:

As he drew near the town, [Dimmesdale] took an impression of change from the series of familiar objects that presented themselves...[There] was each former trace of the street, as he remembered it, and all the peculiarities of the houses, with the due multitude of gable-peaks, and a weathercock at every point where his memory suggested one. Not, the less, however came this importunate sense of change. The same was true as regarded the acquaintances whom he met, and all the well-known shapes of human life, about the little town. They looked neither older nor younger, now; the beards of the aged were no whiter, nor could the creeping babe of yesterday walk on his feet to-day; it was impossible to describe what respect they differed from the individuals on whom he had so recently bestowed a parting glance; and yet the minister's deepest sense seemed to inform him of their mutability (SL 232).

'Present' and 'past' contaminate one another with a resulting sense of 'mutability'. As a consequence of this Dimmesdale demonstrates (one can say after Lyotard) a 'high degree of refinement in the perception of small differences'. A new sense of transience undermines any pre-given hierarchy in this world of simulacra (there is 'a weathercock at every point where [Dimmesdale's] memory suggested one' says Hawthorne).



Dimmesdale's sense of 'mutability' is echoed by the enthusiasm Hawthorne felt for seventeenth century Dutch painters during his visits to European art galleries. 'Often [in Dutch paintings]', Hawthorne wrote after visiting the Uffizzi gallery in 1858, 'there is a bird's nest, every straw perfectly represented, and the stray feather, or the down that the mother-bird plucked from her bosom, with the three or four small, speckled eggs, that seem as if they might be yet warm.' (FIN 317). Hawthorne contrasts this style favourably with what he calls the 'grander style of art', 'Until we learn to appreciate the cherubs and angels that Raphael scatters through the blessed air, in a picture of the Nativity, it is not amiss to look at a Dutch fly settling on a peach, or a humble-bee burying himself in a flower' (FIN 317). The sense of 'mutability' can also be discerned in the description of 'romance-writing' in 'The Custom-House'. Hawthorne evokes the 'medium...most suitable for a romance-writer' by describing 'the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment':

the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre-table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and extinguished lamp; the sofa; the book-case; the picture on the wall; all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and becomes things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby (T&S 65/66).

Again, one can align this with an 'openness' to the 'It happens that', an 'openness' which one can also associate with Dimmesdale's sense of 'mutability' in 'the familiar scene' which Dimmesdale experiences in 'The Minister In A Maze'. Hawthorne is aware of what Lyotard calls 'lost time'. 'This lost time,' writes Lyotard, 'is not represented like in a picture, it not even presented.' 'It is

what presents the elements of a picture, an impossible picture', he continues (RM 31). The 'lost time' is akin to the 'chance' which, in 'The Old-Manse', Hawthorne imagines fashioned Indian articles.

However Dimmesdale's fascination with the details of everyday life is undermined by an ongoing fascination with self-presence. 'At every step', Hawthorne says of Dimmesdale after his return from the forest meeting with Hester Prynne, 'he was incited to do some strange, wild, wicked thing or other, with a sense that it would be at once involuntary and intentional' (SL 233).

'During a conversation of some two or three moments', Hawthorne explains:

between the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale and [an] excellent and hoary-bearded deacon, it was only by the most careful self-control that the former could refrain from uttering certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind, respecting the communion-supper. [Dimmesdale] absolutely trembled and turned pale as ashes, lest his tongue should wag itself, in utterance of these horrible matters, and plead his own consent for so doing, without his having fairly given it (SL 234).

Dimmesdale refuses to accept his thoughts as his own. It is as if Dimmesdale derives pleasure from the idea that his 'blasphemous' thoughts only go to confirm, as it were, that part of his self remains pure and untouched. Dimmesdale's attempt to escape from the otherness which is constitutive of the self, his 'egotism' (SL 175), is, of course, prefigured by Roderick Elliston.

'Sometimes, says Hawthorne in 'Egotism;\* or, The Bosom-Serpent':

in his moments of rage and bitter hatred against the snake and himself, Roderick determined to be the death of him, even at the expense of his own life. Once he attempted it by starvation. But while the wretched man was on the point of famishing, the monster seemed to feed upon his heart, and to thrive and wax gamesome, as if it were his sweetest and most congenial diet. Then he privily took a dose of active poison, imagining that it would not fail to kill either himself, or the devil that possessed him, or both together. Another mistake; for if Roderick had not yet been destroyed by his own poisoned heart, nor the snake by gnawing it, they had little to fear from arsenic or corrosive sublimate. Indeed, the venomous pest seemed to operate as an antidote to all other poisons. The physician tried to suffocate the fiend with tobacco-smoke. He breathed it as freely as if it were his native atmosphere. Again, they drugged the patient with opium, and drenched him with intoxicating liquors, hoping that the snake might thus be reduced to a stupor, and perhaps be ejected from the stomach. They succeeded in rendering Roderick insensible; but, placing their hands upon his breast, they were inexpressibly horror-stricken to feel the monster wriggling, twining, and darting to and fro, within his narrow limits, evidently enlivened by the opium and alcohol, and incited to unusual feats of activity. Thenceforth, they gave up all attempts at cure or palliation. The doomed sufferer submitted to his fate, resumed his former loathsome affection for his bosom-fiend, and spent whole miserable days before a looking glass, with his mouth wide open, watching, in hope and horror, to catch a glimpse of the snake's head, far down from within his throat (T&S 790/791).

This final image is an inversion of a figure which Hawthorne used in 'Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure' (1838). Here the protagonist dismantles his house in a search for hidden treasure. The

debris is burned in the fire-place, prompting the narrator to remark that '[the] whole house might be said to have dissolved in smoke, and flown up among the clouds, through the great black flue of the kitchen chimney...It was an admirable parallel to the feat of the man who jumped down his own throat' (T&S 537). A man who jumps down his own throat would leave the otherness of his body behind. In 'Ethan Brand' Hawthorne describes a dog chasing its tail:

a great, elderly dog - who seemed to be his own master, as no person in the company laid claim to him - saw fit to render himself the object of public notice .... all of a sudden, this grave and venerable quadruped, of his own mere notion, and without the slightest suggestion from anybody else, began to run round after his tail, which to heighten the absurdity of proceedings, was a great deal shorter than it should have been. Never was seen such headlong eagerness in pursuit of an object that could not possibly be attained; never was heard such a tremendous outbreak of growling, snarling, barking, and snapping - as if one end of the ridiculous brute's body were at deadly and most unforgivable enmity with the other. Faster and faster, roundabout went the cur; and faster and still faster fled the unapproachable brevity of his tail; and louder and fiercer grew his yells of rage and animosity; until, utterly exhausted, and as far from his goal from ever, the foolish old dog ceased his performance as suddenly as he had begun it (T&S 1062).

The end of the dog's tail is missing, so it seems, and try as he might he cannot complete the circle (and here one remembers James's image of a man who sends letters to himself). One can sense the word 'tale' behind the reference to the dog's tail. 'Brevity', wrote Poe in the 1847 review of Hawthorne, 'may degenerate into epigrammatism, but this danger does not prevent extreme length



from being the one unpardonable sin'.<sup>24</sup> In 'Ethan Brand' Hawthorne suggests that it is precisely because the dog's tail is a 'great deal shorter than it should have been' that, however hard he tries, he remains 'as far from [his goal] as ever'. Yet, Hawthorne implies, even if the tail was particularly long the situation would not improve. One end of the dog's body would still be 'at deadly and most unforgivable enmity with the other'. The dog, and Hawthorne implies that this is true of the literary piece too, can never become a self-identical 'object'. A disjunction between self and self, so to speak, cannot be escaped. The 'thing' that defies the dog, that makes it impossible for the dog to erase itself, is not a 'thing' at all.

One can align the dog with the monster in Roderick Elliston's stomach. They are both '*sui generis*'. They are both cursed by the impossibility of seeing a true reflection of themselves. Yet this is true of Roderick Elliston, of Arthur Dimmesdale, in fact, as Miller suggests, it is a universal condition. '*Monster:*', he writes:

the word means 'showing forth', the demonstration of something hideously unlawful or unique, for example, a monstrous birth...all men and women are monsters. All manifest, in spite of themselves, the sign of the nameless and unattainable secrets all hide in their hearts, secrets monstrously different in each case. The singularity of selfhood, its uniqueness, the impossibility of fitting selfhood into any categories of genre or species, and the impossibility of saying anything definite about it are...perhaps that 'Unpardonable Sin' Ethan Brand seeks everywhere in the world and then finds in his own heart. The unpardonable sin is that sin beyond the reach of language, beyond even that particular

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<sup>24</sup> Poe, 'Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne,' p 585.

form of performative language called a pardon (DI 102).

Like the monstrous bosom-serpent, one could say, all men and women are '*sui generis*'. All men and women are subject to this 'unlawful' law of 'monstrous births'. Miller's reference to 'monstrous births' has a particular significance in relation to Arthur Dimmesdale. Miller obliquely refers to remarks in the preface to John Winthrop's *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Aninomians, Familists & Libertines*.<sup>25</sup> Anne Hutchinson and her friend Mary Dyer 'conceived deformed fetuses'.<sup>26</sup> Winthrop, writes Amy Schrager Lang, did not fail 'to realize or acknowledge the hand of God at work in the controversy'.<sup>27</sup> Winthrop 'labours the ugly details of monstrous births', writes Michael Colacurcio, 'which are at least the providential consequence of [Hutchinson's] criminal heresies'.<sup>28</sup> Colacurcio notes that Hawthorne first referred to the story in the 1830 'Mrs. Hutchinson':

Her enemies believed that the anger of Heaven was following her, of which Governor Winthrop does not to disdain to record a notable instance, very interesting in a scientific point of view, but fitter for his old and homely narrative than for modern repetition (T&S

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<sup>25</sup> See Thomas Weld, preface to John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines*, in *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638*, ed. David D. Hall, (Middlebury, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Mitchell Robert Breitwieser, *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p 209. See also Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson And The Problem Of Dissent In The Literature Of New England*, (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1987), pp 56 - 58.

<sup>27</sup> Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman*, p 53.

<sup>28</sup> Michael J. Colacurcio, 'Footsteps of Anne Hutchinson: the Context of *The Scarlet Letter*', *English Literary History*, 39 (1972) p 476.

‘In a rather startling display of creative process’, continues Colacurcio, ‘it all comes back in the story of...Hester Prynne’.<sup>29</sup> ‘Along with many other characters in *The Scarlet Letter*’, writes Colacurcio, ‘[Hester Prynne is] unable to believe that a sinful conception can come to any valid issue’.<sup>30</sup> In ‘Pearl’, Chapter 6 of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne describes Hester remembering ‘betwixt a smile and a shudder’:

the talk of the neighbouring townspeople; who, seeking vainly elsewhere for the child’s paternity, and observing some of her odd little attributes, had given out that poor little Pearl was a demon offspring; such as, ever since old Catholic times, had occasionally been seen on earth, through the agency of their mother’s sin, and to promote some foul and wicked purpose. Luther, according to the scandal of his monkish enemies, was a brat of that hellish breed; nor was Pearl the only child to whom this inauspicious origin was assigned among the New England Puritans (SL 122).

Partly as a result of this Hawthorne goes on to report that ‘there was a design on the part of some of the leading inhabitants, cherishing the more rigid order of principles in religion and government, to deprive [Hester] of her child’ (SL 123). In Chapter 8, ‘The Elf-Child And The Minister’, Hester and Pearl are interviewed by a group of the ‘leading inhabitants’. ‘Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?’ John Wilson, described as a ‘venerable pastor’, asks Pearl (SL

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<sup>29</sup> Colacurcio, ‘Footsteps of Anne Hutchinson’, p 476.

<sup>30</sup> Colacurcio, ‘Footsteps of Anne Hutchinson’, p 476.



134/131). 'After putting her finger in her mouth', writes the narrator, 'with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson's questions, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door' (SL 134). In the opening chapter the narrator notes that this rose-bush may have 'sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Anne Hutchinson' (SL 76). In a sense, then, Hawthorne does associate Pearl with one of Anne Hutchinson's 'monstrous births'. However, the narrator also suggests *The Scarlet Letter* itself is a 'monstrous birth'. In the opening chapter Hawthorne describes the 'wild rose-bush' at the 'threshold' of the 'prison'. 'Finding it', he continued, 'so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers and present it to the reader' (SL 76). Hawthorne, then, aligns his 'narrative' with a 'monstrous birth'. It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that his writing obeys the unlawful law of 'passibility' (RM 30).

An echo of this passage can be heard in Hawthorne's 1862 essay on the Civil War: 'Chiefly About War Matters. By A Peaceable Man'. 'There is an historical circumstance, known to few', writes the narrator:

that connects the children of the Puritans with [the] Africans of Virginia, in a very singular way. They are our brethren, as being lineal descendants from the May Flower, the fated womb of which, in her first voyage, sent forth a brood of Pilgrims upon Plymouth Rock, and in a subsequent one, spawned Slaves upon the southern soil; - a monstrous birth, but with which we have an instinctive sense of kindred, and so are stirred by an irresistible impulse to attempt their rescue, even at the cost of blood and ruin. The character of our



sacred ship, I fear, may suffer a little by this revelation; but we must let her white progeny offset her dark one - and two such portents never sprang from an identical source before (Ch 420).

The 'May Flower' is, of course, usually referred to as the 'Mayflower'. Hawthorne, it seems, was recalling his references to flora in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne suggests that 'white' and 'dark' progeny 'sprang' from the same 'inauspicious portal', so to speak, 'the fated womb' of the 'May Flower'. In referring to a 'brood of Pilgrims' the 'sacred' identity of the ship appears to be undermined by a sense of Original Sin. It is as if it has become apparent that the Pilgrims are simply one more genus; one more 'monstrous birth' in a world of fallen creatures. In this sense one can align the Pilgrims with Lyotard's description of modernity. 'Modernity', he says, 'is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity' (RM 29). Lyotard argues that the 'postmodern is always implied in the modern'. Modernity, he says, 'comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself...[and] not only to exceed itself in that way, but resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability'. 'Modernity' never actually manages to 'reconcile' itself into 'a sort of ultimate stability'. Sooner or later it will inevitably become apparent that the 'modern' too was always in a state of 'separation from itself'. '[Ceaselessly] pregnant with its postmodernity' the 'modern' cannot escape a universal predicament, 'monstrous birth'. It is subject to the same unlawful law.

The impossibility of self-identity is apparent in Hawthorne's description of Arthur Dimmesdale's rewriting of the Election Sermon. '[Flinging] the already written pages of the Election Sermon into the fire', writes Hawthorne:

[Dimmesdale] forthwith began another, which he wrote with such an impulsive flow of thought and emotion, that he fancied himself inspired; and only wondered that Heaven should see fit to transmit the grand and solemn music of its oracles through so foul an organ-pipe as he (SL 240).

‘[The monument] is itself the orator of this occasion. ...The powerful speaker stands motionless before us’ Daniel Webster said at the inauguration of the Bunker Hill monument.<sup>31</sup> Webster too appears to be embarrassed by the fact that the sacred message has to be carried by a profane vehicle (himself). ‘[It] bears no inscriptions, fronting to the rising sun, from which the future antiquary shall wipe the dust’ said Webster.<sup>32</sup> ‘It is a plain shaft’ Webster is reported to have said.<sup>33</sup> The fact that a ‘timeless’ meaning needs this particular vehicle, the monument that is, troubles Webster. This same tendency is, of course, apparent in Poe’s criticisms of Hawthorne. One can detect it in Poe’s privileging of ‘brevity’ and ‘totality’. Again one can detect it when Poe advises Hawthorne to change his course and write ‘honest, upright, sensible, prehensible and comprehensible things’.<sup>34</sup> Writing as writing, so to speak, appears to be an embarrassment. As I have already noted, Poe aligns ‘extreme length’ with the ‘one unpardonable sin’.<sup>35</sup> Poe implies that an overly long piece of writing is, in some sense, ‘guilty’. Hawthorne may well have made

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel Webster, ‘An address delivered on Bunker Hill, 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 1843’ in *Daniel Webster Reader*, Selected and Edited by Bertha M. Rothe, (New York City: Oceana Publications), p 98.

<sup>32</sup> Webster, ‘An address delivered on Bunker Hill, 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 1843,’ p 98.

<sup>33</sup> Webster, ‘An address delivered on Bunker Hill, 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 1843,’ p 98.

<sup>34</sup> Poe, ‘Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne,’ p 587.

<sup>35</sup> Poe, ‘Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne’, pp 585 - 586.



this point in explicit terms. In 'Etherege' (1860/1861), one of *The American Claimant Manuscripts*, Hawthorne meditates on the plot. 'The story', he says, according to the 1977 *The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne* version, 'must not be founded at all on remorse or secret guilt - all that I've worn out' (ACM 198/99). However, the sentence was transcribed differently in Edward H. Davidson's 1954 *Hawthorne's Doctor Grimshawe's Secret*, 'The story must not be founded at all on remorse or secret guilt - all that Poe wore out'.<sup>36</sup> Frustratingly, the editors of *The Centenary Edition Of The Works Of Nathaniel Hawthorne* version do not remark on this revision. Edward H. Davidson's transcription, however, does make sense. Hawthorne, perhaps, was reminding himself of the space of literature, so to speak. This 'space' would disappear if one, as Poe advised writers to do, kept the 'dénouement constantly in view'. It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that this advice can be connected to remorse and secret guilt.

One can contrast this modern sense of claustrophobia with one of the most hopeful moments in *The Scarlet Letter*. When Hester Prynne advises Dimmesdale to leave the settlement she does so not in the name of some kind of isolation, but rather with a sense that there is a world beyond any particular 'community'. 'Is the world then so narrow?', she says:

'Doth the universe lie within the compass of yonder town, which only a little while ago was but a leaf-strewn desert, as lonely as this around us? Whither leads yonder forest-track? Backward to the settlement, thou sayest! Yes; but onward, too! Deeper it goes,

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<sup>36</sup> Edward H. Davidson, ed., *Hawthorne's Doctor Grimshawe's Secret*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p 105.

and deeper, into the wilderness, less plainly to be seen at every step; until, some few miles hence, the yellow leaves will show no vestige of the white man's tread. There thou art free! So brief a journey would bring thee from a world where thou hast been most wretched, to one where thou mayest still be happy! Is there not shade enough in all this boundless forest to hide thy heart from the gaze of Roger Chillingworth?

'Yes, Hester, but only under the fallen leaves!' Replied the minister, with a sad smile (SL 214).

Dimmesdale agrees to leave the settlement and go away with Hester only after she suggests that they could go to Europe where he might become 'a scholar and a sage among the wisest and most renowned of the cultivated world' (SL 215). 'It has been determined between them', says Hawthorne:

that the Old World, with its crowds and cities, offered them a more eligible shelter and concealment than the wilds of New England, or all America, with its alternatives of an Indian wigwam, or the few settlements of Europeans, scattered thinly along the seaboard. Not to speak of the clergyman's health, so inadequate to sustain the hardships of a forest life, his native gifts, his culture, and his entire development would secure him a home only in the midst of civilization and refinement; the higher the state, the more delicately adapted to it the man. In furtherance of this choice, it so happened that a ship lay in the harbour (SL 230).

Dimmesdale's fate is sealed, one could argue, from the moment he betrays Hester's first



suggestion, from the moment they 'choose' exceptionalism. Their response - recalling Miller - is not the 'impersonal response to an implacable and impersonal demand'. Dimmesdale and Hester betray the original 'demand' by referring to 'some ethical norm or scale of values' (DI 126/127).

Hawthorne connects this with Dimmesdale's final public 'recognition' of Hester Prynne and Pearl. Even when he is arranging the planned departure with Hester Prynne he still secretly plans to leave a lasting impression of his competence in 'public duties'. Hester Prynne informs him that departure 'would probably be on the fourth day from the present', 'That is most fortunate!' he had then said to himself... 'At least, they shall say of me,' thought this exemplary man, 'that I leave no public duty unperformed, nor ill performed!'" (SL 231). The desire to erase himself, as it were, to become an exemplary public figure, leads to the logical conclusion: Arthur Dimmesdale's death. This desire is apparent as Hawthorne describes 'Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale' taking part in the procession to the meeting-house, where, he is about to preach the Election Sermon:

Hester Prynne [gazed] steadfastly at the clergyman... . One glance of recognition, she had imagined, must needs pass between them. She thought of the dim forest, with its little dell of solitude, and love, and anguish, and the mossy tree-trunk, where, sitting hand in hand, they had mingled their sad and passionate talk with the melancholy murmur of the brook. How deeply had they known each other then! And was this the man? She hardly knew him now! He, moving proudly past, enveloped, as it were, in the rich music, with the procession of majestic and venerable fathers; he, so unattainable in his worldly position, and still more so in that far vista of his unsympathizing thoughts, through which she now

beheld him! Her spirit sank with the idea that all must have been a delusion, and that, vividly as she had dreamed it, there could be no real bond betwixt the clergyman and herself (SL 253).

Dimmesdale seems to have a contagious ailment. 'Mother', says Pearl, 'was that the same minister that kissed me by the brook?'. 'I could not be sure that it was he; so strange he looked,', she continues:

'Else I would have run to him, and bid him kiss me now, before all the people; even as he did yonder among the dark old trees. What would the minister have said, mother? Would he have clapped his hand over his heart, and scowled on me, and bid me begone?'

'What should he say, Pearl,' answered Hester, 'save that it was no time to kiss, and that kisses are not to be given in the market-place? Well for thee, foolish child, that thou didst not speak to him!' (SL 254).

The 'exemplary' Arthur Dimmesdale, moving inexorably towards his 'triumphant ignominy' and the 'statue-like' (SL 251) Hester Prynne do, at times, nevertheless, behave in a way which at least recalls the hopeful uncertainty of the forest scene. In 'The Revelation Of The Scarlet Letter' Hawthorne describes a moment of what one could call near intimacy:

[The minister] turned to Hester with an expression of doubt and anxiety in his eyes, not the less evidently betrayed, that there was a feeble smile upon his lips.

'Is not this better,' murmured he, 'than we dreamed of in the forest?'

‘I know not! I know not!’ she hurriedly replied. ‘Better? Yea; so we may both die, and little Pearl die with us!’ (SL 266).

Dimmesdale immediately reverts to type:

‘For thee and Pearl, be it as God shall order,’ said the minister; ‘and God is merciful! Let me now do the will which he hath made plain before my sight. For Hester, I am a dying man. So let me make haste to take my shame upon me’ (SL 266).

It as if Pearl and Hester Prynne become allegorical embodiments of Dimmesdale’s ‘shame’ in the final scaffold scene. Perhaps the bitterest passage in *The Scarlet Letter* occurs when ‘the minister’ asks Pearl to kiss him:

“‘dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not yonder, in the forest! But now thou wilt?’

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl’s errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled (SL 268).

Hawthorne suggests that Pearl has given up her ‘battle with the world’ to be ‘a woman in it’. One recalls the narrator of ‘Mrs. Hutchinson’ describing the eponymous protagonist as ‘the Woman’



(T&S 23). She has been transfigured into a type. Pearl can only be recognised by Dimmesdale when she plays 'a part' in the 'scene of grief' that he has orchestrated. At the end of 'The Christmas Banquet' George Herkimer says that he wishes Gervayse Hastings 'could have imbibed one human grief at the gloomy banquet' (T&S 867). The problem with Hastings, Herkimer implies, is that he mourned for something intangible. Yet, I argue, this was Hawthorne's 'problem' too. Mourning, for Hawthorne, was an interminable process. 'I have appealed', he says of the tales in *Mosses From An Old Manse*, 'to no sentiment or sensibilities, save such as are diffused among us all' (T&S 1147). Hawthorne, then, appeals to an all-pervasive sentiment, a sentiment which cannot be reduced to any particular scene of grief.

## V

Describing the writing of the Election Sermon Hawthorne says that Dimmesdale:

drove his task onward, with earnest haste and ecstasy. Thus the night fled away, as if it were a winged steed, and he careering on it; morning came, and peeped blushing through the curtains; and at last sunrise threw a golden beam into the study, and laid it right across the minister's bedazzled eyes. There he was, with the pen still between his fingers, and a vast, immeasurable tract of written space behind him! (SL 240).

It is as if Dimmesdale's writing is the hinge of the universe. He reaches the end of the rewritten sermon and the sun bedazzles his eyes. Yet, Hawthorne implies, however 'vast' and 'immeasurable' Dimmesdale's 'tract of written space' may be it is still transcended by a greater



indecipherable 'written space'. Hawthorne makes a similar point in 'The Custom-House'.

Remembering the creative difficulties he had while working at the Salem custom-house he writes:

The page of life that was spread out before me seemed dull and commonplace, only because I had not fathomed its deeper import. A better book than I shall ever write was there; leaf after leaf presenting it to me, just as it was written out by the reality of the flitting hour; and vanishing as fast as written, only because my brain wanted the insight and my hand the cunning to transcribe it (SL 68).

Hawthorne cannot rewrite the text because he knows he cannot read it in the first place.

Dimmesdale, on the other hand, is not so cautious. During the second scaffold scene Dimmesdale sees in a 'meteor' 'the appearance of an immense letter, - the letter A' (SL 175). 'Nothing was more common', comments Hawthorne:

in those days, than to interpret all meteoric appearances, and other natural phenomena, that occurred with less regularity than the rise of sun and set of moon, as so many revelations from a supernatural source. Thus a blazing spear, a sword of flame, a bow, or a sheaf of arrows, seen in the midnight sky, prefigured Indian warfare. Pestilence was known to have been foreboded by a shower of crimson light. We doubt whether any marked event, for good and evil, ever befell New England, from its settlement down to Revolutionary times, of which the inhabitants had not been previously warned by some spectacle of this nature. Not seldom, it had been seen by multitudes. Oftener, however, its credibility rested on the faith of some lonely eyewitness, who beheld the wonder through the medium

of his imagination, and shaped it more distinctly in his afterthought. It was, indeed, a majestic idea, that the destiny of nations should be revealed in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven. A scroll so wide might not be deemed too expansive for Providence to write a people's doom upon. The belief was a favorite one with our forefathers, as betokening that their infant commonwealth was under a celestial guardianship of peculiar intimacy and strictness. But what shall we say, when an individual discovers a revelation, addressed to himself alone, on the same vast sheet of record! In such a case, it could only be the symptom of a highly disordered mental state, when a man, rendered morbidly self-contemplative by long, intense, and secret pain, had extended his egotism over the whole expanse of nature until the firmament itself should appear no more than a fitting page for his soul's history and fate (SL 174/175).

In 'Drowne's Wooden Image' Captain Hunnewell commissions the figurehead for his ship, the 'Cynosure' (T&S 932). Cynosure can be defined as a centre of attraction and admiration. However it also refers to the constellation containing the North Star, the Lesser Bear (*Ursa Minor*), a constellation which is sometimes known as the dog's tail. In fact, cynosure derives from the Greek *kunosoura*: dog's tail. In my reading of 'Drowne's Wooden Image' I suggested that the figurehead refuses to be reduced to the status of an obscene 'object'. Similarly, in the 'Ethan Brand' story the 'cur' cannot erase itself. In *The Scarlet Letter* it is as if Dimmesdale is transfigured into the status of an object at the centre of a universal narrative. Yet, Hawthorne suggests, for Dimmesdale, as for everyone else, the 'awful hieroglyphics' on the 'vast sheet of



record' are indecipherable.<sup>37</sup>

In Chapter 15 of *The Scarlet Letter* Hester asks Pearl what the scarlet letter 'means'. 'It is the great letter A. Thou hast taught it me in the horn-book', Pearl replies. 'Hester looked steadily into her little face', the narrator continues, 'there was that singular expression which [Hester] had so often remarked in [Pearl's] black eyes, she could not satisfy herself whether Pearl really attached any meaning to the symbol' (SL 196). A horn-book was a simple technical device used to disseminate the Roman based English alphabet. It is as if Pearl, then, says that the letter A is

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<sup>37</sup> This 'everyone else', however, also includes the Puritan commonwealth. '[Either] the survival of the community or a necessarily short-lived tolerance', Charles Swann says defending what he believes to be Hawthorne's position in relation to Anne Hutchinson. Yet I would argue that far from seeing the Puritan commonwealth and Anne Hutchinson as in opposition to one another, Hawthorne saw an identity between them. '[Their] hearts are turning from those whom they have chosen to lead them to Heaven', Hawthorne says of those who listened to Anne Hutchinson, 'and they feel like children who have been enticed far from home, and see the features of their guides change all at once, assuming a fiendish shape in some frightful solitude' (T&S 21). Yet this is precisely the way the Puritan authorities apparently saw the Indians. The sketch concludes with Hawthorne noting the circumstances surrounding the exiled Anne Hutchinson's death:

The savage foe was on the watch for blood. Sixteen persons assembled at the evening prayer; in the deep midnight, their cry rang through the forest; and daylight dawned upon the lifeless clay of all but one. It was a circumstance not to be unnoticed by our stern ancestors, in considering the fate of her who so troubled their religion, that an infant daughter, the sole survivor amid the terrible destruction of her mother's household, was bred in a barbarous faith, and never learned the way to the Christian's Heaven. Yet we will hope, that there the mother and child have met (T&S 24).

Anne Hutchinson's surviving daughter, according to this view, was destined to be brought up by just such fiendish shapes. However, Anne Hutchinson, Hawthorne suggests, was still a Christian. Consequently, he hopes that in the 'Christian's Heaven' Anne Hutchinson will be reunited with her infant daughter. However, Hawthorne also implies that, if the daughter can be redeemed, then maybe the 'savage foe' can be as well. In this way Hawthorne appears to be challenging the Puritan definition of the Indians as 'savage foe'. Moreover, he implies that Anne Hutchinson was a microcosm of the Puritan commonwealth in as much as she shared their sense of 'exceptionalism'.

the letter A - no more, no less. Like Pearl, in itself, the letter 'A' 'means' nothing. It will not be 'translated' into a transcendent meaning. 'My eyes fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter, and would not be turned aside', Hawthorne writes in 'The Custom-House':

Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind.

While thus perplexed...I happened to place it on my breast. It seemed to me, - the reader may smile, but must not doubt my word, - it seemed to me, then, that I experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron. I shuddered, and involuntarily let it fall upon the floor.

In the absorbing contemplation of the scarlet letter, I had hitherto neglected to examine a small roll of dingy paper, around which it had been twisted. This I now opened, and had the satisfaction to find, recorded by the old Surveyor's pen, a reasonably complete explanation of the whole affair (SL 62).

Hawthorne experiences (although 'experiences' does not really seem to be an accurate term here) a sensation which is neither of the 'mind' or 'altogether physical'. One might imagine that the 'reasonably complete explanation of the whole affair' would fully account for the scarlet letter. Yet Hawthorne insists that the sense of otherness cannot be taken away from the scarlet letter. One can not 'put it down' (one can say remembering Lyotard) by locating it in its historical context. Hawthorne says as much in the 'Conclusion' of *The Scarlet Letter*. 'We have', says Hawthorne,



‘thrown all the light we could acquire on the portent, and would gladly, now that it has done its office, erase its deep print out of our own brain; where long meditation has fixed it in very undesirable distinctness’ (SL 270). Yet even the ‘very undesirable distinctness’ simply reminds one that the ‘meaning’ of the scarlet letter cannot abolish that aspect of it which can never be ‘translated’, which is ‘incommunicable’.

It is this sense of the incommensurable which Hester Prynne evokes when, in Chapter 18 of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne says that she ‘undid the clasps that fastened the scarlet letter, and, taking it from her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves’. ‘The past is gone!’, she says to Arthur Dimmesdale, ‘Wherefore should we linger upon it now? See! With this symbol, I undo it all, and make it as it had never been!’ (SL 219). ‘When Hester removes the scarlet letter from her breast’, Donald Pease writes, ‘[she] does not affirm her hope but only renews what Hawthorne believes to be her relation to despair’.<sup>38</sup> ‘This wish for a new life’, Pease says, ‘is part of everything that Hawthorne found wrong with America’. However, I argue that the gesture encapsulates everything that Hawthorne found right with America. ‘The stigma gone’, Hawthorne writes:

Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom! By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 104.

beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was growing on her cheek, that had long been so pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past (SL 220).

By removing the scarlet letter from her breast Hester Prynne remembers an 'irrevocable past' - a 'past' which reduces every sign to the status of a 'relic' (SL 63), a past which could never be captured by any particular symbol. It as if Hawthorne is suggesting that there is no point in trying to embody 'the past' in a symbolic totality because 'the past' is, as it were, always already there.

One recalls Arthur Dimmesdale's frame of mind after his return from the forest meeting with Hester Prynne, 'That self was gone! Another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former could never have reached' (SL 238 ). In contrast to Hester Prynne, Dimmesdale suggests that a particular part of the past has gone (an old 'self'). As it transpires, of course, 'that self' is far from 'gone.' Dimmesdale drives toward some kind of revelation right up until the final scaffold scene. In delivering the Election Sermon Dimmesdale appears to 'rewrite' it once again. 'According to the united testimony of [his hearers]', Hawthorne says:

[never had] inspiration breathed through mortal lips more evidently than it did through his. Its influence could be seen, as it were, descending upon him, and possessing him, and continually lifting him out of the written discourse that lay before him, and filling him with ideas that must have been as marvellous to himself as to his audience (SL 261).



‘The voice’, writes Jacques Derrida, ‘has the phenomenal characteristics of spontaneity, of self-presence, of the circular return to itself.’<sup>39</sup> Dimmesdale’s ‘rewriting’, then, can be associated with a desire for self-presence, a desire which Derrida associates with the privileging of speech at the expense of writing. So, describing the delivery of the Election Sermon Hawthorne notes that:

majestic as [the minister’s] voice sometimes became, there was forever in it an essential character of plaintiveness. A loud or low expression of anguish, - the whisper, or the shriek, as it might be conceived, of suffering humanity, that touched a sensibility in every bosom! At times this deep strain of pathos was all that could be heard, and scarcely heard, sighing amid a desolate silence. But even when the minister’s grew high and commanding, - when it gushed irrepressibly upward, when it assumed its utmost breath and power, so overfilling the church as to burst its way though the solid walls, and diffuse itself in the open air, - still if the auditor listened to the same purpose, he could detect the same cry of pain (SL 256/257).

‘[It] is of the essence of desire’, Lyotard writes in ‘Rewriting Modernity’, ‘to desire also to free itself of itself, because desire is intolerable’ (RM 29) and yet, of course, this is not possible. It as if Dimmesdale is attempting to experience his own death. Yet ‘Death’ is a displaced name for what Maurice Blanchot calls the ‘*unknown name, alien to naming*’. Once one names ‘it’ one has missed ‘it’. ‘This ‘outside’’, as Hillis Miller says, ‘can by no procedures of language be given an other than enigmatic expression.’ In other words, one is destined to find more veils, more names, more language. This is the double-bind.

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida, ‘Le Facteur de la vérité’ in *A Derrida Reader*, p 472 .

In this respect one can align Arthur Dimmesdale's 'words of flame' (SL 261) with the productions of 'mad writer' Oberon, the central protagonist in Hawthorne's 1835 tale, 'The Devil in Manuscript'. 'As to the events of the tale' writes G.R. Thompson:

the naturalized or normative world explanation is that the sparks from [Oberon's] manuscript go up the chimney and set the town ablaze. But the mad writer thinks (or says he does) that the 'fiend' in his brain has escaped the subjective manuscript world and that he himself is the triumphant 'author' of the destruction of the objective real world. Conventionally, it is mad to think like this, but throughout the tale it is suggested that the real world is as much a fiction of the brain as is the manuscript world and vice versa, for the manuscript is a real world to its author. As the 'fictional' world burns, so too do the 'real' world's pages apparently begin to curl in flame, in an ironic literalization of metaphor. Or do they?<sup>40</sup>

Like Dimmesdale, Oberon's manuscript seems to envelop the whole of the 'objective real world'. However., G.R. Thompson adds the proviso: 'Or do they?'. Once the 'real world' is equated with a 'fiction of the brain' then it becomes impossible to say when the dénouement has really been reached. One cannot stop the succession of 'pages.' The story is, says G.R. Thompson, 'a comic version of the author's recurrent addressing of the inside/outside problem of metaphysical, cultural, and egotistic self-containment.'<sup>41</sup> An 'outside' always exceeds that which believes itself to be 'self-contained' and, moreover, haunts as if from within. In *The Writing Of The Disaster*

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<sup>40</sup> Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence*, p 212.

<sup>41</sup> Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence*, p 212.



Blanchot cites Mallarmé, '*There is no explosion except a book.*'<sup>42</sup> Not even the biggest of 'real' explosions can put an end to the ongoing indecipherable text which is 'history'. This sense is echoed in the final lines of *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne describes the tombstone that serves for both Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale:

[On] this simple slab of slate - as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport - there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which might serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow: -

'ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES' (SL 276/277).

The motto, an allusion to the final line of Andrew Marvell's 'The Unfortunate Lover', is undermined by the line that precedes it. The letter A, Hawthorne suggests, is the 'one ever-glowing point of light *gloomier* than the shadow' (my italics). It is as if Hawthorne is saying that a 'one ever-glowing point of light' still would not really offer any final illumination. It would still just be a 'token', one can say remembering 'The Ambitious Guest'. One can connect this to Maurice Blanchot's remark: '*The calm, the burn of the holocaust, the annihilation of noon - the calm of the disaster*'.<sup>43</sup> A light as bright as the noon day sun, one can say, still does not finally abolish opaqueness and shadow. Things still do not make sense. Obsessive faith in self-presence

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<sup>42</sup> Blanchot, *The Writing Of The Disaster*, p 7.

<sup>43</sup> Blanchot, *The Writing Of The Disaster*, p 6.

counts for nothing. Even if, like those who were responsible for the holocaust perhaps, one chooses not to acknowledge 'the calm of the disaster', it is still the rule.

Hawthorne actually published a story called 'Earth's Holocaust' (1844) in which he makes the same point. He describes a 'world so overburthened with an accumulation of worn-out trumpery, that the inhabitants determined to rid themselves of it by a general bonfire' (T&S 887). 'I have stood by, this livelong night, and laughed at the whole business', says a 'dark-visaged stranger' at the close of the tale (T&S 905). 'There is', he continues, 'one thing that these wiseacres have forgotten to throw into the fire, and without which all the conflagration is nothing at all - yes; though they had burnt the earth itself into a cinder' (T&S 905). They have forgotten, he explains, 'the human heart itself' (T&S 905). 'This brief conversation', Hawthorne concludes in 'Earth's Holocaust':

supplied me with a theme for lengthened thought. How sad a truth - if truth it were - that Man's age-long endeavor for perfection had served only to render him the mockery of the Evil Principle, from the fatal circumstances of an error at the very root of the matter! The Heart - the Heart - there was the little, yet boundless sphere, wherein existed the original wrong, of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types. Purify that inner sphere; and many shapes of evil that haunt the outward, and which now seem almost our only realities, will turn to shadowy phantoms, and vanish of their own accord (T&S 906).

So, it is as if Hawthorne is saying: what if consciousness itself were the 'error at the very root of



the matter'. 'One of Hawthorne's frequent names for the hidden self is 'heart'', writes Miller:

When Ethan Brand has been purified into lime in his own limekiln, what remains is a skeleton of lime and a lump of lime in the shape of a human heart. All Brand's flesh can be burned away, but his heart remains, that material embodiment of the secrecy of consciousness, hidden even from itself (DI 75).

Consciousness, Hawthorne suggests in 'Earth's Holocaust', is akin to something which is everywhere and nowhere. One cannot 'purify' the 'heart', Hawthorne implies, because this 'inner sphere' is also 'boundless'. As Hawthorne says of the 'second story' of the Salem Custom-House building, it 'contains far more space than its occupants know what to do with' (SL 58). Destroy everything and one would still miss this 'dislocated space'.<sup>44</sup> '[If] we go no deeper

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<sup>44</sup> This antagonism toward totality explains Hawthorne's ambivalent attitude to the Civil War. Daniel Aaron has noted that in 1863 Hawthorne, along with a number of other American writers, sent holographs to be sold at the Baltimore Fair. 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', writes Aaron, 'obliged by copying out a passage from 'Earth's Holocaust' [1844], a curious choice when compared to the nationalistic or inspirational selections sent by his fellow authors' (Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers And The Civil War*, (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p 42). 'In this grim little sketch', writes Aaron, 'composed fifteen years before the Fort Sumter bombardment, 'all weapons and munitions of war' are thrown into a great bonfire along with the rest of the world's 'worn-out trumpery'. Aaron goes on to cite the following passage:

And now the drums were beaten and the trumpets brayed all together, as a proclamation of the universal and eternal peace, and the announcement that glory was no longer to be won by blood; but that it would hence forth be the contention of the human race, to work out the greatest mutual good... The blessed tidings were accordingly promulgated, and caused infinite rejoicings among those who had stood aghast at the horror and absurdity of war.

But I saw a grim smile pass over the scarred visage of a stately old commander (T&S 894/895).

Hawthorne, Aaron writes, 'omitted the next words of the old veteran predicting that this

than the Intellect', says Hawthorne in 'Earth's Holocaust':

and strive, with merely that feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong, our whole accomplishment will be a dream; so unsubstantial, that it matters little whether the bonfire, which I have so faithfully described, were what we choose to call a real event, and a flame that would scorch the finger - or only a phosphoric radiance, and a parable of my own brain! (T&S 906).

'Intellect' cannot 'discern and rectify what is wrong' because 'Intellect' is itself in the 'wrong', so to speak. Something always comes before 'Intellect', something it cannot erase. In which case it does not really matter whether the 'bonfire' is 'real' or not. In any event, 'the secrecy of consciousness' remains intact. Whatever happens, the 'parable' will not be deciphered. This sheds some light on Hawthorne's reference to the 'rag of scarlet cloth' in 'The Custom-House'. '[Pue's] original papers, together with the scarlet letter itself, - a most curious relic, - are still in my possession, and shall be freely exhibited to whomsoever, induced by the great interest of the narrative, may desire a sight of them', says Hawthorne (SL 63). By protesting too much, as it were, Hawthorne draws attention to the literary status of the reference to 'rag of scarlet cloth'. By doing this it is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that it not fair to ask if the 'curious relic' is real or not. One should rather judge it by a different set of criteria. In that the reference to the rag of scarlet cloth evokes 'the secrecy of consciousness' it can be said to obey the 'unlawful' law which

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philanthropic foolery would only make more work for the canon founders' (42). The stately old commander has seen it all before, so to speak. Hawthorne appears to take a position in between 'the stately old commander' and the 'philanthropic foolery'. For Hawthorne, the consequences of 'Earth's holocaust' cannot be predicted because even this event cannot eclipse the overshadowing 'outside'.



I have already associated with ‘the law of literary propriety’. It is simply one more ‘shape of evil’. Like earth’s holocaust it would be ‘merely’ one more ‘type’. Yet, compared to the rag of scarlet cloth, a ‘real’ holocaust would be at a disadvantage. The former, at least, appears to be aware that it is a simulacrum. Hawthorne, then, suggests that one should acknowledge that one is always already guilty of the ‘original wrong’. ‘The sketch which I am now bringing to a close’ says Hawthorne in ‘The Custom-House’:

if too autobiographical for a modest person to publish in his lifetimes, will readily be excused in a gentleman who writes from beyond the grave. Peace be with all the world! My blessing on my friends! My forgiveness to my enemies! For I am in the realm of the quiet! (SL 73).<sup>45</sup>

Hawthorne’s ‘rewriting’, then, is based on a sense that cultural exchanges should always be commensurate with a sense that there can never be anything other than an endless circulation of ‘excuses,’ apologies for the same ‘crime’: the ‘crime’ which is writing.

## VI

This sense of ‘original wrong’ explains Hawthorne’s reference to his Puritan ancestors (William Hathorne (c. 1607-1681) and son John Hathorne (c. 1641-1717)) in ‘The Custom-House’.

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<sup>45</sup>In this respect one can align Hawthorne with William Wordsworth. ‘Wordsworth’, writes de Man, ‘is one of the few poets who can write proleptically about their own death and speak, as it were, from beyond their own graves’ (Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric Of Temporality, *Blindness and Insight*, p 225.).

William Hathorne, writes Hawthorne:

was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor. ....His son, too, 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 dry old bones, in the Charter Street burial-ground, must retain it, if they have not crumbled utterly to dust! (SL 41).

It is as if Hawthorne refuses to see his ancestors as embodiments of an obscene primal father. In a sense, this would be to repeat the original crime, for this is how John Hathorne apparently saw the 'witches'. Hathorne presumably believed that they had supernatural power. While Hawthorne says that the blood of the witches may have left a stain on his ancestor he, nevertheless, insists that John Hathorne was simply one more transient being. His 'dry old bones', he suggests, may have 'crumbled utterly to dust'. 'I know not', Hawthorne continues:

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 events, 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 of the race, for many a long year back, would argue to exist - may be now and henceforth removed (SL 41).

Around 1828, at about the age twenty-four, Hawthorne restored his surname (Hathorne) to its original English spelling (adding a 'W'). His mother and two sisters followed suit.<sup>46</sup> Hawthorne, one could say, 'wiped the slate clean'. This gesture, perhaps, is the 'curse' which Hawthorne refers to in the above cited passage. '[In] seeking out, designating and naming the hidden facts that one imagines to be the source of the ills that ail one...one cannot fail to perpetrate the crime, and perpetrate it anew instead of putting an end to it' says Lyotard. If Hawthorne changed the spelling of his name because he wanted to dissociate himself from the crimes of his Puritan ancestors, crimes encapsulated by John Hathorne's association with the Salem witch trials, then, one can say, he merely perpetrated the crime anew. Like his ancestors, Hawthorne assumed that 'crime' could be personified and then consigned to 'the past'. One can associate this attempt to 'personify' crime with Lyotard's sense of 'remembering'. 'Remembering', writes Lyotard:

one still *wants* too much. One wants to get hold of the past, grasp what has gone away, master, exhibit the initial crime, the lost crime of the origin, show it as such as though it could be disentangled from its affective context, the connotations of fault, of shame, of pride, of anguish in which we are still plunged at present, and are which precisely what motivate the idea of an origin (RM 29).

Dimmesdale, of course, takes 'shame' upon himself in the final scaffold scene and puts in 'his plea of guilty at the bar of Eternal Justice' (SL 267). Yet Hawthorne suggests that Dimmesdale is wrong to think that one could ever not be steeped in 'shame'. 'Shame', he suggests, is akin to

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<sup>46</sup>See Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, (London: Duckworth, 1991), p 84.



a sense that one can never really predict the outcome of one's actions. In this sense, one cannot avoid committing crime. This universal situation paradoxically allows Hawthorne to be reconciled with the Puritan ancestors. Hawthorne suggests that it is impossible to define the 'selfhood' of the seventeenth century Hawthornes. 'Unsuited to proffering', 'selfhood' can only be evoked by the endless circulation simulacra. Hawthorne identifies with his ancestors because he too is 'in a state of separation' from himself, he too is subject to the 'intolerable suffering' which Lyotard associates with the psychoanalytic 'patient'.

The secret of selfhood, one could say, is always destined to remain 'private'. In this sense one could take issue with one of Donald Pease's claims. Pease, one recalls, has no time for what he calls the 'private self'. He has, moreover, an analogous attitude to the 'private family'. The 'private family', he says, 'organizes itself through exclusion. The turn to a private family is also a turn away from the public world'.<sup>47</sup> Drawing attention to Hawthorne's description of Mr. Surveyor Pue (Hawthorne's eighteenth century predecessor in the Salem custom-house) as his 'official ancestor' (SL 64), Pease says that Hawthorne places himself within a 'cultural lineage'.<sup>48</sup> Hawthorne, then, rejected the 'private family' in favour of what Pease calls the 'universal human family'.<sup>49</sup> In some comments on Hawthorne's early sketch, 'Mrs. Hutchinson' (1830), Charles Swann makes a similar point. Hawthorne, he says:

[has taken] a hard position, a tragic choice not entirely dissimilar to that of *Antigone* in the

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<sup>47</sup>Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 88.

<sup>48</sup>Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 67.

<sup>49</sup>Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, p 67.



Hegelian formulation (a conflict of ethical substance), only Hawthorne is making a version of Creon's argument: either the survival of the community or a necessarily short-lived tolerance.<sup>50</sup>

I have already noted that I read 'Mrs. Hutchinson' differently. Swann, however, argues that the 'community' has priority. However, I would, in fact, align Hawthorne with Hegel's position as stated in the *Aesthetics*. 'Creon, the King', says Hegel:

had issued, as head of state, the strict command that the son of Oedipus [Polyneices], who had risen against Thebes as an enemy of his country, was to be refused the honour of burial. This command contains an essential justification, provision for the welfare of the entire city. But Antigone is animated by an equally ethical power, her holy love for her brother, whom she cannot leave unburied, a prey of the birds. Not to fulfil the duty of burial would be against family piety, and therefore she transgresses Creon's command.<sup>51</sup>

'As Hegel shows' says Tom Paulin in 'The Making of a Loyalist', 'in [*Antigone*] "neither the right of the family, nor that of the state is denied; what is denied is the absoluteness of the claim of each"'.<sup>52</sup> The family, then, is an important check on the state. Like allegory, the family

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<sup>50</sup> Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 10. I have already noted (in Footnote 37) that I read this story differently.

<sup>51</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Art* (Volume I), T.M. Knox trs., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) p 221.

<sup>52</sup> Tom Paulin, 'The Making of a Loyalist' in *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996* (1996), (London: Faber and Faber 1998), p 6. This reading can be aligned with Mitchell Robert Breitwieser's account of *Antigone* in *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning*. Breitwieser does not associate this reading of *Antigone* with Hegel,

undermines the state's attempt to memorialize by insisting on every individual's particularity.

In this respect the 1832 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' is one of Hawthorne's most important stories. 'I would argue', Swann says of the story:

that the revolutionary mob is right to rebel against Molineux as far as his *public* role is concerned. ...what happens in the story is that justifiable revolutionary activity against the representative of the British imperialist state tragically involves the humiliating suffering of a private man. The consequence is a *private* agony.<sup>53</sup>

While I agree that Hawthorne most definitely saw the American Revolution in a positive light I think, nevertheless, that in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' Hawthorne presents a particular bit of revolutionary activity which he regarded as unacceptable precisely because it does involve the 'humiliating suffering of a private man'. It seems to me that the Major's humiliation is connected to the fact that at the climax of the story he is disowned by Robin, his own 'kinsman'. '[Perhaps] the bitterest pang of all' says Hawthorne in the climactic scene:

was when [Major Molineux's] eyes met those of Robin; for he evidently knew him on the instant, as the youth stood witnessing the foul disgrace of a head that had grown grey in

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however. On the contrary, he aligns Hegel with Creon. George Steiner has remarked that '[modern] scholars tend to reject Hegel's interpretation in the seemingly dogmatic, simplified form in which most of them have come to know it' (*Antigones*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p 41). Like Swann and Paulin, Steiner argues that it is inaccurate to simply align Hegel with Creon.

<sup>53</sup>Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p 14.



honor. They stared at each other in silence, and Robin's knees shook, and his hair bristled, with a mixture of pity and terror. Soon, however, a bewildering excitement began to seize upon his mind; the preceding adventures of the night, the unexpected appearance of the crowd, the torches, the confused din, and the hush that followed, the spectre of his kinsman reviled by the great multitude, all this, and more than all, a perception of tremendous ridicule in the whole scene, affected him with a sort of mental inebriety. ...all at once [Robin] ... sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street; every man shook his sides, every man emptied his lungs, but Robin's shout was the loudest there (T&S 86).

Unlike Antigone (but perhaps like the young Samuel Johnson) Robin seems to disown his relation. He behaves as if his uncle were a total stranger. There is not even the slightest intimation on Robin's side that they have some bond of familiarity. In a way Hawthorne is dramatising a missed opportunity. Robin, has missed the opportunity, not just to intimate to his Uncle that they have some bond of familiarity, but also to intimate to 'the crowd' that while revolutionary activity is certainly justifiable in relation to the Major one should also never forget that he is somebody's 'kinsman'. In other words, one should not forget that the Major is not really an omnipotent primal father.

In the end, it is left to Hawthorne to say as much. 'When there was a momentary calm in that tempestuous sea of sound' he says:

the leader gave the sign, the procession resumed its march. On they went, like fiends that

throng in mockery round some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony. On they went, in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man's heart. On swept the tumult, and left a silent street behind (T&S 86).

Finally, Hawthorne suggests, that Molineux's 'majesty' does not derive from the fact that he represents the imperial British state (nor would it derive from the fact that one is a representative of the American state). It is nothing to do with the fact that he was once a 'potentate'. On the contrary, Molineux's 'majesty' appears to be related to a sense in which he represents - he rewrites - something that is absolutely indecipherable: the 'heart'. 'I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes' says Hawthorne of his ancestors in 'The Custom-House'. Hawthorne re-presents, he re-writes, the absence of meaning, an absence which always has been and always will be.

This is reflected in the last words of the final work that Hawthorne saw published in his lifetime. In the final sketch of *Our Old Home* (1863), 'Civic Banquets', Hawthorne recalls an incident at a Lord Mayor's dinner in London. Hawthorne explains how he accepted 'an invitation to one of the regular dinners' on the condition that he should not be expected to make a speech (OOH 364/365). A 'diplomatic squabble' had disturbed Anglo-American relations (OOH 378) and, Hawthorne suggests, his invitation to the dinner was a 'piece of strategy' (OOH 375). This appears to be confirmed when the Lord Mayor reneges on the prior agreement and invites his totally unprepared guest to make a speech:



The tables roared and thundered at me, and suddenly were silent again. But as I have never happened to stand in a position of greater dignity and peril, I deem it a stratagem of sage policy to close these Sketches, leaving myself still erect in so heroic an attitude (T&S 380).

Like a phallus that realises it is illusory, Hawthorne feels most 'erect' when he forgets himself; when he waits to hear himself speak. Hawthorne, then, was not just performing when he acted as an American representative. There could, he implies, never be anything other than performance.

## CONCLUDING CHAPTER

### ‘ALICE DOANE’S APPEAL’: SALEM AND UTTOXETER

In the introduction I suggested that, despite appearances, Poe’s sense of a single aesthetic effect can be aligned with memorialization. They are connected by a shared obsession with the unveiling of meaning. As I hope to have demonstrated, Hawthorne saw allegory as a way of challenging certainties. This, I argue, can be connected to Hawthorne’s approach to history. For Hawthorne, one only ever approached history when one remembered that uncertainty is all pervasive. This is why, I argue in this concluding chapter, the Alice Doane section of ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’ (1835)<sup>1</sup> can be regarded as historical. The section, I argue, is no less historical

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<sup>1</sup> For the best discussion of the story to date see G. R. Thompson, ‘The Power of Negative Suggestion: *Alethea* and *Apokalypsis* in ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’ in G. R. Thompson, *The Art of Authorial Presence*. See also Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety*, Mutsuo Fujisaki, ‘From History to Legend: ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’ and ‘Legends of the Province-House’’, *Studies in English Language and Literature* (Chuo-ku, Fukuoka, Japan 1987, March, 37, pp 13-26), Susan Swartzlander, ‘“Appealing to the heart”: The Use of History and the Role of Fiction in ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’’, *Studies in Short Fiction* (Newberry, SC. 1988 Spring, 25:2, pp 121-128), R. McClure Smith, ‘Void in the Narrative: The Seduction of the Reader in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’’, *American Transcendental Quarterly* (Kingston, RI. 1991 June, 5:2, pp 73-82), Catherine Carr Lee, ‘Silencing the Female in Hawthorne’s ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’’, *Mount Olive Review* (Mount Olive, NC. 1992 Spring, 6, pp 86-93), Lauren Berlant, ‘America, Post-Utopia: Body, Landscape, and National Fantasy in Hawthorne’s *Native Land*’ in Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy Of National Fantasy*, Richard H. Millington, *Practising Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne’s Fiction*, (Princeton University Press, 1992), Mary K. Ventura ‘“Alice Doane’s Appeal”: The Seducer Revealed’, *American Transcendental Quarterly* (Kingston, RI. 1996 Mar, 10:1, pp 25 -39), Christopher E. Packard, ‘Who’s Laughing Now? Sentimental Readers And Authorial Revenge In ‘Alice Doane’s Appeal’’, *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal Of American Literature, Culture and Theory* (Volume 52, Number 2, Summer 1996).

than the description of the Salem executions which follows.

‘On a pleasant afternoon of June, it was my good fortune to be the companion of two young ladies in a walk,’ writes Hawthorne (T&S 205). The three climb Gallows Hill, Salem, site of the 1692 executions. ‘I have often courted the historic influence of the spot’ Hawthorne writes (T&S 205). ‘Though with feminine susceptibility, my companions caught all the melancholy associations of the scene’ he continues:

yet these could but imperfectly overcome the gayety of girlish spirits. Their emotions came and went with quick vicissitude, and sometimes combined to form a peculiar and delicious excitement, the mirth brightening the gloom into a sunny shower of feeling, a rainbow in the mind (T&S 206).

It should be apparent by now that this kind of ambiguous feeling was much more to Hawthorne’s taste than any single effect - and this is confirmed by the Alice Doane story. ‘A hundred years, and nearly half that time, have elapsed since the body of a murdered man was found, at about the distance of three miles, on the road to old Boston’, says Hawthorne (T&S 208). The impatient killer had left the body unburied but, Hawthorne says:

There had been a slight fall of snow during the night, and as if Nature were shocked at the deed, and strove to hide it with her frozen tears, a little drifted heap had partly buried the body, and lay deepest over the pale dead face. An early traveller, whose dog had led him to the spot, ventured to uncover the features, but was affrighted by their expression.



A look of evil and scornful triumph had hardened on them, and made death so life-like and so terrible, that the beholder at once took flight, as swiftly as if the stiffened corpse would rise up and follow (T&S 208)

The corpse automatically causes shock and fear. Everything seems to be in order. Hawthorne goes on to introduce the ‘personages who were to move among the succeeding events’ (T&S 208). ‘They were but three’, he says:

A young man and his sister; the former characterized by a diseased imagination and morbid feelings; the latter, beautiful and virtuous, and instilling something of her own excellence into the wild heart of her brother, but not enough to cure the deep taint of his nature. The third person was a wizard (T&S 209).

Everything is still moving along quite smoothly. However, suddenly things get a little confused. ‘The central scene of the story was an interview between this wretch and Leonard Doane, in the wizard’s hut, situated beneath a range of rocks at some distance from the town’ says Hawthorne (T&S 209). Leonard, Hawthorne says, ‘related his discovery, or suspicion of a secret sympathy between his sister and Walter Brome, and told how a distempered jealousy had maddened him’ (T&S 209). It appears that Alice Doane may not be ‘virtuous’ after all. ‘Now, [Walter Brome] was a man’ says Leonard to the wizard, ‘whom Alice might love with all the strength of sisterly affection, added to that impure passion which alone engrosses all the heart’ (T&S 210). ‘Leonard Doane went on to describe the insane hatred that had kindled his heart into a volume of hellish flame’, writes Hawthorne (T&S 210). ‘While Leonard spoke’:



the wizard had sat listening to what he already knew, yet with tokens of pleasurable interest, manifested by flashes of expression across his vacant features, by grisly smiles and by a word here and there, mysteriously filling up the void in the narrative. But when the young man told, how Walter Brome had taunted him with indubitable proofs of the shame of Alice, and before the triumphant sneer could vanish from his face, had died by her brother's hand, the wizard laughed aloud. Leonard started, but just then a gust of wind came down the chimney, forming itself into a close resemblance of the slow, unvaried laughter, by which he had been interrupted. 'I was deceived', thought he; and thus pursued his fearful story (T&S 210).

The wizard, then, is not akin to Poe's ideal reader. In the 1847 Hawthorne review Poe imagines a reader who 'is filled with an intrinsic and extrinsic delight', a reader 'who feels and intensely enjoys the seeming novelty of [a] thought, enjoys it as really novel, as absolutely original'. The wizard, 'listening to what he already knew', seems to have heard it all before. He appears to know more about the story than Leonard. Moreover, he does not seem to be responding in the way Leonard anticipated. His reactions appear to be completely inappropriate, and, like the 'gust of wind' that comes down the chimney, they also appear to be completely unpredictable. Nevertheless, persuading himself that he must be deceived, Leonard presses on.

Leonard, then, says that he killed Walter Brome. 'I bent down over the body of Walter Brome' he says:

gazing into his face, and striving to make my soul glad with the thought that he, in very

truth, lay dead before me. I know not what space of time I had thus stood, nor how the vision came. But it seemed to me that the irrevocable years, since childhood had rolled back, and a scene, that had long been confused and broken in my memory, arrayed itself with all its first distinctness. Methought I stood a weeping infant by my father's hearth; by the cold and blood-stained hearth where he lay dead. I heard the childish wail of Alice, and my own cry arose with hers, as we beheld the features of our parent, fierce with strife and distorted with the pain, in which his spirit had passed away. As I gazed, a cold wind whistled by, and waved my father's hair. Immediately, I stood again in the lonesome road, no more a sinless child, but a man of blood, whose tears were falling fast over the face of his dead enemy. But the delusion was not wholly gone; that face still wore a likeness of my father (T&S 211).

Hyatt H. Waggoner has suggested that this passage may relate to the death of Hawthorne's own father in 1808.<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne was four years old when his mother told him that his father, a mariner, had died while in Surinam.<sup>3</sup> One might also discern Johnson's penance in this passage. 'Such was the dreadful confession of Leonard Doane', continues Hawthorne:

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<sup>2</sup>See Hyatt H. Waggoner, *Hawthorne: A Critical Study*, Revised Edition - first published 1953, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p 52. For a reading which sees this passage as evidence of Hawthorne's 'patricidal' tendencies, see Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966). For another reading which emphasises what Crews calls 'Oedipal strife' (*The Sins of the Fathers*, p 79) at the heart of Hawthorne's work see Phillip Young *Hawthorne's Secret: An Un-told Tale* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1984). See also Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place*. 'No one from the family having witnessed the coffin or the burial, [Hawthorne's] father was in effect unburied', he writes (p 26).

<sup>3</sup>For the best biography of Hawthorne to date see Arlin Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).



And now tortured by the idea of his sister's guilt, yet sometimes yielding to a conviction of her purity; stung with remorse for the death of Walter Brome, and shuddering with a deeper sense of some unutterable crime, perpetrated, as he imagined, in madness or a dream; moved also by dark impulses, as if a fiend were whispering him to meditate violence against the life of Alice; he had sought this interview with the wizard, who, on certain conditions, had no power to withhold his aid in unravelling the mystery (T&S 211).

Leonard, then, is in a state of some confusion. His anxiety has not been appeased by killing Walter Brome and so, now, he searches for some other cause. Alice, 'some unutterable crime' and a fiend are seen as potentially tied in with the mystery. Finally, though, the wizard himself seems to have a crucial part to play. He is apparently obliged to take part in the proceedings.

However, a moment of discontinuity. The tale takes an unpredicted turn. The setting is no longer the wizard's hut. 'The moon was bright on high' says Hawthorne:

The rain of the preceding night had frozen as it fell, and, by that simple magic, had wrought wonders. The trees were hung with diamonds and many-colored gems; the houses were overlaid with silver, and the streets paved with slippery brightness; a frigid glory was flung over all familiar things, from the cottage chimney to the steeple of the meeting house, that gleamed upward to the sky. This living world, where we sit by our firesides, or go forth to meet beings like ourselves, seemed rather the creation of wizard power, with so much of resemblance to known objects, that a man might shudder at the



ghostly shape of his old beloved dwelling, and the shadow of a ghostly tree before his door. One looked to behold inhabitants suited to such a town, glittering in icy garments, with motionless features, cold, sparkling eyes, and *just sensation enough in their frozen hearts to shiver at each other's presence* (T&S 212).

Salem appears to be frozen in a 'brilliant' present, as a self-contained and complete world, a world of totally self-sufficient beings. It is 'ghostly' in the sense that death is unheard of. It does not appear to have that sense of 'mutability' which one associates with the ghostliness of Hawthorne's romance.

One can contrast this passage with remarks Hawthorne made when he was introducing the Alice Doane story. Hawthorne and companions look out over 'old Essex' from their vantage point on Gallows Hill. 'There are' Hawthorne says:

few such prospects of town and village, woodland and cultivated field, steeples and country seats, as we beheld from this unhappy spot. ...all was prosperity and riches, healthfully distributed. Before us lay our native town, extending from the foot of the hill to the harbor, level as a chess board, embraced by two arms of the sea, and filling the whole peninsula with a close assemblage of wooden roofs, overtopped by many a spire, and intermixed with frequent heaps of verdure, where trees threw up their shade from unseen trunks (T&S 207).

Even from this privileged viewpoint one does not see things clearly. The play of light and dark,

unveiling and veiling, is evoked by the references to the chess board, to the 'roofs' and the trees with their 'unseen trunks'. 'Beyond, was the bay and its islands' continues Hawthorne:

almost the only objects, in a country unmarked by strong natural features, on which time and human toil had produced no change. Retaining these portions of the scene, and also the peaceful glory and tender gloom of the declining sun, we threw, in imagination, a veil of deep forest over the land, and pictured a few scattered villages, as when the prince of hell bore sway there (T&S 207).

The 'peaceful glory and tender gloom' contrasts with the 'brilliant' 'frigid glory' which Hawthorne refers to in the Alice Doane story. If the former can be associated with a sense of opaqueness that one associates with Hawthorne's romance, the latter appears to be akin to a revelation.

'By this fantastic piece of description, and more in the same style' continues Hawthorne in the Alice Doane story, 'I intended to throw a ghostly glimmer round the reader, so that his imagination might view the town through a medium that should take off its everyday aspect, and make it a proper theatre for so wild a scene as the final one' (T&S 212). So the final scene promises to be 'wild'. The reader should prepare themselves for a transgression. Yet at the same time there is a suggestion that the reader should not be duped. It is as if Hawthorne is suggesting that the reader must remember that the imagination, the power of reflective thought, can deconstruct even the most extreme phenomena. 'Amid this unearthly show' says Hawthorne, 'the wretched brother and sister were represented as setting forth, at midnight, through the

gleaming streets, and directing their steps to a grave yard, where all the dead had been laid, from the first corpse in that ancient town, to the murdered man who was buried three days before' (T&S 212). Again, Hawthorne draws attention to the fact that this is a representation. 'As they went' he continues:

they seemed to see the wizard gliding by their sides, or walking dimly on the path before them. But here I paused, and gazed into the faces of my two fair auditors, to judge whether, even on the hill where so many had been brought to death by wilder tales than this, I might venture to proceed. Their bright eyes were fixed on me; their lips apart. I took courage, and led the fated pair to a new made grave (T&S 212).

This is a difficult passage. For the first time Hawthorne appears to identify with the wizard. Both Hawthorne and the wizard seem to lead 'the fated pair to a new made grave'. Moreover, at this moment at least, the 'fated pair' could refer to either Leonard and Alice or the 'two fair auditors'. It is as if Hawthorne is doing his utmost to test the credulity of his companions in the hope that, in contrast to 1692, the auditors are not simply taken in by what they hear.

'[For] a few moments, in the bright and silent midnight, [the fated pair] stood alone' Hawthorne says (T&S 212). 'But suddenly' - another discontinuous instant - 'there was a multitude of people among the graves' (T&S 212). 'Each family tomb' he explains:

had given up its inhabitants, who, one by one, through distant years, had been borne to its dark chamber, but now came forth and stood in a pale group together. ...[All] were



there; the dead of other generations, whose moss-grown names could scarce be read upon their tomb stones, and their successors, whose graves were not yet green; all whom black funerals had followed slowly hither, now re-appeared where the mourners left them. Yet none but souls accursed were there, and fiends counterfeiting the likeness of departed saints. ...Such was the apparition, though too shadowy for language to portray; for here would be the moonbeams on the ice, glittering through a warrior's breast-plate, and there the letters of a tomb stone, on the form that stood before it; and whenever a breeze went by, it swept the old men's hoary heads, the women's fearful beauty, and all the unreal throng, into one indistinguishable cloud together (T&S 212/213/214).

The story seems so intent on transgressing some final undefined rule that it appears to be about to go up in smoke (or at least into one indistinguishable cloud). 'I dare not give the remainder of the scene' Hawthorne writes:

except in a very brief epitome. The company of devils and condemned souls had come on a holiday, to revel in the discovery of a complicated crime; as foul a one as ever was imagined in their dreadful abode. In the course of the tale, the reader had been permitted to discover, that all the incidents were the machinations of the wizard, who had cunningly devised that Walter Brome should tempt his unknown sister to guilt and shame, and himself perish by the hand of his twin-brother (T&S 214).

The wizard, then, appears to be a wizard of transgression (in this case incest and fratricide are

the crimes). With his obsession with presence he anticipates Hawthorne's description of Time in 'Time's Portraiture' (1838). 'Time' Hawthorne says, 'is so eager to talk of novelties, that he never fails to give circulation to the most incredible rumours of the day, though at the hazard of being compelled to eat his words to-morrow' (T&S 588). 'Time', then, is aligned with the age-old repetition of novelty. 'If you stare [Time] full in the face' Hawthorne says, 'you will perhaps detect a few wrinkles; but, on a hasty glance, you might suppose him to be in the very hey-day of life, as fresh as he was in the garden of Eden' (T&S 586). '[After] engulfing thus much of creation' Hawthorne says in *The House of the Seven Gables*, '[Time] looked almost as if he been just that moment made' (HSG 115). In 'Alice Doane's Appeal' Hawthorne describes the wizard as 'a small, gray, withered man, with fiendish ingenuity in devising evil, and superhuman power to execute it, but senseless as an idiot and feebler than a child, to all better purposes' (T&S 209). Like Time, the wizard is associated with the very young, but also the very, very old. So, as well as a wizard of transgression, one could say that he is also a wizard of ennui. 'I described the glee of the fiends, at this hideous conception, and their eagerness to know if it were consummated' continues Hawthorne. The 'fiends', then, appear to be fascinated by the thought of a new, more extreme phenomenon. However, Hawthorne says: 'The story concluded with the Appeal of Alice to the spectre of Walter Brome; his reply, absolving her from every stain; and the trembling awe with which ghost and devil fled, as from the sinless presence of an angel' (T&S 214). Is this one more of the wizard's machinations? In any case, Alice Doane's 'Appeal' for absolution is made to a 'spectre'. So, although this appears to be a revelation, and this is presumably the significance of Alice Doane's initials (which are the same as Arthur Dimmesdale's, of course), in truth, nothing really has been disclosed at all. It is as if the 'trembling awe' of 'ghost and devil' is the result of a sudden sense that nothing has been (or ever



can be) proved. The appeal is never answered, seduction never ends.

This sense of indeterminacy results in a particular kind of feeling which is incommensurable with any 'eagerness to know'. '[While I] read how Alice and her brother were left alone among the graves' Hawthorne continues, 'my voice mingled with the sigh of a summer wind, which passed over the hill top with the broad and hollow sound, as of the flight of unseen spirits' (T&S 214). Hawthorne seems to make an analogy between the continuing flight of the unseen spirits and the disabling effect he hopes his story has had on any 'eagerness to know'. His 'voice', mingling with the 'sigh of a summer wind', mourns that it can never 'know'. This sense of the opaque is reiterated as Hawthorne says that the 'sun had gone down' as he held his 'page of wonders in the fading light' (T&S 214).

'Not a word was spoken' Hawthorne says, 'till I added, that the wizard's grave was close beside us, and that the wood-wax had sprouted originally from his unhallowed bones' (T&S 214). Hawthorne had introduced the wood-wax in the first paragraph of 'Alice Doane's Appeal'. The 'whole slope and summit [of Gallows Hill] were of a peculiarly deep green' he says. '[But] strange to tell', he continues, 'scarce a blade of grass was visible from the slope upward' (T&S 205). 'This deceitful verdure', he explains:

was occasioned by a plentiful crop of 'wood-wax,' which wears the same dark and glossy green throughout the summer, except at one short period, when it puts forth a profusion of yellow blossoms. At that season to a distant spectator, the hills appears absolutely overlaid with gold, or covered with a glory of sunshine, even beneath a clouded sky. But



the curious wanderer on the hill will perceive that all the grass, and everything that should nourish man or beast, has been destroyed by this vile and ineradicable weed: its tufted roots make the soil their own, and permit nothing else to vegetate among them; so that a physical curse may be said to have blasted the spot, where guilt and phrenzy consummated the most execrable scene, that our history blushes to record (T&S 205).

So, two explanations are given as to the origin of the plentiful crop of wood-wax. On the one hand, it is aligned with a 'physical curse' which was the result of the 1692 executions. On the other hand, the wood-wax is said to have 'sprouted' from the 'unhallowed bones' of the wizard. Yet Hawthorne implies that these two explanations come to the same thing. The wood-wax, one could say, is a sign of 'Time's' indifference. 'It is a common mistake' says Hawthorne in 'Time's Portraiture':

to suppose that Time wanders among old ruins and sits on mouldering walls and moss-grown stones, meditating about matters which everybody else has forgotten ... Some would look for him on the ridge of Gallows-Hill, where, in one of his darkest moods, he and Cotton Mather hung the witches. But they need not seek him there. Time is invariably the first to forget his own deeds, his own history, and his own former associates (T&S 586/587).

Time, then, has forgotten the 1692 executions and, in an analogous way, he has forgotten his former associate, the wizard. Yet, in that Time still goes on, the wizard might as well have not been buried after all. It is the same old story: disclosure and non-disclosure. Even after as

memorable an event as the 1692 executions, life goes on. Nothing really happened, Hawthorne seems to say. Hawthorne emphasises this by imagining that the wood-wax is the result of the 1692 executions. In truth, he implies, even 'the most execrable scene that our history blushes to record' has now been consigned to the irrevocable past. In a precursor to his concern with Johnson's penance, Hawthorne notes that 'all traces of the precise spot of the executions' have 'vanished now' (T&S 206). In a sense, then, the wood-wax can be described as a typically Hawthornian 'memorial'. This 'memorial' remembers the double-bind: that the forgotten has been forgotten, that the forgotten can never really be remembered. It is a memorial that remembers to forget.

However, Hawthorne is unhappy with his companions response to the reference to the wood-wax sprouting from the wizard's unhallowed bones. 'The ladies started' he writes:

perhaps their cheeks might have grown pale, had not the crimson west been blushing on them; but after a moment they began to laugh, while the breeze took a livelier motion, as if responsive to their mirth. I kept an awful solemnity of visage, being indeed a little piqued, that a narrative which had good authority in our ancient superstitions, and would have brought even a church deacon to Gallows Hill, in old witch times, should now be considered too grotesque and extravagant, for timid maids to tremble at. Though it was past supper time, I detained them for a while longer on the hill, and made a trial whether truth were more powerful than fiction (T&S 214/215).

His companions, Hawthorne suggests, simply see his narrative as an unsuccessful attempt to



shock. They are not shocked, he implies, because they regard the narrative as pure fiction. The reference to the wizard's unhallowed bones is relevant because it appears to overreach itself, overstepping the margin between fiction and reality. But, Hawthorne implies, it is not right to simply regard the story as 'untrue'. On the one hand, Hawthorne says, people believed this kind of thing in 1692. More interestingly, though, he also implies that his companion's laughter shows an unhealthy self-confidence in 'truth' and, in a sense, this is the 'fiction'. Their laughter, in fact, echoes the wizard's response to Leonard Doane's narrative. Yet, Hawthorne has implied, 'Time' even caught up with the wizard in the end. It is not that Hawthorne is asking his companions, like people in 1692, to believe that narratives like this are true in any straightforward sense. On the contrary, narratives like this, he implies, should evoke a sentiment connected to the fact that one can never 'know'. This is what Hawthorne had implied with his earlier reference to a 'rainbow in the mind'. That is to say, an undefinable feeling, a feeling that is connected to a sense of ambiguity, a sense that one can never really 'know'.

It is as if Hawthorne is 'piqued', then, because, by laughing at the reference to the wizard's unhallowed bones, his companions have implied that there is a fundamental difference between 'fiction' and 'truth'. In the description of the Salem executions which follows, however, Hawthorne suggests that 'fiction' and 'truth' can share the same 'eagerness to know'. This 'eagerness', he implies, can be aligned with a desire to erase oneself. 'With such eloquence as my share of feeling and fancy could supply' says Hawthorne at the beginning of the description of the executions:

I called back hoar antiquity, and bade my companions imagine an ancient multitude of



people, congregated on the hill side, spreading far below, clustering on the old steep roofs, and climbing the adjacent heights, wherever a glimpse of this spot might be obtained (T&S 215).

The 'multitude of people' 'glimpse', but they appear to be unaware that they themselves can, in a sense, be glimpsed. 'In the rear of the procession' continues Hawthorne:

rode a figure on horseback, so darkly conspicuous, so sternly triumphant, that my hearers mistook him for the visible presence of the fiend himself; but it was only his good friend Cotton Mather, proud of his well won dignity, as the representative of all the hateful features of his time; the one blood-thirsty man, in whom were concentrated all those vices of spirit and errors of opinion, that suffered to madden the whole surrounding multitude (T&S 215).

In the second paragraph of 'Alice Doane's Appeal' Hawthorne had outlined a contemporaneous position in respect to the 1692 executions. '[It] is singular' he wrote:

how few come on pilgrimage to this famous hill; how many spend their lives almost at its base, and never once obey the summons of the shadowy past, as it beckons them to the summit. Till a year or two since, this portion of our history had been very imperfectly written, and, as we are not a people of legend or tradition, it was not every citizen of our ancient town that could tell, within half a century, so much as the date of the witchcraft delusion. Recently, indeed, an historian has treated the subject in a manner

that will keep his name alive, in the only desirable connection with the errors of our ancestry, by converting the hill of their disgrace into an honorable monument of his own antiquarian lore, and of that better wisdom, which draws the moral while it tells the tale (T&S 205/206).

This 'historian', G.R. Thompson has noted, 'has been rather conclusively identified as Charles Wentworth Upham, author of *Lectures upon Witchcraft*, published in Boston in 1831, a book critical of the witchcraft delusions of seventeenth-century New Englanders and of Cotton Mather in particular'.<sup>4</sup> The *Lectures upon Witchcraft* were, he explains, based on Robert Calef's account of events in *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700). However Thompson cites Chadwick Hansen's *Witchcraft at Salem* (1969) which, he explains, 'defends the Mathers and charges Calef with lying, laying at his door the historical distortions of the next two and a half centuries'.<sup>5</sup> Hawthorne, Thompson suggests, anticipates Chadwick Hansen in 'Alice Doane's Appeal'. In 'Alice Doane's Appeal', Thompson writes, the 'storyteller all has along suggested that final knowledge of good and evil is uncertain'.<sup>6</sup> As I have argued, this uncertainty is precisely what is at stake when Alice Doane appeals to the spectre of Walter Brome. 'If Hawthorne is referring to Upham in this story', Thompson writes:

the aim of the 'historian' alluded to in 'Alice Doane's Appeal' should be cause not for fame but for shame; for he is keeping his name alive via calumny of the dead. The

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<sup>4</sup>G.R. Thompson, *The Art Of Authorial Presence*, p 199.

<sup>5</sup>G.R. Thompson, *The Art Of Authorial Presence*, p 199.

<sup>6</sup>G.R. Thompson, *The Art Of Authorial Presence*, p 198.

‘historian’s’ laying the blame for the witch trials at the door of the family of one man, Cotton Mather, is implicitly criticized, even as the witchcraft craze itself is lamented.<sup>7</sup>

In the description of the executions Hawthorne implies that the historian who is simply concerned with establishing the ‘truth’ repeats the crime. He or she refuses to acknowledge ‘uncertainty’.

After the reference to Upham Hawthorne writes:

we are a people of the present, and have no heartfelt interest in the olden time. Every fifth of November, in commemoration of they know not what, or rather without an idea beyond the momentary blaze, the young men scare the town with bonfires on this haunted height, but never dream of paying funeral honors to those who died so wrongfully, and without a coffin or a prayer, were buried here (T&S 206)

The young men, Hawthorne suggests, do not seem to be aware that they can be situated in alternative constellations, whether it be in terms of town or history. Yet, Hawthorne implies, this is no different to the historicist. He, too, behaves as if he can see, but cannot be seen. ‘And thus I marshalled them onward, the innocent who were to die, and the guilty who were to grow old in long remorse - tracing their every step, by rock, and shrub, and broken track, till their shadowy visages had circled round the hill-top, where we stood’ Hawthorne says, after the reference to Cotton Mather at the ‘rear’ of the ‘procession’ (T&S 216). The ‘I’, here, could refer to

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<sup>7</sup>G.R. Thompson, *The Art Of Authorial Presence*, p 200.



Hawthorne as narrator, but it could also almost refer to Cotton Mather. Like the image of Cotton Mather, the historicist, Hawthorne implies, sees, but does not acknowledge that he can be seen. He judges, but does not acknowledge that he too can be judged. Yet by identifying with Mather, Hawthorne suggests that he, at least, will not be seduced by the illusion of objective knowledge.

Hawthorne would later echo this in 'Main-Street'. The Puritans' mode of action 'may be partly judged from the spectacles which now pass before your eyes', says Hawthorne:

Joshua Buffum is standing in the pillory. Cassandra Southwick is led to prison. And there a woman, - it is Anne Coleman, - naked from the waist upward, and bound to the tail of a cart, is dragged through the Main-street at the pace of a brisk walk, while the constable follows with a whip of knotted cords. A strong armed fellow is that constable; and each time that he flourishes his lash in the air, you see a frown wrinkling and twisting his brow, and, at the same instant, a smile upon his lips. He loves his business, faithful officer that he is, and puts his soul into every stroke, zealous to fulfil the injunction of Major Hawthorne's warrant, in the spirit and to the letter. There came down a stroke that has drawn blood!...The crimson trail goes wavering along the Main-street; but Heaven grant, that, as the rain of so many years has wept upon it, time after time, and washed it all away, so there may have been a dew of mercy, to cleanse this cruel blood-stain out of the record of this persecutors life!

Pass on, thou spectral constable, and betake thee to thine own place of torment! (T&S 1041).

The Major Hawthorne was, of course, a Major Hathorne. It is as if this anachronism points to the way in which the identities of Hawthorne and Major Hathorne have become confused. The 'constable', Hawthorne says, 'loves his business, faithful officer that he is, and puts his soul into every stroke, zealous to fulfil the injunction of Major Hawthorne's warrant, in the spirit and to the letter.' This remark could refer to the seventeenth century Major Hathorne - but also to his nineteenth century descendent 'N. Hawthorne, Esq' (When 'Main-Street' first appeared, in an 1849 edition of *Aesthetic Papers* the work was attributed to 'N. Hawthorne, Esq'). The 'constable' is, after all, simply one more protagonist in the latter's 'puppet-show'. One recalls Hawthorne's description of Ethan Brand:

He was no longer a brother-man...he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study.

Thus Ethan Brand became a fiend (T&S 1064).

This is, of course, a valid description of the narrator of 'Ethan Brand'. He too seems to defy the categorical imperative. Yet, if a reader simply agrees with this proposition then he or she perpetuates the problem. By saying that Hawthorne is a fiend he or she simply takes the place of a fiend. Yet, Hawthorne suggests, the only way to break this vicious circle is to remember that everyone, like the 'constable' in 'Main-Street', is 'spectral'. One can align this with Miller's account of the 'ethics of reading':

The ethics of reading...is [the] impersonal response to an implacable and impersonal demand, not the response of a freely willing and choosing I to alternative possibilities in the light of some ethical norm or scale of values. At the same time, however, by an equally inescapable necessity, in any of these reading or writing acts unmasking prosopopoeia the illusory sovereign 'I' is in one way or another at the same time repositied, and that 'I' must in its own proper name take responsibility for the results of its acts of reading, writing, or speaking. 'I' did it, and I must take the consequences (DI 126/127).

One takes responsibility, Miller suggests, by remembering that every act of reading, writing, or speaking, including the present one, is, what one can call with Hawthorne in mind, 'spectral'.

'I plunged into my imagination' Hawthorne says concluding the description of the 1692 executions:

for a blacker horror, and a deeper woe, and pictured the scaffold -

But here my companions seized my arm on each side; their nerves were trembling; and sweeter victory still, I had reached the seldom trodden places of their hearts, and found the wellspring of their tears (T&S 216).

The 'truthful' description of the executions, then, echoes the 'fictitious' Alice Doane tale in that it seems to prepare the way for a final disclosure, only to deny it at the last. But in the description of the executions Hawthorne's pleasure seems to be connected to the fact that his



companions would not let him do this. It is as if his companions reject this 'knowledge', which, in any case, is always necessarily 'spectral', in favour of a common feeling. 'The simplest words must intimate, but not portray, the unutterable horror of the catastrophe' Hawthorne says in 'The Ambitious Guest', before describing the fatal rock fall (T&S 306). One does not 'portray' a catastrophe, Hawthorne suggests, because this implies objective knowledge. One 'intimates' the 'unutterable horror' in order to emphasise a shared sense of fragility. 'Suppose,' says Lyotard:

that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure the earthquake directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force.<sup>8</sup>

The survivors are inspired by something which, in the very fact that it cannot be measured, draws attention to their mortal limitations. So, in 'Alice Doane's Appeal', Hawthorne's companions respond to an 'intimation' rather than to a 'portrayal'.

'And now' Hawthorne continues:

the past had done all it could. We slowly descended, watching the lights as they twinkled gradually through the town, and listening to the distant mirth of boys at play, and to the voice of a young girl, warbling somewhere in the dusk, a pleasant sound to wanderers

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<sup>8</sup>Lyotard, *The Differend*, p 56, paragraph 93.

from old witch times (T&S 216).

Returning from 'old witch times' Hawthorne refers to the 'distant mirth of boys at play' and the 'voice of a young girl, warbling somewhere in dusk' as if to reiterate a sense of shared particularity. Those who took part in the executions of 1692 somehow seemed to be unaware that they were involved in something which was destined to be simply one more open-ended monument on the endless historical record. And then comes the reference to a memorial, and it is worth citing this again in full. 'Ere we left the hill,' Hawthorne says:

we could not but regret, that there is nothing on its barren summit, no relic of old, nor lettered stone of later days, to assist the imagination in appealing to the heart. We build the memorial column on the height which our fathers made sacred with their blood, poured out in a holy cause. And here in dark funereal stone, should rise another monument, sadly commemorative of the errors of an earlier race, and not to be cast down, while the human heart has one infirmity that may result in crime (T&S 216).

While the proposed monument would remember the errors of an earlier race it would do so from a strange position. The monument, one can infer, might itself be another crime. While the 'human heart has one infirmity that may result in crime' who can say that the monument might not itself be a symptom (rather than the cure) of crime? The monument, then, might itself be another error. Finally, of course, one can say the same about the passage itself. The proposal for a monument might itself be evidence of another infirmity. How could one ever know? In a sense, one could say that the only thing that ever really rises up and then refuses to be cast

down is 'infirmity' itself. All one can say is 'it happened'. As for 'what happened', Hawthorne suggests that this is precisely what one cannot know.

Yet, it is precisely for this reason that this passage is a more accurate memorial of the Salem executions and the Bunker Hill dead as well. In the description of Bunker Hill Hawthorne evokes omnipotent primal fathers, fathers who pour out their blood for a holy cause. It is as if they died 'beautiful deaths', giving away their transient lives to receive immortality in exchange.<sup>9</sup> But, Hawthorne implies that one can never really know what happened because, in a sense, nothing meaningful happened anyway. Something happened and that is all one can ever say. Hawthorne, then, remembers that 'our fathers' are never really primal fathers at all. Like everyone else, they too were subject to a series of indecipherable scenes. For Hawthorne, then, nothing ever really coincides with itself, and this is true of even the most familiar of occurrences. Rewriting means registering this sense that, as with icebergs, in every event the greater part is always missing. However, because citation is always a possibility no event ever really vanishes either. It is always possible that a forgotten event will 'rise' from nowhere, as it were, but always with the proviso that it will immediately fall back toward oblivion.

This is of course, precisely what did not happen with Johnson's Uttoxeter penance. As I noted in the introduction, a memorial was erected after Hawthorne's visit and still stands to this day. In fact, every year a ceremony takes place at the monument, involving various local representatives and parties of local school children. 'The annual event', it is reported in a 1997 edition of the *Uttoxeter Advertiser*, 'commemorates the day 220 years ago when Dr Johnson

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<sup>9</sup>For remarks on the 'beautiful death' see Lyotard, *The Differend* ('Result' chapter).



stood bareheaded in pouring rain as a penance for not serving at his father's book stall'.<sup>10</sup> The commemoration climaxes in a 'traditional wreath-laying ceremony at the kiosk monument'.<sup>11</sup> As I have noted, a copy of Richard Cockle Lucas' bas-relief of Johnson's penance was attached to Thomas Fradgley's 1854 'Weighing Machine'. The 'Weighing Machine' has now become a kiosk which sells cigarettes, confectionary, newspapers etc.. Despite all the fuss that Hawthorne made over the precise spot of Johnson's penance there is evidence to suggest that the present monument is in the wrong place. In *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter* Francis Redfern, one recalls, announced that he was able 'put the place of the Doctor's penance beyond question'. Redfern describes an interview he had with one Joseph Twigg. Initially, says Redfern:

[Twigg had] no recollection of any such occurrence; but about a year and a half, or two years, afterwards, when he was no longer to get out of the house, on going to see him (he being at that time in his eighty-sixth year), asked me 'if I had not once asked him whether some one, when he [Twigg, that is] was a lad, had done penance in the Market-place?' I told him I most probably had, and that a very great man had once done penance thereabout. He then related that he had a recollection of something of the kind. He said that, when he was a lad, his father, one *market day*, came into the house late, to dinner, and his mother asked him why he had not come sooner? To which he answered, '*that he had been looking at a man standing in the Market-place, at the pillory*, without his hat, doing penance.' The pillory, to which the stocks were connected at that date, stood, he informed me, in the centre of Bear Hill, the open space at the east end of the Market-

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<sup>10</sup>*The Uttoxeter Advertiser*, Wednesday September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

<sup>11</sup>*The Uttoxeter Advertiser*, Wednesday September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

place. This is a considerable distance from the conduit and weighing machine, where the stocks stood in recent years, and where it was supposed the Doctor imposed upon himself the penance. Twigg also told me that what his father stated so struck him for its singularity, that either that day or early the next morning, he went to Bear Hill himself, and although he did not see the renowned penitent, he saw the rubbish and stones which had been cast at him in derision by children. My informant was then about eight years of age, and was therefore quite old enough to have recollection of so strange an affair - particularly as he visited the spot himself where it took place - impressed upon his memory.<sup>12</sup>

Too soon to be understood, too late to be recovered. Nearly eighty years later, then, Twigg apparently recollected the event. The memorial was, then, put in the wrong place. Curiously another, apparently unconnected memorial, was erected on the spot where Johnson stood when, circa 1922, a war memorial was placed there (the 'Market Cross').<sup>13</sup> Initially intended to commemorate the 1914-18 war it now also serves as a memorial to a number of other conflicts (including the 1991 'Gulf War'). 'Wreaths were ... laid at the war memorial in the Market Place' reports a 1997 edition of the *Uttoxeter Advertiser* in an article on the annual Remembrance Day parade.<sup>14</sup> It is strange to think that over two centuries ago Johnson might have stood on the exact spot where the war memorial now stands. One is tempted to suggest that the authorities should swap the memorials around. A better, more practicable solution to the problem, might lie,

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Redfern, *History Of The Town Of Uttoxeter*, pp 112 -113.

<sup>13</sup> See Pevsner, *Staffordshire*, p 290.

<sup>14</sup> *The Uttoxeter Advertiser*, Wednesday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1997.



however, in simply swapping the ceremonies around (for a year, say). Remembrance Day might then involve laying wreaths at the Johnson memorial. The Johnson ceremony, on the other hand, might involve laying a wreath at the war memorial. One cannot help but feel that the respective gestures would remind the participants, among other things, that memorializing is, as Hawthorne demonstrated throughout his work, never anything other than a problematic process. Commemorating the first world war at the Johnson monument might lead those present to a sense that they are not simply remembering a monumental historical event (the first world war). In fact, what they are remembering resembles Johnson's penance in that it breaks down into an endless complexity of disconnected events in which, remembering Lyotard, the 'It happens' was always 'prior' to the 'What happens'. On the other hand, commemorating Johnson's penance at Uttoxeter's war memorial might lead those present to a sense that they are not remembering an event which can *simply* be described as disconnected. On the contrary, the disconnected nature of Johnson's penance is precisely what makes it an exemplary event.

The thesis has argued that Hawthorne rejected the idea that history involves the storage of facts (a project which is aligned with memorialising). Hawthorne, it has been argued, associated the will to knowledge with brutality (and this can even be true of those memorials which, in one way or another, attempt to memorialise acts of brutality). An uncritical quest for knowledge can be associated with, in Lyotard's terms, the 'putting down' of history. Hawthorne subverts memorialising by repeatedly drawing attention to an alterity that contaminates every historical happening and this, moreover, allows him to make connections between apparently unrelated occurrences (the two memorials in Uttoxeter, for example). In chapters 1 and 2 this was connected with a common sentiment which was associated with the impossibility of saying



anything positive or conclusive about 'identity'. For Hawthorne, then, a sense of universal community derives from the impossibility of saying anything positive about 'identity' (whether 'individual' or 'collective'). This uncanny sense of community is repeatedly reinaugurated in an endless series of simulacrum.

Hawthorne associated the United States with this common sentiment in as much as its recent foundation meant that it was quite clear that it was time-bound formation. Clearly, however, this does not apply to those aspects of nineteenth century United States which themselves can be associated with a fixed sense of identity (e.g. Imperialistic expansion, Indian removal, Slavery etc.). At a later date Hawthorne's relationship to these questions will have to be examined in greater detail. Hawthorne also saw this temporal predicament evoked in the excess of signs that he found in Britain (in Westminster Abbey, for instance). The obvious artificiality of the United States coupled with the dense cultural detail of Britain evoked a sense of belatedness which, I have argued, is a crucial aspect of Hawthorne's re-writing, a sense of belatedness which is encapsulated in the Johnson incident. Finally, of course, the terms are reversible. America never really was, as Henry James implied, akin to a blank sheet of paper, while Britain always was, and always will be, as artificial as any other nation state. The opposition between centre and margins cannot be sustained.

One recalls the scene at the Royal Greenwich Observatory (at the 'very centre of time and space'). Partners 'tumble together' down the hill. Like the girl who goes heels over head down the slope, the partners fall away from the centre. Again, then, there is a process of sliding away from monumental certainties, a process which undermines monumental certainties. This sense

of continual falling was strangely present in the history of his birthplace. Salem, of course, is an abbreviation of Jerusalem and one recalls the ambitions of the seventeenth century settlers to build the 'city on the hill.' Nineteenth century Salem, however, was the faint shadow of the projected world-central settlement. This movement from centre to margins also describes Hawthorne's view of the creative process. When one reads Hawthorne one is obliged to follow his lead by opening oneself up to 'some less obvious peculiarity of the subject' (as he said of alter-ego Aubépine). For this reason Hawthorne should be regarded as a writer of paragraphs (rather than a writer of monumental narrative totalities with monumental narrative dénouements). When reading Hawthorne no word, no scene, no tableau, no 'image' (remembering Borges again) can be taken for granted.

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