“This matter of the individual”: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Individualism

James Thomas Hussey

A dissertation submitted to the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2019
Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work. I agree to deposit this thesis in the University’s open access institutional repository or allow the Library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

_____________

James Hussey
Summary

This dissertation explores Nathaniel Hawthorne’s engagement with Jacksonian and antebellum conceptions of individualism, demonstrating how this part of the American psyche played a crucial role in his authorial (and personal) development. Initially, this analysis had dedicated an extra chapter to examining Hawthorne’s female individualists, but it was necessary to incorporate this within the other sections, to indicate the intricate formulation of these characters, but also to suggest the dialectical structures employed by this writer in his creation of storyworlds. Fundamentally, this criticism moves away from a Puritan-centred view of Hawthorne, to consolidate his position as a thoroughly modern writer from the perspective of his milieu.

The introduction provides an overview of the study, illustrating the importance of re-evaluating Hawthorne’s career through its Jacksonian foundations, and the role of a specific type of American individualism promulgated within Jacksonian America that was interrogated and processed by the era’s writers.

The opening chapter focuses on Hawthorne’s work and career utilising extensive political, specifically Democratic, evidence to suggest his importance to an understanding of a uniquely Jacksonian culture. In embedding Hawthorne within a dynamic political environment, this analysis suggests the mutability of his authorial image at this time, connecting iterations of Jacksonian individualism to Hawthorne’s ability to appear before the public in shifting guises, something that, I argue, influenced his fiction indelibly. This chapter also provides the first lengthy analysis of Hawthorne’s 1852 campaign biography *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, a work that, I contend, is of real importance to a renewed comprehension of Hawthorne the author. Furthermore, this section presents *The Blithedale Romance* as a central text in understanding Hawthorne’s place within what Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called the “politico-literary” network of New England writers.

Chapter Two argues for the importance of American disestablishment, and its special emphasis during the Jacksonian Era, in viewing Hawthorne’s works. Far from simply regurgitating previous critical viewpoints that express the significance of his Puritan heritage, this section focuses on his contemporary religious situation, infusing analysis with the strong individualism inherent in Calvinist and Unitarian religious philosophies. The writer’s religious characters frequently reflect upon the importance of individual belief rather than communal worship. While this chapter refers primarily to a number of canonical Hawthorne texts, exploring the personal element of spiritual selfhood and soteriology, it also draws focus to lesser-studied works, including “The Old Apple-
Dealer” and “Sunday at Home”, to interrogate Hawthorne’s discomfort with ritualistic and congregational worship. While this chapter is foundational in exploring Hawthorne’s familial and personal religious links, its focus provides innovative perspectives on stories that are not considered part of a larger corpus of American religious narratives.

The third chapter provides detailed analysis of the artistic figure in Hawthorne’s work, and the author’s personal construction of an individualistic aesthetic through these personae. This section includes specific critical passages on The House of the Seven Gables and notable stories such as “The Artist of the Beautiful” and “Drowne’s Wooden Image”, while also suggesting a newfound place for the frequently under-studied Fanshawe within an appreciation of his career. Utilising Fanshawe’s publication date at the beginning of Jackson’s first presidential term, this chapter advocates for a broader understanding of Hawthorne’s artists as figures inextricably tied to the economic machinations of society. Far from presenting Hawthorne’s artists as ephemeral characters, this analysis indicates their importance to a rounded understanding of Jacksonian culture, as figures that gained increasing legitimisation and justification in their choice of career. This chapter also considers the construction of masculinity presented by Hawthorne’s artists as in-keeping with the author’s engagement with contemporary discourses of gender.

Hawthorne’s anti-social individualists have been analysed extensively with regard to their provenance and their connection with the writer’s other personae. This chapter situates the question of individualistic behaviour within discourses of Hawthorne’s time that emphasise the dangers of secrecy, and its conflation with anti-social elements, from banking practices to Masonic groups. This analysis indicates the embedded nature of Ethan Brand within Hawthorne’s oeuvre, and suggests his indefatigable anger is inspired largely by a Tocquevillean conception of Jacksonian America, described as “masterless and separate”. Alexis de Tocqueville plays an important part in this chapter; although Hawthorne did not encounter the Frenchman’s work until later in his career, his work frequently acknowledged how individualistic competition and market conditions affect interpersonal relationships. This chapter renews focus on some of Hawthorne’s most famous characters by situating them amidst prevailing Jacksonian attitudes towards secrecy. In doing so, this analysis reformulates criticism of the author that highlights his characteristic isolation as inextricably connected with dominant contemporary attitudes.

The conclusion reflects on the importance of individualism to a renewed understanding of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s work, and the consolidation of this writer within his time, as an author of texts intricately with the vicissitudes of his America. Further avenues of research are suggested, particularly with regard to Hawthorne’s later, and posthumously published, works.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Stephen Matterson, whose guidance, attentive feedback and thought-provoking conversation greatly facilitated the composition of this work. I am deeply thankful, looking back over these four years, to have been afforded the opportunity to work alongside someone whose breadth of knowledge and inquisitive mind were on hand when needed or, simply, when asked. I also owe a debt to Crawford Gribben, formerly of the parish, and Philip Coleman, whose respective counsel and expertise are indelible influences in this dissertation.

I am hugely appreciative of the support of various funding bodies and associations, including the Irish Research Council (2015-2018), the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society (2017), the Irish Association of American Studies (2016) and the School of English (2013, 2015).

To Andrew Jackson; you were a man of many regrettable traits. If it is possible, however, to disregard these defects of character, you were some lad. To Herman Melville, for teaching me that “(t)here is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness.” To Nathaniel Hawthorne, without whom this wouldn’t have been possible. Thanks for Ethan Brand too.

To Julia and Alex, my fellow researchers, who have provided stimulating discussion, good humour and, most importantly, friendship.

To my friends, particularly John, Sean, Graham and Tobin, my sincere thanks. To my family, without whose influence I would not be where I am today.

To Aisling, you have a lot to put up with, but I’m always grateful you do. Thank you for everything, even the “emotional montages”.

To my mom and dad, whose love and support mean so much. Your generosity and belief are an integral part of the head-the-ball I am. Thank you for every step of the way.

Fino alla fine. Forza Juve.
Contents

Introduction: “…never an associate of the community”: Hawthorne’s American individual 1

1. “Considerable of a politician”: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Political Individualism 22

2. “…alone of mortals”: Hawthorne’s Religious Individualism 89

3. “An idler like myself”: Hawthorne’s individualistic artist 156

4. “…forth from the haunts of men”: (Anti-) Social Individualism and Nathaniel Hawthorne 210

Conclusion 271

Bibliography 277
Introduction

“…never an associate of the community”:

Hawthorne’s American individual

In our domestic concerns there is everything to encourage us,

and if you are true to yourselves nothing can impede your march

to the highest point of national prosperity.

- Andrew Jackson, “Farewell Address” March 4, 1837.

Individualism has been utilised for myriad political and social causes since its theoretical establishment by the socialist Saint-Simonians in France in the 1820s.\(^1\) The term was translated from the French and utilised in a predominantly pejorative sense by the Owenite movement of the 1830s in England, specifically to describe “the motives of antipathy and individualism”, such as “love of money” and “love of rank, privilege, of domination” that would destroy the “state of community” central to contemporary reform ideologies.\(^2\) Individualism, by the nature of its initial construction, was irrevocably political in its description of the state of man. This European origin coexisted with a more optimistic American usage from the late 1830s onwards.

The philosophical tenets of individualism have been subject to consistent and far-reaching analyses, from Romantic ideals of individuality to a political liberalism that idealistically figured the designation around egalitarian claims for the rights of men.\(^3\) American individualism, on the

---

other hand, has been peculiarly served in philosophical examination. It is, without demeaning the work of sociologists and anthropologists, a doctrine that continues to rely heavily on European philosophical traditions in order to explicate its position within a New World Weltanschauung. The necessity of placing specifically “American” traits, or characteristics that have come to be associated with the country, in relation to “Old World” counterparts has often worked to undermine the unique nature of the nation’s individualism and remove it from a homogeneous representation across class, gender, and, particularly for the interests of this examination, time.4

In focusing on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s concept of American individualism, I will examine these philosophical underpinnings in their appropriate historical and contextual milieu. Fundamentally, this criticism will be based on broader Jacksonian and antebellum perceptions of individualism and its use as an ideological formulation by various sections of society, particularly as it relates to the work of this eminent literary figure. In continuing the work of de-homogenising American individualism, particularly in its origins and subsequent proliferation, I will explore further recent contentions that affirm the often sceptical nature of antebellum American culture towards the promises of American exceptionalism and democracy (and their often interlinked natures). As Daniel S. Malachuk has described, we should not look to this era under the impression that its “culture participated so wholeheartedly in (the) effective sacralization of democratic governance.”5 This analysis will look to question the problematic dichotomy of democratic self and democratic society that often plagues discussion of Jacksonian and antebellum America respectively. This dichotomous relation should be viewed in more relational terms, with cultural production of the time indicative of the dialogic structures that exist between political and literary

---

4 See also Adrie Suzanne Kusserow, “De-Homogenizing American Individualism: Socializing Hard and Soft Individualism in Manhattan and Queens”, Ethos Vol. 27, No. 2 (June 1999), 210-234.

formulations of the world. In looking to analyse the exigencies of literature, politics and culture in Jacksonian America, I wish to present an analysis that adds both to existing impressions of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the author, and the milieu from which he wrote. This will not be a straightforward piece of literary criticism that interrogates texts for their meaning, but an examination that foregrounds the possibilities of individualism to, and for, the work of a cultural producer during this age. This will provide a reciprocal view of this author’s work; a “double vision” of the contextualised Hawthorne, and what it means to think about an author in his/her context and intellectual climate. In extrapolating the possibilities of individualism from this context, I will indicate the dialectical structure between self and society that can prove a useful starting point for analysis, beyond the assumed polarities that have heretofore dominated study of this era.

This analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s oeuvre addresses a broad lacuna in the perception of Jacksonian America, but also within the larger field of the study of individualism. In examining the engagement of writers and cultural producers in this period, one comes to recognise the deep-rooted fallibility of individualism; its need to exist in broadly aestheticised terms in order to make up for its essential non-existence. Individualism, however one chooses to define it, is a belief system that influences the manner in which individuals relativise their existence with society. In choosing “to be individualistic”, a singular person reconnects with a larger network of individuals. The qualities of individualism that bespeak its power are only relevant to its formulation in conjunction with social and communal circumstances that allow its propagation and proliferation.

Individualism is founded in, and relies upon, society in order to exist and expand. This expansion, explored herein in the discussion of Hawthorne as a writer that problematised the feminisation of art as a matter of economic importance, is inevitable once individualism is viewed

---

6 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (London; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293. “The whole matter consists in the fact that there may be, between “languages”, highly specific dialogic relations; no matter how these languages are conceived, they may all be taken as particular points of view on the world.”

7 See particularly Sacvan Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 22. Self-versus-society opposition comprises one of the “intrasectarian distinctions within American liberalism” that “serve(s) to exclude alternatives to the dominant culture.”
as an aesthetic of being, rather than a quality of life. In these terms, being individualistic often represents a further, modified state control upon the lives of its citizens. In Jacksonian America, the work of the state required individualism in order to facilitate westward migration, but this ostensibly totalised self-reliance was grounded in the foundational permission of authority.

The choice to view individualism dialectically is driven by the careers of cultural actors in the Jacksonian Era, and their varied reactions to the industrialisation and overt patriotism of the time. In ascertaining the extent of their engagement with the individualistic ideology of Jacksonian America, spearheaded by the presidential namesake of the time, one might demonstrate the myriad complexities and nuances of such a stance. Not alone did this suggest self-reliance, a term critics depend upon exceedingly to connect this ideology to the “high culture” offerings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists, but an increasingly professionalised artistic sphere that lent itself to cultural production for self-gain and nationalistic pride. The actions of authors, journalists and actors, seen in relation to their society, existed in a masculine sphere of self-definition that precluded the “feminising” influences of domesticity, secrecy, and aristocratic treachery that defrauded public interests in their monopolistic desires.8

This process of identification requires thorough examination in order to explicate its importance. The luxurious decadence against which the rugged aesthetic of Jacksonian America strove was not simply placed in direct contrast with masculine values. This analysis will look to them as counterbalancing, interactive entities that worked to constitute individual self-perception within distinct ideological formulations; albeit ones that often refused the dynamic nature of self-presentation. John William Ward described Andrew Jackson (president from 1829-1837) as the man of “malleable iron will”, reconstructing Jackson’s aesthetic in a manner suggestive of the mutable elements of character that allowed a changing presidential image in the public eye.9 I propose that

this ability to control one’s own constructed aesthetic, the public face of the person, was not wholly constituted without a dialectic between individual elements of character, and a relational existence between societal expectation, personal desire and social conditions.

This relationship between the social and personal informs the foundational elements of this analysis of Hawthorne’s work. The dialectical structure this author constructed in his fiction covers the dynamic interaction between self and society, one that works to allow conceptions of both from individual and collective positions respectively. The self-presentation of an individual (or fictive character) does not occur without the interrelation of an idea of one’s self with the presumed idea of one’s place in society, and broader attendant issues of what “society” means. In attaching significance to this, we attribute a sense of agency to the individual’s ability to manipulate a “self” in the face of external pressures and ideologies. This dissertation analyses the phenomenon of self-positioning as a dialectical relation between interiority and externality. This contributes not only to an understanding of the manner in which people might present themselves publicly to elicit sympathy or gain support, but also the basic elements of self-creation that are attendant on our daily lives, occupations and routines. In defining a “personal life” as private time of development, we will extrapolate the potentialities of this relational individualism in order to appreciate the combination of work and personal qualities in Hawthorne’s lifetime. As Wai-chee Dimock has previously stated with regard to Herman Melville, such self-definition mapped the promise of the individual onto that of the nation, “an account that conferred on both the nation and the self a sense of corporeal autonomy in space, and teleological ascendancy in time.” My analysis seeks to further Dimock’s claims about these eras, in order to show that Hawthorne’s conception of contemporary individualism indicated an awareness of its dialectical capacities, while its utilisation by the

---

The utilisation of Hawthorne for the purposes of this analysis must be addressed. Nathaniel Hawthorne has been, since the time of his death, portrayed critically as a writer aloof from the currents of everyday life. His public and political engagements have often been overlooked in favour of extrapolations of character that stem from his literary output. Frequently ignored by critical writing, Hawthorne's most overtly political texts, including *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, indicate the entirely unjustified portrayal of this author as ephemeral, a “citizen of somewhere else” (*I*, 57) as the gleefully misleading “Custom-House” states.\(^{11}\) This examination will contextualise Hawthorne not simply within his Jacksonian milieu, but within the literary culture that allowed him to manipulate so wilfully his public image. This writer’s peculiar ability for self-construction, as befitting his era, makes him especially suitable for this analysis, particularly when viewed within the rubric of his financial success, and his creation of an American literary *career*, something imagined prior to his professional life by Irving and Fenimore Cooper, but brought to a new commercial and public level by Hawthorne.\(^{12}\) In this respect, I will redress the imbalance usually retained for this “citizen”, focusing on the importance of citizenship to this individual, rather than prognosticating on the potentiality of his “somewhere else”.

In reflecting upon Hawthorne’s engagement with his individualistic society, I want to emphasise individualism’s political, social and economic effects. Hawthorne’s individualism indicates an interest in the social exigencies of self-creation, and the basic relational processes with which each person must engage in order to present an individuated “self”. Such processes, of

---

\(^{11}\) References to Hawthorne’s texts and correspondence will be indicated throughout beside the relevant quotation, with a parenthetical note of the volume and page number from the Centenary Edition of his work. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Centenary Edition of the Work of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volumes I-XXIII* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1962-1987).

\(^{12}\) See Byron’s letter to Thomas Moore regarding Leigh Hunt’s “skimble-skamble about (Wordsworth) being at the head of his own profession, in the eyes of those who followed it…I thought that Poetry was an art, or an attribute, not a profession.” Leslie A. Marchand, ed. *Byron’s Letters and Journals Vol. VI: 1818-1819* (London: J. Murray, 1976), 47.
course, account for a state or superstructures of authority, but need not restrict themselves to rigid, formulaic examples. The “state” apparatuses of Jacksonian America, and beyond, influenced the self-formation of Hawthorne and his ability to write in an environment of ostensibly state-mandated masculine individualism.

Seen thus, individualism assumes radically expansive properties. It was not consigned to the forward-looking, nationalist and democratic stereotypes of the era that found voice through the Young America movement. Nor was it solely the reserve of burgeoning capitalist classes, whose wealth grew with the increasing industrialisation of society. As Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim have identified; “…individualization is a fate, not a choice; in the land of individual freedom of choice, the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is emphatically not on the agenda.” The fate of individualism in a nation that enshrined self-reliance as a foundational doctrine of personhood, I contend, is not tantamount to the fact of its existence, but an indication of an aesthetic that metastasises and is adopted by various groups previously beyond its control or acceptance. In the case of cultural production, the artist that engages with political ideology or power need not agree with the message at the heart of government. Rather, in the case of Hawthorne and many of his contemporaries, engagement with primary ideological perspectives (in the case of Jacksonian America, individualistic nationalism) was often displayed in order to gain access to the literary marketplace. This legitimised aesthetic was forwarded by the artist, and constructed around them by publishers and agents to permit literature and art broadly connected to the goals of a political establishment to flourish and dominate goals of an “American art”, something called for continuously from the election of Andrew Jackson onwards.

---


Hawthorne’s friend and long-term correspondent John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, typified the interconnection of the political and cultural spheres that allowed for the creation of individualistic aesthetics, without the necessary proof of masculine achievement or democratic sentiment required of previous generations. As Edward Widmer notes;

During a push to secure the Salem Custom House position (for Hawthorne), O’Sullivan had Evert Duykinck compose a puff arguing “authors are the immediate ornaments of the State”, and should therefore be found employment within the government as a sort of “Literary Pension Fund”…To bolster the case, Duykinck padded the shy writer with manly Jacksonian virtues, arguing his sensitive nature was buttressed by “a rugged frame of body”.15

This represents, apart from a cunning political move, perhaps the first (and last) time that Hawthorne was referred to in such overtly masculine terms. This process indicated the requirement for authors to be seen not as isolated “men of genius”, or subversive figures that criticised the state; rather, artists needed to be perceived as indicative of the rich life of a nation; a country with flourishing artists must also have the success that is attendant on such luxurious expressions of self and nationhood. This was not without its dangers however, as Bryce Traister argues:

At stake in the depiction of the “Custom-House” as a gendered space is Hawthorne’s self-representation as a man whose difference from the sort of men on permanent haunting duties

15 Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 76.
at the Custom House takes the form of aggressively satirising the officers residing in a permanent state of “unmanly” dependence on the federal feeding trough.\textsuperscript{16}

The Custom House position was complicated by its amalgamation of private interests and public concerns. His work as a public servant was inextricably linked with the business ventures of merchants, further indicating the dialectical nature of the public/private dynamic, and its gendered implications.

Individualism of the Jacksonian and antebellum periods was a common denominator in the life of citizens, drawn uncomfortably together in political rhetoric and democratic ideology. In his travels through America, Alexis de Tocqueville encapsulated this “age of the individual” as a society in which “(t)he bond of human affection is extended, but…relaxed.”\textsuperscript{17} The diluted intensity of “feeling” within interpersonal networks was also indicative of one of the key strands of the era’s individualism. The feminising influence of monopolies, aristocratic concerns and the dangers of secrecy were continuously advertised to men of these eras. Individualistic behaviour indicated not only strong, self-reliant living, but precluded its opposite, the domestic life of women. This interconnection of subversive femininity and progressive individualism must be emphasised in the creation of a characteristically male, American aesthetic in these periods. Hawthorne and his fellow authors were witnesses and chroniclers of this Tocquevillean relaxing of community bonds. Their art, however, suggested an inherent trait of femininity that refused the action of life in order to record it. Artists defensively foregrounded the culturally nationalistic implications of their work. F.O. Matthiessen described this in relation to Hawthorne’s inability to create “drama” in The House of the Seven Gables, something seemingly blunted by the writer’s society:


\textsuperscript{17} Alexis de Tocqueville, \textit{Democracy in America} (New York: The Library of America, 2004), 688.
…when Hawthorne centers directly on the presentation of his individuals, he can ordinarily manage no more than to give a careful notation of their traits – as seen with Holgrave – instead of revealing them gradually through significant incidents… Drama… was beyond him: he could not project individuals against a fully developed society. For no such thing had yet been evolved in the individualistic career of our democracy.¹⁸

This sense of drama was inevitably connected to the private lives of Hawthorne’s characters, their pasts and that which they wished to remain secret.¹⁹ His ostensible weakness in this regard was essentially a turn from the domesticating, feminising influences of interiority. Hawthorne, far from being unable to create dramatic edge to his work because of the strictures of society, was engaged in the dialectical formation of new forms of expression for a distinctly American audience. The “drama” required of literature was not cast aside by Hawthorne, but shown within symbolic and emblematic conflicts that were transposed on to the larger struggles of democratic values in the nation as a whole. Matthiessen’s words submerge a broader interpretation than at first apparent. The “individualistic career” quoted above is a telling indication of the superimposition of individualism upon the political and social ideologies constructed in the periods under question. Furthermore, Hawthorne’s use of personal strife in his narratives moves increasingly from the domestic towards masculine positioning and anxiety, often related to economics that, at base, are concerned with the inability of singular individuals to control and self-define meaningfully. We should look towards Hawthorne’s inculcation of individualistic values in his work, and the opposition presented through “feminising” influences, as indicative of a more general compromise between shifting social and cultural attitudes during the lead-up to a so-called “American Renaissance”. In this manner, my analysis will work with the ideas of J. Gerald Kennedy, whose book Strange Nation: Literary


Nationalism and Cultural Conflict in the Age of Poe argues for a nuanced understanding of this cultural period as constructed and retrospectively solidified.20

This dissertation is grounded on the manner in which Hawthorne utilised his publications to engage not only with a broader American public, but also with the political and philosophical ramifications of his production. This layered interpretation of Hawthorne, as an active writer and political figure, but also as someone engaged with the (then relatively recent) idea of constructing a literary career, opens up an avenue of new analysis to his, and his contemporaries’ writing. The examination of his fiction often goes hand-in-hand with biographical readings of his self-imposed solitude upon returning from college at Bowdoin, his friendship with Franklin Pierce, and his travails in various Custom Houses. The innovation that must be sought in renewing our attention on Hawthorne’s life and work is one that questions the very nature of the relationship between author, work and society. From this exploration of the author’s individualism, I contend that Hawthorne’s career, his conception of that career, and his flourishing artistic skill were intricately interconnected in a way that saw the evolution of his self-formulated aesthetic, utilised initially to engage with developing nationalistic and progressive demands for “American art”, and, later on, to problematise and question these patriotic issues. In creating this nexus, the use of individualism in Hawthorne’s oeuvre assumes myriad purposes, in terms of both narrative construction and the manner in which his presented figures relate to the milieu from which the author writes. Hawthorne’s individualism, therefore, is a protean thing, developing within and alongside his writing. Through analysing the author’s correspondence in juxtaposition with the fiction, we might come to a fuller understanding of the shifting ground upon which Hawthorne’s identity as an American artist was built.

Any dialectical understanding of his individualism can be understood in terms of the numerous compromises and developments of this trait depicted in Hawthorne’s work throughout his

lifetime, rather than a distinctly Hegelian comprehension, systematically applied to thought. Heretofore, study of Hawthorne has under-emphasised the consistently philosophical and political lens through which he questioned and problematised contemporary events. The nature of Hawthorne’s writing was concerned with the metaphysical, and its potential to irrupt upon the quotidian rhythms of life, and the manner in which society was ordered. This analysis wishes to redress some of this imbalance in the broader philosophical zeitgeist that may have influenced Hawthorne's work, taking as its starting point his engagement with individualism as both a doctrine, and a malleable thought-entity that was reformulated to suit the needs of its proponents.

This ethic was further complicated by the nationalistic implications of its assumption. To be individualistic in the Jacksonian and antebellum periods was to engage with prevailing ideas of the nation’s destiny made manifest, verbalised by John L. O’Sullivan in 1845, but precipitated by decades of expansionist rhetoric that saw mastery of the continent as both a national and personal right. Individualism’s role in this ensured an inextricable connection between individual and nation, to indicate the mutually important nature of both without allowing the overall, inevitable picture of American progression to be eclipsed by the dangerous desires of the singular man. This analysis of Hawthorne’s work places him within this nexus of politico-literary relations. To suggest that his writing takes on a “double-consciousness” of the national and personal at all points is to ignore the psychological and practical effects of individualism not simply as a patriotic doctrine, but as a system of representation within which individual citizens become “self-made” in name only. To discuss self-reliance in these terms is to challenge deeply its Emersonian conception. Self-reliance, like individualism, is merely an aesthetic presented rather than a reality lived. It is, as this examination of Hawthorne’s work wishes to further, a “system of personification…a form of social


22 Self-reliance found its most famous expression through Emerson’s essays and public lectures, most notably during the 1840’s. Throughout this analysis, quotation from specific texts will indicate the evolution of Emersonian “self-reliance”, and its contemporary theoretical applications.
representation.”23 The originality of this approach to Hawthorne’s oeuvre lies in its reflection upon both the tensions within the texts, and the tensions extant without. Crucial to the “double vision” of this project, is a balanced examination of the factors that influence our understanding of these works, and a desire to move analysis of the writer beyond treatment of his assumed timelessness.

This analysis differs within its treatment of the processes and ramifications of assuming an individualistic identity, or, as is often the case throughout Hawthorne’s career, having such an identity assumed on your behalf. The aforementioned O’Sullivan, writing to Hawthorne during the early stages of “Young Hickory’s” presidency (namely James K. Polk, president from 1845 to 1849), discussed the author’s sitting “for a daguerreotype, that I may take your head off in it…By manufacturing you thus into a Personage, I want to raise your mark higher in Polk’s appreciation.”24 Correspondence like this undoubtedly suggests the interconnection of politics, literature and the building of an identity. Jacksonian and antebellum authors were often forced to accept the compromise of artistic worth and financial security. This was not a mutually exclusive choice, but something that required a creative solution in order to meld one’s personal representation with an artistic identity while assuming “proper” characteristics befitting a male worker and American. One of the Jacksonian Era’s lasting contributions to the American landscape was its ability simultaneously to disavow the “secrecy” of underhanded business that worked to defraud “the people” while implicitly advocating a doctrine of self-creation based solely upon representative traits. Necessarily, the creation of one’s identity is a private concern, as Alan Westin states; “(Man’s) …desire for privacy is distinctively human, a function of his unique ethical, intellectual, and artistic needs.”25 This sense of a “real Me” was later a point of contention for Hawthorne after his stay at

23 Dimock, Empire for Liberty, 26.
24 Widmer, Young America, 76.
25 Alan Westin, “The origins of modern claims to privacy” in Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 56. See also Whitman’s pronunciation in “Song of Myself” that; “…they are not the Me myself. Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am…” Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass and Other Writings (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002), 29.
Brook Farm; having left its confines the author explained to Sophia that he truly “was never an associate of the community” (XV, 566) there, suggesting a process of personification undertaken by the author in order to fit the socialist experiment’s demands.

The connection of the metaphysical and self-creation is inextricable from the question of art, particularly as it relates to this discussion of Hawthorne. In his work, as in his career outside of literature, Hawthorne constructed a view of authorship that complemented his historical moment. Although this was self-regarding and self-reflexive on the author’s part, it was not wholly under his control. The process of self-creation in the public eye creates a mutable dynamic between individual and society that indicates its mutually affective, dialectic properties. Hawthorne’s shifting presence should not dissuade our reading of the development of his role in writing. Without finding a distinct authorial “voice”, we are not left without an author. Rather, we are engaged in the search for someone behind the work, a submerged presence whose real effect is the creation of a relation between self, literature, and audience that grounds the writer within a distinct context, one that avoids the atemporal presentation of works of genius beyond the historicised material available to the individual. The proliferation of the individualistic ethic qua aesthetic at this time, worked to energise this processual, dynamic interconnection between individual author and his/her milieu.

Part of this assumption of a writerly self in these eras was this process of energetic personal formation. Being a “self-made man” crucially subsumes ideas of construction and building, inherently dynamic processes. The fact of appearing “self-made” carries the intrinsic suggestion of having been built. In asserting the importance of the public sphere to the private action of writing, one can delineate the dialectical structure at the heart of such relations. The problematic nature of being “self-made” is its reliance on a society that facilitates such self-making. Super-imposing the politico-literary affiliations of his period, and emphasising the continuously constructed nature of identity and culture (authorial and “American Renaissance” respectively), we may situate
Hawthorne properly in his role as a writer of significance to the development of a literary profession in the United States.

To this extent, this analysis’s first section “Considerable of a politician” will focus on the specifically political elements of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s work to show how his individualistic self-realisation was influenced by this element of his milieu. Hawthorne’s long-term engagement with his contemporary political sphere is ambivalent, compelling and integral to any informed reading of his literary career. Depending on one’s critical outlook, the author may be viewed as a seasoned political manipulator, a reluctant representative of others, a latent but committed conservative, and, perhaps most frequently cited, a Democrat of good standing. It is important to ascertain the truth behind these claims in investigating the radical subversion with which he was accused by Herman Melville.26 It is the work of this analysis to suggest that Hawthorne’s “great power of blackness” was as much a part of his political world-view as it was an epistemological tool.

Hawthorne’s political involvement is a tangled, oft-criticised issue that rarely reflects on the dynamic reality of “belief” in a government, leaders or the councils and bureaucratic measures attendant on their existence. It is important to demonstrate how Hawthorne appeared in relation to “the Democracy” instead of simply analysing his textual pronouncements to inform an understanding of his values. This space, between subjective opinion and object under discussion, is crucial to our appreciation of Hawthorne’s political individualism. It was forged in a Jacksonian milieu, rebranded by his curious imagination, and relayed through myriad texts, from John Endicott to the typologically constructed Franklin Pierce, through the guillotined surveyor he would later, autobiographically, capture in “The Custom-House”.

26 Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and his Mosses” reprinted in James C. Wilson, The Hawthorne and Melville Friendship (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991), 215-229. “Whether Hawthorne has simply availed himself of this mystical blackness as a means to the wondrous effects he makes it to produce in his lights and shades; or whether there really lurks in him…a touch of Puritanic gloom… Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin…..”
This examination will situate Hawthorne’s political corpus within the dynamic, evolving individualism of his contemporary surroundings in order to show his developing understanding of his role within the Democratic political machine, and will provide insight into his work as a cultural “ornament” of the state. The reflexivity of his work was based on the compromise Hawthorne struck between nationalistic values, and the subtle characterisation and description he employed in writing fiction. In demonstrating the relation between these things, the first section will show how the era’s defining political currents influenced the shape and content of both Hawthorne’s career and his fiction.

The second chapter, “…alone of mortals”, will turn to the significance of religion, contemporary and historical, in Hawthorne’s engagement with individualism, and his construction of spiritual characters that facilitate his interrogation of moral hypocrisy within organised religious bodies. The volatility of the Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian eras promulgated the rise of a socially conspicuous individualism that depended on the sacralisation of historical destiny and economic life alike. Individualism, bound ideologically as it was to progress in the social and political realms of the nation, was apparent in “the pervasive popular faith in the individual’s adequacy to fulfil all his aims and functions.”27 Although such qualifications and achievements were necessarily systematised in structures of government and religion, the society’s rapid expansion and transformation led to fragmented, insufficient explanations of Americans’ natures, and that of their country. Previously, such explication was found through scripture or signified through great men doing God’s work.28 In the age of homo Democritus, however, where a society without


28 As Malachuk has indicated in exploring the work of the Transcendentalists through the Augustinian tradition’s delineation of the cities of God and man respectively, American thought has developed largely along lines that distinguish between various “overlap theories”. Foundationalism suggests that the aforementioned cities overlapped at the founding of the United States; aspirationalists indicate that the cities will overlap at some future time; proceduralists insist that such an overlap can only occur through the work of American democracy.
institutionalised state religion sought a better way of life in freedom, the personal became paramount.  

Individualism in the United States has always held a distinct religiosity. Throughout Nathaniel Hawthorne’s lifetime, the continued rejection by governments of an official state religion served to codify the specifically individualised nature of American religious worship. In a seemingly converse manner, American disestablishment emphasised the lasting spiritual heritage of the Pilgrim Fathers. Jackson’s insistence on state neutrality in matters religious encouraged an identification with personal religion as a guiding force in one’s life. As Ralph H. Gabriel attests; “The first half of the nineteenth century saw the decline of deism, the rise of evangelical Protestantism, and the final formulation of that cluster of ideas and values that made up the American democratic credo.” Integral to the formulation of Jacksonian democracy was the guaranteed freedom of religion for the nation’s citizens. Hawthorne’s inculcation in systemic individualism, therefore, was connected indelibly to both his personal religion, and the kind described and instituted within his work. Such religious feeling was both a freedom and a burden, indicating both the power to choose one’s own spiritual path, and the responsibility of maintaining religious feeling and sound moral judgement. The author’s lifelong contemplation of the issue of “personal” religion is crucial to our understanding of the milieu from which he wrote. This chapter will look to situate Hawthorne’s writing within an understanding of the author’s religious individualism, informed by nineteenth century ideologies that altered irrevocably the impact of religion on the individual citizen.

---


30 “I am no sectarian; tho a lover of the christian religion. I do not believe, that any, who shall be so fortunate as to be received to heaven, thru the atonement of our blessed Saviour will be asked whether they belong to the Presbyterian (sic), the Methodist, the Episcopalian Baptist or Roman catholic.” Andrew Jackson, *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson 1829-1832*. Edited by John Spencer Bassett (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1929), 256.

From this point, the analysis will turn to focus on Hawthorne’s ideas surrounding art and the complicated figure of the artist in this period. This will develop a number of the key arguments of the previous chapter discussing the importance of religion to the construction of an individualistic American identity. In the developing, industrialising cities of the eastern seaboard (including nearby Boston in his native Massachusetts) the artist was seemingly divorced from the era’s republican values. By the 1830’s, American political rhetoric was filled with references to the progress of “the people” against the aristocratic elite and the threat of poverty. The “people”, championed by Andrew Jackson, meant, specifically, those involved in physical labour or with immediate involvement in the production of goods. The ostensibly ethereal nature of the artistic process and product did not lend itself to the burgeoning capitalist and expansionist tone of the era’s politics. The freedoms prized by the self-reliant American in this age perhaps found their apotheosis in the freedom of the market. The connection between the market of Jacksonian politics and the progress of the “people” was an intrinsic one, and one that contemporary political rhetoric emphasised in its importance to the average American. Hawthorne’s negativity served to contemplate the artist as having a “haunted mind” or “dangerous soul”, and he worried throughout his career about the possibility of the artist being considered of the “people”, as a valid contributor to the market. As Eric Savoy notes, Hawthorne was bound to the “psychic viability of an ethics of male authorship – an ethics that would be accountable to the Puritan tradition of public service.”

Hawthorne’s self-held fears did not square with his oft-represented vision of the artist as a figure of distinction from the common man; one of potentially fragile demeanour but always of

34 Harding, American Literature in Context, 9.
significant separation. There is an inherent tension present in Hawthorne’s discussion of the artist as possibly subversive, and the simultaneous wish of an author or a sculptor to be successful. Antagonistically, the artist’s ability to compete in the volatile market of mid-nineteenth century America was connected to the individualising character of the “dangerous soul”, as Hawthorne held it. This tendency towards separation worried Hawthorne consistently throughout his career. It was both an identifier of his artistic ability and that which kept the author apart from ordinary Americans. In order to circumvent the anxieties attendant upon this question, Hawthorne created a dynamic relation between the work of art’s individualising process and its subsequent social and public life. The artist was, by necessity, individualistic in his/her move to create art, but the way in which this work was perceived publicly affected the personal representation of the artist. This will be explored throughout this analysis to ascertain the extent to which Hawthorne felt “separate” from the majority of Americans in his creation of art, and his conscious efforts to remain grounded within a narrative of American life.

The issue of distinction is central to the concluding section of this analysis, “…forth from the haunts of men”. Separation, depicted by Hawthorne in his fiction about religious or artistic characters, was an important ideological function of the Jacksonian Era, one that held a number of political and social ramifications in its potentially dangerous nature. The issue of “private menace” was a continuously troubling one for Hawthorne’s writings and times.\(^{36}\) Political rhetoric and movements, religious reforms and sermons, social campaigners and literary practitioners revisited this “evil” time and again in Jacksonian America. The era marked a seismic shift in popular attitudes towards “secrecy” and the legitimacy of a “private sphere”. Often analysed as the impingement of public life on the “inner universe of private experience”,\(^{37}\) this change in thought signified a broader turn from previous conceptions of propriety. In the Jacksonian Era, the public


was paramount, where man was truly “equal and alone, masterless and separate, autonomous, defenceless against the tyranny of the majority.”  
Constitutional change reflected many of these concerns, particularly in ongoing appeals and debate of the Second Amendment. As Saul Cornell attests, this period in American life marked the rise of the first “self-conscious gun rights ideology built around a constitutional right of individual self-defense”, one that sought to limit the problem of the “concealed weapon.”  
As issues of privacy and malignant secrecy converged in the 1830’s, Democratic political rhetoric interpreted the growing inequality of wealth as the product of an aristocratic conspiracy against the rights of the labouring classes. Jacksonian concerns around the increasing overlap of the public and private spheres were symptomatic of larger questions of trust and reliance. Self-reliance, the oft-indicated mantra of this individualistic age, was literally that: a reliance on one’s self in a society that may not be entirely trustworthy.

This section will examine Hawthorne’s work in the context of shifting attitudes towards ideas of privacy and secrecy. In an increasingly capitalistic society, political rhetoric struggled to reconcile private ownership and public responsibility. This criticism will question how societal backlash against secrecy in its popularly perceived forms – banking institutions, fraternal organisations and aristocratic privilege – affected the era’s cultural production, particularly in Hawthorne’s writings. Through an emphasis on privacy as an essentially feminising influence, this discussion will chart individualism’s appearance in Hawthorne’s work as a signifier of accepted masculinity, especially in relation to the literary marketplace.

Seen individually, these chapters represent some of the elements that so moulded Hawthorne’s dynamic and evolving engagement with his society. Taken together, it is hoped they indicate the importance of individualism in understanding this writer and his contemporary milieu. The problematic, changing qualities of individualism through the Jacksonian and antebellum

periods are marked, and demonstrated ably by an author whose trademark was a searching ambiguity that both problematised the nature of his own “power of blackness” and extended to the society in which he lived and worked. Hawthorne’s contribution to American letters is a commonplace, a cornerstone of antebellum culture. In delving into his work, however, we might better understand the centrality of American cultural life in the expansion and development of the nation’s ubiquitous individualism, not simply an adornment of a country-in-progress, but a helping hand in a system of representation that portrayed America to the world.
Chapter One

“Considerable of a politician”:

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Political Individualism

Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, every man has a Property in his own Person.

This nobody has a right to but himself.

- John Locke, Second Treatise

Nathaniel Hawthorne was inextricably involved with his nation’s politics. Aside from his personal endorsement of the Democratic Party, lifelong friendship with Franklin Pierce or longstanding admiration for Andrew Jackson, Hawthorne’s writing reflected his political milieu. From the start of his career, the question of American nationhood was a preoccupation of his prose, and the connection of individual to political society was reflected not only in the content of his texts, but in the course of his life. This has often been overlooked because of the sense of isolation with which he imbued his work, his characteristically alienated personae representing a derealised style that questions what offers itself as our reality, rather than simply casting doubt over the world.

Hawthorne is perfectly positioned for an analysis that works to establish not only the relation of a writer to his respective public or political spheres, but how an author of cultural significance comes to position himself alongside and within the institutions of his age. This author’s complex reaction to, and interrogation of, his society through literature was grounded upon a socially ingrained masculine culture. Writers were often represented (and self-represented) in

---


overtly masculine ways throughout the Jacksonian and antebellum periods; from Whitman’s pictorial portrayal to his assumed audience in “Pioneers! O Pioneers!”, the relation of author to identity was firmly established and significant of many elements of one’s personal qualities. As Milette Shamir attests, the “general sympathy” that Hawthorne’s stories appealed to was “one that belongs properly to men.”3 This was a “hyperpolitical time, when every question was probed for its relevance to the great party struggle taking place, and America’s precarious position as the world’s only large-scale democracy.”4 Fellow Bowdoin alumnus, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, reflected mournfully on the continuous relation of the artistic and the political in a letter to Lewis Gaylord Clark dated July 20th, 1839:

Boz, (Dickens) reigns supreme, as the popular writer. Bancroft has written a violent article against Gölhe in the Christian Examiner. The Loco-focos are organising a new politico-literary system. They shout Hosanna to every loco-foco authorling, and speak coolly of, if they do not abuse, every other. They puff Bryant loud and long; likewise my good friend Hawthorne of “Twice-Told Tales”; also a Mr. Sullivan, once Editor of the “Democratic Review”, now Secretary of Legation at Paris…5

This “changing of the guard” in American literature, that found in the 1830s the rise of an author with democratic sentiments, rather than one advocated by John Quincy Adams as necessitating the “aristocratic” nature that was art’s due.6 It is notable that the authors Longfellow focused on were


4 Widmer, Young America, 26.


not simply writers or journalists, but those linked directly to the Democratic Party’s cultural machinations. Bryant’s *New York Evening Post* was, from Jackson’s election onwards, a supporter of “Old Hickory” and his popular revolution. In 1828, Bryant went so far as to compose an “Ode to Jackson” that asked that “our festive halls this day/ Re-echo Jackson’s fame” while highlighting the president’s “democratic attainment of power”; as opposed to the violence and hereditary inequality of Old World monarchies. The invocation of John L. O’Sullivan and Hawthorne’s connection to the editor of the *Democratic Review* is clear enough; Longfellow emphasised the “politico-literary” nexus within which these authors wrote and which, at least in part, supplemented their income and status.

This era emphasised the burgeoning power of individual action, with Jacksonian religion particularly presenting a renewed ethics *qua* aesthetics. Political pronouncements, rhetoric and journalistic accounts help to inform our understanding of a popular will that was utilised by public figures for their own ends, particularly in cultural terms. The move to democracy in its Jacksonian form forced the utilisation of evangelical language with political formulations. Inherent to the concepts of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny were ideas of salvific promise, justified action and righteous freedom. As Yehoshua Arieli states; “…unlike the European democrat, the American narrowly circumscribed the sphere of the state and exalted that of the individual. The dichotomy and tension which elsewhere existed between liberty and equality disappeared in America.” For Hawthorne, the relation between individual liberty and public presentation in America, in-keeping with Arieli’s diagnosis of the American democrat, was a dynamic, self-
reflexive one.\textsuperscript{11} A systemic, publicly individualistic aesthetic, mediated through an intensely nationalistic milieu, was made manifest through the policies and activities of the Democratic Party.

Hawthorne’s relationship with his era’s politics was ever-evolving.\textsuperscript{12} The freedom engendered by the growth of individualistic sentiment was not simply a spectacle of New World politics, but the codification, acceptance and proliferation of modes of personification that dictated to Americans their part in the political system. The disappearance of previously established distinctions did not merely re-align peoples’ relation to the political, but fundamentally altered conceptions of accepted limits and definitions.\textsuperscript{13} The role of the individual metamorphosed, newfound possibilities of self-reliance replaced self-reliance-\textit{in-itself}, as a core element of national and personal destinies respectively made accessible. America was newly inscribed with the importance of the personal, where national expansion was regulated only by the delivery of individual promise. “Manifest Destiny” was a spatialised term, “a powerful account of national and individual destiny, an account that conferred on both the nation and the self a sense of corporeal autonomy in space, and teleological ascendancy in time.”\textsuperscript{14} The promise of the individual could be mapped onto that of the nation, their complementarity served to further both.

Within this lay the (often paradoxical) relationship of serving oneself while also serving one’s country. This relation looked to remove a sense of subordination between the subject and a greater political structure. As Marshall Berman has indicated; “The whole trouble with the state was


\textsuperscript{12} The initial use of “aestheticised” suggests the power of public perception that follows on from political choices, or public political support. I will indicate its use and control by figures in the wake of Jackson whose mutable aesthetic, from rugged frontiersman to Southern gentleman, was utilised to great effect in his political life.

\textsuperscript{13} For contemporary commentary on this aspect of American life, see de Tocqueville, \textit{Democracy in America}, 138: “When inequality of conditions is the common law of society, the most marked inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on the same level, the slightest are marked enough to hurt it. Hence the desire of equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete.”

\textsuperscript{14} Dimock, \textit{Empire for Liberty}, 10.
the arbitrariness of its incursions into social life, conferring special privileges on some men, imposing special burdens on others.”\(^{15}\) The tensions apparent to de Tocqueville in Jacksonian democracy existed in the potential for arbitrary intrusion by political superstructures upon the individual. Democratic rhetoric advocated individualism that ostensibly attempted to place the citizen on a relational footing with society, one that rejected the structures of the past. This era’s nationalism was based on patriotic values that were actively questioned as part of the foundational freedom upon which America had been established. The self-made man situated himself within the swirling nexus of Jacksonian democracy, the Market Revolution and the hunt for self-reliant stability. That such stability was the deferred promise of a newfound political freedom is undoubted, that it served to create new relations of citizen-to-citizen and citizen-to-state respectively we must explore further.

The oft-cited “volatility” of the era came to be defined through the age’s presidential namesake. As Ward has stated; “(Andrew Jackson) was the embodiment (sic) of the true spirit of the nation in which he lived...(he) further represents the ideal of self-sufficient individualism which was the inevitable rationalisation of America’s disorganised development.”\(^{16}\) The figure of Old Hickory saw the first president whose individual personality was not lost in his representative character.\(^{17}\) Susan Tenneriello further asserts that Jackson “forged a political dialog of negotiation…(that) set off the creative mobility of capital empowerment.”\(^{18}\) The intensely divisive feelings surrounding Jackson’s presidency, and the terms of office for those that followed him, are evidenced by the symbolism that became associated with his supporters and opponents respectively. His very person came to be the lightning rod for much social change and division in this burgeoning


\(^{16}\) Ward, *Andrew Jackson*, 149.


international power. Although he presented himself as a simple restorer of the principles marked by the Founding Fathers, “(he) could express in his words and his life the linkages between the egalitarian ideology of his age and the near-sacred precepts” embodied by the commemorated heroes of the Revolutionary Era. Deified by his Democrat followers, despised by his Whig opponents as “King Andrew”, the truth of his time in office is not to be found in some compromise between the two positions. The machinery of his political party, and the public persona presented by Jackson himself, carefully constructed a flexible image. Richard Hofstadter, in his examination of the American political tradition, claimed that until the day of his inauguration, Jackson had “contributed neither a thought nor a deed to the democratic movement.” His symbolic power, however, modernised the space in which political power was made and utilised. Jackson’s lasting influence was contingent on the perpetuation and mutation of a fabricated image of his person.

Without going so far as to view this era in terms of modern, spectacular politics, Jackson exemplified the immanent image become President. Guy Debord's diagnosis of the transferral of power is indicative of a Tocquevillean world-view, upon which “the Democracy” seized:

The emergence of political power, seemingly associated with the last great technical revolutions, such as iron smelting, which occurred at the threshold of a period that was to experience no further major upheavals until the rise of modern industry, also coincided with the first signs of the dissolution of the bonds of kinship. From this moment on, the succession of the generations left the natural realm of the purely cyclical and became a purposeful succession of events, a mechanism for the transmission of power.  

---

19 Watson, Liberty and Power, 10.
This is not to say that Jackson’s presidency was merely a case of “smoke and mirrors”, but to suggest that his election relied on a ruthlessly stilted perception of his principles. The event that could draw people together was central to the proliferation and propagation of image as a core aspect of one’s election. Jackson instilled in American politics the power of the image, in the “Coffin handbills” that attacked him, or the enduring military portraits that glorified his career. Jacksonianism could fit all men in the land of expectant capitalism; from the quiet author of snowy New England to the slaveholders of the South, from the locofocos of New York to the pioneering frontiersman; “When John Quincy Adams supporters circulated a note written by Jackson filled with misspellings and bad grammar, Jacksonians praised him as “self-taught”.”

22 Jackson’s 1828 efforts drew heavily on his unsuccessful 1824 campaign. Writing to Ebenezer H. Cummins in August 1826:

I am aware of the great exertions that were made in 1824 and will be made again by falsehood and misrepresentation, this phamphlets, anonemous letters, and newspaper squibs to slander me, and was I to attempt to answer all the false statements thus propagated, I might do nothing but write and refute them. I have always held that truth is might, and will prevail.  

23 For those who wished to view Jackson as despotic, Whig organs produced propaganda warning of a return to Old World monarchy. The more sympathetic Democrat could read stories of his military career and frontier life as a youth for romantic representations of the candidate as an indefatigably

---


24 Particularly notable were pictorial representations of Jackson that combined his facial characteristics with commonplace portraits of Napoleon Bonaparte. Apart from media discussion of “King Andrew”, Jackson’s early biographer James Parton’s Life of the president (1859) included a decidedly Napoleonic Jackson posing from the frontispiece. Gazing to the right, with his left hand tucked against his tightly-fitted military jacket, there is no doubt of the aesthetic of the president that greets readers upon their consultation of the book.
fair man. Upon his election, Jackson spoke sentimentally of his governance as an extension of popular will: “To be elected …from the will of the people (to) a government whose vital principle is the right of the people to control its measures…cannot but penetrate me with the most powerful and mingled emotions of thanks…” Whether the “people” wanted to be represented by Jackson the military hero, or the more reflective politician who carried out his judgements as instructed by, and through, his fellow Americans, the aesthetic of Jackson was reconfigured to serve the purpose of the individual citizen. As David Greenberg comments, “nineteenth century presidents paid attention to spreading their messages and fashioning their images…the Washington Globe, run by Andrew Jackson’s cronies Amos Kendall and Francis Blair, (was an) unabashed mouthpiece” of the Democrats. Jackson manipulated his image to foreground his military past in times of perceived crisis. On the other hand, when his image needed softening from accusations of frontier brutality, Jackson was positioned more readily as a self-made man, a figure that represented “the possibility that any citizen might become President”, creating a relatable, empathetic figure. As Nancy Isenberg describes;

General Jackson was celebrated as “Old Hickory”, in sharp contrast to Crèvecoeur’s tame analogy of Americans as carefully cultivated plants. Rising up in the harsh hinterland of what was once the western extension of North Carolina, the Tennessean…was the perfect

---

25 This was opposed to Whig assertions of Jackson’s brutality, perhaps most famously encapsulated in the “Coffin Handbills” published for the election campaign of 1828. William Hunting Howell has described how these “handbills” were rendered in eminently literary fashion, in order to slander Jackson’s character: “The borders and coffins, reminiscent of both an eighteenth-century elegy tradition and of the broadsides commemorating the Boston Massacre of 1770, trade on print-culture commonplaces to align support for Jackson with public mourning and with anti-American violence.” William Hunting Howell, “Read, Pause, and Reflect!!” Journal of the Early Republic 30, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 294.


28 Blau, Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy, x.
match for the tough, dense wood of Indian bows and hickory switches from which he acquired his nickname.  

Jackson’s power came to stand for the country as a whole, a cosmic force for justice and distinctive American identity, as noted by Herman Melville who, through Ishmael, exhorts the God that “didst pick up Andrew Jackson from the pebbles; who didst hurl him upon a war-horse; who didst thunder him higher than a throne.”  

Melville’s word-play suggests the cosmic celebration of Jackson while simultaneously affirming the height of the President’s political canonisation. Jackson is “higher than a throne”, indicative of his supernatural force, but subtly remarking on the charges previously brought against the President’s autocratic tendencies. Not only is Jackson more than worthy of his adulation, Melville’s character rebukes previous accusations of Napoleonic qualities in placing the Democratic hero higher than that upon which a king might sit. The very nature of Jackson’s self-made character was enough for his respective public and personal salvations in Melville’s terms, something Hawthorne also subsumed into his work.  

Jacksonian Democrats were, however, trenchantly mundane in their political concerns. The country’s “Manifest Destiny” was not purely metaphysical, rather concerning itself with ideals firmly based in expansionist, materialistic ideology. The message relayed by the Democrats to the electorate was important as much for its formal mutability as it was for its central concerns. As Widmer contends, Democratic writers were prized mainly for their “flexible mode of thinking that could explain the United States to its people after the long hangover of the Revolution, through the many aftershocks of the Jacksonian era.” The relationship of the Jacksonian myth to the fabled “people” was a protean one. As Richard Slotkin states:

---

29 Isenberg, White Trash, 113.


31 Widmer, Young America, 3.
the success of Andrew Jackson’s personal and political myth follows very much in this
military-aristocratic mold. His gentility was achieved…but his trappings were traditional…
In Jacksonian rhetoric the traits of aristocracy were simultaneously the signs of valid
achievement and the caste marks of illegitimate privilege.32

The 1828 election presented an entrance point to a more “fluid economic and social system”, one
that “broke the bonds of a fixed and stratified political order.”33 This elides the complex statements
of popular political opinion in the years that followed. If the language of politics and the law was
saturated with appeals to first principles, Jacksonian man was also asked consistently to look solely
to future speculation and success.34 This paradox was consumed by the individualistic ethic of the
era. The common man could empower himself to become an expectant capitalist or westward
expansionist, a literal creator of America, regardless of previous social standing - but the call to
democratic values was simultaneously one to the greatness of the idealised collective of the
American nation.

Jackson’s public image relied on such ideas of collectivity. His rejection of autocracy was
founded upon a nationalistic fervour that saw, through its individualism, the betterment of all. As
Secretary John C. Calhoun pointed out to Jackson during the early stages of his political career,
although popularity was lavished on the former general, it was most important not to accede to this
solely, unlike the demagogues of old; “many of those sacrifices, which now distinguish your life,
would have been spared; but then that deep debt which you will have left on your country and

33 Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, 65.
34 Daniel T. Rodgers, Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence (Cambridge, Massachusetts;
posterity, would not have existed.”35 Calhoun indicated the tensions within American individualism - without the collective one is nothing, but the citizen’s personal achievement remains one’s defining act.36 This marked the move of American society from its traditional founding mythologies toward a model that foregrounded the integrity of the ordinary man. A re-implementation of Jeffersonian values was itself a rejection of their efficacy. The empowerment of the individual was seen in terms of a national lack to that point. As John L. O’Sullivan wrote in 1837; “All history has to be re-written; political science and the whole scope of all moral truth have to be considered and illustrated in the light of the democratic principle.”37 This move was linked to the creation of a publicly-presented aesthetic - something that could “contain multitudes”, while, in its own particular fashion, was related to the ultimate success of the aggregate. The dialectical relation of the collective and individual found in its Jacksonian expression a productive tension between the two terms, one fundamental to the propagation of contemporary self-made ideals.38

Gary B. Nash emphasises the shifting attitudes to history that endangered the public memory of the revolution’s import. In the years directly following Jackson’s term of office, “radical activists (were) not only interested in ordinary people as agents of revolutionary change but worried about the conservative, reverent, tragedy-free core narrative being peddled in schoolbooks and popular histories by a genteel band of white male writers.”39 The age called for a reconditioning of historiography, a turn to embrace the individual’s destiny as it may be mapped on to that of the nation at large. As George Lippard, wrote; “The General who receives all the glory…is not the hero.

35 Jackson, *Correspondence Vol. III*, 46.
38 Whitman’s ubiquitous “I am large, I contain multitudes” is indicative of the centrality this tension to “the Democracy”. As Michael Kazin states: “The shrewd creators of “the Jackson Party,” soon renamed “the Democracy,” assembled a broad coalition that stretched from Walt Whitman and white radical artisans in the urban North to Jefferson Davis and his fellow defenders of slavery in the agrarian South.” Michael Kazin, “The Two Andrew Jacksons”, *Nation*, vol. 305, no. 5 (August 28, 2017), 36.
No; the hero is the private soldier, who stands upon the battle field.”\textsuperscript{40} This was both a perpetuation and rejection of Jeffersonian ideals - and necessarily so, for to ignore one side was to refuse the dynamic relation to be observed between individual rights and collective responsibilities. Political language called men to achieve their financial and social utmost, while dissociating itself from those whose good fortune stemmed from others’ toil. One was to be a General unto oneself, but to refuse patrician pomp and ceremony, and engage on the battlefield of the everyday. This simple analogy to exhort Americans to become “generals” in their own lives contained a complicated dissociative process that characterised the tension between individual and collective. Democratic rhetoric emphasised an acquisitive capitalism that, in foregrounding the self, diminished the exploitative elements seen in Whiggish conceptions of the same system. Democrats saw this as part of a levelling process, where their political opponents would further entrench hierarchical division. This compression was something that featured prominently in the rejection of one form of capitalist gain for another, seemingly fairer version.

The proliferation of the individualistic ethic was an ideological construction of society that facilitated the expansion of American power over a continent it viewed as its own. Jacksonian man was a foot soldier in the Democracy’s push towards opportunity for ordinary Americans. Despite the predominance of the “people” in this age’s rhetoric, it is important to note, as Remini does, that Jackson’s ascendancy, although dependent on the popular will, did not begin in the form of a push from the grassroots of political support - rather, his “revolution” moved in “one direction only - from the top down.”\textsuperscript{41} This presents a seemingly incontrovertible crux in the logic of the era’s defining character, suggesting a man whose lack of executive experience or patronage was constructed and, ultimately, false. In an internal memorandum of December 1828, Jackson noted how he had retired from the bustle of public life to his farm, to recuperate an ailing body, the toll of

\textsuperscript{40} ibid, xxiv.

\textsuperscript{41} Robert V. Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson} (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 87.
serving the United States having exhausted him. Through amazing powers of sensation however, Jackson describes how “(t)he people of their own mere will brought my name before the nation for the office of President of the United States.”

As previously quoted correspondence with Secretary Calhoun reminds us, Jackson was long-engaged in mythologising his own back-story, in order to ensure it was consonant with constructed public perception. As John Spencer Bassett informs us, Jackson’s associates “were alarmed lest he burst out in anger at some of the tactics of his opponents and in so doing destroying the work so carefully done.”

The letters of the period 1821-1828 show a man keenly aware of others to besmirch his public image. Jackson was careful to cultivate retrospectively the picture of his rise, eliding clear evidence of his creation of a fearsome party apparatus. By virtue of the fact of his alliance with notable politicians before his initial campaign of 1824, and especially in its aftermath, where the purpose of extending the political sphere to mass participation became apparent, Jackson’s utilisation and manipulation of personal history to coincide with national destiny became a powerful instance of political creativity. This allowed him to advocate anti-developmentalism while consistently invoking a politically consistent sense of American fate. The expansion of individualism’s possibilities and opportunities to (white, male) citizens, if not a contradictory abstraction in itself, was one of a litany of the era’s paradoxes, where the President stood for all things democratic, egalitarian and participatory. As Ward alludes to, if “iron” was the key word in most sympathetic appraisals of Jackson, it was “malleable iron”. If;

---

42 Jackson, Correspondence Vol. III, 454.
43 ibid, viii.
44 Sandra M. Gustafson, Imagining Deliberative Democracy in the Early American Republic (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011). 4. Jackson’s powerful harnessing of electoral mistrust of elites, and widespread use of his image to instil a sense of “message” or “vision” foreshadows much of the political sphere that was to come. If not something done personally, as Hofstadter charges, then Jackson’s overall contribution to the path of democratic thought is something that deserves further analysis.
Jackson, from 1815-1845, was constantly before the American imagination as the embodiment of the success that awaits the man of iron will, the man who can overcome insuperable opposition simply by determination”, it was the fluidity presented to general perception that guaranteed his fixity in the popular mind.46

The longevity of Jackson’s image suggests its power over the national imagination. Democratic newspapers eagerly highlighted the quasi-biblical strength and righteousness of his persona. Noteworthy is Walt Whitman’s appreciation for Old Hickory, expressed during the 1832 presidential campaign while Jackson sought votes in Brooklyn. Whitman never forgot the excitement of seeing the “Hero and Sage in his big-brimmed white beaver hat”, as he passed through the multitudes that revered him as a saviour.47 After the carefully managed construction of the narrative of his rise to executive office it was necessary to spread the message of his power while simultaneously indicating the prerequisite affirmation of the country’s citizens. During the Bank War, George Lippard wrote a telling piece widely distributed to his Philadelphia readership:

When I think…of that ONE MAN, standing there at Washington, battling with all the powers of the Bank and panic combined, betrayed…assailed…when I think of that one man placing his back against the rock and folding his arms for the blow, while he uttered his awful vow: “By the Eternal, I will not swerve one inch from the course I have chosen! I must confess that the records of Greece and Rome - nay, the proudest day of Napoleon and

46 Ward, Andrew Jackson, 158.
47 Widmer, Young America, 7. See also, Nathan Faries, “Whitman and the Presidency” in Walt Whitman Quarterly Review Vol. 22, (Spring 2005),161. Faries notes how Whitman’s father had been so enamoured of the era’s defining president that Walt grew up alongside his brother, Andrew Jackson Whitman.
Jackson, figured in Herculean terms, was consistently formulated in the classic pose of hero against emblematic monster. Lippard connected the president to European figures that had formerly been cited against him as examples of Old World autocracy. This argues against previous oppositional representations, utilising the names of Napoleon and Cromwell to indicate two leaders whose patriotic efforts were remembered for their expansionist campaigns and respective individual power. In linking Jackson with Napoleon and Cromwell, and emphasising his power as something that superseded their historic examples, Lippard counteracted claims of Jackson’s dictatorial nature, affirming his American, democratic context as necessarily superior. Implicitly, Jackson’s power was granted through the people and for the people, indicating his inability to follow the mistakes of Napoleonic absolutism or Cromwellian arrogance.

Inherent in any portrayal of Jackson in the “Bank War” was the public assumption of his being a normal citizen, interested only in the plight of the everyday American. In these terms, each individual faced their own, personal “Bank contest”, where the self-made man fought to forge his destiny in the public sphere. Jackson, in correspondence with Martin Van Buren, saw himself as representative of these quotidian struggles, albeit with greater ramifications; “When called by my country to the station which I occupy, it was not without a deep sense of its arduous responsibilities and a strong distrust of myself that I obeyed (sic) the call…” Jackson managed to combine a sense of the project before him, with a call to his fellow countrymen not simply to follow, but to aid his efforts with their own. Where Jackson went was the design of the people, reliant on an “unshaken

---


49 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 16-17.

50 Jackson, Correspondence Vol. IV, 262.
confidence in (their) virtue and intelligence.” Democrat conceptions of Andrew Jackson utilised a Napoleonic analogy differently, to suggest a powerful, divinely-guided national saviour. As Nye attests, such political action and rhetorical manipulation “can be most clearly read in terms of a pervasive popular faith in the individual’s adequacy to fulfil his aims and functions.” The president straddled the seemingly incommensurate demands of democracy, progress and individualism, and democratised a fluid narrative of self-typology, one that signified endless possibility, for the individual and, by extension, the nation.

The age’s normative individualism focused on personal responsibility and freedom of choice, based on the core belief that individuals are fundamentally independent of one another. The interaction between liberty and democracy required a new social order that did not stop at a fresh emphasis on the action of an individual citizen. This relationship needed to relocate the causal inferences that, once applied to society, were now focused on the individual. As Oyserman states, this is “because the decontextualised self is assumed to be a stable, causal nexus.” Here the tension in moving the emphasis from a steadily growing collective to the relation between individual citizen and larger political structures is apparent. The fixity of this “causal nexus”, insofar as it existed only through independent individuals, contrasted sharply with the sense of movement integral to the growth and expansion of America. Through inscription in subjectivity, we may look to this fixity/fluidity dynamic as another example of the era’s proliferating pluralism, where expansion was remarkable for its internal oppositions as much as it was for its assuredness.

---

51 ibid, 235.


54 ibid, 5.
American pluralism, as said, is distinguished by an insistence that the legitimacy of micro-formations (states, individuals) is conferred by the nation-state itself: the nation in theory sees dissent as a sign of the paradoxical permeability and permanence of its political/territorial authority and welcomes the opportunity to contain political opposition.55

Built from perspectives and causal frameworks independent of each other, these ideologies did the philosophical work of Jacksonianism, simultaneously connoting the possibility of the nation’s perfectibility, while also functioning to place America on a legitimate plane amongst the world’s nations, a state with unique temporal and spatial possibility. Jackson defined the era as belonging to the greatness of the people, manifest in the individual. Counterbalanced in his references to the “people” lay the inevitable tension of a world-view that emphasised collective liberty while foregrounding individual non-interference. Within this, Hawthorne explored the inevitable politics that influenced the lives of each individual.

The individualistic ethic espoused by the Democrats through their party organs, by various reformers and, indeed, from pulpits across the nation, was an all-encompassing weltanschauung, tied to personal and national success.56 The question of freedom emphasised ideas of destiny that, rhetorically, were unavoidable in the era’s politics. Crucially, this was played out in the public sphere, as Michael Kimmel has attested; “If (being a self-made man) could be proved, it had to be proved in the eyes of other men.”57 If one could not succeed in this pressing environment, it was not due to institutional bias or bad luck. This era symbolised not only possibility for all, but the chance to fulfil the unrecognised promise of past generations. This was not without collateral damage. As

57 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 26.
Charles Sellers has identified, the household economy was one of the age’s major victims; “Resenting a parental authority that seemed less reasonable as it became less functional, many departing children leapt into the capitalist race with the zeal of converts.”\textsuperscript{58} The masculinity that was emphasised by the era, and the focus with which Hawthorne surveyed ideas of the masculine in his texts, is something that often precluded the inclusion of realistic portrayals of femininity. This issue will be addressed throughout this analysis, with particular reference to the individualistic women presented by Hawthorne, something indicative of Hawthorne’s social positioning, as much as it suggests the constructive potentialities of characters like Zenobia or Hester Prynne.

The call to void one’s history and look to a glorious future was simultaneously stoked by the fires of nationalism. This was not simply a business or financial potentiality, but one that built on individual promise in all aspects of one’s life. Bryant, speaking in 1845 as the chairperson of the newly-formed American Art Union at their Annual General Meeting in New York, summoned this nationalistic fervour to emphasise the importance of art to Americans, and the people’s true appreciation of artists to the country’s destiny. In firmly democratic terms, Bryant incorporated the artist within a framework of patriotic duty and public service:

\begin{quote}
Nor let me do injustice to my countrymen. They are already, I think, in great measure, prepared for the just appreciation of the best things our artists have done, or can do…There is no surer path to distinction, than through the arts, even here. A boy shall, yesterday, have been a poor apprentice, to a cutter of tombstones, a carver of dials, or a painter of sigons (sic). He feels the divinity of genius stirring within him… Look at the roll of our painters
\end{quote}

and sculptors. Is there a man with soul so dead, as not to feel that they have raised the character of the country, and who does not appropriate a part of their glory to himself?\textsuperscript{59}

Individualism yoked together the differing impulses of a society that lionised progression while consolidating the nation’s place within constructed historical narratives. If this “age of individualism, was...a period of sharpening tensions and polarities,” it was the possibilities of this selfsame individualism that tied these oppositions together, and allowed their subsumption into a progressive narrative.\textsuperscript{60} Art could help to prove one’s American credentials, without labelling one’s creative output as useless in the context of national improvement.

Rhetoric around American destiny of the time promised not only mass participation, but seemingly realistic hope of personal success based off the increased opportunity guaranteed by enlarged enfranchisement. As the \textit{New York Times} suggested at the time, “(o)ur paupers to-day, thanks to free labor, are our yeomen and merchants of tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{61} The author may, however, have felt himself outside this great concourse of mass participation. His was not ostensibly masculine work. The physical exertions of agricultural and industrial workers marked them as the targets of Democrat rhetoric, the young men whose restless aspiration looked to consolidate individual success. The era’s political and social ethos was required to designate individualism’s divergence from selfishness. Neither was it to be confused with self-sufficiency, which connoted for Jacksonians the dangers of isolation and alienation. Individualism was the “mature and calm feeling that one’s fate was of one’s own making.”\textsuperscript{62} Although the emphasis of the era’s political actors may have been on manual labourers to better their luck through concerted work, “corporation


\textsuperscript{60} Dimock, \textit{Empire for Liberty}, 11.


\textsuperscript{62} Kohl, \textit{The Politics of Individualism}, 11.
stockholders might be more representative of individualism than the self-sufficient yeoman farmer who is too often taken to embody the concept.\textsuperscript{63} The possibilities provided through individualism were inclusive of those for whom the appearance of being “self-made” was as important as its fact in reality. The worker for whom Andrew Jackson initially campaigned had himself transformed into an aspiring, or successful, capitalist by the 1840s; the Democrats were required, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, to include those that had succeeded, and those that still remained hopeful of fortune.

The growth of democratic values relied on the private concerns of citizens for whom individualism was not necessarily a “natural” step, but an inevitability in the sweeping movements of progress. Bruce McConachie has analysed the rise of entrepreneurial values in the Jacksonian theatre scene. The self-made man was as useful to the exercise of an entrepreneurial impulse as it was on the battlefield or in the political arena. Once co-opted, the individualistic ethic percolated throughout one’s life, an all-encompassing way of being, working and owning. If this could apply to the factory owner, it could be extended to the proprietor of a theatre or their actors. Previous systems of patronage in these occupations were disbanded:

By the late 1820s, the pressures of free market capitalism and egalitarian democracy had undermined paternalistic relations in the theatre to such an extent that traditional practices began collapsing of their own weight… Star performers (in the theatre) in the 1820s and early 1830s were entrepreneurs of their own careers who avoided the hierarchical restraints of local acting companies for the freedom of an emerging market…\textsuperscript{64}

One such actor, Edwin Forrest, grew in fame throughout the era for his consistently heroic roles, deeply inculcated in the Democratic ideals of the day. His creation of an individualistic aesthetic

\textsuperscript{63} ibid, 12.

\textsuperscript{64} Bruce A. McConachie, \textit{Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870} (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 30.
was fraught with many of the same issues encountered by his fellow citizens. On and offstage, questions of acquisition and destiny were central to Forrest’s success. One’s aesthetic came to supersede many of the human qualities naturally presented. Ideological power was attained, for Forrest, by combining his acting skills with his “mimetic talents to appeal directly to Jacksonian principles.”

This presented aesthetic was founded upon Forrest’s ability to portray brawny characters that scoffed at a patrician elite. Previous foppish images of actors were rejected, along with attendant entrapments of decadence.

This was seen before the Astor Place Riots of 1849, where Forrest was pitted against the renowned English actor George Macready, who was to play Macbeth in a staging of Shakespeare’s tragedy at the Astor Place Theatre. Tension gripped the production, as Forrest and his supporters sought to undermine the “English hog” that was performing a Shakespearean role on American soil in the presence of the generation’s defining American actor.

Nationalist fervour was piqued further when the *New York Herald*, in the days leading up to the performance, published:

```
WORKING MEN,

SHALL

AMERICANS

OR

ENGLISH RULE

IN THIS CITY?

The Crew of the British steamer have

Threatened all Americans who shall dare to

express their opinions this night, at the
```

65 ibid, 116.

English ARISTOCRATIC Opera House!

We advocate no violence, but a free expression of

opinion to all public men!

WORKINGMEN! FREEMEN!

STAND BY YOUR

LAWFUL RIGHTS!

American Committee

The suggestive ordering of words recalled colonial rule effectively in its depiction of a personal feud between actors. Forrest was the embodiment of Jacksonian American values; strong and masculine, he often lent his characters a rebellious spirit that endeared him to his contemporaries, who adopted him as the “theatrical exemplar” of the Young America movement. Macready, on the other hand, was a prominent English Shakespearean who frequently acted for wealthy patrons. The ideological battleground drawn placed Forrest as “the Andrew Jackson of his profession”, while Macready represented “aristocratic villainy.” Although this extreme example elucidates the public placing of such figures, it is important to note the political language of their portraits. Forrest’s virile performances enamoured him to the theatre-attending public. Hardly the figure Jackson might have had in mind when calling for Americans to take on the arduous responsibilities of an expanding nation, he nonetheless came to symbolise a particular strain of nationalistic, masculine virtues that contested aristocratic privilege. As noted above in the New York Herald, free expression was there for all “public men”.

---


68 Ibid, 432.

69 McConachie, Melodramatic Formations, 92, 144.
The Astor Place riots show evidence of the continuing changes in popular perception towards “legitimate” careers and their impact in the politico-social network that had grown from this “hyperpolitical” era. The figurative coalface had been moved to the playhouse for Forrest, in this specific example, where for Hawthorne it became the writing desk. The hard work of actors and writers may not have shown in the traditional forms of weathered brows or calloused hands, but it became increasingly difficult for the emerging middle classes to identify tension between newfound capitalist hero-worship and the practice of democracy. As Sheila McVey attests, it was at the tail-end of Jackson’s presidency that the American publishing market took shape properly, based on the dissemination of non-pirated material, a move that stemmed from the substantial capital risk undertaken by American companies. As Joel Pfister attests:

Hawthorne (read) industrial capitalism as a subtle interiority-making system. To operate as a flexible machinery of individualistic motive production, capitalism required not just Franklinian entrepreneurs, inventors, and proletarians who would embrace self-sacrifice and competition as necessary for character building and success, it also, more visibly needed authors and artists to expand the cultural range of incentives, self-images, and individualised and aestheticized expressions of liberation and permissible relations.

The spread of the apparently individualistic, non-traditional “worker” highlighted the merits of American freedom, while the possibilities of success in “effeminate” occupations evidenced society’s increasingly democratic, and therefore justified, nature.

---


The increasing contiguity of the public and private spheres allowed Americans of this era the chance to recreate aspects of their life based on Jacksonian Democracy’s interconnected representations of individualism and democracy. The Jacksonian image fused the political with the personal, ensuring that presidential contests were fundamentally based around popularity. This analysis contends that closing the gap between public life (one’s occupation or social standing) and private life (beliefs, instincts) was a necessary stage in the creation of an aesthetic, a systematised personification that merged one’s “identity” with one’s presentation. This informed the portrayal of an individual, self-controlling agency, something that actively fed into perceptions of future potentiality. As Dimock states:

Individualism might quite properly be called a system of personification, for it too invests… agency within a material form… To say this is not to dispute either the force of individualism, or its reality in the world. Rather, it is to study it as a form of social representation, a form at once congruent with and related to its literary counterpart.72

Through its ideological utility, and as attested to by the increasing convergence of the public and the private, the pervasive ethos of individualism at this time presented a codified effort in society at large. The transposition of individualism to fields aside from the economic or political - those perceived to contribute most directly to the nation’s inscribed destiny - does not do justice to its power. These values were not transferred as “good ideas”, simply for opportunistic Americans looking to use their talents to make their fortune. The proliferation of individualistic values

72 Dimock, Empire for Liberty, 26.
throughout society at this time indicated not only the personification of “the Market” or other impersonal institutions, but a new world-view of totalised personhood.\textsuperscript{73}

Nathaniel Hawthorne was inevitably inculcated in this system of agency, personification and self-advancement. We might look to the characteristic ambiguities of his work as indicative of the tensions inherent in an “individualistic” society that simultaneously sought collective advancement. Hawthorne’s feelings surrounding individualism were well-contemplated and mature, far from critical accusations levelled at his writing as a warning against America’s irrevocable self-absorption in downright selfishness.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, in Jacksonian terms, Hawthorne stood opposed to Poe’s charge that the corruption that follows popular democracy promoted an “every-man-for-himself confederacy of greed and self-aggrandizement.”\textsuperscript{75} Hawthorne’s individualism was, in this sense, absolutely connected to Jackson’s democratic vision for America. His consistent involvement in politics and engagement with democratic ideology suggest both a man for whom politics provided a welcome source of financial surety and an outlet to develop a cultivated aesthetic of self-making in the volatile literary marketplace. Dekker comments; “(b)eyond question…Hawthorne was an active participant in the literary and political movements of his time, a follower of Scott and Jefferson rather than of Bradford or the Mathers.”\textsuperscript{76} We might suggest the more deeply interwoven nature of literature and politics during this era; Hawthorne was central to the literary-political and politico-literary scenes of his age. As Turner identified, Hawthorne’s involvement in official politics was continuous from his early thirties onwards; “…besides holding two appointments (from the Democratic Party) and numbering among his associates, politicians on the national level, he had

\textsuperscript{73} Perhaps most famously captured by Jackson’s assertion that: “The bank is trying to kill me, Mr. Van Buren, but I will kill it.” In “The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren”, published in Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1918, vol. II (1920), ed. John Clement Fitzpatrick, 625.


\textsuperscript{75} Kennedy, Strange Nation, 7.

\textsuperscript{76} Dekker, The American Historical Romance, 132.
written a memorial essay on a congressman and a biography that helped elect a president.”

Although this compresses the time represented (1820s to 1850s), central to our appreciation of the era is the continuing influence of Jackson, whose life spanned the election of two further Democratic presidents, and whose lasting legacy was incalculable to the party and the office he held from 1829 to 1837.

The convergence of the literary and political spheres predated Hawthorne, but his was an important contribution in how we understand their overlap. He did not wish for the public voice to promote openly an agenda of individualism, like Emerson, and yet as a Democrat and author, Hawthorne’s financial security rested, at least ideologically, in the advancement of the individual as the ultimate incarnation of American values. We can see in Hawthorne’s creation of socially conscious characters and symbols of differing world-views contemporary evocations of multiplicity, which found their alpha in Emerson’s essays and omega in Whitman’s poetry; “The individual has to become, in a manner of speaking, many different individuals, a multiplicity of personae: each fulfilled and affirmative.” Contemporary literary evidence for this abounds. Emerson’s 1840 pronunciation that he “only (has) one doctrine, the infinitude of the private man” is clearly indicative of this individually designed proliferation of selfhood, something further explored by Whitman within the dynamic “I contain multitudes” from “Song of Myself.”

Hawthorne’s characters stem from such multiplicity, indeed, so does his career. His multitudinous representation of the past contained much of the same relation to American statehood that the Jacksonians wished

77 Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, 252.


79 Quieter examples were also present during this era; see particularly Emily Dickinson’s “The way I read a letter’s this”:

“Peruse how infinite I am
To - no one that you know!
And sigh for lack of heaven, - but not
The heaven the creeds bestow.”

Hawthorne’s conception of history was for the individual, both character and reader, to decide. Just as “the Democracy” called on Americans to forge their own future, so did Hawthorne, but with the added nuance that such exegesis relied on a personal interpretation of what had gone before. This was reflective of the thought the author believed was characterised by individualism, without being something personally mandated by his writing.

During Hawthorne’s active political and literary careers respectively, the question of democracy as a “natural”, teleological system proliferated in democratic ideology. That party political organs took a stance on the question of an American telos distinguishes them from the plethora of other materials on the publishing market, including sentimental novels, stories of heinous true crime, national and increasingly international news. If Hawthorne did not delve personally into the world of political journalism in its traditional sense, his correspondence illuminates the connections he held with men who, under the auspices of their Democratic beliefs, informed the reading public of the destiny their efforts were producing for America:

If poor Duyckinck is remembered primarily because he was the friend of Melville, John Louis O’Sullivan is known mainly as the friend of Hawthorne, despite the efforts of historians to tell what a great role he played in political journalism, and to remind us that he coined the phrase, “Manifest Destiny”.

Through these associations we may see the crossover between the literary and political spheres as a dynamic process of exchange. Jonathan Arac has pointed, misleadingly, to the romantic

---


81 For more on this see, Jeffrey A. Mullins, “‘Hurrah for Hanging’: Monsters, Irony, and the Contested Meaning of Horror for Nineteenth-Century America” in *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2016), 81.

idiom of Hawthorne and Melville as something that would provide qualitative differentiation between art and social reality, where; “the ability of the imagination to reconfigure and reorder material contexts was considered paramount.”

In actuality, the appeal of Hawthorne’s art, and his fundamental negativity, lay in its recognition of the failure of transcendence and its situation in the quotidian concerns of an America still searching for meaning. Hawthorne’s portrayal of the overlap and convergence of previously disparate social sectors was both a suggestion of the individual’s internal dissonance, and a larger question about the authenticity of democracy and individualism within the nation.

The process of self-positioning undertaken by Hawthorne (and others) suggests the inevitability of political involvement and the attendant challenge it presents to originality. Emerson rejected what he saw as the bastardised, anti-intellectual individualism espoused by the Jacksonians, but was irrevocably inculcated in this discourse. In working out the Transcendentalist self, Emerson’s tone often appeared militant in his taking for granted the organisational principles of society. “Emerson’s America” seemed to be “built upon the… Self that discovers its Strength in its capacity to represent itself as “other” from all the conventional determinations (institutions) that threaten it.”

Other contemporaries bewailed the seeming lack of progress in the political sphere, pointing to the lack of freedom enjoyed by some. James Fenimore Cooper wrote; “…the American nation, in some particulars the greatest the world ever saw…is lamentably in arrears to its own avowed principles.”

In many ways, the response of the Democrats to these “principles” (a stated return to the values of the Founding Fathers) was the genesis of the political institution of individualism. As Thoreau wished for self-definition beyond the reach of institutions, so Hawthorne

---


looked to personal experience to qualify the possibilities of literary success and its relation to the political through the challenges of the marketplace.

Elizabeth Langland argues for society’s “formal role” in works of fiction, looking “to ways in which structural elements of a particular depiction are combined and evaluated to make society itself an integral part of a novel’s form, a significant element in the principles generating a particular work.” For a society in which authorship is a profession rather than a pastime, the inevitability of commercialisation and literary commodification indicates the increasing contiguity of economics, culture and politics. It has long been identified that “democracy…introduces a trading spirit into literature.” I wish to suggest that this is further indication of the growing role of individualism in this market sector, which for Hawthorne, led to the lifelong contemplation of the commensurability of artistic urges and democratic duty. Far from being unable to balance these roles, what we receive in this era’s literature is a sense of that inner sphere of feeling that necessarily engaged with the market to survive. An idealistic artist like Owen Warland might have rejected the commission of a campaign biography, but the practical craftsman Drowne certainly would not. This interplay of texts will be analysed to ascertain Hawthorne’s conscious aesthetic-creation, a process that was interwoven with his compositions of literary works, and prominent political career.

As Kaul has identified, some of Hawthorne’s major preoccupations - “(t)he loss of a sense of community, obsession with self, exploitative individualism…(represented) the dangers latent in democratic society and are not the products of…‘aristocratic withdrawal’.” The core assumption of the age, that individuals are fundamentally independent of one another, was perhaps the central

---


89 Note again Bryant’s “American Art Union” speech from 1845; “Look at the roll of our painters and sculptors.” Warland and Drowne fit *types* of American artists and artisans, with varying degrees of financial success.

tenet of much of Hawthorne’s fiction, and should not be separated into a “theme” or “concern” of his oeuvre. Hawthorne examined how we accept differing opinions without reneging on a “contract” with the self in reference to Andrew Jackson himself because of “his power of presenting his own view of a subject, with irresistible force, to the mind of the auditor” (XV, 35). For Hawthorne to succeed in impressing his “auditors”, never mind thriving economically, the question of presenting a strong enough voice, over the ever-growing market, was of central importance - a clear indication of the need not only to accept the tenets of a free, self-governing democracy, but to see at its base the “self-governing individual, liberated from subjection and exploitation and able to develop in cooperation with others the powers which nature gave men.”

Much comment has been directed to the image of Hawthorne’s forefathers castigating his decision to be a writer in “The Custom-House.” As Amal Amireh states, what is most objectionable is not that Hawthorne writes, but that he only writes. Interestingly, criticism often elides the fact that Hawthorne’s surveying work allowed him the opportunity to choose a career as a writer. Hawthorne was in danger of being left behind in an era of insatiable acquisition. Not only should we see the hoary heads of his Puritan ancestors admonishing this “idler” for his choice of occupation, but also, the newly-minted “man of business”, the ideal representative of the emergent middle class that had cast off the shackles of the past to engage in the project of bildung (and therefore nation-building). Indeed, this scene’s effectiveness is blunted in a solely historicist reading. These proto-individualistic Puritans look at their descendant who, ostensibly, is doing little for himself and, by extension, his community or country.

Hawthorne, in this environment of historical judgment and his own day’s condition of legitimate public contribution, needed to infuse his work with his naturally held feeling for democracy. Being a writer lent itself to images of domesticity, a lifestyle that usually allowed a

91 Arieli, Individualism and Nationalism, 191.

wealthy man to create fiction in a land where daily toil was expected for national greatness, where the “plowman” was juxtaposed with the “professor”. Pfister has commented on the difficulties faced by the country’s most famous writers at this time, noting how few of the canonised figures we admire today ever managed to be self-sufficient through their work alone. Combined with the exacerbation of popular nationalism and the legal and compensatory deficiencies of porous copyright regulations, authors’ precarious survival became an active symptom, not of effeminate weakness in the world of the plowman, but a sign of the literary marketplace as an expansion of society’s capitalistic drive, where; “(in) the turmoil and bustle of an active, selfish world, (a man) has to encounter innumerable difficulties, hardships and labors.” Hawthorne’s work must be approached from the perspective of this impulse for material gain, as an extension of the belief that enshrined psychic self-governance was the “essential manly virtue.”

In “The Village Blacksmith” in 1844, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote;

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate’er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.”

---

93 In the election campaign of 1828, a famous election song extolling Jackson’s virtues pitted him as “the man who can fight” against the one “who can write”, namely John Quincy Adams. Kimmel, Manhood in America, 34.
95 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 53.
96 ibid, 28.
This is, in essence, the figure of the artisan in the age of industrialisation; looking towards an uncertain future with a proud bearing. The titular village suggests artisanal grounding in communitarian values, while the fulfilled masculinity of the blacksmith, denoted by his “sweat”, is an idealistic portrayal of the common effort seen as fundamental to Jacksonian, and therefore American, teleological success. The man featured in the poem was the archetypal Jacksonian, despite Longfellow’s personal reticence before Jackson’s ostensibly uncouth nature. Not alone was he hard-working, the last line quoted above indicates both a laudatory self-reliance, and the avoidance of contemporary banking practices, ensured to defraud the “honest” American. Hawthorne utilised a similar democratic feeling in his work, most notably in “Drowne’s Wooden Image” and in the recurrence of blacksmith characters in stories as diverse as “The Birthmark” and “The Artist of the Beautiful”. Hawthorne’s blacksmiths are primarily workers in utility, indicators of difference from the decorative woodcarvers and artists presented by Hawthorne in juxtaposition. This character indicates the proliferation of a markedly patriotic literature at the time; one fundamentally based on a telos of equality. Democratic equality promised personal and professional opportunity where available. Democratic politics of mass participation strove to allow all enfranchised men the capability to “look the whole world in the face.” Furthermore, the utility of blacksmiths’ work, for Hawthorne, captured something of the move towards use-value, and the new commodification of manual labour. Hawthorne’s blacksmiths interrogate the individualistic nature of work in the Jacksonian Era, and provide a nuanced interpretation of the move of work from the communal to the commercial.

Hawthorne’s personal conceptions of the democratic state and its apparatuses are evident throughout his fiction. This remains the case despite the transposition of his tales to different chronological periods. His ability to construct stories in disparate eras and political situations, is keenly evidenced in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1831). In it, the narrator refers to numerous eighteenth century events within the introductory descriptions of its protagonist. The tale collapses
history to provide not only a viewpoint on (pre-)revolutionary violence, but suggestions of how the American character relates to the country’s political structures.

This tale is founded upon the rise of the country from an aristocratic past to a future promised to the people. Like Hawthorne’s *Life of Franklin Pierce* (1852) that held his election as both an aim and the ultimate bearer of truth for its composition, “Kinsman”, with the aid of hindsight, presented the progress to America’s current state as an implicit part of the text’s revolutionary violence.

The protagonist, Robin, is a “country-bred” (*XI*, 209) youth who, travelling to visit his titular kinsman, hopes to receive patronage in “the little metropolis of a New England colony” (*XI*, 210). Intrinsic in Robin’s presumed journey is the promise foundational to American liberty. As Scott Marston attests; “(a) society of contractual individualism was not merely foisted on the country by great merchants and aristocrats. A liberal social order percolated up from the convictions of ordinary people who were convinced that gospel liberty was the very meaning of America.”

The eager citizen that moved from country to city was, at least theoretically, looking to self-make in the bustling confines of a new environment. This sits coherently with the opening passages of Hawthorne’s story, which foreshadows its denouement’s violence by suggesting the revolutionary anger of the American people, in the unnatural aspect of their political situation. We are told;

…(t)he people looked with most jealous scrutiny to the exercise of power, which did not emanate from themselves, and they usually rewarded the rulers with slender gratitude, for the compliances, by which in softening their instructions from beyond the sea, they had incurred the reprehension of those who gave them (*XI*, 208).

---

This story held a double mirror to American society, creating and combining views of past and present that inculcated political outcomes in the description of historical events. American democracy was a fulfilment of this “exercise of power”, where the destiny of American man to self-rule was depicted as having its roots in the oppression of Molineux’s era. Jackson’s contemporaneity with this story’s composition is indicative of the immanence of democracy in the actions of the crowd.

Robin is ostracised initially by the townspeople, whose social codes and mannerisms are alien to him. It is telling that, apart from his largely financial relationship with the ferryman, the first point of contact he has is with a figure of “authority” who threatens his perceived insubordination with punishment in the stocks. There is an undoubted performativity to this story; punishment is continuously publicised and its participants are restricted within socially constructed roles. The sense of authority relayed by the aristocratic class is figured through external appearance and show. This person, dressed “with a full periwig of grey hair, a wide-skirted coat of dark cloth, and silk stockings rolled about his knees” (XI, 210) is, from the outset, associated with the ruling imperial power of Britain, and its dominion over America. His rebuke of Robin is synecdochic for the political structure under which the people are oppressed. The youth, despite his good manners, is ignorant of the subtext of the question he asks, both in terms of its larger political consequences, and his familial situation, which has not yet become apparent. The anti-democratic response of this “honored Sir” is, however, well-practised; his “long-favored countenance…of anger and annoyance” (XI, 211) is not simply a personal characteristic, but a metonymic reaction representative more broadly of British attitudes towards its colonial subjects.

The narrative hides its revolutionary moment subtly in describing how the town’s barber emits a “roar of laughter” upon hearing Robin’s supplication. Closer analysis of the barber reveals that his customers at that moment have, respectively, “a well-soaped chin” (XI, 211) and a Ramillie
wig, the suggested clientele provide an interesting, complex comment on the situation before us.\textsuperscript{99} The local economy, from this snapshot, appears reliant on aristocratic custom. The town’s presentation creates an impression that the ordinary working man (particularly in the inn scene) is not economically self-reliant. The possibility of self-making is a distant possibility in this scenario, where economic selfhood is linked to hereditary wealth and international mercantile capitalism. Robin’s attempts to enquire after his “kinsman” reinforce his separation from the villagers, given his inability to see the situation as it stands. Robin’s individualisation is complicated by his simultaneous reliance on the major. In later iterations of American democratic thought, such patronage was seen as outdated and harmful to the creative spirit, which must be spurred on by one’s own thoughts:

“Now is it not strange,” thought Robin, with his usual shrewdness, “is it not strange, that the confession of an empty pocket, should outweigh the name of my kinsman, Major Molineux? Oh, if I had one of these grinning rascals in the woods, where I and my oak sampling grew up together, I would teach him that my arm is heavy, though my purse is light!” (XI, 215)

Robin’s confusion is intrinsically linked to his inability to recognise this turn from “un-American” modes of being. The uprising that so brutally deposes Molineux is a violent reaction to the colonial power’s insidious hegemony and feminisation of the story’s personae. This feminisation is multi-layered; imperial control presents emasculated subjects, restricted to unfulfilled promises of violence away from the public sphere, where a masculine identity might be proven. Further, the public punishment that follows for the titular character is inextricably connected to his military and civil roles. His humiliation and removal from public life (read feminisation) is inevitably connoted

as the irruption of the crowd’s assertion of dominance, in disrupting colonial subjection through revolution.

Numerous details lend an ominous sense of the changing political milieu from which Hawthorne writes. The tale posits renewed emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to aid collective efforts; “(t)here was a sudden and general movement in the room, which Robin interpreted as expressing the eagerness of each individual to become his guide” (XI, 214). For the misinformed youth, the American setting confuses his ability to interpret collective discomfort as a willingness towards individual action. Robin’s misreading foreshadows the tale’s dramatic conclusion, despite the apparent obscuring of clues to the naive protagonist. There is an indefatigable inquisitiveness to his character that is suggestive of the temperament required of a “shrewd youth, (who) may rise in the world” (XI, 231). Robin’s “instinctive antipathy” toward the night-watchman, “the guardian of the midnight order” (XI, 218), is a characteristically Jacksonian reaction to the voyeuristic blending of public and private suggested in the controlling impulses of this figure. In attempting to subjugate the normal tendencies of Americans spatially (guarding against individual action) and temporally (repressing the public space in light and darkness), the colonial oppressors leave their subjects with little option but the “sudden and general movement” (XI, 228) of revolution. Even Robin, encountering the “double-faced fellow” (XI, 228) is aware of the inevitability of his later involvement, “that he was himself to bear a part in the pageantry” (XI, 228). Figured through the confusing, tumultuous egalitarianism of darkness, the explosion of revolutionary fervour in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” is based fundamentally on its equalising qualities.

The phantasmagoric conclusion is interesting in its representation of the “mob”. Night provides the cover necessary for these pre-Revolutionary citizens to live out their democratic desires, in a space that is made safe from colonial oppression in its opacity. This tale’s analysis of a penal public sphere emphasises the physical shackles of colonialism. In its Jacksonian setting, this
fact may be continued to rhetoric of the era that called for the simplification of the public sphere -
and amplification of natural nativity that, by right, wished to extend dominion over an enlivening,
enlightening freedom that, in its corporeal and national forms, was rightfully America’s. As stated
by Jackson early in his second presidential term:

If only I can restore to our institutions their primitive simplicity and purity, can only succeed
in banishing those extraneous corrupting influences which tend to fasten monopoly and
aristocracy on the constitution and to make the Government an engine of oppression to the
people instead of the agent of their will…100

This story’s political resonance is layered upon the democratic milieu of its composition. The
dynamic that exists between its individualising and homogenising tendencies leans heavily on
contemporaneous rhetoric utilised by the Jacksonian Democrats. In providing his colonial
characters a space in which they might enact their freedom from oppression, Hawthorne signals the
progressive democratisation of America so important to its perception at the time of the tale’s
publication.

The tale’s conclusion ambiguously evidences the individualistic implications of its
construction. Although the “dense multitude” is made up of unidentifiable figures, the mob’s leader
is not only individualised, but represented as “war personified” (XI, 227). The crowd are portrayed
not simply as a multitude of revolutionary persuasion, but a carefully detailed portrayal of various
metonymic personae that encapsulate and portend nascent revolutionary violence. The “single
horseman”, known “by his fierce and variegated countenance” (XI, 227), personifies the impending
Revolution. This production and reproduction of revolutionary impulse, the “many fantastic shapes

100 Andrew Jackson to Tilghman Ashurst Howard, August 20, 1833, Series 1: General Correspondence, http://
hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/maj.01084_0354_0357.
without a model”, the “mass of…applauding spectators” (XI, 228), is consistent with images of the “people” evoked in Jacksonian rhetoric. Hawthorne’s “people” reject the restricted order of economic and social repression as part of their native temperament. Major Molineux’s destiny is explained through the carnivalesque normalisation of people’s desire for freedom not as privilege but as natural right. This analysis is opposed to Sharon Cameron’s discussion of the text, which suggests the meaninglessness of the people’s violence; “Or rather, what meaning it does have…seems an inconsequential part of a more inexplicable violence that first enlists a cause and then subsumes it.”

This point of view overlooks the importance of Hawthorne’s own revolutionary milieu, in favour of the more straightforwardly revolutionary moment that is prophesied by the story’s conclusion. The double-layering of Jacksonian and eighteenth-century prefigures the tumultuous denouement, and legitimises the actions of the mob in terms more understandable to an audience of Hawthorne’s era.

The violence visited upon the Major presents a possible judgement against the purported promise of the revolution. Hawthorne’s representation of Molineux’s demise connotes an infernal psychopompos, problematising the moment of revolutionary action that permitted the crowd to commit this act of humiliation. The tarring and feathering of Molineux by Hawthorne in the early 1830s has percolated through layers of American history. Before the Revolution, provincial Massachusetts towns saw a remarkable increase in its use against colonial targets and British sympathisers. Historical evidence indicates that the basic aim of this act was the mortification of its victim, in order to testify publicly against his being “a gentleman.”


Hawthorne’s major ties him to the sense of unease surrounding aristocratic characters, and their connection with colonial rule. The inevitable connotation of “Major” with aristocracy, empire and subjection define the mob’s actions within a discourse of revolutionary conflict. The mortification of the titular character is, however, problematised by Hawthorne because of the practice’s continuation into the antebellum period, albeit with decreasing utilisation. In 1835, after the story’s publication, prominent Massachusetts abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was threatened with “tar-and-feathers”, indicative of the power of humiliation that attended this mob punishment, long beyond the reaches of the Revolution.105 The public nature of this punishment relied on the victim’s role in society to that point. Crucial to the process of embarrassment intrinsic to the tarring-and-feathering was a recognition of the publicity of the subject’s position; Hawthorne provides a painful reminder that the revolutionary chastisement meted out to “gentleman” and British officers was continued into his own era to suppress radical or overtly political public spokesmen.

In Hawthorne’s time, such humiliation tactics were utilised against abolitionists and “anti-social elements” as a form of “community justice”. Further literary reference of the era to this method of disciplining is made in Poe’s darkly comic short story about the conditions of mental asylum patients in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” (1845). This, then, is far more than a democratic claim of independence on the part of the would-be American revolutionaries. Hawthorne’s immediate political context informed this dehumanising disciplining, and served to indicate the vicious mob-mentality that might overcome individual rationality, focusing on means rather than ends.

Having seen these grotesque events unfold, Robin is refused a return to his rural home. His status as an American citizen-to-be requires relocation, physically and ideologically, to a space of individual values. The agrarian sphere that slowly receded to make way for the world of industry and capitalism, and the difference in their respective economies, was of central concern to

---

Hawthorne’s contemporary political system. The implication of the story’s final lines (“Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux” (XI, 231)) rebukes nepotistic patronage and privilege. Democrats wished for a return to the Revolution’s principles informs the narrative’s ultimate vision of the self-made man, and elucidated the turn from aristocratic privilege as foundational to personal transformation.

The inculcation of personal development into a national(ist) ethos in antebellum America was perhaps most fruitfully utilised by Hawthorne for his composition of Franklin Pierce’s campaign biography. Biographers in the post-Jacksonian era utilised Jackson’s recognisable traits in order to guarantee the legitimacy of his would-be heirs. In 1824 the citizenry were promised that Jackson was:

not…one of those blind infatuated partizans, who holds the opinions of others in derision, and determines the good or bad qualities of a man according as he belongs to this or the other political sect; but influenced by higher and nobler sentiments, acts on the liberal principle that:

Honour and shame from no condition rise,

Act well your part, there all the honour lies -

Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow.\footnote{John Henry Eaton, \textit{The Life of Andrew Jackson} (Philadelphia: Bradford Publishing, 1824), 438.}
Jacksonian ideology was a personal characteristic. As represented in Democratic newspapers, his unbounded zeal for expansion was matched only with his “seamless, life-long party allegiance.” Following his retirement from politics, as Brown notes, candidates required an “almost stereotyped method of appeal” in order to create the “correct” symbol, one that consisted of “the ideas, beliefs, images, ideals, and emotions that the American public reveres.” The process of presenting an appropriate presidential aesthetic, although propagandistic, was a central aspect of the delivery of a candidate to as wide an audience as possible.

If the candidates themselves were reluctant to appear before the people, their friends could at least present them through the incalculable power of the printed word… In the place of the candidate could take in a campaign was limited, it may be that the image constructed around him was more important in advancing his cause than his own conduct.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was asked to write a campaign biography for his former Bowdoin classmate for the 1852 election in which the Democratic nominee was a “dark horse” candidate. This work has been overlooked throughout criticism of Hawthorne’s work, reserved to a small sample of article-length analyses, and perfunctory mentions within more extensive critiques of the fiction. This text is placed at a critical juncture of Hawthorne’s career. The campaign biography is, chronologically, sandwiched between *House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Seen in this light, *The Life of Franklin Pierce* inhabits an important position commercially and in terms of the author’s reputation. If *House of the Seven Gables* might be viewed as Hawthorne's

---


literary continuation and usage of Puritan scandal and influence on the Salem area to consolidate the audience attracted by *The Scarlet Letter*, then the *Life* is an important element of Hawthorne’s utilisation of his literary reputation at the height of the “American Renaissance”. As Scott E. Casper notes, Hawthorne bifurcated careers converged in 1852, with the “noted author” winning “a lucrative patronage plum.”

The Hawthorne campaign biography became the principal printed communication of Pierce’s life during the election trail, with more creative editions suppressed in order to give precedence to the work of the established New England author. Our concern here is not to compare these works, nor to identify the literary distinction (or lack thereof) of *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, but to ascertain the individualistic aesthetic with which Hawthorne imbued the work. Furthermore, we will look to how Hawthorne and this book were positioned in the literary marketplace of the time. This is important for our understanding of the nexus in which an author and his product were represented and commodified in mid-nineteenth century America, even at an advanced stage of the writer’s career.

It is notable that Hawthorne was the first person of “literary character”, as O’Sullivan’s *Democratic Review* informed its readership, to deign to take on what the contemporaneous *Westminster Review* called the “mongrel species of literature called “political biography.” In a damnatory tone, this anonymous reviewer admonished Hawthorne for “dealing in compliments”, rather than appealing to artistic qualities as any discerning writer should; “his genius forsakes him; and his usual thoughtfulness is replaced by declamatory panegyric.” The differing, transatlantic conceptions of the literary marketplace are striking. Even Whig reviewers in America accepted the “remarkable and poetic beauty of style with which Hawthorne wrote”, however much they disliked

---

100 Casper, “Two Lives”, 203.


112 ibid, 234.
his blatant entry into party political propagandising. The British reviewer was shut off from Hawthorne’s reasoning into taking the project, and, in a broader sense, the realities of authorship in America. For Hawthorne, such lucrative work could scarcely be refused. As Evert Duyckinck pointed to; “(I)t has brought (Hawthorne) down from the subtle metaphysical analysis of morbid temperaments…to a healthy encounter with living interests.” This contemporary observation, and the criticism that followed Hawthorne’s life and literature from Henry James’s Hawthorne onwards has largely indicated an impression of Hawthorne’s character, a “citizen of somewhere else”, rather than the actuality of his career. In this formulation, the “somewhere else” has been given preference, rather than attention being paid to the fact that Hawthorne refers to himself as a “citizen”, presumably of a polis, and its attendant duties and responsibilities. Far from solely being an aloof, distant observer of life, Hawthorne’s pronouncement is indicative of his connectedness with state and society, a citizen whose minds lies “elsewhere”, but whose physical reality fundamentally connects him to his position in the Custom House.

This comment quietly alludes to the mutual importance of this work to both Pierce and Hawthorne, a politico-literary symbiosis that aestheticises the would-be President in the mould of Jackson, and represents the writer as willing citizen whose simultaneous appreciation of American democratic ideals reaffirms his standing “at the head of all the living writers of fiction in this country.” The convergence of politics and literature allowed Hawthorne the opportunity to comment openly on his conception of liberal democracy and the individualism that was a latent force in his works.

This must be borne in mind when we interpret Arlin Turner’s assertion that this biography “brought Hawthorne into prominence on the political scene, (but) he was by no means a beginner in

---


114 ibid, 232.

115 ibid, 230.
politics. His tutelage had begun with the efforts of his friends in 1837 to place him on the Reynolds expedition.\textsuperscript{116} This attempt was part of a conscious construction and public exhibition of Hawthorne’s beliefs, an externalisation that legitimised his work in Market Revolution America. As identified by Ticknor and Fields, the commission of an election biography was “above all a cheap advertisement for Hawthorne and the publishing firm itself.”\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore, it presented a chance for diversity in a market that cherished variety.\textsuperscript{118} The understanding of the perceptive reader acknowledged this diversification, at the same time as it understood the aesthetic at play beneath such self-presentation; “Mr. Hawthorne presents himself before us in the triple aspect of the novelist, biographer, and politician. It is not to be expected, even of a man of so much versatility, that he should appear quite so well in each character…”\textsuperscript{119}

The identification of Hawthorne as politician finds slight, almost playful, resistance in the book’s preface, where the author declares himself “so little of a politician that he scarcely feels entitled to call himself a member of any party” (i). Hawthorne’s task, as he makes clear, is an exercise in the lost art of telling the truth; to balance biased celebrations of Pierce in the Democratic press and overly harsh excoriations of his anonymity and record by the Whigs.\textsuperscript{120} The writer’s characteristic ambiguity is latent throughout this statement; the “lost” nature of the truth, to be recovered through Pierce’s presidency, was missing from American life, a damning indictment on an age that sought to “rewrite” history in its own democratic guise. Although Hawthorne continues with the reformulation of historical narrative, his prevarication before the overt politicisation of history is clear. Hawthorne the writer was tempted to muddy the idealised picture of Revolutionary

\textsuperscript{116} Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, 252.

\textsuperscript{117} Casper, “Two Lives”, 216.


\textsuperscript{119} Hale, “Nathaniel Hawthorne”, 230.

\textsuperscript{120} Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Life of Franklin Pierce (Boston: Dodo Press, 1852), i. Henceforward, all references to The Life of Franklin Pierce will be included parenthetically within the text.
Era America presented in the biography’s opening section. This is achieved through the Jacksonian portrait of Pierce and his family. As the biography begins, one could be forgiven for believing not only that Pierce would grow into his role as successor to Andrew Jackson, but that he was, in fact, the great General’s son. General Benjamin Pierce shares the impulsivity of Jackson, and seems to follow suit in his individualistic, dutiful and entrepreneurial impulses. This latter quality is a clear anachronism in the presentation of the narrative. From the agricultural milieu of life during the War of Independence, Pierce’s father is seemingly endowed with the capitalist feeling that so marked Hawthorne’s era. Hawthorne melds the time periods to suggest both the Pierce family’s foresight and capabilities, but also to indicate the effective continuity between these generations.

In recapturing the “lost art of telling the truth”, Hawthorne paints a direct lineage between Benjamin Pierce’s Revolutionary past, and his son’s democratic future; being political movements cut from the same historical cloth. Benjamin’s ability to alter roles in daily life make him the archetypal Jacksonian patriot. As news of “the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord” (1) is disseminated throughout the colonies, Franklin’s father-to-be inhabits the role of the noble plowman who teleologically suspends the ethical, taking up arms to fulfil his nation’s destiny as inextricably linked to that of America.

To live and fight for one’s country, it is suggested, is the sweetest thing, something that both Pierce, his father, and Jackson share in common. Renewed emphasis on the individual further differentiated the heroic dead from the heroic survivors. To serve one’s country was a life-long undertaking, and could be augmented by the noble quest for democracy after fighting for freedom. The heroic energy of the Revolutionary Era, in Hawthorne’s utilisation of history, was bestowed upon the proponents of democracy who fought valiantly against the oppression of “the people” into the mid-nineteenth century. Hawthorne positioned Pierce in the mould of previous generations, whose fight against colonial rule had been transposed to the insidious threat of patrician rule in the 1850s.
To emphasise further the Jacksonian father figure, Benjamin Pierce was similarly iron-willed in his “fidelity to his principles” which “marked every public, as well as private, action of his life” (2). His convictions were personally held, but reliant on the influence of Jefferson. The correlation of Jefferson and Jackson is strongest in this section, foregrounding the latter as his generation’s connection to the ideals of independence and revolution. Pierce’s “inflexibly democratic” values foreshadowed those of Jackson, who grew from a similar generation, patriotic to the core, opportunistic but not selfish, ever-ready to put forward his political opinion “at all places of casual resort, where…the minds of men were made to operate effectually upon each other” (4).

The typological significance of Jackson, to both Franklin Pierce and his father, throughout this book indicates Hawthorne’s intent of portrayal, and, indeed, the larger setting of the text’s role within the literary marketplace. As Casper affirms, Hawthorne’s commission was not for innovation, his name printed prominently on the book’s cover, combined with the “language of popular literature culture” alongside “well-worn images of Jacksonian political culture,” would be enough for the purposes of the campaign.121

The repetition of figural imagery and detail of Pierce’s minor speeches and engagements as a lawyer works to foreground a foundation of antebellum democratic principles upon which the candidate’s campaign rested. If Hawthorne’s objective was to “craft the solid promotional literature that sold both his candidate and his book”,122 what was actually required was a sense of identificatory relations between author, politician, and public. Hawthorne’s position was not simply a name of renown or a college friend of the subject, but a knowing narrator who could identify the utility of enduring Jacksonian folklore, all the while portraying Pierce with a subtle nod of recognition to a literary culture existing beyond this work of electoral propaganda.

---

121 Casper, “Two Lives” 204.
122 Roggenkamp, “Campaigning for the Literary Marketplace”, 368.
Intrinsic to the Revolutionary generation’s spirit, individualism was an inevitable characteristic that allowed for easy self-identification and the acknowledgement of success. Hawthorne’s authorship was deeply telling in this manner, providing the writer the opportunity to assert his composition “as the rhetorical source of biographic truth.”

The Pierce campaign was the first to sanction officially only one biography - previously, editions of the life of Martin Van Buren or James K. Polk proliferated, their supporters pointing to such competition to tell the presidential story as a sign of the candidate’s fame. For Hawthorne and his publishers, the economy of literature enforced the need to engender an image of the authority of their edition over any other. The use of recognisable traits and adherence to conventions of Jacksonian imagery was a rhetorical strategy on the author’s part, a confirmation, not of his knowledge of the subject alone, but an aestheticised version of what it was to be an American. His utilisation of the gamut of Jacksonian images and a keen knowledge of his lifetime’s democratic history was an appeal to readers of having lived the era alongside them.

Hawthorne occupied an authorial space that refuted the rarefied air of “literature”. Just as he was required, in a manner of speaking, to disconnect Pierce the lawyer from the negative connotations of the legal profession, so Hawthorne had to justify his own presence to the reader. Pierce, it is noted, having been granted a stern, early moral education by his patriotic father, failed to win his first case (10). Similarly, Hawthorne remarks that his work, a first time offering in the political sphere, cannot be flattered for being remarkably successful (i). Not only is the book set up to narrate Pierce’s personal bildung on the way to the presidency, it stands also to appeal to our perception of Hawthorne the author, who presented himself in the same vein of being tested only to

---

123 Casper, “Two Lives”, 207.

124 For more on this element of competition, see Hershel Parker, Melville: A Biography Vol. 1, 1817-1851 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 323-327. This section tells the story of James K. Polk’s search for a campaign biographer, with the most notable candidate suggested being Gansevoort Melville, Herman’s older brother.
overcome, like the best of American manhood, whose daily travails are empathised with, by writer and subject.

Inevitably, Hawthorne’s hurried narrative included autobiographical details collated from other sources, including the testimony of political colleagues and friends of Pierce within the legal profession. His consultation process for the work was curtailed due to the nature of the political campaign, where economic and marketing concerns, not to mention the presence of other biographies for sale, forced Hawthorne’s hand in its speedy construction. Furthermore, during the summer of 1852, Hawthorne’s sister, Louisa, drowned in a tragic steamboat accident. These events conspired to slow the development of the work, despite Hawthorne’s initial word to Pierce that he was “taking (the) life as fast” as he could.125

The focus in critical work on this understudied element of Hawthorne’s career often suggests the masculinity that Hawthorne utilised in order to convey his image of the nominee. In figuring our conception of the text around the legacy of Jackson however, the emphasis of the narrative shifts to include not only contemporary ideas of masculinity, but evidence of the author’s specific engagement with continuing strains of Jacksonian ideals. The author evidently wrote back to his own personal conception of Jackson, in his typological portrayal of Pierce. We are told:

During these years, the contest for the presidency had been fought with a fervour that drew almost every body into it, on one side or the other, and had terminated in the triumph of Andrew Jackson. Franklin Pierce, in advance of his father’s decision, though not in opposition to it, had declared for the illustrious man, whose military renown was destined to be thrown into the shade by a civil administration the most splendid and powerful that ever

adorned the annals of our country. I love to record the subject of this memoir, that his first political faith was pledged to that great leader of the democracy (11).

There are numerous strategies at work here, combining the historical imprint of Jackson with both Pierce’s suitability for office and Hawthorne’s ability as an author for his current enterprise. This excerpt shows clear indication of the aforementioned “seamless, life-long party allegiance” prerequisite for any Democratic candidate. Hawthorne implies that Franklin Pierce never knew anything other than the democratic values passed on to him by his heroic father. The joy Hawthorne shares in narrating the first pledge of Pierce’s political faith is consolidated as a suggested commonality between author and patron. Not content in his work as biographer, Hawthorne’s authorial intrusion works as an audition for future positions within the incumbent’s administration. Further individualistic sentiment within the Life can be traced in its early drafts, prior to the approval of Pierce, who inspected the manuscript in August 1852. As Claude M. Simpson details, Hawthorne’s conception of Pierce on the battlefield was, in fact, toned down before reaching the presses:

Where Hawthorne had written that it was General Pierce’s brigade "upon which the fortunes of the day entirely depended," Pierce replaced "entirely" with "much" (MS 61; p. 96). And where his bravery was described as "reckless" and "rash," he evidently felt it expedient to eliminate such signs of bravado (MS 66; p. 104). He canceled a considerable transcript from his Mexican diary describing childish behavior of troops, perhaps because he sensed a gratuitous slur on young volunteers now eligible to vote…Pierce kept the substance without the grandiloquence associated with the language of military citations. Although the revision did not eliminate an account of the "stirring" remarks Pierce made to the officers as they

---

passed, he did recast his message so that it read, not that the honor of New England was in the hands of the Ninth Infantry (as Hawthorne had it), but that the honor of the country was in the hands of the entire brigade.\textsuperscript{127}

Hawthorne’s portrayal of Pierce erred towards the individualistic and ultra-masculine. Where this analysis disagrees with Simpson is the contention that such changes by Pierce constituted “minor cosmetic touch-ups”.\textsuperscript{128} The portrait offered by Hawthorne was altogether too in-line with that of Andrew Jackson, the rampaging general whose effectiveness in war was borne of an iron will and fervent patriotism. Pierce’s alterations appear to affirm the latter while discarding the former of these qualities, advocating the effort of the brigade over that of the “reckless” leader whose individual genius might win the day. Obviously, Pierce’s self-image differed from that which Hawthorne was in the process of constructing. The “model of manhood” that Leland S. Person has noted as central to Hawthorne’s project is inextricably linked to the male-centred individualism that so defined American economic relations during this era.\textsuperscript{129} It is important to note, therefore, Pierce’s “corrections” as indicative of the differences between Hawthorne’s portrait of his subject and that subject’s self-perception. It is clear that Hawthorne’s version of Pierce over-emphasised individualistic characteristics, refusing the balance so carefully struck in Jacksonian portraits that viewed Old Hickory as a “man of malleable iron” will.\textsuperscript{130} Pierce’s changes not only deflect the glory to his regiment, but move away from Hawthorne’s Jacksonian contention that the honour of all New England depended upon the actions of the general alone.


\textsuperscript{128} ibid, 380.


\textsuperscript{130} Ward, \textit{Jackson}, 137.
Pierce’s personal development continually focuses on this experiential quality, over a classical education; the “truth (that Pierce) has no fluency of words, except when an earnest meaning and purpose supply their own expression” (13) holds a multitude of potential interpretations. Under the book’s typology, this statement marked Pierce both as the ultimate party man and as someone who believed strongly that those who spoke most eloquently were those “cormorants of office”, the Whigs, whose governance was “constituted only to take money out of the pockets of the people.”  

The quiet man of deeds, whose principles stood for the common American man over personal financial gain, worked both to remind the reader of Jackson’s special place in American history, while emphasising his heir apparent as perfectly situated to continue the honourable work of the Democracy.

The work of individualism was one of a progressive truth; Jackson’s core belief in the “People” was based on his having been influenced by Jefferson’s assertion that “definite limits” could no longer be assigned to “the improveability of the human race.” As Nye attests, the change in attitude to individualism at this time, particularly in America, centred on the new emphasis on rationality as an active agent in the availability of “truth”. To highlight a speech or comment of a Democrat was to, in the constructs of the campaign biography, focus on the area where Whiggish duplicity was at its height. Traditional Whig charges against Democrat candidates of nepotism, used initially against Van Buren, or of a lack of public duty were, almost paradoxically, signs of excellent party practice interwoven along similar lines. The refusal to be tied strongly to specific causes was, far from a weakness, further indication of selfless democratic action, in Pierce’s case a period of learning, where his support was expected for organisational causes, alongside his humble party allegiance; “Amidst great national affairs, he was acquiring the best of all educations for future

---

131 Heale, The Presidential Quest, 208.


133 ibid, 4.
eminence and leadership. In the midst of statesmen, he grew to be a statesman” (16). This part of Pierce’s life, rather than a classical education, was to be the foundation upon which his democratic spirit was built.

This represented the Democrat trope of continuous, forward-looking development that so connected the individualistic citizen to his ambitious country. As Dimock states in relation to the era’s vaunted individualism and its creation of “new men” without familial or societal ties; “…the seeker with no past at his back… The art of discontinuity, judiciously applied, clearly (had) its political advantages.” Throughout the biography, Hawthorne enacted this selfsame careful “art of discontinuity” in its contrast of Pierce with his opponent, Winfield Scott. Pierce was portrayed not as an old soldier in the mould of Scott, but as a “new man”. Its appeal to Democrats lay simultaneously in the renewed emphasis placed on the future, and rhetorical constructions of destiny and potential for infinitude. In constructing what was typically democratic and Democratic about Pierce, Hawthorne embedded his subject’s forward-looking world-view within a progressive portrait that associated the little-known politician with Jackson, the Founding Fathers (particularly Jefferson) and an overall picture of the nation as expanding and developing in its destined manner.

It remains for the citizens of this great country to decide, within the next few weeks, whether they will retard the steps of human progress by placing at its head an illustrious soldier, indeed, a patriot and one indelibly stamped into the history of the past, but who has already done his work, and has not in him the spirit of the present or of the coming time,- or whether they will put their trust in a new man, whom a life of energy and various activity

134 Dimock, Empire for Liberty, 125.

135 Note particularly that the Democratic Review referred to Hawthorne in their review of Pierce’s campaign biography as “Nathaniel Hawthorne, politician”.  

73
has tested, but not worn out, and advance with him into the auspicious epoch upon which we are about to enter (84).

Pierce, unlike Scott, was formulated in a manner that tied individual and nation together in a progressive manner. The way in which Scott was represented, although not disrespectful, bound him and his party to a past that no longer suited an “American way of life”. Without Pierce as president, it was suggested, the nation would deny itself its own destiny, manifest in the democratic promise that the candidate advanced from its Jeffersonian and Jacksonian roots, and renewed with his own individualistic, inquisitive spirit. Pierce was not just one man in the midst of his age; he had the potential to become the age, a reflection on the individual power of Jackson and his lasting legacy into the antebellum era.

The biography’s objective was, by necessity, to focus on the deeds of the past in order to illustrate the life of the current persona. Immanent in any campaign biography, however, is an expectant election victory. In writing about the Jacksonian past of Pierce, Hawthorne simultaneously foreshadowed the Democratic presidency of his subject and friend. As Slotkin phrases it; “Buckskin is a necessary stage through which American heroes pass on their way to presidential broadcloth.”136 That which is symbolised by the former is inclusive of the variety of personal traits continuously attributed to Andrew Jackson - egalitarianism, individualism, entrepreneurialism, “achievement and self-aggrandisement without end.”137

Within the parameters of the age’s promise-filled capitalism was not simply the ability to become a self-made man, but to self-make a personal image that was consonant with one’s ambitions. Franklin Pierce’s constructed image, through Hawthorne, is particularly interesting for

136 Slotkin, Fatal Environment, 126.

137 ibid, 126. Also, from the same analysis, Slotkin states that; “Jackson was the man of humble birth who had risen…to the status of a traditional aristocrat…(his) power as a figure in popular mythology derived from his unique combination of aristocratic status with a plebeian or backwoods style”, 123.
its many-layered qualities, not simply that of the candidate, but of the writer also. It translates, in figural and descriptive fashion, to a broader analogy of American growth. We are told that Pierce’s “intellectual growth, continued beyond the ordinary period (25),” something analogously reflected in his physical constitution - “it being a fact that he continued to grow in stature between his twenty-first and twenty-fifth years” (25). This growth is, suggested by the dates of Pierce’s 21st and 25th years respectively, contemporaneous with Andrew Jackson’s election campaigns of 1824 and 1828. Not only does Pierce reflect the expansion of the nation as a whole during this time, his continued growth simultaneously cleaves to the ascension of Jackson through the highest echelons of political representation. Physically, and ideologically, Pierce’s life has proven a consistent chart for the evolution of democratic values in America, Hawthorne’s work seems to suggest. Such development, grounded in heredity and identity, is an ever-present strand of the Life. This is illustrated in Hawthorne’s mournful statement regarding the death of Benjamin Pierce, something that manages to mark our impression of where Franklin had come from, while reaffirming the importance of ambition to the nation; “His father died in…1839, at the mansion which he built, after the original log cabin grew too narrow for his rising family and fortunes” (26). There can be no sense of begrudging the Pierce family the wealth for which they toiled - buckskin to broadcloth was not simply the reserve of presidents, but for the patriotic individualist reflected in his country’s growth.

The Life is a testament to the image of the man at its core, an idealised Jacksonian democrat whose personal growth was harmonious with that of his nation, a figure of such “unbroken consistency” (67) that eschewed temporary renown for longstanding personal and national gain. Hawthorne created a character whose representational form indicates a variety of personal, socio-political meanings. Rooted in the past but fixated with future national glorification, Franklin Pierce was never promised as a panacea to America’s ills, but was ideally positioned as an ostensibly extraordinary everyman to work for the “people”. Conveniently, Hawthorne’s claims to truth in the
Life are further supplemented by his active portrayal of Pierce in the guise of far-sighted man of action. The author states; “(f)or the sake of true manhood, we gladly turn to confide the course adopted by General Pierce…(at) one of those junctures which test the difference between the man of principle and the mere politician” (71). Hawthorne prefaced this book with the claim that he felt himself “so little of a politician” as to be unable to declare himself for any party. What this falsehood amounted to, retrospectively, was a claim laid for the responsibility and facticity of the work. To be involved in politics as a politician was to be untrustworthy, a “cormorant” who reneged on his ultimate duty to himself, i.e. to be independent, in order to pander to others in order to remain in power. Pierce relinquished his independence on no score if we are to believe this idealised portrait, his knowledge that religious belief was a matter for the individual soul was both strongly Jacksonian and, more largely, indicative of this central tenet. Pierce’s growth was situated within a narrative of individualism that Hawthorne posited about America as a whole. This was not an unquestioning acceptance, but, like with Franklin Pierce, a process of interrogating the positive and negative qualities of self-reliance. Bound to this was the candidate’s analytical perspective on the influence of politics on that which the American man holds most dearly: “He had looked long and closely at the effects of high public station on the character and happiness, and on what is the innermost and dearest part of man's possessions - his independence” (79). Not only was individual freedom a self-made thing, it was a process of increasing ownership, something proven in the public sphere, before one’s fellow independent man. Mapped on to the nation, we find again the notion of a personified individualism that allowed and required interchangeable aesthetics in order to function. The Life is a further product of the dynamic nexus between the poles of individualism and nationalism, the personifying processes that existed within this dynamic relation, and the interference of the anthropomorphised economy (viz. “the Bank”) that impinged on the ordinary citizen. In this whirling space of competing entities, Pierce and Hawthorne were both independent
and symbiotically codependent within the market sphere, sellers of selfhood modelled on previous incarnations of the idealised American self.

This work held a layered economy of selfhood within Hawthorne’s authorship; the expansion of his own (and his publishers’ market) was equally an extension of perceived selfhood in order to control and regulate a personal economy. This necessitated the aestheticisation of Hawthorne as author to legitimise his construction of the Pierce we find in the Life, an image of the writer as friend, confidante, and, most importantly, truth-teller. Hawthorne divorced himself from his own image of “politician” in order to renew his political activity - he relied on the ability to interchange his image in this book as much as he does in the literary marketplace. “(T)he market… has two positions to offer. As a model of exchange...in a functional complementarity - it must constitute the individual as a double entity.” The Life of Franklin Pierce problematised this complementarity, exhibiting the polyvalent outlets of existence between writer and subject, where self-identification was a continuous re-figuration of the self to the perception of others. Hawthorne's authorial aesthetic, crafted long before this work, is seen not wholly in terms of complementarity to Pierce’s political aesthetic, but, more fruitfully, as an evolving relation that subsumes “opposite” characteristics in a mutual fashion.

The prevailing tenets of individualism influenced Hawthorne’s narratives, but also the ideological, social and political concerns that pervaded his role as author. In the American Notebooks, the writer bemoaned the ever-converging worlds of reality and superficiality; “A man tries to be happy in love; he cannot sincerely give his heart, and the affair seems all a dream. In domestic life, the same; in politics, a seeming patriot; but still he is sincere, and all seems like a theatre” (VIII, 153). Duncan Faherty has discussed the considerable effect that “Jacksonian godheadism was (having on) domestic identity”, and, by extension, self-identification. America,

138 Dimock, Empire for Liberty, 188.

as it appears in Hawthorne’s rendering, placed too much emphasis on the creation of an image of self-making, where real nationalism and “seeming patriots” are confused to the point that the actuality of their national feeling is rendered unimportant. To be self-made in the public sphere was necessarily to present an interchangeable image of shifting selves - it was the consistency of such interchangeability that provided the basis for individualistic self-presentation. Hawthorne’s disillusionment with this ambiguity was borne out in a number of his longer works, particularly in his exploration of the tensions between collective duty and individual fulfilment.

Connected to this theatre of public aesthetic, Hawthorne invoked the theatrical throughout his work, where the prevailing sense of self-identity was one of misrepresentation, a “contrivance” (III, 8) to the world that hides an unnatural, twisted motive at its core. Hawthorne’s experiences at Brook Farm informed, to some degree, the narrative of *The Blithedale Romance*. Much of what Hawthorne presented as false about both his personal experience and that of his protagonist, Miles Coverdale, was the decidedly atemporal and anti-progressive nature of the community that refused a voice to the individual in the context of the early 1840s.

Hawthorne’s narrative has an unusually strong American identity, despite its insistent ethereality. The “atmosphere of strange enchantment” (III, 2) may seem an esoteric ground upon which to lay a charge of nationalism, but this is “what the American romancer needs” (III, 2). The strategy of separating his romances from the directly relatable public sphere may appear purely literary in its aims, but Hawthorne used this technique to claim subtly a sense of the work’s literary nationalism - for it is rarefied air from which his *American* art stems. Interestingly, “a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel”, the author, with “his present concern with the Socialist Community” seeks “to establish a theatre” (III, 1). Here, in this uniquely American setting, Hawthorne created a drama of the individual.

Hawthorne indicates early on that this community did not live up to expectation. There is a falseness to its presentation in the opening pages connected to “a phenomenon in the mesmeric
line” (III, 5). Despite being the required environment to compose his narrative, it is this same atmosphere of “enchantment” through which the inhabitants have a “propriety of their own” (III, 2). This suggests the tension-filled connection between Hawthorne’s artistic efforts and Blithedale’s communal fault-lines. The setting of this experiment required a mystical quality in order to present conflicting individual personalities. The community is not a suitable driver of the story without the machinations of singular characters. The narrativisation of Blithedale elides this community basis from the outset, preferring to focus on the unique nature of interpersonal relationships, being incapable of detailing the group’s story as a whole. Without the personal “propriety” (III, 2) that the American romance needs, the tale would fall short in its scope. Hawthorne subtly introduced the “community” enforced upon people as something fake, the mesmerism required to maintain peoples’ involvement and active participation a suggestion of the unnatural coercion such communal experiments place on the liberated American spirit.

This story is one of masks and veils, where the public and private spheres interact in a dangerous fashion, ultimately concluding in the death of a self-making female. As Roberta Weldon states about Zenobia; “(s)he expresses herself in unconventional discourse and her power of articulation allows her to create her own image, while Priscilla waits for men to “veil” or unveil her at will.” If Blithedale is a masquerade, the question of who, if anyone, ultimately controls the process of masking is one of the central concerns of its plot. The slightest hint of control from an exterior, unwarranted source was viewed dimly in Jacksonian America. This text asks the reader to recast preconceived notions of individualism in order to introduce the self-made woman, whose threat is deemed too great for the patriarchal world of the mid-nineteenth century. Milette Shamir states that American literature of this era imagined “masculinity as closely linked to enclosed, interior, private spaces…(the) male writer often (found) freedom in retreating behind a “veil of

140 Roberta Weldon, Hawthorne, Gender, and Death: Christianity and Its Discontents (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 89.
ignorance”.”

Zenobia, the novel’s vital impulse, “is merely (the) public name” (III, 8) of this woman. It is “a sort of mask in which she comes before the world…a contrivance in short, like the white drapery of the Veiled Lady, only a little more transparent…” (III, 8) Blithedale is a text that understands the need to aestheticise oneself before the public - to present an image of self that, even amidst the confines of an egalitarian community, works to posit the individual as a dynamic member of society, capable of the upwards mobility that, at heart, these characters crave, and find denied in the socialist experiment.

Hawthorne carefully constructed the artificiality of the community so as to distance its inhabitants from the city and its indistinguishable masses, the “swinish multitude” (20) of the smoky, insincere metropolis. Indeed, even the most serious conversations that occur in the city, particularly those Coverdale holds with Old Moodie, are representative of the games that people play when in direct, if unseen, competition with each other. If Blithedale aims to promote “brotherhood” (III, 12) and “mutual aid” (III, 19), the city normalises quotidian contestation and acquisitive individualism. Interestingly, the Hawthornesque Coverdale most quickly arrives at a comprehension of the incommensurability of the Socialist community and expansionist America. From the halcyon days of his initial arrival at the farm, where Coverdale comments ironically, if not naively, that “nobody, at least, in our bleak little world of New England had dreamed of Paradise” (III, 9) until the beginning of the community, a fresh impetus, is provided. Hawthorne’s playfulness towards New England’s religious heritage aside, this situation changes quickly. All mention of things paradisiacal is replaced with the realisation that far from being a separation from capitalist acquisition, Blithedale further emphasises the inescapability of the economic system; “It struck me as rather odd, that one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, should relate to the possibility of getting the advantage over the

---

outside barbarians in their field of labor” (III, 20). The individuals involved in Blithedale have merely deferred self-involvement to a broader, community-based model of acquisition and competition. There is little difference, except in the displacement of individual responsibility. The community merely becomes, in its intersection with the market, another actor in the burgeoning capitalist system of this era.

Hawthorne, like Coverdale, may have involved himself in the Socialist community for noble reasons, but he cannot escape the inevitability of its undemocratic and unnatural aspects. The “selfish competition” Blithedale hopes to avoid is an inescapable fact of America at this stage of its development. As Charles Swann has pointed out, “(d)uring the empty religious experience of Blithedale, no translation - moral or artistic - occurs.”142 To this list we might add economic as well, for despite its intentions to profit without “wresting it by the strong hand from an enemy, or filching it craftily from those less shrewd than ourselves” (III, 19), Blithedale cannot help but be implicated in this economic system, and, by extension, the politics that accompanies it. Its ultimate failure, particularly for Coverdale, is its divorce from the reality of its time. Hawthorne subtly suggests this in introducing the economic and social fault-lines along which the community believe they are isolated. In assuming the dream of Paradise for those on the farm, the protagonist excludes New England religious history from the story. This suggests the self-made identity of Blithedale itself, a commune that creates its own past through the destruction of differing histories. The ahistorical community cannot truly remove itself from broader New England narratives however, its belief in its unique nature reproduces the false foundations of its existence. The communal life of Blithedale intensifies the focus on the need to self-create, rather than indicating a removal from the “self-seeking world” (III, 20). The story’s veils destroy its characters in the end, gnawing away at their original identity - further example of an experiment in Hawthorne's work that attempts to intercede

on mortal life for the purposes of mesmeric or supernatural gain, only to fail catastrophically because of humanity’s intractable nature.

Coverdale cannot remove the enduring aspects of antebellum life from his understanding of the world, despite the efforts of those in Blithedale, who are deeply implicated within it as well. He accepts the name Zenobia, even though he suggests knowledge of it being constructed for the public. Further to this, the name informs his perception of her person to the point that her birth-name is immaterial. Zenobia, “this quaint and prim cognomen” (III, 29) is, for Coverdale, a known aesthetic but one that has “so amalgamated itself with my idea of the girl, that it seemed as if no other name could have adhered to her for a moment” (III, 29). The question of a name “adhering” to someone inculcates both character and author in a discourse of self-making as a matter of inevitability. Zenobia’s choice of her name works in tandem with the social, public aesthetic she presents to the world. The name is further instance of a veil, utilised in the process of public self-making. Far from being isolated from its era, it is precisely the inability of Blithedale’s inhabitants to reconcile their modernity with a personal sense of self that creates the narrative’s central tension. The constant sense of secrecy that pervades the story often stems from the “fantasy” in which the farm is engaged (III, 27) coming into sharp conjunction with the reality of a world that requires active participation in a public sphere of masks, a paradoxical openness to hidden motives assumed on the part of rational actors. Coverdale’s naive beliefs are, apart from the cold that leaves him shaken physically, contributory to the “weakness” that allows others to impress themselves too powerfully on his “sphere” (III, 46-47). Blithedale’s isolation should not confuse temporal and spatial dimensions; it is inextricably of its time. What Coverdale sees as a purifying of intention at the farm is simply another aesthetic, the crafty machinations of others continue unabated, leaving him open to manipulation and the unreliable account of his experience.

The character of Hollingsworth further complicates the community’s portrayed sociability. His declaration of “an inflexible severity of purpose” (III, 43) marks him as a Melvillean
individualist who similarly declares “(t)he path of…fixed purpose is laid with iron rails whereon my soul is grooved to run.” Unlike such monomaniacal fixity, Hollingsworth is differentiated from the ship captain through his empathy, ostensible in his often caring position within the commune. He is described as “tender” (III, 43), there is “something of the woman” (III, 42) about him in Coverdale’s estimation. His self-exhortation is perceived in terms of quiet disbelief, as Coverdale foreshadows his most strenuous statements with descriptions designed to undercut his apparently “inflexible” (III, 43) nature.

Coverdale, despite his engagement with the Socialist experiment, continuously subverts the ideals and goals of Blithedale. While sick, and after being attended by Hollingsworth, Coverdale reads a variety of books that praise the individual above all else, namely “Mr. Emerson’s Essays, the Dial, Carlyle’s Works” (III, 52). To read these texts in his context is perhaps not the oxymoron it appears, but his conclusions on their shared message is undoubtedly a facetious indication of the shortcomings of communal living; “Agreeing in little else, most of these utterances were like the cry of some solitary sentinel, whose station was on the outposts of the advance-guard of human progression” (III, 52). The isolated individual emphasised throughout these works is an apparently uneasy bedfellow with Coverdale’s situation at Blithedale. To add insult to such injurious conclusions, the protagonist finds the work of Fourier, the man on whom the principles of the community were based, “horribly tedious” (III, 53). Coverdale in his sickbed appears to realise what Swann notes as the impossibility of the community “because of the irreconcilable contrast between the fluidity of personality and the evasive fixity of the mask.”

Negotiating the appearance and reality of the community, Coverdale identifies his democratic foundations in the world connoted by the city as not simply the “vast, undefined space, pressing from the outside” (III, 36) but the all-pervasive age of the individual that marks Blithedale as a contradictory reformation.

143 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 166.

Hawthorne’s essential call for balance between self and society is ostensibly ignored by the socialist commitment of some, and the “dreadful peculiarity” (III, 70) of others. Coverdale notices how difficult it is to gather people of such marked individuality together. In his contemplation of this fact, numerous instances of authorial intrusion enlarge the debate of Blithedale to the broader setting of America. This text discusses how individuals of differing opinions and outlooks have constructed a connection between citizens that “(is) not affirmative, but negative”; “(w)e had individually found one thing or another to quarrel with, in our past life, and were pretty well agreed as to the inexpediency of lumbering along with the old system any further” (III, 63). Blithedale questions the “negative” relation of person to person, where communality grows not from a shared presence, but from shared differing absences. Individual citizens held various conceptions of common identifying principles under the ethos of the era, while still self-identifying as nationalist. “America” was not a monolithic set of beliefs, attitudes or principles due to its state in nature. In a letter to Sophia of September 3rd, 1841, it could be Hawthorne or Coverdale explaining the isolation of Blithedale as intrinsically artificial, something that blunts the self’s growth in its insistence on a false communality better served in communion with other citizens:

But really I should judge it to be twenty years since I left Brook Farm; and I take this to be one proof that my life there was an unnatural and unsuitable and therefore an unreal one. It already looks like a dream behind me. The real Me was never an associate of the community; there has been a spectral Appearance there…But be not thou deceived, Dove of my heart. This Spectre was not thy husband…insomuch that many people persist in

145 Hawthorne undoubtedly bore in mind the cultural elite that populated Brook Farm; the impossibility of smoothly integrating a community of people whose core tenets (religious and social) were founded on the individual’s moral worth and powers of interpretation was not lost on him.

146 Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 232.
believing that he, after all, was the aforesaid spectral hornsounder, cow-milker, potatoe-hoer, and hay-maker. But such a people do not know a reality from a shadow (XV, 566).

Hawthorne’s presence in Brook Farm was masked. His refusal of communal life cannot wholly be shared by Coverdale given the tragic, traumatic ending that awaits the reader of *Blithedale*, however their shared emphasis on the artificiality of the constructed community is interesting in light of their respective focus on individual values. Coverdale goes so far as to seek out a “hermitage” while at the farm in order to keep his selfhood “inviolate” (III, 99). The hermitage, in its seclusion, draws Coverdale to comment that it “symbolized my individuality” (III, 99). Coverdale’s essentially democratic values keep him, despite his isolation, from the maniacal pursuits of Hollingsworth and Westervelt, both of whom act to subject their respective wills upon others’ minds. Although Hawthorne uses Westervelt, as Dohra Ahmad contends, “to parody phony spiritualism”, the professor’s “hyperbolic language also documents the connection between Mesmerism and movements for radical democracy.” Despite this, he is not so proud as to suggest complete innocence in the matter; “There are some spheres, the contact with which inevitably degrades the high, debases the pure…I detested this kind of man, and all the more, because a part of my own nature showed itself responsive to him” (III, 101, 102). Coverdale embodies one of the key paradoxes of Jacksonian society, namely the problem of negotiating how one could be individualistic without interfering overly in the affairs of others. Blithedale tests this to the extreme, the community barely restraining the impulse of various members to control through their “rigid and unconquerable” (III, 131) natures. Hawthorne’s democratic values disallowed his full engagement with Brook Farm and he similarly nuanced Coverdale’s situation - the desire for

---

occasional seclusion, a recognition of the community’s artifice, and the identification of the individual at the root of all society.

The prevailing sense that Coverdale is a product of his time is not, however, solely reserved to the clear democratic principles that allow him to maintain distance from Hollingsworth. Crucially, his attitude to Zenobia reflects his fundamentally patriarchal outlook; “(a)lthough he professes to be sympathetic to Zenobia’s position and even argues that women must not be subordinate to men, he cannot escape the power of prevailing ideas and express his commitment to radical views with action.” Despite her ostensible individualism, Zenobia is never identified entirely within or of herself, a superficial indication of the ingrained nature of a male-dominated social order. Even if the truth is initially concealed from Coverdale, her repression of various strongly-held traits in order to regain the acceptance of her father further suggests the relativity of her position as subordinate to masculine constructs.

Zenobia does, however, recognise the eventual futility of single-mindedness, particularly as displayed by Hollingsworth. As she answer Coverdale when asked if she ever truly felt herself a part of the “earnest, thoughtful, philanthropic labourers”; “Those ideas have their time and place… But, I fancy, it must be a very circumscribed mind that can find room for no others” (III, 164).

Unlike the story’s male characters that are allowed the space to execute their personal ideas as another aspect of their self-making, Zenobia is not allowed access to such processes of self-recognition. The world-weary male characters that, ultimately, define Zenobia’s fate, are afforded a sense of self-cultivation that, in its possibility, excludes women from similar experience. Zenobia herself repeats the ideological formation that forbids the transgression of such boundaries, albeit in relation to Coverdale’s admiration of Priscilla; “In society, indeed, a genuine American never dreams of stepping across the inappreciable air-line which separates one class from another” (III, 170). She assaults Coverdale’s comfortable patriarchal and individualistic values soon after when

---

148 Weldon, Hawthorne, Gender, and Death, 93.
questioning masculine ideas of duty that provide the basis for interference with other’s autonomy; “Oh, this stale excuse of duty!…I have often heard it before, from those who sought to interfere with me, and I know precisely what it signifies. Bigotry, self-conceit…” (III, 170) Zenobia charges Coverdale for his part in an oppressive world order that, on the one hand, extols the virtues of democracy, while, on the other, represses swathes of society to see their liberty fulfilled. In a manner deeply critical of the Jacksonian world-view, Zenobia interprets masculine individualism as an irreverent replacement of Providence, something that is deeply presumptuous of its importance to the world and, unfortunately, dismissive of those seen to be retardants of “Manifest Destiny”. Ironically, her self is measured negatively against her knowledge of the lack of self-cultivating opportunities. Obstacles are thrown before the would-be individualistic woman because she simultaneously threatens patriarchal order and reaffirms her subordination within this system; “…the whole universe…and Providence, or Destiny, to boot, make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair’s breadth out of the beaten track. Yes; and add,…that, with that one hair’s breadth, she goes all astray, and never sees the world in its true aspect, afterwards!” (III, 222)

Zenobia identifies the inherently male-centred world-view of individualism in a similar fashion to Hester Prynne, for whom knowledge of the entire situation changes everything “in its true aspect” (III, 224) upon her knowing. The challenges of women’s self-making were bound to the opposing status of individualism which devalues externally manifested displays of the feminine self. The intrinsic tension of this era’s individualism was deeply connected to the absence of shared characteristics upon which to draw the nation together. In introducing a potentially similar sense of individualism that spanned all sectors of society for women, merely through the construction and implementation of an aesthetic, the “steady course” of American progress may have been disrupted. Individualistic identity was, crucially, counterpointed with its lack elsewhere. Exceptionalism secured native thought in the belief that other states simply could not have their future guaranteed in
perfectibility to rival the United States.\textsuperscript{149} The process of affirming individualism as a core ideological tenet of American identity was a strengthening of existing social conditions and status. The dangerous individualism of some - Ahab, Hester, Zenobia, Ethan Brand - was as much reliant on their overstepping the “inappreciable air-line(s)” of “genuine American” (III, 170) society as their personal outlook.

To act in an individualistic manner at this time was to guarantee one’s own upholding of American ideals, codified and disseminated by the party machinery and political rhetoric of the era. Hawthorne’s texts inevitably tended towards the democratic, but their subversive qualities were consistently interspersed with depictions of affirmative social reality that dispersed the outsider's available power before its tragic use could destroy its intended target. The inextricable nature of individualism's self-making from contemporary society maintained the writer’s link with his status quo.\textsuperscript{150} The presence of individualism was not radical, but confirmation of an American author writing about American things. His tales were inevitably an extension of his society, from which he aimed to make his living; “Other persons have bought large estates and built splendid mansions with such little books as I mean to write…” (XV, 563) The economic, social and cultural nexus from which Hawthorne wrote reduced individualism to its proper contemporary aspect - that of an unavoidable American trait, upon which national identity was fundamentally borne.

\textsuperscript{149} Lewis O. Saum, \textit{The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America} (London: Greenwood Press, 1980), 23.

Chapter Two

“…alone of mortals”:

Hawthorne’s Religious Individualism

When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness.

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

The deification of Jackson, the “embodiment of the true spirit of the nation”,¹ supplemented by relentless political rhetoric and conflicting newspaper editorials, cemented his legacy from the election of 1824 until the early 1850s. This ingrained ideals of rugged individualism seen as central to conceptions of the American character through the elevation of a seemingly transhistorical figure, the apotheosis of public life. The consequences and machinations of the changes wrought at this time by individualism have rightly been identified as a dynamic process.² American individualism must be understood as an ongoing interaction in the nineteenth century, of a different aspect than its formative predecessors, particularly its incarnation in colonial New England. The exceptionalist views of the early Puritan settlers contained much of the individualism that would scare later thinkers about its radical potentiality and allow the term’s pejorative sense to live on into the Age of Jackson in “virtually all nineteenth-century critics of liberal society.”³


The differences that exist between this conception of religion and that of the Puritans were, ostensibly, insurmountable. In their importation of a Calvinistic faith to the New World, the colonists, including Hawthorne’s ancestors, practised a religion of striking personal strength, albeit one that inhabited a dialectical relation with its social and political manifestations. Exclusive trust in God became a prerequisite for salvation, with their former countrymen in England frequently noting warnings “against any trust in the aid of friendship of men.”

The privatisation of faith was necessary in order to consider oneself chosen and, also, to combat doubt as a temptation to wickedness. Although privatised, it had a necessarily public demeanour; it was integral that one’s private faith could be categorised and explained for one’s contemporaries. Its subjectivity, seemingly immaterial in the predetermined scheme, was a required bastion of hope, where thought that guided good deeds might win out over the state of nature. It is through this visibility we might understand the Calvinistic roots of Jacksonian religion. In resisting the state-structured and openly political nature of public religion, the Jacksonian Democrats developed the individualistic aspects of their ancestors’ strict Calvinism, rather developing its ideals of public transparency with their incipient world-view.

This was something further emphasised by Melville in “Bartleby, The Scrivener”, whose narrator claims to have been given a “salutary feeling” from having “looked into Edwards on the Will” and “Priestly on Necessity”.

That this citizen of Wall Street can be found at his “leisure” reading the work of Jonathan Edwards on individual will is testament to the continuing influence of Puritan Reformed theology to this period of American cultural life.

Religion’s individual character was simultaneously connected with communal engagement and active, visible participation in one’s ethical and moral duties. Such “works”, although not

---


5 See Nathan O. Hatch’s description of this transformation; the “humble into a marvellous sense of individual potential” in The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1989), 5.

initially significant of a strong faith, were based on shared laws that stood as an unattainable ideal. As Hawthorne would later portray, a tension existed between the Puritan separation of individual and collective. The faith of the former, perhaps not indicative of salvation, also required the completion of duties for the latter. *Sola fides* was an admirable goal of personal fulfilment, but collective survival in the harshness of the New World served to highlight the frequent incommensurability of personal conscience and communitarian ideology. Religious individualism, in its American incarnation made do with a refusal to go back to a source higher than individual conscience, excepting God. The colonists’ Calvinism promoted individual soteriological responsibilities, relying strongly on the idea of *visible* saints. Although Calvinism was undoubtedly individualistic, it was based on contractualist terms. It was from this inherent tension within the structures of the church that some of its extreme propositions were relaxed and, over the changing milieu of centuries of American life, diluted. Although this was marked in its movement away from Calvin’s radical tenets, the kernel of individualism remained. As Steven Lukes has pointed to, “American society was often criticised in the name of individualism - (it) acquired different layers of meaning under successive influences of New England Puritanism, Jeffersonian tradition and natural rights philosophy; Unitarianism; Transcendentalism and evangelicalism.” Individualism was not a monolithic construction that appeared to the Jacksonian generation, “as if…overnight”, but a process instigated within the religious fervour of early settlers, developed upon the salvific potential of the individual, and increasingly secularised by various traditions.

This points us to the origins of religious individualism in America; and leaves us to address the tension present in a worldview that attributes action to self-interest and will, not to fate or

---

7 Lukes, *Individualism*, 94.
8 ibid, 28.
10 “Individualism is one of the key value orientations distinctive to American culture.” Claude Fischer, “Paradoxes of American Individualism” in *Sociological Forum* Vol. 23, no. 2 (2008), 363.
God. Puritan values surrounding religious individualism trickled down to the nineteenth century not only in the form of religious principles, but in ways that represented the sacralised economics and exceptional history. The Protestant religions that flourished in America from the Colonial Period were seen as an all-encompassing spirit that instructed the believer in all aspects of his/her life. The Protestantism of the ordinary worker was “a people’s religion” that, with its more cultivated relative, Transcendentalism, were “at bottom, romantic religions” that focused deeply on the concept of individual dignity in the age of burgeoning democracy. This, by extension, altered and shaped how one conceived of past and future, in both their personal and national senses:

(Protestant) humanitarians saw themselves as the last survivors of that slowly dying American who acted according to universe and time-honored standards and who did not adopt current fad and fashion as a guide. Religion made men republicans; it also made them individualists.

Furthermore, the traditions Hawthorne encountered within New England with greatest intensity, that of Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, were of outstandingly individualised religious priority. As Lydia Willsky-Ciollo has stated, “(t)he Unitarian ethos of self-culture enabled (its adherents) to envision a world outside”, and allowed the incorporation of both “institutional and alternative sources of religious authority.” The increasingly romantic, liberal religion of the era contrasted with its previous incarnations in New England, but Hawthorne’s conception was undoubtedly influenced by his engagement with the era’s ostensibly radical thought. As Perry Miller has

---

11 ibid, 364.
12 Gabriel, Evangelical Religion, 45.
asserted, “(u)nder rationalism’s banner, Unitarianism had broken Calvinism’s monopolistic hold upon the New England mind” by the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} Whatever guise it took in Washington, New England religion’s ubiquitous individualism emphasised the uniqueness of personal spirituality, to varying degrees of radicalism.\textsuperscript{16}

With the aforementioned Puritan \textit{Weltanschauung} receding in the memory of most, American religion presented a syncretic, fragmented face, becoming deeply individualised in a social sense that had escaped the uneasy individualist-collectivist balance of the early settlers. Religion took on new powers of justification in post-Revolution America. The justified, whose “faith alone” once guaranteed their salvation, now extended to the spheres of business and the rising industrialisation of the Market Revolution. Puritan justification, insofar as it became evident through the “works” of the believer, showed little sense of boundaries; if one was truly justified, then one’s good deeds were borne out in all sectors of day-to-day life. This idea underwent a qualitative shift in to the nineteenth century. By the time of Jackson, the individualist could be said to view their material status as part of a generalised religious sensibility. As Sellers alludes to, the old dogma of “Calvinism also became the spiritual medium of capitalist transformation by sanctifying worldly work as religious duty and wealth as fruit of grace.”\textsuperscript{17} Such a move had been precipitated as early as the opening decades of the eighteenth century across New England, where Arminian doctrine was declared from Boston’s pulpits relating salvation to human effort.\textsuperscript{18} As Robert T. Handy further emphasises:


\textsuperscript{16} Earl Morse Wilbur holds that “Unitarianism, in the main, sprang independently from native roots in the soil of New England Congregationalism, which in turn had arisen from a fusion of the Pilgrim Colony of Plymouth and the Puritan Colonies of Salem and Massachusetts Bay.” \textit{A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England and America} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 380.

\textsuperscript{17} Sellers, \textit{Market Revolution}, 29.

\textsuperscript{18} ibid, 30.
For the most part, Protestant leaders felt that true religion was the prior and more basic concern, an essential ingredient in a sound civilization. The same religion which held the key to eternity as Protestants saw it, also showed the way to a sound and satisfying civilization…Christian hope in the coming glorious kingdom of God was often presented in such a way as to undergird Christian interest in the advance of civilization. Somewhat paradoxically, the intensification of an otherworldly concern provided a basis for this-worldly effort.19

As America made its way in an increasingly capitalistic world, the eternal verities the early settlers had reserved for religion were resurrected as dogma for the economic sphere. The framework of state-run religion was reduced and diminished entirely; what remained was an overflowing individualism. de Tocqueville had earlier pointed to the loosening of interpersonal bonds as indicative of a move from the grand narratives of life; the heritage of Calvinistic individualism saw American development and personal success as fundamental to personal salvation. The shift from the rigid formalism of Calvinism in the New England of this era could be formulated thus; “Before, the good of man consisted ultimately in glorifying God; now, the glory of God consists in the good of man.”20

The transformation of religious strength was not necessarily its weakening. The momentum of Puritan values was sublated rather than destroyed. American religion of the Jacksonian and antebellum periods moved towards a justification of personal pursuits; the attainment of financial or other public success was tied to an ethic that helped foreground the elevation of the individual. The change in American religion of this era was punctuated by outbursts of nationalist, spiritual fervour.


As evidenced throughout the Jacksonian era, simplistic theology backed by firebrand rhetoric was at the core of religious revivalism. Its intense pragmatism was second only to a materialistic worldview that appeared to condone the individual’s search for salvation through a beneficent, but nevertheless economic, outlook.\textsuperscript{21} This extended to the world of finance largely through the focus on personal goals and self control.\textsuperscript{22} With the emphasis shifted towards the individual’s role in his/her own salvation, the opportunities of the world opened up to the person that believed that his/her success was directly connected to the manifestation of Divine grace.\textsuperscript{23} Ideas of the self developed during this period to incorporate ever growing pressures in the marketplace, where seemingly abstract forces could alter one’s fate, ostensibly on a whim.\textsuperscript{24} In such situations, individuals required ideological reinforcement for the increasingly sacralised choices of economic life. The implementation of individualistic, religious characteristics was a defensive process that leaned on preconceived Calvinist ideas of justification to ward off the stress of capitalist endeavour; in time, “only religious intensity could reconstitute intraphysic/interpersonal life to the imperatives of competitive effort.”\textsuperscript{25} This was not simply an exercise in assuaging guilt; if an enterprise failed, some aspect of religiosity was missing in the instigator. America’s God was, for some, becoming one who overlooked the financial state of His nation. This heady mixture of nationalist and religious zeal imbued the market with cosmic importance. The Unitarian Rev. John T. Kirkland stated that his movement’s God would “secure the rich from rapacity, no less than the poor from oppression the

\textsuperscript{21} Edward Pessen, \textit{Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics} (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 70.


\textsuperscript{23} The “manifestation” of grace is famously contained within John L. O’Sullivan’s declaration of Manifest Destiny, a dictum that borrows heavily from religious rhetoric and doctrinal sources; “to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High -- the Sacred and the True.” John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity”, \textit{The United States Democratic Review}, Volume 6, No. 23, 429.


\textsuperscript{25} Sellers, \textit{The Market Revolution}, 29
high from envy no less than the low from contempt.”

This deity secured financial success as a reward for spiritual progression. The Unitarian God moved in ways no less mysterious than His representation by other Christian sects in New England; the central message was the uplifting of the individual from the “wheel of chance” as represented by the “city of man”.

Religion of this time held numerous roles beyond the strictly economic, with its ethical remit stretching to the political and cultural. Independent of its formation, religion intersected at this time with myriad aspects of American life, traditional and modern, adapting to modulate the personal concerns of citizens of a rapidly expanding nation. Heather Curtis states that “(r)eligious communities developed in new ways in nineteenth century America in response to the establishment of the new American Republic, the expansion of American Empire, and demands for American “civilisation”.”

Criticisms of this view have seen the emphasis on religion’s role in the growth of these sectors in society as an oversimplification of the complex nature of the individual’s spiritual reality within these communities. Richard K. Fenn indicates that the “Christian religious individualism” that anticipated the emergence of later forms of secular individualism, emphasised the process of self-renunciation before God and the devaluing of the mundane barriers to this divine union.

In the case of Market Revolution America, the radical interiorisation of the economic, political or cultural presented a genetic move from Calvinist origins. Far from individual “this-worldly salvation”, it provided a re-focusing on the extenuating circumstances of human activity, before the possibility of salvation. As Handy attests, fundamental to church guidance was a double-layered message of citizenship for now, and for the afterlife: “After the separation of church and


27 Malachuk, Two Cities, 54.


state, the continuing Protestant effort to secure a Christian civilisation had to proceed chiefly by influencing personal behaviour."

Contrary to a devaluing of the earthly barriers attendant on salvation, the development of individualism in this era held fundamental the worldly expression of religion. One may still renounce the self before God while retaining the utmost faith in the symbol of American man. The “higher faith” attributed to democracy by many Jacksonians, from the pulpit, the editorial column or their literary platforms, accompanied the changing nature of “truth” evidenced throughout the era. The “self-evident axiom”, something generally or collectively received, could not be demonstrated but, importantly, was “itself much better known than anything that can be brought to prove it.”

As Malachuk has shown with regard to the Transcendentalists, the question of truth or individual betterment in this era was not predicated on the reclamation of America as a “city upon a hill”, but through the confirmation of its individuals as perfectible. This indicates the development from the initial individualist-collectivist balance struck by the New England Puritans, while falling in line with Fenn’s reflection on the “perfection of the self” that is a “perfection which is not concerned with the moral accomplishments of the individual, but with access to a higher state of being”. For the Jacksonian Era, the everyday was enmeshed in larger, more potent concerns with individual salvation. Far from devaluing the world within a Protestant nexus, the “mundane barriers” people of this period seized upon demonstrated the possibilities of “truth” in America. As James Marsh stated in 1829, one might discover truth “by those laws of the understanding which belong in common to all men… It is by self-inspection that we can alone arrive at any rational knowledge.” American

33 Fenn, “Individualism and the Validation of Faith”, 165.
34 Nye, “The Search for the Individual”, 6. Quote from the Vermont philosopher and congregationalist, James Marsh, from his “Preliminary Essay” to an edition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*. Marsh was one of the foremost American exponents of “crede ut intelligam”, or the maxim that “I believe so that I may understand.”
religious and political rhetoric of the time tied together citizens through an individually available truth. Far from limiting the power of things earthly, this worked to emphasise opportunities for those who wished not only to be “self-made”, but who would also self-make their world.

It is not enough to focus solely on certain Protestant belief systems in order to explain how the temporal and eternal were held in delicate balance during the lifespan of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Contemporaneously, the dissemination of new scientific theories caught the imagination of the public. Coupled with the growth of commercial and material enterprises as personally rewarding spiritual opportunities, the public face of religion underwent a deep-rooted transformation. Colacurcio addressed this with reference to the overall situation of New England’s religion at this time.

After New England religion had ceased to be what we, in our tolerance, would call “narrow” or “harsh”, but before it became what we, in spite of our liberalism, would think of as entirely too “free and easy”, it seems to have been possible to try to believe the medieval doctrine of Original Sin as (principally) an opposable bias toward actual sin, and to think of divine grace as (chiefly) a resistible aid to a weakened but not entirely ruined nature which could not always love or act as it would.35

This is indicative of the tension inherent in the emergence of New England religion, from its Calvinist past towards a heterodox future. Wesley T. Mott further contests that “in terms of both the inner life and church polity, “New England Puritanism” became the process of tension itself, whereby the heart, thirsting for the Spirit, made its necessary accommodations with the world.”36

The continued reference to this era’s volatility is strongly connected to the many apparent


contradictions bound in the public appearance of religion and its connection to the politico-economic sphere. The perceived “trickery” of capitalism was kept in the sights of Jackson’s Democratic Party, not always framed in moral terms, but consistently portrayed as a levelling of the field of opportunity; “Jackson was felt to symbolize the fact that the time had already come when all Americans could begin life on a fair field.”  

In order to fulfil the hopes of the President, American man was required to become the “architect of his own fortune” as Andrew Stevenson declared during the President’s eulogy. Implicit in this was the individual’s soteriological standing. In emphasising the power of individual action, democracy implied a salvific equality heretofore unheard of in Protestant religions. In demonstrating a concern prejudiced towards life on earth, rather than in heaven, many Americans of the Jacksonian era were enabled to attain a worldly salvation in the forms of visible self-making over sainthood, personal well-being before that of the collective, and the accumulation of wealth as a sign of God’s grace and approval. The everyday success of man engendered lasting spiritual security for the individual, self-made here and forever.

Concerns about individual salvation in this schema were undeniably linked to the ability of the nation to live out and fulfil the promise of the Founding Fathers’ virtuous republic. Jackson, whose democratic policies were hailed as the second coming of Jeffersonianism, seems to have taken his cue from the central message of Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address, as pointed to by Marvin Meyers; America should have “a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.” “Industry and improvement”, central to the excerpt, are to the fore in the minds of the patriotic citizen. Not

---


38 *ibid*, 127.


simply do they represent the ideals of the country, they link inextricably the ideas of work and individual betterment. The framing of the language suggests that “improvement” comes after “industry”, suggestive of the formative, basically good, effects of labour on the individual person. One’s “pursuits” were one’s own, to fulfil the life and choices that one creates without the interference of one’s fellow citizens. The government’s principal objective was to ensure that inhabitants of America did not obstruct each other on their respective paths of individual development. The era of Jackson wished to accept such promise as a challenge to fulfilment; “(Jackson) further represents the ideal of self-sufficient individualism which was the inevitable rationalisation of America’s disorganised development.” Under the aegis of these ideals, the syncretic, heterogeneous beliefs of America could work towards national prosperity, a seemingly oxymoronic collective of individualists, whose “instinctive superiority, self-reliance, and impulsive energy” did not blaspheme, but stood testament to God’s continued favour. The intrinsically individual ethic of “self-culture” that proved foundational for Unitarians and Transcendentalists was grounded on a psychological acceptance of personal worth as tantamount to divine approval. This indicates the combination of such diverse ideologies as “biblical individualism and civic individualism, as well as a utilitarian and an expressive individualism” that founded many expressions of American religion. Ostensibly irreconcilable, they were connected by the sanctity of the individual, an incontrovertible dignity before all, including God. The visibility of this self-worth simultaneously acted in “time and eternity”, seeking to overlap the cities of God and man respectively in ways that found ratification in both. Jackson himself set the tone for this dualistic approach in his 1829 Inaugural Address:

---

42 Ward, Andrew Jackson, 149.

43 ibid,154.

And a firm reliance on the goodness of that Power whose providence mercifully protected our national infancy, and has since upheld our liberties in various vicissitudes, encourages me to offer up my ardent supplications that He will continue to make our beloved country the object of His divine care and gracious benediction.45

Incorporated into this broadly individualistic consensus was the knowledge of self-reliance as a process rather than a status, a turning towards oneself. America’s “magnetic chain” was maintained through the very nature of subjectivity, its inscription into public life created opportunity for Jackson’s “people” just as it allowed for the sacred imperative of differentiation. As Weber attested through his explication of the principle of beruf, or profession as vocation, American society “proclaimed for the first time the equal legitimacy and moral dignity of all forms of reputedly virtuous activity.”46 Bruno Latour theorised this change in the socio-religious dynamic as follows:

Reinterpretation of the ancient Christian theological themes made it possible to bring God’s transcendence and His immanence into play simultaneously…Spirituality was re-invented: the all-powerful God could descend into men’s heart of hearts without intervening in any way in their external affairs. A wholly individual and wholly spiritual religion made it possible to criticize both the ascendency of science and that of society, without needing to bring God into either.47

45 Andrew Jackson, "First printing of Andrew Jackson's first inaugural address." Adam Matthew Digital, EBSCOhost (accessed July 6, 2017).
The “spiritual”, in a similar manner to individualism as a systematic representation of self, expanded throughout society in the inculcation of divine approval for personal achievement. Man’s agency was emphasised as Latour notes, indicating a movement towards individual advancement that both required God’s blessing, but without the controlling emphasis of prior conceptions of religion. Competition therefore, particularly in its American formulation, was an individualised struggle, purified in its self-contained nature, unaffected by the interference of natural or supernatural forces.

Among religious institutions, competition was central to the hope of legitimation. Movements that aligned themselves with the zeitgeist succeeded most in the market of believers; “The sects which were most flourishing were those that best adjusted themselves to the rural conditions of an expanding people and represented its democratic and emotional spirit.”48 Religious movements emphasised to the public their naturally expansionist model as relative to the progress westward of the nation. As Americans ventured towards the Pacific, so did religious bodies and congregations whose express desire was to proselytise and entice people to faith, or attract pioneers to new forms of religious community; as noted by Wilbur, religious movement westward was encapsulated by the Unitarian situation, who “called for aid in founding new churches”, and “as the funds of the Association increased it became possible to assist” in their construction.49 The ability of religion to draw on the power of America’s “Manifest Destiny” was bound to a strident emotionality that focused on interpersonal connection. Reforging the magnetic chain of humanity while maintaining emphasis on each link required the nation’s imagination, but also contained the tension central to the project the Jacksonian felt he carried from the Founding Fathers. The growth of the country necessitated religious groups to shadow and theorise such developments. The religious acceptance of America's “Manifest Destiny” became integral to a broadened understanding of

---


nationalism and progress. Religious pronouncements reflected upon economic success as a sign of national identification and betterment.

The proliferation of individualism in Jacksonian America naturally encapsulated religion as a rationalising force for the abstract market, and its power to place the individual within the discourses of democracy, destiny and achievement that so came to define the era. Not simply a justification, individualism nonetheless justified the role of the citizen in the pursuit of material gain or the promise of salvation for the businessman who, cleaving to some form of democratic principles, might identify his market success with a blessing from the fiscally-minded God. This religious aspect is central to the concerns of the era. Bancroft may have been mistaken in his allusion to the era’s “unchanging” nature, but his pronouncement that “(t)he cause of democracy is the cause of pure religion not less than of justice; it is the cause of practical christianity,” is indicative of the age’s Christian foundations, without the incorporation of state religion. The careful balance of the nation’s progress with the focus on individual rights, individual dignity and individual autonomy necessitate that, in studying the era’s writers, we reflect on their respective brands of social opinion, of which individualism and religion play imperative, inevitable roles.

American religious life fascinated visitors because of its strangeness. If there was much continuity, in an institution that stressed the immutability of its central truths, there was much change too in the complex, heterogeneous religion that flourished in Jacksonian America. If some level of “continuity” can be put down to a strong tradition of religious individualism, the reliance of many on ministerial direction was evidence of a consistent congregationalist aspect to

---

much of America’s religion.\textsuperscript{52} As de Tocqueville observed, it was important to label such spiritual practices as distinctly American, religious zeal was, for him, “perpetually warmed by the fires of patriotism.”\textsuperscript{53} This servitude to national improvement was a major shared aspect of a Protestantism of which “splintering…was so pronounced a phenomenon in the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{54} Jackson, in his “guarded use of authority”,\textsuperscript{55} refused to give precedence to one religious grouping over any other, expanding Jeffersonian ideals to the question of the liberty of religion. This move, which caused much consternation among religious leaders at the time, was symptomatic of the rise of the “people”. As Schlesinger, Jr. notes:

Social radicalism in America had long been tinged with anticlericalism. The old alliances of church establishments with local aristocracies, and the widespread assumption of the clergy that God was a disciple of Alexander Hamilton, had antagonised men of liberal inclination; and European deism obligingly provided plausible arguments from history and philosophy for detesting the clergy and spurning revealed religion.\textsuperscript{56}

During this era, doctrine and sermons modified their message to incorporate the ideals of opportunity to the general public, who were imbued with “a marvellous sense of individual potential and of collective aspiration.”\textsuperscript{57} Reformers and revivalists wishing to hark back to a bygone purity, were not immune from the social exigencies of the age, preferring to focus on an intense

\textsuperscript{52} Handy, \textit{A Christian America}, 28.  
\textsuperscript{53} de Tocqueville, \textit{Democracy in America}, 143.  
\textsuperscript{54} Gabriel, “Evangelical Religion”, 38.  
\textsuperscript{56} Schlesinger, \textit{The Age of Jackson}, 136.  
\textsuperscript{57} Hatch, \textit{Democratisation of American Christianity}, 5.
pragmatism and materialism to extend the message of optimism, of individual and societal
perfectibility that was so particularly American at this time.58

Although such questions as “meaning” and “truth” were left to the personal thought of the
citizen, religious groupings, including Presbyterians, Baptists, Unitarians and Quakers, offered a
proliferation of options that contained disparate ontological, ethical and epistemological world-
views.59 On the one hand, individualist interpretations of spiritual grace seemed to condone and
promote success in the marketplace as an indicator of hard-working virtue. On the other, the “manly
passions” of economic advancement were “simultaneously condemned…as signs of a corrupt and
sinful nature.”60 Such contrasting views did not propagate the same levels of doctrinal subservience
witnessed in Europe. As Cohen and Hill testify, disestablishment meant that the “individual-centred
construal of religion” in America “seems to have become even more individualistic because of the
history of the church-state relationship.”61

Hawthorne was one such citizen whose “highly individualistic…religious temperament”
allowed him freedom from denominational ties.62 Certainly, this man of “Calvinist psychology”,63
who shared with his Puritan ancestors a keen sense of sin and deep consciousness of how it
permeated life, was not swept along by his era’s religion in the common sense. His religion was not
that of the common man, yet liberal religious views of the day influenced Hawthorne’s theological
thought and philosophy of ethics.64 His literary output pointed to the dialectic of good and evil in
man, rather than something dichotomous. His son, Julian, pronounced that; “(my father) had a deep

58 Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 70.
59 Brian Yothers, “Terrors of the Soul: Religious Pluralism, Epistemological Dread, and Cosmic Exaltation in Poe,
61 Cohen and Hill, “Religion as Culture”, 711.
63 Colacurcio, *Province of Piety*, 11.
64 David Lyttle, *Studies in Religion in Early American Literature: Edwards, Poe, Channing, Emerson, Some Minor
and reverent religious faith, of what precise purport I am unable to say.” Larry J. Reynolds has discussed Hawthorne’s privacy when it came to religious matters, but even in this, glaring contradictions rear their head. During his lifetime, Hawthorne “chose not to discuss his faith, although his wife Sophia was quite forthcoming about hers.” Furthermore, James T. Fields, the writer’s publisher, friend and long-time correspondent recalls how “(Hawthorne’s) voice would be tremulous with feeling, as he sometimes quoted a touching passage from the New Testament.” His “Christian imagination” aside, he believed deeply in the individual’s need to ascertain subjective truths while confirming the inscrutability of God’s counsels at every turn; “All sorts of persons, and every individual, has a place to fill in the world, and is important in some respects, whether he chooses to be so or not” (VIII, 20). Such statements stand at the heart of Hawthorne’s essentially Christian, democratic values. Although his personal faith is often lost amidst the criticism that surrounds his “religious” characters, Hawthorne was undoubtedly a man of his age - not necessarily in step with all aspects of the common current, but his life was too often bound to the vicissitudes of Jacksonian America to imagine him properly as a “citizen of somewhere else”. Even when focusing on the incommensurability of the temporal and the eternal, he represented too much “the subject that has been politically socialized within the “mise-en-scene of desire” that constitutes the discourse of American national identity.”

Hawthorne’s religious formation took place in the midst of numerous competing strands of spirituality, not least that which his New England contemporary writers, including Emerson, Thoreau and Fuller, found represented in Transcendentalism. This is conclusively a part of

65 Quoted in Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 199.
67 ibid, 3.
68 Colacurcio, Province of Piety, 26.
69 Berlant, Anatomy of National Fantasy, 5.
Hawthorne’s deeply American nature; his syncretic beliefs borrowed from the religious succour on offer, be they Transcendental or Puritan. As Alfred Rosa contests; “(Transcendentalism) gave him support for his individualism and helped him formulate his ideas on the relative power of good and evil.” Insofar as this is correct, Agnes McNeill Donohue comforts any worried Hawthorne scholar who might fear that his “power of blackness” is not as strong as was once represented;

Hawthorne (was) betrayed into irony by a damnatory Calvinism that yet provided the healthiest climate for the dramatic tension of his art…(he) seems to feel a necessity to see everywhere a reenactment of the Fall from Eden from his nineteenth century survival amidst the moldering remains of the American Dream of New Jerusalem.

In his work, reflective of his religious milieu, Hawthorne presented a syncretic vision of New England religion enmeshed in its darkness and light. Not wholly one or the other but dialectically co-existent, Hawthorne’s use of religious thought functioned to display a worldly understanding of the dynamics of spirituality, and its ability to represent the interior struggles of the individual.

Hawthorne's situation was peculiarly American, often provincial (although not in Henry James’s pejorative sense) and consistently minded of a higher sphere, throughout his texts and letters. His contemplation on this subject aligns itself with varying strains of thought that occupied many of his contemporaries. His lifelong reflection on the knowability of providence suggests Hawthorne’s preoccupation with an “other” place, something that has seen the placement of Transcendentalist thought within a broad Augustinian tradition. Hawthorne’s “high” thought

71 ibid, 114.
73 See particularly Hawthorne’s letter to Sophia dated April 6th 1840, from the Boston Custom House. “Thou makest me an embodied spirit…” (XV, 437).
should not be seen as a turn from the practical, largely mundane focus that so obsessed theorists of his era. Like his contemporaries, and by the subject’s very nature, Hawthorne’s views on religion were not monolithic, but rather, progressive, developing in their contact with schools of thought. To this end, we might see Hawthorne’s belief in a “city of God” as suggestive of a contiguity with the beliefs of his fellow writers in Transcendentalist circles. The “power of blackness” that so dictates our retrospective view of his work may have shadowed our engagement with this writer’s active social and cultural conscience, one that remains mysterious through the complexity of its syncretism.

Crucial to Hawthorne’s potential self-reliance is his notion of sympathy. What Melville posited in relation to “The Old Apple Dealer” as an extrinsic “depth of tenderness”, others have suggested something internal, without impulse towards direct action. In Emily Miller Budick’s opinion; “Sympathy, in Hawthorne’s view, is a receptivity to others that…enables the compassionate comprehension of and empathy with another person’s suffering.” This is deeply bound to Hawthorne’s personal conception of God, particularly His aforementioned inscrutability. Due to man's ultimate inability to divine the workings of Providence, Hawthorne seemed to suggest that such acts are presumptuous of an authority that, despite the lack of mediation between God and the individual believer, takes on a power that acts like God’s, but is more probably traceable from another source; “His instruments have no consciousness of His purpose; if they imagine they have, it is pretty sure token that they are not His instruments” (XVIII, 118).

This prevarication before the certainty of God’s purpose in the world sat uneasily with democratic calls of “manifest destiny” that, although not officially coined before 1845, were apparent throughout the Jacksonian Era. The unknown nature of God’s workings did not present Hawthorne as a man of weaker personal faith, but of a differentiating faith from the “insipid

76 ibid, 4.
moralities” of many of his contemporaries. Previously, religion and politics ran together to endorse the destiny of America (as it would again), but Hawthorne’s insistence on divine inscrutability, while maintaining personal Christian beliefs, was symptomatic of larger contemporary thought that wished to “eradicate the lingering traces of theocracy” while supporting the Constitutional right that gave “every person the right to choose his own religion, and to enjoy it freely, without molestation.”\textsuperscript{77} This is particularly true of preceding generations whose focus on the founding of America, and its subsequent mythologising, led to beliefs about the concurrence of the “city of man” and the divine at the moment of the nation’s establishment. This metamorphosed to incorporate proceduralists and aspirationalists, who respectively insisted that the human and divine would converge as destined in America, but after the requisite actions were enacted by its people.\textsuperscript{78} The “hands off” approach of the Democratic party at this time evidenced the increasing secularisation of American society, but, by and large, personal religious feeling remained strong. Writers as diverse as conservative New Jersey senator Theodore Frelinghuysen and Daniel D. Barnard attested to the fundamental place of religion in American society. It yet remained that “(t)he great economical and social questions between Capital and Labour” needed to be resolved by reliance on moral and ethical commonalities that struck to the heart of American society.\textsuperscript{79} The primary religious difference between the era of Hawthorne’s manhood and that which preceded his youth was the renewed aspirations of a Christianity that focused on “its quickening power in the individual soul, not a belief in the infallibility of church or priesthood.”\textsuperscript{80}

It becomes apparent, that Hawthorne was embedded in a system that actively extolled the benefits, possibilities and necessities of the individualistic spirit. Alongside Melville, Hawthorne

\textsuperscript{77} Richard M. Johnson, “Report on the Transportation of the Mail on Sunday” (Boston: (u.p.): 1827), 5.

\textsuperscript{78} Malachuk, \textit{Two Cities}, 129. Note particularly the author’s comment on Hannah Arendt mythologising of Early America in terms of its convergent destiny.


\textsuperscript{80} Schlesinger, \textit{Age of Jackson}, 360.
has been seen solely in the light of his “nay-saying”, appearing as an idiosyncratic counterpoint to the dominant confidence and assertiveness of his era. Lewis Saum convincingly argues, however, that despite appearing out of step with the “optimism of higher circles, (his) dark brooding about fate and providence bore a powerful resemblance to the outlook of the common American.”

For all of Emerson’s optimism, his complete faith in the individual who turned from a decaying church structure, was markedly different to that of a disempowered public who toiled daily in the fields and factories of the new nation to earn a living. Furthermore; “it would be difficult to concoct a statement of the relation between self and society more alien than parts of Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” to the precepts of the common people.”

Although Hawthorne was never fully given to the precepts of Transcendentalism in the way of his fellow New Englanders, particularly after his abortive stay at Brook Farm, its influence was indelible. Such influence, in its truest sense, must be accepted both in its positive and negative implications. The optimism against which Hawthorne was culturally pitted was not simply transcendental or a consensus *zeitgeist*, but a combination of society’s belief in the greater power of the individual before his fellow man. To explain away Hawthorne’s fiction in which a dark mood predominates is to focus on a complex cultural dynamic in an oversimplified manner.

It was the fact of his democratic nature, borne out across his *oeuvre* that adds curious intricacy to any analysis of Hawthorne grounded in his historical moment. His religious individualism was complex, being deeply personal, of a certain Calvinist disposition, while relying on the guidance of none but being influenced by many. His “unshackled democratic spirit of Christianity in all things” was kept private, maybe in contrast to the very public ancestor

---

82 ibid, 108.
83 The argument regarding the overstatement of Transcendentalism’s influence on Hawthorne is discussed in depth in Rosa, *Salem, Transcendentalism, and Hawthorne*, 114-145.
of whom Hawthorne granted only a description of cold disdain; “In the old burial-ground, Charter Street, a slate gravestone, carved round the borders, to the memory of “Colonel John Hawthorne, Esq.”, who died in 1717. This was the witch judge” (VIII, 172). Hawthorne utilised this (and more) in his observation of his contemporary situation. His societal perusal was not cold, rather his fiction analysed and transposed cultural norms and imperatives so as to view them from a meaningful distance, to engender questioning rather than a strictly subversive interrogation of the inscribed subjectivity that provided the quintessence of American life. In his admiration of Andrew Jackson, Hawthorne appreciated the exigencies of life that meant that, as much as any singular character trait, the President’s individualism was aestheticised, undergoing an inevitable process of change in the public eye. Under a watchful but unknowable God, it was the flexible, mutable symbolism of Jackson’s individualism that Hawthorne saw as laudable, not the rigid, unchanging mask of contemporary reformers. One’s beliefs could not make one all men before others, but provided the potential to be all men before oneself.

Hawthorne situated stories in various eras and environs; some within the complex religio-political hegemony of Puritan New England, others in his own contemporary sphere, reflective of religious and cultural issues attendant on the development of the United States. The legacy of Puritanism and Hawthorne’s unique interaction with the subject has drawn innumerable layers of analysis and critique in literature about his work. After attempting to situate Hawthorne within his contemporary moment, we may look with renewed focus on the tales and longer romances, in order to ascertain the place of religious individualism in Hawthorne’s oeuvre. Through this lens, ideas of American societal progress were interrogated and the writer’s ubiquitous “power of blackness” brought to bear on the organised religions of America’s past and contemporary situations.

86 Smith, The System of Liberty, 179. “…that which saw him labelled the “American Cincinnatus.”
The question of the spiritual in Hawthorne is a broad-reaching one. In order to undertake such criticism, I will not draw a linearly chronological pattern through Hawthorne’s fiction, as the recurring impetus of Jacksonian individualism presents a lasting influence, one that Hawthorne examined in his transposition of settings in far-flung milieu, both in time and space. “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) provides us with a Hawthornean template for religiously individualistic practice, while also containing the proviso that collective worship can lead one astray, and take thinking from ritual until it is drained of significance. “Young Goodman Brown” begins, interestingly, on a note of mutuality, on the couple that fulfils each other’s needs. Faith asks her husband to “tarry” longer before beginning his journey (X, 74); she fears the nightmares and thoughts that creep in upon a woman while alone at home. Brown answers in the negative, but his affirmation that his wife is “(m)y love and my Faith” (X, 74) is a curious indication of the balance of the relationship - the wife needs her husband to ward off the evil thoughts that are stirred in the darkness, while the husband similarly requires her strength to remain upon the right path. This seeming symbiosis and the disastrous consequences of its rupture are neatly encapsulated in Hawthorne’s clever inversion of the couple’s language. Faith asks Brown to “(p)ray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year!” (X, 74) The inseparability of the couple, despite the forewarned movement of the titular character, is suggested through their dialogue in the opening sections. Faith and Brown’s conversation appears palindromic but for the husband’s slight inversion of the action of tarrying; “My love and my Faith…of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee” (X, 74). Immediately, Hawthorne bears witness to an individual striking out on their own, intertwining notions of isolation and the rejection of Faith (in physical or spiritual form). This immediately connotes the destruction of the sacrament of marriage, undone by Brown’s journey through the forest. As soon as the couple’s dialogue begins to lose its responsive,

87 Fulfilment for singular characters in Hawthorne’s work rarely happens; it is through love that some sense of fulfilment comes to bear. This is most clearly portrayed in “The May-Pole of Merry Mount”, where Edith and Edgar realise the shortcomings of the world simultaneously, in what appears as a moment shared totally before John Endicott.
chiasmatic characteristic, a sense of foreboding settles in about the intentions of the traveller. The danger of being left alone are embedded within the very nature of the characters’ language.

The story allows little time to appreciate Brown’s seclusion in the forest, even before he meets the man of “grave and decent attire”, (X, 75) for “there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead…” (X, 75) Brown is not left alone by Hawthorne in the story’s early stages. He has assumed a new union, once he has (literally) turned his back on his sacred vows. Brown has left his partner for the destructive power of the mysterious wanderer, the latter leaving him spiritually alone. This focuses the reader on the subjectivity of opinion and the ability of the individual to hide the darkness of their heart; “I marvel they never spoke of these matters” (X, 77).

The initial claims of the eponymous traveller to a collective relationship with his fellow villagers trickle away, as the “shape of old Goodman Brown” (X, 79) exposes the lie of the young man’s societal contact and its assumptive prescription to believing others’ truth. “Shared” knowledge begins to unravel rapidly in the darkened confines of the forest. Brown’s disbelief at Goody Cloyse’s actions is counterpointed by her formative influence on him. When he broaches the subject with his darksome companion, it is linked directly with Brown’s journey - any attempt to spare the “wretched old woman” from her infernal fate would disrupt his plans. Brown’s powerful statement “(t)hat old woman taught me my catechism!”, supplemented by its importance as holding a “world of meaning” (X, 80), is strongly indicative of the story’s ambiguity towards the shared religious experience. Brown’s catechism was explained to him by a potential devil-worshipper, rather than the rewarding spiritual task of self-discovery bound to interpreting Scripture. This significant detail about Brown’s past raises questions of the self-exploration required of each person. Self-discovery comes to be regarded as fundamental to individuality. Hawthorne conducts a journey *through* the individual, which presumes a central position prefigured in the tale’s title. This is not simply a psychological wandering through the darkened woods of Puritan New England, but
a movement through the variety of roles and duties of the individual to his society and fellow man. Not only is Goodman Brown a figure that finds little solace in the warped celebration of collective religion, his story evocatively displays the integral nature of love and companionship to the fulfillment of any singular person. Although individualism is foregrounded in its rejection of collectively informed religious practice, it finds specific approval from Hawthorne only in its communion with the lives of others.

Brown’s next encounter is with Deacon Gookin, a man whom the protagonist has formerly congratulated himself for having the clarity of conscience to look in the eye. “Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying, so deep into the heathen wilderness?” (X, 82) This despairing question reasserts Brown’s solitude in his situation - neither “solitary Christian” nor congregation have ventured this far into the darkness. Brown finds himself alone against the powers of the devil at a boundary previously uncrossed. Interesting in this respect is Marcus Nevitt’s reassertion of the traditionally male nature of this character:

…this figure of the solitary Christian champion was extensively interrogated and problematised by Spenser in The Faerie Queene with its need to frame the possibilities for female heroism in patriarchal Elizabethan contexts. Milton scrutinized the issue further in Paradise Lost wherein the respective merits of Christian and Satanic valour are frequently and complexly indeterminate. These monumental texts aside, it was common for more overtly polemical seventeenth-century writers to co-opt the image of the Christian hero as an unambiguously masculine trope.89

88 This presents another example of this story’s eminent canonicity. Brown’s journey through the wood, separated from his wife and only briefly under the guidance of the “darksome” traveller, is a reformulation of the “solitary Christian” that reaches Hawthorne in its literary guise through the work of Edmund Spenser and John Milton, two formative influences on his writing. For more on this figure see, Peter Frederick Anson, The Call of the Desert: The Solitary Life in the Christian Church (S.P.C.K: London, 1964).

89 Marcus Nevitt, Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England 1640-1660 (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), 31. Hawthorne’s reading of Spenser and Milton is well-documented, see particularly Kesserling, Hawthorne’s Reading 1828-1850.
“Young Goodman Brown”, notable as an early example in Hawthorne’s work of an overtly solitary character within a Puritan community, is aligned with the traditionary male Christian hero. Hawthorne’s protagonist subverts such heroic traits throughout the tale, particularly in his flight from the Black Mass and his having fainted at the sight of Faith being co-opted into the infernal celebration. It nonetheless represents Hawthorne’s engagement with the individualism of his day and a literary trope that, in its canonisation, is specifically European in its outlook, an American subversion of a specifically European outlook. This presents an initial attempt on the part of the writer to locate a specifically individualistic character within the constraints of national identity, while maintaining ideas of canonicity to his conception.

The gendered element of “Young Goodman Brown” presents an interesting link to Hawthorne’s more radical Christian individualist, Hester Prynne, whose gender identity especially marks her out from the tradition presented previously. The inextricability of these characters from an American context is as crucial to their creation as is their relation to traditional religious motifs. At this juncture in his career, however, Hawthorne’s contributions to an American tradition of individualistic characters was specifically male in its construction, with the notable exception of 1830’s “Mrs. Hutchinson”. This story, which presents a formative example for Hawthorne’s creation of Hester Prynne, is striking in its representation of the antinomian Puritan. Notable is Hawthorne’s description of Hutchinson’s relation to nature in the story’s denouement, something that contrasts with the awful solitude experienced by Brown as “the chief horror of the scene”. We are told that Hutchinson, having left the Massachusetts Colony:

…(p)erhaps here found the repose, hitherto so vainly sought. Secluded from all whose faith she could not govern, surrounded by the dependents over whom she held an unlimited influence, agitated by none of the tumultuous billows which were left swelling
behind her, we may suppose, that, in the stillness of Nature, her heart was stilled

(XXIII, 67).

Where Brown rages through nature, afraid of his solitude, Hutchinson is calmed by the ability to escape the oppressive structures of collectivity imposed upon her faith by the Puritans. Hawthorne’s 1830 sketch is juvenile in its conception of character, leaning heavily on history without the characteristic verve and subversion of his more accomplished tales. It is, however, interesting to view “Mrs. Hutchinson” from the standpoint of the individualism it presents so early chronologically in the first presidential term of Andrew Jackson. Hawthorne, although only initially engaging with the tropes of individualism that would so stand out through the later, Transcendentalist-inspired figures of Zenobia and Hester, explores the implications of spiritual isolation not in a particularly subversive manner, but through a definitively subversive historical personage.

Young Goodman Brown is a formative individualist within Hawthorne’s *oeuvre*; easier to construct in relation to community because he is male, but with the requisite subversion apparent through his behaviour, rather than his social standing. It is within the individual to strike his own belief, and “stand firm against the devil” (X, 82). Yet, when such an individual is forced into unity with the group, against their intention, the possibility of natural discordance is enhanced. Hawthorne here echoes John Calvin’s indictment on the evils of the Roman Catholic Mass. With the knowledge that the Black Mass of the story highlights the perversion of subjective belief by collective worship in the profanity of ritualistic actions that promote a lack of contemplation, we may quote Calvin’s words while remembering Brown’s ordeal of hearing “his cry…lost to his own ear, by its unison with the cry of the desert” (X, 84).
(Mass has) intoxicated all the kings and nations of the earth, from the highest to the lowest…so struck them with stupor and giddiness, that, duller than the lower animals, they have placed the vessel of their salvation in this fateful vortex. Certainly Satan never employed a more powerful engine to assail and storm the kingdom of Christ. It were a greater work to illustrate these great mysteries as they deserve, and I am unwilling to meddle with their obscene impurities, which are daily before the eyes and faces of all, that it may be understood that the mass, taken in the most choice form in which it can be exhibited, without any appendages, teems from head to foot with all kinds of impiety, blasphemy, idolatry, and sacrilege.\textsuperscript{90}

It is cogent to note that Brown’s despair grows relative to the “chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness, peal(ing)in awful harmony together” (X, 84). Brown’s entire work within the storyworld appears to lead towards the outing of spiritual practices as insufficient and, in the case of Hawthorne’s exaggerated vision, malevolent. Collective worship is continuously disparaged as fruitless for the person before God, their voice being lost in a tumult of the faithful that mislead each other. As seen above, Hawthorne’s Puritan joins a long line of criticism centred on the mass as a corrupting abstraction that obfuscates meaning and encourages idolatry.

The tale moves forward inexorably to the mass, foreshadowed as the apotheosis of the community’s secrecy and internal corruption. This episode’s depiction of the homogenised crowd, engaged in communal worship, indicates their ill-defined contemplation of personal salvation. In a Calvinist schema, the focus on a group dynamic by Hawthorne emphasises the lack of spiritual succour attained by the individual. The writer appears to be mulling over concerns of the “people” before God and the tension struck upon the administration’s individualist impulses and rhetoric, one

that calls to the potential of the individual but checks its focus on rights above duties. In the case of “Young Goodman Brown”, the religious congregation is a dangerous aggregate where identity is lost before all through “the nature of mankind” (X, 88). In the lead up to the awful gathering however, a shocked but observant Brown stares in wonder at the “grave and dark-clad company” as they await their infernal celebrant. Similarly, in “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1836), a story we will revisit in detail later, Hawthorne utilised descriptions of darkened clothing to describe a group of Puritans. Their darksome figures were intermixed with the “wild shapes of their foes…” (IX, 62)

The Puritans are, continuously, “darksome” or “dark-clad”. Such lack of illumination serves to homogenise them, without differentiating costumes or the “bells of the morrice dancers” (IX, 84), we are allowed no glimpse of their physical reality. It is only when John Endicott hews the titular may-pole in an act of individualistic, but ritualistically significant, violence that their members are named. Hawthorne maintains the link from “Young Goodman Brown” of the congregation and the thoughtless rite - in the latter tale the Puritan reaction is discarded almost entirely apart from a shout of “Amen” that ends the ceremonial felling. Such acts receive a markedly disapproving tone from Hawthorne, who returns to emphasise choice and contemplation in personal spirituality.91

More explicitly again, the observational tale “Sunday at Home” focuses on the shortcomings of communal religion, extolling rather insight that stems from the thought of the individual Christian. Written in 1837, this story is, at times, openly hostile to the churchgoers whose verses filled the rooms of the village meetinghouse, in a manner similar to the “company” of “Young Goodman Brown”. Its narrator observes from his window that in the church, “(h)ourly, while it speaks a moral to the few that think, it reminds thousands of busy individuals of their separate and most secret affairs” (IX, 20). The narrator asserts that for those who focus on the meaning of the ritual there is something to hold on to for spiritual value. For those that practise thoughtlessly

91 Puritan religious violence, as will be emphasised in our analysis of The Scarlet Letter, is portrayed as part of communal ritual in the same unthinking vein.
however, they become distracted by the vicissitudes of the everyday, forgetting the importance of
the eternal. Hawthorne warns here of the despair brought on by the perils of organised religion,
speaking through his narrator to show the reader the grand futility of the weekly ritual:

   And in the church, we might suppose, are garnered up, throughout the week, all thoughts
and feelings that have reference to eternity, until the holy day comes round again, to let
them forth… It must suffice, that, though my form be absent, my inner man goes
constantly to church, while many, whose bodily presence fills the accustomed seats, have
left their souls at home (IX, 21).

These commonalities emphasise the strongly-held beliefs of the writer with regard to the
individual’s control over their own spiritual focus. The congregation of “Young Goodman Brown”
mix freely before the Mass begins. For the sense of ritual attendant on the mass, its attendees do not
stand on ceremony, the “revered pastor”, and various “church-members of Salem village, famous
for…especial sanctity” (X, 85) are found to be “irreverently consorting with…men of dissolute lives
and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice” (X, 85). Importantly,
Hawthorne adds the detail that, as neither the wicked nor the good “shrank” from each other, it grew
increasingly difficult to identify them, but for the infernal aid of the “four blazing pines” (X, 86)
that help differentiate the shapes of the “impious assembly” (X, 86). Note here McNeill Donohue’s
statement regarding Hawthorne’s attitude to Mass, particularly when we consider the phrasing of
Goodman Brown’s narration of the ritual’s beginning at the point of his asking “where is Faith?” (X,
85), a reference to the protagonist’s wife, and the unthinking spectacle of the rite:

   Hawthorne maintained throughout his life a similar mistrust and suspicion of the Mass, in
fact a suspicion of any ceremonial liturgy that departed at all from the stark pulpit-
centered-plain-meetinghouse preaching of the Word to which he was accustomed. When, in Italy, he found himself in the cathedrals, basilicas, and churches in which these ceremonies were taking place, he was embarrassed and discomfited.92

Brown, unable to endure the visible evil of others, recognizes his own only through the “loathful brotherhood” he shares with the congregation. The language of this story’s penultimate episode continuously pits the individual against the congregation in its contrasting the celebrant’s speech (the human race’s “communion”) with Brown’s attempts to save himself and his Faith from the “verge of wickedness” (X, 88). The protagonist and his wife subvert the ideas of “union” to be seen in “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” and Hester and Dimmesdale on the scaffold in The Scarlet Letter. After the mass has finished, Goodman Brown stands alone against the elements, cast from the congregation, but nonetheless having been taken within the confines of the “communion” of his race, he is unaware of the true nature of things, on his own having been powerless “to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms, and led him to the blazing rock” (X, 86). Forced to accept the reality of others and unable to view his world without the repercussions of his vision in the forest, Goodman Brown’s “dying hour was gloom” (X, 90).

It is not merely language that the believer uses in condemning his/her own conviction, but a sin against all that imbues the individual with that belief. Calvinist commentary states, while discussing Matthew 12:32 (‘…whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come’); “This is, he that striveth against the truth which he knoweth, and against his own conscience, can not returne to repentance for he sinneth against the holie Gost.”93 Young Goodman Brown suffers largely from his inability to trust his own truth, to accept his knowledge of God as that which is fundamental to his salvation. Upon returning

92 McNeill Donohue, Calvin’s Ironic Stepchild, 29.
to the village, he has lost all ability to tell his convictions apart from those of the congregation. This radical reading is trumpeted throughout the closing paragraphs by Hawthorne, who assumes fully the role of narrator towards the tale’s denouement. It is not Goodman Brown who will face immediate retribution from a vengeful God:

When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid eloquence, and with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading, lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers (X, 89).

Importantly, the protagonist does not state that God will revenge Himself upon the villagers for having partaken in the infernal ritual of Brown’s walk in the woods. This is a more nuanced conclusion of despair for the young man who cannot exert his own spiritual truths (whatever they might be) and is therefore bound to the fate of the unthinking collective, whose continued adherence to ritual (“the congregation were singing a holy psalm” (X, 89)) is damnation, the “fateful vortex” that true Calvinist belief wished to cast off. Hawthorne’s illumination of despair is, unlike the link drawn between the Calvinist reprobate and his/her deserving despair, something deeply modern.

Hawthorne finishes this story with a sustained commentary on the current state of religion in his United States, more so than a simple harking-back to the mistakes of John Hathorne and his vengeful ilk. The realisation, on Brown’s behalf, of personal dread is more akin to a “sickness unto death” than it is a self-judgment of election. Brown is not the type to shrink as meekly as it has been suggested from the recognition of his community’s damnation, or, indeed, his own. The story acknowledges from the outset that Brown will require to “cling to (Faith’s) skirts and follow her to

---

94 McNeill Donohue, *Calvin’s Ironic Stepchild*, 179.
Heaven” (X, 75). Brown is aware of the grave nature of humanity’s plight. The presence of the Devil in community life undermines for him his faith in institutions and the false reverence that man places on other men, or rituals, as a simulacra for God. From the hermeneutics of Calvinism, it is abundantly clear the mistrust placed in the abstract, potentially arbitrary, import of the mass on one’s “true faith”. Hawthorne’s representation of the collective shows a group gone astray in their spiritual journey, something reflected in the physical movements into the woods. The wilful expectation of the Puritan villagers to find some meaning within the congregation subverts the fiercely individual element of their worship. The Black Mass, within which Hawthorne subverts the church setting of Catholicism (the rough rock that acts as a crude altar, the four “blazing pines” that stand for the candles and incense of Catholic mass), is the ultimate signifier of the truth that should be individually known, and yet is taken for signs and wonders by weak believers. Although this analysis does not have sufficient space to explore the issue, Catholicism plays an interesting role in the work of American literature of this era. Prior to the so-called “American Renaissance”, authors had clearly thought about the strange, often controversial position of Catholicism within American society. Far from its contemporary English situation, which saw active oppression and official disavowal of Catholics, American disestablishment allowed for Catholic worship, but inspired fears around the worship of a foreign leader, the Pope, and the dominion of the Holy See over American governmental structures.

The devil’s trickery atop the altar is the supernatural message the congregation so desire, rather than focusing on their individual journeys with God. Fundamental to the presentation of the mass is the sense of ease that it provides for those that will not self-examine as is necessary for the salvation of the righteous person. As Calvin stated:


96 Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati, OH: Truman & Smith, 1835), 61. “The Catholic system is adverse to liberty, and the clergy to a great extent are dependent on foreigners opposed to the principles of our government, for patronage and support.”
But it is likewise a proof of their dishonesty; for the objection which they sophistically urge is inconsistent with their own doctrine. Who knows not their distinction, that sins are freely pardoned in respect of guilt, but that punishment and satisfaction are demanded? This is an acknowledgment, that there is no hope of salvation to any one whose guilt is not pardoned before death.⁹⁷

Although this story relies heavily on its Puritan setting, and the psychosocial ramifications of the Calvinist way of life, there is something distinctly modern about the tale’s ambivalence. It cannot confirm with any certainty the ontological or epistemological status of anything it proposes. What it does enact, in the midst of Jacksonian democracy, is a radical indication of the ultimate futility of the collective to impose meaningful structure on the life of the individual. The storyworld’s societal breakdown, apotheosised in the Black Mass, suggests the dissolution of collective authority. Brown relates to manifest uncertainty subjectively. His horror is not based on the lapse of the community; the protagonist’s real feeling is shown only when he has personal interest in the person tempted from righteousness. This is not a tale, in dream or reality, of pure conjecture. When the devil marks out one of his worshippers to the travelling Puritan, he consistently allows them to reveal their own relation to him. Questioning Goody Cloyse, he asks if she “knows her old friend”, answered in the affirmative. Brown’s despair, latent to begin with, is realised and confirmed when the pillars of his world are pulled down, leaving him alone to deal with the repercussions.

As William Lynch posits, the Christian imagination is one that descends into fact and ascends into insight, what a contemporary of Hawthorne’s envisioned as a “double longing”, a development that “consists in moving away from oneself infinitely by the process of infinitising oneself, and in returning to oneself infinitely by the process of finitising.” Brown descends into the forest of fact to be met with an ascent back to the village where insight plays out on his daily life. For one of America’s great “nay-sayers”, the possibilities of a despairing life do not equate to a shortcoming, but present an opportunity for the darkly-meditative man who distrusts institutional rhetoric to forge his own path. The “power of blackness” so often attributed to Hawthorne is, perhaps, most significant in its compulsion to illuminate a situation. Hawthorne’s great insistence on “blackness”, canonised by Melville, is conversely an obsessive examination instigated by the natural impulse of self-knowledge.

The strangeness of this story is linked indelibly to the individual intuition that Hawthorne encourages through his “blackness”. The last impression of this tale is that Young Goodman Brown, saddled with a life of dread, still recognises the centrality of legacy to the Puritan project, in the children and grandchildren his marriage with Faith produces. Brown may be a “hoary corpse” (X, 89) whose “dying hour was gloom” (X, 90), but he has clearly not acted sufficiently against the sinfulness of the villagers. The epistemological breakdown suffered by Brown has clearly impacted his ability to empathise with his peers, and nullified his ability to influence their behaviour. His isolation in the midst of the community is as much an element of his continued inaction, based on a fundamental inability to know. For Hawthorne’s “power of blackness”, his protagonist’s knowledge of his own innate depravity is neither positive nor negative, it simply is. That of others exists, like that of Providence, beyond one’s personal understanding.

---


100 Colacurcio, *Province of Piety*, 291.
Lest we dwell too long on Hawthorne’s dynamic acceptance and intense focus on the negative, we may turn briefly to two tales of little renown that yet strike a chord with the “depth of tenderness” Melville associated with his contemporary’s work (although one still based on “the subtlest spirit of sadness”). Here we will look to Hawthorne’s feelings of sympathy and how they impact upon this question of religious individualism.

“A Good Man’s Miracle” (1844) is an uncollected story of Hawthorne’s, appearing slight in comparison with the damnatory morality of the tales written contemporaneously, namely “The Christmas Banquet”, “The Intelligence Office” and “Earth’s Holocaust”, all from Mosses. This simplistic tale, first published in the Child’s Friend magazine appears straightforward in its narration, but contains much of the moral integrity and concern with the onus of individual action that so marked many of the writer’s most weighty, ethically driven stories. This tale focuses on the efforts of one man who, seeing the destitution of children in the London community in which he lives, decides to set up Sunday schools so that its attendants may receive instruction, “more profitable to them than all the gold on earth” (XI, 358), and keep them from mischief. Interestingly, however, for its simple narration and momentary forays into Hawthorne’s “gloom(y) spectacle…of those obscure streets of London” (XI, 354) this story refocuses attention on the question highlighted earlier about the self’s journey to relate to itself, to help gain insight of our true nature. Hawthorne mixes this trope with his attestation of God’s inscrutability, maintaining singular focus on the individual’s place in humanity’s magnetic chain:

In every good action there is a divine quality, which does not end with the completion of that particular deed, but goes on to bring forth good works in an infinite series. It is seldom possible, indeed, for human eyes to trace out the chain of blessed consequences, that extends from a benevolent man’s simple and conscientious act, here on earth, and connects it with

---

Hawthorne narrates the story of Mr. Robert Raikes, whose moral impulse serves as an incident of individual action, while affirming how the structures of Church worship dismiss those that might benefit most from it, to the extent that it would be better “to have been born among the wildest savages,” ignorant of God and his worship, “than to grow up thus in a Christian country” (XI, 355). The Sabbath acts only to emphasise the shortcomings of its formalised nature. Raikes demonstrates how collective enterprise necessitates individual emphasis.

This story was written during the post-Jacksonian presidencies that saw Hawthorne’s job security and fortunes fluctuate. The sense of America’s promise in the 1840’s had somewhat waned for the Salem writer, whose personal entanglements with the literary market had met with success without necessarily translating into substantial financial gain. An integral part of what followed in this story, and the tales included in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), was a meditation on the nature of individualism specifically as it pertained to collective wellbeing. At this juncture in his career, Hawthorne was a frequent contributor to the *Democratic Review*, and his stories were indelibly marked by a “pattern of cultural-political symbiosis…in which a writer could expect certain favours from the party (that) rewarded writers with proven party credentials.”

Situated in this network of political and literary empowerment, Hawthorne’s religious tales take on a slightly didactic quality. Introduced to the public by Democratic reviewers and their political bias, the story of “A Good Man’s Miracle” is strongly indicative of an initiative that benefits others, and raises “the people” to their rightful standing. Although it did not appear in a collection, its tone and moral inflections indicate the overall feeling of Hawthorne’s tales of this time.

---

102 Widmer, *Young America*, 19.
Hawthorne was engaged in a renewed interrogation of the souls of Christians, like the narrator of “Sunday at Home”, who would rather keep their faith pent up in communal ritual, rather than allowing its individual expression. As the housebound narrator wonders about the worshippers whose bodies are there but whose souls are elsewhere, so Raikes questions “(h)ow can any Christian remain idle, when there is so much evil to be remedied within a morning’s walk of his own home?” (XI, 355) Not only are such Christians viewing the world solely in physical terms, their ability to act was predicated on a no longer existent impulse to eternity. Hawthorne affirms this contention through Raikes who contemplates their existence thus:

The longer he considered, the more terrible did it appear that those children should grow up in ignorance and sin, and that the germs of immortal goodness, which Heaven had implanted in their souls, should be for ever blighted by neglect. And the earnestness of his compassion quickened his mind to perceive what was to be done (XI, 356).

Herein lies a consistent affirmation of Hawthorne’s work, that the beneficent act is one that occurs in time and eternity. This strain of his tales cleaves to the assertion made by William Ellery Channing that “a man need only “to trust, dare and be” to have infinite good ready for your asking.”103 Without Channing and Emerson’s respective Transcendentalist beliefs that inculcated the principles of progress into a rule of life, Hawthorne problematised his age’s contention that God was man infinitely projected.104 His view was certainly less paradigmatic in its contestation of individual superiority and societal progression, but nonetheless insistent on the necessity for individual action to seize the initiative, rather than wait on “the king and his nobles, and the wealthy

---

103 Quoted in Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 49.
gentlemen” who “with all their boundless means, had for many years, done nothing so worthy of grateful remembrance, as what was now to be effected by this humble individual” (XI, 357).

Hawthorne’s characteristically skeptical view of the ideas of progress touted by his editor in the Democratic Review, John L. O’Sullivan, helped to inform his opinion of the age as one bound to acquisitive gain over the possibilities of lasting moral influence. The era’s preoccupation with perceived individual agency was, for the writer, of central importance to the possibility of morality. Although caught up in the democratic milieu of the mid-1840’s by necessity and personal belief, Hawthorne staked his perception of individualism to a more benevolent model than many of his contemporaries, who, he believed, were either too mundane (the Young Americans and O’Sullivan) or too ethereal (the Transcendentalists). The writer’s skepticism surrounding America’s “progression” glossed over many of the basic characteristics, such as sympathy, that underpinned the validity of moral action. The mixture of reality and ideality that demarcated true progress was often unseen by the “people” for whom the material gain of the nation or individual constituted progress, in a way that art and culture did not. Raikes’s skill lies in his ability to find the balance that so often escapes Hawthorne’s characters. Raikes’s gentle breed of didacticism, encapsulated in his move to open Sunday schools for the poor children, was symptomatic of Hawthorne’s less radical take on individualism than his immediate contemporaries, yet nonetheless emphasised the fundamental need to found individualism on a base of morality.

Hawthorne’s power of sympathy often focuses on the notion of individualisation and personal agency’s relation to the aforementioned structures of morality. “The Old Apple-Dealer” (1843) shared the common concern of Hawthorne’s work in its questioning of the nature of progress and the work of the past on an individual’s psyche. Reynolds has affirmed that it contains the sense of “realism and compassion… foundational to (his) work.”105 Joseph Allard has further stated that; “(T)here was in Hawthorne a deep sense of alienation, the feeling that he was an

observer rather than a participant, a watchman. He was a moral philosopher who perceived truth in a metaphysical realm of altered consciousness.\textsuperscript{106} The eponymous man is of inconspicuous aspect. Even the narrator, though he sees him daily, finds it difficult “to define and individualize a character like this which we are now handling” (X, 444). The story imagines the spiritual aspects of the life of somebody whose existence appears so demeaning. The narrator focuses on the impact of the man’s life on his spirit; in spite of his lack of “individuality” (X, 446), he will pass into “the infinite” nevertheless; “There is a spiritual essence in this gray and lean old shape that shall flit upward too” (X, 446).

The titular dealer sits outside a train depot, peddling gingerbread and apples with little enthusiasm and less success. The narrator informs us that “innumerable disappointments have rendered him so far a philosopher” (X, 442). Yet, little of the product of his thought is brought to bear on the world. The little criticism extant on this story points to the transient, insignificant nature of this character whose “abortive prime…likewise, contained within itself the prophecy and image of his lean and torpid age” (X, 443).\textsuperscript{107} Indeed, critical material indicates the narrator’s focus on what his sketch is missing, contrasted with the usual role of a narrator whose regular priority is to discuss the storyworld’s potentiality. In fact, Hawthorne utilised this lack to explore the ideas of alienation and progress so attendant on individualism at this time.

The observer is drawn to the apple-dealer despite the “beautiful faces” and “noble forms” that he encounters on his daily journey. There is something about this subdued man that evokes a sense of sympathy in the narrator, one that engages him to describe the apparent futility of his work, and the lack of ostensible will to change his situation. The incongruity of the apple-dealer’s situation marks the man out as remarkable, however. Sitting by the rail-depot, he appears to be

\textsuperscript{106} Allard, “A Watchman”, 38.

pitted against his natural enemy, “the steam fiend…the type of all that go ahead” (X, 445). Contrastingly, here sits “the old man, the representative of that melancholy class who, by some witchcraft, are doomed never to share in the world’s exulting progress” (X, 446). The purpose of this tale, from the outset, looks to show how the “moral picturesque” (X, 439) must be sought in the concrete reality of humankind, over the abstraction of imagined words. The subject of Hawthorne’s story is one for whom the temporal presents a real, justifiable dimension of appreciation - his interest does not lie elsewhere. It will necessitate his death before any contact with the infinite can be made.

There is, however, some sleight of hand by the author in his comparative view of “progress” - the alienated individual and the “type of all that go ahead”. Despite the supernatural association of the train, it is a strong signifier of the “stiff and regular process” that turned Owen Warland pale and sickly (X, 450). The “progress” of the train is impersonal and, therefore, illusory for Hawthorne, much like that portrayed by Clifford Pyncheon as he discusses time through the lens of his travel (II, 257). The developments associated with train travel suggest the removal of the individual from one’s worldly placement for the writer. This destroys that which tends towards the eternal in one’s life, leaving only the earthly for appreciation, something that impacts Clifford’s mind deeply. The train does not represent the spiritualisation of material bound to the work of an artist, but the functional, purely temporal movement of something that can go faster than that which preceded it, making the soteriological journey no speedier than the uninspired person. Hawthorne problematises the reality of progress, as something affected by individual action and industrial development.

The “life-long shiver” that will pass from the unremarkable apple-dealer is comparable to the beloved progress symbolised by locomotion, which takes from the spiritual the emphasis needed to experience “real” movement towards salvation. His individual qualities make for a sympathetic portrayal that ensures his presumed suffering will end upon death. There is something to his solitary nature that allows the reader to agree with the narrator’s assumption that, because his “essence” (X,
446) is unlike the iron of the train, he might attain salvation. Hawthorne suggests that those who mould themselves and their surroundings from iron are soteriologically compromised, particularly where one’s “vapors” should “vanish away while the essence flits upward to the infinite” (X, 443). There is a delicate balance to be sought between the real and the ideal. The preoccupation with the mundane found in “The Old Apple-Dealer” is echoed by a number of Hawthorne’s characters, whose hard nature makes acceptance of humanity’s flaws difficult. Perhaps the most prominent of these figures is the ruthless John Endicott, whose “whole man, visage, frame, and soul, seemed wrought of iron, gifted with life and thought, yet all of one substance with his head-piece and breast-plate” (IX, 63). Hawthorne often features blacksmiths within this category of men, continuously emphasising in his work the crudity of their livelihood, and the harshness of their individual striving. Robert Danforth of “The Artist of the Beautiful” has little time for the spiritual or anything that gets in the way of his work. In “The Birthmark”, the blacksmith character of Aminadab, who “seemed to represent man’s physical nature” (X, 43), is presented as infernal, travelling from his subterranean workshop to fulfil the requests of the maniacal Aylmer. Hawthorne turns other characters too focused on the material into stone. In “The Man of Adamant”, Richard Digby is ossified having ignored the pleas of Mary Goffe to pray in the clearing’s sunshine, and after drinking from the water in his cave, ossifies. Similarly, having cast himself into his old lime kiln, Ethan Brand’s heart is discovered to have turned to lime, before the unapologetically mundane Bartram breaks his remains up to make another half bushel to sell. Hawthorne’s characters that refuse to balance the earthly and metaphysical slowly turn into inanimate objects, or become ignorant of the world outside of the material. Their inurement is metonymically apparent in the objects they lust after, or the objects they become. As David Mitchell writes about Captain Ahab,

108 Numerous articles on the question of the relation between the physical and metaphysical natures of literary figures now proliferate. Although not restricted to the field of disability studies, the most fruitful readings have thus far come from the examination of disability and its holistic effect on a character’s perception of, and interaction with, the storyworld of a narrative. See Cindy LaConn, “‘It is More than Lame’: Female Disability, Sexuality, and the Maternal in the 19th Century Novel” in The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189-201. Also, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
whose physicality is an exemplar of his metaphysical, cosmic standing: “There is a short-circuiting of narrative purpose that occurs because of the physical fact of Ahab’s prostheticized difference. The repaired leg signifies a physical and metaphysical lack that cements the captain’s identity as obsessive, overbearing, and overwrought.”

Indubitately, the leg not only connects Ahab to the earth in its materiality, but, in the case of Hawthorne’s characters, it is symptomatic of, and further disallows, the tendency towards the spiritual.

The idea of the substantial, then, is critical to any reading of Hawthorne’s work in relation to his religious individualism. The writer contemplates the subject of balancing the material and the ethereal - the continual interplay in life of the real and the ideal, and how giving oneself too much to one or the other is ultimately unsatisfactory, even dangerous. If the old apple-dealer may be accused of failing to think upon the eternal, while simultaneously caring little for his own life’s influence on the world around him, then Richard Digby is, in “The Man of Adamant” (1837), an example of the extreme individualist who, through his religion, breaks all links with humanity, based on a stubborn belief in personal predestined election. Like Ethan Brand, his radicalism has taken him too far from the “magnetic chain of humanity” and his personal soteriological struggle.

Richard Digby’s self-belief in personal election leads him to commit the mortal sin of claiming to know the will of God. Hawthorne takes Calvinist tenets to an ironic extreme to show their inherent hypocrisy, pointing to the tension at the heart of Calvin’s theology and preventing the protagonist’s “absolute dissent” as a reductio ad absurdum of Protestantism, one that brings a man into so rigid and lonely an orthodoxy that he becomes “the prisoner of himself.”

Digby leaves the Puritan community, because he believes their practices are flawed and impious. Digby asserts the predominance of his own beliefs over those of his peers, and takes to the forest in order to find a secluded spot that will allow him solitude to indulge his piety without the interference of “the

---


wretches whom he saw struggling with the billows of eternal death” (XI, 161). This “man of adamant” is too given to the “vapors” of his own eternity, unacknowledged previously by the apple-dealer (X, 443). He casts off the brotherhood of man from the tale’s outset, he is “the gloomiest and most intolerant” of his Calvinist peers (XI, 161). His belief in his own election is unshakeable, as Providence “had entrusted him, alone of mortals,…with the treasure of a true faith” (XI, 161). This believer is not for turning; his very “communion” with his fellow man endangers the gifts bestowed on him by Heaven. His biblical language situates him in a schema of constant spiritual battle against the Devil, who has already laid claim to those that listen to sermons in the meetinghouse, that “temple of heathen idolatry” (XI, 162). The cosmic setting of this contest takes on a number of the characteristics of Ahab’s struggle with the Whale. Digby’s insistence on his solitary crusade echoes the aforementioned tropes problematised by Spenser and Milton; but his specifically masculine nature reinforces a tradition of deep-rooted Christian strength. Furthermore, in presenting his conflict, Digby very literally leaves the “city of man”, focusing entirely on his salvation and battle against evil in terms akin to the civitas Dei that Emerson so borrowed from in his rhetoric and writings.111

Although Digby’s faith is deeply individualistic, he declares that it is not in himself, rather seeking proof through its God-given nature. Hawthorne appears, in this story that echoes “Young Goodman Brown’s” structure, to be checking the list of attributes for the religious individualist, taken to the extreme in this bigoted character. Importantly, this tale works out many of the problems of the Calvinist insistence on faith alone while simultaneously requiring good deeds as an unavoidable extension of visible sainthood. Rigby asserts where Brown was unable to; “In his view of the matter, it was a most abominable crime - as, indeed, it is a great folly - for men to trust to

---

111 From “Self-Reliance”; “Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For every thing that is given, something is taken.” See comparisons with Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance” in The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Vol. II Essays: First Series (New York; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 84.

133
their own strength” (XI, 161). Digby seems to have isolated salvation through himself, removing his physical presence from the seemingly miasmic iniquity of the “communion with those abominable myriads” (XI, 161).

This story presents a continuation of many of the issues presented in “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) and “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1836). Furthermore, it is something Hawthorne would return to later in his career in an inversion of “The Man of Adamant”, namely “The Great Stone Face” (1850), where the inanimate becomes incarnate through greatness, rather than the indication here (and later in “Ethan Brand”) that those who isolate themselves wilfully from the brotherhood of man become ossified and forgotten in death. Digby’s religious individualism is contiguous with the defiant violence of Hawthorne’s “Red Cross Knight errant”, John Endicott.112 These Puritan Übermenschen must “hew” space for their religion to flourish in the New World. This is deeply suggestive of the author’s attitude toward the violence that so characterised Puritanism’s establishment and enforcement in the face of dissenters and native populations. Just as Endicott “assaulted the hallowed May-Pole…with his keen sword” (IX, 63), so Richard Digby arms himself “to hew space enough for a tabernacle in the wilderness, and some few other necessaries, especially a sword and gun” (XI, 162). In each case, the truth of the Lord comes with military might that controls belief and threatens removal from the predestined schema of Puritanism. These stories’ expansionist claims occur spiritually and physically, intertwined through the act of land “reclamation” for the American project. It is the will of Providence made “manifest” in the actions of these acquisitive citizens. Hawthorne’s skepticism about this process is suggested by the tone of ambiguity taken towards his Puritan frontiersmen; in assuming to know the place of America in the world, they simultaneously stake claim to knowing the designs of God in His plans for the country. Their religious individualism subtly undercuts Digby and Endicott’s respective claims for salvation. To cut out a space for “proper” worship in America, they must reject the

112 Colacurcio, Province of Piety, 599 n. 24.
impropriety of all beliefs but their own, “rest on (their) sword” (IX, 65), and gaze upon the inevitable judgment of God on those deemed unworthy.

This situation shows little of the balance needed for the individual, between the temporal and the eternal. Hence how Digby, now set up in the wilderness feels “a curiosity…to see whether the fire and brimstone would not rush down from Heaven at once, now that the one righteous man had provided for his own safety” (XI, 162). As with Endicott’s claim of universal centrality, “there lies the only may-pole in New England” (IX, 63) (and, by extension, the only one that matters in Christendom) so Digby’s “tabernacle” presents a similar Christian omphalos. Hawthorne highlights a deified individualism that commits the error of pretending to know God’s will. Digby’s rejection of “the lying interpretations” of others is here portrayed in extremis:

If a British Royalist - named “Digby” as it turns out - could plausibly predict that Puritanism would empower “a pope in every parish”, then surely on American Ironist can fairly notice the reductive accomplishment of that already reductive prediction.

Everyman his own Pope.113

Hawthorne warns against this unnatural self-relationship, that posits a “completed” persona, exultant in solitude. The individualism Hawthorne indicates is one contingent on an existent relationship with a community, one that balances the individual’s dangerous impulses with the moral and ethically embedded codes of society. Where Digby and Endicott explain the world through their self-focused, presumptuous model, the righteous person might look to express their own “self-culture” in a way that maintains connection with humanity’s “magnetic chain.”114 Richard

---

113 ibid, 240.

114 This was, as noted by various Unitarian ministers, a central contention of the social power of religion. As Handy further notes, the relationship between civil rule and the truth of religion was seen as inextricable in Hawthorne’s time; “(society) must sustain the fundamental truths of religion, without which their would be no social tie, or any obligation of law extending to the conscience” in Handy, A Christian America, 49.
Digby is an archetypal religious individualist, but has lost connection with the humanity that might provide equilibrium to his pursuits. As Sharon Cameron states, his “(R)igidity fossilizes his whole body, engraves it in the cave…which represents exemption from the human community from which he flees, and represents as well, and as fundamentally, exemption from all that is beyond his own corporeal limits.”\textsuperscript{115} In his reliance on a skewed vision of the eternal and ignorance of the earthly, his individualist beliefs overleap themselves in assuming to know how the “finger of Providence hath pointed (the) way” (\textit{XI}, 163).

Often, the relationship between the temporal and eternal in Hawthorne’s work is signified through the description of psychological separation or, in the case of Digby, excision from the community that reminds one of one’s timely limitations. Where Digby enacted and embodied a visible religious individualism, caring little for worldly concerns unless directed by Providence, the Reverend Hooper of “The Minister’s Black Veil” presents a physical blockage to his own views, separating the community from his self-held beliefs through a veil. As Fogle asserts; “the solid actuality (of the veil) has the effect of isolating the minister from Human society, which unhappy result presumably differs only in degree from the self-isolation of every living soul.”\textsuperscript{116} Rev. Hooper has placed too much stock in worldly appearance and action as a signifier of a larger, spiritual reality. Hawthorne draws our attention to this in his preponderance on the physical description of the minister’s parishioners; the “spruce bachelors” and “pretty maidens” (\textit{IX}, 37). Even before we discover the nature of the black veil, the “clerical neatness, as if a careful wife had starched his band” (\textit{IX}, 38) of Hooper is described. Immediately the narrative situates Hooper physically within a community, emphasising these attributes above his spiritual qualities. The veil is described through its material attributes, the “two folds of crape, which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin” (\textit{IX}, 38). Hooper takes the esoteric decision to cover his eyes from the world,

\textsuperscript{115} Cameron, \textit{Corporeal Self}, 80.

\textsuperscript{116} Fogle, \textit{The Light and the Dark}, 34.
and to restrict their view of what he sees, how he sees and the reason for seeing this way. It is, despite the metaphysical nature of various aspects of the process of looking, a difference constituted through an object that engenders Hawthorne’s treatment of Hooper’s peculiar brand of individualism. This is something we will return to with Hester Prynne, who is represented through the “A”, the significance of her distinction bound initially to it takes on the difference of psychology, spirituality and morality, as becomes the case with the self-concealed minister.

Hawthorne shows how, once one’s opinions are concealed, a secret made manifest in appearance, society grows uncomfortable. The writer may be searching into New England’s past for the foundations of this story, but it carries with it the Jacksonian fear of those who worked in secret. If the time created the “radical equality of condition which makes (man) masterless and separate”, it carried the proviso that the self-determined man, “if his will power were not enlisted in the disinterested service of his country, might destroy the fabric of society by his egotistically determined course.” Work completed in secret, as Hawthorne illustrated in “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, “The Artist of the Beautiful” and “Drowne’s Wooden Image” was inherently untrustworthy, as it sought actively its own good, rather than that of the collective. Symptomatic of this widely-propagated opinion is Andrew Jackson’s letter to Samuel Swartwout, dated February 22, 1825:

No mid-night taper burnt by me; no secret conclaves were held, or cabals entered into, to persuade any to a violation of pledges given, or of instructions received. By me no plans were concerted to impair the pure principles of our Republican institutions, or to frustrate that fundamental (sic) one which maintains the supremacy of the peoples will; on

---

117 Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion, 44.
118 Ward, Andrew Jackson, 188.
the contrary, having never in any manner either before the people or Congress in the slightest manner interfered with the question, my conscience stands void of offence…119

The thematic importance of this to Hawthorne’s work, and to the Jacksonian Era as a whole, cannot be overstated. Jackson’s “Democracy” had ingrained in it a set of values that, by their democratic nature, were based fundamentally on ideas of public guidance. Approval was secondary to the man that worked in public in Jackson’s eyes, because the approbation of others was inevitable for the self-made man. Jacksonian individualism required public scrutiny, in order to legitimise the claim of being “self-made”.

Hooper, his face cloaked, walks at the “slow and quiet pace…customary with abstracted men” (IX, 38). The veil refocuses his mind and, seemingly, his soul, as “it threw its obscurity between him” (IX, 39) and the Word of God. It also refocuses his congregation’s world-view, imbuing in his sermons a “power of blackness”, a gloom associated with bygone generations of Puritans who exulted the more “the darker the shadow overhead” (IX, 162). The villagers are unable to see the face, the “trustworthy sign of the subjectivity within,”120 that would comfort their worldly insufficiency. This blackness of spirit serves only to admit its own iniquity. This exemplifies the tale’s “twice-told” nature, it is both identifying the dark “communion” (X, 88) of the human race, while self-demarcating as an individual sinner. Hawthorne’s “twice-told” stories need refracting for their double nature, the darkness of Hooper’s veil is the refractive implement through which humanity’s sinfulness becomes apparent in the story, and thereby individualised. In personalising his sin, the veil works to reflect that of others; their fright potentially stemming from the


120 J. Hillis Miller, Hawthorne and History (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 76. The issue of repressed sexuality is one keenly felt in an era that admonished secrecy from its uppermost political echelons. Hawthorne addresses the issue of secret sexuality in his tale “Monsieur du Miroir”. This deeply suggestive tale appears to discuss contemporary issues regarding sexuality and masturbation, which was equated by reformers and moralists in Hawthorne’s as “the slavery of man to himself.” For more on this see Russ Castronovo, Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth Century United States (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2001), 97.
paradoxical illuminating qualities of the “power of blackness”, as noted earlier in the discussion of “Young Goodman Brown”. The ostensible disembodiment of Hooper’s face appears to present a favourable epistemological outlook, a depth of thought shut off from the majority of mankind. Hooper’s physicality, the visibility of his “blackness”, incorporates the potential of the spiritual insight his plight may have afforded him. Furthermore, the separation the veil guarantees indicates his potential status as a “voice of one crying in the wilderness”, who calls for “the way of the Lord” to be prepared, with the implication that his dire warnings will be ignored.\footnote{Matt. 3:3 (AV)} The disembodiment of Hooper, that which assures his privileged epistemology, denies his being heeded by the congregation in the manner he intends.

Hooper’s differentiation from his congregation turns from the pure physicality of the veil to the spiritual during his sermon. We are told that though his words have not changed from previous sermons in their intent, “(a)n unsought pathos came hand in hand with awe” (IX, 40). The apparent ridiculousness of the situation is not lost on the parishioners who, acknowledging their difficulty in identifying why Hooper’s hidden visage so perturbs them, discuss the veil’s awful potential; “How strange,” said a lady, “that a simple black veil, such as any woman might wear on her bonnet, should become such a terrible thing on Mr. Hooper’s face!” (IX, 41) Hawthorne’s portrayal of the effect of secrecy on small-town gossip indicates the provincial wonderings of local persons. Tellingly, however, Hawthorne inserts ontological contemplation into the words of the parishioners that exists on a level of thoughtful questioning apparent to the Rev. Hooper, but something that still escapes them; “I wonder he is not afraid to be alone with himself!”…”Men sometimes are so,” said her husband” (IX, 41). Hooper’s decision to remain behind the veil is one of physical secrecy, but does not necessarily guarantee spiritual “improvement”. We are told that his sermons maintain their previous standard, but it is the power with which the parishioners imbue his words that lend them their terrible nature. Hooper, on a literal level, can no longer be taken at face value. His separation,
however, grows through what many in the Jacksonian era would have seen as a virtuous trait when put to good use, the “gentle, but unconquerable obstinacy” (*IX*, 46) of the American who places himself before God’s judgment, and freely admits inadequacy.

The veil itself has little precedent on an institutional level. Although Hooper continues his work in the village, his peculiar method of separation is not scripturally justified, nor condoned by any Church body. It is the physical manifestation of the separation found in the “darkness between our souls!” (*IX*, 47) Hooper’s “plighted wife” (*IX*, 45), Elizabeth, is unable to have the beleaguered reverend remove the veil, although their interaction reveals the ambiguity at the heart of the covering, one that the wearer himself is potentially unable to explain. On two occasions it is suggested that the veil is in place because of “sorrow” or “sin” (*IX*, 46, 48). Certainly, if this is the case, it has cast a wealth of sadness on his daily life, and that of the parishioners. When seen the other way, sadness at mankind’s iniquity serves only to highlight the sin which drew the minister to don his concealment. Like Goodman Brown’s unknowable reality, the complexion of the world changes once one admits the state of depravity in which one lives before God. It represents the ultimate interruption to our perception, individualising our sin to the moment of self-perception, simultaneously emphasising our shortcomings and the inscrutability of the Providence that “pointed the way” (*IX*, 163). Fundamentally, the veil, in its “power of blackness” reflects uncertainty, and confirms the epistemological break represented in the separation of consciousnesses.

There is a pervading sense, however, that Hooper does not think himself in any way special, particularly when viewed comparatively with Richard Digby or John Endicott. His is a distinction that works in the world, one that wonders about the fact of difference and its essential reason, even as it enacts separation; “…if I cover (my face) for secret sin, what mortal might not do the same?” (*IX*, 46) Hooper’s individualism is not monomaniacal, the very signifier of his difference points to a religious reality, rather than claims of salvific preference. His veiling is an acknowledgement of the collective nature of depravity, the fact his veil is never removed suggests
that his revelation to come is constantly deferred, something that Hooper embodies but cannot claim to know. The mystery of the veil can be seen as a representation of the unknown ways of Providence. It is also, however, important to note that this selfsame mystery neither enlightens the wearer nor the congregation. Hooper, if previously enlightened, knows only that he knows humanity’s darkness; “With self-shudderings and outward terrors, he walked continually in its shadow, groping darkly within his own soul, or gazing through a medium that saddened the whole world” (IX, 48). Mankind is destined to view the world “through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13), but the physical manifestation of the veil acts only to confirm the Hooper’s individual perspective, and the unseen veils of humanity. Hawthorne indicates this special aspect of the veil’s ability to affirm the individual, purely personal nature of suffering, soteriological or otherwise:

By the aid of his mysterious emblem - for there was no other apparent cause - he became a man of awful power, over souls that were in agony for sin. His converts always regarded him with a dread peculiar to themselves, affirming, though but figuratively, that, before he brought them to celestial light, they had been with him behind the black veil. Its gloom, indeed enabled him to sympathize with all dark affections… In this manner Mr. Hooper spent a long life, irreproachable in outward act, yet shrouded in dismal suspicions; kind and loving, though unloved, and dimly feared; a man apart from men, shunned in their health and joy, but ever summoned to their aid in mortal anguish (IX, 49).

The “figurative” nature of the sinner’s respective experience is emphasised, the feeling as if they had had revealed to them the world’s blackness from behind the veil. This is, for Hawthorne as for Hooper, impossible. The story’s spiritual impact relies on the subjective religiosity demanded by many distinctly American contemporary religious movements, most notably Unitarianism and Transcendentalism. The veil serves to confirm the solitary nature of our dread, although it my be
shared between people, it is the significance of how one sees through it that affects its power. Hooper is a man apart from men; even those who attain the feeling of having shared the reverend’s plight die soon afterwards - it is the “dying sinners” (IX, 49) who cry aloud for the absolving powers his veil may provide. His sympathy is as figurative as the veil is for the reprobate; Hooper’s “secret sin” is his own, his empathy “with all dark affections” merely a suggestion of the insight his burden has presented to him. This portrayal of the collective suffering of humanity finds its apotheosis in this passage, maintaining the focus on the individualised nature of sin. Hawthorne moves between the ontological categories of Sin and sin here, rejecting neither, but emphasising the unknowable nature of the former, and the unavoidability of the latter, reserved for each individual alone.

Hooper’s death encapsulates the repercussions of his life’s choices. It represents the human condition’s ultimate despair over the feeble reverend, who is surrounded by “deacons, and other eminently pious members of his church” (IX, 50). It is expected that the dying man will allow his face to be revealed before death; but the minister refuses, and clasps the veil to his face so that “(o)n earth, never” (IX, 50) will his self-imposed darkness be lifted. Hooper repudiated the precedent of his church and the traditions of his forebears throughout his life, and so, as he dies, he provides another refusal of expectation. Hawthorne phrases the figurative nature of the veil through Reverend Mr. Clark, of Westbury, who sees it as shutting off “time from eternity” (IX, 51). As heretofore recognised, Hawthorne’s repeated contemplation of this dichotomy finds no easy answer in various situations throughout his oeuvre. It is not necessarily dialectical in its struggle, Hawthorne’s characters rarely find the synthesis that so constituted these systematic processes. The lack of ostensible closure in this synthetic formulation is also true of the reader. This uncertainty has many functions, but frequently works to emphasise the fundamental ineffability that Hawthorne believed characterised our spiritual life. Uncertainty is, in this case, an element not restricted to the hermeneutic of the story, but something intrinsic to its consideration, a dual ambiguity of reader and
text that Hawthorne posits the text *qua* reader. This effectively expands these respective roles to renew the loss of interpretation contingent on, and consequent to, the veil.

In the case of Hooper, who, with his last breath, casts off any residual claim of institutional authority, we see the import of the individual actor in his religious beliefs, over the processual march of the collective. Hooper accepts sole vision and responsibility for his earthly action, deferring to the promise of salvation. The epistemological breakdown represented by the veil appears to disrupt causality. He accepts the inability to know time through eternity, or vice versa, where the attending reverends expect one to follow the other, as simple cause and effect. The black veil connects the minister to both the temporal and the everlasting. It is his misfortune, in a manner similar to Goodman Brown, to recognise the darkness in the “communion of our race.” His evocation of a situation in which “man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator” (*IX*, 52) suggests a perfectibility which Hawthorne ultimately rejects. This is no tale of the “knight of faith”, but a continued attempt by the author to bear witness to the worldly balance of time and eternity that so obsessed his artistic characters. In rejecting the shared sin of the world, Hooper yet confesses to Sin and the powerlessness of the individual to avoid it. This story of observation transposes the murky forest of Goodman Brown or the scaffold-view of Arthur Dimmesdale into “two folds of crape” (*IX*, 38) and consigns us to the darksome view that is our reality, without promising the lifting of the veil.

Hawthorne’s “power of blackness” is a relative, dynamic term of reference. Where we expect moral judgment we do not find it, Hawthorne’s ability to observe mankind’s connection through common weakness is central to our understanding of his work.122 This ambiguity continues to our interpretation of his characters that stand beyond humanity’s dark “communion”. The collective, when rejected, has a way of returning the individual to the place they belong, a link in humanity’s magnetic chain that is reminded of its connections, through death. As Doctor Clarke

remarks about Lady Eleanor: “She seeks to place herself above the sympathies of our common nature, which envelopes 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!” (IX, 276) Sympathy is pervasive within Hawthorne’s art, and for the individualist who remains on the right side of the monomaniacal, it is often this quality that allows them retain societal position and a link with the brotherhood of man. This relation is itself quasi-dialectical, as Bercovitch notes; it results in an “exclusion and expansion that established, defined, and processually secured the boundaries of union, something “new” replete with mythic past and “manifest” future.”

This dialectic is, perhaps, most clearly seen in the story of Hester Prynne, with whom our sense of community is formed through the isolation that denies her membership of the collective. As with Hooper’s fabric, her situation touches upon the delicate balance between the temporal and the transcendent that so bewitched Hawthorne, to different ends than obsessed his Transcendentalist contemporaries. It is within Hester’s consciousness that Hawthorne exhibited the powerful potential of the individual, he/she that dialectically produces the statist impulse towards incarceration on the one hand, while simultaneously sowing the seeds of dissent, the American self of “multitudes”.

Criticism surrounding The Scarlet Letter by and large focuses on the figure of Hester Prynne as an outsider, as somebody whose dissent is bound to civil and religious disobedience, inextricably connected in Puritan New England. Michael Pringle points to the “political power linked to God and religion, the center around which the community is structured, there cannot be any casual questioning of the official decree that brands Hester an adulteress.” Bercovitch posits the theory that the “A” is “a matter not of repressing radical energies but of redirecting them… into a


124 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, 77.

continuing opposition between self and society.”

The issue of Hester’s “sainted” individualism is that, paradoxically within it, there lies the urge to radicalism that touches on the tension of Calvinism’s subjective sola fide that still requires public divulgence and exposition. Bercovitch focuses on the political aspect, continuing; “(t)o endorse Hester as radical is to believe that social change follows from self-realization, not vice-versa; that true revolution is therefore an issue of individual growth rather than group action…”

I wish to look at Hester’s individualism by extending these previous statements, while also suggesting that her resistance to the control of institutions is, in part, linked to the disempowering and depoliticising nature of maturing Jacksonian ideologies that condoned the generalised counterattack on the accepted pillars of society (and their moral lessons). Hawthorne’s portrayal of Hester exhibits many of the aspects of individualistic behaviour found in his exploration of Puritan societal structures in “Young Goodman Brown” and “The May-Pole of Merry Mount”. Among the common threads of these tales and the larger romance is the question of the disempowerment of the individual by politico-religious means. The deconstruction of his belief structures leaves Brown lost in the midst of his community, where, having removed the kernel of his faith, he grows isolated. Any control he holds is purely subjective, a reflection of his mistrust of those that cavort with the Devil at night, only to play the judicious magistrate or deacon during the day. Similarly, the actions of John Endicott enforce Puritan hegemony. His violent, undemocratic hewing of the titular pole is indicative of the circumvention of the political by the religious. As later developed in The Scarlet Letter, the may-pole of the Old World becomes a Puritan whipping post. Perhaps, in the Jacksonian call for progress, this in turn became the telegraph pole, and later the telephone pole that so aided the trans-regional development of the United States. As Hawthorne attested in “The Custom-

126 Bercovitch, Office, 33.
127 ibid, 120.
128 Widmer, Young America, 3.
House”, the changing contextual web of influence transformed emblems inter-generationally. Just as the eponymous letter reached him through its chequered, punitive history, so do the technical advancements that others claimed for “progress”. The whole country could not be taken up and changed, but its narratives could be reformed along democratic lines. The letter-as-emblem is indicative of such a model of progress; its once punitive nature becomes artefact. Without the context of the religious-political nexus of the Puritan judicial and carceral systems, the letter is merely something that invites the writer’s imagination by presenting an ostensible lack of signification.

Hester’s space for individualistic behaviour is the wresting back of control taken from her through the moral judgments of magistrates whose strict codes centre on the celebration of God in inflexible terms. Through this text, Hawthorne problematises the utopian self-reliance of his age. His characters continuously acknowledge an imbalance between the self and institutional power; when the implicitly self-interested nature of these bodies is externalised, the possibility for individual self-reliance may be realised. The position of Hester may be analysed through the lens of her religious, “sainted” individualism as a figure of initial powerlessness, whose control develops through a complex nexus of the tension that exists between self and society. Furthermore, Dimmesdale’s secret sin, typologically similar to Reverend Hooper, also necessitates bodily covering, something that improves his visible demonstrations of faith.

Hawthorne’s employment status is a central element of “The Custom-House”. It puts words into Puritans’ mouths in a way that is strikingly different from the rest of Hawthorne’s output. “A writer of story-books! What kind of a business in life, - what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in this day and generation, - may that be? Why the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!” (I, 10) Immediately, religion is foregrounded, particularly its interconnected nature with the business of life. Hawthorne’s seemingly frivolous career does not

129 See O’Sullivan, United States Magazine Vol. 1.
suggest to his stern predecessors the salvation-through-vocation expected of the New England man. Hawthorne arrives before his ancestors with his book and his pen, rather than “with his Bible and his sword” (I, 9). Further than this, Hawthorne’s ventriloquising creates an interesting power dynamic between the “decapitated surveyor” and his ancestors. Not only does Hawthorne control what they see and say, his voicing of their scorn is an undermining of the sentiments expressed. Hawthorne’s art posits his position of authority, not in terms of his work, but in his ability to reformulate what his ancestors say, to control and narrativise their anger. Previous readings of this passage have analysed it as an example of paternal authority, and the continuing influence of “a false constricting sense of authoritatively decreed value with the paternal - his Puritan ancestors, the governmental patronage system in Customs, the patriarchal society of seventeenth-century Boston - a force that insists on confining “objectivity”.”

Fundamentally, this misses the act of writing undertaken by the real Hawthorne that, in its own biographic manner, answers back to his forefathers. The ventriloquism is, in itself, a claim to authorial power. As they dismiss his vocation from centuries previous, Hawthorne undermines the very notion of their politico-religious, patriarchal society through the usurpation of their voices.

Other criticism of this passage has focused on Hawthorne’s previous “isolation from the market” before his return to the Custom-House that “compels him to reside in a dilapidated monument to commercialism.” This misreads the situation on a number of counts, particularly with regard to Hawthorne’s transgression from the domestic sphere into the economic confines of the workplace. Far from this being the case, Hawthorne’s economic life prior to his appointment in Salem was self-directed and manipulated through the literary marketplace. Understanding Hawthorne as an economic actor only when he entered the Custom-House continues the perception


131 Faherty, Remodeling the Nation, 183.
of this writer as an isolated man, aloof from the currents of everyday life; as opposed to the politically engaged, astute citizen that this analysis will consolidate.

*The Scarlet Letter*, from the outset, focuses on the visibility of individualism. Hawthorne points to this idea throughout his *oeuvre*, suggesting the invented, rather than spiritually predestined, nature of the New World. Just as Hawthorne presented an image of patriotism in order to circumvent the questions asked of the surveyor/writer in “The Custom-House”, so, it is implied, the Puritans were required to embody a certain aesthetic of religiosity in their community that demonstrated the power of individual belief. Owing to the strength of one’s religious beliefs and individual strength in that faith, the question of the superficial nature of such outward presentation is emphasised by Hawthorne. The narrative begins with a stark reminder of the need to maintain distinction between individual and collective, as we are faced with “(a) throng of bearded men, in sad-colored garments and gray…” (*I*, 47) Hawthorne’s homogenisation of the Puritans begins afresh, having begun in the arboreal blackness of “Young Goodman Brown”, their greyness leads us to see them in purely collective terms, intermixed with nameless women. Indeed, the only aspects of the scene Hawthorne wishes to differentiate from the all-consuming grey, apart from the scarlet letter-bearing Hester, the “wild rose-bush” (*I*, 48) are two strangers to the village, namely a native American and Roger Chillingworth. Hawthorne’s highlighting of the fabricated nature of New England society is bound in these early scenes to the “black flower(s)” (*I*, 48) of the presented society, most notably the prison and the cemetery. The American vision, this *civitas Dei*, is not untouched by death or punishment, early imperfections demonstrated by the narrator alongside this group of faces that all hold “the same solemnity…” (*I*, 49)

From the unnamed women that are strewn throughout the crowd we return to the centralised figure of Hester. Such is the power of her response to the severe Puritans that, like the “sainted Anne Hutchinson” (*I*, 48), her presence has “the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself” (*I*, 54). Hester “is dragged out into
the sunshine” (I, 54) to differentiate her further from the grey villagers who attend the sombre spectacle of her judgment. Her strength and the individualistic nature of her belief, respectively, mark her out from the “common mind” (I, 57) of the village-people. Hawthorne’s focus on the “physiognomies” of the crowd extends to those he wishes to differentiate through their visible self-reliance. Hester’s beauty, magnified anew by the tragedy of her situation, leads people to look at her as if for the first time. In particular, Hawthorne focuses on her “dark and abundant hair” (I, 52), which, once covered as instructed by the Puritan judgement, is indicative of the intense sexuality of her character, and the religious modesty that is encouraged by its covering. Hawthorne’s description of Hester’s beauty suggests the other elements of her disciplining, namely the prescribed modesty with which she must now comply. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the features of Chillingworth hold a “remarkable intelligence”, “as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could not fail to mould the physical to itself, and become manifest by unmistakable tokens” (I, 60). Although the fact of their connection has not been revealed, Hester and Chillingworth’s respective radical interiorities distinguishes them from the encircling Puritans. The homogeneity of the latter’s belief system works to place them within an immutable relation to the world, and thus their features are not individually presented or, even, attributable. The Puritans appear to place their version of the “city of Man” in absolute relation to that of God. This is reflected in the extreme interiority of their beliefs, that which Colacurcio saw as Hawthorne’s subtle irony of a “Pope in every parish” in the figure of Richard Digby.

Hester and Chillingworth, in particular, may be grouped separately from the Puritans grouped together at the novel’s opening and conclusion respectively. The individualisation of Hester and Chillingworth in these scenes is an important narratorial technique utilised not simply to contrast these figures with the Puritans, but to indicate the provenance of their individuality. It is not

---

132 The influence of Augustinian thought on Calvin is well-documented, see particularly; “Calvin’s teaching was to a considerable extent...a revival of Augustinianism.” Anthony N.S. Lane, John Calvin: A Student of the Church Fathers (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 38.
enough to suggest their difference; one must look to the internalised religiosity of the Puritans as a
counterpoint to the public differentiation illustrated by the author in order to demonstrate the
immanent individualism of Hester and Chillingworth. Akin to Calvinist readings of man’s fallen
nature, this is a “state” for the Puritans, whereas Hester, particularly, exemplifies the mutability of
man, and the unknowability of Providence. Chillingworth’s involvement in the narrative is an
experiment on Dimmesdale that posits the changeability of his metaphysical nature through
interference with his physical self. Hester’s secrecy is a preoccupation with the changing relation of
her self to society, a relationship that consistently changes with the softening of attitudes towards
her “crime” as it recedes into the past.

These characters’ respectively individualistic attitudes become apparent through a visible
change in the power dynamic between self and society. The realisation of individualistic tendencies
aside, Hester can only assert her self-reliance when there is a rupture in the moral processes of the
collective. Chillingworth’s reliance on looking “inward” (I, 61) is “rather a matter of shame than
self-congratulation…” (I, 65) His self-removal from the “magnetic chain of humanity” is a reaction
to his inability to empathise, which proves symbiotic to his isolation. For Hester, the metamorphosis
in her social standing proves more overt, explicitly visible before the community. The letter makes
her “a living sermon against sin” (I, 63), she is cast from the Puritan settlement, her individualism is
reflexively borne of her enforced lack of contact with would-be peers. Although different for both
Hester and Chillingworth, it is a disruption of selfhood that leads to the imbalance between these
individuals and society.

How society imposes this upon these characters is important, their respective individualisms
take different forms through their respective conception. Chillingworth, having been “a man of kind
and genial spirit” (I, 65) appears to undergo a radical change through his disillusionment, his self-
reliance is innate, constructed from within. Hester’s does not hold the same disillusion with her
conditions, her stoicism seems to react to the extrinsic conditions of her change. Where she must
wear her newfound identity, Chillingworth is bound to a fate of the purely intrinsic. In this external/internal dialectic the unseen synthesis of Arthur Dimmesdale is found, who must wear his internal burden behind the cloth that signifies his social standing. His change stems from this curious mixture of Hester and Chillingworth; the externality of Dimmesdale’s condition is yet cloaked - his selfhood is reliant on the deferral of both the community’s judgment, and his own admittance of guilt. The opening scene, therefore, for Dimmesdale, is as relevant to his portrayal of his own selfhood, and any religious or soteriological conditions attendant on this; “…thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer!” (I, 67) Pleadingly, Dimmesdale requests for Hester to trust her personal strength in order to free him, but she will not speak his name. The minister’s true selfhood is, therefore, cloaked like the revelation of his past, a mixture of Hester’s letter and Chillingworth’s burning interior rejection of society.

Hester, in a manner akin to Hooper’s veil, is imbued with “a new sense” by the scarlet letter (I, 86). Hawthorne examines the positive and negative capabilities of Hester and Chillingworth respective stances, the enhanced “sense” of life with which they are imbued. Through the interruption of Hester’s normal relation to society, and the irruption of society’s mores upon her world in the negation of her identity, she reforms and presents again an aspect (and an individualistic one at that) that acts to reposition her with regard to the collective. In this negation, Hester’s personal reformation and refocusing of her role as citizen and mother force the Puritan community to address that which is central to their project, “the statute-book” that is informed by Scripture” (I, 51). The letter’s “living sermon” (I, 63) is the positive individualism of Hester Prynne.

On a material level, this is encapsulated by the fact that her ostracism leads to an exhibition of her creativity, assuming a new role as de facto village seamstress. Her literal cottage industry becomes an open sign of the positive place she takes up in the public eye. Hester, having faced the spectacle of religion preferred by the Church leaders, and its necessary personal depoliticisation, “punished in
the sight of rulers and people” (I, 62) takes on a positive role that negates the punitive measures of those in authority. She is removed from the political sphere, and is therefore estranged from the politico-religious nexus that so defined the American colonies. Hester’s personal faith becomes integral to her place in the New World. Its privatisation foreshadows the disempowerment of all to which Calvinism tends, once the possibility of visibility grows too obscure. The “A” is not the reason for Hester’s individualism, rather it is a reminder of the need to imbue the inevitable isolation of one’s individual relationship with God and salvation, with a positive, life-affirming power. The “strange and solitary anguish of her life” (I, 86) is the feeling of dread with which Hawthorne imbues his strongest protagonists. It is its realisation that is integral to the fate of his characters - and the subsequent reaction to the recognition of despair, rather than a standpoint of innate depravity, that informs the working out of Hawthorne’s narratives. The individualism these characters assume is as much an aesthetic, invented by the persona, as the “(d)ep ruffs,…and gorgeously embroidered gloves…deemed necessary to the official state of men assuming the reins of power…” (I, 82) As Hawthorne’s minister acknowledges, we all wear a veil through which we see the world darkly, it is its presentation of this view that influences how we are ourselves seen. This is not a crass, material-consumerist point, but an indication of how our respective souls play out on our features. The beauty of Hester is enhanced by a certain je ne sais quoi of the letter - her existence as a living sermon only acts to imbue her with a quality that affects her life holistically. As opposed to the cerebral obsessions of Chillingworth, Hester’s movements appear blessed with moral meaning as she moves through the village. Part of this is the acceptance that we are “equally in the dark as to (our) soul(s), its present depravity, and future destiny!” (I, 112) Hester’s calls to Pearl that she “must gather (her) own sunshine” (I, 103) are as much an indication of her exhortations for individual action, and ultimate inability to “gather (her) own” as a signal of her actualised despair under the letter.
Chillingworth, in his time with Dimmesdale, chides his patient’s inability to own his earthly deeds for what they are:

“These men deceive themselves,” said Roger Chillingworth, with somewhat more emphasis than usual, and making a slight gesture with his forefinger. “They fear to take up the shame that rightfully belongs to them…their zeal for God’s services, - these holy impulses may or may not coexist in their hearts with the evil inmates to which their guilt has unbarred the door, and which must needs propagate a hellish breed within them (I, 133).

Those who do not accept the despair of their existence “deceive themselves” into a deeper despair. They focus entirely on the earthly to the detriment of the eternal - their movements are marked by an ignorance of the overarching truth they must seek. Through Hester’s positive reintegration, we are presented with one aspect of how humanity may relate this despair to our worldly situation. On the other hand, Chillingworth’s maniacal obsession is an earthly revenge that may yet compensate for his salvation, binding the mortal and infinite to an instant of victory, realisation or death. This is the “terrible fascination, a kind of fierce, though still calm, necessity” that so grips Chillingworth (I, 129). He is, as T.S. Eliot termed it, “man enough to be damned”, his despair breeds knowledge of men’s hearts, but not empathy; cold observation rather than friendship.133

As the romance progresses, so does Hester’s reaction to her punitive situation; “The world’s law was no law for her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before” (I, 164). Further to this antinomian emancipation, the capability for individual contemplation becomes an established fact, one that by virtue of its differentiated nature, promotes the proliferation of opinion. The sway of

institutions, it is suggested, will wane as self-reliance grows. Hawthorne indicates the centrality of this to Hester’s growth, as she appears more *American* and less aligned to the mores of the Puritan village; “But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed, from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to clergyman” (*I*, 199). This individualistic “native” strength is opposed to the collective power of the church body. Hawthorne follows up his statement on Hester’s antinomian individualism with a comment on her point of view of “human institutions”, which she looks upon as an isolated, unprejudiced observer. Herein lies a crucial aspect of the difference between Hester and Chillingworth - his observations are biased, his self-worth loaded with the cold obsession of his work. Hester uses her extra-societal position to look upon the established pillars of everyday Puritan life. It is this inner strength, her purely personal outlook, that drives her spirit and around which the village’s opinion turns to one of potential inclusivity for “our Hester” (*I*, 162).

The interweaving of time and eternity, so often recognised throughout this analysis, brings us to our denouement, for it is in his final, revelatory sermon that Dimmesdale acknowledges not only his “secret sin”, but his beliefs in the contiguity of the cities of God and man; “His subject, it appeared, had been the relation between the Deity and the communities of mankind, with a special reference to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness” (*I*, 249). Hawthorne’s familiar irony intrudes as he questions if Dimmesdale’s feet “really tread upon the dust of earth” (*I*, 251), so enlightened did he seem, “and so apotheosised by worshipping admirers” (*I*, 251) was the minister. Dimmesdale, after a narrative of struggle, realises the strength of relinquishing the earthly that so focused his mind. The narrative suggests that those who feel themselves spiritually higher than their fellows should look more closely to discern how to “repudiate more utterly the phantom of human merit” (*I*, 255). Finally, as Dimmesdale relinquishes his physicality, the magnetic chain he created with Hester and Pearl is divulged to the world after his sermon. The depravity of humanity may not be completely realised, but this finale posits the
ultimate responsibility each of us holds for that human “trait whereby the worst may be inferred” (I, 260). As Chillingworth utilised his efforts for the good of one, driven by obsession for the good of none, Hester’s revelation, continuously reminded in the “A”, is for the good of all. From her outside viewpoint, the power of individualism is one of recognition and humility. Any tendency towards radical anti-social behaviour expels the collective nature that facilitates individualism. Hawthorne’s despair at humanity’s depravity is one checked by a feeling for all, a “depth of tenderness” that recognises on one hand the despair of our situation, and on the other, the level playing field wished for in Democratic rhetoric.

Hester is an indicator of the individualism that, mixed with altruism, is fundamental in its formation of modern society. Chillingworth is a model of the dangerous, anti-social individualism that, in its radical calls for the self’s responsibilities, ignores the truth of responsible citizenship. *The Scarlet Letter* may be about Hester Prynne, but it is the dialectical struggle of Arthur Dimmesdale that acts as both a warning and notice of potential for the religious individualist. For Hawthorne, before God and his peers the message remains the same; “Be true! Be true! Be true!” (I, 260) We will revisit *The Scarlet Letter*, its centrality in Hawthorne’s oeuvre makes it an integral connector to the analysis of the anti-social figure in his work. For now, the undoubted religious individualism of Hawthorne has been drawn out through various short stories and his longer works. The contravention of society’s ethics, and attendant on that, God’s designs, will be detailed in the analysis’s final section. It is often Hawthorne’s anti-social figures that, in their refusal to conform to societal norms, demonstrate most clearly the intricate individualistic dynamic, balanced between the democratic and the autocratic, something that Hawthorne integrates into his most complex characters.
Chapter Three

“An idler like myself”:
Hawthorne’s individualistic artist

Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world
has known.

- Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man under Socialism”

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s innate negativity has been cited consistently in studies of his life and
writing.1 Opposed to the optimistic world-views of his Transcendentalist and Democratic
contemporaries respectively, Hawthorne’s contributions to a literary critique of social individualism
have been under-appreciated in criticism and analysis of his work. Whereas Emerson’s exploration
of “self-reliance”, and Democratic ideologues’ focus on a patriotic agenda are clearly individualistic
in their content and delineated aims, Hawthorne’s commentary on the quintessentially Jacksonian
self-made man often remains unsubstantiated. Hawthorne’s contemporaries saw in him an interest
in man’s elemental existence, one that has frequently sidelined the more tangible, socially-engaged
qualities of his career. Critical focus on this has previously excused Hawthorne from the spheres of
social comment and the vicissitudes of engaging in contemporary American life.

Although he did not sermonise on the benefits of self-reliance, or envision an artist or
scholar who “feels all confidence in himself...(and) defer(s) never to the popular cry”, Hawthorne’s

1 For various views on Hawthorne’s perceived “negativity” see: Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 341. Wendy
Graham, Gothic Elements and Religion in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fiction (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1999), 12. Harry
engagement with the artist’s place within Market Revolution America indicate his importance to a well-rounded conception of the era’s individualism.²

Clear delineation was drawn between artists and craftsman at this time.³ The sculptor was perceived as being self-absorbed in his work in a way that the stonemason was not. The latter’s communitarian duties had little time for the artist whose “soul would wither and die within (him), leaving nothing but the busy machine, no germ for immortality, nothing that could taste of heaven” were they to be subjected to the “pure banality of the modern world” (XV, 330). If, for Emerson, the artist figure was “only half himself, the other half…expression”, Hawthorne found difficulty in reconciling this divergent self to the necessities of survival and self-sufficiency.⁴ Hawthorne found little space for surety in his art, evidenced by the need to complement his income with journalistic or, later, political appointments. Although public appreciation of Hawthorne grew throughout his life, his consistently precarious financial position is a marked reminder of the difficulty of earning a living from one’s art in this era. The economic success that accompanied his later literary output did little to ease these misgivings. As late as 1861, in correspondence with his long-term publisher, James T. Fields, Hawthorne appears to dismiss the innate qualities of his art in order to focus on the wherewithal of his editors in getting the work properly publicised; “I think no author can ever have had publishers that he valued so much as I do mine.”⁵ Again, the following year, Hawthorne wrote to Fields, questioning the very nature of his fame: “My own opinion is that I am not really a popular writer and that what popularity I have gained is chiefly accidental, and owing to other causes than my own kind or degree of merit.”⁶ The author removes the onus from his work here, preferring to

---

⁵ James T. Fields, Yesterdays with Authors (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1872), 102.
⁶ Quoted from Arvin Turner, Hawthorne (London: Noel Douglas, 1930), 162.
focus on exterior situational factors, particularly the economic vicissitudes of American life. As Millicent Bell alludes to, it was “striking how few of the great intellectuals of Hawthorne’s time really solved the simple problem of earning a living.” Irving and Fenimore Cooper had provided glimpses of the possibilities of professionalism for those in the literary trade. The obstacles of economics were keenly felt by writers and artists at this time, it was not enough to be talented, art needed representation as a viable commodity in the open marketplace to survive. In Hawthorne’s era, cultural products in the more traditional forms of artistic expression were required to fit into a mode of American individualistic sensibility before their acceptance and successful capitalisation.

To garner a more rounded view of Hawthorne’s perception, and representation, of the artist, we must consult his work and correspondence in relation to the context of his working milieu. Hawthorne’s social observation is often subjugated to his abstract study of humanity (“Ethan Brand”, “Rappaccini’s Daughter”) and preference for the moral concerns of our base, sinful nature (The Scarlet Letter, “The Minister’s Black Veil”) because of his uncanny ability to remove signs of modernity from his work, in order to create seemingly contradictory, emblematic symbols of his immediate social reality. Hawthorne’s fundamental preoccupation with the egotistical individual, the solitary man and he/she who held a perverse relation with that which was considered “normal” or “natural” must be viewed in the context of his career, and the artist’s access to the market of the era.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s artistic individualism relied on the edifying structures of Jacksonian democracy. Democratic newspapers, politicians and commentators debated the delicate balance struck between an individual’s reliance on the secure relations of his personal world, and society’s seemingly natural inclination to those who displayed an individualist ethic. Newspapers of the era often referenced images of slavery and serfdom, advocating the need for the American man to be

---

7 Bell, Hawthorne’s View of the Artist, 9.

his own unfettered citizen; “To be great men we must cease to be slaves; and what slavery is there worse than the slavery of the mind – a slavery to the opinions of others?”  

For the contemporary artist, there lay a deep-seated tension in such statements. The “individualist ethic” was often deemed to lead to anti-social competition, away from the perceived harmony of a tradition-based society. Heightened individuality constructed abstract networks of relations, with emphasis on capitalistic flexibility and market pressures. Jacksonian ideology countered this with an insistence on the benefits of slow and steady accumulation, over the financial speculation that so marked his definition of the aristocratic elite. Radically individualistic citizens, seemingly heralded by the rise of Jackson’s party, held a social indifference to the wider world that was tied to the ability to make money. The ideological work of the democratic citizen was to come to terms with the implications of this ethic, and reconcile competing conceptions of American individualism within a personalised aesthetic.

Alexis de Tocqueville encapsulated this in his illustration of interpersonal networks between American citizens as wider but of lessened intensity; “(t)he bond of human affection is extended, but it is relaxed.” The move to seek meaning in private spheres of one’s own making may have appealed to the craftsman-turned-capitalist, but this newfound “freedom” often induced troubled notions of independence for Americans of the time, who saw individualism as an unavoidable facilitator of competition and suspicion between citizens. These “ties of self-interest” were, for some, no connection at all, with the uniting of resources utilised only for material gain.

---


10 The question of tradition is one that presents a notable tension for this project. In Jacksonian America the notion of tradition suggested constrained individual action. de Tocqueville emphasises how tradition was seen as purely instructive for future action, rather than indicative of long-standing connections. The “rootlessness” of Americans at this time was connected to the idea that tradition was something that should encourage decisive action, rather than restricting upwards mobility. When contrasted with ideas of an “artistic tradition” however, there is undoubtedly an inherent tension. An artist’s individuality necessitated both an acceptance of previous influence and the requirement to break from it and be original.


12 ibid, 12.

13 de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 688.
If the self-reliant American cherished the freedom of the market, the artist was curiously excused of such privilege. Labour was imbued with renewed dignity in this age in America. The artist’s ostensibly ethereal work, through the fact of his/her perceived lack of physical labour, cleaved him/her from “proper” market engagement. Although in this economic, political and social atmosphere the artist’s mind was slave to no other, his/her mind was necessarily enthralled by “the idea of an activity in which one does not see the end in the beginning”, something inherent in the nature of artistic creation. This was a central aspect of the perceived problems of art; the ideas of national progress instituted and codified during this era found their apotheosis in “Manifest Destiny”. This doctrine viewed the triumphant conclusion of the American project as inherent to its very nature. Destiny made manifest was, in itself, an end made apparent in its beginning. Morris Dickstein comments further on how the phrase came to embody a peculiarly capitalist-friendly ethos, one that found fertile ground in nineteenth-century America:

…the myth took on a strongly conservative, even philistine coloring; it became a defense of the status quo, a way of blaming the victim, the loser… In (this) ruthless, competitive climate…the idea of success hardened into a Darwinian formula that condemned the poor as either lazy or inferior. This moral translation of Manifest Destiny identified success with virtue, with character, and with individual effort.

Art was at odds with this environment of immediacy. This is not to suggest that art lost its impact in Jacksonian America due to its incommensurability with the era’s defining narratives, but it must be situated within this frame of reference in order to understand its changing applicability to the rhythms of this quickly-developing nation. The tension between timeless art and temporal progress

---


was a prominent concern for Hawthorne and his contemporaries, and remained central to their capacity to present an individualistic aesthetic before their peers. The artist was required to undergo a publicly visible change affirming him as artist-as-citizen that could contribute to the cause of American progress. The feeling of, as Hawthorne often contemplated, being separated from “the magnetic chain of humanity” was overcome in the renewed possibilities of art’s engagement with the question of the individual. The conditions of America called for, as summated by Henry C. Carey; “the most perfect individuality and the greatest tendency to union.” Jacksonian suspicion of secrecy led to fears of private wrongdoing, a wilful exclusion of society, that engendered a totalised focus on the fulfilment of selfishly-driven gain. The artist’s creative process necessitated such isolation, but when viewed in conjunction with his often ephemeral product, indicates the doubts placed upon such figures in an industrialising, mechanically-focused society. Integral to the reaffirmation of the artist’s role in society was not simply his engagement with contemporary issues, but a broader, more nationalistic understanding of the place of the individual within Jacksonian America. Rarely attributed to Hawthorne, this is most clearly seen in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s public lectures, which, despite ostensibly not in agreement with contemporary Democratic rhetoric, foreground the unique power of individualism in America to achieve the totalised social reform that would elevate “the people” to their proper place.

16 This quote from “Ethan Brand” has often been utilised to describe Hawthorne’s concerns with his socially isolated characters. As will be explored, one’s turn from the “magnetic chain” can have devastating mental, spiritual and, potentially, physical effects for the individual.


18 ibid, 25.


20 For this, see particularly “Man the Reformer”, and the lectures of the early 1840’s. “Man the Reformer”, delivered before the Mechanics’ Apprentices’ Association dialectically combines Emersonian individualism with its Jacksonian counterpart to provide an effective picture to the speaker’s audience, without alienating them through overly metaphysical claims or philosophical language. Emerson, “Man the Reformer” in Collected Works Vol. I, 225-256.
Self-enforced isolation from one’s fellow man did not fit with the Jacksonian picture of American society. The suspicion of secrecy was related in political rhetoric to the controlling desires of the elitist opposition party, the Whigs. If man worked in isolation, his objectives were possibly to beguile and corrupt those he believed were beneath his lofty ambitions. The extent of these, for Hawthorne, often suggested the level to which his artist figures were willing to contravene social mores and inhabit “the dangerous soul” in their apprehension of the transcendent.

As seen in contemporary economics, Democrats held that credit and finance, beyond the general public’s understanding, were bound to try and enslave “the people” under a governing “heartless aristocracy”, one that “cheats the people out of their rights everywhere.” The artist’s secrecy had little to do with economic potential, but a generalised fear of secretive work. Secrecy was attributed to individual actors as well as conspiring groups, and proved a central concern for American progressive narratives during the Jacksonian era. Mistrust of his solitary, creative processes was concerned with the aims of art – not the artistic product, but the fundamentals of its formation.

The artist’s quest for truth may be pointed to as further reason for his ephemerality. This served a two-fold purpose, suggesting the artist’s honourable aims while also attempting to excuse him from the machinations of contemporary economics. In his 1834 book, *A History of the Rise and Progress of The Arts of Design in the United States*, William Dunlap points to the vocational qualities of the artist, touching simultaneously on his ethereal nature, while attempting to affirm his place in society:

---


Every artist wishes, and ought to wish, that public attention should be called to him. It is for
him so to conduct himself, both as an artist and a man, that his works and his actions may
defy scrutiny, and his reputation may be increased by a knowledge of the truth.\textsuperscript{23}

Dunlap’s artist dealt with higher currency than that which caused the economic squabbles of Whigs
and Democrats. Art’s quest for truth was the writer’s central concern.\textsuperscript{24} Hawthorne’s own discussion
of art reveals his interest in the particularity of inspiration, rather than the technical qualities of the
artistic product. As Bell comments on this aspect of Hawthorne’s thought, he fit the profile of “(t)he
poet (who) was like no other man; his gift to life was that of eternity.”\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, its elusive
nature should not deter an artist from wishing for public commendation. The process of art may be
secretive, disconnected from humanity’s ‘chain’, but its product should not be.

The figure of Dunlap’s writings and Hawthorne’s \textit{oeuvre} emphasised the artist’s position
amidst the driving individualism of Jacksonian America in a manner that fundamentally connected
art and masculinity. Self-reliant for the most part, but suspected of being a dangerous or subversive
figure, the artist subsistent on his/her produce alone was deemed fit to be a proper citizen.\textsuperscript{26} The
often secretive nature of their work, however, provided an innate disconnect from their fellow man.
Unrestrained individualism could stray into egotism, the antithesis of the Jacksonian ethos, which
relied on the virtue of steady effort for individual advancement.

\textsuperscript{23} William Dunlap, \textit{A History of the Rise and Progress of The Arts of Design in the United States} (New York: Dover

\textsuperscript{24} Emerson, “Art”, \textit{Collected Works Vol. II}, 362-363. “There is a higher work for Art than the arts. Art is the need to
create; but in its essence, immense and universal or monstrous such as all pictures and statues are, it is impatient of
working with lame or tied hands, and of making cripples.”

\textsuperscript{25} Bell, \textit{Hawthorne’s View of the Artist}, 39.

\textsuperscript{26} Washington Irving being the first writer/artist figure who made a living as a professional writer, without need of
recourse to another occupation to supplement his earnings. See: Wayne R. Kime, “The Artist as Professional:
In his introduction, Dunlap declares that he publishes by “subscription, because…I am my own publisher, I wish to have the sole control of my work.” This element of autonomy over one’s intellectual property evidences the difficult nature of “the market”, especially with regard to the difficulties encountered by authors in their attempts to copyright books. Hawthorne’s career blossomed under such conditions; it was under the aegis of Jacksonian democracy and the ensuing socialisation of the market that his art found its immediate contemporary backdrop. Dunlap’s decision was pragmatic but with clear ideological overtones. In self-publishing, his control over the content of the book was total, and allowed him to chart the development of American art in a prejudiced, canonising fashion. Dunlap’s work was permitted to foreground certain elements of American art that proved favourable to his market position, and provided his career with important cultural signifiers such as influence, canonical legitimacy, and a sense of auctoritas unachievable without external approval. In controlling his own place within tradition, Dunlap presents a visible aesthetic of an American within an important artistic lineage. This provides an important development in the ability of American cultural figures to present a self-controlled position to the public. This is integral to the capacity of writers, actors and artists to include themselves within the progressive narrative of Jacksonian America, where an individualistic aesthetic became central to one’s perception as a “self-made man.”

Hawthorne has been studied continuously as a writer of artists, a viewer of art and commentator on the ideas of artistic creation and inspiration. The economic and sociological underpinnings and implications of his personal output and commentary on the subject have often been subjugated in textual analysis however. Under the dominion of the market, Hawthorne’s art and character representation indelibly reflected his milieu.


28 See particularly Deanna Fernie, Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011)

29 This is particularly true of Bell’s Hawthorne’s View of the Artist, which seems to dismiss the term “individualism” with regard to Hawthorne’s engagement with the prevailing spirit of the age (p.4).
Jeffrey Sklansky has examined the career of Hawthorne’s loco-foco contemporary, William Leggett in an authorial situation analogous to that of this analysis’s subject.\textsuperscript{30} “Like many journalists in early industrial America, (Lippard) shared the fortunes and fears of the besieged middling class of skilled artisans and small shop owners from which he came.”\textsuperscript{31} Leggett’s situation in these generalised terms was similar to the precarious position of Hawthorne’s early life within middle class Salem, and later in his college years in Bowdoin. After the death of his father, Hawthorne relied on the financial support of his maternal uncles, the Mannings. This previous generation were witnesses to the promulgation of a self-defining American culture. Hawthorne’s era, however, saw an emergent sense of the limitations of American letters and art, separate from distinct colonial influence. The intensive industrial development of America under Jackson and subsequent presidents allowed the transformation of this cultural politics from tea parties and liberty pole celebrations to theatre and playhouse productions.

Leggett, an actor as well as journalist, was deeply involved in this cultural revolution. The move to patriotic performance that showcased national values on stage fuelled the fears of prominent literary figures, newspaper editors and the cultured elite, who believed that the desire for entertainment was liable “to fuel a vicious cycle of self-indulgence rather than self-improvement.”\textsuperscript{32} Crucially, the commodification and revival of such spectacle allowed the expansion of the individualist ethic to continue unabated. If patriotism could be performed and a paying public could attend plays that appeared to honour the message of Jefferson and Franklin, individualism could be culturally justified. Star performers of the Jacksonian era were seen as “entrepreneurs of their own

\textsuperscript{30} “The (loco-foco) movement began to assume definite form (within the Democratic Party) in the fall of 1835 as a mutiny within the Tammany organization against the domination of a conservative element.” William Trimble, “The Social Philosophy of the Loco-Foco Democracy”, American Journal of Sociology 26, no. 6 (1921), 705.


\textsuperscript{32} ibid, 209.
careers who avoided the hierarchical restraints of local acting companies.” The actor could declare his own directed destiny; this new individualist embodied the spirit of Jackson through patriotic performance and in his stand against the elitist hegemony of companies and their market stranglehold. The individualistic ethic could no longer be justified solely by occupations that involved tough physical labour. This performativity of individualism opened the doors for the creation of the ethic as aesthetic. Apart from the stage, the daily newspaper reader could find the a number of famous authors on his pages – Hawthorne, Lowell, Bryant and Stowe “all saw their works on the front page of The Salem Gazette in a single year (1838).” The era’s major writers, both male and female, were required to write for literary journals and newspapers in order to make ends meet. This was further necessitated because of the precarious nature of copyrighted publishing in America at the time. This was famously expressed by Charles Dickens who, after his time in America, addressed a circular letter to prominent English authors, later reprinted by Niles’ Weekly Register.

You may perhaps be aware that, during my stay in America, I lost no opportunity of endeavouring to awaken the public mind to a sense of the unjust and iniquitous state of the law in that country, in reference to the wholesale piracy of British works. Having been successful in making the subject one of general discussion in the United States, I carried to Washington, for presentation to Congress by Mr. Clay, a petition from the whole body of American authors, earnestly praying for the enactment of an International Copyright Law.

---

33 McConachie, Melodramatic Formations, 3.

34 Aesthetic is utilised here to purvey a sense of the public visibility required of the self-made man in his personal implementation of American ideals. It is this turn from “ethos” to “aesthetic” that consolidates one’s public persona. It was not enough to be “self-made”; an important aspect of it was the public portrayal of that fact.


36 Hezekiah Niles, ed. Niles’ National Register Vol. LXII (Baltimore: Jeremiah Hughes, 1842), 380.
From this perspective, Dunlap’s decision to self-publish in order to maintain “sole control” of his work was further validated. Dunlap backed himself in his economic endeavours, in a way that relying on others may have inhibited him. Further to this, Hawthorne’s contemporary, George Thompson, a writer whose career ran the gamut of sensational fiction defended his work from charges of indecency by claiming “that he indulged in the scandalous for no other reason than to promote traditional American values and to warn his compatriots about the dangers that their culture faced, particularly what he considered the pernicious influence of European art and literature.”

Conversely, art could be justified, regardless of its sensational or controversial nature, with the author’s insistence that it was their patriotic duty to illuminate the unsavoury elements of American life.

For the autonomous author, the decision to self-publish or employ representations of individualism was centred on the expansion of the Jacksonian ethos throughout American society. To mirror the era’s defining public figure, Andrew Jackson, in one’s personal endeavours was to project a public image of the self-made man, narrativising one’s life to subsume the era’s dominant nationalism was to portray self-instituted American values. Class, ostensibly, could not separate citizens’ engagement with an individualist ethic. This problematised the struggle of the “people” and the increasingly individualistic ties of Americans. If a property owner, who collected rent, could be part of the “people” under Jackson’s definition, what could stop an actor or writer who represented the ethic of individualism in their work? Further to this, the exaltation of the self-determined man held the inherent tension of the direction this man’s will would take – if not enlisted constructively, it may destroy the fabric of society by virtue of his egotism. It is from this

---


39 Harding, American Literature in Context, 4.

40 Ward, Andrew Jackson, 188.
platform that we will explore Nathaniel Hawthorne’s artistic individualist, an ambiguous, seemingly self-loathing persona, whose relevance to the market of the time indicates the fault-lines upon which it was run. As seen through the examples of Dunlap and Leggett, the possibilities of individualism expanded in the years of Jackson’s presidency, and as will become apparent, Hawthorne interrogated this extended ideology, particularly through his figure of the artist.

Hawthorne was deeply concerned with the social and economic repercussions of choosing a career as a writer, and continuously questioned the implications this would have, personally, psychologically and on a broader, societal level. As Melville stated, Hawthorne was “a man who is bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life.”

Hawthorne’s early life, particularly after the death of his father, seems inextricably linked to ideas of inheritance and familial money. The bustling nature of Salem’s port, combined with Captain Hathorne’s maritime disappearance, must have served to remind Hawthorne of the centrality of money in early nineteenth century America;

The docks were only a few blocks from the Herbert Street house – the area was filled with sailors of various nationalities as well as with merchants, whores and derelicts… At the docks Hawthorne mingled with sailors and watched his father’s ships leave and return, with the uncertainties of separation and the joys of reunion – until his father’s ship failed to return.

Early in his career, Hawthorne consigned himself to the fact that, to make money, he would have to write for newspapers and other such “drudgery.” This, he compromised, would be “less irksome”

41 Wilson, Hawthorne and Melville Friendship, 221.

42 Of the five Manning sons, it was Robert (1784-1842) who played the greatest role in Hawthorne's life. He arranged for the education of his sister Betsey's children, and he was the uncle who was most often present in the Manning home on Herbert St., Salem, where Hawthorne lived with his mother and sisters after his father died in 1808.

43 Edwin Miller Haviland, Salem is my Dwelling Place (London: Duckworth, 1991), 16.
than imaginative writing, and would undoubtedly provide him with a steadier income than works that, he admitted, would not “appeal to the broadest class of sympathies, and therefore will not attain a very wide popularity” (XVI, 311). Moreover, in a letter to his former Bowdoin classmate and eminent poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hawthorne stated that he saw:

…little prospect but that I must scribble for a living. But this troubles me much less than you would suppose. I can turn my pen to all sorts of drudgery, such as children’s books &c, and by and bye, I shall get some editorship that will answer my purpose (XV, 252).

This correspondence was sent after the initial publication of Twice-told Tales, which was received with laudatory reviews, notably from Longfellow himself. This is exemplary of Hawthorne’s direct thoughts on his art, career and the various difficulties he encountered reconciling his working life with the inability to earn money from his rich imagination. Perhaps most clearly indicative of this is a letter Hawthorne sent to his wife-to-be, Sophia Peabody, on July 24th, 1839. Hawthorne was by this time working in the Salem Custom-House, and his complaints suggest the artistic sensibility that distinguished him from the ordinary working man;

Now, my intellect, and my heart and soul, have no share in my present mode of life… I am a machine, and am surrounded by hundreds of similar machines; or rather, all of the business people are so many wheels of one great machine – and we have no more love or sympathy than if we were made of wood, brass or iron, like the wheels of other pieces of complicated machinery (XV, 330).

The majority of his imagined artists encounter the question of mechanisation as a threat, not to their livelihood per se, but to their very creative process. Hawthorne’s distinction between the
artist and the mechanical worker also lamented the lack of common feeling that mechanised the workers of America, depersonalising them and desensitising their appreciation of a shared plight or struggle. The capitalistic impulse is one Hawthorne identifies as alienating, not simply from one’s fellow man, but from one’s purchase on life itself – it is something that necessarily divorses you from reality, from an appreciation of that which leads to artistic creation.

This, however, is not to be confused with the “haunted, dangerous soul” of Hawthorne’s artist characters who appear as if beyond time and society. The subjective alienation of the mechanical actively retards the development of the artistic. The artist’s “dangerous soul” is part of his ability to separate himself from his fellow man, and isolate himself in his creativity. It verges on “dangerous” when it takes on egotistical qualities of extreme self-reliance. Hawthorne’s separation of the “dangerous soul” from the alienation of industry may act as a commentary on the artist’s engagement with the individualistic ethos of Jacksonian America. A “repudiation” of allegiance to the prevailing purpose of his countrymen overstates Hawthorne’s disengagement from society, but the use of romance and allegory locates him at a remove from his own creation.44 Hawthorne appears to question the idea of balance between community and individual at a fundamental level, seeing rather a dialectic that threatens to overcome one or the other, safe only for the assertion of will. It is in this manner that his characters, notably the daguerreotypist Holgrave and the sculptor Drowne, manage the dynamic relation that interweaves the individual’s identity into the overwhelming sublation of society. This presents a dialectical interaction, with self and society remaining in continuous interrelation.

It is apposite to acknowledge that the individualism Hawthorne contemplates is not strictly opposed to community ideals. We must not confuse individualism’s theoretical opposition to collectivism by sublimating the latter term’s definition with that of communitarianism. As substantiated by the idea that America represented simultaneously “the most perfect individuality

and the greatest tendency to union”, Jacksonianism turned from a tradition-based collectivism to embrace the idea of community driven along individualist lines. Hawthorne stood simultaneously by his work and within the community from which that work operates:

This long connection of a family with one spot, as its place of birth and burial, creates a kindred between the human being and the locality, quite independent of any charm in the scenery or moral circumstances that surround him. It is not love, but instinct. The new inhabitant…has little claim to be called a Salemite (I, 11).

Hawthorne’s representation of Salem was both elemental and material. It is not simply that Hawthorne represented personal interconnectedness with his home, but that he imbued the locality with a characteristic sense of agency as well. Salem, and its attendant ideas of community, were as much of the person, as this inhabitant was of Salem.

Hawthorne avoided dogmatic proclamations of “right” in discussing the individual’s place in the community, preferring reflection on contemporary affairs through the remove of an imagined past or a parallel present. As Millicent Bell comments; “…the artist was a man among living men, his activities were, most obviously, definable in terms of the prevailing patterns of social behaviour, for which the somewhat tired term “individualism” has long served.”45 This analysis unfortunately fails to recognise the individual author’s conception of the “term” under discussion. Defining the artist’s activities within the predominant cultural movements of his time must also factor in the interwoven nature of this system of relative qualities. To characterise it through a description of behaviours is to ignore the nexus of relations between self and society, of which Hawthorne’s writing and career provide important evidence.

---

45 Bell, *Hawthorne’s View of the Artist*, 4.
Hawthorne imbued his artists with the “dangerous soul” attributed to individualism he feared was part of his own artistic impulse. His artistic individualists enact separation from the community on some level, often beyond the physical. Spiritual differentiation through transformative or magical properties, the portrayal of solitary work and a remote self-absorption that is, at best, misunderstood by the common man, are common tropes of the artist figure’s relational dynamic with society. Hawthorne’s artists dabble in, and touch upon, the Unendlichkeit, facets of “infinitude” that, like the Carlylean model of the “hero as poet”, are incommunicable.\textsuperscript{46}

For Hawthorne’s Scottish contemporary, and one of Emerson’s great inspirations, Thomas Carlyle believed the poet was, as a great man, always beyond comprehension in his own time. As with Carlyle’s ideal poets, who communicate their intentions perfectly only to have their work met with ignorance, Hawthorne’s depiction of the artist exhibited this separation process ambivalently. America ostensibly confused the artist’s distinction from the collective, often subverting the relationship. For Carlyle, art was not inspired by distinction from the people, but was not hindered by it either. Hawthorne addressed this in his fiction by introducing notions of community values to problematise the accepted opposition of collective and individual. Hawthorne’s artists inhabit a space of relation between both collective and individual, rather than the straightforward distinction suggested in Carlyle’s work that indicates clear delineation between the poet and society. This suggests Hawthorne’s engagement with contemporary, relational value systems that Carlyle, in his thought, posits as more of a straightforward dynamic. Necessarily, Hawthorne’s invocation of the social context within which an individual lives and works contained the author’s own oblique questioning of these societal modes, and the foundations upon which they are built.

Hawthorne’s tragic figures have been noted as examples of his exploration of the “subterranean history of the American individual”\textsuperscript{47} The characters are posited in relation to society

\begin{enumerate}
\item Thomas Carlyle, \textit{On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History}. Edited by David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 71.
\item Matthiessen, \textit{American Renaissance}, 180.
\end{enumerate}
as a whole, pointing to the ability of the singular individual to perceive something transcendent, despite radical personal flaws. Hawthorne’s artist, if tragic, is spurred forward by his own differentiation from those around him. The imperfections of Hawthorne’s artists lie as much in their realisation of the unbridgeable gap between themselves and the anonymised mass as it does in their tragic reflection on man’s shortcomings. Hawthorne’s fictive representation of the “dangerous soul” is frequently epiphanic.\textsuperscript{48} Hawthorne’s presumed fears that the artist would be lost, so long as he remained an artist, take on a falsely damnatory tone when viewed in conjunction with the need to perceive his artists as unavoidably individualistic, but not irredeemably selfish.\textsuperscript{49}

Art’s essential incommunicability was emphasised in his work, but the effort to integrate the common man with its heightening possibilities was simultaneously shown. The artist’s individualism presented a two-sided relationship. The hazardous nature of solitude and secrecy, particularly in Jacksonian America, was to be balanced with the dismissal by the ordinary American of the power of art. The Hawthorne who created the cold-hearted “painter, or wizard” of “The Prophetic Pictures” at the end of Jackson’s presidency (1837), was the self-same author that contacted John Frost in March 1844 as a consideration of best practice “to extend and vary his audience as much as possible” (XVI, 17). Moreover, in correspondence with Sophia in January 1842, Hawthorne reflected on his self-christened “dangerous soul” in a vivaciously positive tone; “Here is thy husband in his old chamber, where he produced those stupendous works of fiction, which have since impressed the Universe with wonderment and awe.”\textsuperscript{50} Hawthorne’s reflections on the creative process and the final product of art meditated on the much-maligned “dangerous soul” in its individualist implications within the context of contemporary American society. Despite its negative connotations, Hawthorne’s use of the “haunted” imagination drew on a multitude of


\textsuperscript{49} Johnson, \textit{The Productive Tension of Hawthorne’s Art}, 42.

\textsuperscript{50} ibid, 99.
sources, past and present, in its creation of an aesthetic that transposed the individualist ethic into its fictive representation. The aestheticisation of the ethic allowed writers and artists of the era to inhabit spheres previously left to those directly connected with economic production. Subsequently, they could justifiably be cited as individualistic, their work advocating the centrality of the individual, over the moral worth of the whole.

To declare Hawthorne’s description of the “dangerous soul” as purely negative ignores the possible outcomes of assuming the associated artistic position; isolated from society, indulged in the solitary, enthralling creative process amidst the burgeoning market of this era’s American society. Throughout his career, Hawthorne fought with feelings of invalidity, in the surrounds of an increasingly capitalistic society. In a letter to Sophia dated April 15th 1840, Hawthorne spends the first page “declaiming” the “art of writing”.51 James Mancall identifies in this Hawthorne’s struggle with the idea that the author was an ambiguous, “paradoxical figure with both effeminate debility and virulent power.”52 This psychological dichotomy, when placed against the backdrop of Jacksonian culture, suggests the difficulty of the artist’s inner struggle, but should not be seen as indicative of an inability to deal with the socio-political machinations of contemporary America. The artist’s physical isolation was not a disavowal of the realities, material or otherwise, of his era. Hawthorne’s self-held fears do not indicate an author averse to the social questions of his day, but one whose engagement with the period’s individualist ethic took a varied approach through his work, evidenced in his correspondence.

Hawthorne’s worries about the healthy state of the writer or artist in the aggressive marketplace must be viewed in conjunction with his respect and admiration for the burly Old Hickory (XIV, 367). This was further buttressed by the people that surrounded him during his career, particularly in the late 1830s. In the midst of the Democratic push to have Hawthorne

51 ibid, 75.

appointed to the Salem Custom-House, Evert Duyckinck wrote a “puff piece” emphasising how “authors are the immediate ornaments of the State”, and bolstered Hawthorne with Jacksonian virtues, indicating that the sensitive nature of his art was supported by a “rugged frame of body.”

The expansion of the possibilities of individualism in this era was something that, in his seeming negativity, Hawthorne engaged in as much as Emerson or Channing, but differently. Despite his shrewd, politically ambivalent prefaces to *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Hawthorne was “the only New England man of letters who was also an active Democrat.” Yet, even still, the myth of his being hermetically sealed from his era has long been popular. He may not have had aspirations for self-reliance in the same manner as his Transcendentalist contemporaries, but his fictive social commentary inevitably brought him to interrogate the possibilities of the individualist ethic so prevalent in his society. The ‘glass darkly’ through which Hawthorne saw the world did not preclude a view of individualism, but a deeper investigation of its possibilities.

Withdrawal from society to write or study is present from the earliest stages of Hawthorne’s oeuvre. The artist’s retreat in his work advertised Hawthorne’s growing abilities while presenting a nuanced social commentary on his era. In his anonymously published first novel, *Fanshawe* (1828), Hawthorne picked up on many of the problems the artist faced in the economic system of his America. Furthermore, its publication date coincides with the election of the era’s defining figure, Andrew Jackson. The author showed deep admiration for the incumbent president. As stated by his sister after the writer’s death, Hawthorne’s respect for the President knew no bounds, verging on hero-worship. Further anecdotes indicate that Hawthorne, a committed Democrat, was one of the

53 Widmer, *Young America*, 76.
54 Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*, 114.
56 Mancall, “*Thoughts Painfully Intense*”, 5.
few Salemites who greeted Jackson as he made his way past the town on his presidential election campaign:

Since his youth, (Hawthorne) declared himself a Democrat, and one of the more remarkable stories of his early life is the anecdote recounted by his sister Elizabeth about Jackson’s visit to unfriendly Salem in 1833: “When General Jackson, of whom he professed himself a partisan, visited Salem in 1833, he walked out to the boundary of the town to meet him, not to speak to him – but only to look at him, and found only a few men and boys collected, not enough, without the assistance that he rendered, to welcome the General with a good cheer.\textsuperscript{57}

From the context of this political support, \textit{Fanshawe} (a “melodramatic romance” that its author would later disown) and the tales of the 1830s, were written.

The secluded setting of Hawthorne’s first romance allows us to reflect on the political and social milieu of contemporary America by way of contrast. The eponymous protagonist represents in no way the paragon of his rough-and-tumble era. Much like Owen Warland who “turned pale and grew sick” (\textit{X}, 450) upon encountering signifiers of expansionist America, namely the steam engine, so Fanshawe’s natural environment is dominated by quiet, “shady retreats” and “secluded spots” (\textit{III}, 4) provided by his “seminary of learning” (\textit{III}, 3). Indeed, even if nature grows too loud for the student, “he had always a sure and quiet retreat in his study” (\textit{III}, 6). Despite his inability to deal with thunderclaps or driving rain while sitting at the hearth, we are informed that his features held a “strength and boldness” (\textit{III}, 15) that belied his contemplative occupation. It is, however, precisely Fanshawe’s return to humanity’s “magnetic chain”, and away from the selfishness of solitary work, whereby his strength grows and the pallor is lifted.

\textsuperscript{57} Quoted in Widmer, \textit{Young America}, 8.
Fanshawe obsesses over the physical attributes of its eponymous character and his sheltered upbringing, away from the “modern” life of characters like Mr. Langton, a merchant introduced early on in the story as a direct contrast to the shielded New Englanders. As opposed to the often abstract descriptions attributed to a number of the book’s scholarly characters, Langton’s brief history tells us that “(c)ertain misfortunes in trade…had deprived him of a large portion of his property” (III, 7). Upon introduction, and in clear distinction to the figure of Dr. Melmoth, the “learned and orthodox Divine” (III, 4), Langton is emphasised as a man of the world. His capitalistic drive and engagements with the machinations of trade in the nascent market of the Jacksonian Era have cost him dearly. Unlike many of the characters that populate the wooded confines of this “retired corner of one of the New England States” (III, 3), Langton has experienced life outside these quiet climes and, in the process, “sacrificed his domestic happiness” (III, 7) in setting his heart on material gain.

The self-held fears of the author at this time, his perceived inability to engage in modern life, undoubtedly contributed to the fragility of the titular figure. Contrastingly, Langton and the villainous Angler are portrayed throughout as men tainted by previous engagement with the impersonal world of trade (XV, 191).58 In comparison to the academic lethargy of Fanshawe, who at times seems to have resumed his “habits of seclusion” from those around him, the Angler and Langton are practical men. Their “arts” (III, 23) are those of business and utility, their robust speech indicative of their knowledge of the world beyond the confines of Harley College, an easily identifiable analogue for Bowdoin. Furthermore, the figure of Hugh Crombie is directly related to Hawthorne’s representation of artists, being a musician and poet. Crombie is a clear depiction of Hawthorne’s fears surrounding issues of individual manhood in his America. Kimmel contends, American men of this era began;

---

58 Hawthorne’s correspondence, particularly around the time of his graduation and ensuing return home, contains similar references to an inability to engage with the American literary marketplace. Having graduated alongside figures like Franklin Pierce and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hawthorne was deeply aware of the competitive nature of the marketplace.
…to link their sense of themselves as men to their position in the volatile marketplace, to their economic success – a far less stable yet far more exciting and potentially rewarding peg upon which to hang one’s identity…The Self-Made Man of American mythology was born anxious and insecure.59

We see in these figures a self-reflexive awareness of masculinity’s predominance in the progressive projects of American nationalism and capitalist expression, and its antagonism to Hawthorne’s “native temperament.”60 The author’s absent father is surely invoked in Fanshawe’s obsessive picture of the economic marketplace; “everyone in Salem must have known that Hawthorne after graduating from Bowdoin had neither profession nor visible means of livelihood.”61

Crombie is exemplary of Hawthorne’s fears at this time, possessing little to recommend him to the marketplace in terms of skill in the “manual arts” that gave “bread to others; but…would (not) give bread to him” (III, 32). His work, despite its local fame, is but of “temporary interest” (III, 33), and does not have the atemporal qualities of the true artist. Its universality is stunted by its being based solely in the New England experience. His work as a poet, despite some songs of his that “retain their influence over the heart” (III, 33), is not enough to allow Crombie be financially, and therefore socially, self-reliant. He leaves for sea, to gain “such property to render him easy in the decline of his days” (III, 35). Even at this stage of his career, Hawthorne was preoccupied with the question of making a living from his work, exhibiting in Crombie the fear that

59 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 9.


61 Haviland, Salem is my Dwelling Place, 152.
one would have to supplement a writing career with the manual labour that ensures self-sufficiency and masculine individuality in capricious Market Revolution America.

Contemporary reviews of *Fanshawe* focused on the artist-society dynamic and economic preoccupations at the heart of the story. In her critique from *Godey’s Lady’s Magazine* published November 1828, Sarah Josepha Hale strikes to the heart of Hawthorne’s fears as an “invalid author”, affirming the need for American art, but emphasising the eminence of business in the climate of the country. Her review demonstrates the public attitude towards practical, visible endeavour that took precedence over the luxury of metaphysical travails and aesthetic concerns:

Not that we wish to see a race of mere book-worm authors fostered among us. Our institutions and character demand activity in business; the useful should be preferred before the ornamental; practical industry before speculative philosophy; reality before romance.

But still the emanations of genius may be appreciated, and a refined taste cultivated among us.62

Hawthorne’s admiration for Jacksonian Democracy was often offset by his inability to discern a legitimate place for art in its ideological development. As Charles Wiltse discusses, American art of this era remained largely “imitative, reportorial, or polemic”, preferring escapist or propagandistic portrayals over meaningful searches for deeper significance.63 This seeming lack of originality was connected to the literary market, suggestive of a need to reproduce the familiar, rather than alter the course of tradition with something that was risky, or not financially viable.64 The stance that one can

---


63 Wiltse, *New Nation*, 127.

64 Emerson’s “American Scholar” holds under-appreciated financial concerns: “Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years.” Written formulaically, a work can never go beyond its influencers, artistically-speaking, but also within the rubric of Jacksonian America, from the point-of-view of a purchasing public. Emerson, “The American Scholar” in *Collected Works Vol. 1*, 91.
inhabit the individualist ethic in one’s own field, no matter its seeming frivolity (like Edwin Forrest and his aesthetic of patriotic stagecraft), was developing and, as yet, not fully instituted. Fanshawe must throw off the stolid inaction of his academic life to save the story’s central love interest, Ellen. His being driven to engage with the devious Angler, and other “men of the world”, reflects Hawthorne’s subscription to the needs of Americans, similarly stated by Hale in her review. Interestingly, however, Hawthorne introduces a synthesis of the “man of action” trope and Fanshawe’s recognisably academic caution; “Fanshawe was not deterred by the danger…and whether owing to his advantage in lightness of frame, or to superior caution, he arrived safely at the base of the precipice” (III, 106). As noted previously; “if he read nothing at all but the newspapers, the American of the 1830’s could hardly avoid imbibing something of the restless, questing spirit of Jacksonian Democracy.”

Hawthorne tried to reconcile the ability of his sheltered collegian with that of a masculine, independent figure when faced with the risks of the outside world. Hawthorne’s personal attempts to overcome his own fears of invalidity are reflected in the character of Fanshawe. When called upon, he becomes an individual man of action, who casts away the hesitant conscience of the observer in order to save those nearest to him. These aspects of character provide evidence of a dynamic interaction between the public aesthetic of action, and private intention. Hawthorne contemplated the visible space of his America, while contrasting it with the individual impulse of artistic creation.

*Fanshawe* depicts elements of nascent individualism within its protagonist, while also providing representations of the unpredictable marketplace and its relation to Jacksonian Americans. The principal character’s metamorphosis from weak, isolated student to strong, self-driven saviour is crucial to Hawthorne’s growing personal appreciation of the individualist ethic in America, instigated by the rise of Jacksonian politics. His representations of individualism become

---

more nuanced as his career progressed, developing into contemplations of a unifying American ethos based on the values of individualism, before revisiting the apotheosis of this image in the commissioned *Life of Franklin Pierce*. In 1828 however, *Fanshawe* portrayed the roots of individualism, through a character who, despite his inactivity in the business of practical life, could turn from the speculative nature of his private work to come to the aid of one in need. This is representative of various aspects of the ideal Jacksonian – the individual who connects to the “magnetic chain of humanity” through self-honed strength; an individualist that, without contradiction, maintains visible collective identification.

The development of this nuance in Hawthorne’s presentation of the individualist ethic brought it into line with what the *U.S. Magazine* and *Democratic Review* aligned positively with national values and ideals seen in evolutionary and universal terms. This was a slight change from the individualism commented on in the early years of Jackson’s presidency, “which maintained largely simplistic views of the individual American’s links with his/her community.”

Contrastingly, reflecting the growth of thought on the subject, other critiques of this time discussed the country’s Jacksonian ethic in more philosophical terms; “The course of civilization is the progress of man from a state of savage individualism to that of an individualism more elevated, moral and refined.” From the period of writing *Fanshawe*, and the creation of characters that exhibited connections to the world of business and art/academia respectively as spheres with little in common, Hawthorne’s portrayal of individualism, particularly that of the artist, showed increasing nuance.

Hawthorne’s short fiction of the 1830’s further charts his developing individualist aesthetic, especially in relation to his artist figures. “The Prophetic Pictures” (1837) draws together a number of strands previously discussed, and suggests a natural step for this analysis. Published in *Twice-told

---


68 This quote, from Lukes, is attributed to an anonymous article in the *Boston Quarterly Review* of 1839.
Tales, this peculiar story’s conception was inspired “by an anecdote of Stuart”, related in the aforementioned Dunlap’s History of the Arts of Design – “a most entertaining book to the general reader, and a deeply interesting one, we should think, to the artist” (IX, 166).

Immediately, differentiation is made between the artist’s ability to draw inspiration and that of the average American. Simply put, he sees things inaccessible to the common man. The central artist of the story sees elements of character in his patrons that allows them to “find a mirror of themselves in this wonderful painter” (IX, 166). His ability to portray his models with aspects of personality previously unknown to them is questioned because of his residence in Boston. Apparently, the Massachusetts city is a “perilous abode” for such a talent, leading Elinor, the painter’s prospective subject, to question if she is being told “of a painter, or a wizard?” (IX, 167).

The man’s artistic temperament does not seem suitable for city dwelling. In The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne wrote about the fragile nature of art within an urban setting. Not simply an environmental concern, the qualities of the city seem at odds with that of inspiration itself. Miles Coverdale remarks, that the city, on “either side, seemed to press too closely upon us, insomuch that our hearts found barely room enough to throb between” (III, 28). The demands of living in an American city were portrayed as damaging for the emergent artist. Hawthorne, interestingly, disassociates the city from the “heart”. Left to the devices of the “head”, the city lacks the necessary empathy or emotional introspection that characterises the artistic project.

The protagonist of this story engages with America in a unique fashion with regard to Hawthorne’s œuvre, while also reflecting Dunlap’s description of the artist Copley in his 1834 publication. The painter of the titular portraits “had been born and educated in Europe” (IX, 168). The ways of the Old World had been used up for artistic inspiration for this mysterious figure, and his journeying to America is bound to its ability to present a new picture to him through Nature; “whither none of his professional brethren had preceded him” (IX, 168). The idea of an artist travelling abroad to encounter new scenes to paint or describe, although not unique in Hawthorne’s
work, is rarely cast as a trade from Europe to America. We are told in *The Marble Faun* that Hilda, the young American painter, enjoyed a “freedom of life which it is possible for a female artist to enjoy (only) at Rome” (*IV*, 54). It appears as if Hilda’s gender, something that marks her as a member of that “damned mob of…women” in America is rendered less problematic once removed from the competitive market under which Hawthorne laboured. Similarly, from the author’s own experience of Rome, we may appreciate the difficult position of the artist in “The Prophetic Pictures”, in this seemingly reversed trading of countries; “(there is) a perception of such weight and density in a by-gone life, of which this spot was the centre, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here, as elsewhere” (*IV*, 6).

America, too poor in spirit for the “artist of eminence” (*IX*, 168), alerts us to this painter’s peculiar character. The tale provides further interesting developments in Hawthorne’s formation of artistic autonomy and individualism. The artist encounters different obstacles in America not relevant in Europe, beyond the abstract difficulties of “the market”. This new country, with its fresh economic systems and emphasis on the individual’s self-making power, finds a definitive break from the weighty history that burdens European art. Where guilds and, subsequently, rich patrons controlled the output of art in Europe, America was, as yet, “too poor to afford such temptations” (*IX*, 168).69 The freed artist in his new environs paints what his predecessors would not have deigned to look upon, exhausting his talent upon a “child (that) happened to look up and smile” (*IX*, 168) rather than painting for wealthy subjects.

Hawthorne continues his contemplation of the solitary artist in this story, something previously described as the writer being “clearly engaged in self-portraiture.”70 Artistic individualism reflected the increasingly globalised nature of the art trade in the mid-nineteenth century.

---

century. The artist’s European origin is practically unimportant in his ability to engage with, and be defined by, the demands of individualism in America. His presence there necessitates his engagement with the social norms of his adopted country. Hawthorne transposed the issues of the artist in his day into a previous era, utilising the template of the Copley story from Dunlap’s book to explore this question in trans-temporal fashion, one that simultaneously acknowledges and problematises the question of canonical tradition received and constructed by American artists.

The painter of “The Prophetic Pictures” exemplifies the “dangerous soul”. He represents the figure of solitude, the artist that is uncertain of his direction and burdened with melancholy; “The artist – the true artist – must look beneath the exterior. It is his gift – his proudest, but often a melancholy one – to see the inmost soul, and, by a power indefinable to himself, to make it glow or darken upon the canvass…” (IX, 175) The artist that intrudes upon the souls of others makes a living from an ethereal product whose meaning escapes the common man, and it is for this, and the “engrossing purpose” of his art, that “he was insulated from the mass of human kind” (IX, 178). This individuation is compounded by his coldness of heart, whereby he ceases to see that which is represented through art, preferring to focus on it in the manner of the cold observer who elevates the inanimate above mankind.

“The Prophetic Pictures” presents a troubling, problematic portrayal of the artist in America. The “haunted mind” of the protagonist distinguishes him from his fellow man, as much as his talent does. The artist is clearly separated from everyone he represents in Boston throughout the story. He is a consummate individualist, placing his own moral worth above that of everyone else. As Claude Henri de Saint-Simon stated in his 1828 model of individualism, the individualist “refuses to go back to a source higher than individual conscience.”71 The artist of this story is so consumed by the worth of his occupation that he appears to see art as somehow a priori to the forms it represents;

---

“‘Oh, glorious Art!’ thus mused the enthusiastic painter, as he trod the street. ‘Thou art the image of the Creator’s own. The innumerable forms, that wander in nothingness, start into being at thy beck’ (IX, 179). This stance is a far cry from a comparative excerpt from Hawthorne’s later romance, *The Marble Faun*, where the author complains of his inability to write Romance “about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery” (IV, 3). The presented artist shows various signs of the transposed Jacksonian ethic. His work is not secret in the way despised of by Hawthorne’s Democratic contemporaries, but remains insulated from the people he passed on “the toilsome street” (IX, 180) through his obscured comprehension of its power. This artist is dangerously uncaring, realising too late the significance of the eponymous pictures’ prophecy, leading to the deaths of the aforementioned Elinor and Walter.

Before the publication of *Twice-told Tales*, Hawthorne wrote directly about his future literary output, knowing that, were he to give in to “scribbling”, life would be much easier than the arduous task of imaginative writing. Negative representations of the artist, as in “The Prophetic Pictures” exhibited his “virulent power”, while concomitantly indicating the self-indulgent, potentially destructive aspects of his talent and distinction from humanity. This individualism cannot be reconciled with the necessities and responsibilities of a progressive society. His self-reliance borders on the narcissism Hawthorne feared in his contemporaries. Similar to the artist of “The Prophetic Pictures” is the titular figure of “Monsieur du Miroir” (1837). As Leverenz notes, Hawthorne’s “fascination with marketplace humiliation reflects a profound quarrel with the manhood he feels inside himself, so narcissistically needy for self-empowering through malice and cruelty.”

The risky, continuous self-mirroring of Monsieur du Miroir leads to self-pollution. In “The Prophetic Pictures”, dangerous self-reliance is shown as overcompensation, and leads only to the destruction of the lives upon which it touches. The tale’s catastrophic ending indicates the results of such a reconciliation. The artist’s timelessness does not square with the society into which

---

his art is introduced. Things fall apart for the characters involved, suggesting the deeply unsettling
denouement as inevitable. The subversive nature of the artist becomes apparent, his ability to
observe provides an unsuitable knowledge for the society he has entered.

The thematic and contextual resonance of “The Prophetic Pictures” within Hawthorne’s
career and contemporary milieu denote this artist’s continuous contemplation of the dangers of
supplanting humanity in one’s mind with the object of aesthetic desire. Such concerns placed the
author within a tradition of artistic anxiety – self-made artists whose ambiguous inspiration often
lead to destructive tendencies and imbalanced social relations. “Drowne’s Wooden Image” (1844),
collected in Mosses from an Old Manse, illustrates another example of Hawthorne’s maturing
appreciation for the enduring Jacksonian ethic’s effect on America and the individual. Similarly to
“The Prophetic Pictures”, the story of Drowne, “a young carver in wood” (X, 306) is transposed to a
previous era, while maintaining many of the concerns and preoccupations of Hawthorne’s cultural
and social milieu.73

Drowne’s figures are exceedingly lifelike, and his reputation leads to his being
commissioned by the ebullient Captain Hunnewell to carve a masthead for a ship. The carver is
“conscious of eminence in his art” (X, 306) but Hawthorne obfuscates the picture of the character’s
ability, suggesting that as “the first American…known to have attempted” the art of sculpture, he
held a “knack” rather than a genius for the “imitation of the human figure” (X, 307). Relating to
this, Hawthorne’s earlier “Chippings with a Chisel” (1837), discussed the clear delineation between
European and American sculpture:

These productions of Gothic taste must have been quite beyond the colonial skill of the day,
and were probably carved in London, and brought across the ocean… The more recent

73 Bell, Hawthorne’s View of the Artist, 127.
monuments are mere slabs of slate, in the ordinary style, without any superfluous flourishes to set off the bald inscriptions (IX, 408).

Drowne straddles the boundary of craftsman and artist. Here, the author carefully suggests the levels of differentiation that exist between the creation of art and the worker’s engagement with his craft. Hawthorne clearly engaged with the drive of Market Revolution America towards a practical, progressive future, where the visibility of one’s work demarcated one’s individualistic nature. By accommodating the story of Drowne in a different period, Hawthorne was able to develop a number of the thematic questions raised in previous tales. The movement of time in this case allows Hawthorne to present a retrospective view of the emergence of an artistic tradition in America, shaped to allow his contemporary concerns to affect the portrayal of the protagonist. Hawthorne does not simply provide us with a picture of an anxious artist, a mundane craftsman, or nascent capitalist; these representations evoke both the rise of American art, and a commentary on its current position.

Relative to “The Artist of the Beautiful”, but without its manifest seriousness, “Drowne’s Wooden Image” provides commentary on Romantic theories of art, particularly how a piece of “Fancy” may become a representation of imaginative genius. The titular woodcarver continuously rejects the development of this latter inspired ability however, telling the artist Copley (the same that provided inspiration for “The Prophetic Pictures”) that his creation is “no man’s work… The figure lies within that block of oak, and it is my business to find it” (X, 311). Drowne’s artistic qualities are short-lived in this respect, inspired by the love of a Portuguese maiden under Hunnewell’s protection, rather than a lifelong aesthete. This must colour our impression of his talent and product, but the fact that this craftsman is touched with the inspiration of the true artist is

---

74 Male pronouns are used throughout this analysis when discussing artists; Hawthorne’s artists are, up until The Marble Faun, exclusively male.
deeply important. This acts as a distinguishing point for the artist, separated from the majority of Americans, for whom artistic inspiration is beyond understanding. Drowne’s differentiation from the public is important, but the mechanics of capitalism with which Hawthorne imbues the story provide us with an indication of his inability to foresee the direction in which his art must be taken for financial and social self-sufficiency. Drowne, as aforementioned, stands on his own in his time in being a sculptor. American art has moved on from his humble “blockheads”, but his creation introduces a dialectical development into Hawthorne’s contemplation of art and individualism. As a worker in the “mechanical”, Drowne works on a broadly communitarian level. His productions are strewn across the city of Boston, serving a “useful capacity” (X, 319). There is little to recommend Drowne individually in this, his work serves a purpose but is not transcendent. It is his love for the model of the wooden image that produces its timeless effect, its human reality stems from emotion far from the “cold hearted” artist of “The Prophetic Pictures.” The love and inspiration are episodic however, leaving Drowne to return to the work of the community as opposed to his glorifying sculpture, a rejected dialectic that confirms his status as a craftsman.

Hawthorne’s reflection, as such, probed the tension extant in the separation of inspired work from craft. By transmuting the story to a previous era, Hawthorne allowed himself to chart the development of such a condition, without acknowledging its presence in the society under discussion. Drowne’s art is a process of magical transformation, bordering on the alchemical, as the dangerously individualistic actions taken by Rappaccini or Aylmer in their respective tales. The sculptor’s return to craftwork is as much an admittance of his inability to engage with the vicissitudes of art as a career; his return to the practical demonstrates the differentiation between art and craft that Hawthorne constructs throughout these stories.

When Drowne reveals his work of art, questions are raised regarding the potentially infernal provenance of his inspiration. Inasmuch as Hawthorne’s artists are misunderstood figures, Drowne’s sculpture, despite its later use, is similarly marvelled at as a piece of wizardry. Where the European
artist of “The Prophetic Pictures” is coldly individualistic, affirming his personal moral worth as paramount, Drowne is separated from this as an American of the colonial era. In the still-fledgling nation, utility is connected, and often wholly connoted, with survival, as in “The Artist of the Beautiful”. The story of Drowne takes place in the environs of Boston’s busy docks. It is a place of industry, one from which Drowne makes his living. He is, as Hawthorne describes in relation to Hugh Crombie in Fanshawe, “acquainted with the manual arts that gave bread” to the labourer, mechanic or artisan (III, 33). It is telling that the main differences in outlook between Drowne and the “true artist”, Copley, centre around issues of the fame that art brings; “Drowne…if this work were in marble, it would make you famous at once; nay, I would almost affirm that it would make an era in the art” (X, 313). For Copley, evidently, there is a qualitative difference between the worker in wood and the sculptor in marble. He seems to understand the difference in operational aesthetic between craftsman and sculptor.75 Fame would work to mark out Drowne in his generation, but, like the fleeting nature of his inspiration and the similarly quick appearance of the “dark lady”, his figure does not carry enough of the timeless to buttress his “spirit of genius” (X, 313).

Copley most nearly represents the conscious artist of the piece. Upon seeing the presumed model, he admits that he would sell “himself to the devil”, as Drowne is assumed to have done, “for the privilege of taking her picture” (X, 317). His concerns surround issues of art, the fame that follows its successful production and the hope of making a living from it. William Dunlap quotes the historical Lord Lyndhurst regarding his father, John Singleton Copley: “My father…was entirely devoted to his art, which he pursued with unremitting assiduity to the last year of his life. The result is before the public in his works, which must speak for themselves.”76 Hawthorne draws on this picture of Copley. Where Drowne’s work brings him fame, its use and his subsequent return to “the

75 Martin, ed., Cultural Change, 3.
76 Dunlap, A History of the Rise, 129.
mechanical” suggest his reaction to the “germ for immortality.” Although one could suggest that his return to the mundane emphasises the mind of a proto-capitalist American in his desire to make money, it is Copley’s crafting of a career from his art that is chiefly submerged within this tale. His combination of the timelessness of art and the temporal concerns of money-making indicate his comprehension of the emergent marketplace, while simultaneously affirming American art’s place within a historically relevant tradition. For Copley, who appreciates the struggle of the artist in the increasingly trade-centred market of America, Drowne’s situation takes on tragic dimensions. His pleas to sell the figure in England, and become wealthy, fall on deaf ears. Copley appreciates the wider ramifications of a monumental work of art; that which “announces” oneself. Drowne has no such ability, despite his fleeting inspiration.

In terms of our overarching discussion of the artistic individualist, Copley puts faith in his moral worth, before all else, to the extent that he would damn himself to further his art. Drowne may produce something artistic, but in the schema of the Jacksonian ethic from which Hawthorne and his contemporaries worked, he is unable to see beyond the mundane without the isolated spark of inspiration. Drowne is a craftsman whose work is financially viable but lacking in inspiration. Love may elevate him, but transcendent beauty eventually escapes him. If he represents an alternative, for Hawthorne, to the ethereal, unearthly voice of Owen Warland, it is because his work is based on craftsmanship. This story, so often read in parallel to “The Artist of the Beautiful” (1844), furthers the question of inspiration and the burgeoning status of the artist, placed in direct contrast to Copley, in the spheres of economics, society and culture in this era. Its affirmation of an American artistic tradition holds inescapable relevance for Hawthorne’s personal self-positioning in relation to the story. It is the dynamic of craft and art that is to the fore, an individual backdrop upon which its author explores his singular concerns about art’s financial viability. Hawthorne’s retrospective look at the tradition from which he writes further politicises his
efforts, working retroactively to suggest both the facticity of the canon, and the author’s deserved place within it.

The aforementioned Owen Warland is, perhaps, the apotheosis of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s illustrations of a “haunted mind”. Feeble and introverted, Warland wishes to be left to tinker with watch-parts, rather than engage with progressive society, represented by the busy little town in which he lives; “A plague on such ingenuity! All the effect that ever I knew of it was to spoil the accuracy of some of the best watches in (the) shop” (X, 456). His predecessor in the workshop, and harshest critic, the retired watchmaker Peter Hovenden, is the antithesis of Warland’s endeavours. From the outset, Hawthorne stages the characters of “The Artist of the Beautiful” (1844) to represent various aspects of American society and elements of tension and personal ambiguities present in his own life. The quietly subversive artist, who refuses to work properly for the community, ostensibly places his own aims and hopes above that of the collective. Against him stand the men of everyday economics, masculine craftsmen who work towards a communal good (for example, Danforth the blacksmith), disdaining the ingenuity of a feminine artist that creates timeless beauty, rather than (literally) timed utility.

If Warland is Hawthorne’s “archetypal artist of the fancy”, we must not confuse his intent with the tale’s representations of modernity and its deeply reflective social commentary.77 The destruction of the “beautiful” by the Danforths’ child (apparently significant of the next generations and the foregrounding of the material in American life) can be read as an indication of the advancing marketplace and the artist/scholar’s vulnerability in the face of that advance.78 This reading is limited in its portrayal of the true import of the individualist ethic, as instigated and developed in Jacksonian America, but suggests the metonymic significance of Hovenden and

---


78 Mancall, *Thoughts Painfully Intense*, 19. As von Deusen points out, the Jacksonian Era “was mainly absorbed in the pursuit of material gain”. The Danforths’ child epitomises this move from the transcendent to the material.
Danforth for the market and capitalist forces of modernity. The precarity of Warland’s idealistic produce is emphasised in the fragility of the artistic product in a demand-driven economy, and art’s place within the practical world-view of the watchmaker and the blacksmith. As Hovenden threatens; “one pinch of my finger and thumb (and) I am going to deliver you from all future peril” (X, 456). Market forces, it is made clear to Warland, and the needs of the community can rend his “beautiful” asunder with ease. This act of destruction is not, however, simply an indication of Warland’s separation from the rest of Jacksonian society. By looking at the intricate relations Hawthorne creates in the scene, between the practical characters and Warland, and, further, Warland and the child, we may glean a different interpretation of the representations of modernity and individualism displayed in this tale.

Despite his ostensible lack of engagement with society, Warland, in his choice of career and decision to produce the titular “beautiful”, is artistically individualistic. It is his decision to work in secret that jeopardises his bond with his fellow man. Warland’s ideals, annihilated in their exposure to the practical, rely on his own defence against mankind, in order that he “be his own sole disciple” (X, 454). The importance of this cannot be underestimated; just as the individual may become a self-made man in the arena of capitalist economics, politics or social matters, so can the artist in his isolation from these spheres. His work in secret may disagree with the central tenets of Jacksonian ideology, but the choice to work in a solitary, artistic setting is itself individualistic. Warland does not simply turn his back on the community, but places himself in a renewed relation with his fellow man. His “stepping aside” from humanity endangers his health and happiness, but allows for the creation of the “beautiful”. Warland’s individualistic stance may be appreciated, not simply as one who places the importance of his own work over that of others, but who views the ultimate goal of his endeavours (transcendence) as beneficial for all. This dynamic is crucial in our ongoing understanding of Hawthorne’s engagement with individualism and art; it does not simply guarantee
a turn from the community, but suggests a renewed relationship that might prove mutually
beneficial.

This story presents various, conflicting views of modernity. The Danforths’ practicality and
misunderstanding of Warland’s work, along with their presentation as people with traditional,
community-based values, indicates their strong collective identity. Their work is collectively-
focused, emphasising the nation-building utility associated with the ideal Jacksonian American
citizen.79 Warland, on the other hand, is almost entirely isolated from the people around him, largely
eschewing company to work on his artistic inventions. He is the isolated individual feared by
Jacksonians as the dangerous man of unbounded self-reliance, “insulated from the common
business of life”, experiencing the “sensation of moral cold that makes the spirit shiver.”80 What
further complicates Warland’s damaging, secret self-sufficiency is his apparent lack of hunger or
thirst. His unnatural behaviour is given clear notice in his lack of desires or impulses. His passivity
marks his self-reliance as peculiar, his esoteric behaviour demonstrates his alienation from the mass
of American life. This may be said to represent two distinct aspects of the Jacksonian era’s
ambivalence towards cultural productivity. As stated by von Deusen; “Along with this search for
freedom, Americans found some time for cultivation of the more aesthetic side of life… By and
large, however, this Jacksonian era had little time for the cultural side of like. It was mainly
absorbed in the pursuit of material gain.”81 On one side of this sociological divide, the collective is
represented as machine-like, unable to enjoy the world without the oppressive systems of authority
and time; “that steady and matter-of-fact class of people who hold the opinion that time is not to be
trifled with, whether considered as the medium of advancement and prosperity in this world or
preparation for the next” (X, 451-452). These people, often homogenised by Hawthorne, were

79 See particularly: J.M. Opal, “General Jackson’s Passports: Natural Rights and Sovereign Citizens in the Political
80 Jacobson, Hawthorne’s Conception, 26.
81 Deusen, The Jacksonian Era, 2.
focused on material development and the improvement of conditions within the community based on the burgeoning ideals of capitalist America.\textsuperscript{82} Warland, contrastingly, is absorbed in his own purpose, ignoring the exterior demands of society and economy to fulfil his individual project. Set up in opposition to each other, Warland and the story’s other speaking characters actually embody the relational difficulties of the individualist ethic in America. On one side, the “dangerous soul” of the artist strains against itself and society while the plodding utility of Hovenden and the Danforths threatens to become drudgery. Hawthorne does not suggest a balance because of the dynamic nature of such relativity. The lack of comprehension shown by either side is indicative of the moving standards of engagement demonstrated by both. The separation experienced by Warland is, in itself, a reaffirmation of his individualism, while reinforcing his need to appeal to the collective to appreciate his work.

The artist’s transcendence of his situation by story’s end reasserts his separation from the metonymic Hovenden, his daughter and the excessively masculine Danforth. Furthermore, we are told that the townspeople, when viewing Warland’s secretive work, “had one comprehensive explanation of all these irregularities” (\textit{X}, 462). Hawthorne describes how the fragile Owen was once “one of the household” (\textit{X}, 463) before his artistic inclination set him on a different path. For the artist under the conditions of post-Jacksonian economics and the market revolution, the idea of individual pursuit was necessitated by the non-collaborative nature of the artistic process. If, as Steven Lukes points out, “it was in America that “individualism” came to celebrate capitalism,” how can we reconcile this with the figure of Warland? \textsuperscript{83} Clearly, Hawthorne’s artist does not celebrate the ideals of individualism as laid out by Jacksonian ideologues, or commentators that pointed to the rapid, feverish pace of growth in business during this time.\textsuperscript{84} The financial

\textsuperscript{82} Kohl, \textit{The Politics of Individualism}, 4. For other examples of the representation of a “homogenised” mass of people in Hawthorne’s work, see particularly “Sunday at Home”, “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” or “Endicott and the Red Cross”.

\textsuperscript{83} Lukes, \textit{Individualism}, 26.

\textsuperscript{84} von Deusen, \textit{The Jacksonian Era}, 12.
speculation seemingly deplored by the upstanding Democrat “could not have been more effectively promoted by Jacksonian policies had that been the president’s purpose in office.” Owen’s seemingly apathetic withdrawal into a self-constructed space contrasts sharply with Danforth and Hovenden, definitive craftsmen who come to embody the changing face of American economics. The destructive child of the story’s conclusion rents asunder the artwork as a sign of nascent acquisitive capitalism that will, Hawthorne prognosticates, prove so injurious to cultural expression. This child, the product of a blacksmith and a watchmaker’s daughter, indicates the move from the artisan economy to that familiar to observers of Hawthorne’s contemporary milieu.

Hawthorne creates this dynamic in order to compare the social outlooks of two of his most oft-visited groupings, namely artists and craftsmen. Both sides are incomplete in their ability to navigate the machinations of Jacksonian individualism. The former are individualistic in their isolated endeavour, placing the moral worth of ethereal workings above the practical, economic importance of something as fundamental as knowing the time. On the other hand, the collectivist tendencies of the craftsmen suggest that they, despite their need to have the correct time for their money-making businesses, are out-of-joint with the era. Ultimately, their anachronistic values will not fit with the individualistic ethic of the time to come. Generally, Jacksonians observed traditions but saw them purely as part of a progressive chain of betterment. As seen in de Tocqueville’s analysis, they were radically out of step with the rising tide of self-reliance:

…(Americans) accept tradition only as a means of information, and existing facts only as a lesson to be used in doing otherwise and doing better; to seek the reason of things for oneself, and in oneself alone; to tend to results without being bound to means, and to strike

86 Cyril Connolly’s later comment that “(t)here is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall” perhaps shows Hawthorne’s prescience and real-life situation at this time. Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise (London: Deutsch, 1988), 116.
87 Particularly resonant in this is the Franklinian dogma that “time is money”.

195
the form to the substance – such are the principal characteristics of what I shall call the philosophical method of the Americans.88

“The Artist of the Beautiful”, in its representation of the collectivist-individualist dynamic in American life, suggests various ways in which the artist can temper his stance without compromising his art, but, interestingly, maintains a level of separation between art and common comprehension. This story works to re-affirm what Hawthorne wrote in a letter to Sophia dated 24th July 1839 regarding the quotidian rhythm of work in the Custom-House. It becomes clear that in working like “a machine”, Hawthorne separated himself from an “enjoyment (that) was not all finite”; “my intellect, and my heart and soul, have no share in my present mode of life – they find neither labor nor food in it” (XV, 330). This is symptomatic of the “germ for immortality” present in Owen Warland. His health suffers as he works on his own for “sluggish weeks” that induce a “cold, dull, nameless change” (X, 454-455) upon his countenance, but the individualistic nature of his art is integral to the fact of its (and his) existence. Contrastingly, the same thing cannot be said for the Hovendens and Danforth. Their inability to understand Warland’s work and, ultimately, the reason their child destroys “the Beautiful”, is fundamental. If self-confidence in one’s ability to create is a basic fact of Warland’s inspired process, an individualistic stance is necessitated in his claim for creative self-reliance. The distinction posited between artist and his audience is intangible but definitive. Hawthorne utilised this story, not to illustrate this point solely, but to explore the nature of the artist amidst the financial and cultural strains of the nascent American market. Ethereal genius and fanciful ideas of transcendence will not make money in the industrialising, capitalist world of mid-nineteenth century America. The individualism of Owen Warland that finds form in extreme isolation must be combined with savvy dissemination to an expanding cultural market for profit. Unfortunately for those not aware of the nuance of the creative process, their individualistic

stance (or otherwise) is ineffective, they will remain at a constant remove from the incorporeal “beautiful.” When read in this fashion, Hawthorne maintains the distance between artist and the common man, while simultaneously questioning Democratic and Tocquevillean conceptions of the individual’s role in society. The ability of the artist to work is inextricably linked to its metaphysical divestment from preconceived ideas of luxury and opulence. In exploring the storyworld of Owen Warland, Hawthorne posited a watchmaker that turned his back on time to seek transcendence, and hence denied implications of useless materialism that would consign his artist to anonymity. In creating the timeless, Warland inevitably staged his inspiration in American terms, a perhaps unwitting call of nationalism to the question of American art’s worldly position. This examination is furthered in Hawthorne’s longer romances, where, inculcated within a public/private discourse, the question of the visible arena of individual action in Jacksonian America is explored in relation to the aesthetics men utilised in their attempts to ascertain self-reliance.

_The House of the Seven Gables_ was written and published during a deeply important period of Hawthorne’s life and career. Its publication in 1851 came at a time that saw Hawthorne gain increasing public adulation, potentially as a “great” American writer. Despite his composition of two of America’s most enduring narratives in the space of two years, the precarity of the writer’s life was brought home to Hawthorne. Melville’s letter to his friend at this time summates this struggle; “Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is always grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar.” Seven Gables presented an agonising reappraisal of what writing meant in America. It portrayed the debate held by Hawthorne and his contemporaries about art, and its links to the machinations of the marketplace. It is practically unimaginable today to suggest that the author of such well-received books as _The Scarlet Letter_ and _Seven Gables_ would, the summer following the latter’s publication, be required to bow and scrape in the form of a sycophantic campaign biography.

---


90 Wilson, _Hawthorne and Melville Friendship_, 234.
to maintain an income. In this environment, it is insufficient to view Hawthorne’s artist figures, like Holgrave and Clifford, in isolation from the post-Jacksonian era, rather, their stories necessitate an acknowledgement of the enmeshed nature of their respective situations in contemporary American life.

It has been suggested that “(f)or Hawthorne, the function of art is to support…the transcendental dignity of the individual self.”

Although this metaphysical view is useful in analysing the place of art within this narrative, such a focus limits the possibilities for Hawthorne’s characters in terms of the purely material. This was a time of great strain in the author’s life and, although biographical critiques are persuasive, it is this text’s relation to society that reflects the situation of the author within a contemporary cultural and economic milieu.

The daguerreotypist Holgrave intrudes physically and psychologically upon *Seven Gables*. He is often connected to Hawthorne, with emphasis placed on his viewing the world through a “reflection in the magical mirror of the beloved.”

Furthermore, Holgrave is descended from a wizard, and his compelling power throughout the romance is akin to Hawthorne’s belief in the writer’s ability to enchant the reader, a mysterious force that regularly works, as in “The Prophetic Pictures”, to “insulate (the artist) from the flow of human sympathy.”

Holgrave’s Jacksonian characteristics are best traced anachronistically from the story’s culmination, where the love he shares with Phoebe is linked directly with a specifically Hawthornean conception of what it is to be a man, and, subsequently, part of a couple in Jacksonian America. In discussing his marriage to Sophia, Hawthorne writes; “The fight with the world – the

---

91 Sean J. Kelly, ““Hawthorne’s Material Ghosts”: Photographic Realism and Liminal Selfhood in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Papers on Language and Literature 47, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 234.


93 Bell, *Hawthorne’s View of the Artist*, 162. Hawthorne does not reserve this sense of emotional isolation for his artist figures, but it is through them that he developed the portrayal of being “apart from humanity” apotheosised in Hester Prynne. Ethan Brand, Rappaccini and Aylmer, although ostensibly not artists, are reconfigurations of this, and suggestive of the emotional separation that promulgated a spiritual awakening.
struggle of a man among men – the agony of the universal effort to wrench the means of life from a
host of greedy competitors – all this seems like a dream to me” (VIII, 332).

Following his marriage, Hawthorne felt himself taken from the volatile marketplace,
isolated from its vicissitudes and the lack of surety about his financial situation. His love for Sophia
was re-imagined in terms of the struggle for self-reliance; “I intend to improve vastly by
marriage” (XV, 639). Isolation, in this sense, holds little of the negative connotations that come to
be associated with Holgrave prior to his declaration of love for Phoebe, or Clifford in his existence
in the shadows of the house. The solitude of the husband and wife in the wake of their wedding is a
comforting one, removing the pressures of society without severing the link that would constitute
the “dangerous” nature of hermetic personalities.

In looking at Holgrave therefore, it is important to note that his love for Phoebe, within the
“previously Edenic space” of the House acts as a renewal of its idealised past. It creates the
necessary break from society required to provide the space in which the couple’s love may blossom.
Particularly apparent is the empathetic development of Holgrave during this time, and how his
relationship with Phoebe serves to define her character for herself, rather than simply the
performance of a role within the patriarchal confines that have so diminished Hepzibah’s spirit. The
starting point of this illustrates Holgrave’s tendency to view the world in too abstract a manner:

“I wish you would speak more plainly,” cried Phoebe, perplexed and displeased; “and
above all, that you would feel more like a Christian and a human being! How is it possible
to see people in distress, without desiring, more than anything else, to help and comfort
them? You talk as if this old house were a theatre; and you seem to look at Hepzibah’s and

---

94 Allan Gardner Lloyd-Smith, Eve Tempted: Writing and Sexuality in Hawthorne’s Fiction (Sydney; London: Croom
Helm, 1984), 45.
Clifford’s misfortunes, and those of generations before them, as a tragedy… The play costs
the performers too much – and the audience is too cold-hearted” (II, 217).

Phoebe’s situation at this time is reminiscent of Zenobia in her struggle for self-expression
throughout *The Blithedale Romance*; the limitations and expectations placed on both young women
preclude self-definition and work to control their destiny. As Phoebe states, Holgrave (and Jaffrey
by implication) has assumed the role of a stage director, and his nature seems too inclined to view
others as puppets. It is no great leap to suggest that the realities of American life enforce Holgrave’s
decisions, and it is not a rejection of his previous radicalism that leads to his “settling down”, but a
radical acceptance of the individualistic properties of the “self-made man” that guides his role in
relation to Phoebe and society in the book’s dénouement.

If, as Crews attests, “the obsessed Holgrave (is) the character who most nearly resembles
Hawthorne-as-artist”, then Hawthorne the writer, marked by financial precariousness during this
period, is reaching out to any potential readers in the guise of an unabashed Democrat. The
chapter, “The Daguerreotypist”, reveals Holgrave’s past in all its malleable glory, comparable with
political profiles of the era. Holgrave inhabits the role of the idealised Jacksonian American male
citizen, whose characteristic individualism is borne of youthful hardship and the surging desire to
improve oneself constantly.

Holgrave, as he told Phoebe, somewhat proudly, could not boast of his origin, unless as
being exceedingly humble, nor of his education, except that it had been the scantiest
possible, and obtained by a few winter-months’ attendance at a district-school (II, 176).

---

95 Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne’s Psychological Themes* (London: University of California
Essentially an auto-didact who refuses to be defined by this past, Holgrave represents the bootstrap Democrat, who transported frontier ideals surrounding the possibility of being “self-made” to the increasingly capitalistic marketplace. From ideas of being individualistic on the frontier, Democrats extrapolated what may be termed an operational aesthetic that saw self-reliant ideals as crucially formative for the American man. Holgrave reflects a continuation of the tradition most closely associated with Andrew Jackson himself in this descriptive passage. Like the model of Jackson’s life so revered by his political supporters, Hawthorne makes a virtue of Holgrave’s childhood situation. The self-sufficiency of someone who survived a poverty-stricken early life was foregrounded by Democratic ideologues and followers of Jackson. Although we are not told specifically about Holgrave’s family, it is notable that he had been “(l)eft early to his own guidance” and “had begun to be self-dependent while yet a boy; and it was a condition aptly suited to his natural force of will” (II, 176). This, undoubtedly, is a portrait of the artist as a young Jacksonian. Indeed, as the profile of Holgrave continues, one may suggest that the daguerreotypist represents a sense of wishful thinking on the part of the author. Hawthorne’s financial concerns at the time, when viewed in conjunction with the individualistic and masculine-driven ethos of his contemporary society, required a multi-layered approach to the composition and publication of his fiction. It was not enough to produce a book in this era; central to this possibility was the point that writers at this time were required to present a self-reliant public aesthetic that simultaneously displayed self-dependence and defeminised the role of the author in America. Artistic solitude became dangerous when seen from the perspective Hawthorne often utilised – that of the person lacking empathy, who had forgotten his/her connection with mankind. In the grand democratic project of America however, he/she whose work stood aside or above the collective provided potentially subversive example, while contributing little to the great national enterprise of

---

96 Heather D. Curtis, “Visions of Self, Success and Society in antebellum Boston”, Church History 73, no. 3: 613-634.
democracy. Holgrave can therefore be said, in some important respects, to represent dialectically an idealised combination of the Hawthornean artist and the Jacksonian individualist.

Such self-sufficiency was not merely a sign of patriotism, but was indelibly linked to the outward display of one’s masculinity, something intimately connected with one’s claim to citizenship. Along with this heady mixture, Hawthorne imbues Holgrave with a “will” that complements his Jacksonian qualities without overpowering them. These combined traits lend Holgrave a feeling of being deeply situated within the era from which Hawthorne writes. His ancestry may impact strongly on the narrative, but from the initial impression provided by Holgrave’s past, we encounter a character of ideal Jacksonian nature, whose past is superseded by his ever-changing present. In “the degree to which (the work of art) can create a sustained vision of man’s existence... Hawthorne fulfilled his chief function, since his work was a mirror of its age by virtue both of its searching honesty and of its inevitable unconscious limitations.”

What Matthiessen attests to here is the “feeling” of his era Hawthorne presents to the reader; innate to this is an exposition of Holgrave as a possible citizen, not of “somewhere else”, but of Hawthorne’s conception of his particular environment. This is not to conduct a biographical reading of the character, but to suggest his inevitable embeddedness within Hawthorne’s experiential outlook on the Jacksonian era, one that would rear its head in 1852 in the guise of Franklin Pierce’s campaign biography, a veritable work of neo-Jacksonianism.

The listing of Holgrave’s occupations presents a satirical view on the realities of life for self-made men, and the idea of “trying one’s hand” at various positions (often without the requisite qualifications) that was inculcated into the ethic of self-reliance. Although undoubtedly overstated, the importance of this section lies in its emphasis on the possibilities for the American man of this era. In an expanding marketplace, ambition became a central deciding factor in one’s ability to be self-reliant. Without the negative connotations of previous eras, personal ambition could, it seemed,

---

97 Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 336.
with the help of the people and the guiding hand of Providence, take an ordinary citizen all the way to the White House.

Hawthorne’s hyperbolic statement of the course of Holgrave’s various careers intentionally plays on the masculine roles expected of men in Jacksonian America. When Holgrave arrives to the house in “(i)n his present phase, as a Daguerreotypist”, he has been employed previously in no less than eight occupations. Crucially, upon closer inspection, what Hawthorne provides in no uncertain terms is an image of a young American man who is engaged in the rough-and-tumble of the post-Jacksonian milieu.

Though now but twenty-two years old,…he had already been, first, a country-schoolmaster; next, a salesman in a country-store; and, either at the same time or afterwards, the political-editor of a country-newspaper. He had subsequently travelled New England and the middle states as a pedler… In an episodical way, he had studied and practised dentistry, and with very flattering success… As a supernumerary official, of some kind or other, aboard a packet-ship, he had visited Europe, and found means, before his return, to see Italy, and part of France and Germany. At a later period, he had spent some months in a community of Fourierists. Still more recently, he had been a public lecturer on Mesmerism, for which science…he had very remarkable endowments… His present phase, as a Daguerreotypist, was of no more importance in his own view, nor likely to be more permanent, than any of the preceding ones. It had been taken up with the careless alacrity of an adventurer, who had his bread to earn; it would be thrown aside as carelessly, whenever he should choose to earn his bread by some other equally digressive means (II, 176-177).

Hawthorne essentially enacts a whistle-stop tour of the self-made man, while complementing Holgrave’s character with traditionally Romantic traits and, indeed, radical socialist political ideals.
Taken to the point of satirical observation, this passage has, nonetheless, been critically undervalued in its connection of Holgrave to the author’s situation, with emphasis usually placed on his important connection with the Maule family. It is, however, a section of text fundamentally embedded in its time. As Emory Elliott has noted, the foregrounding of the daguerreotype and other new forms of technology, and “the growing importance of empirical science and materialism was accompanied by a growing scepticism about traditional ideals of morality.” In “(h)is present phase”, Holgrave may appear to have broken from his previous incarnations, but his new occupation presents a real challenge to social and ethical mores, in-keeping with his preceding stances as a “Fourierist” and, especially, his public lectures on the controversial subject of Mesmerism. Far from simply presenting a connection between Holgrave and his ancestor Maule, these appointments place the young man firmly within the tradition of Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* (1857) and the need for individual flexibility in facing the machinations of the antebellum marketplace.

Simultaneously, however, this passage places Holgrave within a Romantic tradition of artists, or within a social class that his log-cabin background belies. His life, in terms of work, has been founded on ambition and a desire to see the world. Hawthorne moves Holgrave from his “country” occupations to a broader view of the homes of European culture. It is significant that Holgrave visits Italy, Germany and France. The suggestion that the young man’s world-view has been changed subsequent to his trip is bound to his radical, more clearly philosophical undertakings in its aftermath. One may see in him, perhaps, a returning American influenced by Goethe’s Romanticism, Fourier and the French socialists, or the Renaissance paintings and sculptures that so bewitched Hawthorne prior to his composition of *The Marble Faun*. Importantly, however,
Holgrave’s engagement with the tradition of the Grand Tour is not contiguous with previous, idyllic pictures of pedagogical experiences for the British and American upper classes. Rather, the young Jacksonian takes the opportunity to see these countries while on a break from working on a “packet ship”. The feeling here is of a new response to Romantic traditions, whereby Hawthorne sublates images of the artist travelling around Europe for inspiration, with a picture of Jacksonian exertion. This combination works to place Holgrave within a dialectic consciously crafted by Hawthorne to exhibit the requirements of the new American artist, concomitantly a student of past influences and an agent for individual action irrevocably present in the Democratic weltanschauung. The dynamic indicated here presents the tension existent in the Jacksonian rejection of/reliance on tradition. The individualistic ethos of the era lauded heroic figures of the American past while valorising a Jeffersonian, often rural-ideal, way of life. This stands in contrast with progressive, destiny-driven narratives that proliferated contemporaneously, often inspired philosophically by the work of John Locke. As Richard J. Ellis writes about Jacksonian America:

(Jacksonians) interpreted Locke to suit egalitarian ends. When Locke said that “Justice gives every Man a Title to the product of his honest industry”, radical Jacksonians used it to attack wealthy speculators who turned a quick profit. When Locke argued there was a natural right to property, radical Jacksonians took that to mean not only an individual’s property should be protected from government but that every individual should possess property.100

The use of Locke, as evidenced here, was moulded to fit the aims of Jacksonian Democracy. Where some utilised his thought to argue against unchecked accumulation, certain voices appealed to his

philosophy as a call for expansionist nationalism, one that saw material increase as intrinsic to the larger project of American destiny.

One might expect that with such upheaval in his life, Holgrave’s space for personal development is compromised. He is, however, indisputably American in his ability to utilise the operational aesthetics of his work without necessarily being subsumed by them. Holgrave is a teacher in the same non-definitive way that he is a “pedler” or a “supernumerary official.” These are versions of self, rather than essences of his personality. His capacity to work in such positions is as much due to a malleability of character; to effect a public persona of suitability to an occupation. Each of the public faces and appointments of Holgrave suggest means to an unspecified end, continuously cycling through jobs “carelessly, whenever he should choose to earn his bread by some other equally digressive means” (II, 177). Most importantly for our understanding of Holgrave as a young Jacksonian is the significance of Hawthorne’s statement on the man that arrives at the House, after apparent personal turmoil; “But what was most remarkable, and perhaps showed a more than common poise in the young man, was the fact, that, amid all these personal vicissitudes, he had never lost his identity” (II, 177). Fundamental to the place of individualism as an American constant during this era, in the philosophical declarations of Emerson, or the lived example of Jackson and the editorials of his Democratic supporters, was a consistency of personal identity, even with the mutability of one’s occupations or presentation before one’s peers. A certain public aesthetic was required of the “political-editor” that would not have been needed of the “supernumerary official”, yet this did not change essentially the quality of one’s identity, but helped to affirm a uniquely American character – individualistic in each pursuit, patriotic in every guise. The curiosity of Holgrave’s tenure amidst the radical Fourierists does not necessarily preclude this patriotic slant; the reformation of society could be hailed as an example of an evolving view of one’s country. In seemingly contradictory terms, the inspiration provided by Emerson for such communities did not necessarily affect the power of his individualistic message. In his (and
Hawthorne’s dialectical combination of Jacksonian practicality and philosophical idealism, the potential for defining American action was brought into a wider scheme of possibility, the aforementioned broadening of the Jacksonian ethic as identified by cultural actors of the era.

The ambiguities at the centre of Holgrave’s situation lie in his self-making before he comes to assume his role as a daguerreotypist, somebody that replicates the world around him for the appreciation of others. In Hawthorne’s era, writers such as William Leggett and actors like Edwin Forrest used a specific personal brand of “native”, American qualities to exhibit their patriotic qualities through their work. No longer was the artist a “luxuriance” or reminder of Old World decadence, but his/her individualistic aesthetic presented space in which to create a new aspect of the progressive national narrative. Importantly, for Holgrave, in the era of self-definition, he has not “wasted entirely that beautiful spirit of youth”, something that, in its ability to “diffuse itself over the universe” (II, 179) separated him from the characters around him while simultaneously affirming his place in the world. The absence of Ethan Brand from humanity’s “magnetic chain” is never risked by Holgrave, who maintains a sense of humane sympathy despite his “premature experience of life.” If it is Hawthorne that sees Holgrave as a resemblance, an avatar in imagined Salem, then his vulnerability in the Jacksonian marketplace is here amply demonstrated. Hawthorne, with some sleight of hand, might position himself as the striving author whose continuous engagement with the Massachusetts literary scene in his early career is finally bearing fruit. His need to gain employment elsewhere had tethered him to the world, he could not become the “calm and cool observer” (II, 177) he so desperately feared.

…when Hawthorne centers directly on the presentation of his individuals, he can ordinarily manage no more than to give a careful notation of their traits – as seen with Holgrave –

---

instead of revealing them gradually through significant incidents… Drama… was beyond him: he could not project individuals against a fully developed society. For no such thing had yet been evolved in the individualistic career of our democracy.¹⁰²

Matthiessen’s posited use of the democracy in these terms was that of a backdrop, where things were highlighted but maintained a sense of two-dimensional narratorial movement. Although this may seems at odds with my contention that Holgrave presents a sustained engagement on Hawthorne’s behalf with his contemporary societal environment, it is important to remember that, in creating Holgrave, Hawthorne provided not just “careful notation of (his) traits”, but a series of aesthetics inhabited by the daguerreotypist; self-posited spaces relative to society that provide both the opportunity to work as part of a collective and the ability to maintain a coherent sense of self. Hawthorne, in many ways opposed to Matthiessen’s words, is not creating the “developed society” upon which to project characters, but illustrating his personae amidst the swirling, individualistic nexus of American life. Hawthorne never fully explained his reasoning behind the symptoms he presents in Ethan Brand or the artist of “The Prophetic Pictures”, as potentially dangerous. It is clear why they become too cold in the face of humanity, but the process by which it occurs is necessarily obfuscated. What is clear is that the relevant aesthetic of these figures, apotheosised by Holgrave, provides a view of one’s relation to society, and therefore illumines the intricacies of the collective-individual dialectic often lost in the projection of a “fully developed society.” In Hawthorne’s presentation of the artist figure Holgrave, we are immersed into Jacksonian society in a way that complements the narrative form of *The House of the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne, in discussing the occupations and various aesthetics of the daguerreotypist does not simply show his personal traits as the potentially heartless observer, but opens up society to explore the process one undertakes in moving through it. Holgrave’s mutability is intimately connected not only with his current position,

but with Hawthorne’s knowledge of the vicissitudes that affect and attempt to upset the contemporary American.

Hawthorne’s contemplation of art is a deep, varied and developing one throughout his career, shown in this chronological analysis. From the early *Fanshawe* through his major short story collections to his later romances, Hawthorne wrestled with the political, social and economic implications of art and the artist. He often discussed the painful process of inspiration, but the backdrop of mid-nineteenth century America provided the author with plenteous material to discuss the ramifications of being an artist in an industrialising society. The once fearful, ashamed writer of *Fanshawe* came to ponder individualism as represented in the work of his contemporaries, allowing it to expand to fields previously seen as superfluous to the demands of expansionist America. This was a recurrent interrogation of art infused by the potentiality of the nation, something that Hawthorne did not take up individually but as part of a larger, pre-American Renaissance project of thought and intellectual mobility. Hawthorne’s artists reflect his own work, inspired by the toil of the contemporary period, distinguished by their genius from the average American. They inhabit these expanded spheres as Hawthorne did. The writer’s concerns regarding the volatile marketplace were as much a reflection on the status of Jacksonian individualism, as they were self-held beliefs in the right of art to hold sway amidst the economic turbulence of the age.

Hawthorne’s artists are inevitably individualistic. The author’s relation to humanity was obscured by the nature of a deeper understanding of the soul of things, the need to look into the heart rather than be a “machine…surrounded by hundreds of similar machines” (*XV*, 330). Hawthorne’s artists may be called idlers in the grand scheme of the era’s democracy, but their work affirmed a dynamic individualistic ethic; ultimately affirming their worth alongside the “people” of Jacksonian (and post-Jacksonian) America, allowing their inspiration to come to fruition as distinct social actors.
Chapter Four

“…forth from the haunts of men”:

(Anti-) Social Individualism and Nathaniel Hawthorne

Every normal man must be tempted, at times, to spit on his hands,
hoist the black flag, and begin slitting throats.

- Henry Louis Mencken, *Prejudices: First Series*

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s anti-social figures are profoundly unable to reconcile personal and societal needs. This is frequently based on an inability to integrate duty and responsibility beyond the immediately personal in their respective quests of fulfilment. Their self-serving stance assumes literal, dangerous qualities when positioned beside an ill-defined social outlook, and is characterised by an individual right to self-aggrandisement, over and above societal obligation.1 Hawthorne’s anti-social writings often appeared after a time of concerted (frequently enforced) contact with the general public, although even during his noted period of self-isolation, his works betray an author consistently focused on the problematic issue of a self away from society.

In seeking work at the Custom-House in Boston, Hawthorne maintained a world-weary, cynical view of the application process. His correspondence and notes of this time show a knowledge of the powers of protective secrecy, while showing a deeper appreciation of the creation of a public aesthetic in order to procure work. Hawthorne counselled his friend, the poet Richard

Henry Stoddard, in this regard upon the latter’s application for a position in the New York Custom-House:

Roll up and pile up as much of a snowball as you can, in the way of political interest; for there never was a fiercer time than this, among the office-seekers…Perhaps it would be as well for you to apply for some place that has a literary fragrance about it…When applying for office, if you are conscious of any deficiencies (moral, intellectual, or educational, whatever else) keep them to yourself, and let those find them out whose business it may be. For example, supposing the office of Translator to the State Department to be tendered you, accept it boldly, without hinting that your acquaintance with foreign language may not be the most familiar… The business is, to establish yourself, somehow and anywhere…

(XVI, 648-649)

This world-view was sanctioned by, and through, Market Revolution American life, where the efficacious ability to hide one’s defects was of paramount importance in holding office, even at the highest echelons of national politics. As Matthew Crenson discusses, any illogical elements of the Jacksonian creed were easily dismissed in the continuous relevance of the unifying “Old Hickory” figure; all aspects of the Democratic establishment were adjunct of Jackson’s personality, “intended to compensate for his personal deficiencies and to extend his personal influence.”

Public manifestations of work were definitive of one’s manhood. Writing’s increasingly nationalistic expression and “decidedly social bent” impressed upon a sceptical people the occupation’s rejection of previously effete and domesticated insulation from the rough-and-tumble

---

of the market. Hawthorne’s oft-repeated desire to engage in a “communion with the world” was inextricable from his wish to live off the proceeds of his literary production; in doing so, he could self-legitimise, a key hurdle to individual advancement, and a central element to the difficulties faced by authors of this era.

“Communion” with others was often characterised by relationships that excluded the public. Prior suspicion of authors focused on the secrecy of the artistic process. Herman Melville’s series of 1851 letters to Hawthorne suggested an artistic need to disengage, and the concomitant horror the writer felt at his disengagement: “In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my “Whale” while it is driving through the press.” David Potter assesses the American distrust of secrecy as a defining characteristic of the national character, an “attribution of corruption to society and of innocence to man alone.” The Jacksonian Era saw the proliferation and codification of this ethos. To this extent, the *American Review* commented on contemporary citizens as “unsociable, driven, uncultivated, and unhappy.” That the self-motivated American could be placed aside from society marked a seismic change in social relations. Simultaneously, in a society seemingly defined by the “people”, the very perception of popularity and connection created fears of isolation. Although difficult in its generalisation, if one were to follow the logic of Jacksonian ideology, one might confirm that the honest striving of the ambitious individual was always preferable to the necessarily corrupted conversation of a group. The latter’s communion with life was distorted by its collectivity, and inducted an essential femininity through compromise. This picture is, however, troubled by the introduction of a capitalist set of values to the

---


4 Wilson, *Hawthorne and Melville Friendship*, 234.


individual’s frame of reference; his self-reliant independence must be tempered for fear of anarchy and interference in the natural rights of his fellow citizen. The individual was required to retain the transparency requisite for any true patriot, and engage in capitalistic practice insofar as he was a singular manifestation of America’s cosmic destiny. The aggregate, distrusted for its blunting of the American’s natural individualism could yet contribute to the progressive effort, but only through the propagation and encouragement of its individual members.

The dialectic that tied individualists harmoniously to the progressive whole, was symptomatic of the aforementioned tensions within the Jacksonian world-view. From this background, issues of privacy, and indeed popular backlash against secrecy, proliferated during this era. As private property became increasingly commodified within the ever-expanding promise of capitalist enterprise, the very question of privacy took on dimensions of a right intrinsic to the citizen. Post-Jacksonian America prefigured, and promoted further, the allowances of privacy for the individual, but, as Greenberg points out, politics and economics are predicated on advancing one’s interests and values in the public sphere, inevitably impinging on the world of the strictly private.

This was made manifest in myriad ways. Andrew Jackson, himself a committed Freemason, attacked private interest through the call of corruption within institutions, his suggestion that secretive groups were necessarily at odds with the public good found numerous willing adherents throughout his presidential terms and beyond. His public belief in the innate goodness and promise of the individual led his earliest biographers to exhibit the general’s simultaneous embodiment of this virtue, and unwavering desire for transparency.

---


When Jackson was told that one Augustus, a servant with the run of the White House, might be smuggling presidential papers to the general’s opponents, (he) responded:

“They are welcome sire, to anything they can get out of my papers. They will find there, among other things, false grammar and bad spelling; but they are welcome to it all, grammar and spelling included. Let them make the most of it.”

Jackson was not only indicating his lack of secrets and the idealised convergence of his public persona and private concerns, but also his consistency of character as the masculine “man who could fight” against the effeminate “man who could write”. This powerful anecdote would have reminded his supporters that public office held little tolerance for the privacy of man, and that one’s masculinity was staked to a publicly professed openness. The simplicity of Jackson’s means, the “false grammar” and “bad spelling”, indicate the possibility of such transparency for all; their lack further solidified the president’s claims to frank expression.

On the other hand, Jackson’s aesthetic of total transparency may have been a political ploy to remove attention and momentum from the coalition of Anti-Mason groups that coalesced and contested elections throughout the 1830’s. The continuously quoted mantra of Jackson, and other advocates of substantive due process like Thomas Cooley, “sought to make the machinations of government more transparent in order to ensure that no group was privileged over another.”

Viewed in light of the growth in support for Anti-Mason groupings, particularly in the Northeast

---


12 For further discussion on the masculine presentation of election slogans in 1828 see Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 34.

13 Isenberg, *White Trash*, 125; “Jackson’s men used Crockett-like humor to defend him, claiming that the general was really guilty of having eaten the six militiamen.”

where the murder of William Morgan “set the western counties of New York blazing with an all-consuming hatred of Masons”, Jackson’s stance on the dangers of privacy may be read as diversionary from his own involvement with Masonry. As early as 1827, Martin Van Buren recognised the political necessity of a Democratic stance on openness, being “almost immediately aware that Anti-Masonry might foreshadow the abandonment of “Old Party feelings”, to the detriment of Jacksonians everywhere.” Jackson, an unrepentant Mason, required a new frame of hermeneutics to overleap this potentially dangerous political issue. Since he was involved in a secret society that seemingly compromised his beliefs on the ultimate power of the public individual, it was a matter of utmost political importance for the incumbent president to reformulate his American spin on the role of the private sphere. Jacksonian ideologues picked up on this imperative, rarely focusing on Anti-Masonry and civil unrest about secret societies, preferring to emphasise possible scandals as the result of hidden agendas within the opposition and throughout society at large. As William Leggett suggested in an editorial:

> The antagonist principles of government, which should constitute the sole ground of controversy, are lost sight of in the eagerness of sordid motives; and the struggle, which should be one of the purest reason with no aim but the achievement of political truth and the promotion of the greatest good of the greatest number, sinks into a mere brawl, in which passion, avarice, and profligacy are the prominent actors.  

---


16 *ibid*, 156.

Secret societies, although undoubtedly a threat to Jacksonian rule, particularly after Anti-Mason leader, Thurlow Weed, joined forces with the 1828 campaign of President John Quincy Adams, were secondary to the secret desires and personal agendas harboured by the American individual. Although a matter of political convenience, Jacksonian Democrats could excoriate the anti-republican values of secrecy without insulting their figurehead and symbolic leader. Individual privacy contrasted sharply with secrecy; the latter term indicated corrupt plotting for personal gain, fundamentally against the idealised level-playing of the marketplace.

Although we will return to the change around Anti-Mason sentiment and political organisation, it is crucial to highlight the fertile ground upon which such ideas were planted and propagated. As Harry Watson asserts, though Whigs, Democrats, and Anti-Masons “all pointed to different sources of menace, each group was clearly troubled for the future of free government, respectively drawing on traditional republican rhetoric to express themselves.”18 Superficially political or economic in its public declaration, they pointed to “secret” sin, away from discerning judgment, as a root of evil. What the Anti-Masons raged against in terms of structural preferential treatment between members of secret societies, Democrats extended to the whole of American society. The ordinary labourer had no lobby group before the Jacksonians arrived, and democratic values alone could be trusted to improve the lot of everyone. Democrats were at pains to focus on the necessity of keeping the machinations behind improvement transparent. Charges against this invariably attacked these intentions as self-defeating, as government could not keep transparent the inherently closed nature of its quasi-ritualistic decision-making. As one contemporary commentator suggested; “the claim to assign government the task of directly promoting the general good is to sanction whatever actions the government chooses to perform.”19 Regardless of political affiliation, the sense of privacy demanded by government and the democratic process deferred the possibility

18 Watson, Liberty and Power, 153.
19 Lysander Spooner, quoted in Frankel, Natural Rights Individualism, 173.
of secret action against the people only insofar as the electorate trusted their legislators that private process and secret sin were not one and the same.

The question of secrecy, as opposed to the inviolable right to personal privacy, was a publicly contentious and politically weaponised issue. If morality is the product of human beings in social interaction, the potential for secrecy to be aligned with sin, and for private action to be frowned upon as personally enriching but communally damaging is logically congruous.20 As William Seward stated regarding the affairs of the United States in 1830;

It is the privilege of freemen to consult together, openly and peaceably, on all subjects interesting to their common welfare… Secrecy is the shutting up of the mind from communion with other minds. And so far as it prevails, in relation to any social good, it is selfish, sour, ignorant, and restless.21

The restless spirit of the American was contrasted with the suspicious restlessness of the secret group, whose selfishness did not equate to betterment. “Social good” was not simply an improvement of communal feeling, but the opening of opportunity for the individual. The significance of the interconnection of public and private interests complicated the status of the domestic, figured before this era largely in gendered terms of community utility and value focused on the feminine. The move to disassociate the home from the accusatory gaze of the “secret” was as much a realignment of private interest with commercial and traditional values of masculinity, as it was an actual alteration in the fabric of society.22

21 Davis, ed., The Fear of Conspiracy, 77.
Viewed in this manner, Democratic ideology and rhetoric were fundamental to an interpretation of economic legitimacy and self-worth, particularly as explored and experienced by cultural actors, notably Nathaniel Hawthorne and his contemporaries. This era was marked by an individualism that rejected the corrupt secrecy of activity behind closed doors. Furthermore, as society evolved along Jacksonian lines, it was seen as having been imbued with the “mentality of independent entrepreneur(ship), where two national impulses were bound to make themselves felt; the impulse toward democracy and the impulse toward capitalism.”

Although Alexis de Tocqueville’s formulation of democratic America viewed the connections between citizens as more relaxed than in aristocratic, subject-based countries, the reality of this statement was a political fiction, where a radical “equality of condition” was something cultivated by parties grasping for votes. The importance of this public, democratic aesthetic cannot be underestimated, relevant as it is from Jackson’s White House to the most menial of worker; the ability to be an exponent of democracy was one that required the balance of stiff public rigidity with a hidden private luxuriance. As Sam Wiseman attests, all institutions, narratives, and histories are performative sites, where “(p)erformers are not simply free to assemble their own identity, but must constantly negotiate cultural and social pressures.” Democratic values as a site of contestation are, by definition, performative. What Neil Harris termed the “operational aesthetic”, we may use to ascertain the use of secrecy and privacy narratives by political and non-political actors, in order to gain a sense of economic legitimisation in Jacksonian America.

The unfortunate status attributed to writers was indelibly linked to Jacksonian issues of secrecy. Writing was often seen in terms of the private work of the author, ignoring its social

---


implications as a dynamic text, whose inward talent allowed for the creation of art without transparent process. Michael Davitt Bell comments that Hawthorne and Melville dealt very differently, in reaction to this suspicion, with the former associating writing with “guilty isolation”, the latter wrote on in “defiance.”

Fundamentally, Jacksonian America portrayed the private sphere as a realm of aristocratic decadence. The idyllic domestic space was diametrically opposed to the public testing ground of the idealised Frontier, a concept that Jacksonians had managed to export to every facet of personal American life. Despite the various convergences between the Anti-Mason and Whig parties before the 1832 re-election of Andrew Jackson, it was the president’s Democratic machine that adapted and developed Anti-Mason rhetorical assertions against monopolistic, “old-money” privilege, and the secret contrivances of the wealthy to conspire against the honest labour of the working classes. Monopolies stood at odds with the rights of “the people”, as much in how they prevented equal conditions for those whose hard work sustained them, as for the necessarily secret workings of those who attained wealth through the sweat of others. Secrecy inevitably became connected with the idea of unfair advantage. As one contemporary source observed:

…our fathers have purchased for us political rights and an equality of privileges which we have not yet had the intelligence to appreciate, nor the courage to protect, nor the wisdom to enjoy, yet do we not see everywhere around us, privileges, advantages, monopolies enjoyed by the few…denied to the many.\textsuperscript{28}

The qualities assessed in this quotation suggest a foundationally individualistic nature, while also indicating a strong sense of monopoly’s public appearance and the inability to identify its origin,

\textsuperscript{27} Michael Davitt Bell, \textit{The Development of American Romanticism: The Sacrifice of Relation} (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 129.

\textsuperscript{28} Davis, ed., \textit{The Fear of Conspiracy}, 69.
and wrest it from the few for the many. Aristocracy, monopoly, and secrecy, although not synonymous nor interchangeable, came before the Jacksonian public in an associative manner, indicative of forces beyond public control whose subtle powers created tension and stopped honest work. Secrecy also took from the ordinary citizen an element of his birthright. When taken to its conclusion, Democratic ideologues attributed a deferral of the promise of the American Revolution to society’s secret actors. Implicit in his campaign as a champion of the Heroic Artisan and the Rural Yeomen, was the understanding that Jackson would open up Washington to his lionised masses, and curtail the excesses of secretive minority elements. Where de Tocqueville saw the danger of excessive privatisation in terms of a concern for “personal well-being that would undermine public concerns,”29 Jacksonians saw a shadowy grouping of stereotyped Eastern capitalists, whose exploitation of labourers disallowed the benefit of all.

Although political parties each dealt with constructed ideas of “private menace” in order to further their respective public profiles, Andrew Jackson’s “war” with the Bank of the United States came to define for many Democratic conflict with perceived secretive, monopolistic forces. Although the details of this battle have been examined and analysed exhaustively, it is pertinent to recast this struggle in terms of popular attitudes towards privilege, hidden agendas, and the forces of capitalism that constrained the working man. Jackson had much comment about his administration’s contest with the Bank, particularly with relation to the obscure motivations and unsure interference of this opaque financial institution:

The corporations and wealthy individuals who are engaged in large manufacturing establishments desire a high tariff to increase their gains. Designing politicians will support it to conciliate their favor and to obtain the means of profuse expenditure for the purpose of purchasing influence in other quarters…if your currency continues as exclusively

29 John Schwarzmantel, The Age of Ideology, 78.
paper as it now is, it will foster this eager desire to amass wealth without labor; it will multiply the number of dependents on bank accommodations and bank favors.\(^{30}\)

Jackson’s “war” was not an autocratic novelty, but was symptomatic of a broader culture that had long been a feature of American life. Jackson’s words, particularly “designing”, “influence”, and “favors”, were loaded with cultural messages for the reader. Not only was this attempting to dissuade people of the utility of the Bank, and its dangerous, monopolistic status, creating “dependents”, implicit was the suggestion that this institution was deeply un-American. It did not simply halt people in their wish to be self-reliant, individualistic citizens, but compounded a lack of personal agency by working behind closed doors, away from popular knowledge and, Jackson suggests, without public regulation.

The Bank War’s lasting symbolic significance was based on the political relevance of secrecy to Americans during the Market Revolution. This particular campaign was founded on the fissures of nineteenth century capitalism in America, as it turned from an agrarian model to an industrial one. Individual action was all well and good, it was the great characteristic of this era, but anticipated by monopolistic interests and exclusive privileges, the ability to counteract the hidden machinations of financial institutions was inadequate. Jackson indicated this change in the economic landscape, representing a clarion call for “(t)he agricultural, the mechanical, and the laboring classes” to alter their respective outlooks with regard to the environment of secrecy in which they live. These freemen, the heart and soul of the Jacksonian project, were, the President admitted, “incapable of forming extensive combinations to act together with united force”\(^{31}\), but, at least, must not expect that the honesty by which they work will be reciprocated by an unfair system.


It is little wonder, as Helen Tangires asserts, that the public market was so lauded and protected by American municipal ordinances, statutes and local governments as an exemplar of a civic culture that reconciled the warring attributes of transparency and economic self-sufficiency. Marking both a change from previous agrarian models, the public market presented a space where the agricultural and industrial melded in nineteenth century America. They were “the common ground where citizens and government struggled to define the shared values of the community” at this time.\textsuperscript{32} It is important to note that at the confluence of the agricultural and industrial in Jacksonian America, in the space of the public market, one could hark back to the yeoman of Jefferson’s projected idyl, while engaging with the self-made entrepreneur Jackson felt was part of American destiny. In the open, in the middle of “the people”, this presented an interesting counterbalance to the Bank struggle, and emphasised the idealisation of the public and intense politicisation of privacy and secrecy in this period.

The “Bank versus Andrew Jackson” also connotes a gendered, psychoanalytical quality that reintroduces the debate to an important part of the division of “spheres”, and their impingement on each other. Michael Kimmel provides an interesting overview of this discussion:

…the Bank symbolized the devouring mother from whose grasp the adolescent nation was trying to escape… The “Mother Bank”, was a “monster Hydra”, a “hydra of corruption”, as Jackson himself put it, and it became a symbol of corporate powers – paper money, monopoly privilege, complex credit - that turned men from “the sober pursuits of honest industry.”\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Helen Tangires, \textit{Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth Century America} (London; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), xvi.

\textsuperscript{33} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 35.
In an era where conflicts were simplified for public consumption in print media, often to the level of a duel, the coded language of Jackson’s struggle with the Bank was couched in specifically gendered terms that worked from previous associations of femininity, domesticity, and privacy. As Daniel Walker Howe indicates, public support of political parties, first, and political causes, second was of deep significance to the era’s voters; “(t)o be a Democrat or Whig could be an important facet of a man’s identity.” Privacy was not simply a consignment of the feminine to an enclosed space, but must be taken in juxtaposition with the status of the public sphere as the ultimate proving ground for American men. The “private sphere” afforded its inhabitants a degree of privacy only through a form of dependence on the public sphere. Ostensibly paradoxical, the man that proved his worth in public might be afforded more time in private, to indulge himself and his family. These opportunities were, of course, restricted for women of this era. As David Cheal affirms; “(s)ocial participation in the nineteenth century is described as being divided into a male sphere of employment and a “woman’s sphere” of domesticity and nurturance.” To nurture and help develop the next wave of American expansionists, individualists, and entrepreneurs remained the remit of many of this era’s women, while men asserted their economic legitimacy in the volatile marketplace, and therefore the extended legitimacy of the nation. A woman, by maintaining familial morality, was included, via her husband, “in the achievement and peaceful enjoyment of personal independence, the objective that had continued to be the most visible and powerful imperative in the emerging American culture.” This is not to say that a husband’s individualism


was a guarantor of his wife’s, rather it presented a public image of a sufficient domesticity that allowed the American man to flourish amidst his peers and rivals.

Undoubtedly this phallocentric reading of the era’s domestic relations provides a simplified picture of the contemporary household; but under the rubric of a discussion on the issue of privacy and secrecy, the role of the woman as a domestic enforcer of morality, and her consignment to the “private sphere”, is central to the depiction of hidden machinations in this period’s rhetoric and politics. Jackson’s struggle with the Bank, and institutions more generally, may be characterised in terms of his hyper-masculinity in contest with a monstrous, feminising influence. The president positioned himself as a force against entrenched institutions, working to relinquish their emasculating grip on the American public sphere. American man required transparency in order to be truly self-reliant. Unfortunately, as Democratic ideologues railed against, such individualism was out of reach for many, not due to personal failings, but the hidden agendas of private interest and privilege. If we assume that a man’s self-reliance at this time was crucially formative for his public aesthetic of masculinity, it is easy to identify how various figures connected the corrupt aims of the private sphere with an ideology of repressive feminisation. As early as 1820, one laudatory biography of Jackson praised his manliness as a possible antidote to the alarming “voluptuousness and effeminacy” that threatened America. If the United States wished to make manifest its destiny, the only manner in which to do this was through an unrelenting emphasis on masculine ideals, and a continuous self-assessment of individualism in the openness of the marketplace.

In such gendered terms, the debate surrounding secrecy took on a further destabilising, insidious aspect throughout the 1830's. One of the principal factors in the organisation of Anti-Masonic coalitions was the belief that, due to their presence in public office throughout America, private lobby groups and secret privileges may sway the course of the country’s destiny. Jackson, himself a Mason, needed to qualify his public image to overcome the problems of his association

with private interest. In a country that interwove personal qualities with the ideology of the nation, lurking secret societies, in their reported drive to ensnare the labourer and defraud the yeoman, were ultimately seeking to oppress the worker’s masculinity and freedom. Without that, he could not be an American, and was a man in name only. Little wonder then that the *New York Argus*, reporting in 1828, supported the Democratic candidate, emphasising his military career as both the development of a hero, and the growth of a distinctly American man; “Soldier Boy of the First War of Independence. The Veteran Hero of the Second. He Saved the Country. Let the Cry be Jackson…”

Earlier sections of this analysis have pointed to Hawthorne’s presentation of a legitimate aesthetic as proof of his validity as an economic actor in the destabilised, protean world of the marketplace, particularly that pertaining to literary production. The fundamental connection drawn between solitude, excessive, suspicious privacy, and the fear of emasculation problematised the role of the writer in American society, and influenced their career in myriad manners. As Lawrence Buell has previously identified; “(t)he commercialization of letters led to an increasingly diverse and complicated set of mediations between author and public.” The period in question saw an increasing professionalisation of a wide variety of occupations, and at many occupational levels. In America, a wave of nationalism produced calls for the establishment of an “American science, American art, and an American literature” that emphasised a new “self-consciously American” quality, or set of characteristics. In 1833 in Salem, Rufus Choate delivered an address beseeching a worthy writer to “make the heroic age of American history for the first time familiar, intelligible, and interesting to the mass of the reading community.” The process of commercialising letters and

---

43 Maddox, *Removals*, 89.
literary publications had distinctly democratic and nationalistic angles, and although it rarely
specified that such a chronicler should be a “a man of the people”, the assumption was that he
would be a man, and that the work would exhibit a sense of the openness prerequisite for the
American project. From Emerson’s “American Scholar” onwards, writing was required to perform a
cultural task beyond the merely aesthetic, being reflective, and documenting the course, of national
progress.

Above all, the American writer would necessarily be imbued with an individualism that both
proved his legitimacy and confirmed the “equality of conditions” in the nation. The major obstacle
in this, of course, was the intrinsically solitary nature of the creative process, one that shut the writer
away from his fellow man. In order to reconcile the era’s pervasive individualism with the ethereal,
often glacially slow, progress of composing a book, there needed to be essential change to the
relation between public life and private dealings, to dissuade readings of the writer’s situation as a
subversive, feminine figure. As has been noted, this caused “confusion in the discussion of the
American character, from the fact that the term individualism (was) sometimes used to mean
willingness to think and act separately from the majority, and sometimes (as by Turner) to mean
capacity to get along without help.”\textsuperscript{44} The writer, therefore, needed to adapt to the ethos of
Jacksonian individualism. This was not a simple process, and asked of each cultural producer the
innate quality of his art. As Henry Nash Smith indicates; “The nineteenth century writer whom we
value resisted the demands of the new middlebrow audience, yet without exception their work was
visibly influenced by this struggle - sometimes to a considerable, even decisive extent.”\textsuperscript{45} It is my
contention that not only is this true (and the word “visibly” above holds more important
ramifications than perhaps intended) but that the ostensibly imperceptible encroachment of public
perception (the “middlebrow audience”) caused a definitive change in the relation of the artist to a

\textsuperscript{44} Potter, \textit{History and American Society}, 252.

state of solitude previously assumed as fitting for the creative process. In a society where, as Leo Marx attests, the “common man threatened to supplant both…the rich and the poor”, it is vital we understand the changing role of the once anti-social author to recognise an engaged commentator that utilised secrecy and privacy in a very different manner than his forebears.46

Joseph Ellis has provided an interesting but not altogether consistent picture of what he terms the “voluntary withdrawal of American artists and intellectuals into a separate sphere from society”:

Artists and writers began to conceive of themselves as refugees from the American mainstream, the specially endowed inhabitants of a transcendent region sealed off from the hurly-burly of the marketplace, the banality of popular opinion, and the grime of industrialized society… Alienation became the customary and most comfortable posture for American intellectuals; criticism rather than celebration of the dominant American institutions and attitudes became the accepted norm.47

This misreads the adaptable engagement of writers and artists with the metamorphosing, commercially-driven society in which they found themselves during the Jacksonian Era. If anything, the fact that most contemporary writers wrote for a variety of publications, often prior to a more “literary”, celebrated career should provide evidence of their willingness to construct a public persona in the face of what many complained of as the democratic community’s “tendency in all things towards mediocrity.”48 That Hawthorne, Stowe, Melville, and others frequently appeared in


local and regional newspapers throughout the 1830s suggests that, far from “self-veiling”, writers of this era saw the need to criticise and analyse the society around them, but within the recognisable parameters of national, celebrated individualism. If anything, the professionalisation of art and literature should suggest to us the changing attitudes during this era to a group once viewed in more hostile terms. Recognition appears to have come that artists and writers, in searching for a deeper truth, might come to draw out the reality of a world shrouded in mystery for the common man; a world that, because of this mystery, held him back from reaching his true potential.

Perhaps most importantly for an age and a people to whom an inherent distrust of groups was attributed, art was always a solitary pursuit. Although the possibility for subversion remained, the increasing consumption of literature, be it in book form or in local theatres and lyceums indicates that Jacksonian America had largely bypassed previous generations’ association of the artist as a “creature who symbolised the victory of luxury over virtue, (and) the corruption of simple, agrarian values by commercial arrangements.” Historiography of the Jacksonian Era appears to mark a general turn from such an outlook, as Jeffrey Mullins proffers; “Industrialism, mechanisation, displacement of workers, dependence on wage labour, and the other arrangements that came with the market revolution, need not have been the fear of the resourceful artisan.”

Although not necessarily positive about the model of the “Heroic Artisan”, the pervasive culture of individualism within a society could not be avoided, even by isolated men of genius. The reality is that, although inheritors of Romantic ideals and ideas, American writers were too embedded in

49 Davis, *Hawthorne’s Shyness*, 56.
52 Bell, *The Development of American Romanticism*, xiii.
regional and national movements of culture to avoid encouraging “individualistic striving toward self-improvement and self-education, typically on a rationalist model.”

Predicated on the discussion of the Jacksonian marketplace was its accessibility to men whose dynamic masculinity was publicly proven. Self-made, self-reliant, virile masculine qualities were required characteristics of the entrepreneur, at least in ideological configurations. For the increasingly industrialised, democratic nation, there stood a renewed emphasis on a freedom that glossed over the radical disconnection felt between men for whom industry “(broke) the chain and free(d) every link.” Michel Chevalier noted after visiting America that it was a country of “universal instability”, where success was earned when proven constantly. It is, in the anxieties of the seemingly unsuccessful, however, that we may view the persuasive allure of the marketplace, and its public profile.

Andrew Levy interlinks two of Jacksonian America’s most important writers in a way that illuminates the far-reaching possibilities of writing as a newly-legitimised profession, one that, in theory, would set its exponents within the patriotic, manly, progressive competition so rejoiced in by Democrats:

Poe’s literary philosophy, as expressed in his review of Hawthorne, owes much to Aristotle’s Poetics for its discussion of unity, but it also rests firmly within the tradition of the confidence man (another American invention of the 1840s), who attempts to manipulate an audience directly for the purpose of personal profit.

54 Quoted in Kimmel, Manhood in America, 25.
The connection of writers to salesmen is both astute and problematic, as it presumes a role that most authors at this time failed to inhabit. The increasing contiguity of author and publisher suggests the enlarged stake of the former by the need to engage in the process of publication, rather than simply hand a manuscript off to a producer. Hawthorne, perhaps, shows this most eloquently in a letter to John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*:

That I have not recently contributed, is owing to no disinclination thereto; but the fact is, I am quite done for and broken up as a literary man, so long as I retain this office. Nothing have I written since I held it, save two or three puffs of your own Magazine. My duties have not been very laborious hitherto; but I have been cramped by a sense that I am no longer master of my own time and motions (*XV*, 13).

Within the discourse that situated writer in a competitive marketplace, Hawthorne appears to complain that in his work as, essentially, a clerk in the Salem Custom-House, his spatial and temporal interaction with the world has been undermined to the extent that he can no longer write. It is important to emphasise that Hawthorne freely admits to one of Jacksonian America’s most devoted Democratic ideologues that his work was not “very laborious”. Inspiration seems hard to come by in the daily grind of the work of a customs surveyor, but I contend that, in correspondence with this particular editor, Hawthorne is engaged in the sort of manipulation Levy identified as part of Poe’s philosophy. To emphasise that his work was not difficult or taxing, was simultaneously to indicate the perils of writing. To support this underlying point, Hawthorne refers distinctly to both sides of his occupational access to the marketplace - “literary” suggesting status above that of a scribbler, and “man” indicative of the essential, required element for approval in the eyes of his peers. Writing, it seems, made Hawthorne, in this formulation, appreciate the individual’s ability to control his destiny. In the Custom-House, without mastery over his own time and motions,
Hawthorne is constrained in a manner alien to idealised American values. Without control of these faculties, Hawthorne engages O’Sullivan in the rhetoric of individual destiny mapped onto the nation. Hawthorne cannot contribute anything to O’Sullivan because the mundane, menial work of the Custom-House is not befitting the man that wishes to control his path in life, something emphasised above the taxing effect of such drudgery on the man of genius. Yet, the picture Hawthorne presents of his authorship while toiling away at the Custom-House is of a self-employed individual. Far from the ethereal figure, the “citizen of somewhere else”, Hawthorne’s continued writing while elsewhere employed is merely another form of his capitalist, individualistic expression.

Contrast this with a letter of four months previous to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Although possible that he had not realised the daily realities of his newfound work by 1839, it is a very different picture that Hawthorne presents to his fellow Bowdoin alumnus, indicative of the relations between “literary men” that so characterise his correspondence, and differentiate them from his letters with O’Sullivan and the more politically-minded of his acquaintances and friends.

Pray Heaven I may take opportunities to make defalcation! They tell me that a considerable portion of my time will be unoccupied; the which I mean to employ in sketches of my new experience… And whatever aid a Custom-House officer could afford, should always be forthcoming (XV, 287).

This is a far cry from the enslaved worker of other letters (XV, 391). Time opens up before him, and indeed it is the reserve of the officer to utilise his time for other projects that befit his talent. It is not necessarily the tone of these letters that is striking, rather the change of idiom and appeal to

57 To Sophia; “Dearest wife, I did hope, till this afternoon, that I should be able to disburthen myself of the cargo of salt which has been resting on my weary shoulders for a week past; but it does seem as if Heaven’s mercy were not meant for us miserable Custom-House officers.”
common experience and ideology that the letters exemplify. “Work” is protean within Hawthorne’s correspondences; for the writer’s letter, it is the financial opportunity that allows the man of letters to follow his artistic inspiration, and contribute to an artistic community. For the letter to O’Sullivan, work has metamorphosed into an alienating, soulless enterprise that threatens to derail the author’s cultivated public aesthetic of masculinity, and, on a broader level, jeopardise his patriotic, individualistic claim to a market-linked identifier of citizenship.

Similarly, these letters delineate clear ideas of “public” and “private” to suit their aims and ideological functions. To Longfellow, Hawthorne implicitly figures the Custom-House as a private space, where it will be easier to work and write “sketches of new experience”. In the O’Sullivan correspondence, the writer is no longer a private individual, connoted by his lack of mastery over fundamental human faculties. He has become an instrument of the institution to which he now belongs, ceding his individuality in terms of personal action and the leisure time in which other unique interests may be pursued. The letter to O’Sullivan, despite complaining of a lack of immediate freedom, does not suggest the absence of agency to which the Longfellow letter freely admits. The latter relays how Hawthorne has been told his role by his superiors (“They tell me that…”) and it is only if presented with free time that he may indulge in writing. The May letter to O’Sullivan amounts, therefore, if read superficially, to an ideological volte face, as Hawthorne laments the cramping of the interior workspace on the true freedoms of man in the Jacksonian Era. It is unlikely that Hawthorne underwent so radical a change in his world-view, particularly given the comment of contemporary Jacksonian and American historian George Bancroft to Emerson that “Hawthorne (is) the most efficient and best of the Customs House officers.”

It may be attributed that the writer maintained focus on his art throughout the drudgery of his “actual” work but that is too simplistic. It is, as Donald Pease has commented, as if the ghosts of

---

the Custom-House remove the writer “from the self-enclosed sphere of self-interest and (return) him to a world in which even the individual’s interest in himself served, through public confession, the interest of the public good, these ghosts reminded Hawthorne of a life of civic duty.”59 His employment was an opening unto the world, one that required a negotiation of the politics of the past and the space of contemporary work. Hawthorne did not reconcile this space through an engagement with masculine identification and individualistic self-striving; rather he dealt with all sides through the careful construction of a public aesthetic, one that catered in correspondence with literary figures and influential Democrats, without compromising personal ideological beliefs. In the “business” of establishing oneself, self-direction, reliance, and aggrandisement represented one coherent nexus of ideas, played out in public, and within an environment hostile to the possibility of secrecy.

Hawthorne’s fiction bears the marks of a life-long engagement with the problems of antisocial behaviour, and the issues surrounding Jacksonian Democrats’ incorporation and implementation of public individualism as a national characteristic. His personae often struggle between the space afforded public action, and their uniquely private fears. Utilising historical and religious codes of morality, Hawthorne examined those most sacred and secret of spaces to analyse the negative and positive aspects of his era, his nation’s history, and, more broadly, the “spirit” of man. He emphasised how liminal spaces between individual and society are destabilised and jeopardised by unusual or extended changes and refusal of duty or responsibility. These were intrinsically linked with a pervasive individualism that viewed the public sphere in masculine terms, maintaining a distrust of the private sphere for fear of its power to corrupt and endanger man’s link with his peers. Such writing was borne of a contemporary predilection to an individualistic ethos

that fretted over issues of civic duty and civil expectations in antebellum America. These lacunae were often characterised through epistemological shortcomings or assumptions, something included by Hawthorne to problematise a number of the issues he saw as manifest in American society.

Doubt is a concept fundamental to Hawthorne’s portrayal of his contemporary milieu. It provides much of the ambiguity long-appreciated as an inescapable quality of his work, but doubt is deeply connected to the spaces Hawthorne created between characters, and exploited for the effective telling of tales. Doubt is, we might say as a working definition, the disruption of knowable truth, a break in epistemological relation where characters are unable to present consistent explanations for external phenomena. Millicent Bell’s Romantic formulation of doubt views it as “the sense of religious and social isolation, the separation of reason from creative power.”60 Doubt, then, may be said to have certain alienating qualities, where a lack of surety in one’s role leads to a sense of one’s liminality. Hawthorne’s doubtfulness over his place in the Custom-House, and the concomitant doubt felt in his ability to write and to be an individual social actor, delineates the pressure felt in presenting a public image of self-betterment and, crucially, questions the very possibility of improvement.

Isolation was a difficult aesthetic to sell to the marketplace unless directly connected with westward expansion, the frontier, and the improving destiny of America.61 In an age where origin myths proliferated of Old Hickory defeating the British through skills learned from “nature herself”,62 the figure of the solitary man could only be positive if developmental hardship was emphasised, and anti-social tendencies ignored. Certain senses of guilt were attendant on isolation, particularly when it came to American progress. As Dan McCall asserts; “It was in the Puritan

60 Bell, Hawthorne’s View of the Artist, 14.

61 For more on this, see Emerson’s “The Transcendentalist”: “They are lonely; the spirit of their writing and conversation is lonely; they repel influences; they shun general society; they incline to shut themselves in their chamber in the house, to live in the country rather than in the town, and to find their tasks and amusements in solitude. Society, to be sure, does not like this very well…” Emerson, “The Transcendentalist” in Collected Works Vol. 1, 342.

settlement that American society exacted its highest price; if the community was going to live at all, it would live at tremendous cost to the individual.” Solitary individuals were not commodifiable, and their secrecy, necessitated by lack of human contact, perturbed the Jacksonian. Doubts grew in the popular mind regarding potential subversion; the “private menace” so often utilised in political rhetoric to enflame passion and scare the electorate found its incarnation in the solitary figure. There was, along with a physical demarcation of distance, a mental and epistemological break present - in social terms it was impossible to define the parameters of an isolated person’s thought; it became dangerous and secretive. For Americans of the Jacksonian Era, it was the epitome of the private interest that would emasculate and homogenise, whose tendency to monopolise the work of others seeded a belief that solitary people were not publicly tested, their special nature was self-designed and self-approved, with little of the public obligations of individualistic behaviour.

“Ethan Brand”, Hawthorne’s story initially published as “The Unpardonable Sin. From an Unfinished Work” in 1850, is archetypal of Hawthorne’s doubtful wanderer whose self-belief in personal epistemological superiority leads him away from humanity in an individualistic search, and to his ultimate demise in the lime-kiln he once tended. Although, chronologically, this tale falls towards the latter stages of Hawthorne’s career, it provides an important element of context, a point of culmination wherein the ideas that he had explored throughout his career find apotheotic expression. This story charts Brand’s journey from community to solitude to a realisation of mistake before death, and importantly a request for forgiveness. In essence, Ethan Brand makes a claim for his superiority that, as Charles Swann astutely remarks is “a Romantic, a Faustian claim that he is special – and, unlike Bunyan, the Bible, the authority of a text, plays little part in his quest.” The protagonist appears to work from a personal premise without historicity and prior “permission” to exercise individual will. Indeed his search for the “Unpardonable Sin”, although ostensibly self-

---

63 McCall, *Citizens of Somewhere Else*, 60.

64 Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 56.
directed, was not literally self-directed, as Hawthorne enquires of his audience the difficult question; what if that which is unpardonable is centred on human action and will? Brand’s search, although extreme, seems to posit that mankind’s inherent separation is easily exploited in the solitary man’s actions, when society no longer has recourse to regulate and limit danger and subversion. Ethan’s anti-social behaviour is much more than that; its power and ability to scare Bartram, Little Joe and the villagers is connected to its profound anti-community, anti-reason, and anti-nature stance.

Ethan Brand exemplifies Alexis de Tocqueville’s pronunciation of American democratic man as “masterless and separate.” Brand takes this to the extreme of being without authority or, to his mind, historical precedent, demonstrated by statements such as; “...what need have I of the devil? I have left him behind me, on my track” (XI, 89). This is both a spiritual and epistemological break from America’s Puritan heritage while also maintaining a physical separation that, unlike Young Goodman Browns’ solitary errand, cannot even be shared by the Devil. Brand rejects the possibility of a dichotomous schema of salvation and reprobation. The sole soteriological element of his search is the ultimate discovery of selfhood, and therefore a simultaneous rejection of the structures and impulses of others.

“I have looked,” said he, “into many a human heart that was seven times hotter with sinful passions than yonder furnace is with fire. But I found not there what I sought. No, not the Unpardonable Sin... It is a sin that grew within my own breast… The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims (XI, 90).

Brand does not deny the possible existence of God and the Devil, or by extension good and evil. He does, however, take the remarkable leap to say that fundamentally the individual cannot know these
entities, concepts or states through the experiences or transmissions of others. Far from simply being radically individualistic, Ethan Brand is categorical in the stance that the authority of external forces, despite actuality, is essentially false and restrictive. His solitude is not something present in his absence from communion with mankind, but a claim of illimitable isolation through the unknowability of mind and heart. As Leo Marx comments; “(N)ot only has (Brand) sought throughout the world for what was closest to himself, but, as it turns out, the “Unpardonable Sin” resides in the very principle for which he undertook the quest; the desire for knowledge as an end in itself.”

In an era defined by manifestations of destiny and progress, the story of Ethan Brand was disturbing for cultural assumptions of perfectibility and contentment. The aforementioned volatility of the marketplace was granted, and the continuous need to prove masculinity before one’s peers assumed almost tragic proportions in the political and ideological framings of the Jacksonian Democrats. Hawthorne appeared here to transmute that struggle to a cosmic level, and, in the process, delimit his protagonist’s moral strictures, and the control of society over the individual’s will and capabilities. The author brings this into focus upon introducing three former acquaintances of Brand’s who, through an attested fondness for alcohol, come before the fiend upon his return to the village. These figures, the stage-agent, Lawyer Giles, and the doctor are individuated from the mass of villagers that congregate in order to catch a glimpse of the esoteric traveller. There is a strange exchange between Brand and the group, culminating in the “wayfarer’s” pronouncement that he had “groped into (their) hearts, and found nothing there for (his) purpose” (XI, 93) In taking individualism to its logical conclusion, Hawthorne combined it with themes of exploitation and secrecy that held great discursive significance for his audience. Despite the story’s obvious qualities, and the inescapability of Ethan’s material world, Hawthorne is unable to reconcile the

65 Marx, Machine in the Garden, 266.
66 Swann, Tradition and Revolution, 62.
various representations of Americans in the way that his story seeks to do. The fragmented village characters, once figured as whole men when discussed in relation to the previous occupations, appear to reflect and foreshadow Brand’s broken soul, but fail to map comfortably on to the nobility of his cosmic struggle. This is why, when Brand admonishes the men - “ye brute beasts, that have made yourself so, shrivelling up your souls with fiery liquors!” (XI, 93) - there remains a certain analogous emptiness to the situation. This is indicated by Smith in the comment that “during the early and middle periods of Hawthorne’s writing career, the periods when he produced his best work, he was in general highly critical of the raucous materialism and utilitarian coarseness of American society.”

One feels that, unlike similarly dangerous individualists in his work such as Aylmer and Rappaccini, Hawthorne recognises in Brand a kindred spirit whose wish to live purely in the abstract and ethereal realm of the “Unpardonable Sin”, is inevitably tied to the material. Although Hawthorne cannot be said to admire Brand’s monomaniacal sinfulness, it is his claim of self-definition, knowledge of a higher nature (be it salvific or destructive), and refusal of constraints that leave such a lasting impression of the character.

The continuing distrust of secrecy in Hawthorne’s society undoubtedly informed some of the background of the story. Brand’s individualism pervades his life; dangerously so, especially given that he has turned from all spiritual authority by the story’s end, and dictates his last words to the paganistic “Mother Earth…who art no more my Mother” (XI, 100). In his separation from society, Brand’s morality is fragmented, and his personal quest for the “Unpardonable Sin” is bound to a secret superiority that cannot be shared because others are unworthy to hear it. In this manner, the protagonist reflects contemporary views on the ritualistic inductions and secretive ceremonies of hidden societies. The initiation is itself exclusionary, but in the formalised process of induction into a society, and in Brand’s case the society of one, the secret has not encompassed “the forbidden”. As Fran Lloyd explains; “(T)he secret…necessarily excludes others, while the forbidden demarcates

---

67 Smith, Democracy and the Novel, 18.
the boundaries of what is permissible or prohibited, acceptable or undesirable, within specific
domains." It is through this combination of a secrecy that is necessarily exclusive, and the context
of the forbidden journey he undertakes, that Ethan Brand’s quest takes on its cosmic proportions.
Brand projects the individual’s democratic struggle into an ever-broadening scape, sometimes
material but more often transcendent. As in Hawthorne’s other stories, this “proud claim to
freedoms transcending ordinary moral laws” was, for the writer, particularly suspect.

From these tales of frightening anti-social characters it is clear that Hawthorne saw no
achievement in heightened personal development that was worth exclusion from humanity’s
“magnetic chain.” The claim of transcendence, for him, was troubling because it emphasised a
lessening of one’s humanity over a perfectibility of the subject. This is important to consider in
relation to this story as an analogue for the act of writing. As a piece of self-interrogation, “Ethan
Brand” contemplates the spaces and acts of being in a similar manner to Melville and Hawthorne’s
thought and correspondence on the facts of writing; “What I feel most moved to write, that is
banned, - it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot.” Brand’s self-interrogation
ultimately decides the path of his life. For the writer, it is the possibility of removal from oneself
that horrifies; Melville’s indecision over what type of artist he was can be seen as both visionary
and entirely socially embedded, reliant as it was on previous conceptions of authorship. The space
to write, much like the space to self-interrogate and become individuated, was one that Hawthorne
showed as intensely precarious, and consistently wearisome. Hawthorne’s negativity disagreed
with positive Jacksonian calls of destiny transposed to each individual, or optimistic Emersonian

68 Fran Lloyd and Catherine O’Brien, Secret Spaces, Forbidden Places: Rethinking Culture (Berghahn Books, New
York, 2000), xviii.

69 Bell, Hawthorne’s View of the Artist, 19.

70 Wilson, Hawthorne and Melville Friendship, 234.

can be seen in Conrad’s pronunciation on the “space for writing”, as if journeying in a foreign land while
composing his thoughts: “On my return I found (speaking somewhat in the style of Captain Gulliver) my family all
well, my wife heartily glad to learn that the fuss was all over, and our small boy considerably grown during my
absence.”
“infinitude”. When Ethan’s “moral nature had ceased to keep the pace of improvement with his intellect” (XI, 100), it affirms the primeval guilt that exists within everyone, and highlights the ease with which the projects of the heart may be outstripped by the headstrong nature of the intellect.

Ethan Brand is characteristically Hawthornean in his ostensible rejection of the domestic, private sphere, only to cling to it desperately in secret. Although Brand has toyed with the lives of some previously, this tale’s subtle problematisation of the gendered division of spheres indicates the lasting appeal of privacy for Hawthorne’s most individualistic characters. Ethan renounces privacy in his search for the “Unpardonable Sin”; however, his retention of the qualities of the same sin indicate a need to restrain knowledge from the public eye. The foremost quality of his Sin is its unalterable individuality and arrogant personal protection. Hawthorne destabilises the boundaries of public and private discourses in this tale, in a similar manner to how he questions the possibility of the timelessness of the protagonist’s crime as it binds itself to the human heart. Ethan’s secrecy is not an emasculating aspect of his character, nor is his public persona a guarantor of his masculinity. The very nature of Ethan’s situation is his turn from this discourse. Brand’s individualism precludes any relation to his fellow man, as much as it does a relationship with God. His “remorseless purpose”, it might be suggested, is the removal of all relativity from his earthly, temporal situation, but also the renunciation of any possible connection to the transcendent; a cosmic exceptionalism that draws no parameters of comparison beyond its self-serving insistence on individualistic striving. Ethan Brand is an incarnation of “Manifest Destiny” gone rogue, his identity as a man, and further as an American man, is impossible to ascertain in his interminable struggle against the essential conceptual points of human relation.

The “achievement” of Ethan Brand’s individualism is his dangerous refusal of society. As Anne Rose points out; “Hawthorne entertained the disturbing thought that human nature was far
less predictable than the cult of domesticity assumed.” Ethan’s unpredictability stems from personal withdrawal, but is connected to an insistent refusal to be identified with anything. The power of a public aesthetic in antebellum America was its impact on the private, and its broader cultural expression of a nation with destiny, and a sense of bestowed individualism. This era’s individual conjured self-importance from such exceptionalism, but concomitantly from a belief in the necessity to subjugate personal glory for social progress. These ideas, at the core of individualistic pursuit, and tempered by Democratic ideology to maintain a sense of collective betterment through individual liberation, only function at a societal level when enacted in a strict nexus of relational constructions. The problematisation of such essential social qualities by Hawthorne is bound to the “unpardonable” nature of Ethan’s sin. Unlike Dimmesdale who beseeches the assembled crowd to “behold (him) here, the one sinner of the world!” (I, 254), Ethan’s same call for others to believe that his profession “is no delusion” cannot be accepted in similarly tragic fashion. Crucial here is that Ethan’s unpardonable nature recuses his relation to everything. His final call to Mother Earth is immediately rescinded (“who art no more my Mother”), in a manner that affirms his self-belief in the transcendence of his impropriety. As Bartram’s conclusive actions confirm “the fiend’s” materiality, it is suggested that Brand’s delusional search for the inexcusable is an end in itself. The problematic inability of Hawthorne’s story to reconcile the individual character to any social impulse leaves the reader short in our appreciation of the scale of Ethan’s negative achievement. Hawthorne’s ambiguity towards this dangerous character is seated in the fact of his super-relativity, with no discernible connection to the presented storyworld or society. Brand’s anti-social nature is not simply a refusal to engage based on an inward knowledge of self-superiority; it is due to his cosmic tragedy that disbelieves in the abilities of the universe to effect change on him; it is the individual without a society, and the sense of power drawn from one’s relation to others. If, as Dimmesdale’s tragedy tells us, one cannot talk

73 Rose, Voices of the Marketplace, 122.
in the marketplace about what was said in the forest (I, 240), “Ethan Brand” rejects the import of both, and presents not just as anti-social, but as asocial. The “Unpardonable” is the removal of the possibility of pardon, in public and private, and the refusal of the existence of he or she that might, ultimately, forgive.

This analysis of “Ethan Brand” reconsiders critical debate surrounding its status as an “Abortive Romance”. In assuming the dangerous implications of the character’s individualism, Hawthorne places his protagonist beyond the discourses of antebellum America, and removes the ideological scaffolding under which many of his most intriguing stories are written. Hawthorne’s sense of individualism, although not solely reliant on the world-view of his Democratic contemporaries, is indelibly linked to a relational conception between self and society where the operational aesthetic of the individual may be played out in public. Although it may stray towards the narcissistic extremes of Aylmer and Rappaccini, there is nothing “inauthentic” in this self-presentation, rather suggesting the need to utilise a mechanism “which permits otherness to be brought into the intrapsychic space” of personality that concomitantly attempts to control unwanted effects. Narcissism is, in this rubric, not solely self-alienating, but productive of a need to control a social influence that is both stimulating (Hawthorne’s “magnetic chain of humanity”) and damaging in its restlessness and perpetually unsatisfied nature. Such controlling reactions attempt to place boundaries on an open, constantly changing system. In “Ethan Brand”, we receive an image of transcendence that, for the protagonist, refuses the basis of such a system, while endangering the comfortable world-view of those that accept societal rootlessness as beyond personal responsibility. The irreconcilable nature of these conflicting viewpoints leads to Ethan’s eventual use as “fragments” of lime by Bartram; it is fitting that his destruction leads to the lime-burner’s disavowal of respect for “half a bushel” more. If Hawthorne criticises Brand’s cosmic narcissism, he leaves his
last criticism for a society that cannot appreciate the uniqueness of radical individuality, alienating systematically their self-interest.

Hawthorne, earlier in his career, appeared to propound a different, developmental model of narcissism, one that would rather the self-direction of individuality, but see the problem of sharing intrapsychic space with other entities. “Wakefield” (1835) presents an admirable picture of the effects of narcissism that focuses on the “little strangeness” that is often found “in the good man” (IX, 132). Although we may find the titular protagonist’s actions inexcusable, they serve to highlight the changing discourse of secrecy with which Hawthorne engaged, and his questioning of the strict dichotomies presented in the ideological formations of the cult of domesticity; in essence, his representation of a public that might remain private, and vice versa.

“Wakefield” begins with a Melvillean formulation; “In some old magazine or newspaper 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” (IX, 130). This figure leaves home only to live for a prolonged period in a neighbouring street, where he may observe his wife and his household without detection, all, it seems, without reason. Hawthorne buries this story in secrecy from its outset. The tale’s source material, indicated by the vague reference to an aged journal, is discarded immediately, focusing rather on authorial control for the story’s impetus. In the creation of “Wakefield”, Hawthorne removes the reader from the “truth” of the tale, while entering into an assumed contract with the reader over the identification of both the protagonist, and the story as a whole. This is a deliberate element of Hawthorne’s artistry, a wilful withholding of character interiority, evident in a number of the texts under discussion in this section. If “Call me Ishmael” is suggestive of a self-forged identity that informs our understanding of the seaman, then the contractually obliged reader is immediately at odds with the direction of the story. We are at a remove of comprehension that makes the importance of the name impossible to ascertain. Moreover, we do not know who refers to Wakefield
as such, so this assumed identity (on his behalf) indicates a source of freedom for the character that is not accompanied by the attendant agency of self-identification.

Importantly, the narrator discusses what the protagonist leaves behind, without providing reason for his disappearance. In retreating, somewhat confusedly, into a public sphere, Wakefield leaves his wife. Shamir asserts that the story “imagines the creation of a definitively masculine realm of intractable privacy within the antebellum private sphere.” This is a crucial detail embedded in the cultural discourse of the era’s discussion of the public and private spheres. Wakefield does not simply leave his home or neighbourhood. The character abruptly leaves his wife, only to return to observe her movements and, presumably, her grief. Wakefield leaves the domestic behind for a strange combination of the public private life that has so bemused readers of the story. Kenneth Dauber views our sharing of the “reading” with Hawthorne, assumed by the opening paragraph, as a joint-exploration of “separation through art…(Wakefield) would bypass his alienation rather than reform it. Afraid he will be overcome, he no longer admits there is anything to overcome.” This viewpoint, to me, limits the broader societal issues Hawthorne interrogates in this story. To limit “Wakefield” to a nebulous fear of the separating power of the artist as “man of genius” ignores the anxieties of contemporary Americans surrounding the spheres of public and private respectively, and the constitution of masculine and feminine ideals inviolably linked to ideas of nationhood, progress, and individualism. Hawthorne appears, in “Wakefield” as a reader/writer hybrid that reflects the complex relationship between privacy and openness that his character encapsulates, while questioning the attribution of traits to these aspects of life. Hawthorne, in including the detail of Wakefield leaving his wife in the same sentence as the assumption of identity, foregrounds the issues of secrecy and privacy. As Hawthorne does this, he explores, in a similar manner to Emerson in Society and Solitude, that which is located “underneath our domestic

---

75 Shamir, Inexpressible Privacy, 71.
76 Dauber, Rediscovering Hawthorne, 60.
and neighborly life” where “each adult soul” makes “warm covenants sentimental and momentary.”

Underneath the domestic lurks Wakefield who, alongside Poe’s “Man of the Crowd”, lives outside the domestic sphere without being beyond the “general sympathies of mankind” (IX, 131). As Poe’s narrator puts it, referencing the story’s epigraph (“That great misfortune, not to be able to be alone”), there exists a contemporary class of men that talk “to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around.”

Juxtaposed with these men, Wakefield seeks out solitude within society, rather than self-imposed isolation.

The protagonist’s position is due in no part, we are informed, to imaginative ventures of his mind, but rather comes as the result of a “quiet selfishness” or “a peculiar sort of vanity” (IX, 132). Although Hawthorne, like Poe, sets his story away from America and the direct referents of the Jacksonian Era, the unmistakable sense of social danger presented by radical individualism is exuded through Wakefield’s actions. In leaving the domestic behind, Wakefield concomitantly rejects the expectations and duties of contemporary man to progressive societal ideals based on the sacred strength of the household. Wakefield’s “uneasy attribute” indicates his turning from responsibility, but also from cultural codes of masculinity intrinsically connected with the identification of man as a modernised paterfamilias. Fundamentally, the domestic world a man returned to was connected with the domus of antiquity, a space of power for men upon their return from the public sphere of work. In departing, the protagonist affirms his “insignificance in the great world” (IX, 133); rather than viewing the importance of the character, we view the emptiness of his role as a social construct, looking at Wakefield as he observes the absence of what he should be.

Hawthorne continuously emphasises the torpidity of his situation, the profound powerlessness that exemplifies his new life; “It was Wakefield’s unprecedented fate, to retain his original share of human sympathies, and to be still involved in human interests, while he had lost

---


his reciprocal influence on them” (IX, 138). This principle of reciprocity is central to Hawthorne’s work. Idealised dualities in Hawthorne’s oeuvre work reciprocally, not least in “Wakefield”, and its dialectical relation of public and private. They affect each other unendingly, and it is Wakefield’s realisation of the “singularity of his situation” (IX, 138) that draws him back into the influencing world of humanity’s “magnetic chain”. By existing in a sphere that represents both public and private aspects, Wakefield assumes an epistemological break from his peers. As aforementioned, this introduction of doubt acts as a self-enforcing alienating impulse in social and psychic terms. Wakefield’s inability to engage within the intrapsychic social space of community is, in effect, an ostracism that self-perpetuates. The writer’s famous diagnosis of Wakefield’s situation is interesting in this regard:

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 a fearful risk of losing his place forever (IX, 140).

Once epistemologically separate, beyond influence or being influential, Hawthorne suggests that the very attributes of Wakefield’s personhood begin to break down. If Ethan Brand considers himself ontologically superior and beyond comparison because of his self-removal from an existential, relational nexus, Wakefield is shown to engage in a similar, physically-focused alienation, one that stems from an unfounded relativity, rather than its total lack. This emphasises the reciprocal relation between the social and the individual, whose interconnection is affirmed as mutually transformative in its reflexivity.

The sense of torpor aforementioned is catalysed by Wakefield’s “strangeness”. It is only after years of observing his “forlorn” (IX, 130) wife that he comes to experience “something like energy of feeling” (IX, 136). Hawthorne highlighted throughout his writing career the danger of a
lack of emotion, or connection to those around you. Not only does it separate the subject from one’s peers, but it is a part of a self-alienating process that draws man from himself, and leads him to cold, isolated viewpoints. These outlooks are predicated on a removed reflexivity with society that, for normal people, acts as a monitor on their actions. As Rosamund Billington states; “Such reflexivity is possible only because there is continuity of social practices yet it is precisely this reflexivity that is necessary if social life is to change in any way.”

Outside of this causal relation, Wakefield’s morality moves out of step with the social codes and mores that would affect it to inform a balanced, social outlook. The aforementioned sense of being “aside” from society is deeply embedded in discursive constructs of the post-Jacksonian Era. Wakefield is undoubtedly individualistic in his turn from domestic strictures, particularly in his assertion of personal agency to leave his home, and his observation seems entirely for his own excitement. It is, however, deeply misguided, offering no outcome or positive contribution to his psyche or the collective that “swept by, and saw him not” (IX, 138). Moreover, his social place appears forgotten or, at the very least, in jeopardy. That a man might step aside is one thing; that it can have little discernible effect on all but his wife is telling. Wakefield is cognisant of his insignificance in the bustling city, but Hawthorne appears to comment on this general principle for individualists that would hold themselves superior, only to find that society continues regardless, influenced by others, subsuming new norms into its processes.

Hawthorne here seemingly posits a delicate balance between the power of the collective and the innate ability of the individual for change. Were everyone to become an “Outcast of the Universe” (IX, 140), in the way Wakefield does, an entirely new set of parameters would be required for society to continue to function. Hawthorne understands that the dynamic nature of society does not necessitate this, but his contemplation of the subversive potentiality of Wakefield,

---

or characters of his ilk, informs the possibility of individualistic action built on “withdrawal and passivity”, rather than assertive will. For a writer that, we are told, “was obsessed with the notion of his own insubstantiality, his ghostliness, his secret identity as Nobody”, Wakefield is a tragicomic extension. He is simultaneously juxtaposed, and in direct confrontation, with ideas of progress and self-fulfilment. Is it Hawthorne’s “ghostliness” that informs this viewpoint? “The singularity of his situation” (IX, 138) and actions indicate a sense of independence cohesive with Jacksonian ideals of individualism, but we are given little sense of his true self-reliance – indeed, Hawthorne indicated the truth beneath this rhetorical construct, that self-reliant men ultimately rely on each other for sustenance. The oddity of Wakefield’s situation is his observational withdrawal, but it is this extreme case that Hawthorne highlights to show the intrinsic, contradictory aspects of individualism, and its almost contractual obligations with the social.

The impenetrability of Wakefield has led to much conjecture over his subversive qualities. The nature of his perversion cannot be understood fully without careful relation to the character’s milieu. The story suggests that, unless continuously individuated, Wakefield’s danger loses its edge; “We must hurry after him, along the street, ere he lose his individuality, and melt into the great mass of London life” (IX, 133). The story is set in London for a number of reasons; not alone was London contemporaneously viewed as the apotheosis of modernity and urbanity, the logistics of hiding from one’s wife one street removed in Concord or Salem was impossible. In setting the city up in this fashion, Hawthorne emphasises the alienating nature of modernity, in Tocquevillean terms, as an enemy of community and intimacy.

The story is, however, invested with much of America’s Jacksonian implications. The most unsettling aspect of this tale is prefigured by the quote above, something that finds culmination in the pronouncement regarding outcasts “of the Universe.” The problem with such figures, not in a

---


Cold War “enemy within” sensibility, is that, without observation, they exist passively, without contribution to a sense of self or narrative of progress. Wakefield’s coldness is due to his observational behaviour; the larger question of surveillance is crucial not only to the story’s composition, but the ability of society to subsume and control its members. This subsumption indicates the dialectic at the heart of Wakefield’s scenario; his independence is both within and without society, an individuality that is guaranteed and compromised by the state, and exists in negative relation to both his “self”, and society as a whole. Amy Fairchild comments, “viewing” the actions of others in society was to organise and maintain a sense of societal progress. This was a crucial aspect of early medical and contagion reporting in the United States that, when contextualised, emphasises the collective necessity to cast out secrecy in its malignant guises:

Early surveillance statutes (in America) typically conceived of disease reporting as a…public responsibility in two broad respects. First, reporting was not the exclusive domain of the physician…Second, reporting was public in the sense that there existed no permanent public health bodies in the US prior to the mid-nineteenth century…As late as 1884, the Massachusetts legislature required both family members and physicians to “report smallpox, diphtheria, scarlet fever or any other danger to the public health.”

The danger of Wakefield’s secrecy therefore becomes apparent. His very presence has become a secret, hidden from his wife, forbidden to return. His is a social sickness, a resistance to community figured in the temporary breakdown of marital union. By removing himself from the domestic sphere and foregrounding secrecy in the public sphere, Wakefield disavows the possibility of his “illness” being reported. This public code of surveillance was based on the adherence of the collective, and directed itself against individual subversion; Wakefield disrupts this avoidance of

82 Fairchild, Searching Eyes, 1-2.
secrecy, and emphasises the powerlessness of the narrator to alter the situation. He highlights the omnipresence of secrecy, and its dangers, in public discussion and the collective consciousness throughout antebellum America. Wakefield, although unaware of his larger insignificance, is exemplary of the ability of the independent person to disrupt the processes and exigencies of society, the simultaneous capacity to become the centre of one’s own universe, and prove that one is an “outcast” only to other observers.

Immanuel Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* underscored an important duality in the discussion of the individual alone, versus the individual as part of society:

Man has an inclination to live in society, since he feels in this state more like a man, that is, he feels able to develop his natural capacities. But he also has a great tendency to live as an individual, to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance all around, just as he knows of himself that he is in turn inclined to offer resistance to others.83

These dualistic tendencies inform our inclinations towards others, and, to our inner-directed selves. It is the dialectical movement of these relations that presents itself in a relational sense to the outside world. Few Jacksonian Democrats thought openly in such Kantian terms, however their often dualistic presentations of public good and private menace were indelibly connected to Kant’s assessment of resistance within and without the individual. Crucial to our discussion is the sense of observation discussed above in relation to “Wakefield”. The protagonist, through his dialectical public privacy, appears to exist in a state of resistance to society and his self-identity, the former encapsulated by the narrator’s difficulty of diagnosing the source of his side-step from humanity.

Kant’s “unsocial sociability” is predicated upon ideas of openness that contrast with the “closed” nature of the private. Hawthorne’s narratorial use of secrecy problematises this relation, and creates new sources of resistance on both the social and individual levels, something that extends to Wakefield’s metaphysical, potentially cosmic disavowal of society.

Critical inertia surrounding Hawthorne’s characters continues to “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), a story that presents one of Hawthorne’s most resistant protagonists. Its ambiguity stems from a persistent wish to avoid interpretation, an impenetrable nature that, in a manner similar to “Wakefield” defers its time or place from Hawthorne’s contemporary milieu, retains its embedded nature within the cultural context of the Jacksonian Era. This tale, similar to Hawthorne’s other ostensibly anti-social, individualistic characters, presents a break in epistemology between the observed and the observer. This is a crucial aspect of these figures, as it separates and isolates their thinking, while often bestowing it with a sense of superiority that can render it subversive, frightening or dangerous. Who judges the superiority of thought is of deep importance to the structure of these stories, as it informs our perception of the morality and rationale behind characters’ actions. Ethan Brand’s self-directed superiority comes from a personal sense of his “Unpardonable Sin” as something that makes him incomparable to others, particularly the “brute beasts” that cannot comprehend his metaphysical travails. In the case of Richard Digby too, his singular vision is profoundly self-serving, presuming mastery over nature at odds with the design and consequence of the stories. Hawthorne constructed numerous characters, as above, whose physical separation is reliant on, and informed by, epistemological lacunae. Hooper’s literal veil increases, in Kantian terms, the personal resistance to sociability, and further emphasises the nature of one’s isolating thought, and the gap itself. Richard Digby in “The Man of Adamant” provides an interesting example of this but his obvious physical separation lacks the subtlety of the isolation in the midst of man that Reverend Hooper and Wakefield exemplify.
Clark Davis identifies the positive and negative aspects associated with Hooper’s veil, that inexplicably covers his face from his congregation:

Hooper’s veil…makes him a more effective minister, gives him greater sympathy with sinners and “all dark afflichions”…On the other hand, it divides him from the community, runs his engagement and potential family life, and leaves him gloomy and possibly deranged.\(^{84}\)

Hooper’s temperament was one of “gentle gloom” (IX, 40) even before he assumed the veil, however the point stands that whatever epistemological gap existed between him and his fellow villagers beforehand is accentuated and deepened by the presence of this physical barrier. Despite his attempts to maintain a sense of normalcy, the black crape effects profound change amongst his observers who cannot overcome the intense oddity of the decision of their “friend and spiritual guide” (IX, 41). As the novelty of the veil wears off, it takes on frightening characteristics, to the extent that “his plighted wife” (IX, 45) finds it difficult to look directly at it.

Another Hawthorne story riddled with secrecy, another indication that the fabric of society is easily torn asunder, notably by a literal fabric. Hooper’s material distinction is enough to cause widespread fear about the implications of his decision. What the veil symbolises has long been discussed, and it is not the remit of this analysis to focus on this aspect of the narrative. It is, however, important to work out the nexus of thought surrounding the secret nature of Hooper’s decision, and the relative effects and reactions it incurs in the community.

The veil, as above, liberates Hooper in his sermonising. This renewed freedom is a “product of the widening of the borders of the private sphere in Hawthorne’s time”.\(^{85}\) Under the guise of

\(^{84}\) Davis, *Hawthorne’s Shyness*, 58.

secrecy and strange anonymity (insofar as this figure is assumed different to his previous incarnation), the minister appears free to proffer a changed world-view, or, at the very least, a presentation that appears altered from that which he once gave. Secrecy lends the revered gravitas; “an unsought pathos came hand in hand with awe” (IX, 40). The transformation is, for the ordinary parishioner, a change “into something awful, only by hiding his face” (IX, 38). Despite little suggestion from its setting, language or religious presentation, this text is deeply embedded in the discourse of secrecy and anti-social behaviour expounded by Jacksonian ideologues. In his characteristic flourishes, Hawthorne’s observers present an ambivalence of opinion that is founded in contemporary codes of political and social reaction. The protagonist’s strange decision exists within this nexus of thought, affirming Hooper’s individualism as something that tips the balance of Kantian “social unsociability” through internal inclinations made physically manifest.

One of the most serious ambiguities of Hooper’s decision is left largely unanswered by Hawthorne. Hooper, unlike Ethan Brand, does not come to some pronouncement on the possibility of an “Unpardonable Sin” in the main because the veil allows him to see the “veil” that shrouds earthly existence. Within this is an implicit belief in a higher power; never is it suggested that Hooper’s spiritual faculties or appreciation of God are blighted by the presence of the metaphysical veil. Like Brand however, Hooper appears to arrive at some deeper understanding of those that surround him, as if attuned to a more profound element of existence. All of this, we are told, while the presence of the veil “kept him in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart” (IX, 50). The sadness of this fixity is in-keeping with characteristically American restlessness that lives amidst the protean demands of the capitalist economy; unlike Emerson’s called-for “infinitude”, immutability suggests a personal defect, an inability to progress. Here, in the very place that Ethan Brand found the direst flaw, is the incarceration of Hooper enacted. These stories appear to be drawn along

86 Note similarities to this from contemporary sources, particularly Emily Dickinson’s “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”; “How dreary - to be - Somebody!”. Dickinson, Poems Vol. I, 206.
similar ontological schema. It is in this same place that Brand and Hooper connect; the inviolable, essential guilt of the human heart. Where the former is called “fiend” and self-defined as unsuitable for society, the latter’s quest into his heart, and the imperfectability he finds there, lead to his isolation in the midst of men. Perhaps the point of distinction between the two is Brand’s refusal to “shrink from the eye of his Creator” (IX, 52) in the manner Hooper does, and indeed his denial of this same God. The heart is the shared aspect of these stories, and the character’s respective knowledge of its iniquity leads to the fundamental epistemological break between them and every other character. As the minister states from his deathbed, his knowledge differentiates him from men that refuse to, or are unable to, recognise their sinful nature; “deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!” (IX, 52) Hooper’s story seems ontologically different from Brand’s because it removes much of this “universal” feel from the narrative. It is a distinctly human story within an unsettling situation. The otherness of Brand comes from his apocalyptic, pagan outlook. Comparatively, Hooper’s otherness is made manifest as a result of the deferred realisation of others’ sin. Whereas Brand is undeniable in his self-profession, Hooper’s veil, and the secrets of the human heart attendant on it, appear to the reader as a “mode” of being, rather than the qualitative change undergone by the lime-burner.

The story’s bent may rightly be accused of a certain proclivity towards the metaphysical. Undoubtedly, Reverend Hooper’s concerns, although sometimes related to the earthly, are trained on soteriological questions. His own pronunciations on the veil are unambiguously tinged with metaphysical notes, despite often appearing in direct reference to the material “crape”; “There is an hour to come,” said he, “when all of us shall cast aside our veils. Take it not amiss, beloved friend, if I wear this piece of crape till then” (IX, 46). The veil is central to the Minister’s isolation and demonstrates his layered physical and epistemological break from his congregation. If one may point to his increased capacity to show his parishioners a deeper sense of spiritual reality through
his sermons as an indication that the veil has emboldened his work. Despite his seeming concentration on the metaphysical, Hooper’s efficacy as a minister is brought to bear in a physical, material manner. Indeed, his individualistic approach to ministry seems to affect his career in a very “real” way; “…he had never lacked advisers, nor shown himself averse to be guided by their judgment” (IX, 44). The veil changes this, and suggests to the congregation that Hooper has had a religious anagnorisis signified in his hidden visage. The working values so cherished by Jacksonians appear subverted in Hawthorne’s conception of the reverend. Indubitably hard-working, increasingly self-reliant, and seemingly better equipped to contribute for the good of his community, Hooper represents somewhat of a reforming figure, whose realisation of a deeper spiritual reality is shared with his congregation for a progressive, public good. Hawthorne suggests a much darker side to this presented situation that, without an insistence on his contemporary social and cultural milieu, and reference to the “cult of domesticity” and the public/private divide, leaves any interpretation short in its appreciation of Hawthorne’s ambivalently serious tale.

Hooper’s emotional confrontation with his beloved, Elizabeth, is crucial to the self-veiled journey. This interaction exists on a continuum of events that ultimately indicate the breakdown and reconstitution of the tale’s private and public spheres. In the following passage, immediately preceded by the conversation with Elizabeth, Hawthorne presents interesting figuration of the “people’s” alignment within this discourse of privacy.

By persons who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice, it was reckoned merely an eccentric whim, such as often mingles with the sober actions of men otherwise rational, and tinges them all with its own semblance of insanity. But with the multitude, good Mr. Hooper was irreparably a bugbear (IX, 47-48).
Within the context of an era that raged against secrecy, be it legislative, political, or cultural, this simple section is deeply allusive. Hawthorne was profoundly aware and affected by the question of superiority amidst the political revolution of Jackson’s “people”. The ramifications of this for his life as a writer and political attaché were manifold and complex. Tocqueville’s contemporary examination of America explored the questions attendant on this “superiority”, inherent in his claims that democracy leads people inevitably to a sustained level of mediocrity. Hawthorne’s correspondent, John L. O’Sullivan was deeply engaged with the question of “becoming better” as a nation and as an individual in his exhortation of democratic ideology; “Yes, we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Equality of rights is the cynosure of our union of States…”\(^87\) Contemporary writers, thinkers, and politicians all contributed to the discourse of superiority in Hawthorne’s America. Despite changing the period of this story, the author included the unavoidable emphasis of class, the ideas of superiority attendant on it, and the deep distrust of secrecy inextricably linked to social rank formulated in Jacksonian America.

That those “who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice” found little disturbing in the minister’s symbolic wearing of humanity’s imperfect nature was not surprising. These Whiggish figures are, in Democratic rhetoric of the period, natural bedfellows with secret interests. In Hawthorne’s personal life this divide had sharp, meaningful effect. As Leonard D. White outlines:

> Upon the election of President Taylor (1849), Salem Whigs petitioned him to oust the younger Miller at customhouse, where, during his tenure, it had become the “confluence and receptacle of the most active and obnoxious leaders” of the Democratic Party. They declared that the Salem community, decidedly Whig, had “become prejudiced and even incensed, against the political partisans within its walls”,\(^88\)

---

\(^{87}\) O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity”, 430.

The above quote is a Whig imagining of Democratic language. They are “active” and “obnoxious” – there is more than a sense that this suggests the “hunger” often assigned to exponents of “Manifest Destiny”, the greed of expansionism that, for many, was not figured as positively outside the “party of Jackson”. The “activity” brought with it ingrained references to grabbing, and an exploitative nature emboldened and encouraged by unchecked individualism. The “obnoxious” nature of the people that, it seems, had been allowed in to the Custom-House shows a class-informed contempt for Democrats that portrayed them as enemies within. Hawthorne, the “decapitated surveyor” of the same Custom-House, fell foul of this political and class divide upon the election of Zachary Taylor. It seems unlikely that such a self-aware writer, in this context, would be ignorant of the rhetoric utilised by Whigs in their description of the opposition, particularly in relation to civil appointments. Hawthorne was deeply engaged in this sphere, and implies, to return to his story, that those who claim “superiority” lean to the Whig side of the political divide. Above “popular prejudice”, these people indulge the Reverend Hooper’s proclivities as they would any eccentricity, the “whim, such as often mingles with the sober actions of men otherwise rational” (IX, 48).

The ordinary American cannot accept Hooper’s decision. The veil poisons his relationship with “the multitude”, and our perception of the story must be informed by their aversion to the “piece of crape” (IX, 46). Hawthorne plays with the presentation of class in the story, figuring the socially superior as somehow indulgent of esoteric behaviour, based on the stereotype of men of leisure whose recourse to eccentric or, perhaps, effete comportment is authorised by inherited social standing. The “people” have no such time in their labouring lives for this. Fundamentally, this is a question of public presentation and participation that, in Democratic terms, offers a rejoinder to the aspects of one’s private life that should remain hidden. Similar to Wakefield, the figure of Hooper is reproachful to the American mind because of his persistence in mingling his private belief with his
public aesthetic, to the point that his daily life is hurtfully impacted by the preponderance of opinion on personal religious conviction. A letter from President Jackson to William P. Lawrence in 1838 may further our understanding of the social context behind the difficulties of combining private concerns with a public image, or, indeed, allowing it to affect popular perception of a man:

I would long since have made this solemn public dedication to almighty God, but knowing the wickedness of this world and how prone many are to evil, that the scoffer of religion would have cried out hypocrisy – he has joined the church for political effect, I thought it best to postpone this public act, until my retirement to the shades of private life, when no false implications could be made that might be injurious to religion.89

Clearly, religion was a more basic aspect of Hooper’s career and public life than it was Jackson’s, but the point remains that the outward expression of personal belief was often “injurious” to public presentation. Hooper’s veil acts to alienate himself, while simultaneously alienating the “multitude”, whose “impertinence” in this matter emphasises the seemingly unnecessary addition of the veil to their earthly situation. Hooper allows his religious individualism to impinge on others. The lack of comprehension of the lower classes is not indicated by Hawthorne; what is foregrounded is the public experience of a private luxuriance, the living out of private belief in a publicly affective way. This reading problematises the idea that Hooper’s sermons are improved subsequent to his wearing the veil; we may question this assumption due to the possibility that the power of his words stems not from the material, but from the self-directed spirituality of the auditor. The case of the minister is indelibly linked to public perception of his decision, something that must be emphasised through the lack of trust bound to his inexplicable secrecy behind the veil amongst the congregation.

89 Jackson, Correspondence Vol. IV, 565.
Hawthorne focuses much of his attention on the sadness of Hooper’s situation. Private conviction overwhelms his public aesthetic, to the extent that he becomes prisoner in his own heart, separated from “brotherhood” and “love”. The power of his ministry is mollified by the emblem that signifies his deathbed message’s central contention: in becoming commonplace – an eccentricity for some, a “bugbear” for others – the veil loses its power and, hence, so does the foundational aspect of his public ministry. In making private belief a matter for public consumption, Hooper fails to understand the ability of his metaphysical pronouncements to teach and to guide. As he lies dying, the realisation of his individualistic practice comes to bear on his soul. The traditional reading of this passage reads his final words in salvific anguish, where, if tempered with Hawthorne’s seemingly omnipresent ambiguity may be adjudged in much more personal terms, with troubling implications. “I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!” (IX, 52) This exclamation follows on from the narratorial statement that his choice of the veil has left Hooper in “shade…from the sunshine of eternity” (IX, 50). It appears too late for this Calvinist to make such damnatory claims of reprobation for all. The “secret of his sin” has been externalised and appears to free him from the responsibility with which he aligns his congregation, who fail to recognise their own sin. The deathbed realisation may also include the possibility that Hooper recognises his place in the “communion of his race”, the “magnetic chain of humanity” that he symbolically attempted to escape. It harks back to the definitive phrase earlier in the story that “(n)atural connections he had none.” Hooper’s individualism and increasingly anti-social outlook not only endanger his earthly status, but jeopardise the didactic power behind humanity’s collective veil. The message of his veil does not carry, he has become “a monster” in the eyes of some, and a curiosity to others. Hooper’s blending of the public and private is eventually ineffective in its aims, and dehumanising in its effects. Hawthorne’s temporal situation of the story may diverge from his era, but the distrust of secrecy, and need to appeal to the “impertinent” masses, is irrepressibly present in this work.
To provide counterpoint to the gloom of his more weighty contemplations of anti-social action, we may look to the breezy tale of solitude that is “Foot-prints on the Sea-shore” (1838). It is important to note that despite its airy demeanour, this story is not simply a mark of contrast for the cosmic woe of “Ethan Brand”, or the earthy struggle of “Wakefield” or “The Minister’s Black Veil”, but a significant moment in the author’s discussion of the individual and society. For the protagonist of this tale, solitude is “a cool bath” (IX, 451) that allows escape from the “sultry sunshine of the world” and the bustling atmosphere of urban America. Hawthorne touches upon an ideological pulse here, seeming to provide comment on a common contemporary American feeling and anxiety, Gunther Barth addresses the worries of the ever-expanding cityscape in saying: “In an atmosphere of expanding personal freedom and individual opportunity nineteenth century cities severed the old ties of men and women with the countryside, setting them adrift in a maelstrom of people radically different from themselves.”

Hawthorne returns his character to nature’s calmative atmosphere, “forth from the haunts of men” (IX, 451) in Keatsian style, to gaze upon “the firmament”. This figure has a “yearning for seclusion” (IX, 451) and the “comfort” (IX, 453) provided by solitude. There is a sense that this individual’s temporarily anti-social stance is couched in the solace of society, and that the guarantee of future conversation and relations with his fellow citizens is part of the appeal of limited solitude.

Hawthorne makes the important point that it is in the extended confines of solitude that identity is formed, and upon returning to company, the benefits of being able to remain alone are truly appreciated. In the midst of a noisy city, the memory of solitude imparts to the narrator an “affection and sympathy” (IX, 461) that allow him his individuality, to avoid melting “into the indistinguishable mass of human kind” (IX, 461). This story presents an entirely earthly picture of solitude, one that is both relatable and indicative of real concerns on the author’s behalf. What lends

---


260
it significance in the course of Hawthorne’s *oeuvre* is its simplicity and difference from the texts analysed above. Although it similarly suggests larger metaphysical issues, the story’s insistence on a return to community distinguishes it from Hawthorne’s gloomier stories. What one grows to realise is that the incontrovertible solitudes, physical, mental, or spiritual, of Hawthorne’s tragic hermits are the ultimate and self-perpetuating reasons for their isolation. When this protagonist sits in his hermitage, he is gladdened by the fact that it has “no tongue to tell my follies” (*IX*, 459). This sentiment is, however, accompanied by the grasping of the character for a kind of communion, an ability to maintain a connection, tangible or not; “though I sometimes fancy that they have ears to hear them, and a soul to sympathize” (*IX*, 459).\(^2\) His vow of solitude is precarious; before he arrives at his “hermitage”, he admits to his encountering other humans as something that derives “a strangely pleasant sensation” (*IX*, 458). The knowledge of companionship is enough to dispel the onset of existential despair for the solitary walker by the sea-shore. This provides interesting insight into the protagonists of the aforementioned works, who slide into a despair that, it seems, is unperturbed by the presence of others. This is suggestive of a deeper “shutting off” of the self from society. The owner of the titular foot-prints wishes that his “hiding place were lonelier, so that the Past might not find” him (*IX*, 459), but without the same cosmic relevance effected by Ethan Brand and Minister Hooper.

This is an essentially optimistic story in the grand scheme of Hawthorne’s work. The narrator posits himself as one who seeks solitude’s restorative qualities, rather than cold isolation for his own analytical purposes, encapsulated in; “But, with an inward antipathy and a headlong flight, do I eschew the presence of any meditative stroller like myself, known by his pilgrim staff, his sauntering step, his shy demeanour, his observant yet abstracted eye” (*IX*, 458). This brief section indicates a number of important points that might inform our view of Hawthorne’s anti-

\(^2\) Despite his more negative casting of this scenario, Miles Coverdale’s relationship with solitude and his return to the confines of the city (more particularly places away from Blithedale) is similar to this narrator. “Whatever had been my taste for solitude and natural scenery, yet the thick, foggy, stifled element of cities, the entangled life of many men together, sordid as it was, and empty of the beautiful, took quite as strenuous a hold upon my mind” (*III*, 146).
social individualists from a “hermit” comfortable in the knowledge of his return to society. The above quote suggests that the narrator lacks the aesthetic qualities that might fulfil his role as a hermetic figure. He has none of the faculties of solitude, presented by Brand or Hooper. His “inward antipathy” is most unlike Hawthorne’s other isolated characters, whose self-enforced separation is brought to bear because of their ability to empathise solely with their own world-view. The latter group, if anything, hold the world in antipathy, through an “observant yet abstracted eye.” This narrator holds the natural world and society in too much esteem to take on the traits of other recluses. This becomes particularly clear in the assertion that were he to “tarry longer…in the darkening twilight of these grey rocks” (IX, 461), his mood would grow gloomy. In fact, as he consciously removes himself, the places where he was once happy appear increasingly “lonesome” and “dreary” (IX, 461).

His return to society affirms that he has neither the inclination nor despair to engage in his solitude in the manner of Hawthorne’s other anti-social individualists. Theirs is an irrevocable rupture from society. Their experience in solitude works only to confirm a fundamental isolation from the public generally, even in its midst. The narrator of “Foot-prints on the Sea-shore” never fails to be in communion with something, or someone, during his day “alone”. The solitude of Brand, Hooper, or Wakefield becomes a basic constituent of their relation with the world. Even though Wakefield returns home, his period of self-inflicted isolation is an inviolable aspect of his character. The figure of this walker is immersed in a temporary solitude which acts only to strengthen his bond with the “magnetic chain”. It affirms his individuality, seeking to improve this self-realisation through a connection with an idealised humanity. It is, he says, good “to feel and know that there are men and women in the world” (IX, 462). Contrast this with Hooper, whose existential solitude leads to a timeless despair, one that allows him to recognise “on every visage” the titular black veil. Hawthorne appears, in this light picture of a nature walk, to consider the dangers of solitude solely through the narrator’s insistent tendency towards society. Compared with
its figuration elsewhere, where solitude becomes something beyond the relational nexus assumed here, this contemplation does not posit a dichotomy of society and isolation, but a positive dialectic. Undoubtedly, the narrator’s final sentences confirm this conception and present a turn from the philosophical dread of the author’s other prominent solitary characters; “…come up and sup with us! The ladies wave their handkerchiefs. Can I decline? No; and be it owned, after all my solitary joys, that this is the sweetest moment of a Day by the Sea-Shore” (IX, 462).

This conclusion is a familiar re-tread for literary isolatoes. The return to society is a standard, if often problematic, journey in literature. It can be figured in a number of ways, from the cathartic qualities of isolation or communion, to the messianic return from a period of contemplation, to more destructive incarnations, where the dangers of solitude breed social antipathy. The interconnection of solitude and society is one of *The Scarlet Letter*’s most important aspects, proving formative for the relationship at its centre, and providing an intense contemplation of the role of secrecy in the creation of social norms and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. The narrative is riddled with secrecy, from the introductions of its central characters, to the climactic Election Sermon which appears to be fuelled by the power of a hidden force unleashed on an unwitting public.

From its earliest stages, *The Scarlet Letter* foregrounds the absence of a wrongdoer that further consolidates the crime of Hester Prynne. In standing boldly before the society and judiciary that punish her, the tale’s protagonist affirms her individuality, and is portrayed as the ostracised perpetrator of both a sin and an anti-social act, something that brings the fragility of the new order into focus through its potential to influence others, and the disrepute into which society is brought by its deviancy. This stance is irrevocably connected to the need for the social grouping to out secrecy in all its guises. The fervency of the statement exclaimed by Governor Bellingham suggests at the essentiality of truth in God’s colony. Without it, “iniquity” is given the chance to fester; “It
Transparency is immediately presented as a fundamental aspect of the Puritan project. Hester’s refusal to answer is, as much as the fact of the crime itself, the most damaging social function of her sin. Hester’s refusal to speak is not simply insubordinate, rather it marks her individualistic tendencies as defiant to the social order, with the further ramification that in refusing to name her accomplice, the mark of her sin is incomplete. The “A” is, in a figurative sense, only half the battle for the justice system. If seen not as “Adulteress” or “Able” but as “Alone”, it is a cruel reminder that, although isolated in and for her punishment, she is not the sole perpetrator; the unknown second actor remains at large, and therefore endangers the structures of Puritan society.93

The secret stands in the midst of the assembled crowd and, from Hawthorne’s earliest descriptions of Dimmesdale, we receive a picture of somebody out of kilter with society, whose hidden nature ferments until he delivers his final, cathartic sermon. It is clear from the outset, however, that the reverend is not necessarily part of the “communion” of mankind, and that his personhood similarly reflects the isolation of Hester and Chillingworth; “…there was an air about this young minister…as of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own” (I, 66). Between this description, Hester’s imminent exclusion, and Chillingworth’s “pale, thin, scholarlike visage” (I, 58), we are presented with a triumvirate of isolation, whose respective social situations place them aside from the community. The implementation of Hester’s ostracism is crucial to the story’s utilisation of solitude and secrecy, and is foundational for her nascent individualism.

93 “O Hester!…There is not the strength or courage left me to venture into the wide, strange, difficult world, alone!”
   It was the last expression of the despondency of a broken spirit. He lacked energy to grasp the better fortune that seemed within his search.
   He repeated the word.
   “Alone, Hester!”
   “Thou shalt not go alone!” answered she, in a deep whisper.
   Then, all was spoken (I, 198).
Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had stuck into the soil. It was as if a new
birth, with stronger assimilations than the first, had converted the forest-land, still so
uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester Prynne’s wild and dreary, but
life-long home (I, 80).

Hester effects a personal renaissance, one that necessarily provides an epistemological break from
her fellow colonists. This break is of crucial importance to Hawthorne’s construction of
individualistic characters; it is formative for their ability to separate themselves from the world
around them, and instrumental in the characters’ perception of the society as alienating of some, and
inclusive of others. That Hester does not strike into the soil through a sense of citizenship, or any
aspect of a shared quality, is fundamental to her make-up. Her solitude confirms her outcast nature,
and is seemingly guaranteed by it. Hers is not a cosmetic isolation, comfortable like the narrator of
“Foot-prints on the Sea-shore” or Wakefield, who may return to the bosom of society. Hester, in
staking herself outside society, through her iniquity, refuses the normal bonds of citizenship and,
even, civility. She grows from a different source to the colonists of the New World; her seclusion is
symptomatic of an ontogenetic self-schema in which her formation of a self is a cognitive
representation of aloneness, what might be simplified as the living embodiment of a perpetuating
punishment. It is little wonder that, self-positioned in this manner, her daughter Pearl “was a born
outcast of the infantile world” (I, 93). Further to this, we might remember Hawthorne’s earlier,
uncollected story “Mrs. Hutchinson” as another example of a formative ontogenetic exposition
within his oeuvre.

Her final movement was to lead her family within the limits of the Dutch Jurisdiction,
where, having felled the trees of a virgin soil, she became herself the virtual head, civil and
ecclesiastical, of a little colony. Perhaps here she found the repose, hitherto so vainly
sought. Secluded from all whose faith she could not govern, surrounded by the dependents over whom she held an unlimited influence, agitated by none of the tumultuous billows which were left swelling behind her, we may suppose, that in the stillness of Nature, her heart was stilled.94

Within *The Scarlet Letter*, we are reminded how Hester’s exit from prison is connected to the entrance of the titular woman, in the rose bush that had apocryphally sprung up under her footsteps in 1637. The rose-bush, that grows in sympathy with Hutchinson’s plight from the time of the Antinomian Controversy, links Hester with previous punishment and places her within a developmental schema that exists beyond the recourse of Puritan mores. In Hawthorne’s own time, Emerson utilised the word in “Self-Reliance” (1841) and “The Transcendentalist” (1842) to reject charges of Transcendentalism being the new Antinomianism.95 In so doing, Emerson “took pains to show that true self-reliance, being reliance on a higher power, is cause not for arrogance but for humility.”96 This is differentiated from Puritan attitudes towards Antinomian individualism, which saw in the unmoored self a dangerous social actor, something Emerson would come close to describing in “Circles” with the pronouncement that “(n)o facts are sacred to me; none are profane.”97

*The Scarlet Letter* is fundamentally embedded in the discourse of dangerous isolation and secrecy indicated throughout this analysis. The figure of Chillingworth, despite his one-time marriage to Hester, is contrived throughout the story as a physician of the darker elements of man’s soul. His medicine is not traditional, and he obsesses over secrecy’s effect on man. Hester’s and

---


95 From “Self-Reliance”: “The populace think that your rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere antinomianism” Emerson, *Collected Works Vol. II*, 74. From “The Transcendentalist”: “In action, he easily incurs the charge of antinomianism by his avowal that he, who has the Lawgiver, may with safety not only neglect, but even contravene every written commandment.” Emerson, *Collected Works Vol. I*, 336.


97 Emerson, *Complete Works* Vol. 2, 188.
Dimmesdale’s respective secrets are his main port of call, his destructive pursuit of their “truth” is Hawthorne’s archetypal exploration of the damaging effects of secret sin. We receive an image of the lasting disease of the heart that the minister carries, linked to his secret that, as yet undiscovered by Chillingworth, has taken its toll on Dimmesdale’s body and soul respectively. The effects of the secret have a physical dimension, gaining a momentous impetus that works to diminish Dimmesdale’s health and further his separation from the work of his vocation. By leading him from truth (and his ability to tell it), Dimmesdale’s secrets actively distort his personhood, and capacity to engage with the world:

He had striven to put a cheat upon himself by making the avowal of a guilty conscience, but had gained only one other sin, and a self-acknowledged shame, without the momentary relief of being self-deceived. He had spoken the very truth, and transformed it into the veriest falsehood (I, 144).

From this perspective, we might adjudge that the central characters of *The Scarlet Letter* exist in a manner entirely connected to the secret of adultery and the “sin’s” ramifications. Hester and Dimmesdale inhabit the storyworld in relation to society only insofar as they relate primarily to the secret. Their respective link to the book’s society inevitably inculcates the secret they keep. In effect, the physical and metaphysical implications of their secret is to create a society of two (later joined by Pearl), epistemologically separate not simply because of hidden knowledge, but self-isolating in the need to construct a distinct social unit that grows differently both within and without society. It is too simplistic to say that the shared nature of the secret forces these characters together in a familial group; it goes further than that to indicate that Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl are isolated in unique ways due to their relationship with the secret, not society, and that that relativity enforces the creation of a new network, through which society plays a secondary role. This is made
manifest by Dimmesdale’s personal inability to ascertain penance, it is “the constant introspection
wherewith he tortured but could not purify himself” (I, 145). Exemplified by their union in the
forest and culminating in the admission after the Election Sermon, Hester and Dimmesdale live in
strange juxtaposition with society. Their trajectories necessitate the removal of the social mores that
constrain them respectively and are encapsulated by the “A”. In her anti-social stance, Hester uses
the “A” to legitimise her position as an outcast, and affirm her right to remain silent. Its subtle
metamorphosis over time is suggestive of its bearer’s growth aside from society, particularly in
refusing the placidity expected of her. She might be “the town’s own Hester” (I, 162) in the words
of the observer, but unmistakably her trenchant refusal to be co-opted into the growth of the
settlement, beyond her work as a seamstress, is indicative of an intractable nature hardened by an
isolation that is at odds with willing cooperation – “The world’s law was no law for her mind” (I,
164).

Chillingworth’s close proximity to Dimmesdale and his cold, searching nature affect him
deeply. His place in society is, at least superficially, like the reverend’s, unchanged by his private
nature. Where Dimmesdale’s health fluctuates and his ability to engage in his ministerial duties are
jeopardised, Chillingworth is emboldened by the possibility of discovering the secret. His eyes light
up at the prospect of discovery as if his “soul were on fire, and kept on smouldering duskily within
his breast” (I, 169). He is, we are told, “striking evidence of man’s faculty of transforming himself
into a devil” (I, 170). In all of this, the secret guarded by Hester and Dimmesdale has been a catalyst
for Chillingworth’s distorted, fiendish growth. Despite his current disposition, Chillingworth is not
intrinsically anti-social. It is the effect of his being well “stricken” (I, 58) in years that lends him the
penetrative power “to disturb the magnetic sphere of a being so sensitive as Arthur Dimmesdale” (I,
193). This is not without prior movement. Just as Hester’s “scarlet letter was her passport into
regions where other women dared not tread” (I, 199), so the secret permits Chillingworth’s
otherworldly curiosity to flourish. Indelibly linked to that which is hidden, Hester (and by
extension, Pearl), Dimmesdale and Chillingworth’s existence in the storyworld is motivated and moulded by its omnipresence. Hester’s remark that “there is a strange secrecy” to Chillingworth’s nature that “has grown upon him by the hidden practices of his revenge” (I, 196), bears testament to the formative effects of such “strange secrecy”. Her irrevocable connection, emblematised by the “A”, to the secret is the catalyst for her movements throughout the story. Similarly, only when Dimmesdale engages fully with what he desired to keep hidden may he unleash the power of preaching as truly befits his occupation. Once cleared of the original secrecy, Dimmesdale’s mind turns to “busying itself, with preternatural activity, to marshal a procession of stately thoughts that were soon to issue thence” (I, 239). A change has come over the minster since his admission in the forest. It was in this hidden place that the significance of unfettering the secret is realised by Dimmesdale, and culminates in his ecstatic death before “the marketplace” (I, 240). His exclamation upon the scaffold emphasises the secrecy of the human heart that so confounded Chillingworth, and made of him a fiend. It is the secret, rather than the “A” that so transforms the lives of these characters.

Thus put, the “office of the scarlet letter” obscures within a material reality the actuality of sin or past actions. The characters most affected are those whose differing epistemology realises, eventually, the power of secrecy, over its incarnation in a destabilised signifier. Chillingworth becomes a devil, Dimmesdale becomes a preacher, and Hester remains an outcast, and inevitably, “alone” (I, 261). This narrative purveys a warning regarding the liberating, but essentially destructive qualities of secrecy. Separated from “the people” in understanding through the secret, the physical scarlet letter is merely an aesthetic reminder of the secret that remains hidden beneath its colourful presence.

Hawthorne’s long-term meditation on the question of secrecy was undoubtedly connected to his contemporary milieu, the cultural and political context of which provides such important foundations for his tales and characters. In his engagement with anti-social individualism,
Hawthorne maintained an interrogative eye on the parameters of society, and the liminal spaces in which individual self-definition might contravene the controlling norms of the collective. In emphasising the epistemological break extant between his individualists and their peers, Hawthorne foregrounded the question of secrecy as an advantageous or unfair element of his contemporary moment. Undoubtedly suggestive of larger Jacksonian debates against secret organisations and quiet monopolies, Hawthorne’s democratic tendencies were outed in his focus on the damaging and manipulative effects of secrecy, and the potent ramifications it held for self-definition. Be it in the cosmic tragedy of “Ethan Brand”, the uncanny mundanity of “Wakefield” or the endlessly connective nature of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne’s contemplation of secrecy necessitates a re-examination of his portrayal of individualism and its ability to alter the perception of individual character. Hawthorne’s characters become anti-social in a manner that complicates the claim of equality or citizenship portrayed for “normal” society, but it rarely fails to reinforce their individualistic tendencies. The author rows back on his nation’s ideological assumption of inherent individualism, but adapts his representation of selfhood externally manifest to exhibit the complicating power of secrecy on the individual’s identity in society.
Conclusion

There are dark shadows on the earth,
but its lights are stronger in the contrast.

- Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s vaunted ambiguity has allowed us to imagine an author beyond the mundane limitations of context and immediacy since his death. A writer that composed his stories “in the absence of history” was, perhaps, fated to die before the cataclysmic events of the Civil War could be brought to an end the year after his death. The ostensibly atemporal nature of Hawthorne’s work, the apparently ethereal characters that strive to join humanity’s magnetic chain, were, as this analysis has continuously shown, irrevocably embedded within an American milieu and understanding of the world at large.

Writing in 1860, Hawthorne betrayed some of the playfulness with which he approached personal characterisation in his correspondence and public appearance. At this late stage in both his life and career, the former diplomat discussed the works of Anthony Trollope admiringly, reserving derogatory comments for his own literary output, even suggesting that without having written them himself, he would never have read *The Scarlet Letter* or *House of the Seven Gables*.

It is odd enough that my own individual taste is for quite another class of works than those which I myself am able to write. If I were to meet with such books as mine by another writer, I don't believe I should be able to get through them. Have you ever read the novels of Anthony Trollope? They precisely suit my taste,-solid and substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth, and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going...
about their daily business, and not suspecting that they were being made a show of. And these books are just as English as a beef-steak. Have they ever been tried in America? It needs an English residence to make them thoroughly comprehensible; but still I should think that human nature would give them success anywhere (XVIII, 229).

After a lifetime of shifting identities and authorial personae, Hawthorne the American writer could not resist ambivalence towards both his work and his homeland. The association of England with the “strength” of “beef-steak” and the “inspiration of ale” is indicative of a native fortitude Hawthorne portrays as absent in American culture. Beyond the masculine indicators used later in this excerpt, the inculcation of the writer’s preferences is particularly noteworthy. Not alone are Hawthorne’s tales and romances not “solid and substantial”, they are nothing like the books that he is “able to write”. The importance of this cannot be understated for our dynamic understanding of Hawthorne’s engagement with his milieu. At this stage in his career, the author presented his profession in feminine terms, something that writers contemporary to him (and their publishers, friends, and reviewers) tried so desperately to efface during the Jacksonian and antebellum periods; “In the antebellum United States, an ideology of middle-class masculinity developed in the socio-political context of liberal capitalist and imperialist nation-building” which had “at (its) core…an ethic of entrepreneurial individualism.”1 The sense of masculine virtue with which Hawthorne imbued Trollope’s work was, however, a multi-layered engagement with the system of representation that this analysis has demonstrated to be at the heart of Hawthorne’s authorial career. On the one hand, the fault is both personal and, more broadly, American. The former was incapable of providing an experiential rendering in literary form, the latter was devoid of the fertile cultural conditions that could promote dignified artistic expression. Implicitly, Hawthorne claimed for himself, at this late stage of his career, a masculine sensibility and style in his desire to write, while

---

1 Traister, “Bureaucratic Origins”, 79.
concomitantly nodding to his previous success as indicative of individual strength. For Hawthorne, far from the rugged Jacksonian suggested in publicity pieces by figures as diverse as Evert Duyckinck and his longtime publishers William Ticknor and James T. Fields, the writing he wished to conceive was earthy, “hewn” in the same manner, perhaps, as his “Man of Adamant” had established his personal dominion in the wilderness.

The environment of Hawthorne’s literature is inextricable from the writing itself. Seen in the light of longstanding protestations against America’s suitability as a place for writing, we may view the productive tension at the heart of Hawthorne’s work as reliant on the relational dynamic extant between self and a society that required new formulations of authorship and cultural authority to emerge before legitimate acceptance in the public sphere and marketplace. The superficial description of specifically “American” characteristics previously attributed to this writer’s works and those of his contemporaries fails to consolidate the various systems of representation incorporated into the self-presentation attendant on authorship. Individualism, analysed in its American conception, is but another of those systems of personification identified previously that allow personal identification to integrate public interpretation without a “loss of self”.

From the personal individualisms of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, to the cosmic force of Melvillean fictive selfhood, Hawthorne was required to situate himself within a burgeoning nation of volatile attitudes and shifting power structures, where the constancy of individuality seemed to underline the problematic relations that constructed Jacksonian and antebellum society. Hawthorne’s peculiar reaction to this turbulence was a so-called “power of blackness” that, in its deconstructed state, was indicative of a probing mind that appeared simultaneously repulsed and enchanted by the difficulties of relating to others. Melville characterised this selfsame power through “its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity

---

2 Widmer, *Young America*, 76.

and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free.”

This firmly individual appeal was, yet, a reaching out to the imperfection of others. The contemplative mind is free, but in its judgement of others is inevitably drawn to an uncomfortable relation of insufficiency.

Furthermore, the “magnetic chain” aforementioned is both a natural force and a natural impediment to development, something that weighs down its bearer as much as it suggests the communitas of an ideal life. Reminiscent of John Fawcett’s “Blest Be the Tie that Binds”, Hawthorne’s “chain” receives comparatively little attention as a negative force. Ethan Brand’s dangerous, anti-social individualism, in this schema, recasts him not simply as an epic outcast, but as a tragic truth-teller. In the posthumously published Septimius Felton; or, the Elixir of Life, Hawthorne seized again on this motif, constructing an image of existence reinvigorated beyond the universal infelicities of Brand:

It appeared to imbibe its coldness from the cold, chaste moon, until it seemed to Septimius that it was colder than ice itself; the mist gathered upon the crystal vase as upon a tumbler of iced water in a warm room. Some say it actually gathered thick with frost, crystallized into a thousand fantastic and beautiful shapes, but this I do not know so well. Only it was very cold. Septimius pondered upon it, and thought he saw that life itself was cold, individual in its being, a high, pure essence, chastened from all heats; cold, therefore, and therefore invigorating (XIII, 168).

Perhaps, at this late stage of Hawthorne’s career, his feelings towards the anti-social elements of individualistic behaviour had softened to the extent that his characters might take a step away from humanity’s connection in order to see the coldly “invigorating” nature of observation and enquiry.

---

4 Melville, “Hawthorne and his Mosses”, 221.
His work frequently contemplated the relation of individualism to the world as a systematic personification of self, something that disrupted the reality of individual existence in order to demonstrate the ideological and cultural construction of man as part of continuous and dynamic processes. The potential importance of this late quote in these terms suggests a move away from the “dangerous” nature of such self-representation. This construal of public and private is, to this point, peculiarly understated in criticism on the work of Hawthorne. As has been explored here, albeit in insufficient detail given the magnitude of such a project, the construction of privacy within this writer’s works is a subject that requires further attention, particularly with regard to its insistent relation to Jacksonian rhetorical conceptualisations of “public good” and “private menace”.

Hawthorne’s intense, contemplative examination of the individualism that so characterised America in its Jacksonian and antebellum periods was as innovative as it was ambiguous. The “blackness” present in his interrogation of national characteristics, and his use of individualism as a “legitimate aesthetic”, often aligning his narratives with the language of official dictum, was necessarily embedded within historical modes of representation. Although superficially his portrayal of individualistic characters indicated the thought of a writer bound to problematising contemporary structures, Hawthorne’s frequent lionisation and continuous depiction of singularly-minded individuals suggested otherwise. Far from solely being a negative inquisitor of his age, Hawthorne’s consistent perception and literary conception of individuality and personal agency show a writer teasing out the intricacies of a national doctrine of self-representation.

American individualism, in its myriad forms, was foundational to Hawthorne’s artistic expression. It facilitated his access to the literary marketplace in a manner that consolidated his status as one of America’s foremost writers, while emphasising the path through which cultural actors might attain legitimate status as exponents of a renewed, specifically American art. In

---

5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 45. “…state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measure.”
studying Nathaniel Hawthorne, his instrumentalisation and characterisation of individualism bespeak a lasting comment on his contemporary milieu, while remembering that this focus was based in the creation of both a viable career and an artistic identity whose complementarity was fundamental to his work and livelihood.
Bibliography


Bliss, Ann. V. ““Pictures Out of Sunshine”: Daguerreotypy as the Agent of Change in The House of the Seven Gables.” *Explicator* Vol. 72, no. 2 (Apr-Jun 2014), 93-96.


Curtis, Heather D. “Visions of Self, Success and Society in antebellum Boston.” *Church History* 73, no. 3: 613-634.


Graham, Wendy. Gothic Elements and Religion in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fiction (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1999.)


Mullins, Jeffrey A. “‘Hurrah for Hanging”: Monsters, Irony, and the Contested Meaning of Horror for Nineteenth-Century America.” *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2016), 81-92.


