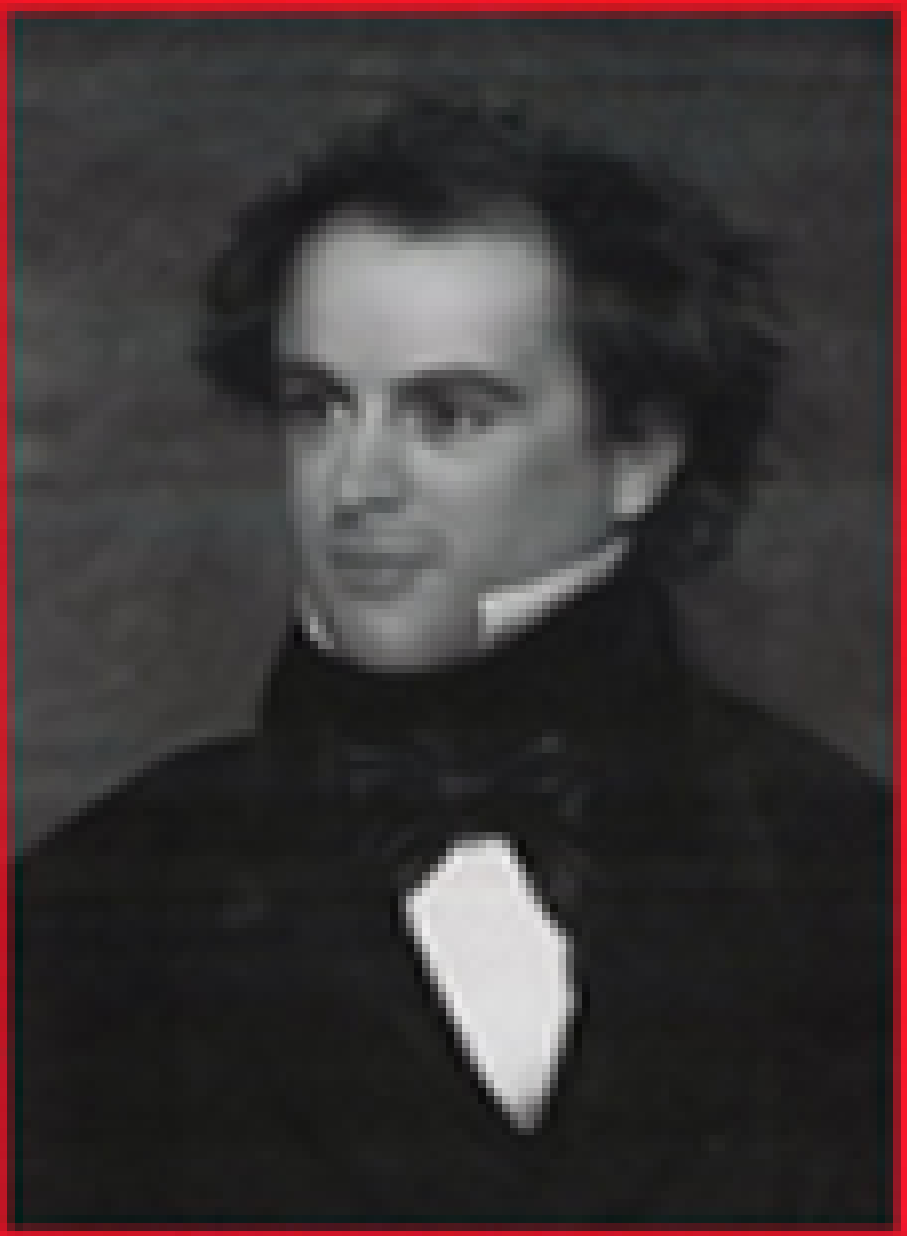
# *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*



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# Writing in the Name of: Hawthorne's "Chiefly about War-Matters"

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> "[We] have gone to war, and we seem to have little, or at least a very misty idea of what we are fighting for. It depends upon the speaker…"
>
> Hawthorne, Letter to F. Bennoch, July 1861

**Unrealpolitik**

Nathaniel Hawthorne is notorious chiefly for his lack of involvement in the major political issues of his time. According to Michael T. Gilmore, "[t]he consensus on Hawthorne and politics goes something like this: unlike Emerson and Thoreau, unlike Douglass and Stowe, activists all, he was an *inactivist* who fetishized deferral" (22). Yet "Chiefly about War-Matters, by a Peaceable Man" offers evidence of his having episodically taken part in the public life of his country. In his recent *Devils and Rebels: The Making of Hawthorne's Damned Politics*, Larry J. Reynolds works to qualify the moralistic judgment on Hawthorne's political escapism. While I share Reynolds's premise, his work differs from mine as it tends to attribute Hawthorne's politics to his biography, a tendency that this article aims to counter.

In the spring of 1862, Hawthorne was commissioned by *The Atlantic Monthly* to travel south in order to write a report on the Civil War. He complied with the request and produced a forty-page text that offers itself as one of his most explicit attempts at journalism, which was, at the same time, an ironic meditation on the legitimacy of the war as well as a reflection on his own legitimacy to write on the issue.[1] Even in this overtly political article, Hawthorne declares himself incompetent in these matters, as though the business of politics was beyond the ken of a mere fiction-monger: "As I make no pretensions to state-craft or soldiership, and could promote the common weal neither by valor nor counsel, it seemed, at first, a pity that I should be debarred from such





*unsubstantial* business as I had contrived for myself, since *nothing more genuine was to be substituted for it*" (23: 403, my emphasis).[2] From the very outset of the text, however, the substantial character of the situation, supposedly in contrast with the "unsubstantial" nature of fiction, is called into question.

In a notable previous political initiative, Hawthorne had offered to write the memoirs of his old college friend Franklin Pierce, who was to run for presidency, but already in the preface, the writer would expressly doubt his right as a fiction writer to encroach upon the domain of politics: "The author of this memoir—being so little of a politician that he scarcely feels entitled to call himself a member of any party—would not voluntarily have undertaken the work here offered to the public" (23: 273). I will argue that this apologetic posture in no way disqualifies his opinion but, rather, grants him the right to consider history from a literary outlook. When Hawthorne does deal with political matters, it is mostly obliquely, safeguarded by the self-professed "neutral territory" of fiction writing.

The difficulty of the question accounts for (or results in) the constantly renewed attempt of a great number of critics to make sense of Hawthorne's relation with his own time. Some, following Sacvan Bercovitch, refute his disengagement in political matters but argue that his fiction is consensual, endorsing the dominant cultural position.[3] Others advocate that fiction, because of its very—and to me highly arguable—difference from reality, is always (albeit negatively) political (Riss).[4] More recently, other works have insisted on the heterogeneity of the clandestine histories composing Hawthorne's stories. Read as scars disfiguring the great national narrative, these hi/stories call into question the validity of an all-erasing History, which offers itself as authorless and evidence-based: "Resistant to the consensualist practice of a marching History that writes itself off, the fictional story leaves in its inscription the scars of memories defaced by the progress of History"[5] (Derail-Imbert, "Le recouvrement du passé" / "Recovering the Past"). Regardless of the perspective, criticism attempts to single out the writer's voice as different from that of history, even if to say that both converge and are conflated "at last" (Bercovitch xxii). The postulate, therefore, is that the writer—"the author"—assumes enough latitude and authority to criticize history. But what when the writer himself underlines his incompe-

tence in this domain? What when, conceiving his article as a censorship hoax, he stages his own inability to express an opinion different from that of the Union? How critical can a text be, ultimately, when it narrates a history that is being made?

By calling attention to the (affected) lack of legitimacy of his interfering in politics, Hawthorne did not decline to take part in the public debate but rather participated in it in pointing to the debate's ambiguous nature. While pretending to ask whether fiction has something to say about politics, he in fact asks whether politics is not, after all, a matter of fiction. Refusing to mark out an essential dichotomy between the praxis of fiction and that of politics, the writer subverts the Puritan imperative to ban the arts from the New World and to write the history of Plymouth Colony in "plaine style," in the words of William Bradford (Ruland and Bradbury 10). What is more, "Chiefly about War-Matters" shows that the rhetoric of the Union is more sibylline—both obscure and prophetic—than "plain." Indeed, in a footnote following an irreverent passage in which the Peaceable Man explicitly doubts that the war be God's will, claiming that "Man's accidents are God's purposes," the sham editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* (in fact Hawthorne himself) portentously interjects, opposing the collective "we" to the singular "I" of the Peaceable Man: "We disagree with him. The counsels of wise and good men are often coincident with the purposes of Providence; and the present war promises to illustrate our remark" (23: 431).

Thus parodying the millenarian accents of the Unionist periodical did not prevent Hawthorne, when writing the memoirs of the future President Pierce ten years earlier, from adopting typological language, even when he disagreed with his former schoolmate. Pierce fully supported the Compromise of 1850, which was a tentative response to the divisive issue of slavery; the idea was notably to placate the South by means, among other laws, of the Fugitive Slave Act, which Hawthorne was in total disapproval of to the point of signing a petition protesting this law. Brenda Wineapple exposes the contradiction at the heart of Hawthorne's patriotic rhetoric that he, a faithful supporter of the Democrats, is prone to conjure up even when he disagrees with Pierce: contemporary Pierce detractors such as Horace Mann could not imagine that Hawthorne could "share Pierce's views. But he did. To one who never felt quite at home, the symbolic loss of one—the dissolution of



the Union—was intolerable . . . And despite satires depicting American vulgarity, avarice, and idiocy, Hawthorne could just as easily summon a rhetoric of manifest destiny, the country as hallowed experiment, the Constitution its covenant" (Wineapple 262). Wineapple quotes from Hawthorne's biography of Pierce to prove her point:

> The fiercest, the least scrupulous, and the most consistent of those, who battle against slavery, recognize the same fact that he does. They see that merely human wisdom and human efforts cannot subvert it, except by tearing to pieces the Constitution, breaking the pledges which it sanctions, and severing into distracted fragments that common country, which Providence brought into one nation through a continued miracle of almost two hundred years, from the first settlement of the American wilderness until the Revolution. (23: 350-51)

She notices a radical change in Hawthorne's views that she imputes to his European journey: "After England, America no longer seemed a political marvel, divinely sanctioned, as he'd argued in the Franklin Pierce biography" (Wineapple 340). In a letter to Henry Bright (December 1860), he declares: "the Union is unnatural, a scheme of man, not an ordinance of God; and as long as it continues, no American of either section will ever feel a genuine thrill of patriotism, such as you Englishmen feel at every breath you draw" (18: 355). This surprising evolution in favor of Secession is understandable if we read the paragraph following Hawthorne's advocacy of Pierce:

> Of course, there is another view of all these matters. The theorist may take that view in his closet; the philanthropist by profession may strive to act upon it, uncompromisingly . . . But the statesman of practical sagacity—who loves his country as it is, and evolves good from things as they exist, and who demands to feel his firm grasp upon a better reality before he quits the one already gained—will be likely, here, with all the greatest statesmen of America, to stand in the attitude of a conservative. (23: 351)

Hawthorne condemns this "other view" because of its lack of pragmatism. He decries the "uncompromising" character of abolitionism—quite logically, since Pierce had signed the Compromise of 1850—making it impossible for U.S. citizens to adhere to the principles of the

Constitution understood here less as a divine covenant than a matter of *Realpolitik*.[6] Hawthorne's view is not very different from Hobbes's theory of sovereignty, which as we will see is no longer providentially justified but appears nonetheless a necessary expedient. As long as the United States is not too deeply challenged by its internal conflicts, the conservative allegiance to the Constitution seems a better remedy; but when the war proves impossible to avoid, it then seems logical to privilege the allegiance to the State over the loyalty to the Union, to opt for patria over nation.

Acknowledging the practical nature of the Constitution, Hawthorne finds it conceivable to abandon it—or to amend it—if the matter of war demands it. Thus, "Chiefly about War-Matters" finally offers a truly subversive alternative:

> Since the matter has gone so far, there seems to be no way but to go on winning victories, and establishing peace and a truer union in another generation, at the expence, probably, of greater trouble, in the present one, than any other people ever voluntarily suffered. We woo the South 'as the Lion woos his bride'; it is a rough courtship, but perhaps Love, and a quiet household, may come of it at last. Or, if we stop short of that blessed consummation, Heaven was Heaven still, as Milton sings, after Lucifer and a third part of the angels had seceded from its golden palaces,—and perhaps all the more heavenly, because so many gloomy brows, and soured, vindictive hearts, had gone to plot ineffectual schemes of mischief elsewhere. (23: 442)

Considering secession as a suitable solution was regarded as treason in 1862. It is not surprising, then, that the (counterfeit) editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* should add a brief note after the author's conclusion: "We regret the innuendo in the concluding sentence. The war can never be allowed to terminate, except in the complete triumph of Northern principles. [. . . .] We should be sorry to cast a doubt on the Peaceable Man's loyalty, but he will allow us to say that we consider him premature in his kindly feelings towards traitors, and sympathizers with treason" (442). On account of a paragraph introducing the text in contemporary editions, the modern reader would be aware that, if Hawthorne consented to remove certain passages the editor of the *Atlantic* objected to, it was on condition that the writer himself provide the eight footnotes



that curtail his text when too seditious. However, no indication of a censorship hoax appeared in the 1862 article. Henry James himself was unable to detect the parody:

> The editor of the periodical appears to have thought that he must give the antidote with the poison, and the paper is accompanied with several little notes disclaiming all sympathy with the writer's political heresies. The heresies strike the reader of to-day as extremely mild, and what excites his emotion, rather, is the questionable taste of the editorial commentary, with which it is strange that Hawthorne should have allowed his article to be encumbered. (159)

James seems surprised less by the bowdlerization than by Hawthorne's relinquishment of his authorial sovereignty. In this explicit *abandonment*—to allude to Hobbes[7]—lies the truly political feat of "Chiefly about War-Matters." Accepting (and exhibiting) censorship may indirectly denounce the fact that a fiction writer is not entitled to write in his own name while politicians have free rein to fictionalize. In a passage omitted in the originally published version, Hawthorne furthers the blending of the political and poetic realms by turning "Uncle Abe," whom he met by joining a deputation about to be introduced to the President, into a storyteller:

> It is the strangest, and yet the fittest thing in the jumble of human vicissitudes, that he, out of so many millions, unlooked-for, unselected by any intelligible process that could be based upon his genuine qualities, unknown to those who chose him, and unsuspected of what endowments may adapt him for his tremendous responsibility, should have found the way open for him to fling his lank personality into the chair of state—where, I presume, it was his first impulse to throw his legs on the council-table, and tell the cabinet-ministers a story. (23: 412)

By transforming history into *a* story, Hawthorne seizes the political potential of fiction to comment on how ideology works in creating the national narrative. From the outset of "Chiefly about War-Matters," Hawthorne accepts that we must do away with the notion that literature should be indifferent to the course of everyday life—a belief that the crisis of war seems to make impossible, though it is doubtful that he ever had any such sincere belief in the first place. Though the war was already

a year in, the man of letters eventually condescends to alight from his ivory tower (literally, as Hawthorne was then working in what he called his "sky-parlor"; Wineapple 333) to respond to a war that had "long ago knocked at [his] cottage-door" (23: 403). This belated realization ironically reveals that there never was such "remoteness of life" and that, as a writer, he has always been in touch with public affairs. Hawthorne alludes to this sustained investment in politics as he compares himself to the sovereign Charles 1st who in 1649, like the writer, had consented to "g[i]ve [him]self up" (23: 404) to hearing the dissenting voices "where the sovereignty and constitution of England were to be set at a stake" (23: 404). Hawthorne self-mockingly postures himself as condescending to care for matters more substantial than fiction, "like other people" (23: 404). But war as a "matter"—the word conveniently referring both to the substantial and theoretical—is no small matter:

> . . . it seemed, at first, a pity that I should be debarred from such unsubstantial business as I had contrived for myself, since nothing more genuine was to be substituted for it. But I magnanimously considered that there is a kind of treason in insulating one's self from the universal fear and sorrow, and thinking one's idle thoughts in the dread time of civil war . . . (23: 403).

Hawthorne affects to relinquish his "idle" activities in order to acknowledge the reality of war only to show that, while human and material damage is to be deplored, the real stake of the Civil War is symbolic and, therefore, a matter of fiction.

Rather than expressing the nostalgic desire to return to the historically "neutral territory" of fiction, "Chiefly about War-Matters" claims that there never was such a territory. If anything, fiction is politics continued by other means. From this perspective, the poet's annexation of the sovereign voice of the Union is highly problematic. Indeed, what does it mean to speak "chiefly" about something? How can a fiction writer "represent" something that *is actually happening*? When war becomes civil and therefore penetrates all aspects of life, can one's voice still be neutral? How can a person of letters be a faithful spokesperson for his or her fellow citizens? What does it mean to write *in the name of* someone? What right does one have to invoke the Founding Fathers? What right to write in the name of the slaves, of the South? What right would Lincoln have at Gettysburg, a year later, to speak in the name of



dead soldiers? Hawthorne offers a radical criticism of a consent-based government that, in the context of the Civil War, seems essentially coercive.

## Founding the Union

Hawthorne's title for his essay poses a semantic problem. That the text claims to deal "chiefly" with war seems to leave room for something other than "war matters" at a time when crisis has become the rule, when the conflict had supposedly invaded every aspect of life: "There is no remoteness of life and thought—no hermetically sealed seclusion, except, possibly, that of the grave—into which the disturbing influences of this war do not penetrate" (23: 403). The very first sentence contradicts the latitude that the title requests in affirming the omnipresence of war, unless of course the author of the article is understood to speak "chiefly," that is *as a chief*, about war matters. The adverb, most of the time surmised to be a synonym for "mainly," can also stand for "manly" and, borrowing from the rhetoric of masculinity, suggests that the Peaceable Man paradoxically occupies the position of a (military) leader. It can also be understood as a performative statement made by an author worried that the all-pervasive war will deprive him of his authority, unable to speak "chiefly"—that is sovereignly—in a context of crisis when, as Herman Melville suggested in "Inscription for Graves at Pea Ridge," the very idea of poetry seems barbaric.

"Chiefly about War-Matters" was published at a critical moment when the sovereignty of the Union was under very great strain. While ten years earlier in the biography of Pierce, Hawthorne had introduced himself as a fervent advocator of the Union, his stance in "Chiefly about War-Matters" seems to have evolved in favor of secession: "The anomaly of two allegiances (of which that of the State comes nearest home to a man's feelings, and includes the altar and the hearth, while the General Government claims his devotion only to an airy mode of law, and has no symbol but a flag) is exceedingly mischievous in this point of view" (23: 416). The claim of the southern states—the entitlement to manage their domestic policies also known as Squatter Sovereignty—thus seems natural whereas the Leviathan[8] of the Union appears as a monstrous creature whose limbs are artificially held together. The Peaceable Man thus seems to endorse, *a priori*, the idea that a natural attachment

to one's land preexists any legal affiliation, and therefore that natural rights are grounded while civil rights rest only on symbolic foundations. If Hawthorne's statement echoes Hobbes's, the former draws the diametrically opposite conclusion by supporting secession, while Hobbes is advocating the legitimacy of a central power.

It is interesting to note that Hobbes is himself also interested in the "matter" of politics, as his title indicates: "*Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil.*" Hawthorne's description of war offers a rather obvious similarity to Hobbes's *bellum omnium contra omnes*. The latter perceived the Civil War as an infelicitous return to the state of nature that only a central sovereign government could impede. Hawthorne cynically affects to find this regression salutary:

> The atmosphere of the camp and the smoke of the battlefield are morally invigorating . . . The enervating effects of centuries of civilization vanish at once, and leave these young men to enjoy a life of hardship, and the exhilarating sense of danger—to kill men blamelessly, or to be killed gloriously—and to be happy in following out their native instincts of destruction, precisely in the spirit of Homer's heroes, only with some considerable change of mode. One touch of Nature makes not only the whole world, but all time akin. Set men face to face, with weapons in their hands, and they are as ready to slaughter one another, now, after playing at peace and good-will for so many years, as in the rudest ages, that never heard of peace-societies, and thought no wine so delicious as what they quaffed from an enemy's skull. Indeed, if the report of a Congressional committee be reliable, that old-fashioned kind of goblet has again come into use, at the expense of our northern head-pieces—a costly drinking-cup to him that furnishes it. Heaven forgive me for seeming to jest upon such a subject;—only, it is so odd, when we measure our advances from barbarism, and find ourselves just here! (23: 421-422)

The sham editor, impervious to the blatant irony of the comment, congratulates the author for his sudden bellicosity, misreading it for the latter's support to the Union: "We hardly expected this outbreak in favor of War, from the Peaceable Man; but the justice of our cause makes us all soldiers at heart, however quiet in our outward life" (23: 422). Peace, being "played at," is presented as an elusive game when compared to the



actual matter of the war.

Hobbes clearly acknowledges the symbolical essence of the Republic that guarantees peace, as shown by the function he ascribes to the frontispiece accompanying *The Leviathan*. Drawn by Abraham Bosse under the instructions of the philosopher himself, it testifies to the author's wish to attach an image that would bestow upon his text an added sense of unity. The frontispiece represents the effigy of a giant composed of a multitude of anonymous individuals surmounted by a crowned head. The Leviathan holds a sword in his right hand and a scepter in his left, symbols of temporal and spiritual powers.


**Frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan, (1651). (public domain)**

German Historian Horst Bredekamp argues that in order to understand why Hobbes deemed it necessary to include an image when explaining his conception of the State, one should keep in mind the context in which the philosopher was writing. In 1651, the danger was "not the self-affirmation of an authoritative power but rather political disruption and the outburst of Civil War in England" (Bredekamp 17), an outburst experienced as the failure of political systems to assure peace. Hobbes concluded from this observation that state authority demanded to be erected against natural inclinations and to be sustained by a "stabilizer capable of translating the contract into actions and into a lasting validity"; this stabilizer would therefore need to "have at his command the monopoly of violence as well as images that impress themselves on the mind" (Bredekamp 17-18).[9] The image is no adventitious illustration of the concept of the state but rather one that grants the state its very authority. The foundation of the state rests on the replacement of a natural order by an artificial political organization.

In acknowledging that since the dethronement of Charles 1st, the monarch is no longer justified by *jus divinum* but is bound to his people by social contract, Hobbes's ambition was to produce a State that would not resort to transcendence to legitimize sovereign power *a priori*. For Hobbes, the state of nature is less a reality than a theoretical postulate necessary to the validation of this contract. From this perspective, nature acts as the foundation of its *other*: society.[10] The allegorical figure of the Leviathan aims at the comprehension (or containment) of an otherwise ungraspable plurality in a subsuming totality.[11] The sovereign discourse, holding the allegory and held by its allegorization, establishes a metonymical relationship between plural singularities and a unifying totality. But it is a metonymy whose signified is absent, an abstraction, an exception. If individual bodies are meant to form a unified body politic, Hobbes recognizes the groundlessness of the newly founded corps of the Leviathan.

In "Chiefly about War-Matters," Hawthorne "converts" the terms of this relation in order to show the artificiality of a Union that presents itself as natural or authorized by the election of a people manifestly destined to found the New Jerusalem. Seeing "elderly men with frilled shirt-fronts . . . the fashion of which adornment passed away from among the people of this world, half a century ago," Hawthorne playfully imagines



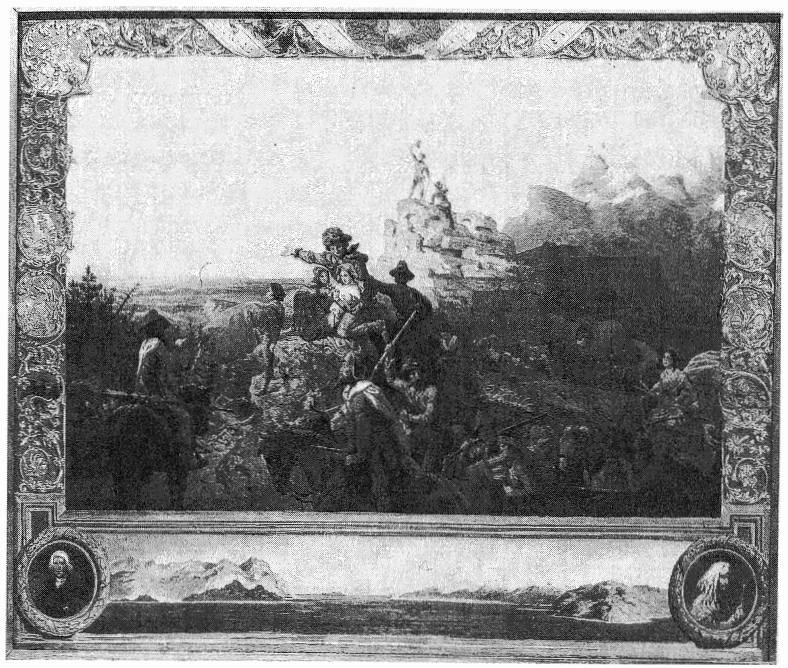
that the Founding Fathers—who committed the originary violence now become law—have come back to save the Union.

> It is as if one of Stuart's portraits were walking abroad. [Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) was an American painter best known for his portraits of the first five presidents.] I see no way of accounting for this, except that the trouble of the times, the impiety of traitors, and the peril of our sacred Union and Constitution, have disturbed, in their honored graves, some of the venerable fathers of the country, and summoned them forth to protest against the meditated and half-accomplished sacrilege. (23: 439)

The simile is explicitly ironic as Hawthorne adds: "If it be so, their wonted fires are not altogether extinguished in their ashes—in their throats, I might rather say;—for I beheld one of these excellent old men quaffing such a horn of Bourbon Whiskey, as a toper of the present century would be loath to venture upon" (23: 439). The representatives of the Union are stripped of their pictorial solemnity as they are rendered all-too-human and turned into binge drinkers. Gilbert Stuart's portraits of the founding political figures of the United States step out of their frames to set foot in the reality of the Civil War. Thus recontextualized, these "antiquated figures" are deprived of the sacred character conferred by the timelessness of the paintings to expose the "aesthetic" dimension of sovereignty.

Pursuing his investigations in Washington, Hawthorne is surprised, upon entering the Capitol, to find that the heart of the Union is empty: "Everybody seems to be at Washington, and yet there is a singular dearth of imperatively noticeable people there" (23: 410). The only man to be found in the seat of the U.S. Congress is, significantly, a painter: "We found one man, however, at the Capitol, who was satisfactorily adequate to the business which brought him thither" (408). The painter in question is Emanuel Leutze, engaged in executing the famous *Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way*.[12]

It is when the sovereignty of the Union is challenged that Leutze is commissioned by the Congress to paint this allegorical work meant to buttress the myth of Manifest Destiny. It seems that the Union is held together by its ability to represent itself. The American democracy, recognized as the sovereignty of the people by the people, must paradoxically resort to a providential authority to found and legitimize its existence.



**Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way, 1861. Mural Study, U.S. Capitol. Bequest of Sara Carr Upton**


"The noble design spoke for itself upon the wall" (409), Hawthorne comments, revealing the allegorical process at work in the fresco. Allegory's principle is to substitute for the obvious sense of a work another sense that seeks to be perceived as natural—that would speak for itself—a voice that overpowers any dissident voice. Leutze's "great national work" expresses an "indefeasible claim" to transcend "rude" reality and to remain immune to petty temporary crises:

> It was an absolute comfort, indeed, to find Leutze so quietly busy at this great national work, which is destined to glow for centuries on the walls of the Capitol, if that edifice shall stand, or must share its fate, if treason shall succeed in subverting it with the Union which it represents. . . . But the artist keeps right on, firm of heart and hand, drawing his outlines with an unwavering pencil, beautifying and idealizing our rude, material life, and thus manifesting that we have an indefeasible claim to a more enduring national existence. In honest truth, what with the hope-inspiring influence of the design, and what with Leutze's undisturbed evolvement of it, I was exceedingly encouraged, and allowed these cheerful auguries to weigh against a sinister omen that was pointed out to me in another part of the Capitol. The freestone walls of the central edifice are pervaded with great cracks, and threaten to come thundering down, under the immense weight of the iron dome;—an appropriate catastrophe enough, if it should occur on the day when we drop the Southern stars out of our flag. (23: 409-410)



Leutze idealizes the ordinary by inscribing it in the national chronicles, transforming the meaningless event into a consequential moment in the destiny of the country just as the voice of the Union, by way of history, is justifying a war that even those who fight it, graciously called "bumpkins," are unable to understand. While Leutze's "unwavering pencil" covers the walls of the edifice, the narrator discerns cracks that threaten the solidity of the Capitol. If the representativeness of the painting is granted any legitimacy, what is to prevent the beholder from making sense of other signs—other scars—not intended to be read as such and yet readable? Whereas Hobbes's image sustains the authority of the state, Hawthorne's ekphrasis (turning the image into a narrative, retemporalizing what he sees "represented in a momentary pause of triumph" [23: 409]) underlines the delusive quality of the sovereign representation (which in this case also accounts for its representativeness).[13] Ostensibly repeating Hobbes's gesture two centuries after the English philosopher, Hawthorne does not seek to legitimize the Union but in fact exhibits the mechanisms of sovereignty at a time when, as Michel Foucault has shown, the concept of sovereignty is less applicable than other forms of power, namely what Foucault has called "governmentality."[14] This anachronism reveals Hawthorne's disbelief in a linear progress of history and exposes the hollowness of the rhetoric of sovereignty deployed by the Union.

Hawthorne notices that the official centre of power is strangely devoid of political representatives. The fact that Leutze was German—which did not prevent Hawthorne from saying that the "work will be emphatically original and American" (23: 409)—adds to the external character of an authority founded on a principle of exception. The true vital force of the nation is not to be found in the Capitol but in a hotel,

a place of transit and ephemeral sojourn: "[Willard's] hotel, in fact, may be much more justly called the centre of Washington and the Union, than either the Capitol, the White House, or the State Department. . . . It is the meeting-place of the true representatives of the country" (23: 438).

The "true representatives of the country" are therefore to be found in the margins: they are, so to speak, out of (their) office. Leutze's foreignness echoes the fact that Lincoln, "the man of men," happens to be a Southerner and yet is representative of the Union:

> Unquestionably, Western man though he be, and Kentuckian by birth, President Lincoln is the essential representative of all Yankees, and the veritable specimen, physically, of what the world seems determined to regard as our characteristic qualities. (23: 412)[15]

Lincoln is, paradoxically, unrepresentative enough to perfectly represent the Northern States. The locus of power always appears external to what it represents; as Giorgio Agamben suggests, it is *intrinsically exceptional.* The sovereign is the one who, though outside the law, declares "that there is nothing outside the law" (Agamben 15).

**"Putting a Bright Face upon a Bad Matter"**

"Chiefly about War-Matters" suggests that the Union conceals this foundational paradox through the aestheticization of politics: "there would be a less striking contrast between Southern and New England villages, if the former were as much in the habit of using white paint as we are. It is prodigiously efficacious in putting a bright face upon a bad matter" (23: 426-427). Hawthorne's passing reference to the regional performance of "white face," a sort of inverted minstrelsy, cannot but resonate with the ambivalent relationships various regions of the U.S. had to the slave trade at the historical moment of abolitionism. The Union aims at repairing blemishes left on the relationship between the North and the South by covering up their differing realities with a little "make-up." The representatives of the Union offer to give the slaves a voice and yet they always remain *below* the law, or submerged below the surface of attempts to apply a reparative veneer to the cause. In other words, Union attempts to restore the historical record, by speaking in the name of slaves who had previously been denied representation, become but another form of domination. In the only passage where he explicitly deals with slavery, Hawthorne transforms an (*a priori*) ethical question into an aesthetic issue. In so doing, "Chiefly about War-Matters" underlines the cosmetic character of the political debate:



> One very pregnant token of a social system thoroughly disturbed was presented by a party of Contrabands, escaping out of the mysterious depths of Secessia; and its strangeness consisted in the leisurely delay with which they trudged forward, as dreading no pursuer, and encountering nobody to turn them back.
>
> They were unlike the specimens of their race whom we are accustomed to see at the North, and, in my judgment, were *far more agreeable*. So rudely were they *attired—as if their garb had grown upon them spontaneously*—so *picturesquely natural* in manners, and wearing such a *crust of primeval simplicity*, (which is quite *polished away* from the northern black man,) that they seemed *a kind of creature* by themselves, *not altogether human, but perhaps quite as good, and akin to the fauns and rustic deities of olden times*. I wonder whether I shall excite anybody's wrath by saying this? *It is no great matter*. (23: 419-420; my emphasis)

Switching from the anecdotal to the allegorical mood, the article assimilates the slave to the faun who has fled the realm of romance not so much to derealize the matter of slavery as to comment upon it from an aesthetic point of view. The question of slavery, as antebellum racism would have it, is similar to the one posed by the character of Donatello in *The Marble Faun*: do these "creatures" count as persons? Hawthorne observes the fugitives at the liminal moment when they leave the South and are supposed to acquire freemen's rights. Riss recalls that in antebellum American rhetoric, blacks were defined as the missing links between animal and man. The faun interrogates the validity of the binaristic categories distinguishing man from the rest of the creation as the free slave questions the hierarchy between blacks and whites. (It is worth remembering that *On the Origin of Species* was written in 1859). Arthur Riss argues that Hawthorne derides the postulate of "aesthetic racism" showing that the metamorphosis of the passing slave is not a real evolution, only a superficial alteration. Resorting to allegory in order to relocate the problem of black slavery from an insoluble epistemological debate to an indisputable ontological question, Hawthorne excludes the

black slave from what Riss calls the "real": "According to Hawthorne, the Negro does not belong in America precisely because the Negro, like an aesthetic object, inaugurates a tension between the literal and the figurative, the material and the transcendent, the interior and the exterior" (Riss 278).

"*Like* an aesthetic object." Hawthorne does not establish a transparent equivalence between the slave and the faun but proceeds to compare them. The slave is "akin to" the faun and oxymoronically looks "picturesquely natural." These rhetorical precautions are overlooked by Riss, who does not take into account the satirical (and highly sacrilegious) dimension of the text. Rather than displace the problem in a metaphysical sphere, Hawthorne, on the contrary, underlines its reality, which happens to be ambiguous. It is the lot of the American real, as Agnès Derail-Imbert has shown, to always be prophetic (Derail-Imbert, "Imaginer le Réel" / "Imagining the Real").[16] Thus, when Hawthorne affirms that he will let Providence assume the responsibility of the matter—"On behalf of my own race, I am glad, and can only hope that an inscrutable Providence means good to both parties" (23: 420)—he does not refuse to take a political stand as he is careful to call this Providence "inscrutable." The signs (*omen, portent, character, token*) of the providential national history are sent back to their illegible materiality, to their reality.

Hawthorne thus exposes—in what he ironically calls "colorless and uncertain words" (23: 409), in contrast with the "unwavering pencil"—the paradox of sovereignty as fundamentally allegorical, a force of self-legitimization that rests on realities it tries to erase. From this perspective, his refusal to speak in the name of the slaves—in the fashion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—suggests strong political significance. Hawthorne will only speak on behalf of those who can speak, those who are guilty of benefiting from their belonging to white society ("on behalf of my own race"). Like Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Self-Reliance," Hawthorne cannot speak in the name of those who are not *his* poor. Stanley Cavell explains:

> I do not know in advance how deep my agreement with myself is, how far responsibility for the language may run. But if I am to have my own voice in it, I must be speaking for others and allow them to speak for me. The alternative to speaking for myself representatively . . . is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute. (28)



Or to say it in Agamben's words: "To speak [*dire*] is always to 'speak the law,' *ius dicere*" (21).

That "Chiefly about War-Matters" was a censorship hoax further complicates the matter of representativeness. Hawthorne was the unique source of the two opposed voices staged in the article, alternatively embodying the Peaceable Man driven to turn his attention to the war around him and the sham editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* "compelled to interfere with [his] friend's license of personal description and criticism" (23: 410). Such ventriloquism is particularly intriguing as it questions the intrinsic violence of the dominant voice overpowering those of its dissenters. Thus parodying democracy, "Chiefly about War-Matters" investigates the violence undergone by the voiceless and exposes power as a force that is always monological and will not suffer contradiction.

The text leaves us with one final question: who, then, is speaking in "Chiefly about War-Matters"? To put it in J. Hillis Miller's words: "By what authority, in whose name, did Hawthorne rework with such interpretive violence the materials of New England history?" (125) Who is this "illusory sovereign 'I' Hawthorne uses?" (Miller 127) And by extension, by what authority, in whose name, do we read this text and attribute such or such "intention," as James Bense does, to Hawthorne?

Bense argues that, by devising the piece as a censorship hoax, Hawthorne's "intention" was to "communicate the importance of freedom of speech." This contention, however, would seem inadequate as Hawthorne's readers had no way of knowing that the text was a hoax (only in the 1883 Riverside edition of his works was it explicitly stated that Hawthorne was both the censored and the censor). Playing with censorship, Hawthorne activates a number of questions about the impossibility of speaking in the isolation provided by the first-person singular (as one's own "Chief"), or the fantasy that one might speak only for oneself in times of crisis. Indeed, why censor a text if it is written only in the name of the speaker? At the same time, censorship reveals the violence inherent to the liberal argument—resting on the freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment—that justifies the sovereignty of the Union. Speaking in the name of someone entails depriving the person of their sovereignty; it comes down to converting the sovereign sub-

ject claimed to be at the origin of the speech to merely an object of the speech. Impossible as it is *not* to speak in the name of, it appears equally impossible to speak in the name of.

By questioning his legitimacy to speak about historical matters not only in the name of his contemporaries but also in his own name, the Peaceable Man offers an ironical revaluation of the Hobbesian concept of sovereignty, exhibiting the seams of a manufactured Union seeking to appear, as it does on Leutze's canvas, seamlessly providential. The critical dimension of the text arises from the initial questioning of the fiction writer's legitimacy to write chiefly about war matters.

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## Notes

[1]Most of Hawthorne's sketches were published as "articles," notably in *The Democratic Review*, and more or less overtly dealt with contemporary issues (see, for instance, "P's Correspondence," 1845, foreshadowing the American-Mexican War of 1846). Hawthorne's early stories did not profess the utter incompatibility of fiction and politics, as is done at the beginning of "Chiefly about War Matter," nor did they claim the necessity to "suspend the contemplation of certain fantasies" to "look a little more closely" at the matters of war "with [his] own eyes" (404).

[2]All citations of Hawthorne's writings are to the *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne,* ed. William Charvat et al. 23 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962 - 1993) and are indicated by volume number.

[3]Bercovitch concludes *The Office of the Scarlet Letter* with a reference to "Chiefly about War-Matters." In this article, he says, Hawthorne alludes to the *Mayflower* as a "symbol overdetermined by history" whose "deeper meanings point insistently to the discontinuities of process and the precariousness of the hiatus that links 'rescue' to 'blood and ruin'" (158). Bercovitch understands in the *Mayflower* a "parable of social conflict following upon (as well as generating) cultural myth." The ship in which the Pilgrims sailed from England to America in 1620 goes on to its final destination in spite of the conflicts it shelters; this view implies a conception of history and culture as teleologically determined, adopting a transhistorical view of history. Bercovitch's reading, searching for "deeper meanings," tends to overlook the relevance of details and particularities that are—retrospectively—integrated in the great narrative of American history (see Derail-Imbert, "Le recouvrement du passé").

[4]Riss's argument rests on the assumption that Hawthorne believed that aesthetics is a transcendent category essentially different from the real. Mentioning how Hawthorne compares slaves to fauns, Riss argues that "[a]lthough this self-consciously aesthetic representation of fugitive slaves may seem incongruous given the self-professed aims of Hawthorne's essay, when put in the context of what we now see as Hawthorne's notorious insensitivity to the historical problem of U.S. slavery, such aestheticizing becomes not only comprehensible but almost expected as soon as it is put in the context of Hawthorne's notorious slavery politics. It confirms the sense that Hawthorne could not adequately confront the historical problem of race-based slavery, a failing most clearly marked by his unwillingness to represent slavery as anything but a metaphor for psychological bondage and an image of the power relationships among white people (i.e. figural rather than real slavery)." ("'Chiefly about War-Matters' and the Problem of Human Rights"). By assuming a clear-cut division between fiction and non-fiction, between "metaphors" and "historical problems," between "figural" and "real," Riss simplifies Hawthorne's gesture and condemns it as *inadequate*, or "impolitic" (417), to say it in Hawthorne's own words. Riss understands well that "Chiefly about War-Matters" poses the problem of the representation/representativeness of slaves but does not seem to contemplate the possibility that this "unwillingness to represent slavery as anything but a metaphor" might not be a refusal to speak of them/in their name, but a confession of his powerlessness to do so more directly.

[5]My translation. "Contre la pratique consensualiste de l'Histoire en marche qui s'écrit en s'effaçant, l'histoire comme fiction, comme *story*, laisse dans son inscription les cicatrices (*scar*) des mémoires abîmées par son passage." I am translating Derail's idea that history progresses by erasing the individual stories it is made of with the collocation "writing off," which I borrow from a passage from *The Blithedale Romance* where Coverdale's experience in the socialist community is said to be "a leaf of some mysterious volume interpolated into the current history which Time was writing off" (146). Commenting on the formulation, Tony Tanner asks: "Does Time both write current history and write it off at the same time? Is history somehow at once inscribed and erased?" (viii)

[6]On the (scarlet) letter of the law being a matter of *Realpolitik*, see Derail, "Imaginer le Réel": "It is a matter of Realpolitik: in order for the citizen to love the law as his/her sole reality, it is necessary for the law to herald, as a letter in its fantastic curlicues, the excess of passion which draws the horizon of its utopia" ("C'est une affaire de *Realpolitik* : afin que le citoyen puisse aimer la loi comme sa seule réalité, encore faut-il qu'elle fasse signe, comme la lettre dans ses illuminations fantastiques, vers l'excès de passion comme l'horizon de son utopie," my translation, 33). In like manner, the transcendent a-historical character of the Constitution appears as a practical necessity in "Chiefly about War-Matters."

[7]The Civil War is not so much the abolition of the king's sovereignty as the restoration of individual sovereignty that the subject had consented to *abandon*, if we refer to Hobbes's conception of sovereignty: "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man" (Hobbes 227). Sovereignty, in *Leviathan*, is the exercise of a vio-

lence (someone speaks in my name) that I have contractually accepted. The subjects are, in this perspective, "authors" of their Sovereign: "[The Sovereign] is one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by Mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author..." Agamben also uses the paradigm of ban, or "abandonment," to describe the structure of sovereignty: "*The originary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment*" (Agamben 29, italics not mine). However, he does not posit the deliberate action of rational individuals as the origin of this state of ban.

[8]For Hobbes, "the sovereignty is an artificial soul" (5).

[9]My translation. "[Man] muss berücksichtigen, dass er nicht die Gefahr der Verselbständigung einer autoritativen Macht, sondern die politische Zersplitterung und den Bürgerkrieg Englands [...] vor Augen hatte [...]. Dass Hobbes Zeit seines Lebens von jener Angst erfüllt war, die er durch die Gegenangst vor dem Leviathan zu Überwinden hoffte, lag vor allem in seiner Erfahrung, dass alle Sicherungssysteme versagt hatten und alle alle Legitimationsmittel den Bürgerkrieg nicht hatten verhindern können.Er zog daraus die Konsequenz, dass die staatliche Autorität nicht im Einklang mit der sozialen Anlage der Menschen, sondern gegen deren Natur errichtert werden müsse. Für diese Schöpfung benötigt er ein künstliches Gerüst, das die vertragliche Grundlage des Staates aufzurichten und zu stützen vermag. Dieser Stabilsator, der den Vertrag in Handlungen und in eine dauerhafte Geltung zu überführen vermag, muss für Hobbes sowohl über das Gewaltmonopol wie über einprägsame Bilder verfügen" (Bredekamp 17-18).

[10]"The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Möbius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of exception), and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between outside and inside, nature and exception, *physis* and *nomos*" (Agamben 37).

[11]In the Old Testament, the composite nature of the Biblical monster makes it improper to any global perception: the inexhaustible list of its attributes prevents any positive understanding of the Leviathan (Job, 41).

[12]This title comes from Bishop Berkeley's 1724 poem predicting that "the transfer of imperial authority shall not continue further west but culminate triumphantly in what American poets would call 'the rising glory of America'" (Tennenhouse 13).

[13]Gayatri Spivak reproaches the lack of self-consciousness in the work of those who, claiming to represent minorities unable to speak for themselves, "represent themselves as transparent." She unfolds the two meanings of the term "representation" used indifferently by Deleuze: "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy." (275) However related the two notions, it is important to distinguish the "proxy" from the "portrait" (276), she insists, in order to show that representation is never quite achieved through re-presentation.



[14]With the emergence of the concept of population at the end of the 17th century, Foucault explains that the modern political model becomes that of "governmentality": "this inversion of government with reign and the fact that government is much more than sovereignty . . . the modern political problem, is I think absolutely linked with population" ("cette inversion du gouvernement par rapport au règne et le fait que le gouvernement soit au fond beaucoup plus que la souveraineté . . . le problème politique moderne, je crois que c'est lié absolument à la population," my translation, *Sécurité territoire population* 78).

[15]Historically, Kentucky was grouped with the Southern states.

[16]In "Imaginer le réel," Agnès Derail-Imbert resolves to settle the paradox of Henry James's declaration that such an unlikely choice as Hawthorne would be the best representative of a nascent American literature—one that might be most apt to portray the "American real" while at the same time declaring the romancer utterly uninfluenced by realism. Derail suggests that the nature of this "American real" is deeply ambiguous and perhaps best defined by its volatile and imaginary essence.

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# Reading Hawthorne's "Failure" at The Wayside: The Uncanny Architecture of *Septimius*

Alex Shakespeare

> Thoreau first told me about this predecessor of mine; though, I think he knew nothing of his character and history, nor anything but the singular fact, that here, in this simple old house, at the foot of the hill, and so close to the Lexington Road that I call it the Wayside (partly for that, and partly because I never feel as if I were more permanently located than the traveller who sits down to rest by the road which he is plodding along) here dwelt, in some long-past time, this man who was resolved never to die. ("Study 1," 13:499)

In the initial "studies" for what became *Septimius Felton*, Hawthorne wrote that he should "Begin, with a reference to a certain room in my house, which I hint to be haunted" (13: 504).[1] "It is strange," he begins another such study, "how these familiar places are haunted. We think it is only by old memories; but my belief is that it is by ghosts of those who once dwelt here, and whose spirits took such hold of the spots, the dwellings, that they cannot easily be disjoined with them, when they would fain be so" (13: 498-99). From its first conception, it seems that Hawthorne's *Septimius* revolved around a consideration for the spirit of a place—of The Wayside, on Lexington Road, in Concord, Massachusetts. This residence, the only one that Hawthorne ever owned, has a vital role in the composition of Hawthorne's so-called "failed" romance, so much so that in a sense, my reading of the *Septimius* narrative as a paradoxical success relies upon a reading of the house itself, as Hawthorne wrote that house and its given name into his texts. For not only is The Wayside house mythologized by "Thoreau's legend of the man who would not die" (13: 504), the legend that provided the basis for *Septimius*, but it also serves as the haunted architectural backdrop where Hawthorne confronts a shadowy protagonist, who is obsessed by the certainty of death.

Indeed, the slippage between actual home and fictional setting may