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ABSTRACT

of

Approaching THE SCARLET LETTER:
Spatiality as Theme and Method

by

Susan L. Scott

Although my goal is ultimately to understand Hawthorne's THE SCARLET LETTER, the emphasis of this thesis is upon ways of approaching that goal. Only the last chapter is directly about the text of that romance. In the first chapter I consider the state of the field, religion and literature, with a view to identifying my own position in it. In the second, I look at the cultural historical contexts for reading the story, specifically, the seventeenth century Puritans and the nineteenth century American romance. The third chapter focuses on variants of the idea of spatiality, for instance, sacred space, topophilia, and embodiment. And in my fourth chapter I look at the spatial themes and relationships in THE SCARLET LETTER.

Approaching THE SCARLET LETTER:
Spatiality as Theme and Method

by

Susan L. Scott

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree Master of Arts

Wilfrid Laurier University
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Canada

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INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne lies buried in Sleepy Hollow cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts. He is in good company; his friend Henry Thoreau is just across the way, and Emerson is at a comfortable distance around the bend. There are several Hawthorne graves. More than one of them is unmarked, and it is difficult to tell which is the author's. This seems the fitting last touch to a private life, careful even in death to guard against the trampling enthusiasm of the curious and grateful. "Author's Ridge" is a quiet, luxurious spot, a haven from the drone of commerce. It inspires a kind of drowsy pleasure just to walk among the graves and see the past so still and groomed, unmoved by another's presence.

Less than an hour away from this pastoral shrine is Hawthorne's birthplace in Salem. It has been relocated, conveniently, next to the ominous "house of the seven gables," so one can tour both places without having to move the car. A few blocks away from these landmarks stands the Custom House, where Hawthorne worked before his release back into literary obscurity. Here occurred his fictionalized finding of the remarkable letter "A," the emblem that took hold in his mind as a token of some unsolved mystery. This vexed strand of cloth, along with a roll of paper containing the story of one Hester Prynne and her ignominious fate in the early Boston colony, had been stowed away in the upper regions of the Custom House and forgotten.

Hawthorne rescued the artifacts from neglect, letting the fragmented mystery root in his imagination. The outgrowth of that nurtured seed was THE SCARLET LETTER.

Today people seem accustomed to the author's tale. They straggle, unimpressed, through the noteworthy shelters of Hawthorne's life. The musty reconstructions of a by-gone era no longer harbour the atmosphere that Hawthorne breathed and moved in. The dramas that gave meaning to each of these spots have long since quit the stage, and the remaining props stand as listless reminders of a departed presence. The one artifact that remains intact and "unimproved upon" is the story itself, THE SCARLET LETTER.

The most appreciable difference between prowling around old haunts and perusing Hawthorne's romance is that the latter allows one to adopt a position other than that of spectator. The very act of reading, since it involves a constant engagement with the text, provokes reflection and response. A kind of immediacy is available to the reader that is not offered to the tourist.

I did not start out studying THE SCARLET LETTER with a mind to examine it as a cultural-historic relic. Nor was I particularly interested in using "space" as a metaphor for interpreting human experience. My coming to understand the relation between position, movement, and context arose in response to, and in dialogue with, the story. As I struggled to articulate what it was about the tale that inspired--yet eluded--me, I found myself hovering over the same spots, repeatedly. I was intrigued with Hawthorne's use of arrested motion and repetitive movement, his stark tableaux and fixed nodes of action. Inevitably, I circled those spots until it seemed necessary to break

away from the narrator's carefully guided tour and launch out on my own through the wilderness of gnarled symbols.

I sought companionship among those whose talents are brilliantly suited to literary ventures. But in the long run, I have trekked through most of the territory unaccompanied, relieved by the occasional flare of insight a fellow critic has sent darting in my direction. It is not that setting and action have gone unnoticed in readings of *THE SCARLET LETTER*. Even a cursory glance at the text will reveal Hawthorne's careful deliberations over "spots" and "spheres" and that "magic circle of ignominy," and no serious critic has ignored these. What differentiates my approach from the mainstream of critical response is that I linger at these spots, rather than bypass them on the way to something more "significant." I excavate the foundations of the story--setting, geography, gesture, position--in order to find the architectural blueprint. What I want to know is not what this or that gesture "means," or what the geography symbolizes, but what the story means whose central images are embodied and arranged in specific settings. Hawthorne has taken great care to "place" his characters, and to build the story around the factors that affect their placement. If I trace the pathways tread by the characters, I come closer to understanding the significance of ambiguous elements in the plot.

What began as a project that explored geography and gesture rapidly grew into an expedition, mapping connections and associations that reached far beyond the boundaries of the story itself. I soon realized that what I was doing was discovering and creating contexts for not only the story but the act of criticism. The organization of

the thesis reflects this. The search to understand the story is at the centre. I have strung the other chapters together so that they move from abstract, theoretical considerations to concrete, situational particulars that ground the story's images. My actual writing process, however, did not cut as clean a path.

Before I could articulate Hawthorne's spatial sensibility I had to understand more about the nature of spatiality. I then found it necessary to "locate" the story and the author, to pull back from the romance and place it among factors that shaped and animated the creative spirit of the nineteenth century. Finally, I realized that my approach to the whole subject was conditioned in part by my relation to others doing literary criticism. I was forced to think through my position on the nature and implications of criticism and thereby orient myself in the field of religion and literature. The outgrowth of this process is a thesis fundamentally based on positions, and on the relationships that spring up and wither between them. Roaming across the terrain of several disciplines has given me a new respect for frontier-crossing in scholarship. Paradoxically, my search for new ways to confront old problems has led me directly to the classics in areas where I sought guidance. This is not surprising, really. It took a nineteenth century novel to heighten my awareness of a pervasive metaphoric structure of our existence.

THE SCARLET LETTER sprang from the soil of New England. But the earth was unwilling to yield its secrets without a little tilling. It is no different now than it was for that "geographer of the soul," Hawthorne. The sublime indifference that emanates from Sleepy Hollow does not deter me, however, from covering the same old ground. The

authors have laid their tools to rest. The works stand in their stead. But sextons of literature, like myself, will continue to dig through time and space, hoping to unearth the forms that give the stories life.

CHAPTER ONE

A CRITIC'S TASK IN RELIGION AND LITERATURE

Linking a topic such as spatiality with a genre such as romance may seem like an odd combination. It has struck me at times as a hybrid, an orphan someone abandoned en route from Geography to the English department. To provide a legitimate status for my work, I include a "family" portrait, a sketch of religion and literature--the field responsible for encouraging my improvisational efforts.

The principle of organization that I use here, as I do in much of the rest of the thesis, is "positioning." For the sake of reader comprehension as well as creative integrity, I try to "locate" my topic so that there is no mistaking its genealogy and, by inference, its mature possibilities. Because building an argument is largely a matter of choosing one's consorts, I gather together those whose ideas have been especially influential. Such a selective process naturally discloses the identities of others who are formidable debate partners, but whose approach is not germane to this presentation.

THE FAMILY PORTRAIT: Religion and Literature

David Hesla, in an article on developments in religion and literature (1979), after briefly recounting the history of movements in literary circles and seminaries which led to the establishment of religion and literature as an independent field, asks, where does the field go from here, having fulfilled its own goals? Written almost forty years after the first stir in theological circles, it is a

timely piece, one which honours the legacy inherited while anticipating imminent change. The maturation process in religious and literary criticism has reached a critical point. It has hit a growth lag. Hesla, still reminiscent about the days when "relevance" was a central concern, is nonetheless cheered by what he thinks are new opportunities awaiting investigation. What makes his speculations particularly interesting to me is that my thesis is a prime example of this emergent new phase.

One modern impetus to theological literary criticism, according to Hesla, was expressed by T.S. Eliot in 1935. His essay, "Religion and Literature," while instrumental in stimulating dialogue, was not followed by much activity. The next spurt of interest erupted with the publication of works by George Every and Amos Wilder. Not until ten years later, however, did the first flush of sustained inquiry become evident. Stanley Romaine Hopper, Nathan Scott, Jr., and Preston Roberts, Jr., were largely responsible for this, as was the development of the first graduate program in religion and the arts at the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1950.

The arousal of interest in approaching the arts from a theological stance earmarked a radical change in the intellectual orientation and purpose of religious reflection in seminaries and divinity schools. As centres of dialogue and exchange, they were also deeply affected by the ongoing theological debate between Barth and Tillich. A new theological impetus, argues Hesla, was dislodging Barth's hegemony. Self-sufficient theology was pressed to the wall;

in an era of existentialism it no longer seemed in touch with insurgent alienation. What was needed, Tillich and Niebuhr argued, was a theology which was involved, dynamic, responsive, and above all, relevant. Embracing existentialism as partner, apologetic theology sought active interdependence between a particular philosophy and religion. The goal was to engage Christianity in dialogue with existentialism, to provoke a response of faith in an anxiety-ridden era. The rise of this new style of theology brought with it a heightened interest in how the arts inform the understanding of faith. The influence culture exerts on traditional conceptions of faith had suddenly become very significant.

At the same time these currents were circulating in divinity circles, English departments in America were having their own troubles. Literary criticism had, up until the 1940's, enjoyed a stable, if undramatic, existence. "New Criticism" upset all that. A work of art, it proclaimed, should be examined solely as art and not as an auxiliary assessment of historical data. This defense of the integrity of art as existent in its own right inspired the pursuit of criticism which respected that. New Criticism was the antidote to a time-worn habit of viewing art as product, as a means to something else, usually history or biography. It led to a reassessment of the nature and aims of criticism, reformulating its intention and scope. Criticism was to leave social and historical considerations alone, and concentrate strictly on the text itself.

This development in defense of poetry for its own sake was

supplemented by indignation aroused at the logical positivists, who were claiming that no language forms other than those subject to empirical verification were legitimate expressions of truth. Poetry, New Criticism maintained, is a kind of language whose significance bears no direct relation to the objective tasks circumscribed by science. This was the argument brought to bear against the logical positivists. Poetry possesses its own laws and logic; poetry is autonomous.

The liberation of poetry and its guardian, literary criticism, from the fetters of relativism brought with it a high cost. The severance of art from the context in which it was conceived and in which it would be interpreted sealed it in isolation. Removed from the pressures of having to demonstrate its usefulness, criticism suffered a loss of perspective. It succumbed to the self-serving attitude characteristic of total detachment. Criticism had to be redeemed from its own best intentions. Scholars in religion and literature were well equipped for the task. Informed by the Tillichean vision of relevance and propelled by this to secure a dialogue between religion and culture, scholars and theologians arose in protest of the exile of poetry into irrelevance. Along with phenomenologists, psychologists, and Marxist theorists, they exerted enough pressure that literary criticism gradually gave way. The insularity of criticism was finally breached.

Having contended against the exclusivism of the New Criticism and succeeded, religion and the arts had fulfilled the mandate ascribed to

it by its apologists. By the 1970's departments of religion and culture had sprung up across the country; the validity of culture as a forum for serious religious reflection was well established. But the pioneering zeal characteristic of the first generation lacked a vital replacement. Hesla suggests that while this lull is a natural phenomenon, there are in fact exciting new directions to pursue. He outlines these as: religious perspectives in non-Western literature; religious aspects of popular culture; and biography and history --the critical dimensions ignored during the search for literary autonomy.(189)

The movement that Hesla sees as vital to the prolonged health of religious studies is away from traditionally theological and nominally philosophical topics in the direction of more popular interests, such as those accessed by the social sciences. The work being done by anthropologists and social psychologists has broken ground; forays into "religious" artifacts, previously overlooked, can be made, combining the methodological skills of the social sciences with the interpretive insights of religious studies.

The recession of explicitly theological concerns is not a reneging of responsibility, however. It is, instead, a reshaping and a re-envisioning of the task of religious investigation. The social anxieties of the 1950's and 60's were directly addressed and even symbolized by existentialist and apologetic models. Personal angst and individualism are now giving way to heightened social concerns, Hesla maintains. Consequently, it is appropriate that theological

language be exchanged for the parlance of the social sciences, as they move into the forefront with the appropriate tools for diagnosing the culture's malaise. As the field turns away from its own genealogical heritage and adopts new partners in discovery, so the nature of our understanding of religious questions alters too. Religion becomes a way of knowing and not simply an object of it. Religion and literature is a field embedded in the images and symbols which give voice to this search.

THEOLOGY AND CRITICISM

Before moving away from the focus of religion and literature to that of literary criticism, I want to concentrate for a moment on theology. There are at least two very good reasons for doing this. First, it is virtually impossible to leap across the moat from religion and culture to literature without recognizing and acknowledging the theological progenitors. Furthermore, I cannot bypass such renowned influences without making clear my own direction in religious studies. If I take my task seriously, then what I will be saying about the nature of spatiality in a literary context may bear on theological questions. Such possibilities are touched on in later chapters. At present, I think it is in keeping with the scope of this essay to address the relationship between theology and criticism.

The shift in orientation from theology to religion and culture

which Hesla brings to our attention is nowhere more evident than in language. Traditional theological language, he says, is being abandoned for that of religious studies. Does this also signify a move away from theology itself? Hesla thinks not. In an eloquent postscript to his article, he sketches a brief apology for this evolving vision of religious scholarship.

This shift is not a decisive break; the move has been more of a steady migration over the past decade or so. As social and academic interests evolve with the times, so too have the means to adapt to those changes. And this impetus to keep abreast of the issues of the day is in keeping with the principles of dialogical theology as well. Finally, Hesla reminds his colleagues that the apparent neglect of theology only grants it a rest, a fallow period, from which it can emerge and reassert itself anew when the time calls for it. I would like to add that while "doing" theology is a linguistic enterprise, it is by no means simply that. (see Dixon: 134) I do not believe that altering the language used to discuss theology is the same as deserting it. It can be a means of transforming it.

Before moving directly from this historical overview to literary criticism, I would like to discuss my ideas on the nature of criticism, particularly as it bears some relation to the latter part of Hesla's discussion. While my thesis is not directly concerned with theological matters, it is an interpretive piece, and as such exposes not only Hawthorne's religious concerns, but mine as well. I hope that once I present some of my musings on the nature of the critical

process, the reader may have a better grasp of how I conceive of my task as a literary critic in the field of religion and culture.

In *THE NEW ORPHEUS* Nathan Scott, Jr. assesses the "modern experiment in criticism," condemning the general disregard it has for expressly theological reactions to literature. Criticism, he says, must be theological; anything short of this realization amounts to abdication of responsibility.

I have no objection to the idea that criticism can be theological. In fact, I wonder how it can escape being just that. Scott speaks of literature as an "incarnation" of the vision of the artist. Because it is fundamentally oriented by the vision, by the artist's "ultimate concern," it is essentially religious in nature.(163) Criticism, then, is implicitly involved in discovering the theology of the work, just as the art piece is already an expression of some religious comprehension of reality. This, the climax of Scott's argument, is the beginning of mine.

Art, while it is an expressive medium, is also a transformative one: it can both bless and challenge the very ground on which it stands. The religious dimensions of the work itself evolve and reshape during the course of--as a function of--the creative process. When exposed to the duress of critical inquiry, the symbols and images are released kaleidoscopically, being altered, molded, and renamed. Interpretation, then, is neither a key which unlocks nor a grid which measures. It is a dialogical process, a convergence of symbols, not an effort in "translation."

The very act of interpreting art exerts creative pressure on the method of inquiry. Criticism, particularly theologically informed criticism, can no more be a set of static principles applied to art than art is a mere object to be assessed. Theology does not simply exist in a person's mind separate from and prior to one's critical faculties. To criticize art from a theologically informed viewpoint is a far more complex operation than simply annexing dogma to insight. It is to articulate a position in relation to the art work in question. The act of criticizing means the finding of one's position, and that means finding one's theology in the process.

Interaction with art engages the whole self. This is what Eliot was so concerned about when he admonished fellow Christians to be highly selective about what they read.(see Eliot in Tennyson) The aesthetic sense does not abide in quarters separate from the moral or the ethical. And neither are these faculties pre-fabricated qualities, autonomous entities "belonging" to us. Presenting ourselves to art is the same as engaging in an invitation to reform, to transformation. And it is this very interaction that precipitates the discovery of who and where I am. In short, it reveals to me my theology.

Art embodies the form and movements of our very existence; it is the "working out of our destiny."(Dixon: 156) Criticism, then, is as much an act of seeking our own theology as it is working to discern that of the text's. Theological criticism, in this sense, is a mode of participation, a contemplative art, not merely a spectator sport.

It means looking for a theology, and not just looking to apply the one we already have.

APPROACHING THE TEXT: Literary Criticism

The source which best helped me to understand and identify my own critical perspective is Giles Gunn's article on the relationship of literature to religion (1971). Based on M.H. Abram's discussion of four main critical traditions, Gunn reiterates the history and focus of these theoretical bases. Manoeuvring around their faults and assets, he finally strikes a pose which embodies his own critical preference, an eclectic one which incorporates the benefits of the other models.

My approach to THE SCARLET LETTER is not nearly so systematic. I have tried to curb my undisciplined eclecticism, to maintain a balance between method and subject matter, so that they work to interpret one another. Having been alerted to the pitfalls of myopic devotion to a single approach, I have worked to sustain dialogue, to encourage the continuous reshaping of my own conclusions.

Considerations of the main critical positions are located diffusely throughout the thesis. Chapter four is the only section that focuses exclusively on THE SCARLET LETTER and, as such, it is informed by a formalist approach. In order to understand the central role spatiality plays in the romance, I look closely at the story itself. As a self-contained entity, the story's meaning is derived

from and transmitted by its own internal parts. My task is to make obvious the logic of that rendering.

Mimetic, pragmatic, and genre considerations figure largely in chapter three, under the auspices of cultural history. There I ask questions such as: Is THE SCARLET LETTER a true portrayal of the Puritans? Or is it predominantly expressive of Hawthorne's private struggles--his constrained position as an artist, his convictions about the nature of man? These questions can be illuminated once we apprehend the context in which the story was received by his contemporaries. Or by us. The status of THE SCARLET LETTER as a classic in American literature is reflective of serious deliberations about the "worthiness," the significance, of the book as a cultural artifact. Whether the story is valued primarily as instructive (pragmatic), or a faithful portrait of the Puritans (mimetic), or, whether it displays the Romantic preoccupation with revealing the true nature of the poet (expressive), it nonetheless deserves the close, careful attention of a sustained theoretical criticism. Any approach to the piece, however, must be willing to subordinate itself to the truths inherent in the text. René Girard describes exactly what I think is the ideal relationship between art and criticism:

Instead of interpreting the great masterpieces in the light of modern theories, we must criticize modern theories in the light of these masterpieces.... We have more to learn from them than they have to learn from us.... Our conceptual tools do not come up to their level; instead of "applying" to them our ever changing methodologies, we should try to divest ourselves of our misconceptions in order to reach the superior perspective they embody.(xx-xi)

THE DIVINATION OF CONTEXT: Cultural History

For a long time, Gunn claims, those in religion and literature adhered to the Tillichian notion that religion is the substance of culture, culture being simply the form of religion. (1975) Criticism based on this assumption, he says, was largely a matter of looking for religious themes "contained" in literature. With the continuous reformulation of theological paradigms, this particular one has receded into the background. The kind of criticism that can articulate the connections between religion and culture must be committed to studying the relationship between the text and context--the context of which the art is a product and in which it is received. This is an interpretive process respecting art as a "functional relation," (Dixon: 154) as a vehicle for embodying and transmitting truth across time. Criticism of this kind is inevitably historical (attaching itself to evolving conditions) and cultural (focusing on the structures underlying those conditions).

In my view cultural history is the criticism of "placement." Its organizing metaphor is primarily spatial. "Doing" cultural history means following movement, attending to position and stance; it means paying attention to clusters of action and the spaces in between. Cultural history reaches across the expansiveness of an age. It records pace and direction; it notes distance and diversion. To view a culture historically is to watch it from all angles--a backward

glance from our present position will not suffice. What occurs in history is "recorded in time," but time is not the exclusive ledger. Cultural history "flattens" time, then stalks across it.

My understanding of criticism grows out of response to the consummate works of such people as Perry Miller and F.O. Matthiessen. These are scholars whose writings reflect what Alfred Kazin calls the "histoire morale," the spirit of an age. (Kazin in Gunn, 1975:180) Linger first on the ineffable quality of an era, they then move beyond it, to scan the vistas that lie ahead.

The difference in sophistication between my notion that cultural history requires thinking spatially and F.O. Matthiessen's actual ability to "place" a masterpiece--as he does with the works of the American renaissance(1941)--points out how the enthusiast lags behind the artisan. It does not, however, betray a difference in fundamentals in conception and approach. This gives me boundless encouragement.

There is an important sense in which my method both determines and reflects my subject. Understanding cultural history as a critically spatial enterprise allows me to pursue spatial elements in a piece of literature. This method spawns its own aberrations along with bright offspring. It is nonetheless significant that both the model of criticism and the object of it secure my descent in one direction and not in another.

Although I have^s chosen a literary classic as a forum for exploring space as metaphor, my basic intention does not reflect

Lonnie Kliever's belief that it is an example of "story-based spatiality." I am working on a particular story. "Story," as it is used by Kliever and some others in religious studies, is seldom accompanied by even an indefinite article. "Story" is a generic term: it can mean novel or autobiography or myth. But the term itself, if left to circulate indiscriminately, becomes an amorphous void, a catch-all, evoking mythic connotations which claim to supercede its colloquial roots. I distrust adherence to a model loaded with such projections.

Interest in story as "the" paradigm for communicating and preserving human values has taken firm hold in diverse corners of religious studies. Central to this movement is concentration on the essentially narrative quality of existence.(Crites) Story is celebrated as the connective medium in our lives, leading us back to myth and archetype while relieving us of facelessness in an incoherent present.(Winquist) Theological reflection, TeSelle claims, ought to be shaped by story itself. None of these ideas is reminiscent of anything I have set forth, nor anything I am likely to. My inclination to work on this particular story is motivated by completely different concerns. As it stands, I leave ruminations on the parabolic nature of existence to those who claim to know what that means. This frees me up to assume the role I prefer, that of "spiritual geologist."(Gunn, 1975:179)

I will burrow through THE SCARLET LETTER, attending to the continuities and faults inherent in the structure of the piece,

recording patterns that embody the mysteries and lay bare their secrets. Essentially, my goal will be to emulate what Perry Miller describes as tracing the continuities of experience beneath the articulation of ideas.(1956:184-5)

If all this seems like a peculiarly mixed agenda--traversing the nineteenth century, circumambulating the novel, then re-animating its metaphors in the present--little will be lost if I push my methods to their limits. With any success, the meaning of the term "criticism" will expand to include the possibility of regeneration as well as divination.

CHAPTER TWO

CULTURAL HISTORY:

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

The purpose of this chapter is to present a cross-section of images central to the thematic core of THE SCARLET LETTER. In order to accomplish this, I have decided to rely on examples which illustrate my method and choose a method that realizes my goal. I have selected from a variety of sources ideas which I amplify and then contrast with recurrent themes in the story. The themes discussed are an admixture of some associated traditionally with the novel and others that are surprisingly underrated and overlooked. Naturally, this last category appeals to me, because typically glossed over themes betray the intellectual investments of a particular field or era. Spatiality is a noteworthy example of this. The combination of these topics is designed as a sounding board for ideas mounted in chapter four. It is not representative of scholarly investigation into Hawthorne's intentions, nor exhaustive of all themes suggested by the story.

THE PURITANS

A good deal of the criticism of THE SCARLET LETTER presupposes a rudimentary familiarity with Puritanism. Considering that the story is set in seventeenth century Boston, it is hardly surprising that

critical endeavor has, by and large, been an investigation into Hawthorne's depiction of a moral affront in the Puritan community. What is surprising is the lack of critical distinction between fictionalized Puritanism and its historical referent. Hawthorne's portrayals have virtually supplanted documentation; the "dour," "grim," and "grisly" ancestor has become, for many, representative of the real thing, a readily accessible substitute for historical data.

What interests me about this phenomenon is not so much that Hawthorne has been appointed chronicler of the Puritan dynasty, but that criticism dwells on that appointment without recognizing itself as a source of cultural memory. One hundred and thirty years of response to Hawthorne's novel is a study in the evolution of cultural attitudes towards all kinds of issues, Puritan influence being only one. I consider this body of criticism more valuable as an indicator of social thought than as a compendium of insights into the meaning of the story.

This dual nature of criticism presents a wealth of intriguing problems when trying to place the novel in its cultural historical context. For instance, I think it is important to understand the Puritans in order to fully appreciate *THE SCARLET LETTER*, but what Puritanism does that mean? Do I research the customs and beliefs of the New England colony (on which Hawthorne's ideas are based), or do I rely primarily on the author's rendition of Puritan life? Either approach contains implicit assumptions about how the story should be read and what the comparative models should be. The limitations of

relying on either scheme as the authoritative source grow out of these same assumptions.

The preferred route, it seems to me, is that which traces the evolution of images, in history and fiction, associated with the Puritans. By doing so, errant tendencies--such as reading back into Puritan history the conceptions of a nineteenth century romance writer--may be allayed. Also, sorting out the "real" from "fictional" becomes a search for something other than mimetic faithfulness. The emphasis shifts away from Hawthorne as dramatist of the Puritans to images of the Puritans that both fit and do not fit Hawthorne's dramas. Such a process takes seriously the historicity of fiction and the fictionality of history. Both history and fiction act as image-makers. And criticism, literary or otherwise, is a guide, an index, to such images.

"For two centuries our social thinking has been dominated by ideas which were generated in the course of a sweeping revolt against everything for which the Puritans stood."(Miller, 1963:181-2) This comment may explain the roots of a literary enquiry that has rejected a moderate appraisal of Puritan traits. Having taken Hawthorne at his word that the novel's outline was based on authentic plausibilities, critics have then proceeded to read the story as the paradigm for Puritan repression.

I doubt this tack would have pleased Hawthorne, whose acute historical sensibility obliged him to do his homework before committing himself to paper. Since he went to great lengths to link

scenes and situations to corresponding times and events in the 1640's (see Ryskamp in Norton), I think it is important to look at the Puritans of that period in order to apprehend the significance of this effort. I also think that once we have some idea what life was like for the Massachusetts Bay Company, viewing the Puritans as a rigidified remnant of Protestantism* will no longer be acceptable. Instead, I propose the history of the colony be thought of as an adaptive response, and not a reactionary one, to the phenomenon best characterized as displacement.

When we look back and consider what a strange poise of spirit the Lord hath laid upon so many of our hearts, we cannot but wonder at ourselves that so many...should leave our accommodations and comforts, should forsake our dearest relations...overlook all the dangers and difficulties of the vast seas...and all this to go to a wilderness, where we could forecast nothing but care and temptations, only in hopes of enjoying Christ in his ordinances, in the fellowship of his people.(Shepard cited in Slotkin: 41)

Thomas Shepard's "Defense of the Answer," although intended as a statement of apology and a reaffirmation of purpose, struggles with ambivalence about the Puritan migration from England. Departing from familiarity to the land of limitless opportunity brought with it the necessity to justify the same to those left behind. Those comprising the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1629 were convinced of their holy calling. Theirs was not an escapist measure; neither was it for personal gain. They were a select people, ordained as the forerunners of the kingdom, off to America to establish there what could not come to fulfillment in Europe. America was not the promised land, it was the wilderness, and as God had guarded the Israelites when He led them

out of Egypt, so too would the faithful few on this spiritual quest be protected and blessed so long as they remembered their covenant.

They were emigrants in exile, but only temporary exile; this was what was so important for their brethren (and enemies) in England to understand. They were not refugees but pioneers, and woe to the Anglicans and Presbyterians once the colony had been chastened and made ready by ordeal to return. And if they themselves could not return, then their children would or the mantle would surely pass to those of sympathetic mind who had seen that the model of Christendom in America was fit for replication everywhere. Rumours implicating the Puritans as faint of heart--as deserters of the fight to rectify the church from within or as merchants tilted toward riches in the colonies--had to be squelched. Shepard's treatise argued against these charges with astringent defensiveness. But it was the creeping shadow of doubt among the chosen that needed the closest watching.

The plagues and hardships which greeted the company the moment they set foot on New England soil were fitting proof that their mission was extraordinary. But the hopes that inner anxieties over breaking bonds and blood ties would be stilled were left to fester--America was awesome, but it was not home. On either side, the colonists were bordered by the forest's "devil-worshipping" natives, and the land's sheer immensity. For civilization to gain even a foothold both would have to be "cultivated." What could not be cultivated, however, was continuity with life as they had known it. Too much had changed. Communication with the continent was broken.

Children born to the transplanted remnant lacked any direct experience of old world life and so grew away from the ideals, the habits of mind, which had sustained their parents through hardship.

In short, the projected vision of America as tabula rasa was a grave error. The notion that, to short-circuit the entrenched powers of European Protestantism, it was necessary simply to start over in unpolluted territory underestimated the power of migration as a transformative act. America was not the blank slate it was hoped to be; instead, the exigencies of colonization forced the Puritans to merge with the temperament of the land, to reform and adapt rather than impose and correct. The kingdom, as it turned out, would have to be a compromise.

The irony is that, on some level, they already knew this. Yet this fact was resisted continually, at least until it was too late to re-direct the course of thought. Certainly they would never have survived, let alone flourished, had they not responded to the exacting demands of wilderness life. Their reluctance to Americanize was lodged firmly in commitment to an unyielding ideal, that of a purified state. It was the idea of America--the land of opportunity--which was most important; actual geography diminished in significance alongside the landscape strewn with spiritual projections. Ambivalence toward the land was mediated by mythological overlay. As pilgrims in quest of salvation, they could afford no concessions to the wilderness. Yet neither could they ignore the physical and temporal realities--disease, pestilence, threat of

attack--which life in the territories forced upon them. Their anxieties were subdued by the collective assurance that America, after all, was the stage on which this holy drama was set. It was not an irrepressible dramatic force. Or was it?

The Puritans had placed themselves in an untenable position. What they yearned for was a vacant spot, a land unadulterated by European influence, where they could erect that "City upon a Hill" and draw all eyes unto it. What they met with was a rude, lush country, indifferent to the vision to which it was expected to yield. Indifference is not the same as neutrality, however. The land would not conform; it had to be conquered. And the mythology of an "errand into the wilderness" would change to reflect, even justify, that experience.

Geographical images flourished, replete with promises of bounty and threats of menace. The concept of an errand dominated the Puritan sense of mission. But wilderness--the very ground under their feet--turned out to be anything but a mere backdrop. It shifted in significance, absorbing and projecting the ambivalence that never quite made its way to the surface. Geography, then, because it was so loaded with irreconcilable and unconscious images, was not neutral at all. It was a veritable mythmaker. The very fact that it had to be subdued and civilized catapulted it from the role of background to that of formidable opposition. So much for having escaped Old World tyranny. The Puritans, in their singleminded efforts to protect the errand, found themselves wedged into a corner, disaffiliated from

Europe and bewildered in America. The city of God would have to be built somewhere between.

If there is truth to the popular conception of the Puritans as unrelenting, mirthless die-hards, then it is the truth of caricature--an uncompromising attitude of purpose almost invites burlesque imitation. The early Puritan colony refused to compromise its ideals, refused to harbour the heretical. They were committed to overcoming evil, not tolerating it. The severity that characterized their deportment in New England was cultivated. For a people fending off the depravities of sin, the subtle differences between rigor and rigidity were slight. Hemmed in by temptation on all sides, the Puritan turned inward and found only the "loathsome abominations that lay in his bosom."

In order to survive these unmitigated pressures, the Puritans fashioned a system of psychological barricades which acted both as defensive and offensive measures. Perhaps they did not design it so much as they were possessed by it. As a complexity of emotions and ideas it cohered as a system, an organic unity, and disturbance of any elements dislodged others from their functional niche.

It is important to remember that Puritan psychology did not exist separate from its religious foundation. The Puritans brought with them a cosmology deeply exercised in the scholastic thought of the day. They approached all matters of this world formally, in accordance with logic and truth, and with enduring values. They were a people equipped to perpetuate those values under trying

circumstances, and to transform their new environment by imposing law where lawlessness reigned. The world, as they had known it, was unified, structured, and subject to fixed principles animated by divine plan. But they were leaving the world they had known, and this act alone was enough to shake (and possibly shatter) the belief in absolute stability.

The Puritan migration to America was not, to Europeans, an especially threatening incident, yet it proved to be an ominous one. Religious and political upheaval had irreparably altered the course of life on the continent. Europeans would continue to feel the aftereffects of disruption; and none more than those who resisted the changes left in its wake and fled its resurgence. David Leverenz studies the consequences of voluntary displacement, such as that undergone by the Puritans that came to America. He describes Puritanism as an "ambivalent psychological response, expressed in theological language, to various tensions and conflicts in an age of dislocation."^(ix) The conflicts, he says, sprang from the general weakening of traditional norms. Male identity suffered in the transition and evolution from old to new world patterns. The Puritan faith offered a response to uneasy perceptions of the shift in patriarchal authority. Unconscious ambivalence about the male role resulted in both protecting and undermining it at the same time. The fear that one's father was losing his calling in the New World precipitated a concerted effort to support him, and in doing so reinforced apprehensions that he was indeed less than self-sufficient.

The tension inherent in this very dynamic, Leverenz insists, helped energize the Puritan vision and sustain the need for it as a cultural and religious force.

Change and upheaval, even when not consciously acknowledged, drive threatened values to our attention. In the effort to preserve and protect them, elaborate defense strategies take shape. They may be deliberately instituted and enforced, as were rules to keep the colony unified and subject to ecclesiastical discipline, or they may evolve as a model and an expression of these values, as did images of the family. A select people cannot afford to be contaminated. They must be watchful of their own members as well as others, especially outsiders who might threaten the members' solidarity. Deviation, as in the case of Anne Hutchinson, was strictly guarded against. When chastisement did not suffice, banishment usually did. Unregenerates might be admonished much the same way the merrymakers in Hawthorne's tale were by the dread Endicott when he glowers, "For such as violate our civil order, it may be permitted us to show mercy. But woe to the wretch that troubleth our religion."

While the threat of dissolution loomed heavily--succumbing to either English or Indian influence would assure this, the colonist felt--it was all the more important to secure community identity. Images of the family did just this by bonding and perpetuating the religious structure of the community. The relationship of man to God was like that of a wife to her husband, it was preached. Leverenz looks at the associations clustered around husband and wife imagery

and finds them in keeping with traditional, patriarchal models. The husband's role was that of head of the family; his duties, both in the church and in the community, were akin. His position was authoritative: it was that of lordship, priesthood, and public dominance. The wife, on the other hand, represented the more "womanly" aspects of experience. Her nature was given over to the care and nurturing of children. And, like the children she raised, she was more emotive, spontaneous, and expressive. As the man's domain was the church and government, hers was the home and the individuals entrusted to her keeping. Puritan mothers were encouraged to be tender and loving; child-rearing was deemed extremely important considering its formative effects on the future of the community. In general, Leverenz notes, the freedom to express oneself emotionally was assumed by women and children, and suppressed by men. The demonstration of weakness was not acceptable among men. Because women, however, did not pose such a threat to the actual running of the community, they were allowed emotional latitude, something which eventually became one of their strengths. In fact, Puritan women were favoured as religious models--their dependent status in marriage trained them for a right relationship with God. (Porterfield: 34)

Associations like this eventually forced male identity into stricter, narrower channels. As fathers, men were expected to offset the indulgences resulting from excessive mother love. This they had to do in their children, but also in themselves. Leverenz comments that the father's role was to curb self-trust and develop a sense of


shame and guilt, and, of course, sin. The Puritan family, then, exercised conflicting beliefs: that one was to feel valued and cared for, yet feel sinful and ashamed. The combined effect of this emotional dualism, he continues, was to suppress the very acknowledgment of male weakness and compensate for it by "aggressive posturing." (259) This, he says, is what inspired the nineteenth century ideal of solitary individualism. It also led to a family structure that was dichotomized and not balanced, as was its Puritan forerunner. The "ever-watchful Father...dried up into the astringent Yankee who could wither his young with a look, or a distance." (266)

THE SCARLET LETTER is a story of Puritans who bear a striking resemblance to their nineteenth century descendants. It is not likely those who read it recognized this; perhaps even Hawthorne himself shrank from admitting to the likeness. In any case, nineteenth century culture was too busy celebrating its independence from its antiquated Puritan legacy to notice. Constrictions on religious liberty and social and philosophical models that coloured the nation's view of itself and its destiny were being shirked and discarded.

The new America was filled with people on the move away from the depressing shadow of ancestral restraint. They relished freedom, the freedom to get away, the freedom to be, as D.H. Lawrence quipped, "masterless." (in Wilson: 912) And in their exuberance they forgot the lesson their forefathers had learned the hard way: displacement is a conserving force. It sets the pendulum swinging between two fixed extremes, the past and the present. By breaking out of the old

models--by "sophisticating" theological and family images--nineteenth century America exchanged its inheritance for the right to dissent and in doing so, found itself in the very position the Puritans had been herded into. America was now caught between those same two untenable extremes, the Old World (which now included Europe and Puritanism) and the wilderness (which, still, would have to be conquered). Somewhere in the liminal strand between a disinherited past and an uncertain future, America found the voice that gave form to its calling. It is the same voice that narrates THE SCARLET LETTER.

Any literary critic I have read is more than happy to talk about how exciting and dramatic mid-nineteenth century New England was. Apparently, it was a rare age in the history of letters, perhaps for any country, certainly for a blustering new one barely aware of its own artistic pulse. As R.W.B. Lewis describes it, America was a culture in the making. It was the centre of intellectual debate on the possibilities imaginable to the inhabitants of the New World. And everyone was in on the debate, for everyone had a stake in what could become of America. Historians, novelists, and theologians all exercised their keenest powers in exploring and expanding new images. It is not hard to guess what themes cropped up repeatedly--America as the seedbed of hope, the garden of the second Adam, Adam given a second chance. The literary masterpieces of that period more or less follow Adam around, and occasionally prey upon his innocence, just to see if it is the real thing. The new Adam, curiously enough, is no



longer around, but the romances about him still are, which might say something about the New World itself.

The first flush of maturity in what we now recognize as classic American literature occurred at the century's midpoint, marking the last of the struggle of eighteenth century liberalism with the rise of the acquisitive spirit. This was the age of the gold rush, the age of American myth. Each of the books released in this transitional decade (1850's) reworked the themes that were fast becoming clichéd--experience, sin, time, hope, evil, tradition--and it is to these that we turn when we want to know "what life was like" back then: Emerson's REPRESENTATIVE MEN, Melville's MOBY-DICK, Thoreau's WALDEN, Whitman's LEAVES OF GRASS, Hawthorne's THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES, and THE SCARLET LETTER. While none of these works was a best seller in its time, each has secured a place in America's literary heritage because of its peculiar genius in articulating America to itself.

This investment in hindsight underscores America's curiosity about its classics. They are considered enduring and valuable because they vivify the ideas of an age. In fact, none of these literary pieces is a portraiture of day to day American life at all. How, then, do we know the relation of recurring themes to temporal anxieties if we study one to the exclusion of the other? Life in nineteenth century America was troubled about all sorts of things aside from eternal verities. If the flux and flow of those stirrings can be tapped, even briefly, then perhaps the timeliness of the classics will

be appreciated.

THE ROMANCE: Nature's Genre

Europe was inspired by the French Revolution. By the turn of the century, it became very important to proclaim one's nationalism and retrieve the mystery of one's origins. America, unfortunately, could not quite get in on this seige of the primitive: it was not yet "old" enough to really have a past (not to mention the fact that Americans were busy living theirs down). Besides, England taunted, America had been founded on a dull, rationalistic platform; it had no claim to mystery. England, on the other hand, had Sir Walter Scott. He gave back to England what it had not quite realized was missing: romance. Judging by the immediate success of Scott's romances (he used the term to distinguish his intentions from that of novelists and gothic writers) on both sides of the sea, everyone found the romance to be just the right thing. It was the perfect blend of morals and adventure.

America lacked for neither. What it needed was someone who could dramatize the past, make it resound with noble intentions. It took James Fenimore Cooper to do just that. And what Cooper did was only the beginning. In essence, he gave America the fodder for myth, right at a time when the country was ripe for self-expansion. The national ego was recovering some of its mirth and esteem, so it appeared, from the religious pall of its forefathers. Descendants of the Puritans

had cast off the old theology a while ago, only to realize it had found a comfortable lodging in social convention. The virtue of restraint then kept the imagination tame until transcendentalism began erupting in bored Unitarians. The spirit was on the rise again: the urge to express that vital connection between man and wilderness could not, it seemed, be refined right out of necessity. It could, however, be made palatable, even desirable, by making it over into something other than a purely religious appetite. The romance--emblem of a leap in national consciousness--became the medium in which the wilderness became "Nature." And Nature (it was all becoming clear now) provided the rationale for America. Even though it took an act of will to found America, Miller says, "despite ourselves we have become parts of the landscape."(1967:11)

Wanting to identify oneself with Nature was not the same as imitating it. It meant something more radical than that. Balzac captured the essence of the vision when he praised Cooper's tales for embodying the spirit of the land they described. The idea was not so much to become like the land as to be made richer, deeper through association with it. Nature was the sublime; contact with it meant communion with the profound order of things. Chastized by her--and Nature was unequivocally a "she"--inspirational qualities, the self-reliant hero of Emersonian stature stood apart from the hubbub of civilization, no longer in need of explicitly Christian revelation, unperturbed by encroaching land barons. Self-reliance, Miller notes, was exactly what the strapping young country needed in order to

conquer a continent.(1967:152) It may also have been what the religiously inclined needed to break rank with the rest of the churchgoers, who, fortified by the protection of their religious liberty, could not then decide where to cast their lot. Nature was the simple, lofty answer to America's identity.

And that was precisely the problem. Leverenz points this out using psychoanalytic concepts. The idealization of nature and individualism were, as he says, "fantasy structures" that arose as means to cope with radically changing family life at the turn of the nineteenth century.(266) Increasing industrialization had split the family in two: father went to work (away from the home), and mother looked after the children. Young boys, for the first time in America, were left at home with mother until they were old enough to set out on their own. Tensions in the shift from stable, patriarchal family to the consumer, middle-class unit eventually erupted into clever alternatives to facing social realities: escape and self-confrontation. Nature would then be the haven, the womb-like shelter, where one could face deeper, more real questions about ultimacies and not be bothered with oppressive demands to conform.

This discussion may seem a digression from the romance we left in the hands of Balzac until we notice that romancers after Cooper fit Leverenz's description of displaced young men in search of grander themes. I am not saying the romances, particularly those of Hawthorne and Melville, are mere literary projections of personal dilemmas. Instead, I agree with Leverenz on the importance of paying attention

to consistent patterns--like weakness or absence of fathers in the lives of nineteenth century writers--so that we may better understand the complex of motives "for fashioning a literature that could express personal conflicts in public language."(270) And if writers really are, as he calls them, "psychic barometers," then the truths disseminated in their writings are addressed to all of us, insofar as we participate in and are shaped by a cultural mind.

The nineteenth century romance translated the national experience into a medium where it could be confronted, even indulged, without direct consequence. The very suggestion of romance reminds one that both reader and author have a certain latitude of response to the genre. Scott's romances were, he maintained, "fictitious," their interests turned "upon marvellous and uncommon incidents."(cited in Miller, 1967:243-44) For Hawthorne, the great conservative apologist for the American romance, his art was to remain controlled by a higher realism; it pointed to a world of balance and reconciliation. His desire to convey this to his audience elicited metaphoric allusions, "The romance is a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other."(1978:31)

The romance, Bell insists, was a departure not from realism but from reality.(10) Realism, insofar as it was developed in American fiction, and especially in this genre, meant faithfulness to detail, vraisemblance, as it was called. It was the "dramatic interplay of mind and setting."(Miller, 1967:260) The unreality portrayed in the

romance, however, was of a psychological nature, and this actually was its trademark. It tended to reduce characters to types, rather than flesh them out fully; action and not characterization was emphasized. What involvements there were between parties tended to be narrow and obsessive, lacking history and plausibility. Chase sums up its peculiarly liminal qualities when he says romance is "a kind of border fiction." (19) The borders have been crossed. The adventures of Cooper and Simms stalked the wilderness; the reflexive dramas of Hawthorne tread the nether regions of the mind.

The romancer's contrivances invariably included introducing a dark heroine to a fair (i.e., American) hero at some juncture in the story. This is far from a desired balance, however, as the woman is typically a stranger, a foreign influence; she is perhaps too natural. This makes her a threat to the hero--a seductive threat--and a perversion of true, natural impulses, which must then exercise poetic justice to set the situation aright. This, of course, means the woman must be eliminated. I will let Miller's gothic prose set the picture in motion:

Into undefiled Nature went the characters of Romance; within it the dark forces were exorcised, and out of it the creatures of light, male and female, emerged--strengthened, purified, exuding a native virtue that not only needed no instruction from European sophistication but could proudly scorn the culture of the Old World as a mask of depravity. (1967:252)

How little this sounds like the climax of *THE SCARLET LETTER*, yet how typical it seems of popular associations with romances. Certain elements remain a constant in Hawthorne's repertoire, perhaps because

conventionalized images are the most disarming when they are inverted or rearranged. Yet Hester, when compared with her dark sisters in other tales, resembles more closely the heroine of sentimental literature--the saintly woman who "engrosses the sympathy of her readers by suffering harsh seventeenth century penalties for humane nineteenth century beliefs." (Douglas: 127) The conflicts between Puritan fathers and young girls comprised an actual sub-genre of historical fiction at mid-century. And yet, curiously enough, it was the saga of the feminine victims and not the story of Hester that American women lapped up.

The market for popular literature, mostly magazine fiction, was flooded with lofty, sentimental stories that plagued the imaginations of female readers. They also plagued the minds of the "serious" authors, waiting in limbo for recognition from the rapt public. How is it that that "damned mob of scribbling women" Hawthorne so resented kept their readers sufficiently engrossed that they need not turn to the jewels of literature for emotional and intellectual sustenance? And how is it that virtually none of the rivals in sentimental and mass-produced literature has survived its own era? Perhaps they were consumed by their own short-term interests. If so, they expired only to recycle when the climate was right, thoroughly conventionalized and predictable.

Eventually the nineteenth century romance reached the limits of the very form it had discovered, outgrowing the niche it had created for itself. Having aligned the American identity with the fate of

Nature, the romance defeated its own best intentions--all the while the romance climbed to the zenith, the wilderness was being razed to the ground. In recognition of this, the romance is moved to an "elegy of disenchantment." (Miller, 1967:255) *MOBY-DICK* and *THE SCARLET LETTER* are the results.

But was it simply the end of the agrarian era and the threat to the frontier the romance decried? It could not possibly be, for both writers were critical of the very cult that had brought them to prominence. Melville and Hawthorne rejected the escapists' vision. Identity, they felt, could not simply be found in the past, nor in the idealized, feminized world of the forest. They remained the two writers who stood over against Emersonian optimism and its insipid imitators, who resisted the flattery of a romance with nature.

In an age of unprecedented enthusiasm, Hawthorne and Melville pressed beyond the boundaries of this falsifying constraint. America, straddling the borders of civilization and the wilderness, could not seem to strike a balance. In such a compromising position, it stood, vulnerable to the fatal blow of the pendulum--that pendulum set in motion by the acts of retreat: romanticization and escapism. It is this ambivalent motion, this oscillation between illusions, that characterizes the momentum in *THE SCARLET LETTER* and that, when ultimately arrested, leaves the romantic genre lifeless.

HAWTHORNE: A Citizen of Somewhere Else

Before plunging into the text of THE SCARLET LETTER, I pause momentarily to honour the author whose romance has inspired this venture into strange territories. Continuing my focus on context, I dwell on Hawthorne the artist, the cultural diviner, and interpreter. Were THE SCARLET LETTER not a classic, the question of relation between the author and his work would be central, and probably disturbing. I maintain, however, that the story is a unified whole. It speaks for itself. Biographical materials are not necessary for interpretation of the romance, although they supplement our appreciation of the fact the story was written at all.

Calling Hawthorne a cultural historian is commonplace in contemporary criticism, but that was not always the case. The distinct advantage the modern reader possesses is having access to a body of historical and cultural data that makes possible long-range perspective. Looking across time, we recognize Hawthorne as a spokesman for his age and not simply an isolated artisan. This is something his contemporaries could not always see. As artists, Hawthorne and Melville were so immersed--so identified with--their times, they were paradoxically isolated from the mainstream. While the rest of the culture seemed to hum along uninterruptedly with the flow of progress, the artists buried themselves deeper and deeper in one spot. This meant, naturally, that their peers viewed Hawthorne and Melville from a very different vantage point than the one the authors occupied.

At the time Hawthorne was writing, America was busy creating

itself. Being highly self-conscious about artistic renditions of American life, the literary public was critical of the value--both moral and aesthetic--of a writer's work. The mid-century period has been described by some as a climate hostile to the life of the imagination.(see Bell) It was a time when artistic integrity did not exist independent of social expectations. This meant people took exception to writing they felt exhibited "ungentlemanly" tendencies. Hawthorne's humorous derision of the wornout sea-farers in "The Custom-House" shocked fellow Salemites. Their reaction typified the general consensus, which was that if literature is not edifying, it is better left unwritten.

The curious thing about Hawthorne was that, on one level, he agreed with this view (his conservative theory of romance implies this), yet he continually undermined it on another. What accounts for this stance, I think, is Hawthorne's view of what is edifying. His understanding of the morality of writing was rooted in a respect for faithfulness to that higher realism which transformed the ordinary into the archetypal. Hawthorne possessed that rare gift of being able to mold objectionable traits into riveting personalities. These might be highly symbolic, as is the case with the characters in THE SCARLET LETTER, but they are not caricatures. Hawthorne allowed even his most despicable characters their integrity, which is another way of saying he respected the existence of evil. The "power of darkness" that Melville seized upon in Hawthorne's portraits was not the tantalizing chill of the gothic. It was the acute awareness of the underside of

the human personality. Hawthorne's care for what James called "the deeper psychology" bound him closely to those regions of the mind that are the most feared and the least understood. The obsessive types that haunt his tales seem terse and unintegrated when compared with modern conceptions of character development, yet they embody fears that are timeless and insidious. And perhaps this is what the public unwittingly objected to when they demanded the safer, more digestible fiction that placated the sentiments. America wanted something that would distract it from those ineradicable fears, not something that would stir them up.

By becoming a romance writer, Hawthorne had chosen a path that diverged sharply from that of his fellowmen. He had, in effect, opted for a "deviant career,"(Bell: 30) one that ran counter to the "real business of life." It is hardly a wonder that he felt so keenly the scorn of his Puritan ancestors. He felt scorned by his peers. The values that had moved his forefathers and sustained his countrymen would not be consonant with the cause of a moody New Englander who could find no place for himself in the world other than on paper.

We might never know whether Hawthorne deliberately became a writer because, as Bell suggests, it validated a sense of alienation.(35) How much this alienation was a felt state of mind and how much it was descriptive of his social circumstances is still in question. For a long while, Hawthorne was considered to be a vexed personality, a loner, a haunted recluse. Because he was philosophically opposed to the unfettered idealism of the times, he

was assumed to be under the spell of a gloomy disposition. This is not surprising, particularly when his associates--Emerson, for instance--positively glowed with transcendent luminosity. It was not until the posthumous release of his journals and notebooks by family members that sufficient evidence emerged to dispel the disparaging image. The debate over Hawthorne's true nature continues as people remain fascinated by the bond between the artist and his handiwork.

Regardless of the time period or the depth of inquiry, readers have had to face the same problems in Hawthorne's work: ambiguity, allegorization, the manifestations of evil, the connection between the individual and his environment. The more astute critics have shed light on these complexities and the patterns they weave through his works. James's biography of Hawthorne was the first of its kind to take seriously the artistic implications of these themes. Over the next few decades, however, there were few glimmers of insight into "the Hawthorne question" other than D.H. Lawrence's penetration into American literary classics and Eliot's essay on the influence of Hawthorne on James. The last forty years has seen a renewed interest in the romance writer. With the re-issuing and extensive availability of Hawthorne's works, in combination with critical skills from a diversity of disciplines, the way has opened up for a rich investigative movement.

What these works indicate is that Hawthorne was right. He believed that the way to endure for posterity was to live for one's own age. He did just that, which is why his art remains an important

commentary on Puritan morality, transcendentalism, and the nature of that second Adam. Hawthorne concerned himself with the evolution of America. He wanted to see how it had come to be shaped the way it was and in what direction and with what tools the country would advance. What intrigued him most were the choices facing America. In a world rapidly losing sight of enduring truths, Hawthorne was committed to articulating those truths. He was well aware of the task which faced him, and he prepared himself accordingly. He pored over everything he could get access to. The years after his return from college to his mother's house in Salem (1828-1838) found him either in his "haunted chamber," mulling over the visions that stalked his imagination, or in the Salem Atheneum, lapping up the history of a by-gone era. He relished the newspapers and almanacs; they were, he thought, written by the interests of "the age itself." It was these to which he turned for fodder and inspiration, and it was these that animated his keen historical sense. But they gave life to a past he was already deeply conscious of. The "black-browed Puritans" that were his forefathers might have wanted to deny any connection with their degenerate, fiction-peddling descendant, but they could not escape the fact that "strong traits of their nature had intertwined themselves" with his. Hawthorne's family history plagued him. The fact that his ancestors had persecuted and tortured Quakers and witches disturbed him, all the more so because of his acute sensitivity to the past. This gave him a stake in the traditions which condoned and perpetuated such intolerance. It also gave him a vested interest of a deeply

psychological nature in working out on paper what was too late to be resolved in actuality.

Hawthorne's writings have been regarded as catalogues of America's early moral development, but they were more than that. They were charts of the wanderings of an uneasy age, depicted by a "scout," an artist in the territories. Hawthorne mapped out the psychic homelessness of the new era, and in doing so, he charted the patterns of the terrain, left there by the first band of displaced idealists, the Puritans. The continuous, ambiguous movement of THE SCARLET LETTER is an expression of just this kind of homelessness. It is the search for the rhythm that carries and embodies the dilemmas of its characters. It is the tale of displaced persons--citizens of a moral wilderness. The moral and social constrictions that guide Puritan life are the girders of the story; they are the fixed points. Between these the restrained motion of the characters finds action and voice. This movement oscillates between the surfaces and the depths in such a way that, when followed, reveals the "principle value of the work."(Waggoner: 148) But it reveals something else as well: the rhythm and gait of a country animated by what Lawrence recognized was its "spirit of place."(in Wilson)

CHAPTER THREE

SPATIALITY:

REPRESSION OF THE OBVIOUS

In this chapter, I look exclusively at the nature of spatiality--the concept that encompasses space and spatial relationships. The following is an account of investigations into an area of human existence which has too long been ignored or abused in the modern world. I see no need to summarize all the scholarship in this area. The works cited have been chosen instead as examples of ongoing research; my intention is to demonstrate overlap and interplay between the areas represented. Those topics bearing significant relation to the thesis are considered foremost. Where possible, specific examples which demonstrate or clarify such topics are included in preference to general items of interest. Naturally, this organizational model excludes some works which are central to expanding research. An effort has been made, however, to display as wide a selection of viewpoints as possible, attending to the dynamics which give voice and substance to dialogue.

I begin with scholars of religion, who provide a fundamental philosophical-cultural orientation to the influence of space. The focus then shifts to cultural history, a field replete with geographical artifacts, followed by a study of spatial imperatives by the social sciences. I then move away from annotated data to an interpretive mode: that of the arts, where the poetic qualities of

space have long been recognized. The fifth area of interest is theology, the field which is just beginning to assess our debt to spatiality and its significance for moral/ethical considerations. The final section focuses attention on the body, the root of our sense of space. The chapter concludes with a look at the nature of embodiment (the containment of spatiality) and gesture (the expression of that containment).

RELIGIOUS STUDIES: Sacred Space

The recognition of space as a fundamental religious dimension was brought to the attention of religious studies in America by Mircea Eliade. By "breaking" space into two conceptual polarities--the sacred and the profane--Eliade identified the qualities of each dimension. His definition of sacred space may be summarized as: that which breaks in upon homogenous, profane space, demarcating a new spatial orientation. This break, particularly when it contains symbols of the centre--as do most major breaks--is an axis mundi, a consecrated point of reference between cosmic levels, facilitating the repetition of the primordial act of creation: world-founding. (Shiner, 426)

Eliade's view, a paradigmatic model for understanding human religiosity, has remained uncontested until recently. His ideas have influenced a generation of scholars in religion, conditioning the apprehension of space in human affairs as well as the prescribed

"religious" response to space. It is important to consider, however, how envisioning the nature of space--assuming it has a nature to begin with--as schismatic and divisive leads to conclusions which bear little or no relation to experiential analysis.

Eliade's portrayal of modern man's world as being "without structure or consistency, amorphous" is challenged by Larry Shiner's distinction, "lived space."(425) The dichotomized vision of spatiality is undermined by Shiner's focusing on what is common to our experiences of space, namely, that "lived space is the possibility of both the homogenous space of objectifying thought and the luminosity of sacred spaces."(425) In other words, both the language of scientific investigation and the symbols of religious tradition are grounded in the "life-world." The relegation of these modes of expression and quantification to the category "profane" completely misses the point that they stem from a common orientation.

Shiner contests the polarization of space, dissenting from the conceptual basis of work done by Eliade, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and Erich Isaac. It is not the qualities attributed to sacred space that concern him, but the consequences derived from the application of the theory itself. The description of space in terms of either/or principles simply does not reflect actual perception or experience of space. This dualistic thinking permeates the Western view of space. Shiner tries to alter the faulty postulate by showing that unquantified, geometric space is not the same as human space, which is "permeated with human significance."(425)

Shiner's criticism stops short of a provocative re-evaluation of current assumptions about space; he does alert us, however, to the inconsistencies which go unchallenged in habitual thinking. Kliever is dissatisfied with Shiner's argument because it does not go far enough: "Just as Eliade's definition of profane space is inadequate for our time so is his characterization of sacred space." (546) With the notion of sacred space uncontested, the breach between theory and experience is reinforced, and the implicit sacrality in human experience is ignored.

When Kliever argued that all stories "happen somewhere as well as sometime," he provided the rationale for this thesis.(529) His assertion that spatiality deserves serious attention--more so than does time (as time has been overrated, space ignored)--illustrates the stance which has of late become popular in religious studies. Kliever's voice was the first to be raised by those in religious studies; as such, his ideas have had a formative influence on recent efforts to make connections between religion, story, and space.

Reclaiming the religious significance of space from historians of religion, Kliever restores it to its proper base: the story. It is story, he maintains, that incites religious interest, for as "we speak of religion in story" it is "because we experience religion as story."(530) From this position, he concludes that it is "story-based spatiality" which answers to a basic structure of experience and to a central concern^f of religion."(531) After briefly identifying the source of his own interest in spatiality--a discombobulating move

across the street dislodged Kliever from his temporal complacency--he then summarizes the impact of this experience as three generalizable aspects of human spatiality: "1)We are unaware of space until we are seriously displaced. 2)We are embodied in space beyond our own bodies. 3)We are situated in space as fundamentally as in time."(532) Included in the ensuing discussion is a cross-section of definitive works in the field, a survey which is given coherence by the philosophical-scientific backdrop against which it is placed. Kliever traces the renunciation of space as moral and metaphysical category, listing the consequences resulting from the appropriation of time over space.

With the scientific reclassification of space and matter as objective, quantifiable properties, the subjective, "valorized" qualities of consciousness became associated with time. Use of spatial metaphors diminished as did their powers of connotation. The "eternal" and "historical," for instance, evolved as concepts that spatialized time; space became modifier of the "real" process--the continuum of time. The "conquering" of space, however, magnified the domain and dominion of time, making it the suspected rival of progress and expansion. The modern era considers aggression, freedom, and individualism premium virtues. It is these same qualities, however, which are then exercised in order to overcome the threat of time--a threat existing as a by-product of these very drives.

The indifference to space has finally played itself out. "Spatiality is becoming problematic again with a vengeance."(535)

Shifting perspectives in the arts and sciences undermine cloistered prejudices. Space travel has radically altered notions of expansive reality. Pollution, ecological atrocities, urban overcrowding, world food supply shortage--the list spirals as we come to the verge of cosmological displacement. Space and time encroach in tandem, "the twin threats, limits and media of our existence."(535)

I suspect that as awareness of spatiality increases, so too will our anxiety about it. The very fact that established theoretical propositions are now being called into question betrays a certain uneasiness about their influence over our patterns of thought. Yet, inevitably, by breaking out of one mode or approach, we succumb to chaos in the bleak interval between insights.

As we turn away from formidable, traditional categories in search of a language and method which will reveal and clarify our own existence, the stability of our worldview becomes more and more tenuous. Naming perceptions, like developing new theories, is a re-visioning of the world--one which affects our orientation in space and time, alike. We change the very nature of what we study by examining it, effecting, in the process, a slow erosion of our perception of self.

Occasionally, this corrosive process erupts into consciousness. Historian of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith follows the recovery of the structure of sacred space in Judaism.(1969) The repossession of Israel in 1947 and of the temple site, twenty years later, are events in the history of a people that "have re-awakened in an acute way the archaic

language of sacred space," confronting the modern Jew with religious artifacts "which he has proudly thought he has forgotten, myths and symbols which he frequently boasted to others that he never had."(104) It is "the re-birth of the long forgotten gods of the earth," which, as Richard Rubenstein (cited in Smith) reminds us, comes with re-possession of the homeland. Smith concludes his article by calling historians of religion to creativity; it will be their task to extend and re-imagine the mythologies that no longer speak for man in his world.

CULTURAL HISTORY: The Colonization of Space

This responsibility of the historian for engendering and fostering myths is echoed by a colleague in a not too distant field. W.R. Jacobs, historian of the American West, has researched the ecological history of the frontier, raising troubling conclusions about the role of the historian as exploiter. By largely ignoring the very phenomena which have brought present-day America to a severe environmental (and, consequently, identity) crisis, historians have served only to enforce the typical attitudes and policies responsible for this calamity.(Jacobs in Nash, 1972:34)

The historian, however, is swayed by the same bevy of images as everyone else. Man's relation to space, to his country, to his environment is conditioned in large measure by this store of interpretive images: by myths and symbols that recount the ineluctable

mysteries of life. The repository for these stories and images is the culture which gives them life. When a fundamental fact of existence is threatened, as is the ecological stability of American culture today, so too are those myths--the conserving principles of action. Leo Marx (in Nash) examines those assumptions and the ideals which are their precursors. As literary historian, he brings to his understanding of the American predicament an acute awareness of the artistic persuasion peculiar to the ecological sensibility.

The nineteenth century artist in America lived in a country of limitless opportunity, a land whose geography, policy, and spirituality were inextricably bound together. The classic writers of this period, all contemporaries of Hawthorne, lived and breathed this "thorough and delicate interpenetration of consciousness and environment." (Nash: 90) While they nonetheless remained eloquent critics of an encroaching utilitarianism, the romanticism permeating their stance often enhanced that of the opposition.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature" was published in 1836. That essay remains the definitive summary of America's attitude toward the environment and, by extension, the problem of spatiality. "Nature," said Emerson, "is the symbol of the spirit." It draws us toward the higher, transcendental values of life, such as beauty, discipline, and spiritual truth. But, he says, nature is also the source of provision and sustenance; its role as commodity is equally central, albeit not equally noble. Emerson's little tract points toward what was to become a rigid vacillation between two untenable extremes: that of nature as

exploitable resource and as model of the sublime.

The irretrievable esteem of a people in harmony with its environment is no longer an option it appears. Instead, a new approach, one which mediates between the futility of romanticism and the wastefulness of consumerism must be conceived and implemented--an approach which redirects the sway of indifference and resentment, attitudinal remnants of ambivalence.

In 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner's (see Nash) essay was published consecrating the "progress" of civilization. By the time his paper appeared, the celebration was a eulogy; the last glorious vestige of freedom had been claimed. Turner addressed a frontierless America. His legacy was seized enthusiastically, remaining, even now, an integral part of America's national image. This selective attention to the consequences of an unfettered, coast to coast pioneering crystallized into ideology. The history of this mode of thought and its dissenting offshoots is an invaluable source of reflection on the evolution of man's struggle with his own philosophies of space and action. "The landscape, rightly seen, is just as important an historical document as the printed page. While the one is marked with ink, the other bears the impress of axe and bulldozer. We know how to decipher the former; we are just beginning to "read" the latter."(Nash: 2)

SOCIAL SCIENCES: Topophilia and Territoriality

The confusion of virtues associated with the American wilderness at the close of the nineteenth century is only one set of responses typifying man's relationship to his environment. The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has explored the dynamic interplay between land and affect. (1974) "Topophilia" denotes this bond of sentiment between man and place. Using data and interpretive skills from various disciplines, Tuan is able to summarize and evaluate six points central to the theme topophilia. 1) Human response to the environment varies substantially from culture to culture, but also from person to person. Certain formal similarities are biologically based: the limits of human perception will determine what stimuli we can possibly become aware of. Beyond that, however, the arrangement and significance of environmental stimuli are controlled largely by cultural mediation and personal association. 2) Perception, attitude, and values are strongly influenced and conveyed by the group. Attitude to environment changes as worldviews change: increased control over nature has altered man's aesthetic and moral sensibilities, which in turn affect man's notion of responsibility toward that environment. 3) The emotional responses typically associated with topophilia vary in range and intensity from fondness to joy, depending upon the particular connection between person and place. We remain largely ignorant, still, of the kinds of experiences elicited in different settings and their degree of significance for our lives. 4) The influence of science and technology cannot be underestimated when comparing worldviews and attitudinal make-ups between traditional, non-literate societies and ours. Western

culture since the 1500's has evolved from a world that was predominantly vertical, rotary, and richly symbolic to one which is more aesthetic, nonrotary, and profane. 5) The concept of the city has changed from the ancient view as symbol of the cosmos. While modern cities lack a cosmological referent, they still contain structures which enforce the ideals of power and glory. There is no sustained communal structure. Instead, people live in self-contained units, isolated from one another despite close proximity. 6) The garden of innocence and the cosmos are the two enduring images of the ideal environment. On the other hand, the images of wilderness, suburb, and city have undergone radical reversals from their ancient associations. Today the wilderness is perceived as the model for order and freedom, whereas it is the city which is deemed the centre of evil and chaos. The suburb or countryside, once the most marginal territory, is now the preferred one. (1974:245-8)

Tuan's research and comprehensive ordering of data return to one central theme, that of man's persistent need and effort to arrange his environment so that it is reflective of certain ideals like the good and the beautiful. He stresses that while environment may not directly cause topophilia, it does provide "the sensory stimuli, which as perceived images lend shape to our joys and ideals." (113)

Tuan's study is perhaps the first of its kind to draw extensively from mythological sources as well as scientific and literary ones. While it is a significant foray into relatively unexplored territory, it does not go far enough. The concatenation of

attitudes from vastly different cultures and time periods is of little value so long as we remain unskilled in interpreting them. Tuan's approach to environmental affect is limited by its very scope; an overarching emphasis on demonstrating the cross-cultural validity of his thesis stresses similarities to the point of redundancy. What is needed is an imaginative strategy which can successfully integrate these commonalities and penetrate beyond the familiar limits of general conclusions.

A good deal of groundwork is necessary, however, before we are likely to reach the stage where vital insights spring forth spontaneously. The combined efforts of sociologists, psychologists, and geographers is a start. Ethologists such as Robert Ardrey have introduced concepts which are already accepted terms in social usage; his book *THE TERRITORIAL IMPERATIVE* (1966) drew public attention to the spatial habits of man and animal alike. Ardrey's presentation of basic human needs as being intrinsically bound to one's sense of territoriality is now a commonly accepted perspective.

How this territorial sense is manifested and organized has become the focus of "proxemics," the study of personal and social space. Edward T. Hall's book, *THE SILENT LANGUAGE* (1966), is an accessible introduction to the field, tracing the interplay of the visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory senses in ordering space. He discusses various "distance zones" in terms of the structuring, behaviour, sanctions, and penalties associated with each and how these are reflections of cultural norms and values.

Familiarity with cultural expectations may help unravel the mystery of proxemics, but the reverse is of equal importance. S.M. Lyman and M.B. Scott have demarcated "typologies of territory" (Kliever: 537) which are used in deciphering behaviour in group situations, particularly those that are conflict-ridden. Reading backwards from observable spatial habits into cultural norms reinforces the hunch that the two are intrinsically connected and that they should be studied in tandem.

THE ARTS: The Poetics of Scenery

Studies conducted by those in the social sciences encourage speculation about spatial influence on our lives, particularly since the nature and extent of that influence no longer eludes measurement. Tools of the social and physical sciences are by no means the sole methods of divination, however. Philosophy, phenomenology, and the arts have a long and venerable history of playing with time and space. The concerns over environment and territory which seem to have erupted into social consciousness only recently are but fragments--subjects of special interest groups, as it were--of the ontological category of space.

The differentiation between homogenised, geometric space and "lived" space has already been mentioned. We inhabit--no, we create--an environment which is a complexity of images and emotional references. We live in a network designed to establish and reflect the

limits of our cultural personae. What we have to write or say about space is always in some way a confession, yet a distortion, of our own experience. With these unempirical qualifications in mind, I turn to some of the more literate and playful musings about the nature of "what is not."

One of the more devious pleasures of moving away from highly formalized research to the domain of literature comes with the recognition of familiar territory: representations of life in story and poetry often bear a resounding likeness to our habits of thought, more so than do the systems and terminologies of the sciences. But this is more a matter of preference and interpretive ease than it is a statement about the relevance of communication styles. The discerning eye of the researcher is trained to observe and tabulate events which we take for granted. Oblivious to the labyrinth of categories and hidden meanings of the ordinary, we benefit from seeing ourselves in a foreign context, one which flattens the obvious and highlights the hidden. Art, of course, does much the same sort of thing, challenging the banalities of ordinary awareness. The poignancy of images rendered in literature and the plastic arts lies in their capacity to transform our perception of the ordinary--while leaving the ordinary itself intact.

When Bachelard's *POETICS OF SPACE* fulfills its own intentions, it is no longer whimsical phenomenology, but a hybrid of poetic allusions and a formidable meditative position. Yet the houses and nests and little boxes that are the subject matter of this compassionate focus

remain virtually unmoved by the flattery of recognition. We, on the other hand, are drawn into a state of reminiscence and reflection which momentarily, at least, divests us of our dull stereotypes. What Bachelard has cleverly done is rearrange these objects in our spatial consciousness so that they move into unfamiliar contexts--they are theoretically "out of place"--engaging our complicity and assent. Once the dynamics of the spatial relationship between the mind and the object shift, the currency of thought patterns about that object shift as well.

This process is not unlike Thoreau's notion that "distraction from time and distraction in space" are necessary for one to be "placed." This is what he called "fronting a fact," and it was his common sense term for a kind of metaphysical gymnastics, what Ray Hart calls the ability "to be delivered into the initiative-stealing power of reality."(42) "Rightly to place a thing and be placed by it, to "front" it, is to discern its turn, direction, way...is to see how it affords entry to a world otherwise unannounced, undisclosed, unexpressed."(44) Hart's essay is rife with playful meditations on Thoreau's parables. What he tries to do is sensitize us to the Thoreauvian turn of mind by re-presenting it as an updated "hermeneutic of place," and by reminding us that "placement is incorrigibly metaphorical." For us to proceed through life as a locomotive on track is to succumb to a life of "quiet desperation," never knowing the revelations of displacement.

Nonetheless, I think, simply ruminating on the power of the

dislocated remains an introverted, metaphysical exercise, one divorced from the mundane habits and rituals which embody our understanding of the world. Before we can possibly know ourselves, we must first come to "meet" ourselves, introducing thought to act, memory to place, in the hope that a spark of recognition will alight. So long as we live in the static breach between mind and body, we remain unmoved.

"The link between act and setting is so much part of ordinary experience that it is a familiar literary convention." (Burns cited in Burns: 81) Yet the bond between setting and action in a play or novel is not something we typically think of apart from literary convention. The use of scene and setting to reflect or offset the ensuing action has been amplified by Kenneth Burke; he theorises about the dynamics implicit between scene and act and the dramatic tension created by this interplay. Settings are not simply bland spaces to be filled by activity. In a stage-play, for instance, the setting contains the action, at the same time concealing and foreshadowing it. This inherent ambiguity is "converted into a corresponding articulacy" during the course of the play. (Burke cited in Burns: 81) Offstage, perceptual habits tend to shift into another mode. When we think of "setting," we associate this with literary terminology, leaving us without a suitable linguistic counterpart to designate the same phenomenon outside a dramatic context. As a result, our perceptual categories are diminished, thereby obscuring, if not deleting the conscious apprehension of scene and setting as space and place.

Ironically, we continue to operate without an explicit

acknowledgment of the influence of setting, all the time organizing and arranging our lives "under the influence." We seldom think of house or office as setting, yet we take great pains to decorate and maintain these places so that they project accurate or desirable images of ourselves. We create settings that will contain and even inspire the kinds of actions we seek to elicit. "A specific setting makes its own demands for behaviour."(Burns: 79)

Elizabeth Burns comments on setting as a powerful social indicator: it can both establish and determine perceptions of status. Recognition of the role played by the "correct background" has led to strict conventions of arrangement and display in the workplace.(79) Here, control of space is at a premium, as is the power to select what occupies that space.

~~My discussion of space has veered away from exemplary models for studying the nature of spatial relationships to the adaptation of these models for utilitarian purposes. Lapsing from the aesthetic to the consumer mode may in fact indicate a generalized trend in curiosity: if we're going to spend time and energy on examining spatiality, how do we profit from it? A society which is anxious about running out of space will scramble to preserve and even hoard as much of that precious commodity as possible. At the same time, all information which will facilitate this "gaining ground" is likely to be of a more practical nature; those still interested in exploring the ontological aspects of space become a special interest group--theologians for instance.~~

THEOLOGY: A Geography of Faith

"The question of the character of the place on which one stands is the fundamental symbolic and social question. Once an individual or culture has expressed its vision of its place, a whole language of symbols and social structures will follow." (Smith quoted in Janzen: 171) The philosophical assessment of the meaning of place is of no less consequence to societal development than it is to the comprehensive analysis of space itself. It is for precisely this reason that the problems cropping up under the headings of displacement, alienation, ecology and the like demand renewed attention by those in religious studies. Theological interest in the domain converges upon much the same territory as historical studies in religion, retaining a fundamental link with ancient sources and their implied significance for our times.

Waldemar Janzen presents a "geography of faith," one which examines the Christian options in response to a dwindling sense of the connections between place and theology. His study moves quickly over pertinent research in the field of spatiality, coming to rest at what he considers the vital questions confronting Christians once they take these conclusions seriously.

Janzen's article is a critical response to rabbi Rubenstein's essay, subtitled "The Meaning of Place in Contemporary America." (166) Rubenstein's lament for America articulates the few solemn choices

that are left which may re-connect us with a sense of the holy. His prescription for nomads--now that we are estranged from sacred places, now that we cannot go home again--is to turn inward for the "survival resources within ourselves." America must opt for self-reliance, since she has "missed discovering her sacred places." In other words, the sacred spots which would act as reference points, as places of refuge and renewal, are buried and obscured under technological artifacts, leaving us to wander without the hope of finding holy shelter.

Janzen, while he does not find fault with this bleak description of modern fate, dissents radically from the Freudian postscript. The rabbi's position--decried as second best to Baalism--is examined and rejected. Janzen's Christian sensibility has been assaulted and he takes Rubenstein to task, dismantling the other ideological options which the rabbi recounts. These are the options: 1) We can continue to exploit natural resources and assure ourselves of a nomadic future. 2) We can revolt against this violation of ecological balance either aesthetically or by utilizing other modes of architecture and land use. 3) We can "internalize geography," furnishing ourselves with portable images of home and holiness. (This is Rubenstein's preferred model for relating to the land). 4) We can deify the earth, attuning ourselves to the spirit of nature which will draw us to her own sacred spots.

Janzen voices the dissatisfaction of those forced to choose between evils. By re-examining the significance of place in both Testaments, he tries to sort out and re-formulate options which are

environmentally responsible and theologically sound. His excursions into Biblical geography lead to conclusions that diverge from the stereotyped view of the covenants held until now. He urges a move away from viewing faith as having been initially land-tied (Old Testament), then spiritually released or geography-free (New Testament). The old covenant's sense of place was literal, but his interpretation of the New Testament is importantly different: geography is not abandoned for a disembodied kind of spirituality; instead, it gains significance as it becomes the stage for divine intervention in history. Thus, for the Christian, geography emerges as a map, the tracings of which reveal the paths of faith. Seen in this light, interaction with environment becomes permeated with spiritual significance, because acknowledging a relationship to place allows it to stand as reference point on a spiritual journey. Space, Janzen concludes, is an important hermeneutical device in clarifying our experiences, and redirecting our understanding of their religious nature.

GESTURE: Embodiment and Beyond

The focus of research on spatiality is typically environmental, concentrating on the space "out there." In one sense, this is what comes to mind when we think of space: that it is other than where we are; it is where we are not. But such a distinction would not even be possible were it not for the fact that we are positioned somewhere to

begin with. As bodies we displace space; yet we also contain space, even as we are contained by it.

Minds and bodies are the pivotal points of reference in our experience. As the seat of consciousness, the body connects the interior with what is exterior. Mediator of perception and the affections alike, the body both reacts to and initiates action; hence, it occupies a "privileged position." (Bergson cited in Jung: 218) Like space, the body is far from being inert, an insubstantial property divested of real significance. And, like space, our aversion to it betrays the force of a persuasive undertow.

The history of kinesics--the study of body motion and communication--began with Darwin. THE EXPRESSION OF THE EMOTIONS IN MAN AND ANIMALS was published in 1872, but it was not until well into the twentieth century that sustained interest in communicative systems coalesced, engaging the efforts of anthropologists, psychologists, and linguists. Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, chief contributors to kinesics in America, laid the groundwork for the innovative and exacting research done by second generation kinesicists. Sapir, for instance, discovered that body movement was coded, and that successful communication was contingent upon learning that code. David Efron (in Polhemus), a student of Boas, elaborated on this notion by demonstrating the connections between gestural norms and cultural diversification in his provocative study of Jewish and Italian gesticulation. The cultural relativity of gestural behaviour has been documented by Weston LaBarre (in Polhemus), in conjunction with the

findings of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. His interest in Malinowski's notion of "phatic" communication coincides with work he has done on the "pseudo-languages" preceding verbal discourse. The definitive introductory piece on American kinesics, however, is Ray Birdwhistell's INTRODUCTION TO KINESICS. Since the inauguration of the field of kinesics, the predominant trend has been in the direction initiated by Sapir, that is, towards an understanding of gesture as learned, decipherable behaviour.

American kinesicists have honoured the model of structural linguistics, which has provided them with a theoretical framework for the study of body movement. One of the tendencies attributed to close association with linguistic analysis is the temptation to find "meaning" in isolated gestural expressions. This habit is anachronistic, especially to the linguists (who have long since abandoned the efforts of semantic decodification); yet people persist in hoping that the meaning of this and that gesture may one day be revealed, explicitly denoted.

Meaning, not of the isolable unit but of gestural expression in a larger context, is precisely what the mainstream of kinesic research is about. The emphasis in this area of the field is on analyzing the logic at the base of interpersonal activity, systematizing the results so as to clarify the particulars which adhere to specific social situations. The kind of data collected by Irving Goffman, Edward T. Hall, and Jurgen Ruesch is exemplary of what can be done in this area. Other researchers take as their primary task the isolation of specific

aspects of body movement. After this has been done the connection between gesture and situation emerges and can be interpreted in the appropriate context. "It is difficult, if not impossible, to answer the question: What does this symbol or that gesture mean? Meaning is not immanent in particular symbols, words, sentences, or acts of whatever duration but in the behavior elicited by the presence or absence of such behavior in particular contexts." (Birdwhistell: 96)

The methodological development of kinesics, while slow to detach itself from the tutelage of linguistics, has been boosted of late by the movie camera. Tape recorders and slow-motion projectors have become invaluable tools for the researcher, who must isolate and delineate the significance of rapid motion without disturbing the actual social situation in which the behaviour occurs. Expectations about the possibilities for recording and detecting gestural components await the advancement of engineering. Confidence in the eventual refinement of these tools encourages the expectation that the units which comprise body communication will be some day be a known quantity.

The most striking conclusions of kinesic research have so far been indelibly linked to cultural idiosyncracies and the processes by which these are articulated. It is clear from extensive cross-cultural probes that gestural form and meaning are intrinsic to the culture in which they are found, and that the interpretation of these gestures reflects cultural conditioning. Colloquial assumptions about certain gestures being "natural" or "instinctive" are flatly undermined by

this kind of research.(LaBarre in Polhemus) Kinesics has heightened the awareness of cultural imperialism--the notion that the gestural currency of a particular society is innate and universal. The images elicited by kinesic studies show us a world that is relativized, decipherable, and ordered. Kinesics is displacing the ill-fitting, amorphous notions about body movement which prevail.

"We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might almost say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all." This is Edward Sapir's condensing aphorism describing the mystery of gesturality.(cited in Birdwhistell, 1970:182) For all the debunking done by kinesicists--correcting the misapprehensions common to our notion of body language--the central truth of Sapir's observation remains uncontested.

REMARKS: Running Out of Space

In gathering together the remnants of research on space, one other thing seems worth mentioning. The insularity which assures the purity of disciplinary boundaries also serves to undermine the better interests of research as a whole. Unless more bridgework is done between the social sciences and the arts--between the investigators and the interpreters--the gulf between these vital approaches will remain a mere repository of unintegrated data. The student who cannot pick his or her way through the ethereal musings of Hart's poesis any

better than through a kinesics manual is left in the lurch, unable to recognize vital connections. More importantly, the imaginative synapses required to make such leaps will atrophy so long as the need to develop them is neglected. Gratuitous borrowing of terms and methods from these disciplines is not the answer. Dialogue occurs when there is an interpenetration of insights and arguments; random smatterings of research are not true reference points. If any real coherence can be hoped for, much less realized, the translation of data, and the responsibility for this translation must rest with all those involved in the exploration of space.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPATIALITY IN THE SCARLET LETTER

In an 1850 review of THE SCARLET LETTER, E.P. Whipple describes the story as bearing "on every page the evidence of a mind thoroughly alive, watching patiently the movements of morbid hearts...and piercing, by its imaginative power, directly through all the externals to the core of things."(in Hawthorne, 1978:251) This is Hawthorne the detached observer, the artist with the critical edge that made him an important writer. Hawthorne retained a modest distance between himself and his characters, enough to allow them the integrity of their own designs. Yet his own ambivalence towards them does come through, especially in this romance, and it is expressed by the narrator--the voice of a disembodied observer.

A great deal of emphasis in Hawthorne criticism is placed on his preoccupation with seeing and watching, with mirrors and reflected images. The impetus to this sort of discussion stems from Hawthorne's descriptions of his writing process, and the means by which he understood the images that presented themselves to him. In reading Hawthorne's treatment of this revelatory process, a reader can recognize the inherently spatial nature of this mirroring phenomenon. Critics traditionally have worked on understanding the properties of his imaginative faculties (see Matthiessen, 1941) and describing the quality of "remoteness" in his major works. But remoteness is a

spatial fact and not strictly a visual one. And it is remoteness that Hawthorne focuses on when he reaches for words to describe the effect of moonlight on ordinary objects.(1978:31) The moonlight, in fact, is a vital agent to the romance writer because it is the medium by which this peculiar distancing occurs. By virtue of this transformative process, the floor of a familiar room becomes "a neutral territory" into which the romance writer advances. This kind of spatial awareness is endemic to Hawthorne's writing, I think. When, in the opening lines of his introduction to THE SCARLET LETTER, he insists that "thoughts are frozen and utterance benumbed, unless the speaker stand in some true relation with his audience"(1978:7), he is phrasing his concern in terms of a spatial metaphor.

This spatial sensibility informs THE SCARLET LETTER. What I examine in this chapter is the manifestation of that quality of Hawthorne's vision. To do this, I concentrate on the settings in the romance and how they affect the structure and movement in the narrative. And, in keeping with the broader aspects of spatiality, I look at positioning, embodiment, topophilia, and their contribution to a spatialized reading of the romance.

There is a dynamic interaction between the environment--setting in traditional literary critical terms--of the story and the positions of the characters that, when attended to, reveals a rich contextual platform from which the tale may be viewed. My investigation of this interaction is, in one way, an application of Kenneth Burke's "scene-act ratio"(3), which is based on the assumption that scene both

reflects and symbolizes the action it contains. But what I am claiming is that settings do not just contain or reflect the action, they may in fact precipitate it and become a prime motivator in the course of dramatic development. With respect to THE SCARLET LETTER, I think I can demonstrate how the setting "acts" upon the characters, how the momentum and direction of the story depends on the setting.

F.O. Matthiessen insists that the drama of THE SCARLET LETTER grows out of the interactions between the characters, and, that of all Hawthorne's novels, this one is the least dependent on "the backdrops of scenery." (275) I disagree. Scene is not mere backdrop. Rather, it is an integral shaping-force of the action. There is no escaping the effects of the "grounds" of action, even, or especially, when they remain unconscious or unspecified. And, by plotting the sequence of actions within the framework provided by the settings, I may unearth patterns (themes, directions, implications) that have been previously overlooked or simply underrated.

Hyatt Waggoner has identified three basic factors in the construction of the story: the prison, the cemetery, and the rose. (1963) Their values associations form the parameters of the story, and all else, he thinks, may be placed within the confines of this formation. Waggoner says these three items are central because they translate into moral categories (natural and moral evil and good). But I find his approach one that too readily begins with categories and looks for symbols that will fit them. He is limited, I think, by his triangular framework, which excludes other things that

act as nodes of symbolic interaction. I see my task as picking up where critics such as Waggoner have left off.

I base this course of action on the discovery that behind the symbols and actions of the story there stands a framework--a spatial framework--the structure of which allows the meaning of symbol and motion to emerge and intersect. It is the setting, I maintain, that not only frames the action, but contains and spawns the movement of the plot, and the development of the characters. Hawthorne's sense of spatial variables is keen, subtle, and exact. He locates emotions, thoughts, and symbols both bodily and spatially, finding the "spot" that marks the turning of an era. By exploring the spatial relationships of the story, I can show how certain themes are rendered actual and given new significance and how the spatial aspects precipitate, rather than simply reflect, these themes.

I want to deal specifically with what places I think are central to the evolution and climax of the plot and with the positions and gestures of the characters in these spots. By doing so, I hope to get to the heart of the romance, that is, to offer an interpretation based on the perspective gained by this tour of the story's territory. THE SCARLET LETTER, the way I read it, is replete with images that suggest the complexity and pervasiveness of spatial problems.

This chapter is devoted to locating and discussing those images. I begin with the settings, first in "The Custom-House," Hawthorne's introduction to the romance, and then those in the story. I discuss the environment of the romance, and I dwell on scenes which are

particularly rich in spatial metaphors. These include the market-place, the scaffold, and the forest. The focus of my discussion then shifts away from the settings to the relationships which exist between the characters and their environment. That section looks closer at the phenomenon I have referred to elsewhere as displacement. From there I move to consider some of the broader aspects of spatiality, such as topophilia, connecting my ideas with the research mentioned in chapter three. At the close of this chapter, I hope to have made explicit both connections and disparities between the ideas I have presented continuously throughout the thesis and the interpretation I arrive at by applying those ideas to THE SCARLET LETTER.

THE CUSTOM-HOUSE

For a long time "The Custom-House" suffered the fate common to authorial afterthoughts and was generally denied legitimate status alongside its masterful companion, THE SCARLET LETTER. It was originally written as a supplement to "the tale of human frailty and sorrow," when Hawthorne was less than convinced that the romance would stand well on its own. The tone of "The Custom-House" is radically different from that of THE SCARLET LETTER, and this is due, in part to Hawthorne's humour, which enlivens his veiled opinions. The piece, as I have noted elsewhere, was not well received by his peers in Salem.

Over the years publishers found it just as convenient to leave the sketch out altogether, as it was thought to detract from the dramatic unity of THE SCARLET LETTER.

With developments in Hawthorne scholarship in recent years, however, the sketch has become the object of revived interest. The tendency, at present, is to consider it a work complete in itself, yet enhanced when studied in conjunction with the romance. Critics are finding "The Custom-House" an invaluable source of evidence that supplements claims about Hawthorne's psychology, his dilemma as a romance writer, and the projection of his ambivalence onto the narrator. (see Baym in Hawthorne, 1978)

But these concerns are not central to this study. For my purposes, the sketch warrants looking into because of its relationship to THE SCARLET LETTER. As introduction, it literally sits in front of the romance. But, more importantly, it is in "The Custom-House" that Hawthorne describes the events leading up to the writing of THE SCARLET LETTER. Both the settings in which these events occur and Hawthorne's relationship to his environment--past and present--figure prominently in the sketch. Furthermore, a number of spatial themes are raised in "The Custom-House" which are then explored in the romance. The most significant of these focuses on Hawthorne's sense of displacement--both literary and familial. His characters are displaced persons as well, and through exploring the dialectic of their fates, he comes to terms with the alienation that has plagued

his own life and thwarted the development of his talents. THE SCARLET LETTER marks the maturing of his craft and the recognition that his career is his passport into strange, uncharted territories. He never lets his reader forget where this truncated drama in his life took place. The "spatialized" difficulties described in "The Custom-House" are responsible for the birth of the work itself, and, we are left to assume, for the rebirth of Hawthorne as a "citizen of somewhere else."

A paranthetical note of interest is perhaps appropriate here. The Custom-House is in Salem, Massachusetts, not in Boston, where THE SCARLET LETTER is set. This detail assumes curious significance when placed alongside the fact that critics often confuse the location of the well-known romance with that of the introductory preamble. Whether or not this confusion stems from a lapse in the reader's attention somewhere between the sketch and the story is difficult to prove. During the course of my research, I came across several instances of this error. These were strewn across a variety of disciplines and included scholars in geography (Nash) and religion and literature (Gunn, 1979, and Porterfield). My guess is that there is a cluster of associations linking the events of the romance with the infamous history of Salem. Porterfield, for instance, thinks there is an intriguing parallel between the witch-hunts of the 1600's and the plight of Hester. But other than the popular inclination to read THE SCARLET LETTER as a feminist tract, there seems to be no clear rationale for the scattered instances of confusion. Evidently the

history of Salem carries a good deal of associative baggage that rightfully belongs in Boston harbour.

The opening of "The Custom-House" sketch dwells on Hawthorne's return to his birthplace, Salem. Grim and uninteresting as it was, Hawthorne felt compelled to return to his hometown, taking up the duties of chief executive of the Custom-House. His description of Salem and the solemn edifice where he was constrained to wither away three-and-a-half hours a day is marked by a certain perversity of sentiment. Little disparity in spirit exists between the building and the town; both are dilapidated remainders of a nobler era. Yet, in both places Hawthorne seems to find a misplaced vitality where little thrives but the appetite of his cohorts, the customs officers. He speaks of the "spell" that brought him back to his native town, leading him away from the lush harmonies that enhanced life in the Old Manse at Concord.

This spell is a compelling attachment to the spot where his forefathers first took root in America. But Hawthorne's topophilia stems as much from his inability to feel at home in the present as it does from his imaginative connection to the past. He admits to having a certain "homefeeling with the past," which he can "scarcely claim in reference to the present phase of the town." (1978:11) Yet, though he maintains "a stronger claim to residence here" because of the looming visage of his progenitors, he remains fundamentally alienated from them. He can scarcely forgive their persecution of witches and

Quakers, for instance. And, his identification with them is severed at the very juncture where he is most creative. Hawthorne is a fiction writer, which, in the eyes of his ancestors, amounts to being little else than a degenerate. He sits, an "idler," astride the "topmost bough" of the family tree.(1978:11) Hawthorne, in effect, is stuck out on a limb.

Hawthorne remains stranded in this liminal zone, looking for the inspiration that will realign his sentiments and ignite his imagination. The Custom-House seems the last place he would be likely to find it. The atmosphere is certainly not conducive to "the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility."(1978:30) Because of this, Hawthorne suffers from being radically displaced--a loner with no meaningful ties to his present circumstances. A certain despondency settles over him which he cannot cast off even after his working hours are over. The entire venture in the realm of commerce seems to have sapped him of his spirited faculties.

This inertia persists until one day he happens across some old documents belonging to a Surveyor Pue, a customs officer like himself, now long since buried and forgotten. Hawthorne's curiosity is roused by the antiquarian's effects. He comes across a band of scarlet cloth, with the letter "A" sewn upon it. While musing on its significance, he "happened to place it on his breast."(1978:28) This gesture immediately has a strange and arresting effect, as if the letter were red hot. Hawthorne shudders and drops it to the floor.

This strange incident marks the beginning of Hawthorne's reassessment of his plight. Endowed with a sacred commission by the ghost of Surveyor Pue, Hawthorne is moved to record the life of one Hester Prynne, to whom the mysterious emblem belonged. "Do this," the Surveyor's ghost admonishes him, "and the profit shall be all your own! You will shortly need it." (1978:29) The antiquarian was right, because it was not long before Hawthorne was ousted from his position (a Whig victory displaced him) and freed from his incarceration in the Custom-House. The ejected officer is bitter at first about the conduct of his political enemies. He decides, at last, however, that it was a fortunate act that had befallen him. The real Hawthorne, he says, is not the decapitated surveyor the press was making him out to be. His head, he maintains, is "safely on his shoulders," and he has become once again, a literary man. "Henceforth," the author proclaims, the oppressive environment that had stifled him "ceases to be a reality" of his life. No longer subjected to the influence of his home town, Hawthorne embraces his calling as writer with renewed vigor and insight. He is free to pull up his roots, pursue his calling, and become a "citizen of somewhere else." Curiously, enough, we never do find out where that "somewhere else" really is.

SETTINGS

The settings in the main body of THE SCARLET LETTER are sparse. Except for the forest scene, very little attention is devoted to detailed or enlivening description. Hawthorne uses what Leavis calls "traditional settings," a public square, a forest dell, the outside of a church. These combine in such a way that they produce "the sense of a deeply significant public drama being enacted." This, comments Leavis, is in keeping with Hawthorne's concerns, which she describes as being "deeply religious." (in Donahue: 319) Hawthorne sets his characters in motion in stark, usually public, settings. This fact takes on increased significance once the themes of the story are examined, and we see that the division that exists between the tight-knit Puritan community and its outcasts is enacted continuously out of doors--on common ground, as it were. There is a certain neutrality about the nature of the settings, even when they are clearly designated as consecrated (the church, the scaffold) or evil (the forest). Their neutrality, I would say, is due to the fact that they deflect these associations as much as they absorb them.

There is little domestic scenery in the book. We are only in the Governor's mansion for a short time, and we see very little of Dimmesdale's apartment. We never step inside Hester's cottage. The characters seem constantly in motion. Excluded from the warmth and intercourse of the society, they are never at rest but wander here and there like spectres looking for clues to find their way out of the "dismal maze."

New England is "a land," the townsman tells Chillingworth, "where iniquity is searched out and punished in the sight of rulers and people."(1978:49) It is considered by its inhabitants to be a godly place, and it should be the kind of place where a story such as this would never happen. But, of course, it does happen here, in the heart of the Puritan foothold of civilization, that borders on the vast, unrelenting wilderness. Hawthorne's drama is set right in the middle of "what were once the devil's territories."(Mather quoted in Matthiessen: 283)

Carved up into areas that mark the parameters of the story's action, the town of Boston animates the drama's unfolding. The narrator's description of the Puritan settlement in the opening chapter is terse and ironic. The pivotal spots of this New World Utopia, we are told, are the prison and the cemetery--the confines of sin and death. Later in the story we learn that the house shared by Dimmesdale and Chillingworth is located on this same plot of land, next to the graveyard, on the future site of King's Chapel. These three spots form a symbolic triangle, "epitomizing the Puritan drama of sin, death, and salvation."(eds. in Hawthorne, 1978:39)

The next two chapters, "The Market-Place" and "The Recognition," focus tightly on the scaffold and the meeting-house. Both are situated in the town square. "It was no great distance, in those days, from the prison-door to the market-place," we are told. Virtually all of the action in the story is suspended in the lurch

between the places where sin and death are confined and the places where they are manifested. The scaffold stands "nearly beneath the eaves of Boston's earliest church." It is the platform of the pillory, "that instrument of discipline" in which "the very ideal of ignominy is embodied." (1978:45) Directly above the scaffold is the balcony of the meeting-house, where the Puritan counsellors sit in judgment of moral offenders.

The rhythm of the story veers back and forth from the sinner raised on the scaffold to the moral guardians of the community. There is an intense concentration on the divulgence of sin, and it is not just the Puritan counsellors who embody it. Dimmesdale admonishes Hester to divulge her guilty partner; Chillingworth makes it his life's work to discover the lover's identity; Pearl taunts Hester unceasingly about the meaning of the scarlet letter; even Mistress Hibbins takes it upon herself to be the devil's emissary and ferret out those who have been to the forest but will not admit it. Everyone who is not staring into the hearts of others is trying to escape the harsh light of day, retreating into the shadows to preserve his own sore secrets. But there is no escaping the roving eye of the righteous for long, and little relief is found anywhere. Thus the characters are driven inwards--not indoors, because they have no real home--but to the inner recesses of the mind. They become intensely introspective, betraying their true feelings only in the occasional gesture or unpremeditated word.

The repressed woes of the characters are then projected onto this bleak, unsympathetic background. The harsh environment intensifies the psychological and moral traumas of the characters, and it does so precisely because it remains stark and unmoved by their woes. The environment in the story is not an actor so much as a presence. It constitutes the conditions out of which the drama of the tale emerges. The settings symbolize the internal states of the characters in the sense that they activate those states, they set the internal dynamics in motion. They are active, mobilizing symbols, and not just containers or receptacles of meaning. We make the same mistake the Puritans in the story do if we fail to recognize the environment as foundation and influence, as projector and transformer of the lives grounded there. The characters in *THE SCARLET LETTER* are vitally connected to their surroundings. They spend their lives trying to control the nature of that connection (the Puritans), or succumbing to its overriding influence (Hester), or acting out its contradictions (Pearl). "We are embodied in space beyond our own bodies," Kliever says, and the actions of the characters--particularly the compulsive acts--betray the truth of that statement, repeatedly.

In the next section, I move in closer to the story, to look at how the settings described in the opening scene set the stage for the unfolding drama. The connections between environment and the characters become clearer as the central figures in the story take up their positions in the appropriate "spots." Positioning is central to

understanding the actions of the characters throughout the rest of the story, but it is not the only indicator of their significance. The gestures emitted in the first few moments of each character's introduction are equally revealing. They both reveal and typify the role of the character, and because these gestures are perceived but not understood by others in the story, they too become part of the "landscape" of unresolved cues in the story.

THE MARKET-PLACE

R.W.B. Lewis describes the opening scene of THE SCARLET LETTER as the "paradigm dramatic image in American literature." (212) Here is the solitary individual set over against society--the dilemma of America encapsulated. All the "dark and treacherous" possibilities inherent in the young country's situation are exposed in the relationships encountered in the first scene. And, what sets this story apart from its predecessors in American literature is the fact that Hawthorne locates this tension "not any longer on the margins of the plot, but at its very center." (212) The story's movement evolves out of the dynamics portrayed in the opening tableau, and, as Lewis shows that movement mirrors the American situation as it was in Hawthorne's time. Lewis himself is primarily interested in discovering how the romance reflects the quandries of its age--but I think there may be room for a richer, more varied interpretation of

the story than that suggested by the single theme identified by Lewis: individual versus group.

"The Market-Place" and "The Recognition" are the chapters where the drama is mapped out, where the characters are set in opposition to one another, and the convolutions of fate first intimated. Virtually all of the actors are now introduced, placed here and there at strategic vantage points. Hawthorne creates a sparse environment for his drama, then sets his characters on their way without a compass. The spots they occupy indicate not only their present position in the community but the continuing role each may be expected to carry out.

The grim mob of Puritan onlookers, welded together by the common will to exorcize evil from their midst, awaits the opening of the prison door. Hester Prynne is led forth by the town-beadle--the very personification of the "Puritanic code of law." At the threshold she repels him. The three month ordeal in prison has not ruined her, as was expected. Instead, she moves with a sober elegance, and "never had she appeared more lady-like...than as she issued from the prison." Beauty and righteousness are tragically juxtaposed. Hester carries a baby in her arms. When she moves toward the crowd "it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought...on her dress." The token is, of course, the infamous letter "A," the baby is Pearl, and the act, one of concealment.

This bearing-clasping gesture embodies the ambivalence which is at the heart of Hester's attitude toward her ignominious status. On the one hand, she appears to bear her suffering nobly, even proudly. Yet, stripped of all else that is important to her, she contains, hides, and clutches to herself what little she has left. Unlike the sound moral overtones of "bearing," (maternal instinct, long-suffering), "clasping" connotes the reflexive gesture of one about to lose something of great value. It is an act motivated by fear. And grief is now the definitive state of Hester's existence.

Pearl and the letter seem inseparable; certainly their connection with Hester is. They remain the cardinal connections she retains with the community, other than her handiwork. The "A" has "the effect of a spell, taking her out of ordinary relations with humanity and enclosing her in a sphere by herself."(1978:44) It is not simply Hester's sin that sets her apart. The effect of the voluptuous emblem is to ward off the intimacy of others. The letter, I think, is her embroidered self-protection. Hester's life of seclusion will be of her own choosing, the portal fashioned by her own hand. And the emblem serves its purpose well, keeping the tormenters without and the torment within. But the tension that exists between Hester and the Puritans is only partially realized at this moment.

At the far edge of the crowd--that omnipresent crowd of Puritans--stands Chillingworth, the betrayed husband, the ill-fated European immigrant, who has just been released back into the confines

of civilization by his Indian captors. Although he stands on the outskirts of the condemning caucus, his recognition of and by Hester catapults him to the centre of the drama. From this time onward, he steals back and forth between Hester's haunted past and the orbit of life in the Puritan community. And, because of his relation to her, he is also connected to one whose identity is still a secret--to the man whose absence on the scaffold makes him Chillingworth's mortal enemy.

Chillingworth enters the perimeters of the scene, yet already he is caught. He could share in Hester's shame by identifying himself as her long-lost husband, in which case he would either be expected to take her side or to banish her. His choice in the matter is soon made clear. When he realizes Hester sees him, "he calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips."(1978:48) This is Chillingworth's gesture of secrecy. The finger that is outstretched now to preserve his identity will later jab accusingly at the scarlet letter. But, by binding Hester in oath, he still possesses her. And even though he has suffered deposition, he will survive. "Here, on this wild outskirts of the earth, I shall pitch my tent; for, elsewhere a wanderer and, isolated from human interests, I find here a woman, a man, a child, amongst whom and myself exist the closest ligaments."(1978:59) Directed by all the powers of his intellect, Chillingworth digs his way into the heart of the mystery, until his curiosity is satisfied, and Hester's lover is revealed. But to do so, he must live a duplicitous life. He is both physician and sexton, and

the hands that gather herbs to succor the sick in Boston also grub and pry into the heart of its most beloved saint, the Reverend Dimmesdale.

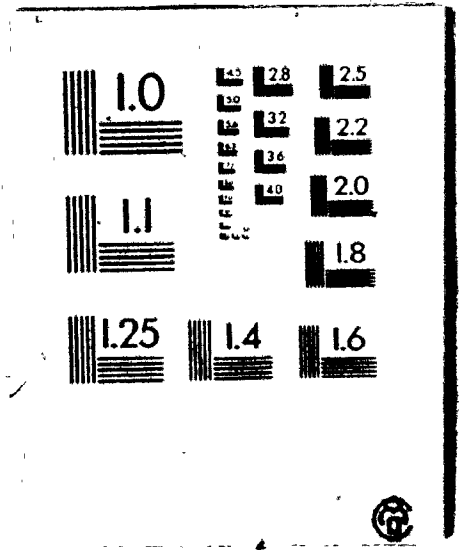
At present, though, Dimmesdale sits with the governor and the rest on the balcony of the meeting-house, looking down on the scaffold, at Hester. Here is a man whose native talents and educated gifts have secured for him a lofty and respected position in the community. He represents the strange contradictions in spirit when "all the learning of the age is brought into our wild forest-land." He is high strung, nervous, and has a tremulous mouth that betrays "a vast power of self-restraint." (1978:52) Notwithstanding the position he occupies, the narrator says, he treads "the shadowy by-paths," and keeps to himself whenever possible. Evidently, he is a man "at a loss in the pathway of human existence."

The picture is complete. The lines of fate are strung between these characters like a spider's web. This "mesh of evil" hangs over the story, creating a delicate balance (or imbalance) of sin and guilt, hope and despair. All of the characters get entangled in its faint, lustrous pattern. This "labyrinth of sin" is more than a psychological metaphor. It exists as part of the route of the plot. The characters are caught in some vexed pathway of their own making, and the places where their wanderings intersect are the poignant moments of tragic completion.

I turn now to the two places that figure prominently in the story as pivots of action, the scaffold and the forest. I want to

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illustrate the "character" of these spots, because I think an understanding of the nature and function of environment in the story is crucial to perceiving the spatial dynamics that emerge between it and the characters. Both the scaffold and the forest are important centres of religious meaning in the Puritan community. Yet the scaffold is the inverse of the forest, in that it is the place where evil is "conquered," that is, it is contained, and not allowed to flourish. When we look at the actions of the characters, however, a different picture emerges, one that overturns the stereotypes associated with either place.

THE SCAFFOLD

The scaffold figures repeatedly in the story as the platform on which sin is displayed, and mysteries revealed. Sin, in the Puritan colony, is to be held up before the entire community, and then cast out. But the function of the scaffold in the story varies from its officially designated purpose. Gathering at the scaffold is an occasion for group solidarity, an expression of communal will. But, inasmuch as it solidifies the Puritans against the offender, coming to the edge of the scaffold excludes the crowd from the mystery that transpires on that consecrated platform. For, to those who climb upon it, it offers a "point of view" denied to those who remain at a distance. The position imposed upon the man or woman who ascends the

platform is one which immediately elevates and displaces him or her from the rest of the community.

The scaffold is the fulcrum of revelation in the story. As we see in the opening scene with Hester and later with Dimmesdale, Pearl, and even Chillingworth, a peculiar kind of self-knowledge is imparted to the person who stands on that spot. It is the scaffold that reveals to Hester "the entire track along which she had been treading." (1978:47) No one who places him or herself on the scaffold is exempt from this kind of eruption in consciousness; just as no one who refuses to ascend the scaffold (the righteous members of the colony, for instance) can be anything other than spectator. The Puritans in the story thus remain fundamentally observers and not participants in the lives of the other characters. They see, but they do not understand (virtually no consensus will exist among them as to what they witness at Dimmesdale's death).

Ironically, whoever is raised upon the scaffold becomes as much the object of mystery as of scorn. Sin, when elevated above the common level, becomes a spectacle. Dimmesdale's own experience on the scaffold exemplifies this. On the night of his vigil he is driven to ascend the platform himself, where a taunting and hideous vision of his freezing to death comes to him. He imagines the reaction of the townspeople, when they discover a figure--a ghost, they would think--on the "place of shame." "Half crazed betwixt alarm and curiosity," the people would rush to the scaffold, to find the

minister, "half frozen to death, overwhelmed with shame, and standing where Hester Prynne had stood!"(1978:111) Dimmesdale's grotesque vision is, according to the narrator, a product of "a highly disordered mental state," but it is also an eerie, compressed image, reflecting the macabre interest the Puritans possess in the mysteries suspended on the scaffold. Banning offenders directly after they have been exposed on the platform creates an inevitable stir of curiosity among the spectators. They become fascinated by what they cannot see. After Hester is led back to the prison, having completed her ordeal on "the pedestal of shame," the whispering begins.

THE FOREST

When Hester enters the forest on the day she hopes to meet Arthur, it reminds her of "the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering."(1978:132) If we could simply equate the forest with all the evil and delusion that fosters a moral wilderness, we could dismiss Hester and explain away her motives without a second thought. Indeed, some critics have done just that.(see Abel in Hawthorne, 1978) Because Hawthorne was influenced by the Puritan notions about the wilderness--that it is dangerous because it is not subject to the lawfulness of moral order--one might automatically assume that the forest is a symbol only of negativity. But, when we actually look at what occurs there, the clear line between good and evil blurs.

A brook runs through the dell where Hester and Pearl are sitting. Trees and rocks hide the course of the brook, "making a mystery" of its course. The narrator describes the trees and rocks as if they are personifications of various motives. No other geographical settings in the book are invested with such a high degree of personability. Yet in the forest, the "heart of Nature" reveals itself as varied and complex as any human heart. It is particularly sympathetic towards Pearl, recognizing in her a "kindred wildness." Here Pearl finds a mirror of her own nature. She is gentler now than in the settlement or in her mother's cottage. The "mother-forest" nourishes her in a way that Hester cannot. Pearl is at home in the woods. Here she has no antagonists. Her preternatural inclinations to concoct a drama with every stick and stone and flower are welcomed. The forest responds to her powers of animation with equal facility and imagination. It can do so because the forest contains and projects mysteries in the same way that Pearl activates and embodies them. When Hester listens to the sad babblings of the brook, she hears it tell her story back to her, just as, when she looks at Pearl, she sees her grief imaged in return.

Pearl is at ease with the mysteries in the forest, and, although she cannot decipher what it is the stream is murmuring, she accepts it. The forest, Pearl senses, is protective of its secrets--the trees guard the course of the stream, lest it "should whisper tales out of the heart of the old forest"--but it is not ashamed of them as her

mother is. Thus, in the heart of the forest Pearl is softened a little and relieved of her duty as the relentless inquisitor after grim mysteries.

Hester, on the other hand, is relieved by the forest's indifference to her status. Here she is sheltered from the cool gaze of familiarity that haunts her in the town. And here she may dare her secret to Arthur without fear that she will be betrayed. The forest is the only spot where she and Arthur may meet and be safe from the lingering stares of others.

DISPLACEMENT

Having sketched briefly the nature of these two places, I consider now their effects on the characters. I examine the relationship between Dimmesdale and the Puritan community as an example of the phenomenon, displacement. The key settings that act as displacing agents are the scaffold and the forest. The view that either of these spots "acts" or is influential in dislodging characters from their positions stems from my delving into the nature and function of the spatial relationships in the story. It is not a view that one is likely to find any of the characters adhering to.

The four main characters are displaced persons, but so are the Puritans. Those who ascend the scaffold or wander into the forest are displaced from the community. They are displaced because they now

occupy dangerous or condemned territory. No self-respecting Puritan would ascend the scaffold out of curiosity; it is a consecrated place.(1978:165) Neither would one dally along the forest path for fear he or she might encounter the Black Man. The associations attached to both of these mysterious settings are shared by all the characters in the story. What is interesting is that these associations are tested and amplified not by the Puritans but by the other four characters. This makes sense in light of the fact that the Puritan colony predates (and outlives) any of the other characters, and certainly the wealth of projections about the scaffold or the forest is part of a complex system of beliefs that protected and guided the early settlers. Those who choose to act in accordance with their own notions of right and wrong are, naturally, a threat to the stability and unity of others.

The Puritans in the story are preoccupied with boundaries and acts that cross them and transgress sacred territory. They seem at times obsessed with a definition of themselves as the elect: "A blessing on the righteous Colony of Massachusetts," the town-beadle proclaims as he ushers Hester into the crowd, "where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine."(1978:44) This fanatical emphasis on keeping the boundaries of the colony pure and uncontaminated is a direct consequence of the Puritans themselves being a displaced people. Here they are, a select people perched on the edge of the wilderness. Their whole orbit of life is conditioned by the threat of

the untamed, the ungodly, and the unknown. This is why they are so afraid of (and fascinated by) the mysteries harboured by the forest and embodied by witches and Indians. And this is why they keep their distance from Hester and Pearl.

The Puritans express the vision of their calling in symbols and legends, in sermons and even in rumour and gossip. And this vision is intrinsically tied to their position on the edge of the wilds, a long, long way from home. Nowhere is this more poignantly expressed than in the Election Day sermon, delivered, prophetically, by Dimmesdale, just before his death. His subject is "the relation between the Deity and the communities of mankind, with a special reference to New England which they are here planting in the wilderness." And, "it is his mission to foretell a high and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord."(1978:176) Little do his parishioners know that the very "angel" who utters these words knows only too well the revelations of displacement. He himself is just recently transformed and given the strength to complete his mission to his people because of the new birth he underwent in the forest. Arthur strayed from the straight and narrow path just long enough to breathe the "wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region."(1978:144) And now he returns to deliver the message of hope to his people, the message that he himself only now believes in.

Neither Dimmesdale nor the Puritans has a true relationship with one another. The people think he is virtually a saint, and, in fact,

he is, in the sense that he ministers to them with feeling and depth because he is the greatest sinner of them all (so he thinks). Arthur's position in the community, on a formal level, is of the highest order, particularly after the Election Day sermon. He stands, moments before he falters to his death, "on the very proudest eminence of superiority." (1978:176) Yet his "true" position, as it is revealed in the story, is a duplicitous one.

But his journey is not in the never-ending maze where Hester and Chillingworth are caught. Instead, he moves "in the shadowy by-paths," feeling himself "quite astray and at loss in the pathway of human existence." (1978:52) And no man, the narrator reminds us, "can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true." (1978:154) Arthur Dimmesdale is thus an odd combination of a man who feels himself to be naturally displaced, as if it were an aspect of his nature, and one who, by virtue of this position, becomes a sacred messenger. The Puritans have, unknowingly, a fallen angel in their midst. Dimmesdale's powers are an expression of his natural gifts, but also his "displacement" from righteousness, as it is typically conceived. The very fact that they love him so well says something about the need of the Puritan community for just that kind of saint--one who embodies the contradictions inherent in the Puritan vision. The governor and his counsellors are not suited to "step forth...and meddle with a question of human guilt, passion, and

anguish."(1978:51) They lack the sensitivity and sympathy to handle the delicacies of the human heart. Yet it is the stern, robust Puritans who live on and Dimmesdale, the visionary, who dies. In the entire story, only those who are genuinely displaced from the community--Hester, Arthur, Pearl--are privy to the gifts of discernment. In fact, the only other Puritan who participates in the strange knowledge imparted to those who traverse the liminal zones, is Mistress Hibbins, and she, of course, is a witch.

TOPOPHILIA

The relationships between the characters and their environment suggest some unusual conclusions about the nature of toponophilia. Having examined the dominant spatial motifs and geographical associations in the text, I would agree with Tuan, that the perceptions of environment are indeed largely controlled by the group. Puritan images of the wilderness and forest, for instance, are shared by all the characters, even those whose experience of these settings diverges radically from the that of the community. The images presented in THE SCARLET LETTER are fraught with associations which, today, would likely be aligned with very different settings. The wilderness, as Tuan has shown, is now considered the model for order and freedom. It is more a haven from civilization than a threat to it. The difference in attitudes towards environments can be

unsettling for a reader, or it can be refreshing. Because I do not automatically share the same set of assumptions about the forest or the town that Hawthorne had, I approach the story from a different vantage point. I read the descriptions of setting and geography with interest, because they raise images of the environment with which I am unfamiliar. I cannot automatically assume that the forest is full of foreboding; I must read closely to find that out.

The one aspect of topophilia I will look closely at is Tuan's third conclusion, regarding the variance in emotional response to the environment. He characterizes people's response as a predominantly positive one, ranging from fondness to joy, and including a host of unnamed emotions somewhere in between. The middle-range reactions to the land bear looking into.

Hawthorne's feeling for his hometown, as he describes it in "The Custom-House" sketch, is tinted with a kind of sentiment that has attached itself to the spot where his forefathers first set down roots in America. None of the characters in *THE SCARLET LETTER* suffers from this particular variety of topophilia, however. But the attachment the Puritans have to their bleak strand of land is nonetheless fraught with a peculiar kind of ambivalence that is not unlike Hawthorne's own reactions to Salem. Even Hester willfully chooses to remain in spite of all that is against her.

Her reasons are not very clear, even to herself. She acts on the basis of her feeling fated in a way that is so "irresistible and

inevitable...it has the force of doom."(1978:61) Here was the spot that marked the turning point in her life, and she is bound to it as if it were the pivot of fate. And indeed it is. All else that was familiar--her home in England, her bright youth--is cast off, as she strikes her roots into the hard, unyielding New England soil. The spell of her ignominy has a riveting effect, binding her to the very place that is "galling to her inmost soul."(1978:61)

For the rest of her life, Hester is plagued by this perverse sentiment. She must remain in an environment that will continuously mirror her grief. Her cottage, which is on a strand of sterile land at the outskirts of the settlement, is forever cheerless. She stands alone in the world. Her only guide is the scarlet letter, and that is her passport not to penitence and release but to "regions where other women dared not tread."(1978:143) Unlike Arthur, who is bound to this town out of a mixture of noble obligation and spiritualized inertia, Hester is here because this is the map and territory of her fate. Because there is no escape, she is free to wander through the nether regions of the mind, untutored by the regulatory principles that govern Dimmesdale's society. "As a priest, the framework of his order inevitably hemmed him in."(1978:143) But, "the tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free,"(1978:143) free to roam listlessly and habitually the well-worn paths of grief.

There is little drama in Hester's life. Because she is so excluded from the normal circle of intercourse, she lacks the rich

variation in circumstance that a change in status or another's perspective would bring. The unending sameness of her circumstances is seldom altered. Only once or twice in her life has the dreary momentum been arrested. Those moments--on the scaffold and in the forest--seem timeless to her. These spots spatialize time. And Hester, for a brief moment, has a reprieve from the relentless surge of reality. These are the places where she becomes completely aware of the shape and form of her life's movement and of the inevitability of this very moment. Hester's strange and fatal attachment to her wilderness purgatory is made all too clear to her as she stands next to the scaffold, listening:

If the minister's voice had not kept her there, there would nevertheless have been an inevitable magnetism in that spot, whence she dated the first hour of her life of ignominy. There was a sense within her,--too ill-defined to be made a thought, but weighing heavily on her mind,--that her whole orb of life, both before and after, was connected with this spot, as with the one point that gave it unity.(1978:173)

Long after Arthur's death and her sojourn in Europe, Hester returns to the abandoned cottage to take up her "real life" again. Hester is no longer simply a displaced Englishwoman, nor is she only a sainted hermit. Hester has become a true New Englander. "Here had been her sin; here her sorrow; and here was to be her penitence."(1978:185) Hester returns, as did Hawthorne, to the environment that moulded her and stunted her as well. But Hawthorne tells us that he learned his lesson and knew it was time he quit his

native town before it stifled him completely. Hawthorne leaves Salem forever, as Pearl leaves America, to become a "citizen of somewhere else." But Hester is able to remain in her sad little cottage because her purpose is here. She counsels women who are the victims of their own "misplaced" passions. She becomes the forerunner of the hoped-for prophetess, the woman who will reveal a new truth, much as Dimmesdale did when he preached the glorious pronouncement of blessing on New England. But her message will pertain to the "whole relation between man and woman," so that it might rest "on a surer ground of mutual happiness." (1978:185) If Dimmesdale's vision of a glorious New England is to be borne out, it will not be in Hester's time. Hester sees the underside of Dimmesdale's vision. A transformed people can not come about until the world grows ripe for it. (1978:185) In the meantime, Hester fulfills her mission as comforter to others who are displaced. Hester reveals to these women her firm beliefs in a better era until she too is silenced and confined in the earth. The tide of revelation, confinement, revelation flows continuously. I follow its pattern in the section following.

FROM THE PRISON-DOOR TO THE CEMETERY

Once Dimmesdale considers the possibility of actually leaving his life in Boston, and escaping to Europe with Hester, the chances of his integrating this wild wish with his real life are eclipsed. For

Dimmesdale cannot easily break the fetters of the moral constrictions that have bonded him to this community until now. Now that he is fully aware of his own feelings and the choices facing him, he can neither return to the settlement and resume his role as victim, nor can he cast off his old life and escape the clutches of his own conscience. There is but one way out for Arthur, and that is death.

The fact that Dimmesdale dies at the very moment he reaches the zenith of his fame is a paradoxical act, a gesture that scatters the other characters. Chillingworth dies within the year (the consummation of his revenge leaves him virtually without "material to support" him (1978:183), while Hester and Pearl leave sometime thereafter for Europe. And we too are spun wide, left standing on the sidelines. Having been so tightly focused on all the tragic particulars, we are thrown off-balance. We are allowed a brief panoramic scan of the fast-fading horizon, as the characters drift out of sight. Once the tight circle disbands, the drama ends. Dimmesdale, it seems, has stolen it.

With "The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter" and the death of Dimmesdale, comes the end of the story, in one sense. James was right, I think, in saying that it is really Arthur's story and not Hester's, after all. (in Hawthorne, 1978:228) With Arthur dies the momentum that has perpetuated the necessity of the plot. But is his death also the resolution? The old bonds are shattered, and a new cycle begins, one which purportedly is free of the demonic

possessiveness that so long tyrannized the characters. At least that is the view the narrator passes onto us, having decided now to rely completely on his historical sources and not intervene at will. But is this really the case? Can THE SCARLET LETTER really have a happy ending after all?

Perhaps a clue to the answer is what happens to Pearl, since it is she who becomes the focus of redemption at her father's death scene. Pearl is born into lawlessness. She is a creature separated from the human community. But this is not her fault; she is a victim of inherited sin, not of original sin.(Garlitz: 638) All the other characters have courted lawlessness by negating their own natures and then finding themselves deserted and lost. They are essentially split off from themselves, and even though they achieve remarkable insight through the course of their trials, they nonetheless remain unintegrated fragments on the edge of the community. But in Pearl, the possibilities (and the contradictions) inherited from her parents are realized. She embodies the potential which neither Hester nor Arthur can fulfill. She is brimming with unresolved energy; she "flits," and "darts," she is possessed by an "undulating, but, oftentimes, a sharp and irregular movement."(1978:173) The Puritans suspect she is a child of the "Prince of the Air."(1978:174) But before she can fly away, she is united with her earthly father, Dimmesdale. "Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken.... And as the tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she

would grow up amid human joy and, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it."(1978:181)

A favourite critical view is to take this scene at face value, and regard it as the juncture at which an emblem of natural law is made into a citizen of the moral order.(see Eisinger) Hester's sin is at this moment expiated by Dimmesdale's conciliatory gesture, culminating in a "psychic transformation."(Eisinger: 328) This view can be supported, I suppose, by the Puritan community's view of Pearl at the end of story: that she "was not only alive, but married, and happy, and mindful of her mother."(1978:185) But, the narrator tells us, it was "the gossips of that day" who believed such. And who are we to believe?

Once Pearl is kissed by Arthur, once she recognizes he is indeed her father, in short, once Pearl participates in the mystery, instead of merely pointing at it--she becomes fully herself. Now that she has a "grief of her own," she has self-knowledge; she has parents. In other words, she has a history. Pearl, unlike anyone else in the story, is freed into history, and is not imprisoned by it (at least not yet). But the responsibility for this release from wildness rests with both her parents, and not just with one. In fact, the entire cast of the story conspires in one way or another to penetrate that mysterious "circle of ignominy" where the true mystery is trapped and release its suspended power. Pearl, it turns out, is the one capable of embodying that power, and she uses it to propel herself straight out

of New England. Fiedler says, "Once she has ceased to be an anima figure and has become merely human, Boston cannot hold Pearl; and she is dispatched to the shadowy world of Europe." (513)

Pearl leaves America and never comes back. She (and not Dimmesdale, as Fiedler suggests) is the only true American in the story. Born and bred in the New England wilderness, she can no longer stay now that her "errand as a messenger of anguish" is fulfilled. But I think it is the wilderness that has sprung her loose. So long as Pearl danced on the tombstones of the Puritan founders (1978:98), the wilderness had a compatriot. But now that she becomes the "richest heiress of her day, in the New World," she is no longer the nymph of the forest or child of the air, but another human being who "owns" a piece of the land. For, remarkably enough, Chillingworth bequeaths to her "a very considerable amount of property" in his will. So the vexed leech of the doomed generation sees to it that the blossom of the wilderness--the wild rose plucked by the prison-door--will have roots. Pearl will have the roots that Chillingworth has spent his life plucking.

F.O. Matthiessen's commentary on the happy ending of THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES (322), when momentarily applied to THE SCARLET LETTER, is enlightening, I find. Like the happily married couple in the other story, Pearl seems "to have made the successful gesture of renouncing the worst of the past." (322) There is a change in the tone of the seven gables story as I think there is towards the close of the

scarlet letter romance. Matthiessen is critical of Hawthorne at this point because he finds Hawthorne's interpretation of the young lovers "comparatively flimsy," especially when set alongside the fact that Hawthorne himself felt there was no escaping the inevitable recurrence of the sins of one generation in the successive ones. "Hawthorne," he says, "has not visualized their future with any precision." He overlooks the fact that "he was sewing all over again the same seeds of evil."(322)

Hawthorne, I think, perceived the movement of the story up through Dimmesdale's confession but seems to have lost sight of his own intentions after that. I cannot believe Chillingworth's significance dwindles so rapidly, that it simply dries up and withers away. Or that Hester is transformed the same as Pearl, that is, that she accepts her fate without question. Or that the Puritans remain simply baffled by the miraculous translation of their minister into a saint before their very eyes, or that they so readily become guardians of the spell of the scarlet letter. Hawthorne, for a brief moment at the climax of the romance, pulls back, and withdraws from his role of artist, taking refuge in his role as editor, delivering up the obligatory happy ending. I am thrown by this drastic swerve in perspective, now that the narrator has deserted his post and given me gossip to read instead.

But, the story does not end as simply as all that. Hawthorne does in fact recover his voice. And the story closes on the same dim

note that it began--with the images of sin and death planted together side by side. After we have left the penitent Hester and Pearl (who is surely the prototype for the prophetess Hester anticipates) (1978:185), we come to the graveyard. Even in death the two are separated. Hester is buried "near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space bewteen, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both." (1978:186) And who has buried Hester here but the same community that has come to her for succor and comfort or to revere the dread emblem on her bodice. Little, it seems, has really changed.

All the other characters in THE SCARLET LETTER have died or emigrated, but the Puritan community lives on. Only the grounds of the dilemma remain, and the grounds are the remains. And what is buried will be revealed anon. That very same momentum and flux--the same problems--that haunted the Puritan community in Hester's day are not dead but sleeping, awaiting the appearance of another form that will embody the unresolved griefs. And, indeed, they already have found another form, the book Surveyor Pue commissioned Hawthorne to write, THE SCARLET LETTER. The very fact the book was written attests to the persistence of the dilemma and the urge to express it. And the Puritans, I am convinced, "knew" this. That is why, one might imagine, they had Hawthorne tell the story of Mistress Prynne, because it is their story also. It was he that the restless Puritans, like the old customs officer, commissioned to tell the tale. The moment

Hawthorne accepted the dusky manuscript from the "ancient Surveyor," he launched himself into the same grim sphere that Hester inhabited, that is, he willfully became an artist, a concocter of fiction, a deviant--a "citizen of somewhere else."

GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY

I mentioned Emerson's 1836 tract, *NATURE*, in the previous chapter and noted that it characterized the American quandry over what to think about all that land that made America what it was. The dilemma that Americans had then, they have had ever since. Is nature not there to be subdued and cultivated for the betterment of man? Or does the true betterment of the self lie in submitting to, and not dominating, nature? Since these two lines of thought have generally persisted in one form or another for over a century, they tend to dominate the direction of the arguments, and consequently, define the nature of the problem. Hawthorne, I think, broached the whole question from a different angle altogether, one which redefined the question.

In *THE SCARLET LETTER*, Hawthorne experiments with the dichotomous propositions that were typical of his era (and ours) and finds both inadequate. He rejects romanticism and the notions of self-sufficiency and radical identification with nature. Nature, in *THE SCARLET LETTER*, is clearly not the model of the sublime that it

was for Thoreau or Emerson. The wilderness, the forest, the sea, all are ambiguous settings. These are the natural scenes in the story which are considered by the characters to be strange, dangerous zones, because they are wild and mysterious and thus unknowable and beyond moral control. They are the places where Indians, witches, and pirates roamed--those who stand apart from the moral interests of the community and thus are a cardinal threat to it. Hester and Chillingworth, in keeping with the Puritan notion that these untamed regions breed lawlessness, stake their roots in the liminal zone between the town and the wilds. No one has to put them in their place; they choose a setting that embodies their position in the world.

On the other hand, the Puritans in the story do not simply ravage the forest. They are not yet smitten with the acquisitive spirit. They are too busy trying to establish themselves, gain a sense of stability and balance, in a hostile environment. They do not exploit the land. They are more worried about its exploiting them. The Puritans work to control the influence of nature, and the only way to do that when the odds are overwhelming is to control what people think about nature. They can hardly build a fence around the forest to keep the Black Man at bay, so they must see to it that they do not allow themselves to wander off into the region he inhabits. And those who do penetrate these territories are subject to fits of delusion, like Dimmesdale, or madness, like Mistress Hibbins.

In the story neither romantic absorption nor systematic suppression of nature works. Both create a severe imbalance, if they are not already expressions of some sort of imbalance to begin with. Hawthorne never resolves this dilemma in the story, but he is able to articulate it with menacing accuracy. And he is able to resist the temptation to offer facile solutions to a problem that is lodged deep in the heart of nineteenth century America because he respects his position as artist, as surveyor, and interpreter. The reason he is able to perceive the dilemma so clearly is because he is a romance writer, that is, he already inhabits a liminal zone, once removed from the continuous hum of commerce and respectability. It is his business as a writer to familiarize himself with that neutral territory "where the Actual and the Imaginary meet." His deviant profession confers upon him the status of a displaced person, which imparts to him a peculiar kind of revelatory genius, the gift which shaped and moulded his craft.

The traditional categories for naming Hawthorne's themes usually centre around terms like isolation, alienation, and the various diseases of the spirit that erupt when people are fundamentally cut-off from society, and hence, from themselves. THE SCARLET LETTER, of course, is rife with this theme. The story does not simply point to disintegration as a trauma, an evil one at that. Rather, it embodies that fact. Hawthorne locates the rhythm and shape of the impulses that lead to the severance of heart from mind and individual

from society. But he also understands well the pervasive influences that shape society and the individual. He physicalizes these in the story as active background, as environment. By focusing on the tension between foreground and background, he finds the pulse of this peculiarly American obsession. Hawthorne identifies America's dilemma as a spatial one. It is a problem with boundaries and territories, relationships and displacement, one particularly suited to treatment as romance, because the genre itself is tied to landscape, including the landscape of the mind.

In conclusion, I find that THE SCARLET LETTER embodies the search for some sort of resolution to a rift in the American consciousness that expresses itself as perennial homelessness. Yet the search is not successful, and there indeed seems to be no resolution to the age-old difficulty of being a pioneer, seeker, or a descendant of either. There is no evading the responsibility, Hawthorne reminds us, of being that second Adam. And there is no avoiding the fact that Eden, in America, is wilderness, and not an Emersonian garden. R.W.B. Lewis recognizes this same insistence in Hawthorne on the inevitability of facing irreconcilable choices. "That is why we have the frantic shuttling, in novel after novel, between the village and the forest, the city and the country; for these are the symbols between which the choice must be made and the means by which moral inference is converted into dramatic action." (Lewis in Hawthorne, 1978:345)

America, Hawthorne might say, has not missed discovering her sacred places. (see Rubenstein in Janzen) The problem is not lack of sacred places; it is that her sacred places are those that are the most ambivalent. This is the crux of the holy as Rudolf Otto describes it in THE IDEA OF THE HOLY. Geography, for Hawthorne, is more than it is for Janzen; it is more than a reference point along a spiritual journey. The environment--both geographical and cultural--exerts a formative influence on our lives. Because of this, it shapes and forms moral questions, and in fact, precipitates them. This fundamental connection between morality and environment suggests, I think, that moral questions are questions of embodiment. Hawthorne's message is woven into the same pattern over and over again: the environmental becomes the physiological becomes the spiritual.

The Puritans who arrived on the shores of New England prepared to transform its barbaric boundaries into the foundations of the kingdom failed. They failed in the sense that they were not able to convert the American wilderness into the promised land. But what did happen was a peculiar reversal. America made the Puritans over into Americans.

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