

CHAPTER 3

Native American Presence

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The opening years of Hawthorne's writing career correspond with the formulation of a federal policy whereby the US government sought territorial cessions from Native American nations east of the Mississippi (primarily in the southeast) and required their relocation to western reservations. In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act and President Jackson signed it into law. By the end of the decade, the federal government had negotiated and implemented, often through physical compulsion, treaties with the Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Cherokees (Hurt 137–163). The most famous instance of forced removal, the Cherokee Trail of Tears, took place in the fall and winter of 1838–1839, when approximately four thousand died on the journey from the southeast to present-day Oklahoma. Outcry over the situation of the Cherokees and other targeted nations fueled years of political debate, which Hawthorne could not have avoided in newspapers or the public square. At the height of national engagement with the "Indian Question," from 1829 to 1832, residents of Salem held a series of events to express sympathy for the Cherokee and other dispossessed nations (Moore 129).

Hawthorne could not have avoided the subject of Native American history and sovereignty in the literary culture to which he belonged either. The 1820s and 1830s saw the flourishing of a US literary nationalism that, in the interest of establishing American distinctiveness, drew on Native American texts, oral traditions and oratory, sacred ritual, and performances (Scheckel 3–12). This was certainly true for such writers as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and it apparently irked Hawthorne. He wrote bitterly in 1835 that he had been "shut out from the most peculiar field of American fiction, by an inability to see any romance, or poetry, or grandeur, or beauty in the Indian character, at least, till such traits were pointed out by others," and famously concluded, "I do abhor an Indian story" (10:428–429).¹ So great was the vogue for Native material, and such was the political need for Native

of resistance, that this period also saw the increased publication of Native-authored literatures. As Maureen Konkle explores in *Writing Indian Nations*, such writers as William Apess (Pequot), Elias Boudinot (Cherokee), George Copway (Ojibwe), and David Cusick (Tuscarora) brought to Native and non-Native readers alike expressions of cultural and political sovereignty. Hawthorne was, then, surrounded by “Indian stories” and by Native Americans who, like himself, sought out new opportunities for publishing within an evolving print culture.

Given Hawthorne’s stated hostility toward Native material, his allegorical use of “the Indian” to denote savagery (appealing and otherwise), his employment of the common trope of the doomed Indian, and the near-absence of fully developed Native characters from his writings, modern readers have concluded Hawthorne was no advocate for Native rights. Indeed, the scholarly consensus seems to be that Hawthorne’s oeuvre represents the literary equivalent of removal.² Nonetheless, critics have persisted in reading his works as powerful records of “a blood-red Indian legacy” at the center of US history (Bergland 158). Noting “how reductive it is to label as Indian stories only stories populated by Indians” (Bellin 27), Joshua David Bellin elucidates Native presence in Hawthorne’s works that appear purposefully to repress Native subjects, and Mark Rifkin shows through *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and other works how “indigeneity dwells within nonnative experience as its effaced/negated condition of possibility” (Rifkin 38). To focus on Native American *presence* in Hawthorne’s works is to acknowledge that Hawthorne lived and wrote in a land inhabited, marked, recorded, and contested by Native Americans and that he simply could not write Native Americans out of historic or contemporary existence.

Native American presence in Hawthorne’s work may be detected through a focus on his use of figures grounded in the discourse of US colonialism but also in white–Indian cultural exchange. These include autochthonous legend, progression through social stages, warfare, captivity, conversion, and masquerade. Even when Native Americans are absent from a Hawthorne text, these figures point toward the “Indian Question,” simultaneously reinforcing the ideology of removal but also constituting a critique of colonial violence, especially that waged by New England Puritans. In her study of “going native,” Shari Huhndorf asks, “To what extent does evoking ‘nativeness’ . . . reveal the conflicts and fissures at the heart of an Americanness imagined as *e pluribus unum*?” (14). Acknowledging and contextualizing the ideology of removal in Hawthorne’s works is of critical importance, but so too are the excavations of deep ironies and

brief moments of aspirational affiliation that destabilize the assumption of Native American absence.

Hawthorne's commitment to what we might call autochthonous legend (i.e., tradition) makes his claim to "abhor an Indian story" deeply ironic. That is, while Hawthorne does not, in the manner of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, offer compositions purportedly faithful to Native orature, his narrators regularly insist their tales have circulated for centuries and acquired a kind of spiritual link to the landscape of New England. As Yael Ben-Zvi argues, "Nativeness, as Hawthorne's works make clear, provides a powerful framework through which colonized-turned-national belonging can be perceived as always-already inalienable" (39). Hawthorne's development of local oral traditions that are tinged with Nativeness but eschew actual Native Americans is another trick of dissociation, one grounded in a Romantic aesthetic, but it nonetheless depends on the paired phenomenon of a burgeoning Native American print culture and a US literary nationalism fueled by appropriated Native tales and themes.

For example, three Hawthorne tales with peripheral Native American characters establish credibility through a seemingly "primaeval" Euro-American orality: the story of Reuben Bourne's betrayal in "Roger Malvin's Burial" (1832) is taken in part "from old men's lips" (10:337); the tale in "Alice Doane's Appeal" (1835) "had good authority in our ancient superstitions" (11:278); and "The Great Stone Face" (1850) centers on a prophecy transferred seamlessly from Native American predecessors to Euro-American residents. In "The Great Carbuncle" (1837), the narrator openly acknowledges Native inspiration, only to insist, "The Indian tradition, on which this somewhat extravagant tale is founded, is both too wild and too beautiful, to be adequately wrought up, in prose" (9:149n). Here Hawthorne converts an Abenaki legend concerning a forbidden gem long hidden in the White Mountains into a story of white vagabonds who pursue beauty rather than compulsory routine. Yet as Renée Bergland argues, the Abenaki story remains "buried deep within his artistic consciousness" as evidenced by Hawthorne's use of the carbuncular shade of scarlet in subsequent texts (154). The Native associations with Hester's letter – some believe it once repelled an arrow (1:163) – and the description of its discovery in "The Custom-House" – in which the rare Puritan records are compared to "Indian arrow-heads" (1:29) – likewise mark it as another autochthonous source. Hawthorne may have looked with jealousy on all who profitably brought Native American materials to the Euro-American literary market, but he found his own means of adapting those materials to his authorial project.

Hawthorne's tales often appear to subscribe to a nineteenth-century understanding of human societies (and, by extension, races) as defined by modes of subsistence, religious practices, and alphabetic literacy and as progressing from simplicity to civilization. Many Euro-American authors and early ethnographers understood Native Americans as savage or barbaric (rather than semi-civilized or civilized), and thus inherently, if tragically, obsolete (Mielke 2–4). Hawthorne's tales often employ such a framework. The "primeval Indian" of "Endicott and the Red Cross" (1838) carries "but childish weapons" and represents to the combative Endicott a threat on par with "[t]he wolf and the bear" (9:436, 438). The discovery of an arrowhead in "The Old Manse" (1846) prompts the narrator to imagine, in contrast with "the broad daylight of reality," a bustling Native village, only to reprimand himself, "But this is nonsense. The old Manse is better than a thousand wigwams" (10:11). Similarly, in "Main-street" (1849), a puppet-show designed to "call up the multiform and many-colored Past before the spectator, and show him . . . a succession of historic incidents" begins with a barely visible Indian trail traversed by "the great Squaw Sachem" and her husband but soon shows a village in which their drunken descendant is ridiculed by schoolboys (11:49, 51, 72). "[T]he Indians," asserts the narrator, "marvel at the deep track which [the white man] makes, and perhaps are saddened by a flitting presentiment, that this heavy tread will find its way over all the land; and that the wild woods, the wild wolf, and the wild Indian, will alike be trampled beneath it" (11:55). Often, then, Hawthorne yokes Native Americans to an atavistic and irrecoverable past even as he aestheticizes and pines for that past.

"The Seven Vagabonds" (1833) departs, at least tentatively, from the stadialism of Hawthorne's other works, lingering on the attractions of Native life. The tale describes a group of wayfarers taking shelter from the rain in the wagon of a traveling showman, and the seventh to arrive is a Penobscot Indian who, like the other vagabonds, survives on performance (in this case, shooting his bow and arrow), begging, and knavery. In fact, the Penobscot Indian typifies this "parliament of . . . free spirits," whose progenitors are "those mighty vagrants, who had chased the deer during thousands of years, and were chasing it now in the Spirit Land" (9:365). Despite this language of disappearance – and the assertion that the Penobscot has lost the "savage virtue and uncultured force" of his ancestors – "Seven Vagabonds" strikes a Thoreauvian note when it refers to civilization's "routine of artificial life" before happily confirming "here was the Indian still" (9:365). The tale concludes with the narrator, a self-proclaimed "itinerant novelist," heading to Boston with the Penobscot

Indian, and in this way the "Seven Vagabonds" resists the myth of disappearance and westward trajectory of removal through an assertion of deep affinity.

Such moments of coexistence notwithstanding, Hawthorne's treatment of white-Indian relations more often contribute to his critique of colonial violence. Pacifism, argues Larry J. Reynolds, "served as the basic and consistent principle by which [Hawthorne] implicitly judged the actions of individuals and nations" (19). Hawthorne often references the shameful brutality of Euro-Americans in conflicts with New England Natives, especially King Philip's War (1675-1678), the bloodiest conflict in North American history. In "The Gray Champion" (1835) we encounter "the veterans of King Philip's war, who had burnt villages and slaughtered young and old, with pious fierceness" (9:11); the protagonist's father in "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) "set fire to an Indian village" during the conflict (10:77); and the skull of King Philip, "whose head the Puritans smote off and exhibited on a pole," shows up in "A Virtuoso's Collection" (1842) (10:483). Reaching back to a ruthless massacre of Pequot Indians at Fort Mystic in 1636, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) tells us that the gleaming armor Pearl finds in Governor Bellingham's hall "had glittered . . . at the head of a regiment in the Pequod war" (1:105-106). The armor distorts and duplicates the symbol of Hester's sin, delighting Pearl, whose "nature [is] wilder than" that of the Indian (1:244), and signifying violence against indigenous peoples as the Puritans' original and perpetual sin.

White-Indian violence is seemingly peripheral yet actually essential to "Roger Malvin's Burial," a tale set in the aftermath of the Battle of Pequawket (1725), which began when a war party of Pequawket Indians ambushed a New England scalping party led by John Lovewell. Hawthorne's tale summons and then suppresses this bloody confrontation by focusing on its aftermath and probing not the virtue of the combatants' methods but the familial honor of a sole white survivor, Reuben Bourne. Allusive to the Old Testament stories of Abraham and Isaac and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, "Roger Malvin's Burial" further allegorizes original sin and the divinity of patriarchal authority, but in an unsettled and unsettling way. As Roger Malvin and Bourne, two of Lovewell's wounded men, make their weary way home through the Maine woods, Malvin works to convince his son-in-law-to-be to leave him in the woods to die so that one of them will have a chance to survive. Bourne does so reluctantly, pledging to return and bury Malvin - a pledge he fails to keep that subsequently taints an otherwise blessed life with his wife, Dorcas, and their son, Cyrus. The story culminates in Bourne accidentally

shooting Cyrus on the very site of Malvin's death, prompting Dorcas to swoon. While the final line emphasizes the expiation of sin – “a prayer, the first for years, went up to Heaven from the lips of Reuben Bourne” (10:360) – hope is undermined by the spectacle of prostrate victims. “Roger Malvin's Burial” extravagantly fails to repress the original sin of European colonialism: the violent dispossession and intended extermination of indigenous inhabitants.

Malvin tells Bourne that twenty years prior he had “escaped . . . Indian captivity, near Montreal” during Queen Anne's War (1702–1713) (10:342). Captivity was a reality of warfare between the groups from first contact in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through the demise of the federal Indian boarding school policy in the early twentieth century. White captivity and acculturation among Native Americans is a ubiquitous trope in US literature of the Removal Era, including as-told-to accounts such as *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824) and historical romances such as Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) and Cooper's *The Wept-of-Wish-Ton-Wish* (1829). Hawthorne reflects on instances of captivity in two historical essays. “Mrs. Hutchinson” (1830) offers an uncharitable assessment of the seventeenth-century Puritan dissident banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Still, the narrative flinches at her fate: Anne Hutchinson and six of her children were killed in an Indian attack and “an infant daughter, the sole survivor amid the terrible destruction of her mother's household, was bred in a barbarous faith, and never learned the way to the Christian's Heaven. Yet we will hope, that there the mother and the child have met” (23:73–74). “The Duston Family” (1836) expresses no such hope for the mother, Hannah Duston. Having escaped from captivity in 1697 by murdering (with the help of two others) ten Abenaki captors and taking scalps for reward, Duston proves herself a “raging tigress” (397). Duston is *captivated* in both the seventeenth-century and later sense of the word: transformed through violent detention into a fundamentally violent creature, utterly irredeemable in both historical and heavenly contexts. Hawthorne seethes: “Would that the bloody old hag had been drowned in crossing Contocook river, or that she had sunk over head and ears in a swamp, and been there buried, till summoned forth to confront her victims at the Day of Judgement” (397). Damned alongside Duston is Hawthorne's source, Cotton Mather, “an old hardhearted, pedantic bigot” who assigns Duston's horrific deeds to Providence (396). In the work of Hawthorne, captivity dehumanizes the participants and fuels the violence central to colonial experience.

Nowhere is this clearer than in *The Scarlet Letter*, in which Indian captivity is the necessary condition for Roger Chillingworth's complex revenge. When he first appears, Chillingworth is "clad in a strange disarray of civilized and savage costume," having, in his words, "been long held in bonds among the heathen-folk, to the southward; and . . . now brought hither by this Indian, to be redeemed out of my captivity" (1:60, 61-62). The people of Boston come to believe that "during his Indian captivity, [Chillingworth] had enlarged his medical attainments by joining in the incantation of savage priests" (1:127). Dimmesdale, then, is "haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan's emissary, in the guise of Old Roger Chillingworth," but they "look[], with an unshaken hope, to see the minister come forth out of the conflict, transfigured with the glory which he would unquestionably win" (1:128). As exemplified by Mary Rowlandson's seminal 1682 narrative, Puritans viewed Indian captivity as a potentially sanctifying experience, a divinely authored ordeal mortifying the flesh and preparing the believer for salvation. In *Scarlet Letter*, Indian captivity ironically does not sanctify Chillingworth but converts him to moral savagery; it is Chillingworth's captivation of Dimmesdale that appears providential. As in "Roger Malvin's Burial," suffering at the hands of Native Americans does not atone for the white man's sin; rather, it spurs sin that must be expiated in more abstract forms of captivity.

As the displacement of captivity from Chillingworth to Dimmesdale suggests, Hawthorne more readily depicts violent conflicts among New England colonists, particularly the persecution of Quakers and those accused of witchcraft, than between colonists and Native Americans. Most prominently, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) displaces white-Indian colonial violence by focusing on the economic injustices within white New England; the ancestral Pyncheon home is built on land the Pyncheons wrested not from Native inhabitants but from the family of condemned wizard Matthew Maule. In retribution, Maule's son Thomas ferrets away in the house "an ancient deed, signed with the hieroglyphics of several Indian sagamores, and conveying to Colonel Pyncheon and his heirs, forever, a vast extent of territory at the eastward" (2:316). Rifkin argues that the deed actually "signals [the Pyncheons'] perverse degeneration into Indianness: an insupportable claim to vast territory . . . that enchains the present to a (primitive) past" (86). The Pyncheons' search for the deed, which becomes "worthless" via a process parallel to Native American degeneracy, multiplies (as does Governor Bellingham's armor) the violence of colonial dispossession, prompting Jaffrey Pyncheon's betrayal of his

cousin Clifford and allowing for Holgrave's victorious repossession of the home site on behalf of the Maule family.

Violence is also displaced from Native Americans to Euro-Americans in Hawthorne's works through masquerade, especially whites dressing up as Indians. Philip Deloria observes that in the colonial and early national periods, Indians represented at once the inverse of "a civilized national Self" and "freedom" from the restraints of civilization, "setting up a 'have-the-cake-and-eat-it-too' dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion" (3). Timothy Powell, with reference to the work of Eric Lott, describes this as "the endless interplay of desire and disavowal" for Native Americans in Hawthorne's fiction (Powell 33). For example, the group of revelers subjugated by Puritan authorities in "The Maypole of Merry Mount" (1836) includes "a counterfeit . . . Indian hunter, with feathery crest and wampum belt" (9:56). In "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), the crowd of rebels that pass young Robin includes "wild figures in the Indian dress," and their terrifying leader's red and black face signifies "war personified" and whites' racial mimicry (11:227–228). The band of sylvan revelers in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), whose appearance presages Zenobia's fateful trial at the hands of Hollingsworth, includes "an Indian chief, with blanket, feathers and war-paint, and uplifted tomahawk" and gathers, as discussed below, in front of a site of Native American conversion (3:209). The ritual of playing Indian in Hawthorne's works signifies resistance to repressive authority, much as it did at the Boston Tea Party. At the same time, Hawthorne emphasizes how such masqueraders attempt to disguise their viciousness as moral action.

Distinct from the play-acting of masquerade in Hawthorne's work is a concern with conversion, especially, as Bellin notes, the ministry of John Eliot (1604–1690), Puritan missionary to the Native Americans and translator of the Bible into the Massachusett language. When Hester and Dimmesdale have their momentous meeting in the woods, Dimmesdale is returning from a visit to Eliot in which he "rejoice[d] with him over the many precious souls he hath won from heathendom!" (1:221). Eliot is a foil for Dimmesdale as the former's faithful service appears to both mirror and give the lie to the latter's ministry. When Hester praises Dimmesdale's service to his parishioners and calls on him to abandon his unhealthy guilt, she urges him to be "the teacher and apostle of the red men" (1:198). In *Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla, and Coverdale spend Sunday afternoons at a rock that purportedly served as Eliot's pulpit, and there Hollingsworth and Zenobia hold forth on their respective topics in "as wild a tract of woodland as the great-great-great-great grandson of

one of Eliot's Indians (had any such posterity been in existence) could have desired" (3:118). Once again Eliot serves as a foil for Hawthorne's characters as the demise of Eliot's cause (in the purported disappearance of local tribes) portends the failure of the utopian community, Hollingsworth's prison, and Zenobia's quest for "woman's wider liberty" (3:120). Indeed, Eliot's pulpit is the site of Zenobia's fateful "trial" wherein the self-centered Hollingsworth charges her with ill doing. Lauren Berlant concludes that "the burial of Indian history beneath the dust of other American delusions is both enacted and alluded to" through the Eliot references (Berlant 49). The only trace left of Eliot and his Native parishioners is a massive rock, and like that marking the burial site of Roger Malvin and Cyrus Bourne, the rock memorializes white victims.

In Hawthorne's ironic conversion narratives, which contain some of his harshest assessments of the Puritans, individuals are won over not to Christianity, indigenous faith, or even Satanism but to somber lives, as exemplified by Young Goodman Brown's deadening self-righteousness. "The Maypole of Merry Mount" inverts colonial conversion by associating the white residents of the nonconforming community at Merry Mount with Nativeness — they are a "giddy tribe" of "[s]worn triflers" — only to narrate their forced submission to the New England Way (9:59, 60). The hostile Puritans who spy on the profoundly English May Day festivities at Merry Mount see only "those devils and ruined souls, with whom their superstition peopled the black wilderness" (9:56). Governor Endicott and the members of his party are characterized by their brutality toward that wilderness and the people who populate it: "Their weapons were always at hand, to shoot down the straggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was . . . to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians" (9:60–61). Fittingly, Endicott interposes with a sword and sends off the Merry Mount revelers for whipping. When he spares the newlyweds Edgar and Edith this humiliation due to their respective prospects as laborer-soldier and mother, the two undergo spiritual-material conversion akin to that of Eliot's Praying Indians: the Puritans crop Edgar's hair, give both "garments of a more decent fashion," and force them to leave behind "their home of wild mirth" (9:66, 67). Despite its displacement of Native history, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" works a critique of forced acculturation through its allegorical assertion that "the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gaiety" (9:66). For Hawthorne, overpowering the innocent may be inevitable but is not defensible.

As critics have made clear, Hawthorne is far from the only US author of the Removal Era whose works convey at once the desire to forget Native Americans and the violence perpetually waged against them and the impossibility of doing so. To use Susan Scheckel's terminology, we find in this period "the *insistence* of the Indian in the American national consciousness" (12, emphasis added), manifested in myriad literary forms. Hawthorne's explicit interest in the repetition and recirculation of narratives finds a powerful corollary in the insistent, if unsteady, presence of Nativeness across his writings. Nowhere is this clearer than in the unfinished *Elixir of Life* manuscripts in which the protagonist, Septimus Felton, has a drive to achieve immortality, a mixed Indian-white heritage, and a sinking feeling that "As dramatists and novelists repeat their plots, so does man's life repeat itself, and at length grows stale" (13:176). Hawthorne's more-than-twice-told tales have Native American content inextricably tied to recurring symbols of violent colonialism and hereditary guilt – including an indelible bloody footprint in *Septimus Felton* and, before that, the Pyncheon heirs' mouthfuls of blood.

Notes

- 1 On this comment and Hawthorne's ambivalence concerning Indian stories, see especially Brickhouse 233–235.
- 2 In the groundbreaking *Removals*, Lucy Maddox emphasizes Hawthorne's conservatism and determines, "For Hawthorne, guilt is not the result of killing savages but of imitating them" (130). Renée L. Bergland and Laura Doyle trace, respectively, the spectralization of Indians and displacement of violence against them in Hawthorne's works.

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