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AMERICAN ROMANTICISM AND THE POLITICS OF NEGATIVE ORIGINALITY: THE DARK PASSAGES OF EMERSON, POE, HAWTHORNE, AND MELVILLE.

by

Peter Brock Olson

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

The University of Memphis

May 2013

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Acknowledgements

The writing of a literary dissertation with dimensions such as this one, especially one with political, historical, and philosophical aspects, depends upon the encouragement and support of a wealth of mentors and colleagues. If it were not for my circle of advisors, professors, and friends, all who took an interest in this project, this document would have been much more daunting. I formulated the idea for this dissertation during my participation in three seminars in American literature at the University of Memphis in the Department of English with Dr. John Ronan during the period from 2006-2008.

During those years I read Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *The Confidence-Man,* Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition," Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter,* and Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature.* These four remarkable authors seemed to have remarkable things to say about originality. The principal idea for this study came about as a result of pondering Melville's discussion of originality in the penultimate chapter of *The Confidence-Man.* Melville quipped about his cosmopolitan character, that he was "Quite an Original," which means, of course, that "wherein his originality consisted was not clearly given." For me, the driving question then centered on what Melville means by the phrase "quite an original genius." The answer is deceptively difficult and even diabolical.

The concept of originality in the Romantic era illuminates much of the philosophical background about which Melville reflected, particularly works by Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Carlyle. I found myself reaching back to German and British Romantics, primary and secondary sources in American Transcendentalism and literary publishing of the mid-nineteenth century, and to commentators on American literature and publishing, more recently working in the twentieth-century.

The preparation of this dissertation was supervised by the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Theron Britt, whose patience and unwavering care helped me to stay on track and remain confident that I could complete the task. Dr. Jeffrey Scraba offered a number of key suggestions about authors and texts that found their way into the work. Dr. John David Miles made some helpful suggestions towards the formation of the draft. Dr. Reginald Martin's suggestions and support are truly appreciated, particularly his subtle reminder that Carlyle's ambiguous position must be contextualized. Dr. Joshua Phillips, who coordinates the Literary and Cultural Studies concentration, gave much appreciated feedback. Dr. Verner Mitchell, chair of English graduate studies at the University of Memphis has been a kind advocate for my work during this study.

I also wish to thank my colleagues at Mississippi State University, especially Dr. Bonnie O'Neill, Dr. Patrick Creevy, whose help with Coleridge and Wordsworth was crucial, Dr. Tennyson O'Donnell (now at Trinity College), Dr. Rich Raymond, and David Nolen, who provided welcome advice and wisdom. I also wish to give my deepest thanks to Mary Hanson, my wife, who helped in a hundred ways, and most of all, for her faith in me. I also thank my mother Claire Olson and Neil Clark for their care and support.

Abstract

Olson, Peter Brock. Ph.D. The University of Memphis. May, 2013. *American Romanticism and the Politics of Negative Originality: The Dark Passages of Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville*. Major Professor: Dr. Theron Britt.

Critics and commentators have recently reinitiated interest in Romanticism within the sphere of nineteenth-century American literature, and have sought to recuperate Romantic aesthetics to explore the implications of the American renaissance. The scholarship in Romantic theory has given impetus to a New Romanticism that synthesizes philosophy of literature--phenomenology and poststructuralism--with cultural and genre studies. This dissertation studies four canonic mid-nineteenth-century American authors--Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville--through the nexus of Romantic negativity and originality, and takes a metacritical approach to a transatlantic critical field juxtaposing American Transcendentalism, British Romanticism, and German Idealism within the sphere of an antebellum cultural matrix composed of American literary culture and politics. As a central premise this dissertation acknowledges the dialectical tensions between European concepts of originality stemming from German and British thinkers and critics and the prevailing tenor of Americanism. The tension in the American antebellum critical scene was exacerbated by cultural debates among literati in the main publishing centers, as well as a desire among intellectuals to create a national aesthetic identity. The critical issue for American literati centered on the relation between originality and democracy. This study concludes that among American romantics both British and German metaphysical ideas formed a concept of negative originality, which becomes a central concern specifically in Emerson's *Nature,* Poe's *Eureka,* Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun,* and Melville's *The Confidence-Man.* While recent studies have explored transatlantic and literary national discursive aspects of genre

and publishing in the antebellum era, this study explores the specific relations between a phenomenology of authorship and a hermeneutics of Romantic theory, and situates American Romantic literary theory as an effect of politically charged demands for originality.

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Preface

This study explores the territory between literary and metaphysical notions of originality as these ideas affected the literary agency of mid-nineteenth-century American Romantics bound by the often negative or disjunctive relation of these concepts to a *cultural matrix* drawn from American national literary ideologies.[1] American Romantics drew upon literary-critical ideas about originality from British Romantic literary criticism and German Idealism. The rhetorical situation for American Romantics, despite an over-determined discourse over literary nationalism, was basically transatlantic, as the tumultuous debates over failed appeals for international copyright attest. Much of the writing by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and others of the period stretched the boundaries between a "democratic" readership and an "original" authorship.

Thomas McFarland, in his *Originality and Imagination* (1985), summarizes the problem of originality. He explains modernism in terms of a Romantic irony juxtaposing the poet and the literary context. McFarland understands the tension between the individual and society in terms of an *originality paradox* where the notion of individual creative originality performs a negative function—a dialogic relation—with respect to the community yet is also dependent upon tradition, as was noted by T. S. Eliot in his famous

[1] Derek Attridge defines the *cultural matrix* as a "changing array of interlocking, overlapping, and often contradictory cultural systems" presented in a transactional relation to a particular individual who has experienced a "complex matrix of habits, cognitive models, representations, beliefs, expectations, prejudices, and preferences that operate intellectually, emotionally, and physically to produce a sense at least relative community, coherence, and significance out of the manifold events of human living." Attridge offers the term 'idioculture' as a term to "refer to this embodiment in a single individual of widespread cultural norms and modes of behavior." Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.

essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919).[2] Eliot's "individual talent" recognized art through a capacity to produce meaning through tradition. Writing in *Letters and Social Aims* (1876), Emerson explains the originality paradox in the essay "Quotation and Originality," noting that "[l]anguage is a city, to the building of which every human being brought a stone…"[3] In Emerson's later understanding of the relation between originality and tradition, the individual creates through a shared language. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, reminiscing about William Wordsworth, noted the paradox of imitation and creation, stating that "in his imaginative power, he stands nearest all modern writers to Shakespear and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own."[4] Language is an inheritance of lexical, syntactic and semantic codes in constant circulation. In this sense, Romantic originality, then, rather than claiming a "privileged trans-historical category" for itself, appears instead to be a "cultural convention."[5]

In the mid-nineteenth century the criteria for originality held by American authors and readers had already been subject to a misreading of transatlantic sources, particularly in Coleridge's reading of Schelling. The disjunction between a universal poetics and a particularized national literature is a fundamental dialectic of the American cultural matrix of the 1840s and 50s. That Emerson discovered an "original relation to the

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[2] Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985); T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode, 37–44 (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1975).

[3] The term 'originality paradox' is Thomas McFarland's. He states that "The very question of originality and the paradoxical relation between artist and tradition arises in the polarity between the individual and society." Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 3. See also, Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," *Letters and Social Aims* (1876), 177.

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 151.

[5] Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

universe" in German and British Romantic theory is only one of the key ironies of American literary nationalism, but it is an important beginning point for understanding an "alternative" strain of American Romanticism that is based on "negative originality." In *The New Romanticism* (2000), Eberhard Alsen recognizes that modernist critics in the mid-twentieth century, particularly Morse Peckham and René Wellek, reinstated a more *negative* attitude with respect to the term romanticism, after the decline of the positive strain that had defined early transcendentalism.[6]

As we shall see in chapter two, Hegel describes negative originality as a "turning point."[7] It is through Emerson's Transcendental Club that we find that negative originality latent in American Romanticism can be traced to Immanuel Kant's "On the Sublime" and *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* particularly Kant's concern about negative freedom.[8] Following Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime* and the commentary by Mary Arensberg and Harold Bloom on the American sublime, as well as the work of Leon Chai in his *Romantic Theory* (2006), textual evidence of a

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[6] Eberhard Alsen, *The New Romanticism: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000). Peckham develops a theory of "negative romanticism" in Beyond the Tragic Vision, carrying the idea further in "Reconsiderations." Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Grorge Brazzilier, 1962; Morse Peckham, "Towards a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations." *Studies in Romanticism* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1961): 1–8.

[7] As an axiomatic theorem, Hegel offers "unity as the essence of genuine originality." G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291. For Hegel, unity is ultimately dialectical, a synthesis of being and negativity. The third term, becoming, is equated with originality since becoming is a singular, self-reflective, instance of an individual "movement of return." Originality comprises an individual side and an absolute side, in Hegelian thinking. Negativity is already present in the original thing and defines its *telos* through becoming. Negativity is the primary dialectical attribute of unity. Hegel states: "Now the negativity just considered constitutes the *turning-point* of the movement of the concept. It is the *simple point of negative self-relation,* the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement." G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel Selections*, ed. M. J. Inwood (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 253.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986).

correspondence between German, British, and American Romantics suggests that the dialectic between a Romantic authorship in America and the cultural matrix resembles the movement of return exemplified by theories of the sublime and the dialectical "negativity" of the Germans Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Herder, Schelling, and Schlegel.[9] In many ways American Romanticism became a movement of return through British Romanticism to German Idealism via the sublime disruption, or *diremption,* of revolution.[10]

A number of important studies by New Americanist critics of nineteenth-century authors "in context" (social and cultural) mark the shift from literary analysis to cultural criticism, a social turn towards New Historicism that remains influential in American studies.[11] In a review of Michael Davitt Bell's *The Problem of American Realism* (1993) Jane F. Thrailkill notes that "the authors themselves….emerge as the primary 'texts' of

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[9] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986); Mary Arensberg, "Introduction: The American Sublime." In *The American Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Harold Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 1–25. Bloom's Period Studies (New York: Chelsea House, 2004); Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006).

[10] According to Theodore Adorno, "works of art cannot rest content with such vague and abstract universality as is typical of classicism. They depend on diremption, and that means that the concrete historical situation, art's other, is the condition. Their social truth depends on whether or not they open themselves to that concrete content, making it their own through assimilation. Their law of form for its part does not smooth over the cleavage, but concerns itself with how to shape it" Theodore. Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*. Edited by Brian O'Conner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 248.

[11] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

Bell's inquiry…"[12] This concentration on the author, argues Thrailkill, might obfuscate "the reflexive engagement of these writers [Howells and Norris] with their particular cultural moment." Thrailkill, in her review, suggests a wider scope for the "cultural of letters" that extends to the "cultural practices" of "American society at large." In order to support this suggestion Thrailkill mentions "recent new historicists" Walter Benn Michaels and Amy Kaplan's work that exposes "a complex cultural engagement with artifice." The deceptions within the cultural matrix involve the relations between "the fictionality of commodities trading and stock speculation, [and] the romance of a mass-market culture that operates by sparking consumer's desires." Thrailkill, in other words, worries that a concentration on authorship obscures "deep-seated cultural anxieties about the dissolution of stable value."

Clearly Thrailkill's concern is to deconstruct the imbrication of cultural deceptions that persist through a romanticized view of what might be construed as real rather than as "social practice."[13] Bell's concentration on authorship, Thrailkill maintains, signifies a persistence of a Romantic dialectic between fiction and the social real. This "cultural" perspective seeks to confront the power of that fictionality and its attributes, including "originality," as social constructs privileging a dominant class anxious about its waning cultural power with respect to an appetitive consumerism duped by the instrumentality of capitalism. Bell acknowledges that in the "distinction" between a "relational" approach to literature and culture and a new historical approach as

[12] Michael Davitt Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation: Selected Essays on American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1. Thrailkill's comments quoted by Bell.

[13] Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation,* 2.

represented by Thrailkill, Michaels, and Kaplan, a valuable discursive field opens to the literary analyst shifts both in critical perspective and in the ideology of historicism.

Bell points out two "contexts" that expose relations between "American literature" and American "culture."[14] Bell reminds us that in the post-WW2-era of American literary studies the so-called "myth and symbol school" of criticism arose under the sway of Henry Nash Smith Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (*1950). Smith's contention that through metonym an image might represent a reified collective idea that became through Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), instantiated as a myth of a "pastoral ideal," an affective correlative with agrarianism that transformed a historical literary idea of utopianism into an ideology of American exceptionalism. Bell identifies the generic distinction between an American romance and a British fictional novel, a distinction maintained by Richard Chase and others but challenged by Robert Weisbuch, in *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (1986), we are reminded that despite the transatlantic literary transactions that defined American literary development in the nineteenth century. It is an American inferiority complex vis-à-vis British literary dominance that held sway from American literary nationalism in the antebellum era through the 1960s when the myth of American exceptionalism was called into question by social protests.

As opposed to the context of the school of "myth and symbol" Bell notes that a subsequent context was defined by the "collapse of this school's prestige."[15] Bruce Kuklick's 1972 essay, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," questions Leo Marx's

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[14] Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation,* 3.

[15] Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation,* 4.

expression “humanists” as an appropriate term for myth and symbol “practitioners.” Kuklick, according to Bell, “is particularly critical of ‘the humanist analysis of the relation between the great work of art’—the kind of work most often central to myth and symbol scholarship— ‘and the culture for which it was written’.” Bell, though, questions Kuklick’s assertion that canonized books implicitly argue for their own representativeness, since it is also the case that some literary works of the nineteenth century, such as Melville’s *Moby-Dick,* failed as popular works.

If one may assume that a literary work is inherently culturally reflexive, according to Kuklick, then its inherent shortcoming is that as a metonym such a text becomes reductive and its persuasive power rests on an inferred authority that obscures its inductive limits. Moreover, Kuklick, Bell argues, holds that humanism (following Gilbert Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind*, 1949) supposes an oversimplified Cartesian subject-object split that promotes a platonic formal typology that inoculates the particular thinker from exposing his or her existential intentions. The problem for cultural historicism, suggests Bell, is that it remains problematic to correlate individual worldviews to social structures and cultural formations without falling into the same gap of generalization that cultural critics charge humanists with.[16]

Bell analyzes two important problematics of New Historicism. One is “a tendency to speak of societies as if they were minds, with anxieties and other problems amenable, for example, to psychoanalytic description.” Another, “is a tendency to speak of societies and parts of societies--of ‘cultures’ and ‘subcultures’—as if they were essentially textual, ‘discourses,’ patterns of symbolic expression to be decoded as we would decode literary

[16] Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation,* 5.

texts."[17] Walter Benn Michaels, for example, in his *Gold Standard*, such notions as "commodity" and "corporation" can never be completely reduced to their constituent physical properties; "writing," he argues further, neither transcends its physical marks nor allows reduction to those marks.[18] Writing, then, cannot be distinguished from culture. For Bell, therein lies the dilemma since the concept of culture must be widened to accommodate its constituents so that all supposed relations are also held to be correlations. Bell notes that "[a]ll of this culminates in a well-known dismissal of the idea that a scholar might 'posit a space outside the culture in order to interrogate the relations between that space (here defined as literary) and the culture'."

According to J. Hillis Miller critical theory proliferates through a range of "incompatible" frameworks.[19] The presence of a theory as a critical mechanism resituates the way an "example" is read. Moreover, the notion of "history" arises as a contrapositive to both theory and text. History becomes the changing continuum in which assumptions about literature and theory are revealed. Meaning within a work is no longer satisfied by a hermeneutical study, but rather necessitates a study of the generative aspects of meaning. In the aftermath of the dissolution of New Criticism and the breakdown of universal ideas of literary value, the multitudinous presence of critical theories along with varying ideas about canonicity, then critical theory becomes "exigent."

Literary examples become, in this situation, emblematic of the effect of theory. Theories generate meaning through example. Critical theory, then, becomes the dominant

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[17] Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation,* 5.

[18] Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation,* 6.

[19] J. Hillis Miller, *Hawthorne and History* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991), 46-47.

instrument for literary study. Canonicity becomes less significant as critical theory instrumentalizes study and examples become more arbitrary.[20] If choices are arbitrary the result is that the claim of critical theory implies a universal applicability and a free play of signification. Each theory becomes, in its own domain and on its own terms, a universal way of reading inscribed with culturally accepted meanings and values. Yet critical theory promises that it might liberate readers by exposing ideology latent in meaning. In this sense critical theory promises to be an ethical resource that addresses politically regressive ideas that are entrenched in institutions of reading. Critical theory has the power to problematize what is latent in works and thus mitigate the power of the canon to propagate ideology.

From that standpoint, summarizing Jerome McGann, Romantic art "reflects" both the individual and social conditions of its subject—the self—since Romanticism attempted a "double act of reflection," both in its representation of the observable and of the self as consciousness, which presents the artist in a transcendent relationship to culture. Forest Pyle develops a metacritical role for that transcendent relation, arguing that "Imagination gains a rhetorical status in discourse due to a disjunction between the claims for the figure and its rhetorical effects."[21] Terry Eagleton notes that underneath the emerging concept of the aesthetic in eighteenth-century Germany was the association

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[20] Miller, *Hawthorne and History*, 48.

[21] Pyle is concerned with a binding of imagination and ideology. The Romantic imagination provides a vantage point from which to view ideology. The term 'imagination' is "mercurial" Imagination becomes the essential figure of Romantic discourse and it is an independent concept from self-formation or property definition….The role of the Romantic imagination is provide an agency where otherwise a device is lacking; in Kant transcendental reason and empirical reality, requiring a faculty of translation that can move between reason and appearance. The translation between original and referent is never total, less a matter of transmission loss than production of meaning hinging on the disjunction between idea and representation" Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 1-5.

between judgment and freedom on the side of reason, and of the association between taste and originality on the part of the imagination. Arguably, it is through Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative that originality becomes conflated with Thomas Carlyle's pretense of the Romantic subject as a universal figure, a bond between genius and originality which became detached through Adorno and Horkeimer's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1947) and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics.* I reexamine that argument from the point of view of the Frankfurt School and suggest through negative originality democratic authorship may represent the state by interrogating its ideals. That is David S. Reynolds' point about the subversive imagination.

Tilottama Rajan notes that the recent emphasis on theory, as opposed to criticism, has increasingly looked toward German Idealism as a means to conduct interdisciplinary "practices."[22] A focus on Romantic Theory in the American context recognizes American literature's "aesthetic particularity"—even its "organic form," as a cultural priority of romance over realism, and an embrace of its "inventedness."[23] This return to aesthetics involves situating much of this study under the rubric of Romantic Theory. My position attempts the metaromantic node of criticism aligned with theorists such as Paul de Man and Paul Hamilton.[24] According to Tilottama Rajan the study of romanticism has

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[22] Tilottama Rajan and Arkady Plotnitsky, eds. *Idealism Without Absolutes: Philosophy and Romantic Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), x.

[23] Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006); Russell B. Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robert Hughes, *Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Beyond of Language* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010); Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

[24] Paul Hamilton suggests that even as the romantic artist is circumscribed by aesthetic limitations, criticism reveals the way aesthetics becomes a political mechanism. Yet "criticism remains immanent." The "aesthetic is indemnified against dissent because critical departures from

witnessed a shift in perspective in the last quarter century from a literary critical view to a theoretical view.[25] Romantic texts have been and continue to be a "major site…for the development of a contemporary theory that makes universal claims for its elaboration of a crisis in the thinking of such categories as representation, the subject, and history." One can point to Romanticism's "originating status" in theorizing problems inherent in literary texts, and by extension the critical works that have been generated by theory. The theoretical field has shifted interest from nineteenth-century critics such as Coleridge and Hazlitt who defined the field in Romantic literary criticism, to German Idealism and its intellectual field due to the requirements of the emerging field of Romantic Theory. Romantic literary theory, with its basis in German Idealism, extends conceptually to involve the disciplines of semiotics and linguistics, which have become increasingly prominent in Romantic criticism.[26]

In this study I survey the American antebellum literary scene with the purpose of explaining a number of discursive cross-relations between literary originality and its cultural context. In a my introduction, I will contrast David S. Reynolds' *Beneath the American Renaissance* and its concept of a "subversive imagination" thesis with Robert Milder's *Exiled Royalties,* which places Melville's ethos of an imagined life in the frame

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it simultaneously double as the metaphorical distance or troping of an original--as further aesthetic production." Negative originality acts as a mode of immanent critique. Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Steven Helmling, "'Immanent Critique' and 'Dialectical Mimesis' in Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment." *Boundary 2* 32, no. 3 (September 1, 2005), 117.

[25] It is notable that Rajan's view of Romantic Theory approximates Weinstein and Looby's return of aesthetics to criticism.

[26] Tilottama Rajan, "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics." In *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer, 155–178 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 155-56.

of negative Romanticism.[27] Reynolds' study, informed by deconstruction and New Historicism, situates the antebellum originality paradox by decentering elite literary culture and recontextualizing marginal popular discourses as influential anxieties. In my focus on negative originality I argue that the position of negativity necessarily frames both cultural context and aesthetics.

Discussions about American literary originality in the mid-nineteenth century inevitably recollect the seminal literary criticism—written between the mid-1930s and the mid-1970s—of F. O. Matthiessen, Perry Miller, and Sacvan Bercovitch.[28] These concerns were "reconsidered" during a phase of political and historical engagement by Americanist critics who preferred not to allow aesthetic questions to interfere with the critical paradigms at stake for New Historicism.[29] For Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby "this dismissal has come to seem…limiting," and they announce that today "aesthetic questions return to the critical conversation."[30]

Commentators on literary originality, such as W. J. Bate, Isaiah Berlin, and Robert Macfarlane notably point to issues of literary influence and questions of imitation or plagiarism.[31] Tillar Mazzeo, particularly, in *Plagiarism and Literary Property* (2007),

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[27] Robert Milder, *Exiled Royalties: Melville and The Life We Imagine* (Oxford University Press, 2006); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[28] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 1941, Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1967); and, Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

[29] Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease, eds. *The American Renaissance Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989).

[30] Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby, eds. *American Literature's Aesthetic Dimensions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1.

[31] Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999); Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

demonstrates the transatlantic incorporation of literary originality as a criterion that enforces copyright. Critics concerned with metaphysical originality, such as Harold Bloom and Thomas McFarland, often address the relation between the artist-as-individual and his or her cultural context or immediate precursors.[32] Such concerns involve the concepts of creative genius and the ideologies of cultural progress. Furthermore, I consider literary nationalism to be a manifestation of metaphysical originality—from the simple point that nationalism proposes a "new beginning," an idea concretized by Matthiessen's notion of an "American renaissance."[33]

Perry Miller, the Harvard Americanist of the mid-twentieth century whose books *The Errand into the Wilderness* and *Nature's Nation* form the bedrock of any study of an American concept of originality, has documented the New York literary scene of the 1840 in his indispensable book *The Raven and the Whale* (1956).[34] Sacvan Bercovitch challenges Miller's idea that the Puritan "errand" was negativised by a declension in faith, and invokes, rather, a positive exhortation of exceptionalism in the jeremiad, if then only to expose its mythic and negative results.[35] Before Bercovitch, Matthiessen had written that democratic authorship might be both critical of the state and representative of

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University Press, 1999); Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[32] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Harold Bloom, *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985).

[33] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).

[34] Perry Miller, *Errand Into The Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard - Belknap, 1956); *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1967); *The Raven and the Whale* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[35] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

its ideals. William Charvat, Lawrence Buell, and others that the crux of the practical debate in the 1840s over American literary nationalism centered on the materially pragmatic questions of international copyright and publishing, questions which depended on specific ideas of literary property and originality.[36] American law refused to grant British authors copyright protection, and as Meredith McGill, Michael Gilmore, Grantland Rice, and others show, this stance, ironically, made it difficult for American authors to compete with cheap British literary imports, which were reprinted and circulated in an ungoverned market that intentionally or unintentionally undercut American authors.[37]

Granted that Joseph Riddel, in *Purloined Letters,* considers the notion of American beginnings as a "problematics of origination,"[38] Joseph Riddel and Joseph Kronick further argue that the American transcendental appeal to originality can be deconstructed through the figure of repetition.[39] Overlapping the territory carved out by a thematics of "renaissance" one encounters a cultural matrix of transatlantic literary ideas in conflict with the pretense of American literary originality. Meredith McGill, for example, shows that American textual reprinting effectively undercut international

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[36] William Charvat, and Matthew Bruccoli, *The Profession of Authorship, 1800-1870*. Social Foundations of Aesthetic Forms (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[37] Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (The University of Chicago Press, 1985); Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Grantland S. Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship in America* (The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[38] Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 1.

[39] Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Joseph Kronick, *American Poetics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

copyright, and as Edgar Allan Poe's criticism shows, served to prolong the era of the literary public sphere well into the mid-1840s, under the regime of what McGill terms the "culture of reprinting."[40]

Following Matthiessen and Bercovitch's critical approach to democratic authorship, McGill, Gilmore, Rice, and Michael Warner explore democratic authorship, following Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* and its ultimate movement into the capitalist marketplace.[41] Although Matthiessen was ultimately concerned with the originality of creative artists as emblematic of democracy, an "organic union between labor and culture" as he put it, he wrote at the height of American socialism in the 1930s, and was therefore arguing in exceptionalist's terms for a causal relation between democracy and originality. Bercovitch, Reynolds, and others in the "structural transformation" continuum focus on the retreat of the author into the democratic marketplace rather than focusing on authorial resistance to it.

The artist, critic, or writer, might discover that to be bound to the cultural matrix as a set of aesthetic cultural determinants imposes dogmatic structures as qualifiers for what passes as creativity. Negative originality, in this sense, implies a contradiction between an artist's drive toward creative autonomy, on one hand, and his or her realization that cultural and historical determinism is, at least in part, unshakable. Negative originality closely parallels negative freedom in that to be original the artist must be on guard against constraint. Unlike positive originality, an idealized state through

[40] Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

[41] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic* (Harvard University Press, 1990).

which an artist makes creative choices without concern for cultural pressure, negative originality sees free choice only in terms of what culture has already established as its rules for what is considered original.

Emerson entered the discourse over originality in the middle 1830s with his first published writings, and as we shall see, came to view originality in literature as nothing other than a form of quotation and repetition. And thus, as Emerson's shift in thinking shows, the relation between originality and repetition becomes a binary opposition that can be deconstructed through the figure of negativity. If Emerson's view offers one way to deal with the issue, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville arguably develop in their works different and significant strategies of negativity that stem from the genre of American "romance."[42]

The concept of originality within the American antebellum cultural matrix arouses, admittedly, a central premise antecedent to my argument: following Tocqueville, we acknowledge the observation that the drive for an American literary nationalism deployed the rhetoric of exceptionalism. And it follows that literary nationalism, as F. O. Matthiessen has offered in his *American Renaissance,* incorporated "transatlantic" Romantic theory and literary criticism, ideas that were crucial in American literary circles. Moreover, I allow that through the Romance genre, following Michael Davitt

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[42] See, for example, Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Richard Brodhead, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985); Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Joel Porte, *The Romance in America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

Bell and Evan Carton, transatlantic aesthetic theory played a central role in defining American literature.[43]

By considering the issue of aesthetic effect in the romance novel and the related Poe-Bulwer idea of “unity of effect,” I began to distinguish a structural form of originality related to the sublime and the Romance from a deconstructive or genealogical concern for origins. Mary Arensberg in her introduction to *The American Sublime* notes that the effect of the sublime moment “produces an uncanny metaphorical effect” upon the reader. Thus originality *in and of itself* in American Romanticism, while it remains ontologically doubtful, also sustains an epistemological problematic in the space between utopia and ideology. Nowhere is that problematic more allegorized than in Melville’s *The Confidence-Man.* When Melville writes in *Pierre* that “the world is forever babbling of originality, but never yet was there an original man,” he simultaneously invokes and negates the utopian ideal of literary originality.

Michael Davitt Bell points out that the degree of *relation* between the actual and the imaginary is metaphorized by Henry James as a “balloon of experience” tethered to the earth by a cable, a cable which ties the imagination to conventional morality in the actual. To cut the cable is to disengage fantasy from responsibility. That disengagement, as Harold Bloom shows in the introduction to his anthology, which borrows its title *The American Renaissance* from F. O. Matthiessen, arises—originates through negation—via the mechanism of *daemonization,* a counterpoint to a precursor through *metalepsis,* a form of misprision that evacuates the precursor’s idea of particularity by denying its capacity to influence. More than a palimpsest, that erasure is a defensive strategy. And in

[43] Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985).

Romantic Theory Leon Chai argues that the mode of negation arises when the possibility of originality obtains in a sublime disjunctive movement of disruption, a disruption of the imagination.[44] As a psychological structure, then, as Thomas Weiskel argues in *The Romantic Sublime*, the feeling of freedom that results in the sublime *movement* results in a "chaos of originality" that *returns* to discursivity in its dénoument.[45] In the return to discursivity, as Richard Eldridge comments in *The Persistence of Romanticism* (2001), rhetoric effaces the "fatigue" that critics have felt towards Romanticism in general; due to its tendencies to solipsism and evasion, Romanticism's "special negativity," as Geoffrey Hartman puts it, highlights the Kantian problem of freedom latent in aesthetic judgment.[46]

The question remains: *How does the author speak for the individual in a multiplex of communities?* The question problematizes the prevailing issue in Romantic ideology that conflates originality with pretense of the Romantic Self.[47] John Bryant and Robert Milder argue that representative artists of the American renaissance and their relationship to national identity and the canon illustrate that "the very notion of representation challenges the possibility of democracy even as it enacts democracy." American society, leaning ever more toward plurality than seems possible for an Emersonian or Whitmanesque sense of unity, recognizes a politics that is "perpetually revolutionary." In the notion of representation in democracy, the voice of the body politic becomes a

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[44] Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006).

[45] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986).

[46] Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[47] Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination* (Stanford University Press, 1995); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990).

"fictive trope," a synecdoche, where any coherent sense of part for whole collapses in the concrete jungle of strangers and invisible men. The original author remains negative in relation to society as a multiplicity. "No single artist, like Melville," says Bryant, "can ever represent an entire culture."[48]

As I began thinking about originality as a topic in nineteenth-century American literature I noticed Melville scholar John Bryant's suggestion in a review of Joseph Riddel's *Purloined Letters* that Riddel's

> readings of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and *Eureka* are lucid fulfillments of his take on originality and the link between hoax and the tale of ratiocination. In all, Riddel's primary achievement lies in providing a critical vocabulary of America's 'belatedness' (that is, self-reflexivity) and of its performance and 'supplementation' (that is, repetition as invention) that links certain nineteenth-century writers to modernism. . . As such, this is a provocative statement that should stimulate more thinking.[49]

Further, Wai-Chee Dimock, in *Empire for Liberty,* writes: "Melville conceptualizes originality as the negation of family relations."[50] I conceptualized that the idea of self-reflexivity and, as Dimock puts it, Melville's dream of transcending "kinship," or the "authorial fantasy" of singularity, results in a negation of originality at a metaphorically generative level, where probability erases possibility. Yet, Poe and Henry James considered originality to possess a potential for aesthetic effect.

In this study I discuss, specifically, the relation between originality and negativity in Emerson's *Nature,* Poe's *Eureka,* Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun,* and Melville's

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[48] John Bryant and Robert Milder, *Melville's Ever-Moving Dawn: Centennial Essays* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997), 3-4.

[49] John Bryant, "*Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature,* by Joseph Riddel," ed. Mark Bauerlein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), *American Literature,* 69 (March 1997), 209.

[50] Wai-Chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989), 141.

Pierre and *The Confidence-Man.* I am arguing that the relation between originality and negativity became an intellectual puzzle for alternative romantic authors, writers who were on one hand constrained by the popular and political interests of the cultural matrix, and on the other, emboldened by the liberating aspects of Romantic originality, ideas that arrived in America by way of German Idealism, British Romanticism, and American Transcendentalism. One preliminary step in discussing these authors' negative originality is to notice that their stance toward "originality" describes an existential condition. "Creation is a private event," says Derek Attridge.[51] Creativity depends on culture to be "registered." It engages culture through incorporation and the greater the engagement the greater the cultural "impact."

I begin by synthesizing Matthiessen's concern for originality as "imaginative vitality" as it appears in his studies of Hawthorne and Melville's aesthetics in the less political central portions of *American Renaissance,* and Miller's *denigration,* as Bercovitch puts it, of democratic exultation. I then revise this synthesis by considering negative originality as Miller frames it in *The Raven and the Whale.* In that book Miller points to the author's (in this case it is surely Melville's) "befuddlement." Melville's originality lacks the power to overcome the "antinomies" of the cultural matrix. I revise Matthiessen and Miller's vitality and befuddlement arguments by addressing a strain of studies in American Romanticism that concentrate on the romance as an aesthetic field. If vitality arises in denigration and then encounters befuddlement, I suggest that it is the *sacrifice of relation* offered by the sublime that becomes the structural mechanism of

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[51] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36.

negative originality.[52] Extending from Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* and Joel Porte's *The Romance in America* to Richard Brodhead's *Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel*, Michael Davitt Bell's *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England,* and Leon Chai's *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance,* I take a decidedly transatlantic view of American Romanticism from the perspective of German Idealism and British Romanticism.[53]

These texts show the role of the Romance genre—and Romantic theory—in the development of the American novel to be revelatory of a dialectic between the Romance author's *originality* and the cultural matrix. These texts point to the increasing subjectivity of Romance authors vis-à-vis the traditions from which they emerged. And it is a central question whether the Romantic imagination, which is by conception subjective in terms of faculty psychology, might draw *negative* associations between problematic traditions and artistic freedom.

That dialectic is further emphasized in Michael Davitt Bell's *The Development of American Romance* that traces what Henry James termed a "sacrifice of relation" between author and society, and Milton Stern's *Contexts for Hawthorne,* which points to a disjunction between openness and closure in American culture, a disjunction arising in

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[52] . Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). Michael Davitt Bell suggests that in the American romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century the priority was certainly on intuition and imagination as opposed to reason and materiality. It is that tension Bell describes as a "sacrifice of relation," the emphasis on imagination over reason, where the relation between fiction and reality is stretched to the breaking point. If we take reality as a framework for the concept of historical facts and origins then the breaking point can be expressed as a motive towards or movement into negative originality.

[53] Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

the contrast between Romantic utopia and classicist ideology.[54] I am extending the Matthiessen-Miller-Bell-Stern synthesis by showing that negative originality—Stern's openness and closure described by Bell and John Seelye (in *Melville: The Ironic Diagram*) as a line (openness) and a circle (closure)—that stems from theories of Romantic originality latent in Transcendentalism and received through European sources.[55] Emerson's "The Poet," "Circles," and "Quotation and Originality," for example, exemplify both linearity ("The Universe is the externalization of the soul," he says in "The Poet") and circularity ("The extent to which this generation of circle, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul"). Emerson's notion of horizons, translating "Circles" into originality, where "The EYE is the first circle," already recognizes that *a principle of negativity lies within the structure of originality.*

Antecedent to the American nineteenth-century cultural matrix, I discuss in detail the aesthetics of German and British romantic philosophers who influenced Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville profoundly.[56] Social satire and criticism found in British novels became models for American alternative romantics, who culled from authors from Oliver Goldsmith to Charles Dickens strategies of dissent towards the three-fold status

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[54] Milton R. Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun and the Politics of Openness and Closure in American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

[55] John Seelye, *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

[56] Richard Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics: Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Patrick Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic "Light of All Our Day"* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005); Thomas Moore, *A Thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, Prefaces, and Essays* (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1994); Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

quo made up of Common-Sense orthodoxies, literary nationalists in the publishing marketplace, and the Whig elite.[57] Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville turned to subversive literary-politico strategies by negating orthodoxies.[58] With the dark romantics, precepts of romantic originality, particularly the relation found within the presumptions of the romance genre that imagination is grounded in reality, became overturned by the subjective imagination. Negative originality presents the possibility of a "sacrifice of relation" such that fact becomes another fiction.[59] In that strategic move of negation the actualities of an Americanist ideology partially evaporate.[60] Indeed, Edward Said reminds

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[57] David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009); Tilar J. Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[58] Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Widmer suggests that Melville articulates a synthesis of the nexus of literary nationalism and literary originality as they serve the democratic essentialism of American exceptionalism. Elsewhere, Melville suggestively undermines this program and alludes to attitudes that negate that system of ideology. Hawthorne also negativised literary nationalism by cleaving futurity from its Millennial promise. The future, Hawthorne insists, is that the present, and future, are undercut by sins of the past.

[59] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[60] Pease, Donald E. "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon." *Boundary 2* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 1–37. Frederick Pease credits Frederick Crews with the coinage of the term "New Americanists." Crews invented the term for his article "Whose American Renaissance?" published in the *New York Review of Books* (Oct. 27, 1988). The term is a derivative of a cluster of concepts including New Historicism, neo-Marxism, and poststructuralism. The term "New Americanist" frames the shift to organizing principles of the field of American studies that respond to the "linguistic turn" as anthologized by Richard Rorty in 1967, and which points to the work of Wittgenstein, Saussure, Foucault, and Derrida, among others. Crews points to the work of scholars Walter Benn Michaels, Donald E. Pease, Russell S. Reising, Sacvan Bercovitch, Myra Jehlen, Jane Tompkins, David S. Reynolds, and Philip Fisher as representative. Crews' title "Whose American Renaissance?" borrows its referent from F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), which Pease acknowledges as the primary example of mid-twentieth-century American literary studies. What distinguishes "New Americanists" is their interest in the centrality of Matthiessen's book as paradigmatic of a master narrative for a phase of American studies exemplifying the "American myth." New Americanists counter that this master narrative masks an ideological underpinning constructed by a cultural absorption during its era in Trilling's *Liberal Imagination.* New Americanists take it upon themselves to

us that René Wellek and Austin Warren noted in 1948 that the term originality remained and perhaps remains, still, "a fundamental problem of literary history." Said argues that the primary concerns for understanding originality are matters of definition and critical employment. The term is suggestive of a privileged aspect of literary history and goes beyond a catalog of examples only by and through theory. This point, of course, contradicts current practice, which is dedicated to "concreteness [within a field of] human, social, and historical" study. Be that as it may, he argues that "literature affords us aesthetic instances of every variety of experience."[61] Moreover, negation moves in the other direction severing the tie between imagination and spirit. For alternative Romantics, as G. R. Thompson terms them, the underlying implication amounts to a crisis in faith.[62]

In order to narrate the rise of negative originality I investigate selected works of Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. As background I study the work of Kant, Schelling, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Emerson and Hedge (as "positive romantics") and contrast their work with alternative romantics Schlegel, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. As writers who stress the irony and negation inherent in the American idea of originality, I deal with Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville following two chapters that contrast the cultural

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unmask this ideology, an ideology that has not taken in full account, they say, of American silence on matters of social injustice and oppression. Pease suggests that Crews complains that New Americanism foregrounds ideology at the risk of replacing literature with politics. The stakes for Crews in the shift to New Americanist criticism are heavy. Crews' book *The Sins of Our Fathers* becomes an example of the master narrative of the American myth school of literary study. A single author study that examines Hawthorne in terms of psychoanalysis presumes norms of text analysis that differentiate the art work from its cultural context, Pease suggests. New Americanists, Pease continues, foreground the assumptions made by American myth critics as ideology, and thus unmask the pretenses of artistic autonomy unquestioned by the older camp.

[61] Edward Said, "On Originality." In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 126–139 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[62] G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

matrix with Romantic theory. In my analysis of this cluster of texts I employ phenomenological and deconstructive approaches as well as new historical approaches to criticism. My analysis of the theme of negative originality situates the authors and texts I cover from the point of view of transatlantic cultural transmission, social context, and the literary market.

In my introduction, "Negative Originality and the American Renaissance," I situate the concepts of originality, singularity, and autonomy within a hermeneutics of negativity. I show the issue of originality as it arises in the American antebellum context, and discuss the implications of negative originality to American nineteenth-century politics. Finally, I show how originality and Americanism merged into a Romantic originality within the sphere of the American sublime.

In chapter 1, "Emerson and Negative Nature," I discuss the impact of transatlantic Romantic originality upon an American Sublime, particularly with respect to Emerson's *Nature* and Coleridgean literary theory. I close the chapter by discussion the sublime and the movement of return. In chapter 2, "Negative Originality and the Romantic Sublime," I develop a narrative on the rise of Romantic originality and its related facets, organicism, negative philosophy and hermeneutics, and Romantic theory. I show ways in which divergent discourses from aesthetic theory to phenomenology to deconstruction unpack concepts of negativity and originality. Finally, I distinguish between generative and structural originality, and show how the latter emerged in the Romantic sublime as a form of phenomenology. I bridge Romantic theory, then, with an American sublime that helps situate Edgar Allan Poe's *Eureka* in the following chapter.

In chapter 3, “Poe’s Pure Reason and Literary Morality,” I explore Poe’s writing in terms of international copyright and its failure to negate American literary nationalism, and the impact that failure had on Poe’s criticism. I then cover Poe’s theory of plagiarism and its related transatlantic borrowings from DeQuincey and Coleridge via British Quarterlies. Lastly, I read Poe’s *Eureka* in terms of Kantian Idealism, which impacts Poe’s ideas of originality and metaphysics. In chapter 4, “Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* and the Negativity of Romance,” I cover Hawthorne's relation to the cultural matrix and his dividedness with respect to audience and the Romance genre. I survey his ideas about allegory and symbol and then proceed to discuss his utopian ideas as they arise in the contrast between actuality and imagination. In a reading of *The Marble Faun,* I explore Hawthorne’s moral vision in terms of the movement of return. I analyze the thematics of *The Marble Faun* as an allegory of writing. And, in chapter 5, “Melville and Negative Originality,” I discuss his works *Mardi, Pierre,* and *The Confidence-Man* in the context of his relation to Young America. I assess the impact on Melville's prose writing of his concept of negative originality by contrasting his “Hawthorne and His Mosses” with his supplement to *The Confidence-Man,* “The River.”

Introduction

In a very condensed sense, the contradictions of American Romanticism which resided within the oxymoron of democratic authorship were *the result of a cultural lag that followed political independence from Britain.* The development of the American literary public sphere and its subsequent unraveling as the market demands for national literature increased resulted in a literary scene in the United States where authors were divided over politics, aesthetic values, and were forced to jockey for literary independence from publishers and critics.[1] As a result, authors of the alternative romantic mold sought independence from the market by subverting democratic ideology through negative originality; that is, by negating the contradictory playing field for American literature through a synthesis of transatlantic ideas. Robert Weisbuch bifurcates the American context in terms of literary-politico parties.[2] The party of mimesis (the cultural matrix) remained obsessed with issues of influence as they revolved in the material practices of publishing a national literature bound by the search for American themes. The party of consciousness, however, was less interested in external manifestations of American original literature, but rather it was interested in ways that American literature

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[1] Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (The University of Chicago Press, 1985). Michael Gilmore explores the stance of American romantic authors vis-à-vis the market, locating the subjective consciousness of the romantic in opposition to the objective "rationality" of the market. Following Leo Marx's notion in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) that the romantic view is essentially anti-technocratic and offers a resistant conservatism towards progressive industrialization, the market is responsible, in this view, for the subjection of art. As opposed to domestic women authors who catered to popular culture–and who helped float a buoyant publishing industry–the romantic authors sought to "repudiate" the rise of "middle brow tastes."...Melville, in particular is regarded by modernist critics as antagonistic to a readership whose "values and judgment he despised." Such positions characterize American antebellum romantic authorship as a "movement of dissent." Thus there was a palpable split between elite and mass culture arising from literature as a commodity form.

[2] Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), x.

could reveal new and American modes of conceptualizing itself through literature. This internal and intellectual style pointed to Transcendentalism. The transcendentalist perspective was less interested in the way the "world" might be conceived—and that viewpoint found it difficult to distinguish between materialistic perceptions on either side of the Atlantic—but was more interested in transforming, ironically, via modes of German and English Idealism, a self-reflective poetics into an American ethos. The only viable response for these "alternative Romantics" seemed to be to evade commercial success, undercut the presuppositions of literary nationalism, and to question or negate originality itself, thus deflecting the false expectations of originality, expectations maintained by the cultural matrix.

Some Romantic writers in America, identified as alternative Romantics, writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe, found their original relation to American literary nationalism problematic.[3] The alternative romantics found themselves unwilling to embrace Emerson's more philosophically positive and transcendental view of the self. This act of refusal had to sift through and ironize the specifics of their cultural moment, and so authors found themselves caught between their relation to the Romantic 'cult of genius' on one hand, and the call for an original national literature, on the other.[4] Michael Newbury argues that "if authors chose highly individualized, independent figures gifted

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[3] Thompson presents a section of the anthology with the heading "Transcendentalism and Alternative Romanticism," see G.R. Thompson, ed. *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2004), 717-741.

[4] Gustavus Stadler notes that "Within this discourse, the concept [of genius] assumed a number of typical forms: that of the 'great' man whose life and words were seen to crystallize a nation or period of history; that the innate, unlearned talents of an artist, performer, writer, or orator; that of the irreducible originality of an idea, work of art, or collective self-conception; that of the irreducible essence of an idea, work of art, or collective self-conception." Gustavus Stadler, *Troubling Minds: The Cultural Politics of Genius in the United States, 1840-1890 (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), xiv.

with a kind of romantic 'Genius' to represent artistic endeavor that would that suggest a disaffection with professionalization and increasingly centralized urban-industrial order."[5] Such disaffection with the cultural matrix raises the question of a politics of aesthetics that underscores negative originality.

Or to put it another way, it is plain that Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, among other authors, sought to develop a literary-critical stance apart from both European sources and the oxymoron of American "democratic authorship." If democratic authorship involved an original and critical stance apart from the democratic mainstream and its nationalistic themes, it would have to resist pressure to develop its autocritical role in a reflexive dependency to a literary market that promoted nationalist themes. Authorship would have to develop its originality in contradistinction to both market values and Americanist cultural chauvinism. Moreover, negative originality as a paradigm of alternative Romanticism, in turn, becomes structured, as Harold Bloom and Mary Arensburg have convincingly shown, according to the concept of an American sublime.[6] Arensburg, Bloom, and Joseph Riddel argue that the "American sublime" is a rhetoric of a belated newness, original in its relation to the past, by invoking the trope of *metalepsis* (a reversal of cause and effect) that accomplishes what Emerson and the Transcendentalists hoped would result in an "original relation to the universe." In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had met Carlyle, Coleridge and Wordsworth in

[5] Michael Newbury, *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 8.

[6] Harold Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 1–25. Bloom's Period Studies (New York: Chelsea House, 2004); Mary Arensberg, "Introduction: The American Sublime." In *The American Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986). In our time, as Thomas Weiskel noted, through "contemporary criticism and the development of structuralist thinking as well, we learn how very little our creations belong to individual vision and choice." Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 6.

England in 1833,[7] configured the paradox of originality by juxtaposing the notion of self-reliance with the problem of quotation and indebtedness.[8] Originality, for Emerson, is power over Nature. The dialectic of Nature and Spirit result in a possible "prospect" for human freedom.[9]

Driven both by practical considerations of the marketplace and by complications in aesthetic theory, Edgar Allan Poe acknowledged that a growing anxiety within literary circles over American exceptionalism had arisen, resulting in publishing and reviewing practices that pinioned the cultural matrix to the literary market in such a way that a cadre of "dark" romantics found themselves in a critical position against which they discovered for themselves a state of negative originality. And while the cultural matrix structured the rhetorical situation in which American alternative romantic writers of the 1840s and 1850s emerged as creative individuals; *originality itself became a theme through which Romance authors explored the relation between originality and negativity.*

A central issue for antebellum Romantic writers arose as the critical idea of originality became conflated with the presumption of an American national literature. In that cultural matrix the precepts of Romantic metaphysical originality as a received European aesthetic theory were channeled through Romance authors' novels. Some

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[7] Patrick Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic "Light of All Our Day"* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 80-81.

[8] In "Shakspeare, or the Poet," Emerson decided that "Great men are more distinguished by range and extent, than by originality. If we require the originality which consists in weaving like a spider their web from their own bowels, in finding clay, and making bricks, and building the house, no great men are original. Nor does valuable originality consist in unlikeness to other men … The genius of our life is jealous of individuals and will not have any individual great, except through the general" Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard - Belknap, 1996), 109.

[9] Barbara L. Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1982), 47.

authors of American Romance and short fiction in the 1840s and 1850s—notably Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville—encountered criticism within the popular democratic literary marketplace on account of their obscurity, while as authors, ironically, at the same time they deployed aesthetics of romantic originality in the interest of social reform to further democracy. For example, Poe's aesthetics articulated the disjunction between a popular confidence in the actualities of democracy and the inherent problems for the understanding endemic in the interpretation of phenomena. David Ketterer notes that

> Fundamental to an understanding of Poe are those tales in which he seeks to undermine man's confidence in his perception of 'reality,' on the grounds that this 'reality' is limited by man's position in space and time and the mechanisms of his inner self. Space, time, and self are the three factors, or coordinates, that obstruct and mislead man's comprehension, consequently leaving him in a state of deception.[10]

Critical theory thus promises to "unmask" ideology.[11] As an example of J. Hillis Miller's synopsis of the state of theory circa 1990, we shall turn momentarily to Scott Peeples' discussion of Edgar Allan Poe's reception in the twentieth century. This brief survey is justified since Matthiessen excluded Poe from his *American Renaissance,* which places Poe in the position of a relation of negative originality with respect to historicism.

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[10] David Ketterer, *The Rationale of Deception in Poe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 1.

[11] J. Hillis Miller, *Hawthorne and History* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991), 51. J. Hillis Miller offers history as a counterpoint to essentialism. The "return to history" that signals the partial foreclosure of subjectivity as well as the formalism of literature suffers from an anthropological vagueness since it is virtually impossible to separate history from ideology. The concentration on history, for Miller, has the effect of calling attention to history as a problematic. Miller's focus turns to the binary relation between allegory and realism in Hawthorne, and discourse on that relation by Henry James as one possible reading. The opposition between allegory and realism exposes the problem of a full "unveiling" of meaning due to the incommensurability of the two concepts. Both terms are "enigmatic" narrative modes that are referential in a domain outside the text yet reside within the textual domain as language that can only partially reveal the enigmatic nature of these two concepts.

According to Peeples, Poe's critical matrix is considered to have engendered, due to his theories of textual unity that can be traced to "The Philosophy of Composition" and other articles from the 1840s, a cluster of interpretive methods later associated with New Criticism, as well as mythical and archetypal critical approaches.[12] This emphasis on unity and originality, which comes to the fore in Poe's reviews of Hawthorne, led to the preference for irony over didacticism favored by New Critics. Yet Poe's appeal to readers of Gothic and subversive popular literature contests New Critical values for literariness as David S. Reynolds argues. In 1859, the year of Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun,* and two years following Melville's *The Confidence-Man*, chapter 20—the "Reappearance of One Who May Be Remembered,"—in which Poe appears as a "dried up old man, with the stature of a boy of twelve, [who] was tottering about like one out of his mind," it was Emerson who labeled Poe "The Jingle Man."

If Matthiessen omitted Poe from his *American Renaissance* because of Poe's transatlantic stature, Matthiesen did write in 1948, curiously, that Poe functioned not as an original but as a precursor, the reverse of William Carlos Williams view in *In the American Grain* (1925). So reignites the contest over Poe's originality that began two days after Poe's death in 1849, when Griswold began the Poe industry by obtaining publishing rights to Poe's oeuvre. Re-evaluating Matthiessen's omission, for the myth and symbol critics, such as R. W. B. Lewis (*The American Adam*) of the 1950s Poe becomes representative of the "destruction of old-world aesthetics and values."[13] Poe's ground-clearing literary criticism becomes in this view quintessentially American; his

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[12] Scott Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), 63-64.

[13] Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe,* 71.

originality cultivates a new literature. This reading of Poe led to developments in Poe criticism in the 1950s by Charles Feidelson (*Symbolism and American Literature*) and Harry Levin (*The Power of Blackness*) that sought to explicate Poe's work in terms of coherent themes and patterns. Richard Wilbur explained Poe's thinking in terms of his internal divisions between rationalism and irrationalism, and his motif of the *dopplegänger.*

Edward Davidson sought to understand Poe in terms of his use of Romantic symbolism.[14] "The mental 'fracture' in much of Poe's work, the split between 'inner self and outer world,' is not a symptom of his own split personality but rather 'part of the major stream of intellectual and artistic life from the seventeenth until well into the nineteenth, and even into the twentieth century'."[15] More than merely a psychology of Poe as an artist, his dualism can be seen as a split between the Romantic imagination and

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[14] Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957), vii-ix. Davidson's "approach to Poe's writing has been primarily through the critical and metaphysical theories of Coleridge--through, in short, that basic investigation Coleridge made into what was Romantic consciousness and what the imagination was doing when it was making poems or other works of art...what produced Coleridge or the Romantic mind was not precisely what produced the mind of Poe ... [which] developed and matured within the special determinations of American thought and American art of that time. Poe did think and write in America; and whatever lack of "American experience" may be charged against him, he nevertheless reflected certain of its social and religious ideas." According to Davidson: "What I have attempted is an understanding of Poe according to two critical theorems: one is the general premises of what we shall, for the moment, call 'Romantic idealism' from Wordsworth and Coleridge in England through Emerson and Poe himself in America; the other is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy of aesthetics and symbolism which ... [holds that] works of art are not at the mercy of psychology or "psychologism" but have meanings quite beyond anything material or temporal…art is regarded as having a specific and autonomous function….The creative imagination does not move in an invented or made-up world but has a mode of projection and therefore, in accordance with the idealist concept of expression, its own mode of reality. This 'reality' is never finite nor positively located; it is a continual negotiation between the creative imagination which requires expression and the very necessities of art itself--those necessities which we know as past, the history, the directions of the artistic world that may be, in terms of time, space, and location, far removed from the world of habit and daily experience."

[15] Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe,* 76-77.

the cultural matrix. For Peeples, Davidson's *Poe: A Critical Study* (1957) "is the best book-length study of the Poe canon prior to the 1970s." Davidson imagines Poe's stance as "defiant," a manifestation of Romantic Agony, where "the artist destroys the material world but does not recreate it; instead, he creates art." In *Eureka,* says Davidson, Poe's desire for purity in art necessitates of a metaphysical world divided between science and art, where creativity is autonomous and singular. Davidson's reading of *Eureka* represents a phenomenology that anticipates the deconstruction of the 1980s except that he remains oriented to Romantic language rather than speech acts in general. Indeed, Poe's Romantic metaphysics amount to a reflexive gesture indicative of his negotiation with the concept of originality, as both an epistemological and critical idea, and as an ontological fundamental.

Richard Wilbur articulates Poe's work in terms of a Cosmic Myth that develops from *Eureka.*[16] He writes that "the poet's business is to help undo phenomena toward unity, dreaming the oak of creation back to its original acorn, his negation of human and earthly subject-matter becomes in Poe's cosmic theory…creative…his denial of Intellect a means to ultimate truth. In short, Poe's myth of the cosmos presents his every apparent limitation as an advantage." Wilbur's Library of Congress lecture, "The House of Poe," posited a "hypnagogic state" between the actual and the dream state, that marks for Poe a transitive moment, similar to Hawthorne's "neutral territory, and moreover, similar to the Romantic sublime, which provides a moment of the possibility of a "visionary condition." David Halliburton's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View* (1973) argues for the transcendental moment of *Eureka* situated between formalism and

[16] Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe,* 78-79.

authorial psychology within interpretive subjectivity that offers a hermeneutics of Poe's creative consciousness.[17] If the 1960s and 70s were concerned with Poe's aesthetics and motifs, a critical foci that remains active, and which situates Poe as a Romantic caught in the legacy of John Locke that is signified by the concept of Romantic Irony, it is G. R. Thompson's *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony and the Gothic Tales* that reconnects Poe to German Idealism. Thompson points to the influence of Friedrich Schlegel as a precursor to Poe's ironic self that is attracted to "nothingness" and absurdity.

John Carlos Rowe, in *Through the Custom House* (1982), helped signal the rise of deconstruction in American literary studies by acknowledging and then challenging the notion of coherence, opened by irony, and then unraveling the referential sinews to expose deferred signifieds. Peeples points out that Poe's problematizing of transcendental unities, often through dialogical bifurcation, acts to expose the realization that decentering and the marginalizing of metaphysics—in Poe's fictive world a form of bracketing by encryption—actually acts as a sort of explication resulting, after all, in a form of coherence. Undoubtedly, Poe's style involves the reader to participate in misreading and deception. Joseph Riddel's *Purloined Letters* argues that, following

[17] Halliburton defines the phenomenological approach: "Without denying that the work has, in some sense, a life of its own, the phenomenologist believes that the work cannot be cut off from the intentionality that made it or from the intentionality that experiences it after it is made. If the work does not arise from *some* act of consciousness, how does it come to be? If the work is not interpreted by *some* act of consciousness, how does criticism come to be? To the phenomenologist the idea of a text-itself is a mystification arising from a historical situation in which criticism, in order to compete with more privileged disciplines, has tried to assimilate the literary work to scientific models. The phenomenologist questions the relevance of such models, much as he questions the 'objectivity' that is sometimes claimed by critics whose procedures are based on the unexamined assumptions of nineteenth-century positivism….The author has created something apart from himself, an entity at once concrete, accessible to others, and reproducible. Yet this new thing preserves the intentional acts through which it came into being. The final product of the creative act is, then, a fusion in which both elements, the subjective and the objective merge." David Halliburton, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 22.

Emerson, Poe's "nature" acts as a metonym for language, language that is complicated by a "problematics" of originality and repetition. The Ideal is infinitely deferred in Riddel's reading of Poe, which reappears as a preoccupation with mystification in Poe's texts.[18] Michael Williams, in *A World of Words,* demonstrates Poe's penchant for undermining logocentrism and the Romantic self. Seeing Poe as an ironist Williams presents Poe as an example of a desired centeredness through the figure of Ligeia, whose beauty figures as an unreachable infinity obtained through a process of metempsychosis.

Our concern with negative originality begins with the relation between the cultural matrix and the Romantic resistance to it by American authors. My approach to this disjunction is through the critical concept "originality." The concept of originality, as we shall see, was in a state of crisis in America. Edward Davidson suggests that this crisis arrived late in the American romantic phase of literary development. "Poe dramatized the whole problem of what the creative imagination does when it is seeking ways of communicating those ideas lying beyond the common discourse of men," says Davidson.[19]

The American antipathy towards Britain over literary traditions, and ironically at the same time, its blatant dependence on that tradition for a literary value schema, became the central conundrum felt by Romantics in America. This key tension, noticed by F. O. Matthiessen, between the need for a distinctly American literature and the dependence on foreign sources, produced a difficult problem.[20] How would American

[18] Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe,* 86.

[19] Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study*, ix.

[20] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 1941). Matthiessen bifurcates the prophetic dimension of Romantic poetics and democratic exceptionalism. Interestingly, he omits Poe because of his aversion to democracy, though

writers maintain critical distance from the market, avoid editorial puffing of American national "originality," and at the same time, escape the dominance of British cultural preferences circulating in America via non-copyrighted reprints? Furthermore, we might ask, how did authors respond to their patriotic sentiments toward American democratic sentiment? In considering these questions, we can begin to get a sense of the difficulty facing American writers and artists who sought to *be* original, in fact.

For Matthiessen and the creators of American studies in the 1930s the problem seemed to be to preserve democracy without sacrificing spirit. Matthiessen thought such a transcendental synthesis possible through the imposition of a unity concept he attributed to democracy as a foundational idea *a priori* to ideology. And, moreover, in preserving that synthesis, a modicum of anarchy kept democracy honest. But for the authors of the so-called American renaissance, the actualities of the American situation presented realities incapable of political, progressive reform, even as the trope of originality offered sublime power through transumption.

In his *American Renaissance,* Matthiessen concludes that authors of the "American Renaissance," Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, and extending that group inclusively to Poe, "all wrote for democracy in a double sense."[21] Matthiessen posits that doubleness in terms of a literature that is either a "true exponent of democracy" or an "insidious form of anarchy," and perhaps both.[22] This bifurcation

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Matthiessen credits Poe for his influence on other writers.

[21] Matthiessen famously excludes Poe because he is "hostile to democracy." F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1941), xv.

[22] Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Matthiessen's musing over the 'possibilities' of democracy, bypasses the fact that Hawthorne and Melville can be distinguished from

poses a number of problems for a historian concerned with the antebellum literature of the American northeast.[23] Framing this literature in terms of an intention that foregrounds literary nationalism founded on exceptionalism as a paradigm ignores a dependence upon transatlantic publishing for a culture of authorship. Moreover, as we shall explore, the main thrust of negative originality stems from Romantic theory as a response to the cultural matrix, and the movement of return arises in the disjunction thereof through the work of the sublime. And the notion of anarchy—or dissent—vis-à-vis a presumably "true" democracy, posits a notion of patriotism that lacks sufficient historicism. The antebellum authors of the American northeast found themselves in a dialogical and emerging literary culture bounded by competing strains of American ideology making national unity a virtual moving target: one author's anarchy is another's patriotism.

Matthiessen excluded Poe on the basis of his indifference to democracy, but I suspect he was also aware that Poe's atheism would result in a negativity towards American democracy, and that if widely applied such a view would result in further anarchy. Poe is uncertain about the trope of *metalepsis*, given his suspicion of the didacticism of metaphysics, and instead he sets up a game of duplicity where center and margin ceaselessly reciprocate, as he repeatedly illustrates by such allegories as Monsieur

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transcendentalist over the matter of New York politics. Literary culture was at the same time political culture.

[23] Robert D. Jacobs, *Poe: Journalist & Critic* (Louisiana State University Press, 1969) 3-5. Further problems are involved in considering Poe's relation to the cultural matrix. In "The Matrix," chapter 1 of his study of Poe as Southern writer, Robert D. Jacobs notes that Edgar Allan Poe's "critical stance" was at once "congenial to the South" and at the same time his critical writing was a source of "dismay" for T. W. White, the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger.* As a Romantic Poe was more inclined toward Lord Byron than Sir Walter Scott, putting him at odds with some Southern Romantics. Jacobs suggests that Poe's Southerness appears through his attraction to the criticism of British quarterlies such as *Blackwood's,* and the critical voice he gleaned from transatlantic criticism might be used to highlight American sectional prejudices, especially towards Boston and transcendentalism.

D___ and his nemesis Dupin in "The Purloined Letter." Through sheer rhetorical power Emerson was able to sustain an American originality through transumption, at least until his *Essays, Second Series* (1844). Hawthorne, in his neutrality, I suggest, was aware of the risks of presenting himself as an anarchist, which is why his narrators find themselves at the precipice of anarchy and withdraw. Melville, as Hawthorne remarked, was prepared for cosmic annihilation by doubting "everything that lies beyond human ken," and for knowing that the profound consequences of negative originality, the condition of apostasy towards original sin, was a mode of anarchy of consciousness.[24] Negative originality, in the American Romantic cultural circuit centering on Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, and to a large extent Emerson, becomes metaphorized by means of literary troping within the transumptive narrative structure of imaginative writing, a mode of writing essays, tales, and romance novels that involve a "sacrifice of relation" between the imagination and the actual. For Hawthorne transumption meant the maintaining of a relation of partial and flexible fidelity between realism and romance, insisting that the latter offered a particularly apt mode of speaking about the former through the imaginative work of fiction. Hawthorne, in his preface to his second romance *The House of the Seven Gables,* maintained that "[w]hen a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both to its fashion and material."[25]

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[24] From Hawthorne's Liverpool journal entry of November 20, 1856, see Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Portable Hawthorne*, ed. Malcomb Cowley (New York: Viking Penguin, 1969), 650-51.

[25] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, (B&N Classics. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2007), 3.

Hawthorne's desire for a "certain latitude" or "freedom of invention," as Bell terms it, opens the question of the relation of authorial freedom with respect to his or her "social texture."[26] The precise relation between idea, cultural matrix, and authorial subject position was frequently ambiguous and inconsistent. It follows from this example then that in the main American Romantic authors experienced a sacrifice of relation in ways characterized, generally, as a state of anxiety. That anxiety motivated a turn from American exceptionalism toward a type of transcendental aesthetics that remapped the Kantian sublime onto an American sublime, and ultimately restructured the alternative-romantic American author in a position toward society akin to the Schlegelian Romantic sublime. I call that subject position negative originality since its orientation, or ideology, subverted American exceptionalism in favor of an authorial self that was closer to Percy Shelley and Thomas Carlyle than the Americans James Fenimore, Cooper, William Gilmore Simms or James Kirke Paulding. No doubt the adoption of transcendental aesthetics by Romantic writers of New York and New England was certainly due in part to the historical influence of Puritanism as well as Emerson's rejection of Unitarianism. But transcendental thinking looking back to Kant and Schelling, combined with the Common-Sense thinking inherent in British *belles lettres* and its obsession with plagiarism and property rights, provided literati in the American Northeast a matrix of transatlantic critical criteria that complicated literary nationalist claims.

R. W. B. Lewis shows that the literary problematic of originality that took its cue from the dialectic between the persistence of an unusable past and an overly optimistic futurity arises in those very interstices that paralleled the rhetoric of and against political

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[26] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 51.

institutions.[27] The public-sphere federalism of the early national period was countered by the agrarian republicanism of Jefferson (and Créveceour) and Jackson. In his *Notes on Virginia* Jefferson expressed his fear of the loss of individual dignity that advancing industrialism would bring upon society. By the 1840s the conservative Whigs and the anti-federal Jacksonians defined the polarity in America between the rights of the individual and the rights of the people. The clash between the property rights assumed by individuals and the social needs of democratic culture tended to be resolved in favor of populism and reform as the rising mass culture saw itself in contradistinction from privileged Whigs more comfortable with transatlantic commerce and institutional memory. The refusal by congress to pass international copyright legislation in the 1840s attests to the anti-British sentiment held by Jacksonians. The priority of democratic literature, literary nationalism, and the idea of American unity and exceptionalism countering a British hegemony of letters, drew the lines between a literary past and American literary originality. Originality as national literature became coextensive with John O'Sullivan's idea of Manifest Destiny.

The net result of the counteraction by literary critics such as Poe was the establishment of a canon of American literature based, ironically, not on an idea of native genius, but on an author's transatlantic stature. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, for example, looked to British audiences for more favorable reception than they found at home. Ultimately, the turning away from the contradictory demands of the American marketplace, as Hawthorne did in *The Marble Faun,* and Melville did by undermining trust in *The Confidence-Man,* narrates a politics of negative originality that

[27] R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1955).

opposes the false premises of American exceptionalism and its originality claims. As the exemplary "positive" Romantic in this study it is Emerson who inherited Coleridge's distinction between reason and understanding, a distinction which posits a positive and universal idea of spiritual unity that can be traced to Coleridge's primary imagination and Kant's positive sense of freedom. Yet Emerson's resignation from the Boston Unitarian Church and his engagement with a problematic of American originality presents for this study the figure of metalepsis, or reversal, that raises the issue of an Emersonian position of negativity.

At the outset of the period under consideration, Ralph Waldo Emerson's resignation from the Unitarian Church in 1832 signaled a dawning crisis of faith in America; it was a period of crisis when Orestes Brownson worried over the Unitarian Church's position to "unchurch philosophy," and a moment of rapture, perhaps, that culminated in the emergence of a negative idea of originality about which Edgar Allan Poe expressed a denial of a higher power.[28] Whereas Brownson agonized retrospectively (in 1857) over the increasing recognition (in the 1830s) of an oncoming age of eternal flux as a reality of modernism—that the "plague-spot of the age…had pronounced the everlasting 'No'," Poe, in *Eureka,* contrarily, embraced it.[29] In *Nature* (1836) Emerson enjoins Brownson in a Transcendentalist position towards the "prospects" for a "positive"

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[28] Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka." *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe,* ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 582. Poe writes: "And now—this Heart Divine—what is it? *It is our own."* Thompson's note states, "Poe's version of Romantic 'self-apotheosis'; being one with the cycle of creation and destruction of the universe, we ourselves God" (n.5, 582). Moreover, Orestes Brownson, writing in September 1836, promoted the philosophy of Victor Cousin to bring about the "well-being of humanity"; Brownson argues that Cousin's ideas are distinguished from the new German philosophers Schelling and Hegel since for them Absolute Being lacks a "starting point"; once an ontological realm becomes confirmed, so Brownson felt, a transition to the phenomenal is conceivable, see Perry Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Harvard University Press, 1950), 108-09.

[29] Brownson, "The Everlasting Yes," in *The Transcendentalists,* Perry Miller, ed. 44-45.

spiritual rebirth despite a secularizing and materialist universe. By 1872 Emerson, in his essay "Quotation and Originality" admitted that any claim of originality must contend with tradition and the continuity of language and ideas. Originality shifts under this perspective from a generative and positive sense to a structural and negative concept given under the rubric of "representation." Against a hoped-for universal spirit that might arise in a positive originality it becomes clear that any gesture of "re-origination" implicit in transcendental thinking carries with it an undertone of negativity. My term for this structure is negative originality. At the outset we might illustrate this structure by considering Thomas Carlyle's reaction to the utilitarian (and in America, Unitarian) outgrowths of the Enlightenment.

In England, Thomas Carlyle's crisis of faith in science, a complaint which cast materialism and utilitarianism as worldviews destructive to spirit, points to a general and sometimes affirmative disposition towards spiritual renewal and moral reform as expressed in the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Emerson earlier writings. Thomas Carlyle, in his essay "On History" (1830), exhorted to the nineteenth-century man that "warring against oblivion, he would fain unite himself in clear conscious relation, as in dim unconscious relation he is already united, with the whole future, and the whole Past."[30] For Carlyle, the reigning mood was determined by a relational sense of negative originality that pertaining to "our whole Metaphysics itself."[31] Arguing against what he termed "the mechanical age," Carlyle's "clear conscious relation" became a dialectic

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[30] Thomas Carlyle, *A Carlyle Reader, Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Copley Publishing Group, 1999), 25-29.

[31] Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," *A Carlyle Reader, Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, 10.

framed by the Romantic's position vis-à-vis the Enlightenment. Bitterly opposing such a mechanical doctrine, Carlyle argued in "Signs of the Times" (1829) that

> from Locke's time downwards, [metaphysics] has been physical; not a spiritual philosophy, but a material one….His whole doctrine is mechanical, in its aim and origin, in its method and its results. It is not a philosophy of the mind: it is a mere discussion concerning the origin of our consciousness, or ideas, or whatever else they are called; a genetic history of what we see *in* the mind. The crabbed secrets of Necessity and Freewill, of the Mind's vital or non-vital dependence on Matter, of our mysterious relation to Time and Space, to God, to the Universe, are not, in the faintest degree touched on these inquiries; and seem not to have the smallest connexion with them.[32]

In the turning from the Enlightenment to the period known as the Romantic era, Carlyle's emphasis on a "mysterious relation to Time and Space, to God, to the Universe" became obsessed with the possibility of an "original relation," as Emerson put it. Carlyle spoke for many Romantics when he suggested that the notion of "freedom," a notion closely associated with originality, as we shall see, is "impossible" without a "belief in the Invisible." Against the "faith in Mechanism" that supported "democratic interest" a tellingly conservative view that reminds us of the differences between Coleridge and Bentham, Carlyle's notion of originality became associated with the unique individual self, or subject, as metaphysicians termed it. Emerson's self-reliant American scholar had to contend with not merely the pretense of the Romantic self but what William Ellery Channing called "self-culture," the post-Puritan communitarian idea of a democratic body politic. And the problem for originality in mid-nineteenth-century "America" would

[32] Carlyle, in an argument that synthesizes organic and sublime elements characteristic of Romantic discourse, adds: "Science and Art have, from first to last, been the free gift of Nature; an unsolicited, unexpected gift; often even a fatal one. These things rose up, as it were, by spontaneous growth, in the free soil and sunshine of Nature that were not planted or grafted, nor even greatly multiplied or improved by the culture or manuring of institutions. Generally speaking, they have derived only partial help from these; often enough have suffered damage. They made constitutions for themselves. *They originated in the Dynamical nature of man, not in his Mechanical nature*." Carlyle, "Signs of the Times." *A Carlyle Reader, Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, 10-14. (My emphasis.)

be *precisely how original American literature might register Carlyle's negative concern over democratic interest.*

It is worth noting here that the relation of the individual to tradition becomes one of the ways originality becomes registered in Romantic thinking. Romantics hope that nature and spirit my in effect displace tradition and thus ensure re-origination. It is also clear that this displacement occurs through the rhetorical effect of transumption, essentially a literary positing of ontological originality through negativity, even as tradition was always already present to hand. But if the divine might scarify tradition originality could be affirmed. Wordsworth wrote in his "Essay: Supplementary to the Preface" (1815) that a poet should "owe nothing but to nature and his own genius."[33] Emerson and Carlyle, suggests F. O. Matthiessen, held that the age of Enlightenment "lacked the springs of faith," principally because John Locke had sacrificed spirit for scientific thinking.[34] One mode of redress offered by Wordsworth, again in his 1815

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[33] William Wordsworth, *Selected Prose* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1988), 399. Robert Macfarlane notes that William Duff, in *An Essay on Original Genius* (1767) defined the term originality: "when applied to Genius, we mean that NATIVE and RADICAL power which the mind possesses, of discovering something NEW and UNCOMMON in every subject on which it employs its faculties." Duff's criterion of "NATIVE power" suggests a problem for the concept of originality, since it opens the subjective concept of genius in contradistinction from the objective idea of phenomena. The late 18th century still under the sway of Locke would likely view knowledge as perceived by the senses. To counter that issue D'Israeli offered the "great writer" as an anomalous character type arising phenomenally. If literary genius was itself empirical then tabula rasa must be an incomplete formulation for the human mind. The damage to the idea of Lockean equality precipitated the notion of the Romantic self, see Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.

[34] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 102-103. Carlyle writes, "The science of the age, in short, is physical, chemical, physiological; in all shapes mechanical." And, "It is no longer the moral, religious, spiritual condition of the people that is our concern, but their physical, practical, economical condition, as regulated by public laws." Here, Carlyle is reacting to the doctrine of utilitarianism. Both Poe and Carlyle point to the anxiety felt as modernism encroaches upon the Romantic Self. Self-apotheosis, or metaphysical originality, becomes the philosophical gesture, much as Kant's second 'Copernican Revolution' was an attempt to redress Humean skepticism by reinvigorating subjectivity, acts as a negation of materialism, or the cultural matrix.

"Essay," was that "Poetry is most just to its divine origin."[35] In this synthesis of genius, spirit, and nature, we find the basis of a transcendental originality that became a hallmark of Romantic thought. Since the Enlightenment had fostered a secular-material worldview that questioned the assumptions of the Reformation and Puritanism, it is perhaps also fair to say that this crisis in world-view helped to precipitate a European and American social revolution. Enlightenment *egalitée* seemed to be foreclosed due in part to the savage results of the French Revolution, an unanticipated result of the rise of science and the questioning of religion in the context of European romanticism. Contemporary writers of the period saw that the paradoxical social results of Enlightenment faith in reason produced the reality of a world-historical figure in Napoleon, whose rise suggested a new order to human destiny connected only obliquely to rational enlightenment ideals.[36]

As the German Idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) would show, the Romantic situation was marked by the very belatedness that found the era negatively responding to the Enlightenment.[37] Romantics "undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal

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See Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," [1829]. In *A Carlyle Reader,* ed. G.B. Tennyson (Acton, MA: Copley Publishing, 1999), 9-12.

[35] Wordsworth, *Selected Prose*, 390.

[36] Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006).

[37] Tilottama Rajan,"Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics." In *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer, 155–178 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 170. For Hegel, a problem arising in romantic aesthetics concerns the instability of the classical mode that is self-dialectical. Hegel's aesthetic history is conceived as a strand that at its terminal ends there exists imbalance: the presence of instability shifts to an absence of stability at the center since the idea of centeredness is unsustainable. Completion is impossible since the classical dissolves into the Romantic. The failure of the Classical to resolve itself amounts to a moment of Romantic irony, where the magnitude of the Idea as compared to form promises development but effectively becomes self-cancelling by destroying closure, and as a result art, which is promised an apotheoris is negated in its own originality.

values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent."[38] Friedrich Schlegel called for a 'new mythology' carved from "the uttermost depth of the spirit," a mythology that would provide the well-spring of originality for Romantic poetics.[39] In place of Enlightenment ideals, the "pretense" of the Romantic Self and the notion of originality became the new locus of value for writers on both sides of the Atlantic from Kant to Coleridge, from Carlyle to Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville.[40] At the center of the shift to Romanticism was an ideology that Carlyle called the "Spirit of Religion in a new Mythus." In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle attempted a synthesis of the natural and the divine through the construct "Natural Supernaturalism," a gesture certainly designed to make materialism secondary to spirit.[41] We shall see that in Nature Emerson embraces the "prospects" of "Natural Supernaturalism" by synthesizing a movement from the self into Nature and then into universal spirit. It is the movement into this third term that is most characteristic of a positive view of originality, a view the later Emerson was forced to abandon given that relation between the self and the world could not be overthrown except for the intervention of a rhetoric of the sublime. What Emerson holds in common with Romantics in general, and specifically with Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville is the ideality of a relation between noumena and phenomena that can be traced to Kant.

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[38] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), 66.

[39] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 67.

[40] Robert C. Solomon defines the Romantic Self in terms of a "transcendental pretense." Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*. A History of Western Philosophy 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2.

[41] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 68.

The relation between self, nature, and the universe was axiomatic for Emerson: "What drew Emerson most to Renaissance individualism was its increased awareness of the self."[42] This Romantic "double consciousness," the reflective self in its relation to the world, that Matthiessen notices shifted back from the faculty of understanding and its objectivity to the faculty of reason, and its intuition of spirit.[43] Romantic originality arises in that intuition of (an oxymoronic) individual spirit—its original relation—as it seeks unity in particulars. By seeking a signifier antecedent to the American context in the quest for an original poetics, poet Walt Whitman would later expose a key irony of Emersonian thought. Through the figure of originality the poet attempts to situate himself as free from the strictures of the social world, yet in so doing his quest for literary originality becomes necessarily bound up with European roots.

Such an irony arises in the paradox of influence in which authors found it impossible to justify an American national literature, as Poe, Margaret Fuller, and James Russell Lowell argued, without taking into account precepts of literariness inherited from British texts.[44] Lowell suggested that "[t]he first question we put to any poet, nay, to any

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[42] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 106.

[43] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance,* 3. It is significant that Matthiessen uses the term most associated with W.E.B. Du Bois. The usage appears as a deliberate means of speaking of what Friedrich Schlegel aptly termed a "permanent parabasis," or an ironic condition that situates the self in the world that should be providential but is instead, in Melville's terms, silent. Matthiessen's closeted homosexuality and his socialist politics may have influenced him to borrow Du Bois's idea, see Randall Fuller, *Emerson's Ghosts: Literature, Politics, and the Making of Americanists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[44] Margaret Fuller remarked that "We have no sympathy with national vanity." For Fuller, American literature remains in a "transitional state"; authors who look to Europe, even anxiously, she considers "colonists and useful schoolmasters. In response to the charge that Transcendentalists have "an undue attachment to foreign continental literature," Fuller views such an interest as defensible since continental literature has "the range and force of ideal manifestation in forms of national individual greatness." In agreement with Poe, Ideal genius transcends nation, she argues. Gordon Hutner, *American Literature, American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.

so-called national literature, is 'who were your forebears?''"[45] Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville accepted, to varying degrees, the idea that the poetic symbol might express universal value, and they recognized the inherent incommensurability between the universal symbol and that which national literature proposed for universal art. In Romantic thought, generally, originality forms the nexus between universal spirit and individual freedom. Such is the basic formulation of Idealism that structures Romantic originality. The relation between Romantic originality and negativity, I argue, situates a phenomenology of American Romanticism in its literary correspondence with national literature and the transatlantic reception of American Transcendentalism, British Romanticism, and German Idealism.

More concerned with democratic publicity (in the sense of an individual relation to a public, per se), Hawthorne repeatedly sought his relation to originality in the "neutral territory" lying between the imagination and phenomenal world. Melville's relation to the cultural matrix discloses his own attempt at negating the linguistic problematic "uncovered" in Emerson's attempt to "reconcile nature with spirit."[46] In seeking that reconciliation through originality as a romantic trope Melville found himself in a disjunctive relation with the cultural matrix. The cultural matrix can be defined in terms of "the public-private binary in the United States culture [that] has usually meant the

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[45] Anticipating Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Lowell continues: Poets "import their raw material from any and everywhere, and the question at last comes down to this,--whether an author have original force enough to assimilate all he has acquired, or that he be so overmastering as to assimilate him. If the poet turns out to be stronger, we allow him to help himself from other people with wonderful equanimity." The argument for individual poetic power, Lowell suggests, supersedes national literary appeals. From the *North American Review*, 1870. James Russell Lowell, *Literary Criticism of James Russell Lowell*, ed. Herbert F. Smith (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1969), 53.

[46] Joseph Kronick, *American Poetics of History: Emerson and the Moderns* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), 6-7.

obeisance of the private to the public life..."[47] That political tension was the case lasting from Puritan colonial life through early republican public-sphere ideologies, and into the realm of immigrant experience. Renza points out that "in Poe's mid-nineteenth-century world, the 'public,' the highlighted site of accepted or contested values, was coming into existence as a special, alienated category of social experience, particularly in the guise of the American capitalist marketplace and mass culture."[48] Following from Ann Douglas's *The Femininization of American Culture,* Renza articulates the rise of a private sphere as an alternate model for the cultural matrix.[49] The private side of the binary occupied by Poe and others raises the question of the critical schema received from the transatlantic literary tradition; and in the 1840s, the critical keyword was *originality.*

Romantic originality, in a view held by Wordsworth that finds poetic originality analogous to divine creation in his "Intimations Ode," finds the origination of the literary work as beyond the material or phenomenal context.[50] In this formulation creativity becomes a sign of transcendence, whereas imitation occupies the material sphere. The bifurcation that structures the concepts of art and nature establishes the domain in which these two concepts traverse. Western "grammars of literary creation" have "migrated"

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[47] Renza, *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy*, 2.

[48] Renza, *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy*, 7.

[49] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Literature* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

[50] M. Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1. In a famous vignette, Wordsworth confessed to by letter to Isabella Fenwick that he finds it remarkable that his own "immaterial nature" regards the external as an extension of the internal self. His metaphysical relation to reality is such that "Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or a tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality," see William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period*. Vol. 2A. 7th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 286.

between the two concepts of invention and creation.[51] The original work is created, in this scheme, by an individual genius—or soul—and the original work presents itself as wholly new and not derivative, an origination stemming from the imagination of the writer rather than from the past.

In the European tradition Romantic originality, as Robert Macfarlane has shown, distinguishes, in a general sense, these two variants of the theory of literary originality: invention and creation. Invention, as we shall see, can be subdivided into rhetorical invention and the copying of nature through an admiration for natural "harmony"; creation can be subdivided between the literary or artistic creation of the *new,* vis-á-vis a resistance to the influence of the past, inherited traditions, or social conventions, and the notion of creation holding that its products result in an instantiation of something *ex nihilo*.[52] This "creative" aspect of Romantic aesthetic theory describes creative originality, originality in the sense of a self-inventing product, defined as a type of metaphysical or ontological originality. It is metaphysical by means of an analogy conceived in organic terms between the created and the thing, and ontological status of

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[51] We are distinguishing "creation" (later under the term structural originality) and "invention" (generative originality). The former is often likened to the organic metaphor whereas the latter is generated by a prior origin that supposes an infinite regression. The latter concept of originality redounds to the linguistic problematic (Kronick) that effaces any possibility of discovering an ultimate signifier. The former concept of originality as a structure in temporal flux is a matter of phenomenological aesthetics <see chapter 1).

[52] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007). Jonathan Culler discusses mimetic issues involved in "parasitic" discourses as belonging to a wider field of linguistic discourses arising in the deconstruction of logocentrism and speech-act theory. Plagiarism, of course, is a negation of originality based on evidence of derivation from a previous source. Literary hoaxes and parodies form a genre of originals that are at the same time imitations. Kant, moreover, in "On Genius," differentiated between "original nonsense" and "exemplary" originality, the latter being underived. Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 225.

the thing in that creation belongs to being.[53] This sort of creative mode is contrasted with invention, which, in this view, involves an encounter with, and a rearrangement of, existing materials. Invention, and its related concept influence, becomes generated in time with respect to a point of origin; creation on the other hand, implies an empty spatial center from which a being, a self-caused thing, metaphorically arises, and the concept implies a "making out of nothing."[54] For example Kant's notion of "creative" genius—a "natural endowment"—involves an "innate mental aptitude *through which* nature gives the rule to art," a definition which seems to posit a "creative" view of artistic originality unhindered or unheralded by tradition.[55] The rule is essentially unmediated except that it exists in temporality. The relation between creation and tradition determines the key dialectic of what Thomas McFarland terms the "originality paradox," a notion of self-binding such that diachronic and synchronic aspects, defined as generative and structural concepts, indicate moments of presence and absence along a syntagmatic chain of signification.[56]

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[53] I will develop the notion of ontological (metaphysical and transcendental) originality as a structure distinct from a generative form of originality that has frequently been the primary definition of literary originality. As such, literary originality as well as post-structural concepts of originality focus on the "problematics of origins," as deconstructive critic Joseph Riddel has termed it; and literary originality has been the subject of discussion under the rubric of "influence studies" by numerous critics of which Harold Bloom is one notable representative.

[54] Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, 1.

[55] Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings,* 224.

[56] Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 3. For McFarland the bifurcation between the individual and community is a hallmark of Romanticism, a problem perpendicular to the relationship of the individual artist to a literary tradition the dichotomy between individual and group becomes intensified at the point in a curve where the artist/tradition line intersects. The originality paradox arises in the artist/ tradition continuum, but is complicated by the relation of the individual to her community. Both binaries are chronologically situated; the individual/group binary is conceived as a horizontal and temporal plane; the individual/tradition binary is situated on a vertical plane of time. The very question of originality and the paradoxical relation between artist and tradition arises in the polarity between the individual and society.

Parallel to the originality paradox, or the unstable relation between creator and tradition, the Kantian paradox recognizes that positive freedom presupposes a universal sense that what is right in all cases must necessarily be a conditional definition. Many romantics recognized that positive freedom, while desired, could not be sustained, and that negative freedom must be the normative state of individuality. Even as Friedrich W. J. Schelling, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson looked to "nature" as a universal that could make a benign world more transparent; alternative romantics—Friedrich Schlegel, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Edgar Allan Poe—saw negativity as a basic irony of the divided human condition, which Friedrich Schlegel saw as a state of "permanent parabasis."[57]

The anxiety over the divided self becomes a turning point in the shift to Romantic negativity. In the relation between author and narrator of fiction, as we see in Melville's Ishmael, and in the metafiction of *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man*, just as the author intrudes on the narrator to comment on the problematics of the writing, the fiction overwhelms the author and brings about "the moment when the author does not return to the world." The question of "recovery" or a movement of return concerns whether a state of romantic irony—the isolation and alienation of the human subject whose self-reflexivity creates a condition of cathexis—might be resolved. Resolution seems available in a nostalgic hope for the infinite, to a state of unity. But reflexivity creates a reading of the self from another metacritical vantage point which is a fictionalization of

[57] Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight*. 2nd Edition, Revised (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 219. Schlegel asserted in 1787 that irony amounts to a permanent state of parabasis, the condition of self-consciousness that interrupts a narrative fiction; rather than replace illusion with reality, parabasis ratifies the illusion by affirming it by metafictional confirmation, obfuscating the reader into "forgetting the essential negativity of the fiction."

the self that the self creates to gain objectivity over itself. But that self-objectification results in a fictive standpoint that is a negation of the prior self. And that state of negativity cannot recover the prior self because of its necessary negativity without a reunification that is self-destructive. If irony gains its power through negativity the mind becomes helpless in attempting to deny itself the freedom to return to reconciliation; to do so would bring a halt to the dialectical nature of consciousness; the mind must accept no point as resolved since it has no temporal power over future states. Although the dialectic of the ironic consciousness is therefore one of infinite succession, it is bounded by mortality, and the consciousness must contain the self as substance and as subject.

The basic romantic impulse towards an originality of the Self finds itself conditioned by the negation of forces perceived as impinging upon its full realization. Full realization brings up the problem of the individual self in the midst of a society and literary tradition, a preexisting condition, as it were, that affects perceptions of originality. The impact of the social context, as critics William Hazlitt, James Russell Lowell, and T. S. Eliot have argued, cannot ultimately be overcome or erased by the imposition of an originality predicating the self as a singular subject, because language and cultural history always already come before it.[58] Negativity is then an ongoing dialectic where the self in its negativity, as G. W. Friedrich Hegel put it, remains in an

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[58] As distinct as these tree critics are from each other, they share the idea the individual author exists in a power relation with a literary tradition and cultural matrix of which they are inextricably part, see William Hazlitt, "Originality," *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings,* ed. Jon Cook (Oxford University Press, 1991), 270-77; James Russell Lowell, "Originality" [North American Review, 1870], *Literary Criticism of James Russell Lowell*, ed. Herbert F. Smith (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 53-54; T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1975), 37–44.

ironic relation to the Kantian notion of positive freedom, which *ought to be*, as Immanuel Kant held it, the condition of the undivided self.

Negative originality is thus contingent to the artist's historical relationship to history and culture.[59] While negative originality erupts due to historical conditions, it behaves as a reactive pattern.[60] That pattern, though it can be seen operating in particular eras dating from classical epic to the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, became particularly striking in early-19th century Europe, and following a decade or so later in America, when Romantic originality had become aligned with exceptionalism and nationalism under the banner of Americanism.[61] Then the construct of "originality"

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[59] McGann offers a 'negative reading' of the cultural dialectic inherent in Romantic thought: "Romantic poetry incorporates Romantic Ideology as a drama of contradictions which are inherent to that ideology." "Romantic poetry occupies an implicit—sometimes even an explicit—critical position toward its subject matter." Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 2.

[60] Adorno states: "The process that occurs in art works and which is arrested in them has to be conceived as being the same as the social process surrounding them. In Leibnizian terminology, they represent this process in a windowless fashion. The configurative totalization of elements in the art work follows immanent laws that are akin to those of society outside. Society's productive forces and rellations, shorn of their facticity, crop up in art because artistic labour is social labour and because an artistic product is a social product. Artistic forces of production are not *per se* different from social ones. The difference lies in the constitutive turn, by the former, away from real society. All that art works do or bring forth has its latent model in social production. It is this affinity that determines whether or not a work has strength and validity outside the confines of its immanence." Theodore Adorno, *The Adorno Reader,* ed. Brian O'Conner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 253.

[61] As Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 60-61. Cornelius Mathews patented the expression Young America in 1845 (plagiarizing its "borrowed sound" from Emerson), he also spoke of America's "intellectual as well as physical destiny" at the very moment (July 1845) that John O'Sullivan coined the expression Manifest Destiny. Mathews usurped the entire revolutionary program under the expression "Americanism" on "behalf of this young America of ours." Mathews' purpose, he claimed, was to "insist on nationality and true Americanism in the books this country furnishes to itself and to the world … It is a literature of this kind that the world (revolutionizing itself slowly under the influence of our example,) asks of our hands." At the very moment that O'Sullivan's democratic principle reached the formulation of Manifest Destiny for expansion into the west, Mathews claimed Americanism and national literature for the literary-cultural geography of New York.

itself, as a critical schema, had become imbricated into the narrative of national literary originality. It became impossible to become an "original" artist (in the creative sense) when the options for originality were already determined by nationalist ideology.[62]

Negative originality becomes an allegory of writing in that the drama of negativity is brought into conflict with originality, as in Melville's "Whiteness of the Whale" chapter of *Moby-Dick.*[63] Melville writes: "in its essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors...[it] is for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink..." The notion of a benign, "positive" originality associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge, and in America, with Longfellow and William Cullen Bryant, had from its beginnings a negative undertone. Schlegel, Shelley, and Poe allegorized originality in a negative sense. For Friedrich Schlegel, originality is "incomprehensible" and it is also ironic that it should be.[64] For Shelley, the irony of Rousseau's intuitive reason that succumbs to feeling in the *Triumph of Life*—the title itself is certainly an ironic statement—finds that human pathos is the unwinding of Enlightenment rationality. For Shelley intuitive reason is no assurance of a benign sense of the faith in the primary imagination as it is for Coleridge.[65]

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[62] That, generally, is the essential point made by poststructuralist commentators on Melville. For a discussion, see Wai-Chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989); and, Patricia Wald, *Constituting Americans* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995).

[63] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, 2nd ed, A Norton Critical ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 159.

[64] Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

[65] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed, James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Negative originality, then, arises as artists sublimate antithetical popular discourses, synthesizing them in a process akin to the romantic sublime by subverting them into an original literariness that is self-reflexive in view of an author's negative relation to the universe. Negative originality, moreover, recognizes that the artist is already bound by the concept of originality that culture promulgates, and the artist therefore recognizes "pure" originality as an impossible condition.[66] As an aesthetic concept promising creative independence—what David S. Reynolds sees as an author's problematic marginality vis-à-vis culture—the ideology of pure originality becomes either a creative impediment masquerading as a free aesthetic possibility, or a quixotic mirage to be attained in some future moment.[67] As such the artist remains bound to culture even as he or she resists or subverts it.[68] Michael Hoffman argues that "every American author since the days of Poe has been [unable] to find his culture adequate to

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[66] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 4. The notion of a "pure" originality bears a Kantian resonance. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues that an "*a priori* cognition…may stand in a two-fold relation to its object. Either it may have to determine the conception of the object—which must be supplied extraneously, or may have to establish its reality. The former is theoretical, the latter is practical …" In both, "the pure or a priori element must be treated first." Furthermore, Fichte argues that "[t]he assertion that the pure I is a product of the not-I expresses a transcendental materialism which is completely contrary to reason." He demands that "all that a person is should be related to his pure I, his mere being as an I." Fichte's categorical imperative of pure originality holds that one should "[a]ct so that you could consider the maxims of your willing as external laws for yourself." Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation." In *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 2003), 4-6.

[67] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[68] For a discussion of the subversive nature of negative originality, see Michael J. Hoffman, *The Subversive Vision: American Romanticism in Literature (*Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

his search for value, either in the universe or in his immediate society."[69] The drive to achieve pure originality entangles the creative artist further into the grasp of the cultural matrix.

Poe's complaint about metaphysical originality, a term closely allied with a historicized Romantic originality, rests on the distinction between a self-reflexive poetics (the poem as poem) and a poem that possesses extrinsic meaning. And in Romantic logic outer and inner correspond infinitely. It is a truism that Romantic originality considered metaphysical originality *intrinsic* through a synecdochal relationship to the infinite. Metaphysical originality is conceptually transcendent, a concept Poe wished to transcend for the sake of art and the artist. Poetics, for Poe, is thus negative with respect to originality, if originality is coextensive with the divine. While Poe rejected "metaphysical originality" as "didactic" he managed to write a metaphysical "prose-poem" *Eureka.*[70]

Poe doesn't reject metaphysics as such but rather insists that a "prose-poem" is necessarily an aesthetics of materiality and chance. Hawthorne and Melville rejected or at least reacted to the Spinozist pantheism of Transcendentalism, seeing instead a Manichean inscrutability or ambiguity as an ever-veiled source of originality lying deeper than the national-political construct of exceptionalism. Melville, in his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," shared with Emerson's *Nature* a desire for the disclosure of transcendental truth. Both Melville and Emerson altered their positions with regard to transcendental truth. The original negativity that might be disclosed through language

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[69] Michael J. Hoffman, *The Subversive Vision: American Romanticism in Literature* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), 4.

[70] Edgar Allan Poe, "Letter to B—" (1836), *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 5-12. Poe criticizes Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth for claiming poetry for metaphysical "instruction." Poe's point is consistent with his general rebuke of didacticism. But it is impossible not to note that Poe made significant contributions in metaphysical speculation

became for Emerson a matter of individual poetic power over the reification of quotation; for Melville an *alethetic* sense of universal truth as an original negativity became doubled through his "cosmopolitan" figure by its own inversion into particularity, even singularity. Negative originality becomes a quasi-Hegelian turn to negation as a parody of originality that sought to negate transcendental presumptions.

Perhaps because the artistic work in this view emerges from the mind of a single soul, the work can be traced to an individual, and thus it can elicit "a well-defined sense both of property…and propriety"; that is, in the "creative" view of originality there must be clear rights of ownership. Such a notion of private ownership can (and has) lead to a disparagement of repetition—that imitation is unoriginal—and eventually to a prohibition against plagiarism.[71]

Plagiarism became "the determination of aesthetic failure" with respect to originality in authorship. Discourses in the literary-critical milieu "offer a sustained account of the cultural negotiations that shaped literary expectations" of Romanticism.[72] As a creation myth, originality discounts what is present in a work that has appeared in other works, and privileges, rather, a criterion of uniqueness by evaluating a work according to what is rare in it; that is, originality emphasizes a work's "singularity" vis-à-

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[71] Macfarlane, *Original Copy, 2-3.*

[72] A focus on plagiarism rather than originality as an aesthetic criteria allows one to focus on ways in which Romantic writers were involved in "assimilation, absorption, and appropriation," as opposed to the normative aesthetic vantage point that "Romanticism has been traditionally associated with the values of autogenous originality and invention." 1- 5, see Tilar J. Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

vis its derivations. Originality, as ideology, despite the deconstructions of originality by poststructuralists, remains for many commentators "highly resistant" to its detractors.[73]

Indeed, copyright law depends on the claim of originality to establish proper ownership. In a curious turn from creative originality as a manifestation of individuality to intellectual property, a turn which in one direction becomes associated with Romantic theory and phenomenology and the sublime movement into negativity as propounded by Hegel, and in the other direction to Emerson's later concern for "quotation," where all literature is "eavesdropping." A similar pattern is evident in the deconstructive idea of grafting, where one discovers "points of juncture and stress where one scion or line of argument has been spliced into another..."[74] This turn, then, sets up the dichotomy between structural and generative originality.[75]

Romantic originality as an autogenic idea becomes further structured by negativity as a phenomenology of consciousness where the self in a Hegelian move returns to the original self; or, generative questions about literary originality turn the question of creativity toward a view, on one hand overburdened by influence, and on the other "bound" by one's singularity to a state of flux that becomes isolating, an apprehension that was theorized by Friedrich Schlegel and Kierkegaard as a condition of radical irony, and by Hawthorne and Melville as the condition of alienation from

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[73] Macfarlane, *Original Copy,* 3.

[74] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 135.

[75] Kierkegaard states that "If we turn back to the foregoing general description of irony as infinite absolute negativity, it is adequately suggested therein that irony is no longer directed against this of that particular phenomenon, against a particular existing thing, but that the whole of existence has become alien to the ironic subject and the ironic subject in turn alien to existence, that as actuality has lost its validity for the ironic subject, he himself has to a certain degree become unactual." Soren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27.

society.[76] The originality paradox—the relation between individual creativity and the literary tradition—maps onto the distinction between structural and generative originality, openness and closure, space and temporality, and the difference in definition between a concept of originality as a center or as a continuum.

Transatlantic literary borrowing provided a countermeasure to the pressures the cultural matrix imposed on American authors to be "original" national figures. For Romantics in America, Coleridge was acknowledged to be the translator of German Idealism. Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* published in America, with a forward by James Marsh in 1829, presented Coleridge's ideas to American readers. Henry Hedge, who was a member of Emerson's circle in Boston and Concord, composed an essay about Coleridge in 1833. Situated in Bangor, Hedge returned to Boston, and after 1836 his visits coalesced in the Transcendental Club. Hedge read Kant in the original German after visiting Germany with George Bancroft at 13.[77] It is clear that Hedge recognized Coleridge as a conduit to German Idealism rather than an originator of Idealistic philosophy.[78]

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[76] Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999); Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986); Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971); Soren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[77] Perry Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Harvard University Press, 1950), 66-69. Emerson praised Hedge's "Coleridge" as "a living leaping Logos." Hedge considers Coleridge's influence on American understanding of Idealism. Hedge's addresses an American "demand for information on the subject [of German Transcendentalism], which prompts Hedge to finish a summary on Kant and German Idealism in expository form. See the discussion in chapter 2, below.

[78] Henry Hedge, "Coleridge," *The Christian Examiner*, March 1833 (XIV, 109-129), in Miller, *The Transcendentalists,* 66-72. According to Perry Miller Coleridge and Carlyle helped expose Americans to an alternative to Locke's empiricism; Hedge was acknowledged to be the

And as if to confirm that Coleridge is the agency of transfer, rather than the inventor of transcendental thought, Hedge gives much discussion to Kant. In the American context, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously turned to the idea of an unconditioned Self when he sought in nature an "original relation to the universe," not just for world-historical figures but for everyone capable of "natural aristocracy."[79] In retrospect it is clear that Emerson is a primary source for a nineteenth-century American concern with "originality," both literary and metaphysical; his transcendental synthesis of the concept of American exceptionalism and German Idealism cleared the ground for one stream of an original American literature.[80]

Traversing another stream, Walt Whitman, writing a decade after Emerson's *Nature,* reminded Emerson that literary originality is an iterative process; a writer originates a text in a field already occupied by his literary precursors: "The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is always ready

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American most knowledgeable about German Idealism. Hedge's "Coleridge" became "the first word...which any American had uttered in respectful recognition of the claims of Transcendentalism."

[79] Merton Sealts argues that Melville heard Emerson lecture (February 5, 1849) and that the lecture was titled "Natural Aristocracy." In that lecture Emerson stated that "The existence of an upper class is not injurious, as long as it is dependent on merit." Merit, for Emerson, notes Sealts, involves talent or Genius, which is "the power to affect the Imagination, as possessed by the orator, the poet, the novelist or the artist." Qtd. in Merton M. Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville 1940-1980* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 259; see also Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (Modern Library, 2000), 3.

[80] Tocqueville seems to be the first to use the term "exceptional" as it is now framed in the word exceptionalism by Seymour Lipset and others. Lipset defines "exceptionalism" as the "American difference, the ways in which the United States varies from the rest of the world." For a modern usage of the term, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 17. Tocqueville states, "The American position is, therefore, entirely exceptional and it is quite possible that no democratic nation will ever be similarly placed" (Vol. 2, Part 1: 525-526), in, Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).

ploughed and manured … others may not know it but he shall."[81] Whitman suggested that if "the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new," then "[i]t is to be indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic."[82] Interpreting this passage by Whitman, Matthiessen notices that for Emerson and Whitman, there is a disjunction between language and reality and that the signifier transcends the signified by universalizing it symbolically: "Everything in the universe goes by indirection," writes Emerson.[83] For Whitman, the transcendent signifier—poetry—indirectly symbolizes (and indeterminately signifies) his "America."

Yet in the Romantic moment Emerson and Whitman held that originality overwhelms the boundaries signified by a direct apprehension of reality, since reason may encompass a field beyond the boundaries of reality. The faculty of reason provides the syntagmatic chain linking a signified to a transcendental signifier, as Emerson conceived it. Yet, for Whitman, we are reminded, the irony underlying American originality is that it must be necessarily "indirect"; there is no direct link between a poetic signified bound to an expressly national context, since the signifier must be transcendent to the cultural matrix. By implication the American poet's originality looks beyond national literary ideals. In Romantic thought, literary spirit—originality—cannot be contained in national reality. Thus the relation between poet and context is structured by definition asymmetrically, or indirectly, as Whitman put it. The "American" poet is absent from the presentness of context.

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[81] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 11.

[82] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers* (London: Walter Scott, 1888), 8.

[83] Qtd. in Matthiessen, *American Renaissance,* 57.

The absence of the American poet from any context comprised through the cultural matrix as an exceptional form of originality as a national literary construct results in a deconstructive moment when American literature in the "Romantic" continuum doubles as both a positing of an original moment and an aporia of any center that might appear decisive. American literature, Joseph Riddel argues, is implicitly self-critical and ironic since its self-reflectiveness reveals its belatedness; its newness is forever deferred. The "poetic" 'origin' of 'American' literature transgresses its origins through the figure of transumption, a reversal of cause and effect that rhetorically permits the repetition to stand as an origin. Moreover, the notion of an intrinsically American discourse of originality has always been "inscribed within a tropic economy that both undoes myths of origins and frontiers and prevents any dialectical sublations of this thoughts' contradictions."[84] Thus the basic ideas of originality, exceptionalism, and nationalism never resolve into a synthesis, but remain effaced by Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville's negative relations to the cultural matrix.

The ever-widening Emersonian circles that attempt to enclose the American concept fall victim to quotation and repetition. Emerson's "original relation" is itself a repetition, a new revelation: the Emersonian mind is a "transgression" of "nature" by, a chiasmus of language. As such, the "American idiom" is a double quotation by definition. The American "original" is a repetition explaining its belatedness, a belatedness that must acknowledge that America is an echo of the Old World. American authorship is orphaned; it must invent its origins in an ahistoric mythos.[85] Riddel's source-text for his

[84] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 4.

[85] Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, eds. *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). New Historicist and New Americanist critics of

deconstructive reading of the American originality position that has been at the center of an "American renaissance" school of hermeneutics is Emerson's admission in "Quotation and Originality" that any rhetoric of originality is already grafted by a burden of the past, and further that the poet is exceptional not by nation but by nature. In this sense generative originality is complicated by a double exposure to political and economic ambiguity. Riddel argues that the deconstructive criticism of American authorship and originality suggests not that origins lie in a precursor, but that originality itself is a conceptual anomaly. American originality is performative.

As a consequence of such circularity, the triangular relations within that circle between transatlantic romanticism, American literary publishing, and the transcendental and over-determined fascination with the idea of originality came to define writing in the antebellum era under discussion. Joseph Riddel propounds that a "problematics of origination" in the understanding of nineteenth-century literary thinking reveals a putative national identity, an ideology interrogated through the concept of an American "originality" in literature.[86] That concept underscores the related and subordinate concepts of Americanism (Cornelius Mathews) and exceptionalism (Tocqueville) and extends into the domain of the concepts of Puritanism, Federalism, Transcendentalism, and modernism, which for Riddel represents a theme and variations of what is discursively intertextualized throughout American postmodernism. This is a matter of

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the 1980s, particularly Donald E. Pease and Myra Jehlen, have shown that the literary Americanists of the 1950s and 60s, whom they have termed the "myth and symbol school," did in fact attempt to explain American literary originality in terms of an ahistorical mythos; see also Donald E. Pease, "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon." *Boundary 2* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 1–37.

[86] Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 1-3.

legacy and belatedness for American writers negotiating influence, transcription, and the "narrative of self-origination."

The claims of romantic originality during the nineteenth century in America's revolutionary middle years became reconstituted within literary nationalism as precepts of what Tocqueville noticed as "exceptionalism." Even as Emerson, the recipient of the transcendental tradition in America who sought to distinguish universal truths from institutional dogma, it became apparent that American literary independence might become corrupted by the marketplace, a possibility that threatened the very nature of republican egalitarianism. The telos of re-origination to which American literary nationalist ideology clung to would require the negation of its false precepts and in that relation a legitimate and intellectually independent literary criticism might intercede. At the center of the American authorial arbitration is the example of the self-reliant author as presented by Emerson. The reaction to its impossibility because of market contradictions arises with Poe's negative example.

Milton R. Stern suggests that the central conflict within Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* centers on the literary marketplace and the political place of the author within it.[87] Stern explores two avenues of inquiry: "a mimetic connection between the literary act and what appear to be 'absolute' universal principles inferred from science"; and, to explore a "paradigmatic illustration of an ongoing literary relationship between those 'absolute' principles and the millennialistic context of American culture." Stern deploys the expression 'millennialist' as a way to address the feeling for American exceptionalism, its function as a "city on a hill."

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[87] Milton R. Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun and the Politics of Openness and Closure in American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 3.

Framing this literature in terms of an intention that foregrounds literary nationalism founded on exceptionalism as a paradigm ignores a *dependence upon transatlantic publishing for a culture of authorship.* And the notion of anarchy—or dissent—vis-à-vis "true" democracy posits a notion of patriotism that lacks sufficient historicism. The antebellum authors of the American northeast found themselves in a dialogical and emerging literary culture bounded by competing strains of American ideology making national unity a virtual moving target: one author's anarchy is another's patriotism. The canonization that displays both anarchic and democratic functions of antebellum authors, under Matthiessen's rubric of an American renaissance, begs the question of the role of negative originality in authorship with respect to its relation to the cultural matrix.

In order to understand the bracketing of the author with respect to negative originality and the consequent bifurcation of the author and the cultural matrix we turn to Richard Brodhead's reading of Melville's literary emergence in the context of the domestic novel, a literary milieu that, because of its heterodoxy, prompts the question of relation. Given that Melville and the domestic novel writers shared the same cultural matrix, we recognize that while domestic novelists accommodated their market, Melville rejected his. Melville's singularity was not simply a political distance from the bourgeois domestic market but a difference in writing strategy. Melville attempted an unprecedented level of artistic autonomy, striving to position himself outside the cultural matrix he was bound to, and thus fostered a radically different "organizing idea" of authorship. Moreover, in his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," to which we will return later, Melville constructs an idea of Hawthorne as an authorial self that is bounded by

received concepts of originality, thus providing the example of how an author renegotiates self-conception in spite of the cultural matrix.[88]

To delve into this construct of an "authorial self" we turn to Perry Miller's analysis of the New York literary scene as one controlling aspect of the cultural matrix. Writing in 1956, Perry Miller looked back at Melville's romance *Moby-Dick* (1851) as "an indubitable masterpiece" of the 19th century, which fell into obscurity soon after its publication and was rediscovered in the 1920s. Miller argued that "The long eclipse of *Moby-Dick* can, of course, be attributed to inherent difficulties in the work itself. But on the other hand, notwithstanding such difficulties, the forces that drove it into limbo may arise not from the complexities of its technique but from those of the American intelligence."[89] In the 1950s, Perry Miller proposed a way to portray Melville's reception in his legacy as an author. Miller suggests, in a still commonly held view, that literary historicism regards Melville as a synecdoche of that literary scene, a part of a forgotten America, an America structured by the New York literary scene during the 1840s and 50s. During his decade as a working novelist, if Melville stood as an exemplary American original, what explains his rather rapid and sustained (until resurrected by D.H. Lawrence in 1924) eclipse?

The essence of Miller's assertion, then, is that the poor reception of Melville's *Moby-Dick* is an example of the crisis of literary originality that Mattheissen and others noticed in the 1840s and 1850s. But also and perhaps more pointedly, it is an example of

[88] Richard H. Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 20.

[89] Miller, *Raven and the Whale,* 3. Miller argues, in other words, that the literary originality of the book was missed by critics and readers looking for confirmation of an originality that suited preconceptions of literary nationalism.

the problems inherent in the ideology of originality in the cultural context and discourses constituting what Miller describes as the "American intelligence."[90] The premise of American literary nationalism's originality was for Melville a premise based in American exceptionalism, a premise that winds up collapsing under the weight of a great question: can America produce an original literature, and if so, what will be its distinctive qualities? Specifically, can America produce an original literature while demanding that its writers conform to the rules imposed by a transatlantic literary market? Put another way, we might question whether literary originality can survive commodification.[91] Certainly, though, Poe, who in his "Prospectus of the Stylus," *imagined* "a Magazine wherein his interest should be not merely editorial, … It will endeavor to be at the same time more varied and unique,—more vigorous, more pungent, more original, more individual, more independent."[92]

The Young American literary program, spearheaded by literary critic Evert Duyckinck and others, folded into the rhetoric of exceptionalism an obsession for what Hawthorne, in his satirical sketch "A Select Party" (1844),[93] sardonically identified as the "Master Genius," whose arrival at the moment of Manifest Destiny, swallowed critical discourses of genius and originality, discourses that had been adopted by the bourgeois from British Romantics, and conflated in the dynamics of the market with assumptions of

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[90] Miller, *Raven and the Whale,* 3.

[91] Such a concern presupposes commodified literary products premised on untenable associations between beneficent democracy and capitalist competition, where literary originality (as a pretense of exceptionalism) lies in the former and becomes lost in its self-commodification in the latter. This form of *modus tollens* awakened Melville to the more profound concern over the metaphysical originality of unconscious drives that would set up this fallacy.

[92] Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1034.

[93] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne: Tales and Sketches*, Library of America College ed. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1982), 957.

literary access to universal truths of the human spirit. That structure exposed contradictions underlying benevolence and material acquisition that bourgeois Americans often ignored. Perry Miller articulated the problem by suggesting that "A republic may abandon the artist not because of his aberrations but because of its own."[94]

Little did Melville know at this point in his career of the rivalry between the democrat Duyckinck and the Whig Lewis Gaylord Clark, editor of the *Knickerbocker,* and of their ideologies that were supported by their various interests. That Melville happened to find himself in Duyckinck's camp became, for Miller, a matter of the "greatest importance in [our] deciphering the final nature of his craft."[95] Melville had aligned himself with the democratic Young America movement, which under Duyckinck had fomented a particular sort of literary nationalism that contrasted Clark's Whig conservatism. In that struggle for political turf, which had the weight to forestall the rise of the emblematic American national author, the contest over literary nationalism was inherently ideological rather than symbolically universal.

But even more significantly, as Miller argues, Melville participated in a cultural "befuddlement"; by accepting the "pretensions" of originality, he could not resolve contradictions in the economy of literature by proposing a solution. Melville faced the problem of befuddlement as a form of declension (of cultural progress) and the role of the writer as a form of cultural jeremiad. In *The Confidence-Man* Melville dialectically portrayed the dilemma facing a ship of state led by a culture of befuddlement. Miller places the dilemma of exceptionalism Melville witnessed—the ideology of original national literature based on pretensions necessitated by the commodification of literature

[94] Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*, 4.

[95] Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*, 6.

as a product of Americanism—squarely in the lap of Young American political goals.

Miller states that

> In Melville's case, there is a further and more instructive dimension: an artist can, once he has caught the ear of his people, abruptly discover himself cut off not because he thunders some clear sanity against their insanity, but because he participates completely in their befuddlement. He accepts as the terms of his problem precisely the terms they propound to him, and can conceive no others; he finds himself, despite the power of genius, no more capable of resolving the antinomies, or of making good the pretensions, than they are. If at the end of his exertions, no matter how titanic, he confronts the blank emptiness of defeat, if then he is relegated to the unreverberating solitude of failure, the tragedy is not so much his overreaching as an inescapable collapse of the structures his society provided for him—indeed, imposed upon him, with no allowance for alternatives.[96]

Melville's literary anxiety had to do with the arbitrariness of originality, the *linguistic problematic* behind the "originality paradox," which structures Matthiessen's doubleness thesis.[97]

The call for originality in national literature was an attempt to conjure through literary poetics the romanticizing power latent in Romantic Idealism. The attempt to redress these problems through partisan literary means was to admit to a particularity of

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[96] Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*, 4.

[97] Joseph Kronick posits American originality as a "linguistic problematic," a problem of meaning always out of reach behind a veil of ideology. American writing is a poetics of history; for Kronick, historical studies are a matter of tropology rather than epistemology: "the rhetorical interplay that poses history as a problematic of reading wherein temporal relations are generated by a linguistic process of exchange," see Joseph Kronick, *American Poetics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984). Similarly, Joseph Riddel speaks of American literary beginnings as a "problematics of origination." Riddel seeks to unpack Matthiessen's renaissance by reopening the "question of modernism" —beginnings and repetitions—in 19th century literature. American "literature" is an oxymoron, since there is no clear delineated national identity in a poetics of literature. Rather, it is the putative national identity that is ultimately interrogated in the discourses of literary nationalism that came to rely on originality claims. Americanism and exceptionalism within the concepts of Puritanism, Federalism, Transcendentalism, modernism represent a theme and variations of what is discursively American. This is a matter of legacy and belatedness in American writers negotiating influence, transcription, and the "narrative of self-origination," see, Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

the transatlantic intersubjectivity in which the negative originality of the idea was cast. If we are to historicize Matthiessen's "doubleness" thesis in a way meaningful to an investigation of negative originality in the nineteenth century, we need to *consider both the democratic situation that produced the literary marketplace and then to understand the shift from a republican political ideology to a socioeconomic reality*, which saw the public sphere reoriented toward individual authorship.[98] Negative originality provides a metacritical access point of relation between socioeconomics and aesthetics.

As we shall see in Bloom's discussion of the American Sublime, Emerson represents the "American writer's imperial self."[99] Such a view is a "denial of history"; the "creation of self through style" and the "emphasis on voice at the expense of content" expresses an "anxiety over the past." Emerson's "importance lies in his creating a poetic program that was only realized, if at all, in the works of Thoreau and Whitman." Emerson

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[98] William Charvat and Matthew Bruccoli, *The Profession of Authorship, 1800-1870*, Social Foundations of Aesthetic Forms (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Charvat has shown that the professionalization of authorship was expanding at the very moment when audiences and cultural interests were undergoing definition. America, in the 1840s, was seeing an expanding market for the novel. Urbanization and a rising middle class bourgeoisie created an impetus for literate women relegated to the private sphere by gendered institutions towards the domestic novel. By 1850 fictional novels were mass marketed to large numbers of readers. Large numbers of women readers fostered a coterie of literary "ladies men" who wrote for gift books and magazines. Further, the phenomenon of the novel saw a host of women writers trade domesticity for authorship, but paradoxically reified domesticity as a market. The emergence of Melville in the context of the domestic novel prompts the question of relation. Given that Melville and the domestic novel writers shared the same cultural matrix, we recognize that while domestic novelists accommodated their market, Melville rejected his. Melville's singularity was not simply a political distance from the bourgeois domestic market but a difference in writing strategy. Melville attempted an unprecedented level of artistic autonomy, striving to position himself outside the cultural matrix he was bound to. Melville thus fostered a radically different "organizing idea of authorship"; see also Richard H. Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19-20.

[99] Joseph Kronick, *American Poetics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 1.

is read as incomplete, and Nature's pleasure is derived from its "epiphanies."[100] The tension between democracy and individualism indicated that originality itself, as a literary value, had become inscribed with ideology. And the vital question centers on whether there exists a structure of originality that arises out of a metaphysics that remains antecedent to the interdiction of ideology. That is, we might ask, in what way does metaphysics rely on aesthetics to do the work of a metacriticism of ideology? We turn to a phenomenology of negativity to explore that question.

American alternative Romantics were faced with the recognition that their concept of originality was incommensurable with what they regarded as a false concept of originality sustained by advocates of literary nationalism. What remained for these alternative Romantics was a Hegelian negation of grounds from which originality might be defined. The Romantic "movement of return," or the passage into negation, a moving into the other (or antithesis), becomes a mode of transcending. For Poe, the notion of individuality or of self, or in more transcendental terms of autonomy of spirit, anticipates the possibility of negation.[101] For alternative Romantics originality remained negative

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[100] In "Emerson's Books, (The Shadows of Them)," Whitman writes: "In the regions we call Nature, towering beyond all measurement, with infinite spread, infinite depth and height—in those regions, including Man, socially and historically, with his moral-emotional influences—how small a part, (it came in my mind to-day,) has literature really depicted—even summing up all of it, all ages. Seems at its best some little fleet of boats, hugging the shores of a boundless sea, and never venturing, exploring the unmapp'd—never, Columbus-like, sailing out for New Worlds, and to complete the orb's rondure. Emerson writes frequently in the atmosphere of this thought, and his books report one or two things from that very ocean and air, and more legibly address'd to our age and American polity than by any man yet. But I will begin by scarifying him—thus proving that I am not insensible to his deepest lessons. I will consider his books from a democratic and western point of view. I will specify the shadows on these sunny expanses …" Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers* (London: Walter Scott, 1888), 142.

[101] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allen Poe,* ed. G. R. Thompson (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004). The term "alternative Romanticism" is Thompson's. He is referring to Poe's reading of German idealists, particularly Schlegel and Schelling, who dealt with

since no unifying “movement of return” (to society or tradition) was possible without self-contradiction. Negative originality is thus the recognition of paradox through reflection upon autonomy. The artist theoretically sees that any conception of autonomy that is necessary for originality in any positive sense, if that were possible, is always negative. Morse Peckham offers that “because of the disparity between an orientation and the data it is called upon to organize, the individual, if he is to adapt successfully to his environment, must perceive a disparity between the order affirmed by orientation [towards an ordered universe] and his actual experience of randomness.”[102]

That paradoxical problem is the result of Kantian metaphysics, which became systematized by Hegel as a three-stage dialectical approach to history. Hegelian negation of negation speaks of a synthetic absolute that culminates the dialectical opposition between thesis and antithesis. The Kantian sublime, however, because of its negativity, never results in a synthesis. As we shall see, the “collapse of comprehension” indicative of the second phase of the Kantian sublime poses the problem of recovery. As the imagination becomes overwhelmed during the sublime event, the promise of a “positive” synthesis via intuitive reason becomes challenged by the very incomprehensibility of the substance present to the imagination. The oxymoron negative-originality, as a

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the impact of irony and the “incomprehensible” upon the idea of positive originality often associated with Transcendentalism.

[102] The cultural break from the Enlightenment in the 1790s was a literary one. One path set by Rousseau was characterized by sentimentalism grounded in a belief that through nature one could envision a "radiant" and ordered world; another stems from Goethe and suggests that human psychology is incommensurable with positive transcendental ideals. This “Negative Romantic stage” places emphasis on the self as the locus of order and value. It follows that the self, paraphrasing Emerson, stands in a *negative relation to the universe*, see Morse Peckham, “Towards a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations.” *Studies in Romanticism* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1961), 2 (1–8). My emphasis.

metacritical expression, attempts to describe that negativity.[103] Before we can fully understand the negativity of the sublime moment—what Paul de Man terms an "epiphany" towards a "presence," we need to appreciate the shift in Romantic thinking from influence-oriented originality to the spontaneous origination within the concept of the organic metaphor.

That shift in thinking centers on the Romantic sublime as a mode of structural originality. Structure is circumscribed by negativity. Negative originality is manifested in a state of doubleness, as many commentators have recognized. In Poe's writing doubleness appears in the pattern of a negative doubling of the central subjective consciousness, as in the tale "William Wilson." In Hawthorne, negativity appears as a result of the author's dual relation to actuality and to the imagination. In Melville, negativity presents itself as an ironized phenomenology of a failed originality intruding upon the normative state of plurality. In Melville's *The Confidence-Man* originality appears as an allegorical literary problem only to become effaced by the Janus-faced transformations of the central cosmopolitan figure, or diabolical everyman. The basic ontological state in Melville's reading of negative originality is that identity becomes virtually unreadable in the flux of iteration. As Elizabeth Renker notes in *Strike through*

[103] Slavoj Zizek makes the point that he term 'sublime' might be "to be conceived in the strictest Kantian sense," points to negation, the excising of a symbolic element within a conventional – a gap between an erased hegemony and a not yet present new one. There is no "origin without its supplement," loss is compensated by a "fantasy-object," which obtains through a need for a 'natural' "circuit" of universals. Appeals to universality become further instances of a freeplay of discourses. But at that very moment, in a retrograde moment, appears a "transcendental turn." Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying With The Negative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

the Mask, “[t]he Confidence-Man’s challenge is effective precisely because he has no real face that could be recognizable.”[104]

For Poe, the negative doubling of the self in his tales such as “William Wilson” recognizes that the possibility of originality prevents itself not in the absolute in the sense of an eternal spirit, but in death. Poe, particularly, was aware of his German and British philosophical antecedents. Melville, moreover, rapidly acquired knowledge of Carlyle and Kant’s views on romantic philosophy (and came to reject them), as Merton Sealts has shown. Hawthorne clearly shows a debt to Ovid, Milton, and Wordsworth, as well as the popular literature of his day. Wordsworth and Coleridge were available to all three through James Marsh’s American edition of Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection,* which posits the contrast between intuitive and discursive reason. In the collapse of intuitive reason (as Poe insisted it should) is the negation of benign originality and the rise of negativity through discursivity.

Thus, while as a concept negative originality suggests a transcendent idea, it here describes a pattern experienced by alternative romantics writing within the cultural field of Romance. The pattern faced three interrelated fronts in the cultural matrix: Common-Sense orthodoxy, democratic literary nationalism that was spreading under the banner of Young America, and the Middle-Light Whig conservatism, whose readers preferred British quarterlies, and against which Emerson and the more radical Transcendentalists of New England had partial affinity with alternative romantics. It is also the case that Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, who each had close ties to the New York literary scene through their publishing interests, were also affected by the radical wing of the Young American

[104] Elizabeth Renker, *Strike through the Mask: Herman Melville and the Scene of Writing* (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1996), 70.

movement, the Loco Foco movement of labor dissenters; Young American radicalism helped for a time to encourage their engagement with literary nationalism.[105] Each of the authors at the forefront of this study, with the exception of Emerson, wrote for John O'Sullivan's *United States and Democratic Review* or Evert Duyckinck's *Literary World.* The relation between these authors and Young America was short lived. Poe was increasingly ostracized after his Longfellow Wars, which raised the ire of literary elites. Hawthorne evaded literary nationalism, ironically, in magazine pieces such as "A Select Party" and called attention to the inequities of capitalism in "The Old Apple Dealer." Melville, after attempting to make a case for a national literary value based upon the tragic human condition he saw in Hawthorne, turned to fully embrace a negative sense of originality in *Moby-Dick* through his character Ahab.

In its incipient form, negative originality arises from the originality paradox.[106] The very question of originality and the paradoxical relation between artist and tradition arises in the polarity between the individual and society. The negative response to history and the Enlightenment can be traced to a sense of anxiety over industrialization and overpopulation as T. R. Malthus, in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), predicted would occur after the French Revolution. That tension precipitated a mode of negative Romanticism characterized by alienation that is visible in Byron, Carlyle, and

[105] Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23. Widmer sees the antebellum politico-literary scene as a social movement and suggests that Young America and Locofocoism were generators of intellectual energy, particularly in the antagonism between what he defines as Young America and. Young America II.

[106] Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 3.

Melville.[107] The criterion of originality parallels the cultural recognition of the romantic artist, a concept which became negativised as the originality paradox became more trenchant. As the individual artist became increasingly anxious about the role of the artist in society—as the narrative proposes—the artist in turn becomes more anxious about tradition as an original condition. Originality no longer points behind but only at itself reflexively, and negative originality becomes defined as a form of reflexivity that seeks an original condition for the individual by negating society's determining grip.

As Romantic alienation, then, this mode of negative originality points to the primary issue of reception within the cultural matrix. The position of resistance which the artist takes toward or against culture invokes (or provokes) a *relation* of negation. Negation originates as a mode of unstable autonomy for the individual since it is never fully realized and always dialogic. The reactive nature of the "original" relation between

[107] Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: George Brazzilier, 1962), 93-99. In what is essentially an existential view, Morse Peckham points to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as the moment of self-awareness of Romantic alienation. Goethe shows the loss of identity by shifting from the epistolary mode to direct narration as *Werther* become more distraught. The loss of identity parallels a breakdown in the faith in Enlightenment letters as a private circuit of communication. The Enlightenment letter is coextensive with Enlightenment orientation. But with the shift in consciousness, the editor becomes the controlling factor of discourse as a way to impose order. *Werther's* gloom necessitates narrative distance, which demonstrates the loss of self. The tragedy of *Werther* resides in the failure of love the sentiment of love to prevail, and in its place the resulting pessimism become the prevailing tenor. Redemption is unavailable because paradise is no longer lost but simply absent. The absence of a possible paradise results in disorientation, thus the individual finds no orientation within which to achieve a sense of pleasure. In the absence of religion and the enlightenment the source of value must reside in the self. The ideas of truth and beauty as assurances of the good, after Kant, become located in the self. Pure reason locates order in the mind alone, freeing orientation from its dependence on religion or empiricism. Such ideas, rather than constitutive, become regulative. The mind regulates data by dividing itself into noumenal and phenomenal spheres. These functions are universal an archetypal, and the human organism's design becomes understandable as an organic whole. Organicism thus becomes the grounding metaphysics of the Romantic are. The assertion of the self as a purposive being becomes its source of intrinsic value, eclipsing outward orientations towards value. Redemption became obtainable through art, and thus nature comes to be as the creative source which the genius draws upon to assert value as an individual artist. And the source of creativity lies in the self within its unconscious. Art is no longer an imitation of nature but a redemption of nature.

art and artist, on one hand, and art and society on the other, in view of post-romantic theories of aesthetic ideology, characterizes negative originality as essentially a political relation.[108] Frankfurt School social critics Max Horkeimer and Theodore Adorno in their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944) argued from the view that the relation between modernism and the Enlightenment is largely negative.

The romantic emphasis of art over nature underscores the first turn from the Enlightenment, which William Hazlitt summarized in his essay "Originality" (1830) by positing that the "horizon of art" widens with the priority of Reason over Nature.[109] A century later, Adorno, whose thinking is clearly steeped in a post-romantic "negative dialectic," affirms in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) that a "cognitive interest" in art supports a philosophical interest in aesthetics, and arises with the dialectic of the Enlightenment. Adorno suggests that "Art, which participates in the process of social emancipation on its path toward autonomy, is characterized by negativity in a twofold fashion: in its relation to the social reality which conditions it and in its historical origin which tradition determines."[110] Adorno's stance vis-à-vis negative originality proposes

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[108] Adorno argues that "[t]he social content of art resides in the principle of individuation, which for its part is social. This explains why art cannot gain insight into its social essence by itself but has to rely on interpretation." Theodore Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Conner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 250; see also Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 139–212. Revised and Expanded. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993); and Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

[109] William Hazlitt, *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford University Press, 1991), 271-72.

[110] Qtd. in Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. Translated by Michael Shaw. Vol. 3. Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 14. Jauss quotes Adorno, who charges that "there is no question that it is only by negating their origin that works of art become what they are. Having once retroactively destroyed what they derive from, the ignominy of their ancient dependence on hocus-pocus, service to those who rule, and divertissment cannot be held against them as a kind of original sin"; see also Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* 12.

that in the abandonment of subservience and the opposition to social determinants, art severs its idea from the stasis of the cultural matrix such that art's social rationale emerges as an exponent of change.

Whatever creative originality the artist realizes obtains from his or her negativity (negative originality is, as such, contingent to the cultural matrix). It is this mode of relation between art and culture that underscores Theodore Adorno's negative dialectics. In his *Aesthetics,* Adorno states that

> Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving towards a total-exchange society where everything is for-other. This social deviance of art is the determinate negation of a determinate society. To be sure, the rejection of society that we see reflected in the sublimation of autonomous art through the law of form, also lends itself to ideological abuse: art's distance from this horrifying society also betrays an attitude of non-intervention. It must be kept in mind that society is not co-extensive with ideology. Any society is more than sheer negativity to be indicted by the aesthetic law of form; even in its most objectionable shape, society is still capable of producing and reproducing human life. Art has had to take this aspect (no less than that of its critical task) into account . . . art has no way of separating affirmation and critique intentionally.[111]

Here, Adorno follows Hegel's idea of experience in the Introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit.* Hegel's notion of consciousness seeks to understand the world as it is filtered through the mind and its "presuppositions."[112] Consciousness is dynamic in its approach to objectivity in light of anthropology. Consciousness reacts dynamically to contradictions that demand a re-evaluation of assumptions about the world. Consciousness is transformed when its criterion for understanding fails to meet the demands of knowing. The movement of transformation is inherently a negative motion

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[111] Theodore Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Conner. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 242.

[112] Brian O'Conner, "Introduction." Theodore Adorno. *The Adorno Reader*. ed. Brian O'Connor (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 11-13.

from static and impoverished criteria to new forms of understanding, which results in what Adorno terms a "determinate negation." Negation strives for more "effective" ways of knowing, where "effect" is a criterion for the correspondence of object to subjective concept. The movement towards a more effective consciousness is contradicted by an inertia that prevents a return to a transformed dynamic consciousness.

It is in this negative moment that the phenomenalism of the Romantic sublime encounters originality as a structure, as Thomas Weiskel shows.[113] The inertia of consciousness is an irrational condition and explains conformity of the self to social forces that destroy individuality. Negation, while alienating the self from conformity, produces a release from a state of consciousness in contradiction with itself. If Hegel and Emerson would hold experience as "irrevocable," Adorno considered "experience" as coextensive with self-awareness of constraining contradictions. For Weiskel negative originality produces a mode of freedom. If meaning arises in the pressure to signify the incomprehensible, "the sublime authorizes a translation of absurdity into freedom."[114] The hypothesis of pure and rational freedom—autonomy—suggests metaphysical originality, but it is plausible only under the condition that we can distinguish incomprehensibility from a lack of understanding; if incomprehensibility suggests the unconditioned, a lack of understanding determines the failure of autonomy. The

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[113] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 34-35. According to Thomas Weiskel, criticism is inherently reductive and a tacit sublimation of the chaos of originality to the order of a hermeneutic. In that hermeneutic is a rhetoric, a discursive reasoning between the poles of indeterminacy and meaning, which is arrived at through the control of indeterminacy. Signifiers arise in the relation between subject and object; signifieds, arbitrary in themselves, take on discursive meaning under the "pressure" of context that subsumes the originating rhetorical occasion. For Weiskel, "the failure to understand something has the very highest meaning."

[114] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 35.

distinction between incomprehensibility and the failure to understand rests on the fact that the latter undermines the possibility of transcendence: the sublime can only arise in incomprehensibility; it reminds us of the possibility of transcendent reason, but disrupts it.

Art's very impetus towards autonomy, though, as a mode of negation, has the potential to become superseded by a mode of autonomy latent in aestheticism, a concern that underscores many thoughtful discussions about originality as a theme. Poe's formalism, which stresses that poetry is essentially a self-reflexive medium, has sometimes been regarded as an incipient New Critical poetics. Following Matthiessen, Myra Jehlen notes that as opposed to the European aristocrat, the American writer "was a democrat."[115] F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* expressed its penchant for the political left, but submerged its politics under transcendent literary values. Matthiessen, notes Jehlen cogently, attempted to weld American democratic literary identity with New Critical literary autonomy, and selected authors for canonization, particularly Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville, who themselves were faced with the dual task of originating an American literature and at the same time bracketing themselves from the social realm by being its critics.[116] Matthiessen wished for a horizontal democratic literature that met the ideology of the socialist thirties and yet retained the New Critical schema for intrinsic value.

Beyond the problematics of intrinsic value and the question of originality, Jehlen

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[115] Myra Jehlen, "Beyond Transcendence," in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. ed. Berkovitch and Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-14.

[116] Jonathan Culler notes cogently that "the realities with which politics is concerned, and the forms in which they are manipulated, are inseparable from discursive structures and systems of signification." Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 15.

develops a narrative of the emergence of a dialectical negativity in Americanist literary criticism. Americanist critics of the "myth and symbol school," she suggests, recognized the divergence of method between formal and historical analysis.[117] Beginning with Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* American formalists adapted formalism to myth analysis and the centerpiece for Americanists of the 1950s and early 1960s was R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam.* Focusing on the myth of American exceptionalism meant that history had to give way to myth and symbol. The authorial subject position as well as the critics' interestedness entered into a dialectical relation with social conflicts such that the reality of diversity, much more complex than a popular/art dichotomy might have anticipated, has resulted in a fluctuating stasis in the critical field where the ability to accept privileged autonomy has become difficult to defend.

Pluralism has thus demanded a dialectical mode of discourse involving the social context. Frankfurt Marxists unpacked the ideological structure of culture as an imbricated ideology; and postructuralists deconstructed language itself. Jameson showed that the "negative dialectic" of Horkeimer and Adorno was a mode of deconstruction that might negate dominant discourse and reveal its regressive underpinnings. For Althusser, ideology is itself a mode of representation. Moreover, Ideology itself is originary in the deconstructive sense of the word. The literary universe is already structured by the forms available within ideology and its content originates within the cultural matrix. Ideology, in this view, is intertextual and interactive, and literary content is generative within that matrix, its originality is an intersection of determinants that are socially constructed. Originality is no longer tenable as a Romantic absolute but as a negative force interacting

[117] Myra Jehlen, "Beyond Transcendence," 13-14.

in a determinative field.

Works that become canonized within authoritative traditions, even those that may have arisen with negative relations to the cultural matrix, eventually lose their autonomy with respect to tradition. In “Fragments on Art: Why the Arts are not Progressive” (1814) William Hazlitt writes that “[w]hat is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical or definite, but depends on genius, taste, and feeling, very soon becomes stationary or retrograde, and loses more than it gains.”[118] For Hazlitt, originality is ephemeral with respect to “progress.” Jauss suggests a similar tack in that “[p]recisely those works that have the historical power to transcend the canon of the customary and the horizon off what is expected are not immune from losing their original negativity in the process of their cultural reception.”[119] Jauss concludes that such a tendency towards “the classical” amounts to a Hegelian “cunning of reason.” Hegelian aesthetics illuminates a transcendent teleology beyond the horizon of originality. This transcendent aspect of negativity underscores the claim that art, even that which precedes the era of autonomous works characterized by the negative/affirmative bifurcation, is essentially polemical.

Originality, as a cultural idea, becomes “not an indwelling quality of writerly production, but instead a function of readerly reception.”[120] Derek Attridge, who wisely avoids splitting the matter into a binary idea, notes in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004)

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[118] William Hazlitt, *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford University Press, 1991), 257-58.

[119] Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Translated by Michael Shaw. Vol. 3. Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 16.

[120] Macfarlane, *Original Copy, 5.*

that creativity involves materials ready to hand, but also deviates from "norms of the cultural matrix."[121] Such deviation arises in what Attridge recognizes as a relation between the "instrumentalism" of literature, that is, the use value of its project to the cultural matrix—as an exemplum of nationalism, for example—or as a mode of "*resistance* to such thinking."[122] Concentrating on a further distinction between originality and singularity, Attridge observes that whereas originality results from the creative application of the discoveries of *aporia* in culture, from tensions, pressures, omissions, "singularity" partakes of an event and "takes place in reception."[123] Singularity bears similarities to Edgar Poe's critical notion of "unity of effect." Unlike originality or imitation, singularity

> is generated *not* by a core of *irreducible materiality or vein of sheer contingency to which the cultural frameworks* we use cannot penetrate but by a configuration of general properties that, in constituting the entity (as it exists in a particular time and place), go beyond the possibilities pre-programmed by culture's norms, the norms with which its members are familiar and through which most cultural products are understood.[124]

Singularity results from the experience produced through apprehending new possibilities; singularity is evanescent; it necessitates accommodation. We shall explore this distinction further in terms of the concepts generative originality (originality "exists in a particular time and place") and structural originality, which Paul de Man describes as a spatial

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[121] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 35.

[122] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 7. Attridge's emphasis.

[123] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 63-64. For Attridge, singularity is conceived as a sign within the structure of originality. The term singularity refers to a "cultural object" that "consists in its difference" with respect to other objects. Singularity does not reference simply an instantiation of general ideas or rules, but as a "peculiar nexus" that is culturally located but one seen as "resisting or exceeding all pre-existing general determinations."

[124] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 63. Attridge suggests that originality consists in material contingency to a cultural framework, or matrix: it is generated by culture. Singularity transcends culture through recontextualization. My emphasis.

center. It is through the structural evanescence of *going beyond* that singularity (in Attridge's definition) approximates negative originality, which, like singularity, is fundamentally relational to culture.[125]

Singularity, as Attridge theorizes, exists in its negative relation to originality, which in turn appears as an *aporia* in culture. It is through Attridge's phenomenological and Heideggerian sense of originality that we can distinguish between a Romantic metaphysical originality and a structural and phenomenal sense of originality. Kant distinguishes between accidental originality as nonsense—mere difference—and "exemplary" originality, produced by genius. That sort establishes a pattern to be followed by imitation; the genius type leads to "new ways to be original in response to originality."[126] The Kantian definition is the strong definition.[127] Kant's definition of originality impacted Romantic theory such that further discussions by Hegel, Emerson, and others necessarily footnote the third *Critique*.

As opposed to Hazlitt's notion of an eventual retrograde tendency of art, for Jauss, art's very temporality indicates that it is inherently opposed to closure and thus is by

[125] Seen as an "other," Attridge offers that singularity comprises something as an "unprecedented, hitherto unimaginable disposition of cultural material that comes into being in the event of invention, is always singular, although that singularity can be experienced only as a process of adjustment in norms and habits whereby it is recognized…" Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 63.

[126] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 36. It is important to recognize in this idea of "response" a pattern of deconstructive iteration that is particularized. Kant had argued instead for a universalized approach to aesthetic judgment.

[127] In "On Genius" Kant maintains that "genius (1) is a *talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule; and that consequently *originality* must be its primary property. (2) Since there may also be original nonsense, its products its products must at the same time be models, i.e. be *exemplary;* and, consequently, though not themselves derived from imitation, they must serve that purpose for others, i.e. as a standard or rule of estimating. (3) It cannot indicate scientifically how it brings about its product, but rather gives the rule as *nature.*" Immanuel. Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings.* Edited by Ernst Behler. (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 224.

nature characterized by negativity. The contrast between Hazlitt and Jauss shows the divide between a utilitarian materiality of the early nineteenth century in England, and a late-Romantic sense of negative and dialectical thinking. The negativity of art per se strives to enter the dialectical sphere as a negation of originality, if we define originality as a horizon of closure or totalization. Negative originality, then, as an instantiation of the "negativity of aesthetic experience," derives its power—in this formulation—from the possibility of transcendental negativity of originality as creation.[128] The power of the symbol derives its power from the negativity of transcendence which promises an infinite return to a utopian beginning. However, structural negativity appears *a priori* to generative originality, which is the affirmative condition of negative originality. Karl Mannheim argues that "a state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs."[129] The "utopian figure of art" encloses, through its representation of a generative model of originality, the idea of transcendence. As a model of transcendence generative originality exceeds the horizons of what Mannheim terms the existing order and at least hypothetically offers a mindset capable of transcending ideology.

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[128] Jauss argues that "negativity of aesthetic experience" becomes the antithesis of a transcendental negativity of Being; aesthetic experience actually derives its impetus from the "utopian figure of art." Negative originality, or aesthetic negativity, is an antithetical doubling of transcendental negativity. But this form of aesthetic negativity recognizes that an aesthetics of essence is an aporia. "The force of negativity" overwhelms aesthetic pleasure through its "negative movement." Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Translated by Michael Shaw. Vol. 3. Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 15.

[129] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1997), 173. Mannheim continues by differentiating utopia from ideology. Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time. In limiting the meaning of the term 'utopia' to that type of orientation which transcends reality and which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order, a distinction is set up between the utopian and the ideological states of mind.

The openness of structural originality (as opposed to the closure indicated by generative originality) reopens the question of poetics. Poetics involves language that exists in its openness. For Martin Heidegger, says Robert Hughes, poetry is the form of language most capable of disclosing Being. By poetry, Heidegger means language as an art that pursues “truth,” and his notion of truth is that it discloses Being. This notion of disclosure helps us understand the difference between utopia and ideology, as Mannheim views it. Artistic language, which might include either prose or verse, is contrasted with “everyday” language. Like a dead metaphor everyday language is a depleted form of poetics. Poetics alone has the power to disclose Being in its originality.[130] Heidegger suggests that *nihil originarium*, an original negativity that is structured by temporality, provides an openness *a priori* to ideology.[131] Paul de Man, in his remarkable essay “Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant,” supports the notion that aesthetic experience redounds, ultimately, to materiality.[132] De Man’s doubt about whether we can trace poetic language to a moment of disclosure that transcends aesthetic materiality situates negative originality in its ultimately ironic context.

Against a sense of transcendental negativity, Tilottama Rajan suggests that Hegelian negativity disrupts any unity of spirit that might analogize the absolute with a unified god term.[133] In Hegel’s aesthetic system that god term arises only in the

[130] Robert Hughes, *Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Beyond of Language* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 77.

[131] Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, ed. William James Entwistle and Walter Angus Morison (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 196-210.

[132] Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 88-89.

[133] Tilottama Rajan, “Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics.” In *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer, 155–178 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 172.

symmetrical classical frame, only to be eradicated by the romantic condition that follows it. Hegel's system then produces a "radical negativity." Thus Hegel's notion of phenomenology must accept the absence of a transcendental signified or a universal logos. This problematic of absence disrupts the possible teleological reading of Hegel's history. Ultimately, for Rajan, Hegel's phenomenology is "(in)adequate [as the] embodiment of its Idea." Logically, then, Hegel's work needs to be read synchronically, in the sense that the corpus as a body arises prior to its partitions.

Hegel's *Logic* amounts to a "paraphrase" of the corpus that begins with the Phenomenology and terminates with *Aesthetics.* Structural originality, then, seems to arise in the negativity of aesthetic experience which derives its power from a phenomenological materiality. Negative originality is contingent to this aesthetic materiality. The paradox of negative originality lies in its imperative to produce contingent closure, thus preparing a further iteration of negativity. This cyclical aspect of negative originality in its dialectical nature is conflated in the structure of the sublime and catharsis. The aesthetics of negativity that produces the flux of autonomy with respect to the cultural matrix results in monad-like particulars within the general horizon of the negative structure, which is bound to the flux of openness and closure. The gap between openness and closure maps onto the gap between negativity and transcendence. One hypothesis in understanding the relation between particular and universal with respect to negativity is that negativity is also a relation: the one is the privation of the many and the many a privation of the one. In the privative concept of unity combined with an act-concept of transcendence, there must be a plurality of transcendences, which are

inherently privative (negative freedom). Singularity is related to plurality disjunctively.[134]

Perhaps because of the social and critical turn in the 1980s, recent scholarship on nineteenth-century American authors and genres has looked to the *relation* between context—the cultural matrix—and texts. In her 2002 essay "Hawthorne and the Real" Millicent Bell makes the point that Romantic Idealism and the romance genre could not mask the Real of the American antebellum social texture, which soon led to real violence.[135] Michael Davitt Bell argues that the "Romance," whether a theme or genre, was the term made explicit and current by Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, and, indeed, finally points to a social texture that I am calling negative originality, a texture bounded by the conflict between Romantic ideas about nature and literary-national conceptions of original form. Hawthorne's "certain latitude," or "freedom of invention" as Bell terms it, opens the question of the relation of authorial freedom with respect to his or her "social texture."[136] The precise relation between idea, cultural matrix, and authorial subject position was frequently ambiguous and inconsistent.[137]

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[134] Gabriel Motzkin, "Heidegger's Transcendental Nothing." In *Languagers of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 100.

[135] Millicent Bell, ed. *Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002).

[136] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance* (Princeton University Press, 1971).

[137] Michael Davitt Bell, "Melville and 'Romance': Literary Nationalism and Fictional Form." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 24 (1974): 56–62. The issue of American "Romance" as a genre of fiction in the nineteenth century raises the question of whether the genre as a tradition rests on its relation to a cultural thematics of both Romantic originality and literary nationalism, or whether "Romance" as a generic term more properly designates a literary form. Perry Miller emphasized the argument that the Romance exemplifies a thematic cluster within the cultural matrix pointing to Romantic ideas about originality and because of its subject matter becomes intrinsically an American national genre. For Miller Romance as an American genre is coextensive with the American-romantic trope of nature. The capitalized term Nature, Miller adds, refers to a universal sensibility within human nature as well as landscape nature as depicted by Thomas Cole. Significantly, Miller's notion of Romance is, according to Michael Davitt Bell,

In the American context Milton Stern argues that the dialectic between an Ideal versus an actual America underscores a vacillation between the concepts of "openness" and "closure," which amounts to the difference between Romantic and Classic notions of utopia.[138] More than the familiar instances of Edenic visions strewn throughout Hawthorne's oeuvre, which attach themselves to chiliastic motives, Stern, following Mannheim, asserts that Hawthorne ultimately can be understood as a social ethicist and a philosophical Classicist. Utopia in the ethical sense differs from ideology, again following Mannheim, in that ideology, while it may deploy utopian language, has at its core a "coercive, jingoistic, and sloganeering" motivation. Clearly Hawthorne's classical utopian ethics put him in opposition to the ideology of American literary nationalism of the 1840s.

In a recent study by Robert Milder, a Melville scholar and critic who takes an interdisciplinary view of American romanticism, we find a synthesis of approaches that suggests a recent emphasis in the way romantic aesthetics and historicism recuperate strategies first developed in Matthiessen's generation. Milder shows that negative Romanticism ironizes the period, when a "[p]rofound constitutional sadness [was] not what Romantics envisioned as the destination of 'the spiral journey back home."[139] Milder

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almost wholly an expression of ideas. Following Hawthorne's famous preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, however, Bell argues that Romance also became an experiment in form that nested within the fictional possibilities of actuality and artifice. Bell suggests a "reconciliation" between cultural and aesthetic views where the central "subject" of Romance—here Melville's subject—"became the relationship, and ultimately the conflict, between these two conceptions of "Romance."

[138] Milton R. Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun and the Politics of Openness and Closure in American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 5.

[139] Robert Milder, *Exiled Royalties: Melville and The Life We Imagine* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

continues, in what amounts to a definition of a decidedly Romantic view of negative originality:

> Against the affirmations of Wordsworth and others, Morse Peckham described a 'negative romanticism' consisting of 'the attitudes, the feelings, and the ideas of man who has left static mechanism but has not yet arrived at a reintegration of his thought and art in terms of dynamic organism;' this is the position of Carlyle's Teufelsdrockh in 'The Everlasting No.' Melville, where Peckham's 'not yet' is permanent, negative Romanticism is, instead, a condition of spiritual aspiration without an accompanying faith in its worldly or otherworldly fulfillment. The challenge for negative Romantics of this sort is not to regain belief or even, despite a posture of expectation, how to conduct themselves in the interim; it is how to establish and maintain human spirituality—their feeling of the self as divinely created and divinely imbued; as 'royal'—without the patent of the supernatural. What negative Romantics set in place of the divine is the soul's yearning for divine and the pain of divine absence. In Byron, in Carlyle, in Arnold, and in Melville the locus of spirituality turns inward from the worship of God to a mental state of self-contemplative suffering celebrated as 'godlike' and ranging in mood from cosmic anger (the Byronic hero) to abject complaint…. 'Man's Unhappiness,' Teufelsdrockh says, 'comes with his Greatness; it is because there is infinite in him, which with all his cunning he can not quite bury under the Finite.' For negative Romantics the converse is equally true: humans' greatness comes of their unhappiness; their greatness is their spiritual unhappiness, which testifies to the infinite in them.[140]

If the negative is the source of human originality, then the relation of the author to the infinite, a hallmark of romanticism, becomes a problematic for the cultural context where that relation is bound up in material conditions of the marketplace. David S. Reynolds turns the American renaissance on its head by focusing on the economic conditions of the cultural matrix for authors, reversing the position of marginal literature with respect to the central concerns of the authorial position in the social context. The matter impacts the position of the canon with respect to the social realm. Ironically, it would seem, as Reynolds argues in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, much ephemeral

[140] Milder, *Exiled Royalties, 45-46.*

popular literature bubbled up into the ranks of what is now a canonized literary art.[141] Emerson's lectures and essays, says Reynolds, secularized popular religious idioms; Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville *transformed* "immoral didacticism" into a subversive style mixing benign moral sentiments with a pessimistic or tragic worldview that found its intrinsic value in its Romantic ambiguity. While Reynolds argues that the American renaissance saw a transfer of the popular into art, a view consonant with New Historicism in general, it is also a view that militates against the notion that American renaissance authors were in fact *alienated* from the popular, as Milder compellingly argues: furthermore, Reynolds also admits that the "subversive literature" of the American renaissance was indeed radical for its very moral ambiguity.

In discussing the subversive style, Reynolds distinguishes popular from "imaginative" texts, and in so doing conspires with the tradition of critics of the Romance genre who see a difference in direction between popular and philosophical discourse. Such a view is indeed problematic given Jonathan Culler's trenchant analysis of the deconstructive concern for speech-act theory, in which binary oppositions between literal and "parasitic" discourses become decentered.[142] By parasitic language Culler means such rhetorical modes as irony, satire, hoax, and parody—language use that depends upon putatively normative illocutionary modes but undermines them. Culler suggests that "to set aside as parasitic certain uses of language in order to base one's theory on other, 'ordinary' uses of language is to beg precisely those questions about essential nature of language that a theory of language ought to answer." The point of course is that Romance

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[141] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[142] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 118.

authors of "imaginative" discourse deployed extended illocutionary modes that contrasted norms of popular discourses in America. For example, Hawthorne's "two reading publics" as Michael Gilmore suggests, parallels Emerson's "Spiritual Laws," where we find both "noisy readers of the hour" and more rarified "court of angels."[143] In order to distinguish imaginative from popular texts Reynolds brackets the discursive relation between alternative romanticism's negativity with respect to the cultural matrix by aligning "subversive reform" with a normative discourse with respect to orthodoxy, thereby sacrificing the distinction between the cultural matrix and negative originality.

Reynolds' concern that antebellum authors—the "major writers" of the American renaissance—worked autonomously from culture, a view he says, held by Lionel Trilling and Richard Chase, raises the debate about the autonomy of New Criticism and the "alternate reality distant from social life" that modernism proposes, reproduces the misapprehension that writers are alienated from popular culture because of their elitism. The association of popular culture and the labor of writing raises the question of Karl Marx's notion that the object of labor becomes appropriated by consumption and this produces estrangement in the worker. This form of alienation, which is not autonomy but a negation of self, finds Marx commenting on Feuerbach's revision of Hegel in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). For Marx, Feuerbach was correct that

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[143] Thomas R. Moore, *A Thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, Prefaces, and Essays* (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 20-28. Thomas R. Moore proposes that the literary-rhetorical style representative of Hawthorne's subversive approach employs a hypotactic structure that deploys opening prepositional phrases, adverbials, and modifying clauses; many examples employ periodic structures where main classes are delayed until the end of the sentence. For example, the opening sentence of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" terminates in the main clause: "and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher." Poe's rhetorical virtuosity sought to overwhelm his readers, often by satirizing them by playing on their gullibility as in "The Philosophy of Composition," which pretends to explain how matter of factly he had written the poem "The Raven," a ploy designed to undercut the reader's preferences for the romantic.

the Hegelian "negation of negation" posited an absolute that is ultimately an untenable abstraction, namely theology. By eliminating the second negation Marx locates "sense-certainty" in finite experience, and originality as an abstract ontological absolute is thus negated. Metaphysically, as Paul de Man argues, materiality becomes an ontological baseline for aesthetics.[144]

Reynolds' admission of 'literariness,' which allows an "affirmation of stylistic potency," and its "problematic ponderings of ambiguity" points to a literary response where art is clearly discernible from conventional forms. And without tarrying with the intentional fallacy it is reasonable to suppose that a subversive mode of literary art might also result in a degree of separation from convention no matter whether we except that the text is autonomous from culture, as Poe's poetics presumed. Poe's difference in direction demands a staunchly critical and objective literary logic that was certainly alienating. And the difference between popular and art-forms as goals suggests also a difference in reception, even as Poe tried to premise his unity of effect on the ideal popular reader.[145] As Michael Gilmore and Thomas R. Moore point out, this rhetorical difference admits to a difference between a popular reading public and an esoteric one, which is recognizable in the language choices writers made.[146] The degree of alienation experienced by alternative romantics had to do with bridging this difference.[147] The lure

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[144] Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[145] Scott Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007).

[146] Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (The University of Chicago Press, 1985); Thomas R. Moore, *A Thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, Prefaces, and Essays* (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1994).

[147] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1983), 45. My use of the expression alienation here is not to infer an

of engaging the esoteric reader is palpable in the difference between philosophical romance and conventional literature. Nowhere could this difference be more succinct than in the *imaginative* writing of Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville.

Reynolds' accommodation to new historicism might be contrasted by his complementary thesis of a "subversive imagination," if we also distinguish, as Michael Davitt Bell does, between genre and process.[148] From that perspective it is possible to align the transformation of the popular into art, and accept, at the same time without contradiction, the role of alienation or negativity as part of the process of "subversive imagination" within a Romance author's creative originality. That is, in fact, Matthiessen's starting point: the American renaissance, he suggested, is defined by its "doubleness," a duality that tethers the socioliterary context and its democratic cultural matrix with the singular (and perhaps isolated and anarchic) author. Negative originality, rather than disguising such distinctions behind a veil of alleged "autonomy," in fact raises the question of the relation between transformation and transcendence. Pure negativity is impossible as is pure originality, and the two forces interplay in a self-binding relation redolent of Poe's *Eureka,* and appear to be analogous to energy itself.

The literary complexities that underscore the originality of Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, writers who found it difficult to grasp value from culture or

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"alienation of labor" so much as a sense of "Romantic alienation" associated with Romantic irony. Frederic Jameson reminds that "[o]ne cannot without intellectual dishonesty assimilate the 'production' of texts...to the production of goods by factory workers: writing and thinking are not alienated labor in that sense, and it is surely fatuous for intellectuals to seek to glamorize their tasks—which can for the most part be subsumed under the rubric of the elaboration, reproduction, or critique of ideology—by assimilating them to real work on the assembly line." [My thanks to Joshua Phillips for suggesting this passage.] For a thorough discussion of Romantic alienation, see also Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Grorge Brazzilier, 1962).

[148] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

cosmos, are bound up in a literary and political nexus of the problematic of originality—the semantic and structural disjunctions of meaning between individual artists and their social environment—as well as the paradox of influence—that it is undeniable that artists create in a rhetorical and discursive environment already flush with precursors. The uniqueness of the individual artist's creative imagination operates in a negative relationship, in terms of its originality, with the authorial context, to the degree that it is plausibly singular. As opposed to the invention of characters in novels, for example, Melville wryly suggested in *The Confidence-Man,* "they are not, in the truest sense, original at all. They are novel or singular..."[149] In his contrast between singularity and originality, Melville is reiterating Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination, though certainly something more.

Indeed, Melville seems to suggest that singularity amounts to a prosaic sense of peculiarity or idiosyncrasy in individuals, whereas originality is reserved for otherworldly Miltonic beings: "For much the same reason that there is but one planet to one orbit, so there can be one such original character to one work of invention…."[150] For Melville, originality in the context of the cultural matrix—that which stood for originality—amounted to a reification of Common Sense reality: "As for original characters in fiction, a grateful reader will, on meeting with one, keep the anniversary of that day," Melville gibes. For Melville, originality demands "original instincts," the uniqueness of a "prodigy," the "new law-giver," a "revolutionizing philosopher, or the founder of a new religion."

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[149] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 282.

[150] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 282.

What Melville described as the "discernibly local" was threatened by an imagination that allowed the Romantic symbol to intervene in the conventional discourses of the market and politics, discourses about facts in the realm of the understanding. Coleridge had stated that symbolism "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible," which means that the symbol, in effect, originates a new imaginary reality.[151] If that is the case then the symbol is the image of a reality apart from what Common Sense reality understood. Knowledge isn't in Locke's primary ideas, in the object before the senses, but in the perception. Perception becomes a faculty of the imagination, and knowledge is gained through symbolism. If the symbol reaches beyond objective reality, then there is a reality beyond conventional denotative language.

Emerson's well-known formulation of the relationship between language and symbol, expressed in three emphatic propositions in the chapter "Language" in *Nature,* allows that words regress infinitely from "signs of natural facts," to symbols of "particular facts," to Nature as a "symbol of spirit."[152] From a poststructural point of view, onomatopoeic signs, which seem to be the natural facts in Emerson's "Language," are conventional and not mimetic. But the contamination of the sign is partly motivated by the *desire* of the user of the sign, which affects the poetic suggestiveness of the similarity between a sign and a thing. The relation between a sign and a thing is not organic but volitional.[153] Indirectly, verbal signifiers symbolize Nature as if to designate a

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[151] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 142.

[152] Qtd. in Matthiessen, *American Renaissance,* 32.

[153] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 189.

universal signifier: spirit (or mind). But to do so is to refer back to an absent origin, a 'transcendental signified,' as Derrida termed it.[154]

Yet even in the face of unavoidable cultural conventions the artists in the antebellum period negated conventions by subverting them through the use of popular discourses that undermined social conventions.[155] In terms of literary originality Emerson came to see pure originality as impossible. Emerson is emphatic: "Our debt to tradition through reading and conversation is so massive, our protest or private addition so rare and insignificant, —and this commonly on the ground of other reading or hearing, —that, in a large sense, one would say that there is no pure originality."[156] Emerson's view in 1836 that language depends on nature is ramified by the Romantic sense that America was still a primeval wilderness, the basis for a concept of language united with originality. Yet, Emerson would soon recognize that culture is sustained through language, a view that nature could not fully overcome. Authorial acts of visionary originality and revivication remained constrained to language.[157] In his 1840 essay "Circles" he recognized that any instantiation of cultural discourse premised on foreclosing on another by exiting its circle, requires the establishment of a new circle. Originality already embodies its own reification.

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[154] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 188. Given the ambiguity existent between signifier and signified there is an open possible for signifier-less concept, or an empty sign. Saussure required the semiotic system of signs to be grounded in a transcendental signified, which is essentially free of any signifier (a prior cause) and transcend any sequential chain of signs. The notion, though, is incomprehensible since all signifiers and signified exchange roles in the position of signs.

[155] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[156] In, Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," in *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1876), 158 (155-192). (My emphasis.)

[157] Richard Poirer, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), 29-30.

Chapter 1: Emerson and Negative Nature

When addressing the graduating class at Harvard College, at the moment of the Panic of 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson announced: "the time is already come when 'literature' ought to be, and will be something else."[1] What was it in the moment of economic collapse, that suggested the recognition that the American "sluggard intellect will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill"?[2] Had the Carlylean "mechanical age" suddenly waked the American scholar from his dogmatic slumber? It is that awakening that I am tracing in this study of negative originality. Although Emerson's Coleridgean tendencies towards "spirit" and "prospects" places him in contradistinction to Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville—as we shall see further—we encounter in Emerson, as Harold Bloom has noted, a tendency toward a certain form of negativity where the Transcendental vision "turns transumptive."[3] The Transcendental vision, as *metalepsis,* works by imposing a negative parallelism on two syntagmatic planes: the past is blamed for the failure of Yankee virtue, and the future portends an overturning by means of a Sublime vision, in which the infinite erases the finite. Read as a form of radical utopia, the vision achieves its ideal through a process of resignification based upon the

[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *American Literature, American Culture,* ed. Gordon Hutner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48.

[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance."

[3] Harold Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, Bloom's Period Studies (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), 3. *Metalepsis* is a metaphor of negative relation, which is the foundational trope of negative originality.

overturning of “signs of the times” for “prospects.” It is this tendency towards overturning that I am calling negative originality.[4]

The Phi Beta Kappa address given at Harvard in the spring of 1837 under the title “The American Scholar” coincided with the moment when Emerson knew he would publically move towards a rupture with Harvard’s Unitarian orthodoxy. For Emerson this rupture represents a field of a liberalizing Transcendentalism, which opposed the Unitarian orthodox status quo led by Andrews Norton and the Harvard establishment, whom Emerson castigated even further the following year in “An Address” given at the Harvard Divinity School (1838). The rift between the Unitarians and the Transcendentalists, as Perry Miller has covered in his anthology *The Transcendentalists*, presented a significant instance of negative originality in the American Romantic movement. Emerging from Emerson’s Transcendental Club, this rift points to the cultural clash between Transcendental futurity and Unitarian orthodoxy.[5] Writing in *The Dial* Emerson concludes:

> This spirit of the time is felt by every individual with some difference,—to each one casting its light upon the objects nearest to his temper and habits of thought;—to one, coming in the shape of special reforms in the state; to another, in modifications of the various callings of men, and the customs of business; to a third, opening a new scope for literature and art; to a fourth, in philosophical

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[4] Bloom, “Introduction.” In *The American Renaissance,* 6. While I shall be focusing on Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville as “alternative romantics” I begin with Emerson as a primary example of the American transumptive movement, through which Emerson's American Sublime constructs the “American Unconscious.”. In “Self-Reliance” the specifically American unconscious is given the nomenclature “Spontaneity or Instinct.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Brooks Atkinson (Modern Library, 2000), 141.

[5] Perry Miller, “Introduction,” *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Harvard University Press, 1950), 6.

> insight; to a fifth, in the vast solitudes of prayer. It is in every form of protest against usage, and a search for principles.[6]

Emerson's movement into negative reflection served as a moment of negative originality, allowing him to wax in an optative mood.[7] Following Kant's optative conditional for the possibility of a positive sense of freedom, Emerson intuits the real possibility of an actuality that is negative with respect to freedom. Emerson presents a conditional "sublimation of negatively cathected reactions to influences that would otherwise have made self precisely *unfree*," which amounts to a rejection of the present.[8] The present, associated with Kant's understanding and its "buzz and din" becomes eschewed in favor of "all infinitude" available as an intuitive projection by universal reason, through which the "over-soul" contrasts mere appearance with "prospects." Emerson presents his optative mood suggesting that "one of those fables, which out of an unknown antiquity, conveys an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he *might* be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end."[9] In prose that must have caught

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[6] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Editors to the Reader," *The Dial,* July 1840, I, 11-4. In *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology*, Perry Miller ed. (Harvard University Press, 1950), 249.

[7] The expression "negative reflection" is Hegel's. Hegel states that "[t]he moment of individuality first individuates the moments of the concept. Individuality is the negative reflection of the concept into itself, therefore the first free differentiation of the concept as the first negation by which the determinacy of the concept is posited, but as particularity. G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler, Vol. 24. The German Library (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990), 104. Also note that Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* opens in chapter 1, titled "In the Optative Mood," with a quote from Emerson's "The Transcendentalist": "Our American Literature and spiritual history are, we confess, in the optative mood." F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (Oxford University Press, 1941), 3.

[8] David Wittenberg, "Philosophy, Revision, Critique: Rereading Practices in Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Emerson (Stanford University Press, 2001), 238.

[9] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *American Literature, American Culture.* 49. My emphasis.

Nietzsche's interest, Emerson offered in Coleridgean terms the sublime moment just at the precipice of recovery:

> The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,—present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man […] In the *divided* or social state [occupations] are parceled out to individuals […] The fable implies that the individual to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about like so many walking monsters […] Man is metamorphosed into a thing, into many things.[10]

Emerson knew, of course, that the conservative side at Harvard was vulnerable to liberalizing tendencies implicit within the Transcendental movement. In Emerson's "American Scholar" the basic narrative pattern, says Leon Chai, is "one of extension and consequent return."[11] Emerson's provocation demands reconciliation. For when correction comes, Emerson concludes, "if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, [then] the huge world will come round to him."[12] Emerson holds that through intuitive reason reconciliation is indeed possible.

Emerson's intention, then, is to force a rupture by massing an attack at the weakest link, which for Norton and Harvard were the materialist and scientific dogmas of the Enlightenment. Goethe, Wordsworth, and Carlyle showed that "man is related to all nature."[13] And then Emerson offered the rupturing gesture:

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[10] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *American Literature, American Culture,* 49.

[11] Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006), 58.

[12] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *American Literature, American Culture,* 58.

[13] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *American Literature, American Culture,* 57.

> We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant.[14]

The consequent rupture anticipates a "movement of return."[15] By finding in America's complaisance the weakest link in its moral defenses, Emerson can enact his movement of return, or self-becoming, that ensues from an overcoming of the sublime effect of rupture and a recovery of originary power. The determined effect of this movement presupposes that the return will be inevitable. The inevitability of a return to the Self assures the premise of the optative mood. Once the rupture of the link occurs through Emerson's own self-overcoming, the equilibrium that is the prevailing status quo is no longer sustainable and its coherence falters. Emerson begins the "Introduction" to *Nature* commenting that "Our Age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers."[16] If, he asks, spirit were present to past civilizations then it must outlive material history susceptible to decay. This is Emerson's announcement that his view of negation is a historical one. Emerson's retrospection seeks to understand which aspects of nature can be sustained even with a radical renewal supposed in his formula of an "original relation to the universe."

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[14] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *American Literature, American Culture,* 58.

[15] Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006), 58-61. In a chapter titled "The Movement of Return" Leon Chai, speaking of Napoleon's army at Jena, during the weeks when Hegel was writing his *Phenomenology of Sprit*, Chai writes that "the deployment of [Napoleon's] own massed reserve against its weakest spot would cause its rupture, or what might be called its movement of return…the essence of this 'world-soul' is a movement: it begins at a single point, from which it reaches out or extends itself over the entire world."

[16] Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3.

Emerson proposes that a “theory of nature” might unmask the essential aspects of spirit that, for him, remain reified in the sepulchres of history present to him in 1836. To divulge this theory of nature he seeks a “philosophy of insight”; a “true theory appears,” he says, through “its own evidence.”[17] Emerson’s theory, in a position redolent of Schelling, seeks to “explain all phenomena,” which as a totality comprises what he terms Nature, or “all that is separate from us.” When Emerson, in the Introduction to *Nature,* asks “Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?[,]” he is speaking about a negative sense of originality. “Originality,” argues Carton, “means the curtailment of ‘retrospective’ tendencies and the development of a vigorous commitment to immediacy, novelty, and personal achievement [...] Originality, in Emerson’s opening paragraph, seems synonymous with creative self-assertion.”[18]

When Emerson demands “an original relation to the universe” he demands that the poet create new horizons, not by imitation but by imagination. The poet constitutes horizons by willing them through self-empowerment—positive freedom—and then, by regenerating them and redeeming them through creativity. Yet in order to redeem one’s horizon as an original relation one has to negate the prior dimension. The artist exerts power over nature by transforming it.[19] Carton adds that “[i]n doing so he both shapes the material world and creates his own image.” This is precisely why Emerson must rescue “art” from the Not Me, an aesthetic problem we will discuss shortly. And it must be established here that the Emersonian moment of negative originality is temporal, which is the very criterion of Harold Bloom’s assertion that Emersonian negativity is

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[17] Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3.

[18] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 30.

[19] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 31.

transumptive. By this definition, as opposed to Schelling and Coleridge's more ahistorical view of universal spirit, the Emersonian Self becomes the spirit that survives history and originates anew in its immediacy.

The notion of subjectivity during the Romantic era, and a view of concern to Transcendentalists in America, concerned the dichotomy, or continuum, between art and nature. The term "nature," Emerson states, in its ordinary sense distinguishes that which remains "unchanged by man"; "art," on the other hand, reflects human activity and judgment. Emerson ends his "Introduction" to *Nature* stating that *art* is insignificant in comparison to *nature*.[20] In this gesture he seems to invoke the Platonic structure of mimesis whereby Nature becomes the primary form and Art the copy of the copy. Yet, Art originates in a positive act of creation and then negates itself by detaching itself from its creation. The inner tension in art "informs romance," says Carton.[21] Art arises through a movement of becoming that strives to become nature. It is through this doubled process of metonymy and then *metalepsis* that Emerson is able to originate the universal spirit through the individuality of the Romantic Self.

In a moment, I will discuss Emersonian negativity and trace the ways it arises in Emerson's resignation from the Unitarian ministry. Richard Grusin argues that Emerson's "disembodiment" from the church, through what Stephen Whicher describes as Emerson's "revolutionary or originary power," did not terminate in a bathos of

[20] Emerson, *The Essential Writings*, 4.

[21] We shall explore the significance to the art-nature divided in Romance as it applies to negative originality in my following chapters. See also, Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 26.

antithesis but culminated in an act of self-reliance.[22] In other words, says Grusin, Emerson crossed the threshold of the second stage of a sublime movement of return through negative originality and arrived at a third stage of recovery exhibiting greater autonomy. Furthermore, Emerson's negative originality, or movement of return, differs from Schelling and Coleridge, particularly because of his very participation in the American antebellum context. It is due to the tenets of exceptionalism that Emerson structured his negative originality around an American Sublime.[23]

The notion of a Romantic ideology (a system of transcendent values as propounded by Coleridge and others) obtains if we suspect that the sublime moment is directed by some "ulterior motive."[24] And the distinction between a universal categorical imperative that Kant describes as an "unconditioned good," and what Paul de Man paraphrases as a form of disinterestedness or "a purposiveness without purpose," reveals a view basic to Emerson's transcendentalism.[25] In "The Transcendentalist," Emerson mentions that

> It is well known to most of my audience that the Idealism of the present day acquired the name of Transcendental from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant. Kant replied to the skeptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses, by showing that there was a very important class of ideas or imperative forms, which did not come into experience, but through which experience was acquired;

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[22] Richard A. Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics: Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 10.

[23] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 1–25.

[24] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 37.

[25] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 165; Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 39-40.

> that these were intuitions of the mind itself; and he denominated them *Transcendental* forms.[26]

If the American sublime does in fact reveal an ulterior motive we would then be at the risk of compounding incomprehensibility with causal substitution. Given that the sublime moment is singular by nature, the notion of Romantic ideology resists *apodeictic* closure. But the causes of the breakdown of logos in the second phase of the sublime movement raises questions of causality of both the disruption and the recovery. In other words, is the dynamic negativity originating in the sublime intrinsic or extrinsic? It has already been suggested that the breakdown is partially a result of linguistic and historical context. Yet the "dynamic ultimacy" that is the causal impetus may lie in the psychology of a defense mechanism.

Emerson's Orphic Poet

In *Nature,* Emerson puts it plainly: "Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the Not Me, that is both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, Nature."[27] Nature, for Emerson is thus held in a dialogic tension, both in a positive and a negative sense. Like Kantian positive freedom when nature, as Emerson puts it, refers to "essences unchanged by man," then nature equates with a state of freedom originating apart from human existence. Nature in a negative sense, however, is that realm of substance, like Kant's phenomena, that are things in themselves, things existing in a state of tension (or

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[26] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (Modern Library, 2000), 86.

[27] Emerson, *Nature.* In *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 6.

negative relation) from the self.[28] Emerson's philosophical definition of Nature points to an existential sphere of reality that is negated from the sphere of the self. The self originates in a subjective sphere such that it must negate Nature.

Negative originality arises as the Self carves itself apart from the Not Me, the world of materiality, the matrix of culture, its art, history, traditions, and common-sense nature. The self's errand in the wilderness, in this view, is to reoriginate itself. Evan Carton contends that "[c]ast here as nature's reciprocal, the self also assumes a divided identity, a positive and a negative character."[29] As such, Emerson's dualism replicates the Cartesian mind-body split in that the body is included in the Not Me, the other that is nature. The dialectic between the self and nature is fundamentally encircled in art. "Art is initially grouped with the negative or the merely material—nature and body—and is thereby separated from the self." However, Emerson's 'positive' definition of nature, which involves "essences unchanged by man," seems to preclude objective nature from the scheme of the self. Indeed, common-sense nature, says Carton, "immediately leads to Emerson's characterization of art as the means by which alienated man makes contact with and gains possession of the essential."[30]

Emerson's chant of the Orphic poet, his interpretation of a creation myth; in the final chapter of *Nature,* titled "Prospects," he utters, "[t]he foundations of man are not in matter, but in spirit. But the element of spirit is eternity."[31] Emerson's Orphic poet declares,

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[28] Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 26.

[29] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 26.

[30] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 26.

[31] Qtd. in Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 36.

> Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature is the absence of spirit … Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven. Know then that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect. What we are, that only we can see. All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do. Adam called his house, heaven and earth; Caesar called his house Rome … line for line and point for point your dominion is as great as theirs … Build therefore your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit.[32]

The impetus for negativity arises for Emerson in originality: "Man is a god in ruin," Emerson protests.[33] "He works on the world with his understanding alone."[34] Coleridge's notion of "intuitive reason," found in *The Friend* (1818), distinguishes knowledge gained through the understanding from that of reason; it is the latter which leads to knowledge of God. Following Schelling, Emerson seeks to unite understanding and reason. In a stance that acknowledges materiality, more so than Coleridge, and allowing another accommodation to Americanism, Emerson admits that the understanding is essential to human potential, potential seeking to place the emergence of new ideas in a context of an epistemology of progress. Natural science, or what Emerson terms "commodity" in Nature, is democratic since it is the "only use of nature which all men apprehend."[35] By the end of *Nature,* in the eighth section "Prospects," Emerson admits: "And there are patient naturalists, but they freeze their subject under the wintry light of understanding."[36] Religion becomes a truth standard to judge ideas as a whole.[37] In the movement of

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[32] Emerson, *Nature,* VIII, "Prospects," in *The Essential Writings,* 39.

[33] Qtd. in Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 36.

[34] Qtd. in Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 37.

[35] Emerson, Nature II, "Commodity," in *The Essential Writings,* 7.

[36] Emerson, *Nature,* VIII, "Prospects," in *The Essential Writings,* 38.

[37] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 43.

negativity Emerson apparently realizes that his ultimate Orphic perspective appeals to intuitive reason as a premise for "Prospects."

Friedrich Schelling, whose system preceded Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* by a decade, held that the unification of self and nature becomes necessary for the "understanding" as knowledge. In what parallels Hegelian negation, Schelling insists that a negative philosophy precedes a unification of self and nature. For Schelling, "the self cannot limit its producing without opposing something to itself. In that the Self limits itself as it is also producing itself, it becomes something to itself; that is, it posits itself. But all positing is a determinate positing. Yet all determining presupposes an absolute indeterminate [...], and so every determination is a blotting-out of absolute reality, that it is a negation."[38] Upon arriving at this point in the movement into negative originality the subject becomes aware that "[a]ll knowledge is founded upon the coincidence of an objective and a subjective.—For we *know* only what is true; but truth is generally taken to consist in the coincidence of presentations with their objects."[39]

Schelling describes an unmediated self as a presence, or in Hegel's terms an "immediate" being coextensive with subjectivity. According to Schelling:

> The intrinsic notion of everything merely *objective* in our knowledge, we may speak of as *nature.* The notion of everything *subjective* is called, on the contrary, the *self,* or the *intelligence.* The two concepts are mutually opposed. The intelligence is initially conceived of as the purely presentative, nature as what can be presented; the one as the conscious, the other as the unconscious. But now in every *knowing* a reciprocal concurrence of the two [...] is necessary.[40]

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[38] Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800).* Trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 36.

[39] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism,* 5.

[40] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism,* 5.

Schelling's move here is a crucial one since it is plain that subject and object inhabit the same consciousness.

Such a definition sees the Self as an ontological construct, or individual consciousness, capable of self-reflection, an inward vision concentrated upon the place of the soul within the infinite and with respect to outward objective phenomena.[41] The juxtaposition between subject and object, one of the *leitmotifs* of Romanticism, is grounded in Kantian philosophy and represented in Emersonian Transcendentalism. Hegel expanded this juxtaposition between subject and object considerably, working out the "dialectical" relations between self and otherness (Emerson's "Not Me"), being and nothingness. Negative originality arises in that dialectic. The second term of the movement, negativity, resembles the moment of the "negative sublime" where the individual's imagination becomes overwhelmed by magnitude or power.[42] While Hegel sought the possibility of a return in the third term to an "absolute" consciousness, he was aware due to the political circumstances of the time that

> The spirit cannot rest content with the mere existence of an order or cult; its will is rather to attain this knowledge of its own determinations. Only in this way can it succeed in uniting its subjectivity with the universal of its objectivity.[43]

The identity of the self doesn't reappear unless there has been a "movement of return" from its original self into negativity and then a subsequent movement reflecting back into becoming.

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[41] Schelling regards reflection as a power of negation with respect to nature.

[42] Thomas Weiskel argues persuasively that "the sublime becomes a means of reading the problem of originality, a transposition of transcendence into a naturalistic key; in short, a stunning metaphor" (4). Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986).

[43] G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel Selections*, ed. M. J. Inwood (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 365.

The sublime arises in what Friedrich Schlegel and others called the "incomprehensible." In "On Incomprehensibility" Schlegel notes that "[a] great part of the incomprehensibility of the *Athenaeum* is unquestionably due to the irony that to a greater of a lesser extent is to be found everywhere in it."[44] Schlegel points to "Critical Fragment 108," stating that

> Socratic irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation…It originates in the union of *savoir vivre* and scientific spirit, in the conjunction of a perfectly instinctive and perfectly conscious philosophy. It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication.[45]

It is in the dissimulation of Romantic Irony, of which Emerson is a representative example, that a sublime movement begins.

In "Critical Fragment 48" Schlegel defines irony aphoristically: "Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great."[46] That, indeed, is the paradox of influence as it situates the problem of democratic authorship. Negative originality arises at the interstices of the categorical imperative and poetic genius.

In "Fragment No. 42" Schlegel remarks:

> Philosophy is the real homeland of irony, which one would like to define as logical beauty: for wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues—and is not simply confined into rigid systems—there irony should be asked for and provided…. Only poetry can reach the heights of philosophy ….[47]

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[44] Friedrich Schlegel, "On Incomprehensibility," in *Classic and Romanic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 302.

[45] Schlegel, "Critical Fragments." In *Classic and Romanic German Aesthetics*, 243.

[46] Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," 241.

[47] Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," 239–245.

Irony, for Schlegel and the alternative romantics, produces an incomprehensible ambiguity, an aporia that, as we shall see, would energize Hawthorne's peering into the iridescence of the moral picturesque.

Schiller agreed that confusion is the cause of the sublime.[48] This confusion is not merely a "spiritual disorder" but moral arbitrariness. Nature is simply inexplicable from a moral perspective. The incomprehensible becomes a mode of judgment when confronted by the absurdity of attempting to square human morality with nature: *physis* and *nomos* are incommensurable. If meaning arises in the pressure to signify the incomprehensible, "the sublime authorizes a translation of absurdity into freedom"; the hypothesis of pure and rational freedom—autonomy—suggests metaphysical originality, but it is plausible only under the condition if we can distinguish incomprehensibility from a lack of understanding; if incomprehensibility suggests the unconditioned, lack of understanding determines a failure of autonomy. The distinction between incomprehensibility and the failure to understand rests on the fact that the latter undermines the possibility of transcendence: the sublime can only arise in incomprehensibility; it reminds us of the possibility of transcendent reason. Alienation becomes problematic when transcendent reason is thwarted by the sublime.

If the sublime suggests a metaphor of height, or *hypsos,* alienation, the result of a state of incomprehensibility at the encounter with sublime magnitude, creates a descent or bathetic response. Alienation recognizes that transcendence is available only upon mediation. Schlegel, in "*Athenaeum* Fragment 234," argues: "It is only prejudice and presumption that maintain there is only a single mediator between God and man. For the

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[48] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 35.

perfect Christian—whom in this respect Spinoza probably resembles most—everything would really have to be a mediator."[49] But what if the mediator is incomprehensible? Again we arrive at the negativity of Hegel's second term. We are grounded in negative reflection. Transcendence is thus a second remove from the sublime; alienation is intermediary.[50] If the subject is to recover from alienation through transcendence there must be a supra-ideological ground that locates meaning beyond the range of rhetorical discourse. Here we are reminded of Coleridge's distinction between 'discursive' reason (understanding) and 'intuitive' reason (transcendence). It would seem then that a failure of understanding resides in the discursive model of reason, whereas the incomprehensible, suggests a disruption (diremption) at the intuitive level of reason. Transcendent reason finds both freedom and the incomprehensible coinciding in the sublime moment.

Schelling, like Emerson, was concerned with the consequences of freedom, consequences which result from the separation of the subject from the object, or of the individual self from the universe. Schelling tried to show that intuitive reason might rectify the separation between individual consciousness and the possibility that the Self exists in a part for whole relation with the universe. Kant's *a priori* synthesis allowed for a critical reason dependent on intersubjective understanding of phenomena. The world, in Kant's formulation, exists in consciousness through the categories of the understanding. In distinguishing objects from thinking subjects Kant wished to rescue spirit from the consequences of Locke's soul-depriving *tabula rasa* by showing the mind as the locus of

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[49] Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments." In *Classic and Romanic German Aesthetics*, 252.

[50] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 36.

primary qualities rather than in the object, as Locke thought.[51] Beyond the understanding's "wintry light," following Schelling (by way of Coleridge) Emerson sought a unity between self and nature.

Schelling had sought to present a 'philosophy of nature' where subject and object became united in a conscious act of what Coleridge termed *intuitive reason*.[52] Schelling explains that "[t]he postulated intuition should comprehend what exists separated in the appearance of freedom and in the intuition of the product of nature, namely, *identity of conscious and unconscious in the ego and consciousness of this identity*"[53] In a key anticipation of a phenomenological view of originality, Schelling understood that intuitive reason *originates* in the consciousness as an awareness of the unity of Self and phenomena, thus bridging the gulf Kant had opened between the individual and the thing-

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[51] Mary Arensberg, *The American Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 5. According to Arensberg, the soul in Locke's system is an *absence.* The idea of a soul-less *tabula rasa* dates to Carlyle, who writes in "Signs of the Times," an essay noticed by Emerson and the Transcendentalists, that "our whole Metaphysics iteslf, from Locke's time downwards, has been physical; not a spiritual philosophy, but a material one [...] His whole doctrine is mechanical, in its aim and origin, in its method and its results. It is not a philosophy the mind: it is a mere discussion concerning the origin of our consciousness, or ideas, or whatever else they are called; a genetic history of what we see *in* the mind; see, Thomas Carlyle, *A Carlyle Reader, Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Copley Publishing Group, 1999), 10.

[52] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection and the Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, ed. Hartley Coleridge (London: George Bell & Sons, 1893), 150, 170-71. Coleridge bifurcates "reason" by positing two modalities, "discursive reason" and "intuitive reason." Citing Leibniz, Coleridge holds that the understanding derives its material completely from the senses, but because it is geared to survival it cannot overcome itself and see its connection with spirit. Understanding in this sense becomes parallel to Milton's term "discursive reason." In a crucial footnote Coleridge remarks that the understanding has a "medial" function, "analogous to the instinct." It is a "faculty of means" rather than of ends, as is "practical reason." This medial "symbol"… "typifies the understanding as the discursive and logical faculty possessed individually by each individual— [...], in distinction from *nous*, that is, intuitive reason, the source of ideas and ABSOLUTE Truths, and the principle of the necessary and the universal in our affirmations and conclusions."

[53] Friedrich W. J. Schelling, "Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an Introduction to the Study of This Science, 2nd Ed., 1803." In *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 2003), 203.

in-itself, which the Self might only apprehend through subjective understanding. Moreover, intuitive reason originates this unity in a synthesis possible through the Self's freedom. Schelling states that "[o]riginally there is an absolute equilibrium of forces and consciousness in man….But through freedom he can annul this equilibrium in order to reestablish it through freedom."[54] Hegel described this annulment of equilibrium as a dialectical movement.

Kant did not develop the intuition beyond a faculty capable of connecting the understanding of phenomena with reason. The Kantian view of freedom depends upon reasoning through the categorical imperative, the idealized maxim that each individual ought to reason that moral choices must be made in view of an *a priori* universal sense of right action. The obvious problem with this idea arises when we realize that we are free to choose the good but we are not free from an obligation to *define* the good *a priori*. In redressing this paradox Schelling insisted that an original freedom arises atemporally and that the individual will is already united with an absolute sense of freedom.[55] The good is already within us. Here is positive originality, by definition. Moreover, Schelling in seeking to collapse the temporal disparity between *phenomena* and *noumena,* argues that

> if things are the *causes* of representations, then they *precede* representation. And with that, the separation between them becomes permanent. But our desire was that after we had separated object and representation through freedom we would

[54] Schelling, "Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an Introduction to the Study of This Science, 2nd Ed., 1803," 169.

[55] We shall see that for Emerson, original freedom is no longer atemporal but historical.

> reunite them both through freedom; we wanted to know that *originally* there is no separation between them, and why this is so.[56]

Thus Schelling's philosophy of nature attempts to unify individual consciousness and the world through the freedom available to the Self's intuitive reason. Moreover, in that original unity there exists, metaphysically, a center point of emanation that helps organize structural originality conceptually. Interestingly, Schelling understood that Kant's distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena* had to be explained in terms of a movement of consciousness through which freedom obtains. In tracing the movement through freedom into self-reflection a second stage negativity presents itself. Schelling suggested that

> Philosophy assigns reflection only a *negative* value. It takes the original separation as a point of departure in order to reunite through *freedom* what was originally and *necessarily* united in the human spirit, i.e., in order to annul that separation forever. And insofar as philosophy itself was made necessary by that separation, was itself only a necessary evil, a corrective of reason gone astray, it works in this sense towards its own annihilation.[57]

It follows then, like Hegel, Schelling posits a three-part *movement of return* that initiates itself in a moment of reflection, a movement that negates the original reflection through a separation between the individual consciousness and the world, and then imposes a reuniting of consciousness and nature in spirit through a "corrective of reason." *It is through this moment of correction that reason knows through intuition that the self exists universally. But what if the third stage becomes truncated?*

Emerson, like Schelling, attempts to unite nature in spirit through the Orphic Poet. Redemption obtains through intuitive reason. Emerson states that

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[56] Schelling, "Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an Introduction to the Study of This Science, 2nd Ed., 1803," 171.

[57] Schelling, "Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature," 169-170.

> [t]he problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit. Love is as much its demand as its perception.[58]

The materiality of Emersonian disembodiment, though it disengages from actual institutions, does not separate itself from the secular covenants of an American ethos, but rather seeks to re-originate itself metaphysically. Emerson writes in his essay "Experience," that it is "too late to be helped" that consciousness has made the "unhappy … discovery … that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man."[59] Consciousness itself has a negativising capacity.

Emerson recognizes that "we do not see directly, but mediately, and we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses."[60] Still that negativising function originates a new awareness within consciousness. He adds, "perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects [other than what we create]."[61] Emerson worries that "the rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us."[62] He says, "each phenomenon has its roots in the faculties and affections of the mind. When the abstract question occupies your intellect, nature brings it in the concrete to be solved by your hands."[63] After the Fall we are left with the underlying question of the Sphinx: "So we shall come to look at the world with new eyes.

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[58] Emerson, *Nature,* VIII, "Prospects," in *The Essential Writings,* 38.

[59] Emerson, *The Essential Writings,* 322.

[60] Emerson, *The Essential Writings,* 321.

[61] Emerson, *The Essential Writings,* 322.

[62] Qtd. in Bloom, Harold. "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance,* 4.

[63] Emerson, *Nature,* VIII, "Prospects," in *The Essential Writings,* 39.

It shall answer the endless inquiry of the intellect—What is truth? and of the affections—What is good?"[64] Existence, after the fall, seeks transcendence.

Nature and Transcendence

It is "nature" that acts to prompt Emerson toward Transcendence.[65] Nature, then, is originary only in the negative sense, as a state of Being that must be transcended through spirit to universality. But how does one explain and accept the "brutal otherness" of nature as it arises in experience?[66] Brute nature supplies a host of obstacles for human life, and these obstacles move humanity toward the overpowering of Nature.[67] For Emerson, the death of another, in terms of a knowledge through experience of that person's feelings, is problematic; we could take death as meaningless, or as a chastening (or as a reproof as Wordsworth had in his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*), or as widening of experience, as something positive. Through memory, others become within us a matter of our dialectical ideas moving towards absolute consciousness. Ultimately, then, the human soul and the divine form a continuum through which the design of Nature acts as an impetus to Spirit, and finally, for Emerson, vision.

In that connection we arrive at a unity of subject and object through transcendence, as it was generalized in Romantic thinking. Clearly, the significant aspect, in the movement of return as an event, is the moment of negative originality, the moment when the potential freedom of the initial originating idea becomes negated by the necessity of separation between substance and subject. More than a mere Hegelian

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[64] Emerson, *Nature,* VIII, "Prospects," in *The Essential Writings,* 39.

[65] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 48.

[66] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 50.

[67] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 51.

negation of negation, the synthesis of subject and its negation produces a *necessary* (and new and different focal point in the self's) philosophic idea. As a post-Kantian reinterpretation of negative freedom where the individual consciousness reunifies with the absolute through a recognition of its own negativity, this synthesis, rather than exhibiting the blind faith of obeisance to the possibility of a positive sense of freedom, understands negativity through self-reflexivity. Through Coleridge, whose philosophy is deeply indebted to Schelling, Emerson in his first book *Nature* undertook this philosophical "movement" by casting in its continuum of eight sections a progression tracing the process of the negative consciousness forward through a point of spiritual unification with the universe and into a moment of self-reflective prescience of re-origination in the final chapter "Prospects."

The "sedimentation" of various sources and narratives that Emerson absorbed in the writing of *Nature*, sources themselves that have been partly obscured by time and intellectual history, forms the substrate of "Prospects." The text's compilation of exempla seems to emanate from three sources, a "supernatural rationalist" who seeks to intuit evidence of intelligent design in creation (the origin of creation), an antinomian reading of those exempla to distinguish them from religious dogma and philosophical commonplaces, and a hermeneutical "redactor" who remains a "shadowy figure" while reconciling precursors.[68] Emerson's triangulation of purposes exposes the book's construction and evolution: he initially wrote the first six chapters, adding the latter two chapters a month before publishing the work. The chapter "Spirit" acts as a binary opposite to "Nature" and results in the final Orphic song he titled "Prospects." Hence the

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[68] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 27.

text *Nature* (1836) involves a tripartite structure, which, similar to Hegel's system features a movement of return that becomes ultimately a synthesis—an overcoming of nature by spirit—through negation.[69]

Packer highlights the hermeneutical challenge of resolving the diachronic genesis of the book with a synchronic structural reading. This hermeneutical challenge, resembling Friedrich Schlegel's notion of 'incomprehensibility', features a synchronic structure that forms the key notion behind the sublime. The book is neither biographical nor wholly dialectical, but a sort of *anemnesis,* or atemporal memory, that attempts (as in Plato) to discover truth beyond mortal capability through the eternal presence of nature as an instance of transparency. Emerson begins his address to the Harvard Divinity School:

> In this refulgent summer, it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine … Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river, and prepares his eyes again for the crimson dawn.[70]

The genesis of *Nature* seems to stem from Emerson's antinomian abandonment of the ministry with his Lord's Supper sermon, the tenor of which culminated in his "An Address" to the Harvard Divinity School the year following the publication of *Nature.* Emerson's trip to Europe, where he met Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle obviously supplied him with a conceptual stratum that influenced New England Transcendentalism.

A key value of that worldview is premised on the acceptance of the doctrine of "moral sentiment," a "special faculty in the soul capable of intuitively apprehending

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[69] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 28-30.

[70] Emerson, *The Essential Writings,* 63.

ethical truths."[71] The moral sense becomes for Emerson, as it was for Coleridge and other Idealists, a "fixed idea."[72] Packer reminds us that "[m]oral sentiment was for Emerson this Archimedean point that gave him leverage on the slippery world of experience. Its freedom from mutability was what distinguished it from mere 'affections of the heart' or 'faculties of the mind'."[73] The stability of the moral sentiment for Emerson was less important than that intuition that might be grounded in it. Since the affections might be capricious and the intellect was limited, moral sentiment might be, therefore, the only basis for truth. And with moral sentiment as his standard, Emerson found it necessary to disenfranchise himself from the Unitarian Church of Boston.

Emerson's disenchantment with Unitarian thinking began as early as 1824 and his full disenchantment became inescapable in 1831.[74] His resignation from the ministry was the deciding gesture of his "originary power."[75] According to Eric Cheyfitz, "Emerson's revolutionary or originary power resides in his disembodiment."[76] Disembodiment partakes of an idea grounded in Emerson's supernatural rationalism in which the body is read as the "Not me." In other words, according to Emerson's third hermeneutical idea, disembodiment allegorizes reconciliation through transumption. That disjunction became for Emerson a separation from Unitarianism as an institution as well as a release from the ministerial profession.[77] But Grusin counters that Emerson's resignation was not a

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[71] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 34.

[72] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 35.

[73] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 36.

[74] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 9.

[75] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 10.

[76] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 9. See Eric Cheyfitz, *The Trans-Parent: Sexual Politics in the Language of Emerson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

[77] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 10.

discontinuation (or disembodiment) of his dedication to the ministerial profession but a continuation of it in the *secular realm*. Emerson, according to Grusin, retained the substance of his ethos through his movement into negativity.

Emerson, in his dedication in "The Divinity School Address," speaks of the ministry as "regeneration," and an act of "trust."[78] He trusts that "the forms and institutions of his profession will minister to him as well."[79] Emerson understood that Unitarian materialism denied this prospect, and thus the Last Supper provides the initial moment of negativity. Whereas Luther and Zwingli held that the Last Supper functioned to represent Christ's actual sacrifice, rather than as a ceremony of Christ's sacrifice, Calvin saw the last supper as a ritual of regeneration for the faithful through communion, or the consumption of the physical into the spiritual.[80] Emersonian regeneration is grounded in the difference between nature and spirit through consummation, through which spirit melds with natire. Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1829) was for Emerson a primary source. Coleridge posits nature and spirit as binary opposites; he said "the most general and negative definition of Nature is, Whatever is not spirit."[81] Emerson's "dialectical agility," says Packer, redounds to his "willingness," as Emerson puts it in the essay "Intellect," to "recognize all the opposite negations between which, as walls, his

[78] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 13.

[79] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 14.

[80] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 17.

[81] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection and the Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, ed. Hartley Coleridge (London: George Bell & Sons., 1893), 155.

being is swung."[82] Emerson, Packer infers, conceives of being in terms of pairs of binary opposites.

For Packer, there are a number of difficulties with an interpretation of the text of *Nature:* foremost, perhaps, is the issue of explaining Emerson's "attempt to unriddle the cosmos [which] can become so absorbing a game that one ends by explaining everything about *Nature* except what made it memorable and influential in the first place: the quality of [its] exhilaration."[83] The New England Puritans, whose colonization of America was consistently characterized as the founding of the New Jerusalem in the North American wilderness, would develop Calvin's association between types and sacraments in the service of the sacramental renaissance that flourished in New England during the decades surrounding the turn of the eighteenth century. Despite that renaissance the third generation Puritans were baptized without their parents in order to stem a decline in religious participation by the second generation. But the decline in church membership continued even as the "halfway covenant" permitted baptism to those third-generation Puritans whose parents had fallen away from the fold.[84]

Grusin suggests that when Emerson became ordained at Boston's Second Church in March, 1829, he had accepted the Lord's Supper as a symbol of preparation. By September of that year, when Emerson preached "a meditation on institutional change," he had begun to view the Lord's Supper hermeneutically as a historical development.[85] In that light, miracles and the doctrine of transubstantiation appear to be "superstition" to

[82] The quote from Emerson's essay "Intellect" is given in Packer, *Emerson's Fall*, 28. See also, Emerson, "Intellect," from *Essays, First Series,* in Emerson, *The Essential Writings,* 271.

[83] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 24.

[84] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics, 17.*

[85] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 18-19.

Emerson. And if Jesus had not specified whether the Last Supper was meant to become an institutionalized ritual, that question was left to interpretation.[86] By analogy, Emerson told his parishioners, "We read the same books [as past readers had] but they speak to us in a different sense."[87] Emerson's notion of progress recognized that the implicit plurality of interpretation of the Last Supper would reinforce liberal Unitarianism.[88]

But Emerson began to question whether Jesus had in fact intended to erect a new institution within Passover, even as the question had been debated by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin before him.[89] Emerson began to see the Last Supper as metaphor for negativity, a metaphor which led him to his own resignation from the Unitarian ministry. In so doing Emerson interprets the Last Supper as the Lord's Supper, an implicit suggestion that the metaphor encourages a "critical conscience." Conscience implies, for Emerson, a transition away from institutional formalism, which had become a matter no longer tenable for him in the Unitarian Church.[90] The priority of the moral sense over the intellect, or intuitive reason as it might prevail over the understanding in Coleridge's terms, impacts Emerson's view of Christ's miracles, which under that doctrine become one more fiction to confirm by the understanding.[91] Yet Emerson was uncomfortable with an all-out reform that might abandon scripture: all-out antinomianism might imply "an exclusive reliance on the inner life of faith can sometimes impoverish the very ardor

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[86] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 20.

[87] Qtd. in, Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 20.

[88] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 21.

[89] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 23.

[90] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics,* 24.

[91] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 37.

it was intended to exalt," notes Packer.[92] The difference redounds to formalized morality and an active conscience. For Emerson, certainly, liberal progress aligns with the latter.[93]

The Sphinx

In the movement through the sublime, as negative originality recovers from its fall, the decision to abide by a sense of original obligation becomes arbitrary. John Smyth suggests that "[b]ecause […] human freedom means at least a provisional suspension of law, causality, determinism, and so on, it also presumably presupposes what such a suspension means when *not* applied."[94] The question arises for Smyth "whether we accept that originality should be understood as an exception to law, or at least to law as hitherto understood, what *is* an exception to law?" If we posit an intuitive sense of freedom that might negate negative freedom and propose instead a re-origination, such a move begs the question of whether positive originality is merely an exception to determinism. "Chance, like originality," adds Smyth, "appears at one level as the opposite of law, but at another as its apotheosis." In an aleatoric game of dice, "everything possible must necessarily occur if the sequence is truly random." Moreover, Smyth adds, "[t]he humanist temptation to found human originality (and law) on human freedom, conceived as a suspension of necessity, finds its quasi-counterpart in scientific appeals to chance." Could Emersonian originality as negative freedom be merely a matter of historical chance configured as nostalgia?

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[92] Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 37.

[93] Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics, 25.*

[94] John Vignaux Smyth, "Originality and the Enlightenment and Beyond." In *Originality and Intellectual Property in the French and English Enlightenment*, ed. Reginald McGinnis (New York: Routledge, 2009), 181-83.

It is this aspect of chance that alludes to the riddle of the Sphinx, a question that perplexed Emerson so dramatically in his book *Nature* (1836). For Barbara Packer, Emerson's *Nature* can be metaphorized as the sphinx; like Romantic originality as a concept "nature" proposes more questions than can be answered.[95] Emerson entered the following passage into his Journal: "The aenigma of ourselves swallows up like the sphinx thousands of systems which pretend to the glory of having guessed its meaning."[96] This aphorism of Madame de Stael's anticipates Nietzsche's famous lines from *Beyond Good and Evil:* "That we should finally learn from this Sphinx to ask questions, too? Who is it really that puts questions to us here? What in us really wants 'truth'? Who of us is Oedipus here? Who is the Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question marks."[97] Emerson's conjectural and metaphorical fall arouses a series of images that appear associated with a singular crisis or catastrophe. Rather than a literal fall into material mortality as a postlapsarian Eden suggests, the Emersonian fall presents a catastrophe as a birth of consciousness. That rebirth, or renaissance as it has been called by Matthiessen and others—and it has also been called a nascence and a culmination—becomes within Bloom's concept of an American Sublime, a "transumptive vision."

With Emerson, argues Bloom, Yankee Virtue could "no longer triumph over the Transcendental vision."[98] The Transcendental vision "turns transumptive" through a sacrifice of relation between the transcendental image and the actual circumstances of the cultural matrix. The Transcendental vision, as *metalepsis,* works by negative parallelism,

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95 Packer, *Emerson's Fall,* 23.

[96] Packer, *Emerson's Fall*, 22.

[97] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 9.

[98] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance,* 3.

composed of two syntagmatic planes: in one, the past is blamed for the failure of Yankee virtue, and the future portends an overturning by means of a Sublime vision, where the infinite erases the finite. In that sense of erasure, Emerson represses what he has termed "Compensation."[99] Within the notion of compensation, Emerson finds a "ray of divinity, the present action of the soul of this world, clean from all vestige of tradition."[100] Bloom regards the concept of compensation as a mode of repression. Freud's theory of repression is dynamic, in that repression is a circulating process. What is repressed in the unconscious may eventually return to the conscious, as preconsciousness; absolute unconsciousness remains repressed. Unconsciousness is made up of ideas; some repressions never fully become ideas because they emerge as affects. For Freud the mind contained an original unrepressed unconscious state, and the mind releases ideas into consciousness, which return later to the unconscious through repression.[101] Emerson, Bloom suggests, means that through the repression of sacrifice, the unconscious mind re-originates itself: "Deep calls unto deep."[102]

In "Self-Reliance" the specifically American unconscious is given the nomenclature "Spontaneity or Instinct."[103] The passage is crucial:

> The magnetism which all original action exerts is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust. Who is the Trustee? What is the aboriginal Self on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence do appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence

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[99] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance,* 3. See the essay that follows "Self-Reliance" in Emerson's *Essays: First Series*.

[100] Emerson, "Compensation," *The Essential Writings,* 154.

[101] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 6

[102] Emerson, *Nature,* VIII, "Prospects." *The Essential Writings,* 38.

[103] Qtd. in Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance, 6.*

> of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin.[104]

Emerson's notion of a parallax recalls the way consciousness arises between boundaries not yet reconciled. But compensation bears a

> fallacy [in which] lay … the immense concession that the bad are successful; that justice is not done now. The blindness of the preacher consisted in deferring to the base estimate of the market of what constitutes a manly sense, instead of confronting and convicting the world from the truth; announcing the presence of the soul; the omnipotence of the will; and establishing the standard of good and ill, of success and falsehood.[105]

According to Bloom, Emerson's "American sublime" involves a tendency within temporality where "repetition is a metonymic reduction, an undoing of all other selves, and his restituting *daemonization* renders him solipsistic and free."[106] That metonymic reduction amounts to what Bloom terms "poetic repression." The result is a "Sublime wildness of freedom," from which Emerson distills his idea of "poetic repression."

In the essay "Fate" Emersonian repetition appears as "successive experiences so important that the new forgets the old … the inward eye opens to the Unity in things, to the omnipresence of law."[107] Emerson converts negativity to prophesy by means of overcoming fate, which is "only parrying and defence." This overcoming appears apocalyptically as a working of "creative forces" that metaphorize as life: "if we breathe and live … if truth come to our mind we suddenly expand to its dimensions, as if we

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[104] Qtd. in Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance,* 6.

[105] Emerson, "Compensation," *The Essential Writings,* 155.

[106] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance,* 3.

[107] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. Joel Porte, Norton Critical (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 270.

grew to worlds. We are as lawgivers; we speak for nature; we prophesy and divine."[108] In Bloom's notion of an American Sublime the transumptive moment arises when Transcendental vision recreates the future despite the fall.

Emerson and the American Sublime

In the context of the transumptive moment of Emerson's first publications in 1837-38, he overcame the problem of influence, creativity, and national literary originality by concentrating not on landscape but rather on language. Through the sublime, says Poirer, "[l]iterature generates its substance, its excitements, its rhetoric, and its plots often with the implicit intention, paradoxically, to get free of them and restore itself to some preferred state of naturalness, authenticity, and simplicity."[109] Consequently, "with nothing to depend on, nothing to lean or rely on, the naked and true self can and will emerge, compelled into expression, or that 'something' will emerge." Poirer makes the point that

> it is sometimes supposed that language itself has an origin outside of culture, outside of any social purpose, that its true origin is in nature. This is a very old argument, and Emerson's first book, *Nature,* in 1836, is in part a rehearsal of it. The special value and poignancy of the book comes less from this or any of its related ideas than from the exhilarated sense that in the New World an ancient dream—of recovering lost origins—might actually be fulfilled.[110]

When William James, in *Pragmatism,* proposes that human experience in the world is coextensive with the fact of violence, he also acknowledges that human presence pre-exists human violence, which is to say that humanity engenders violence.

> This fact complicates any ambition for 'originality' and any desire for the 'disappearance' of literature or the idea of the human, an idea which identifies each of us at birth…any proposal for the disappearance of literature or of the self

[108] Emerson, "Fate," *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, 270.

[109] Poirer, *The Renewal of Literature,* 11.

[110] Poirer, *The Renewal of Literature,* 29-30.

> depends for its language on the existence and perpetuation of the very things scheduled for erasure. The proposal can only be understood, that is, within the system of signs, the community of words and sounds, by which human beings have identifies themselves as human.[111]

The sublime is thus structured by and through discourse and language within the circuit of the cultural matrix. The desire for freedom through an originality that arises when the sublime disrupts the complication society places upon individuality comprises the definition of the negative relation, a relation that must be sacrificed in order to posit a new originality.

The notion of positive freedom as it is explained by Kant and Isaiah Berlin assumes that genuine autonomy requires a reason behind the moral forces that establish that autonomy, and that problematic impels us to recognize that originality is essentially a negative concept with respect to determinism.[112] Originality and repetition are inextricably bound. It may be that sequences of numbers "generated by mere iteration" actually undercut tautology eventually and result in originality. "[T]he question of exceptionality as it concerns relations between human beings, the relation between the individual and the group … is intimately bound up with the question of exceptionality more generally. The real problem of originality is therefore by no means just a question of "solitary genius…but of understanding." It remains a dialectical cognition that when, on one hand, an artist can be said to be socially determined, the more one reflects, on the other, one encounters individuality. The dialectical play between freedom and negativity replays itself in the Matthiessen's idea of an American renaissance, in that freedom rests in the interstices between democracy and anarchy.

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[111] Poirer, *The Renewal of Literature,* 30.

[112] Smyth, "Originality and the Enlightenment and Beyond," 183.

If the American renaissance, in Matthiessen's view, is held together by a sense of positive freedom that arises in the gap between conformist democracy and reformist anarchy, the shock of recognition that suddenly occurs in the recognition that originality can be defined only in terms of negative freedom confronts the challenge to and by quotation. It is perhaps with his essay "Experience" (1844) that Emerson shifted from a positive, creative, and romantic sense of originality to a notion where poetic representation of cultural values signals that all "cultivation is local."[113] In his essay "Quotation and Originality" he pointed out that

> Our knowledge is amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds: our language, our science, our religion, our opinions, our fancies we inherited. Our country, customs, laws, our ambitions, and our notions of fit and fair,—all these were never made; we found them ready-made; we but quote them.[114]

We have already noticed that negative originality is relational to the extent that it arises vis-à-vis the cultural matrix. American authors in the 1840s were particularly fixated on the self-generative model of originality they inherited from the British tradition, and authors negotiated negative originality as they understood the ambiguous circumstances presented by the contradictory priorities of originality framing discourses of national literature, on one hand, and a more universal literary criticism, on the other. In one sense, through the medium of the sublime, the relational aspects of originality disappear since reason is fundamentally disrupted. While undoubtedly ambiguous, as Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville consistently maintain, the subjectivity of authorship in what Emerson termed "lubricity" appears phenomenological. Self-generative originality becomes negativized by its own ironic relation to itself, a discovery of Romantic Theory.

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[113] Emerson, "The Poet," *The Essential Writings,* 287.

[114] See in Emerson, *Letters and Social Aims,* 1876, published in 1904, 177.

The sublime and the role of the unconscious structure a movement of reason that describes an "unsayable" aspect, a capability both embedded and reproducing that is always imminent yet inherently absent in creative consciousness.[115] Negativity is thus an aspect noticed by Romantics, especially Coleridge, Emerson, Kant, and Hegel, and figured by Melville as "a dumb blankness, full of meaning."[116] Turning to the Romantic sublime in the late-twentieth century, as a sign of negative originality, we are reminded by Arensberg that "the sublime is alive and doing well, although it may be living under the guise of assumed names."[117] Mary Arensberg suggests that "the Romantic sublime of Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth was preoccupied with crossings between self and nature—what they called transcendence—and with the boundlessness of the universe or a field of daffodils." With deconstruction "the 'ultimate truths' of language (Self, God, Essence, and so on) have been called into question. No longer do some of us view language signs as absolutes or transcendental signifieds."

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[115] Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, ed. *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory.* (NY: Columbia University Press. 1989), xii-xiii. Sanford Budick writes that the interest in negativity has to do with ideas that are not disclosed (disseminated) in the communicative act. Negativity emerges in the gaps of communication. Negativity arises at the boundaries of communication. It is an articulation of what is just out of reach, and therefore "eludes conceptualization." Negativity is imminent to concept; it is both behind it and after it. Because it cannot be conceptualized it cannot be pointed to. Yet negativity is tacitly present in texts. Negativity is not codetermiant with negation. Whereas negation is cancelling (Hegel's pure negation), negativity is a presence that functions as a "doubling." The "unsayable" is the unstated shadow of language. Because it cannot become explicit as a concept it cannot be negated as a positive. This is an important point. Negativity is not equivocal in that its ambiguity can be resolved by elimination of one or another antithesis. Rather, negativity arises as a product of its operative capability rather than as a quality.

[116] Hermann Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford. 2nd ed, A Norton Critical Ed (W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 165.

[117] Derrida's term "transcendental signified" suggests that universal concepts "are merely signifiers pointing toward, but never signifying, notions outside the text" (21 n. 3, the quote is Arensberg). Mary Arensberg, "Introduction: The American Sublime." In *The American Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

Arensberg reminds us that in deconstruction "no word or sign is privileged over any other …" As a signifier freedom becomes another "fiction invented through free play of other words and signs." Consequently, as with the signifier 'freedom,' the concepts 'originality;' and 'the sublime,' through poststructuralism, become further fictions for transcendence and "absolute disclosure."[118] According to Harold Bloom, The "daemonic in Emerson [is] that apocalyptic frenzy of an American Sublime." Greater than the Romantic Sublime in general, the American Sublime exposes a "deep structure" of defensive rhetoric.[119] Emerson's fall of man involves *daemonization* as a mode of negative originality. Bloom cites Emerson from his *Journal* of 1837, the year of the Panic:

> the boasted world has come to nothing. Prudence itself is at her wits' end. Pride, and Thrift, and Expediency . . . are all flat, and here is the Soul erect and unconquered still. . . as far back as the widening procession of humanity, the marchers are lame and blind and deaf; but to the soul that whole past is but one finite series in its infinite scope. Deteriorating ever and now desperate. Let me begin anew. Let me teach the finite to know its master. Let me ascend above my fate and work down upon the world.[120]

The American Sublime is the "transumptive moment" when a Transcendental vision recreates the future despite the fall. The fall arouses a series of images that appear connected to a singular crisis or catastrophe. Rather than a literal fall into material mortality as a postlapsarian Eden suggests, the Emersonian fall presents catastrophe as the birth of consciousness. Emerson writes in his essay "Experience," that it is "too late to be helped" that consciousness has made the "unhappy...discovery...that we exist. That

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[118] Mary Arensberg, "Introduction: The American Sublime." In *The American Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 3-4.

[119] See, Harold Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance,* Bloom's Period Studies (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), 5.

[120] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 2-3.

discovery is called the Fall of Man."[121] Consciousness itself has a negativising capacity. Emerson recognizes that "we do not see directly, but mediately, and we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses." Still that negativising function originates within consciousness a new awareness. Emerson adds, "perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects [other than what we create]."

Reading Emerson's America

Emerson's negative originality, for Joseph Riddel, enacts itself comically, a performative improvisation "that turns from itself and undoes the theatrics of representation."[122] Moreover, in this sublime satire "literature relates to tradition, at once breaking with and repeating a past it hardly remembers," and in its relation to tradition literature must contend with the problem of translation, a problem "of the need for a new-world language that remains enchained in an old-world history, and yet is the 'beyond' of history." For Riddel, Emerson becomes the name of a paradox that at once seeks to establish a national literary venue that might disentangle itself from European precursors and history and at the same time reach back across time to an even more distant and ancient sense of original and universal reality. Any attempt at translating history into an American literary originality must also realize that a national literature is a linguistic impossibility, both in terms of particulars, since language is itself iterated already, and in terms of universals, since national borders cannot contain universals. American literary originality, then, is a "dream" that is always futural and never achieved.

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[121] Qtd. in Harold Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 4.

[122] Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 99.

Nativism and exceptionalism, as well as Renaissance or Adamic rebirth are unity concepts that are formalistically untenable. There is inherent disunity. The ever-widening Emersonian circles that attempt to enclose the American concept fall victim to quotation and repetition. The history as signified is always constrained by the linguistic signifier. In the American Sublime it is the signifier that in its attempt to imagine its own absence fails to determine its signified. Emerson attempts to "rethink history and thereby rewrite the genealogy, because the American writer can never forget his belatedness."[123] The American Sublime suggests a re-negotiation of history and formalism, but the attempt of situating history in expression remains non-linguistic.[124] American literature is implicitly self-critical and ironic since its self-reflectiveness reveals its belatedness; its newness is ever delayed.

A poetics of history involves reading and writing; Emerson is the model reader. "His desire to reconcile nature with spirit led him to speculate on language and history; in so doing, he uncovered the 'linguistic problematic' hidden within any attempt at a systematic theory of nature and history."[125] In his 1872 essay "Quotation and Originality" Emerson considers the "American writer's anxiety over the question of a national literature surfaces in his obsession with history." We are reminded that Emerson's *Nature* is the starting point for a definition of "American literature" in terms of the nexus of the American Renaissance and the American Sublime. The American "original" is a repetition explaining its belatedness. Even as America is an echo of the Old World, American authorship becomes orphaned; it must invent its origins in an ahistoric *mythos.*

[123] Kronick, *American Poetics,* 7.

[124] Kronick, *American Poetics,* 3.

[125] Kronick, *American Poetics,* 6.

Emerson's *Nature* belies the attempt for the "creation of America itself." At the intersection of the Romantic Sublime and an American rhetoric, writers in the American Renaissance sought a uniquely American history and, at the same time, asserted a Romantic literary tradition, a paradox in which, "the poet reveals that nature and the past do not exist outside language: history is generated by metaphors of representation."[126]

Riddel puts the American Sublime at a register where the "poetic" 'origin' of 'American' thought consists "in the transgression of origins …"[127] Emerson's "original relation" is itself a repetition, a new revelation; the Emersonian mind is a "transgression" of nature by, a "chiasmus" of language. Therein lies a rejection of history, whether in symbolism or renaissance. "American" thought is, according to Riddel, "inscribed within a tropic economy that both undoes myths of origins and frontiers and prevents any dialectical sublations of this thought's contradictions." That is Riddel's Derridaian "American Signature." The "American idiom" is a double quotation by definition. Riddel argues that the deconstructive criticism of American authorship and originality suggests not that origins lie in a precursor, but that originality itself is a conceptual anomaly. American originality is performative. Performance is both a repetition and a negation; to say that one may "build therefore your own world" argues also that style is self.

Emerson reproduces an "American landscape," a metaphor for a new and originary territory built from a putatively new relation between language and nature, at once already a universal thought and which could only be the product of a pattern already

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[126] Kronick, *American Poetics,* 7.

[127] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 4.

in the mythos of European Romantic Idealism.[128] Anticipating, perhaps, Melville's similar concern for the possibility of literary originality in a prosaic culture more interested in "confidence" than cosmopolitanism, Riddel reads Emerson to ask: "In what sense could that nature produce or transform an original voice or idiom that would not be expressed in a language imported from a past, a history, a world older, and in another sense younger?" American writing, Riddel concludes, amounts to a mistranslation, a "miswriting and a supplementation, a translation and a displacement not of some past present but of some past translation." The "American" poem, as Emerson conceived it is a "fluxional symbol," a trope astride a horizon, reflecting not so much a past but what Riddel calls a "future present" signifying its own "effacement." Rather than recuperating the past the American poem horizontalizes the future, as a palimpsest traces a text.

Riddel speaks of this horizontalized trope as a "catachresis," a mixing of language that is not a derivation so much as a "digression." The concentration of American poetry notes a shift from origins to transformatives. The American poem becomes a tropic of criticism since it interrogates what it retains because it is inherently transactive and agonistic. Emerson bifurcates poetics into its creative and critical functions, and the literature, if critical, is combined, with a creative analysis. The text becomes both a literary and a critical mode of discourse, losing its classical qualities as a promised conveyance of truth and meaning, and instead becomes essentially disseminative.[129] Poetics is a form for Emerson of 'miswriting,' says Riddel. Poetics is 'projective' in that it gathers up its materials from what is present to it and then throws its materials forward creating a tracing of literary motion through time. In such a way literature is a mimesis of

[128] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 100.

[129] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 101.

the future, since it is transformed and disfigured as it projects itself, which is to say that literature recollects as it anticipates.

Emerson is ambiguous about originality as a mode of projection. Critical of orthodoxy and dogmatic thinking, in *Nature* Emerson attempts an "original relation" in the context of sepulchres of the past. His view of originality always bears a latent anxiety for the past which he projects forward through his *Essays 1 & 2.* But in attempting to build a new first philosophy he concludes, ironically, that originality is inherently a transformational process and originality and quotation are two sides of the same coin. Emerson's figure of an "original relation" becomes a nexus, a structural center, a point where multiple dichotomies cross in a chiasmatic form. Structural antitheses involving philosophy and poetics, creativity and criticism, the Me and the Not Me, art and nature, zig and zag like the whim of character. The locus of originality could not be a prior and original point of origin but instead becomes a transitive moment of originality, negative with respect to what it presents itself to be at a prior state of flux. Emerson's idea of an "original relation," anticipating Heidegger's notion of a transformational node of originality, is conceived in terms of a natural language, a trope for a dynamic process. Nature, in Emerson's sense, is then a double troping, because it stands for a scene that is at once *a priori* and belated; language as nature is always already present, and thrown at the same time.

In Emerson's essay "Quotation and Originality" mimesis becomes a mode of "creative translation" that is a double form of representation involving "appropriation and misappropriation." Riddel's doubleness thesis is striking in its implicit recollection of Matthiessen's doubleness idea, which sought to understand originality in terms of

resistance. The process of creative translation erases its own recuperation by projecting forward that which is transformed through the originary process. The act of translation makes quotation and originality a synthetic doubling. Emerson's *Nature* is for Riddel the "primal scene," an enactment of "Nature" as a poetic trope and a material text. In his essay "Quotation and Originality" Emerson writes, "All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands."[130]

Originality, following Heidegger's development of art and its origination, is not so much an instantiation of a new series and hermeneutical circle, but a way of conceptualizing how an existing hermeneutical circle gets performed. In Emerson's essay "Art" in the *Essays, First Series*, he writes: "Because the soul is progressive, it never quite repeats itself, but in every act attempts the production of a new and fairer whole."[131] Moreover, "not imitation but creation is the aim," towards which a "new art is always formed out of the old." The "aboriginal power" of art is not found in an origin, or in Heidegger's terms in Being or Presence, but stems from "nature's eclecticism," Heidegger's *Dasein.* Quotation is the vehicle art uses to exert its troped power and create its circle. Although "new in art is always formed out of the old," still the artist "must employ the symbols of his day." The American seeker of an art of Europe "is in danger of forgetting the simplicity of the principles out of which they all sprung."[132] This is precisely the problem that sets the stage for Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun.* If the

[130] Qtd. in Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 102.

[131] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 431.

[132] Emerson, *Essays and Lectures,* 435.

European past promises a cultural model, which because of its age and aesthetic value overwhelms a fledgling American art-form, then the visitor forgets the principals of simplicity and eclecticism that differentiate an American art from the European.[133] Still, it is the deficit that is perceived that confuses the idea of originality and the repetition always undergoes translation into new forms.

Art, moreover, is never finished. Art undergoes a constant flux of transfiguration through disfiguration. Translation of one representation into another creates an originary scene but not an original one. The origin is always lost in translation.[134] The "univocality" that was part of one circle is no longer available in another. The transformation involves a "displacement of signifiers," says Riddel. The displacement of a signifier "is not simply negative" but more fundamental in that it discloses the capacity of language to be radically eclectic. Rather than displacement as simply a negation of an antecedent the transformative aspect of displacement rather than negating a prior signifier displaces it forward thus reversing the position the relation of an originary impetus to its consequent. The basic movement in the American Sublime, then, what many critics of the myth and symbol school accepted as a new beginning, actually arises in a rhetorical trope—metalepsis—that simply posits an effect as a cause.

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[133] Hawthorne writes in the preface to *The Marble Faun*: "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, not anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make the grow." Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), (xxv).

[134] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 103.

Riddel speaks of a concept of literature where the central “problematic” is in its self-engendering. The underlying and critical issue of that problematic arises in the presumption of a literary model based on a relation between a transcendental signified and iterative signifieds. The American sublime is premised on the rhetorical gesture of positing a new world as a transcendental signified when in actually, from a deconstructive point of view, it is always already an iteration within a transatlantic schema of semiotic structure. Riddel recalls the transatlantic gesture of the American's grand tour of Europe as an enactment of repetition, a seeking out of a cultural continuum within the scope of an instrumentality of culture that can be reinstantiated as American.

The America that is inscribed in the myth and symbol critic’s ideas of a “frontier myth” or the “Adamic American,” approaches Europe with a feigned “innocence.” For example, Melville’s Wellingborough Redburn arrives in a Dante-esque Liverpool only to discover through a faded guidebook that his father has been there already. Moreover, American innocence seeks in ancient places such as Rome a touchstone of pre-history that links it with a feeling for new beginnings. In other words, American originality longs to be centered by the ideology of nature and is at the same time marginalized by it. The thereness of America is dispersed in time and space. The problematic of American literature, which speaks to the notion of negative originality, centers on a reading of itself that stresses its connections with the past, a history which structures its present.

Chapter 2: Negative Originality and the Romantic Sublime

The American Sublime that was precipitated by Emerson's *Nature* and instantiated by "The American Scholar" becomes a moment of dynamic redirection.[1] Theodore Parker, writing his own reaction to Emerson in an essay also titled "The American Scholar" (1849), captured the moment of Emerson's negativity with respect to institutions:

> Such is the scholars' position in America; such their duty, and such the way in which they pay the debt they owe [. . .] The scholar never had so fair a chance before [. . .]The nation asks of her scholar better things than ancient letters ever brought [. . .] there is a beauty higher than that of art, above philosophy and mere intellectual grace [. . .] A few great souls can correct the licentiousness of the American press, which is now but the type of covetousness and low ambition; correct the mean economy of the state, and amend the vulgarity of the American church, now the poor prostitute of wealthy sin.[2]

Theodore Parker's reformist rhetoric assesses the responsibility of the American writer to a higher principle than commercial publishing. Writing in 1849 Parker calls upon the representative men of the Transcendentalist movement to enact a moral movement within the national literary field, a movement grounded in literary reform that stems from the prevailing idea among Romantics through which poetics gains its moral power from universal morality. Parker's Christian liberalism would agree with much of

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[1] Mary Arensberg, "Introduction: The American Sublime." In *The American Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986,) 5. Mary Arensberg states that the romantic "negative sublime" that appeared through Kant's *Critique of Judgement* had as its immediate precursor Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry*. While beauty became associated with perfection and closure (sublimation of repression), the sublime arouses anxiety by its emphasis on epistemological disjunctions (5). Further, Harold Bloom writes, that the "daemonic in Emerson [is] that apocalyptic frenzy of an American Sublime." Greater than the Romantic Sublime in general, the American Sublime exposes a "deep structure" of defensive rhetoric, see Harold Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, Bloom's Period Studies (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), 1–25.

[2] Theodore Parker, "The American Scholar," in Gordon Hutner, *American Literature, American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 87.

Wordsworth's metaphysics in that the source of individual moral power is derived from universal world spirit, yet based on his overt social program he demands that "great souls" such as Emerson yoke themselves to specific forms of dissent. As we shall see, apart from Poe's admonition of didacticism, Hawthorne and Melville will largely concur with Parker's dissent, and hence we have in Parker a link between Emersonian self-reliance and Melvillean social critique. As much as he would also agree with Parker's social criticism, Emerson would prefer not to be intellectually bound to a specific social program.

Transcendental Context

Commentators speak widely of Romanticism as a period marked by an emphasis on subjectivity, a view of the Romantic Self as a locus of identity and a nexus between the individual mind and universal reason. Hegel defines identity thusly: "In the sphere of being, identity is immediate self-relatedness, and the negative is merely otherness."[3] Put simply, for Hegel, identity is the negative of the other. Recalling Emerson's distinction between the terms "Me" and "not Me," Hegel's theory of identity appears to be precisely the same as Emerson's. The Romantic theory that Emerson inherited from British and German Philosophy entered New England through a desultory process of print distribution involving texts by Carlyle, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Wordsworth. Elizabeth Peabody, Mary Moody Emerson, and others had met with British thinkers in the early 1830s, but the main transmission of German philosophy to America in the 1820s and 30s

[3] G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler, Vol. 24, The German Library (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990), 81.

was through James Marsh's edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1829) and Henry Hedge's articles on Coleridge and Kant.

Henry Hedge (1805-1890), a member of Emerson's circle in Boston called the "Transcendental Club," had graduated from the Harvard Divinity School in 1825. He had visited Germany in 1818 with historian George Bancroft, and read Kant's writings in the original German. Among the American Transcendentalists he was regarded as the authority on Kant. In his 1833 article on Coleridge, Hedge used the opportunity to explain Kantian metaphysics. According to Perry Miller, Hedge's "Coleridge" became "the first word...which any American had uttered in respectful recognition of the claims of Transcendentalism."[4]

Perry Miller states that Coleridge and Carlyle helped expose Americans to a philosophical alternative to Locke's empiricism; yet, it is primarily Hedge who was acknowledged to be the American most knowledgeable about German Idealism.[5] Emerson praised Hedge's "Coleridge" as "a living leaping Logos."[6] Situated in Bangor, Hedge returned to Boston, and after 1836 his visits coalesced in the Transcendental Club. Hedge read Kant in the original German after visiting Germany with George Bancroft at the age of thirteen. Hedge considers Coleridge's influence on American understanding of Idealism. Even though Coleridge is "eminently fitted for such a task" as explaining German Idealism, because of his "marked fondness for metaphysics," it is Coleridge's

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[4] Perry Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Harvard University Press, 1950), 66-67. See, Henry Hedge, "Coleridge." *The Christian Examiner,* March 1833 (XIV, 109-129). [Perry Miller, "Frederick Henry Hedge (1805-1890)": 66-72.]

[5] James Marsh, who wrote the "Preliminary Essay" to the American edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1829), also helped to promote European Idealism in the United States.

[6] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 66-67.

"excessive anxiety to make himself intelligible" that prevents him from explaining "all that is most valuable in the speculations of Kant and his followers."[7] It is due to Coleridge's "anxiety which leads him to present a subject in so many points of view, that we are sometimes in danger of losing the main topic amid the variety of collateral and illustrative matter which he gathers round it..." Hedge's concern for intelligibility points to both an American common sense and the incomprehensible character that Schlegel found in the Romantic sublime.

In America, Hedge notices, it is "the demand for information on the subject [of German Transcendentalism] is constantly increasing." That concern prompts Hedge to finish his essay on Coleridge with a summary on Kant and German Idealism in expository form. Still, Hedge insists, the onus of blame for misunderstanding Idealism in America does not rest on Coleridge's failings but on the reader's relative capacity to examine his or her own consciousness. Idealism is a metaphysical system, says Hedge, "whose only value to us must depend upon our power to construct it for ourselves from the materials of our own consciousness, and which in fact exists to us only on this condition."[8]

In the second and longer part of the essay Hedge strives to explain German metaphysics to the American reader for the first time in any thorough sense. This is perhaps the moment when Kant fully enters the arena of American romanticism. Hedge suggests that "the present state among literary men in relation to this subject," demands such an explication. To begin, Hedge suggests that American readers, to fully comprehend Kant, will need to develop "the same powers of abstraction and synthetic

[7] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 68.

[8] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 68-69.

generalization" as the Germans.[9] Americans will need to "raise [themselves] at once to a transcendental point of view." American readers will be required to shift from their democratic habits of seeking a "common consciousness"—described as a "passive state"—to an "active" awareness of "interior consciousness."[10]

For Hedge, Idealism is a "free intuition" that demands "vigorous effort of the will," and without such effort Transcendentalism appears to be "vague and mystical."[11] Transcendentalism has an "effect" upon the reader that is "exhilarating," promotes "inspiration," and without such "experience," readers "will have no conception of the feeling" it provides. Transcendentalism is a "veil" behind which lies the "metaphysical existence of this interior consciousness"; those who do not apprehend it are not meant to see it, says Hedge. Hedge denounces as facile "the empirical and common sense schools because the universe is reduced to impressions, ideas, and sensations."[12] Hedge implies that the shift from the early national period in America to a romantic one, traces a shift from "spontaneous production" to a "state of reflection," which prompts thinkers to inquire into the "nature of their being, the evidence of their knowledge, and the grounds of their faith." Here we have an insight into the stakes of a transcendental theory in America and its assault on the finite circumstances of actuality. Hedge thus outlines a contrast that we shall return to in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun.*

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[9] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 69.

[10] The implications toward a reevaluation of the precepts of national literature and democratic authorship in this and the following passages are profound. These implications can be gleaned directly from Emerson's "American Scholar" and its precepts of self-culture; and such values are also implicit in Poe's ratiocinative principle.

[11] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists*, 69.

[12] Hedge's criticism of Locke and the Scottish Common-Sense orthodoxy that was *de riguer* at Harvard helps understand the emphasis on fancy and imagination that became part and parcel of Romance authors Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville.

What was previously "beyond the reach of human intelligence" is made available by a transcendental "system," whose

> *object* is to discover in every form of finite existence, an infinite and unconditioned as the ground of its existence, or rather the ground of our knowledge of its existence, to refer all phenomena to *noumena,* or laws of cognition. It is not a *ratio essendi* but a *ratio cognoscendi;* it seeks not to explain the existence of God and creation, objectively considered, but to explain our knowledge of their existence.[13]

Rather than being a skeptical philosophy, transcendental philosophy seeks to understand human nature and experience on "scientific" principles, "deducing" an "absolute thesis" from a "system of representations."[14] Rather than making empirical claims, transcendental theory claims as its scientific principles what is basically a metaphysical theory.

The system completes itself in the construction of the intuitions of "time, space, and variety," "establishing a coincidence between the facts of ordinary experience and those which we have discovered within ourselves."[15] The system is derived from an investigation of consciousness itself, which will be termed "nature" by transcendentalists. That nature is based on binary oppositional structures, the "distinctions of subject and object, reason and understanding, phenomena and noumena." Moreover, German intellectual culture contributed to the history of ideas, "the categories established by Kant; the moral liberty proclaimed by him as it had never been proclaimed by any before; the authority and evidence of law and duty set forth by Fichte; the universal harmony illustrated by Schelling."[16] In sum, this philosophy, Hedge suggests, results in a

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[13] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 70.

[14] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 70.

[15] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 71.

[16] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 71.

"quickening power"; it is no less than an "impulse to mental culture" with the power to "establish and extend the spiritual in man, and the ideal in nature," which "commends itself by its fruits, it lives by its fruits, and must ever live, though the name of its founder be forgotten, and not one of its doctrines survive."[17]

Such a universal doctrine of positive originality, what Kant had alluded to in *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* recognizes a fundamental paradox: the universal "quickening power" Hedge finds in Romantic originality, a power coextensive with Kantian freedom itself, is a power premised on a circular argument.[18] Kant acknowledges this paradox:

> [T]here is a kind of circle here from which it seems there is no escape. We assume that we are free in the order of efficient causes so that we can conceive of ourselves as subject to moral laws in the order of ends. And then we think of ourselves as subject to these laws because we have ascribed freedom of the will to ourselves. This is circular because freedom and self-legislation of the will are both [related to] autonomy and thus are reciprocal concepts, and for that reason one of them cannot be used to explain the other and to furnish a ground for it.[19]

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[17] Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists,* 72. The expression "quickening power" is Milton's: "We know no time when we were not as now; /Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised /By our own *quickening power,* when fatal course /Had circled his full orb, the birth mature /Of this our native Heaven, ethereal sons. /Our puissance is our own; our own right hand /Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try /Who is our equal: Then thou shalt behold" (866). [book V, *Paradise Lost*]

[18] Terry P. Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62. Terry Pinkard notes that this formulation of the 'Kantian paradox' exposes the problem inherent of the more general problem of grounding propositions in universal truths. It imposes a major premise by affirming the consequent. Kant's solution to the problem was to eliminate the subjective self-interest that would make morality contingent. Moreover, all rational individuals would recognize it to be their duty to waive any self-interest in the interest of the moral law, and that matter assured the primacy of reason. Thus we are free to choose to eschew self-interest but necessitated by reason to our duty to uphold it. Ultimately the final ends, or grounds, of the moral law seem to depend on a religious conviction, but Kant's formulation of freedom makes human agency ultimately responsible for the categorical imperative through the faculty of reason.

[19] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 113.

Unlike Kant, who, as Robert Pippin acknowledges, based his notion of freedom on the concept of voluntarism (free will) Hegel approached the idea of freedom in terms of a "state" concept.[20] Freedom involves a state of self-relation as well as social relations of "recognition." Rather than a condition of causal origins, the state of self-reflexiveness defines freedom for Hegel. Hence, Hegel's notion of freedom is basically negative in its relation between the self and what it recognizes as beyond itself: Emerson's "Not Me." Friedrich Schlegel understood that relation in terms of a state of "permanent *parabasis*" that resembles the Romantic sublime.

Kant and Negative Originality

Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement (1793),* acknowledged that a metaphysical culture of pure reason could not explain art. For Kant, art is a phenomenon in which he saw no empirical law, but only individual, subjective originality obtained through genius.[21] Moreover, Kant's idea of originality, which is the "primary property of

[20] Robert Pippin, "Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel's Compatibilism." *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1999): 194–212: 194.

[21] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 224. Kant's discussion in section 46 of his third *Critique,* "On Genius," describes genius as "an innate productive facility." Although genius "is the innate mental aptitude [*ingenium*] through which nature gives rule to art," originality is given its freedom from nature through "purely" aesthetic disinterest (section 48). I am arguing that Kant's notion of aesthetic disinterest is analogous to his idea of positive freedom as given in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* where he states that the freedom of the will…is synthetical because by analysis of the concept of an absolutely good will that property of the maxim cannot be found. Such synthetical propositions, however, are possible only by the fact that both cognitions are connected through their union with a third in which both of them are to be found." Art, then, for Kant, is conditionally free in that it is the middle term between originality (genius) and nature. And it is the faculty of reason, as "a pure spontaneous activity…above understanding" that guides originality prior to nature, recognizing that nature in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is temporally annexed to understanding. Yet pure spontaneous reason (intuitive reason) appears prior to the freedom of the will, and according to Kant's dictum that all "imperatives are expressed by an "ought" and are essentially mediated by indeterminacy, we are faced with a "definition of freedom [that] is negative and therefore affords no insight into its essence." If we replace the word originality for freedom we have a clear rendering of the

genius," must also be "exemplary" to be authentic as a "rule for estimating."[22] Since Kant's aesthetic problem is to account for a rule that exists in its freedom from imitation, he posits that originality obtains directly from nature. And in being free from imitation, following Kant's discussion of freedom in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, freedom arises "independently of foreign causes."[23] In other words, analogous to his concept of freedom, Kant's idea of originality is that it is autonomous.

Through autonomy, in this view, *originality* becomes free from nature in much the same fashion as in Kant's metaphysics, where reason seeks "universal legislation" above and beyond the will. In its universality, morality and its aesthetic analogue disinterested beauty "must be derived exclusively from the property of freedom" under the expressed condition that "freedom as the property of the will of all rational beings must be *demonstrated*."[24] Any demonstration of freedom becomes simply hypothetical, and is moreover paradoxical, since Kant offers it as a condition that "if I were a member of that [intelligible] world all my actions *would* always be in accordance with the autonomy of the will…my actions *ought* to conform to it."[25] The consequence of such a

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indeterminacy of originality, from Kant's perspective. See also Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 79, 109-10.

[22] Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 225. When art and originality is conceived of as given *a priori* to rule, the issue of how to evaluate art arises immediately. Kant's approach to any estimation of art rests on the relation between beauty and disinterest. As we shall see, in the Kantian sublime (section 23), cognition becomes unlimited to the extent that reason itself fails to grasp totality, whereas the faculty of understanding, which is preceded by a spontaneous aesthetic beauty prior to nature, necessitates that aesthetic judgment is determined and limited by the possibility of freedom (positive originality), Any attempt to regain reason by reconciling the imagination to the limits of beauty becomes possible only by determining its limits through negative freedom (negative originality). See also Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 201-02.

[23] Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 109

[24] Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 110. (My emphasis.)

[25] Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 116.

paradox, for Kant, who concludes the third section of the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* thus, is that "[p]hilosophy must therefore assume that no contradiction will be found between freedom and natural necessity[,]…for it cannot give up the concept of nature any more than that of freedom."[26] We are left with the realization that for Kant the autonomy of originality is a conditional premise, and, though genius, freedom, and natural necessity originates as a synthesis *a priori,* we recognize that originality is probably negative since it awaits the discovery of contradiction.

The discovery of that contradiction, I argue, occurs in the structural originality of the Romantic sublime in its movement of negativity, a movement that ultimately reveals aesthetic judgment to be a factor of phenomenological materiality. Such a phenomenology recalls Kant's indeterminacy, Hegel's aesthetic-historical asymmetry, Heidegger's *nihil originarium,* and Adorno's negative dialectics. While the paradox of Kantian freedom and originality, where such concepts are neither universal nor necessarily Ideal, it is Hegel's view of negativity that untangles the paradox by locating aesthetics in history. Moreover, it is Horkeimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* that reveals the relation of negative originality to the cultural matrix that appears in the American nineteenth-century context. And we shall also point out that it is in Kant's notion that in aesthetic judgment "originality must be the primary *property*" where we rediscover that the cultural work of an aesthetics of negative originality is ultimately bound to materiality through economics.[27]

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[26] Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 118.

[27] Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis." *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 3–25. (My emphasis.) Kant's statement is in "On Genius." Kant, *Philosophical Writings,* 225.

In Kant's rendition of aesthetics, language becomes capable of a mediated expression of Nature through the middle term of originality. Originality, in other words, maintains a relation of negativity with respect to Nature. And yet, as a Romantic trope, originality acts as a simulacrum of nature. In *Conjectures on Original Composition* Edward Young argued in 1759 that the literary possibilities of his generation were equal to the ancients, which for the neoclassical critics was a heresy; in so arguing, Young shifted the emphasis on the meaning of the word "original," stating that "Imitations are of two kinds: one of nature, one of authors."[28] Nature, here, is no longer a calibration of ideal form but a source of life. "An original," Young writes, famously, "may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made."[29]

Young's *Conjectures* recognizes in "originality" a mid-eighteenth-century cultural fascination with individual authorship. Romantic originality is distinguished by a now "familiar" (that is, normative) view of the literary work: if it is original, says Macfarlane, it is "unbidden, native to an individual, and comes into being out of nothing."[30] This view of originality, of its coming into being through the medium of creativity, becomes the hallmark of Romantic originality, and has metaphysical, if not transcendental implications. Moreover, this view of originality resembles what we will designate "structural originality" quite closely. In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism,* Paul de Man shows that *ex nihilo* creation attends to organic processes, yet to describe creation

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[28] Qtd. in Walter Jackson Bate, *Criticism: The Major Texts (*Boston: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 241.

[29] Qtd. in Bate, *Criticism: The Major Texts*.

[30] *Ex nihilo* creation appears at the beginning of syntagmatic chain and is thus a structural moment that entails a generative one. Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, 19.

by means of an organic metaphor invests poetic rhetoric with a trope of originality (a sign structure) that is itself not an organic thing but a Romantic idea. This move precipitates a linguistic turn to "metaromanticism." We will trace this point turn shortly.

For the moment we note that at the heart of Romantic originality, as it arose in the eighteenth century, lies the "organic" metaphor for the *ex nihilo* creative process of "growth." Young speaks of an "Original" as possessing a "vegetable nature"; "it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made: Imitations are a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art, and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own."[31] Young's rhetoric, moreover, extends from its figuring of *organicism* to the paternal and imperial: Young argues that originals supervene imitators since they are "great benefactors." The core idea behind this argument posits a trope that permits the latter event, the event that supervenes the former, as a moment of regeneration, and as we have seen with Emerson, the notion of supervening, or what Hegel termed *aufhebung* or supersession (related to Heidegger's *aufgehen* or emergence). This idea, in turn, relates to the notion of overcoming through transumption, Originals, says Young, "extend the republic of letters, and add a new *province* to its dominion."[32] Young, in a remarkable statement, illustrates by comparison how this new (mid-eighteenth-century) notion of originality, a notion that becomes connected with creativity, genius, and transcendental value, eclipses imitation. Young adds:

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[31] Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, ed. Edith J. Morley, Digital Collections Cornell University Library (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1918), 6-7. Note the contrast between organicism and mechanism.

[32] Qtd. in Bennett, *The Author*, 58. Young's metaphor of a "republic," a "province," and a "dominion" highlights what will become the conception of the American republic of national literature and its association with precisely this organic sense of Romantic originality. My emphasis.

> Learning we thank, genius we revere; That gives us pleasure, This gives us rapture; That informs, This inspires; and is itself inspired; for genius is from heaven, learning from man: This sets us above the low, and illiterate; That, above the learned and polite. Learning is borrowed knowledge; genius is knowledge innate, and quite our own.[33]

In a move characteristic of Wordsworth, art absorbs nature as mind, and it is in that absorbing movement that we locate the sublime.

Nature becomes mind through the figure of the flowing fountain, which together with organicism becomes the master trope of the era. In the generative model of creation-as-originality nature guides artistic perfection, and becomes, during Romanticism, the idea that genius illuminates art and the world from a transcendent source through the medium of the author.[34] For Wordsworth, the root of genius is located in the imagination, and originality becomes its direct associate. In the "*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800), Wordsworth criticizes the form and content of neoclassic poetry in favor of Romantic poetic expression. Originality is located in the imagination, which undergoes a process of "spontaneous overflow" causing "powerful descriptions of the deeper passions."[35] Wordsworth's idea of "spontaneous overflow," says M. H. Abrams, departs from a "mirror held up to nature" and instead "yields the reader insights into the mind and heart of the poet himself."[36] Wordsworth's famous phrase, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," involves a metaphor that according to Abrams "suggests the underlying physical analogy of a container—a fountain or natural spring, perhaps,

[33] Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 17.

[34] Andrew Bennett, *The Author.* New Critical Idiom (New York: Routledge, 2005), 59.

[35] Walter Jackson Bate, *Criticism: The Major Texts*, 345.

[36] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1953), 21-23.

from which water brims over."[37] Tracing out the metaphor, Abrams suggests that the poet contains the fluid and flowing feelings emanating from the poet's mind. The extemporaneous, or spontaneous, emanations results, says Abrams, from the poet's awareness of Nature. That awareness unites the external world of sense with the capacity of the mind to recollect feelings in a tranquil state of reflection. Moreover, as we have just noticed, the self, in its originality, becomes posited through transumption to the rhetorical position of a new *dominion* in a spatially figured context. In that move we see that Romantic originality places the self not only within a part-for-whole relation with the Absolute, but also in a metonymical relation to a space/time relation that is disjunctive with respect to the past.

Another consequence of such Romantic writer-centeredness results in a distancing of the outer world from the self as a center—as a province. Readers, moreover, encounter an aesthetic sensibility that sees the poetic imagination as a naturally occurring outflow from a vessel of spontaneous thought. The source of that thinking is in the consciousness of the poet unencumbered by rational control. Originality, in this Kantian sense, precludes an art of deliberate imitation. In the shift to Romantic sensibility at the turn of the nineteenth century, following from Kant's third *Critique,* the concept of originality became detached from empirical antecedents and then located itself in a creative power capable of bringing art into being *ex nihilo.* As we have seen, Kant had disassociated originality from imitation in "On Genius," yet even Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the

[37] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp, 47.*In Abrams' four-fold division of creative orientation, two are outer directed, and two inner-directed. Of the outer-directed orientations, the mimetic and pragmatic, the artist is concerned primarily with the imitation of Nature and the needs of the audiences. Of the inner-directed orientations, the expressive or the objective, the artist is either concerned with feelings or the work itself. In the outer-directed orientation we are dealing primarily with the work of art as reflecting nature and society, whereas the inner-directed orientation concentrates on the singularity of the work and its originality.

sway of Romantic originality's obvious negativity vis-à-vis imitation, couldn't escape the paradox of influence. The *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) points back to a long vernacular tradition of English folk ballads. Wordsworth's nostalgia for nature and the idealizing of the rustic farmer as the common voice of the people shows an inclination to turn away from Revolutionary upheaval.[38]

The question arises again, whether we regard originality as a turning away or overcoming (negative or structural originality), or as a state of autonomy versus influence (a state of negative freedom).[39] The question remains: what are the consequences of an originality paradox within the frame of the cultural matrix? We recall that genius, as Edward Young maintains, involves "the power of accomplishing great things without the means generally reputed necessary to that end."[40] While Young struggles to account for the "means…necessary" for originality, we have seen that Kant more rigorously attributes exemplary art to nature's rule, a rule given through aesthetic judgment, as he termed it. According to Andrew Bennett:

> Such a formulation points to a crucial paradox specifically mentioned by Kant that underscores Romantic authorship; in the ideal author, in the genius, there is a mysterious disjunction of cause and effect. There is no reason why the genius is able to create the works that he creates. The idea that the genius is both himself and beyond himself is something of a commonplace in Romantic poetics.[41]

The difference seems a matter of openness and closure, flux and stability. The relation of autonomy to imitation presupposes a diachronic relation, though autonomy itself, as Kant

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[38] Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 14.

[39] In this discussion I define structural originality as a synchronic concept and generative originality as a diachronic concept.

[40] Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 13.

[41] Bennett, *The Author*, 60.

argues in the matter of freedom, is a structural relation: freedom is a structure of reason or the negation of it. Both definitions, each in their own way, are instrumental. The Wordsworthian poet, according to the idea of spontaneous overflow, is most creative in a state of tranquility, and this condition becomes the paradigm concept for the original Romantic self. Self-origination, as metaphysical (phenomenological) originality, in a continuum that extended from Wordsworth to Emerson, turns not on a temporal cause-and-effect relationship, but on a seemingly atemporal emanation, which Coleridge termed an "esemplastic power" or spontaneous transcendental imagination.[42] But under the sway of Schlegel and his notion of Romantic irony, originality was brought under the regime of a reversal of cause and effect, or *metalepsis,* a structure that supposes simultaneity and disjunctive relationships.

Negative Philosophy

Robert S. Leventhal, writing about the beginnings of German hermeneutics, reminds us that before Schelling and Hegel, and contemporary with Kant, Fichte, and Friedrich Schlegel, Johann Gottfried Herder noted that the "general consideration of human knowledge in and through language must yield a negative philosophy."[43] Herder (1744-1803), following Linnaeus, conceived culture as an organic life process. Culture became individuated by its own internal potential. The idea is problematic. Even as the organic metaphor, reaching back to Aristotle's ideas of causation, helps understand Romantic-era poetics in terms of a creative theory of self-referentiality, the organic metaphor as it constructs an ideological metaphor of a culture circle is both an

[42] S. T. Coleridge, *The Portable Coleridge*, ed. I. A. Richards (Penguin Group, 1950), 514-16.

[43] Qtd. In Robert Scott Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation: Lessing, Herder, Schlegel and Hermeneutics in Germany, 1750-1800* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 173.

anthropological abstraction and carries with it the probability of absurd and dangerous stereotypes.[44] Originality as applied to culture is untenable. Culture becomes more understandable as an agglomeration of selves and identities sharing some ideas and patterns.

Herder bifurcates 'being' by positing two incommensurable senses of the term: the ideal and the existential.[45] The self in its subjectivity is therefore split between any ideal and foundational essential grounds to 'being' and the actual experiences each individual person collects. The empirical self, then, is not an original and metaphysical self but a multiplex identity that is situated by the conflicts that exist for the individual in history and politics. Herder's metaphysical anthropology sought to understand the human being's experience in terms of its point as a center in sphere of language and history; human understanding is dialectical and rhetorical.[46] Herder's metaphysical anthropology, as can be anticipated, suggests Heidegger's phenomenology.

Given that Herder's view of anthropological metaphysics amounts to a 'negative philosophy,' Herder's notion of the self involves a pragmatic and critical stance:

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[44] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 90-91. After Napoleon had invaded Germany Fichte reconsidered Herder's notion of the individual. Herder regarded the individual as determined by the state through education, language—in that language acts a "common stream" that causes custom and culture to form an "organic unity," and held that he individual is a part of that unity, and hence of the nation. The organic idea of national unity maps onto the idea of pure freedom such that it becomes the business of the state to be free of other. Taken to the logical end of the idea, as Napoleon had, the notion of national freedom ultimately leads to domination. Fichte reversed that part for whole relationship, where instead the individual becomes obsessed with freedom, a "mystical notion of men creatively lunging forward for the purpose of not being frozen," men such as Carlyle. This form of constant "self-creation" equates art and artist as wrapped in a "cosmic design perpetually renewing itself." Paradoxically, what began in Kant's moral philosophy as an urge toward freedom resulted in an absolute idealism that overturned the categorical imperative.

[45] Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation,* 168.

[46] Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation,* 170.

Leventhal suggests that "[a]s a negative discipline, philosophy undermines its own search for foundations and questions its communicability, its discursive possibility."[47] Philosophy becomes a mode of inoculation, in which it becomes "simultaneously the disease and the cure, the illness and the only antidote," of a metaphysical longing for foundations. The center for speculation is no longer metaphysics but the relationship of the human self to language and history. Herder's negative philosophy amounts to critique of discourse in that it seeks to understand discourse in terms of the problematics of 'origins' and 'historicism.' It locates the focus of such a question in terms of the individual identity in the center of its own linguistic and political constraints and exigencies.[48]

Herder's hermeneutics anticipates the "originality paradox" that arises in the relation between artist and society. The traditions inherited by the social realm become grafted onto the cultural matrix's logocentric structure. The ideology representing the cultural matrix sets up a "correspondence theory of truth" that can only be defended within the pragmatic contours of the cultural matrix based upon the instrumentality of its dominant ideological values. A relativistic view of truth admits to a conceptual framework that denies absolutes and endangers the cultural matrix with a form of epistemological nihilism. Negative originality positions the pragmatic paradox between correspondence (a form of originality) and relativity (negation) as a double-edged discursivity that admits logocentrism (originality) at the same time it denies it (negation). At the social level the Self experiences negativity in terms of its correspondence to the cultural matrix in a dialogic relation that Adorno terms 'negative dialectics'; it is in that

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[47] Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation,* 171.

[48] Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation,* 173.

sense that *correspondence results in an aesthetic response to the cultural matrix that validates the critical work of aesthetics by situating it in the material conditions that demand its antithesis as subversion.*

The idea overturns the universals of Kantian *a priori* synthesis since it holds that truth claims are essentially rhetorical and discursive and matters of social constructedness.[49] In the relation between a phenomenology of Romantic originality—and here we turn from the "linguistic problematic" of generative origins in language to the structural originality of the sublime—we encounter again the "originality paradox," which we initially understood as an incommensurable negative relation between artist and cultural matrix, but now understand the issue as it reappears as an unresolvable relation between an Idealist metaphysics and a materialist aesthetics.

Paul de Man, in "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," understands Kantian aesthetic judgment as a project that ultimately transcends the aesthetic in its metaphysical or ideological manifestations. As a substrate of materiality that has Heideggerian dimensions, de Man argues that

> [f]rom the phenomenology of the aesthetic (which is always based on an adequacy of the mind to its physical object, based on what is referred to, in the definition of the sublime, as the concrete representation of ideas...) we have moved to the pure materiality of...aesthetic vision. From the organic, still asserted as architectonic principle in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* to the phenomenological, the rational cognition of incarnate ideas, which the best part of the Kant interpretation in the nineteenth and twentieth century will single out, we have reached, in the final analysis, a materialism that, in the tradition of the reception of the third *Critique,* is seldom or never perceived. To appreciate the full impact of this conclusion one must remember that the entire project of the third *Critique,* the full investment in the aesthetic, was to achieve the articulation that would guarantee the architectonic utility of the system. If the architectonic then appears, very near the end of the analytics of the aesthetic, at the conclusion of the section on the sublime, as the material disarticulation not only of nature but

[49] Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation,* 174.

> of the body, then this moment marks the undoing of the aesthetic as a valid category. The critical power of transcendental philosophy undoes the very project of such philosophy leaving it, certainly not with an ideology—for transcendental and ideological (metaphysical) principles are part of the same system—but with a materialism that Kant's posterity has not yet begun to face up to.[50]

In the "architectonic utility of the system" that Kant's aesthetic judgment is meant to achieve, de Man notices that a final "material disarticulation" by means of the sublime undercuts both nature and body. The net effect of such a consequence is an evaporation of the Cogito by means of an *a priori* structure. Initiated by the sublime, the disruption of cognition results in a "confused mode" of reason that undercuts the potential of aesthetic judgment to reveal an underlying (natural) rational (metaphysical and ideological) law. What remains is a "primordial physicality of our being-in-the-world."[51] This "undoing of the aesthetic" results in a passage from Romantic originality into a form of negativity that traces the asymmetry we find in Hegel's *Aesthetics,* an asymmetry between the Classical and the Romantic phases of Hegel's historicism.

Before we address Hegel's aesthetic historicism we shall inquire into the role of discourse in its metacritical relation to negativity. Jonathan Culler bifurcates concepts of contingency (aesthetics) and essentialism (metaphysics), where the contingent is covered by the essential and the poetic so that the rhetoric (the parasitic) is also covered by trope. Trope emerges as the foreground presence that through aesthetics covers metaphysics. Poetic purity uncovers the longing for an absent originality in the logos. Jonathan Culler notes that "[p]urity is a casting out of the impure aspects of metaphor and the parasitic.

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[50] Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 88-89.

[51] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990) 17-18.

But the parasitic and metaphoric are already indwelling in what is cast as purity."[52] Culler's notion of a representational logocentrism counters de Man's "material disarticulation" by suggesting that materiality is a concept available through representation. Yet de Man argues that metaphor is uncontrollable since the language that might figure it is also metaphorical. Metaphor creates more metaphor and results in a state of undecidability with respect to the inherent asymmetry of the binary model that points to the split between the literal and the figurative. This logic interdicts the distinction between the literal and the figurative, and the same time recognizes the tension within that distinction essential to understanding the concept. This doubleness that requires one to refuse to join a club of which one is always already a member is a tacit strategy of intervention. Aside from the supposition that all readings are bound to logic of some kind, the inherent literariness of the metaphor blurs the line between distinctions.

The relation of reality to representation is bound to presence. Representations seek foundations that are not themselves constructed, but this correspondence is deferred in a potentially infinite process of regression. To forestall infinite regression philosophers may offer pragmatism as a way to posit immediate grounds. "Norms are produced by acts of exclusion."[53] But the refusal to agree on terms points to a weakness in the supposed objectivity of pragmatism. The cultural matrix is ultimately pragmatic but its foundations are produced for its own dominance. The consensus that is taken as truth becomes the point of intervention. Eccentric forces subversive to the consensus reverse the logic of

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[52] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 148-154.

[53] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 153.

center and marginality (negative originality) and create a structure that grafts through opposition. Truth, as a putative goal, may have the instrumentality of revealing new perspectives on marginality. As such, the search for truth is "eccentric" as theory but pragmatic in a fictive sense.

The metacritical relation to epistemological authority raises a critical distance that questions existing frameworks ensconced in the cultural matrix. A fictive sense of 'truth' then plays a role of baiting ideology to emerge from rhetoric. Once the doubleness is exposed it remains illuminated. It is the framework that ultimately makes the case for truth whether or not it might be validated in the social context. This doubling of 'truth' posits itself as a median point between resistance and the cultural matrix.

The relation between the frame and the center of the object, the relation between form and content as it maps onto the relation between trope (the organic metaphor) and essence (whether nature or art) is a critical relation Paul Hamilton terms "metaromanticism," a vantage point framed by Romantic paradoxes.[54] And the phenomenological symptom that I will explore through the frame of structural negative originality is sustained by the persistence of Romantic theory. The immanence of romantic subjectivity resists decentering and the core problems of romantic aesthetics remain intrinsic. Romanticism supplies its own critical matrix and this reconstitutes itself as it diagnoses its own symptoms. The "self-disgust" resulting from the romantic reflective consciousness, a self-binding defined by the promise of transcendence, becomes, through phenomenological aesthetics, universalized. The idealism that characterized the first generation of romantics becomes politicized in the next generation.

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[54] Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4-5.

Even as the romantic artist is circumscribed by aesthetic limitations, criticism reveals the way aesthetics becomes a political mechanism.

For Paul Hamilton, "criticism remains immanent."[55] The "aesthetic is indemnified against dissent because critical departures from it simultaneously double as the metaphorical distance or troping of an original—as further aesthetic production." Though theory may be misled into false hopes of "new foundations," metacriticism does create new grafts of discourse with respect to institutions and cultural practices.[56] The framework that becomes self-limiting through pragmatism raises a problem within metacriticsm. It becomes difficult to evaluate the cultural matrix on its own terms until there is an epistemological paradigm shift. That shift is brought about by metacriticism through critical work: "even if in principle we cannot get outside conceptual frameworks to criticize and evaluate, the practice of self-reflexivity, the attempt to theorize one's practice [through metacriticism], works to produce change...."[57]

De Man argues that a work establishes itself as a context in which a critic can be shown to have misread. That a text can be a "point" of misreading helps to illustrate what may be a moment of structural originality. Although, Barbara Johnson reminds that "all readings are misreadings," and that the idea of truth is rekindled at the point when error is recognized, since a misreading posits a reading against it.[58] Readings are undercut by—or blind to—their own readings. While a reading presupposes a right one of which it is

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[55] Hamilton, *Metaromanticism,* 5.

[56] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 154.

[57] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 154.

[58] Qtd. in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. 25th Anniversary (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 178-79.

"interested," it misreads in order to achieve its reading. Rightness is achieved through negativity. Negativity reinstantiates a fixed point at which misreading's further negativity operates. The fixed point may be a necessary phantom. Misreading, then, admits to a trace of truth, even as reading must be as a consequence of itself, a misreading.[59] The result becomes a "double movement" where negativity, as it moves away from its object, points to and instantiates its object. The result becomes a true error in which the misreading and misunderstanding are partial, a blurred vision of an entity that "resists metaphysical idealization and captures the temporal dynamic of interpretive situation." The consequence of seeing reading as misreading results in a loss of a centered authority of authorization as the normative case becomes both privileged and special.

The problem of defining the literary can be explored by assessing philosophical writing in terms of both cognitive (conative) and performative language. It is through romanticism that literature becomes increasingly inclusive and comprehensive. Romantic literary works included diverse themes, genres, and situations. Reading romantic texts as philosophy impels a reading that seeks definitional closure, whereas to read it as literature is to allow it openness in terms of structure and meaning and freedom of discursive practice. Generically, literary works comprise an asymmetrical relation to works of philosophy, history, and journalism.

German Romantic theory helped to establish a view of literature as an art that is transcendent in meaning, having a quest for meaning and its own identity; these questions become definitive of literature itself.[60] The novel, for example, establishes its identity through its definition which rises through iteration and commentary. As such, a genre

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[59] Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*, 178-79.

[60] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 182-83.

may become protean and absorb its neighboring genres, and may come to be viewed as self-transcending and self-originating. The argument that literature has a special quality as a superior discourse model must contend with an inescapable heterodoxy. If philosophical writing tries to resist fiction, rhetoric, and trope (as Nietzsche does not), literature, as it is normatively defined, admits these aspects. The problem, however, is that the marginalized aspects of fiction, trope, and rhetoric are not easily defined. One would need to clearly distinguish fiction from nonfiction, and define the direct and indirect. The *thematics of originality*, then, become a position from which to deconstruct the trope of *metalepsis* and the mode of the sublime as concerns of phenomenology and negativity. What becomes significant is the inscription of ideology in works not simply as themes or "preoccupations" but as complex relations between literary forms and aesthetics and cultural matrices. What begins with questions of whether certain thematic questions may be deemed (un)reasonable by a discipline, may also *open up to fundamental questions* about language, organization, and experience and the capacity of texts to exhibit their meaning.[61]

Organicism

In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant attempts to frame "pure" judgments of taste apart from other sorts of ideas. If these non-cognitive judgments can be categorized as quality, quantity, relation to ends, and modality, then it appears aesthetic judgments are categorically empty. The frame is given to the concept of aesthetic judgment but the content is cognitively indeterminate. The lack of internal content of the aesthetic makes

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[61] Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*, 208.

the concept of the frame extrinsic to the intrinsic negativity of aesthetic cognition.[62] Because aesthetic judgment depends on categorical framing that is at the same time not cognitive the categories are not available to reason but to sense and therefore absent because they are merely categorical and therefore also unavailable to sense. This explains the reason why Kant, in section 14 of the *Critique of Judgement,* terms the frame a *parerga.*[63] The frame is extrinsic yet confining, and at the same time ornamental. The marginal becomes redefined as central even as it is pure marginality. Because the frame is marginal to the aesthetic content and yet is necessary to contain that content it functions as a boundary of a non-cognitive concept (an empty box) that directs its attachment inward rather than outward. The aesthetic frame merely signals the categorical relations of the concept without itself being part of them. In a sense, framing is creative of an aesthetic experience but is not essentially a part of it. It belongs to the content and not the experience of the content. It has a negative relation to the original content that is itself known by aesthetic judgment and not by cognition.

Analogous to Heidegger's concept of temporality, the frame is a relation of negativity with respect to the aesthetic center (temporalization) it creates, and we conceptualize the center aesthetically only because of the frame that is negative to it. This is because "if framing is what creates the aesthetic object, this does not make the frame a determinable entity whose qualities could be isolated, giving us a theory of the literary frame..."[64] The center is a structural originality that arises because it exists in relation to the negativity of the frame. The frame becomes a "disappearing figure," a "marginal

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[62] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 195-97.

[63] Kant, *Philosophical Writings*, 182.

[64] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 197-99.

supplement," and yet is essential for aesthetic judgment. The frame is present yet "unsayable." In Kant's notion of "purposiveness without purpose" the nonchalance that defines ethical disinterestedness, in which an object "does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end" and yet may "be called final simply on account of being only explicable and intelligible for us by virtue of an assumption on our part of a fundamental causality according to ends," it is the negativity of the frame—the end, as it were—that figures the aesthetic object as a free object not bound to external determinants.[65] Beyond all aspects of the aesthetic bound to representation, the medium and material, what remains as a defining characteristic of the aesthetic, is the foundational negativity of the frame.[66] The foundational negativity of the frame, what Kant terms a *parerga* (*parergon* or ornamentation) becomes an "adjunct" rather than an "intrinsic constituent," yet without the frame as an end in itself there could be no causality for exemplification of design.[67]

The frame is the bearer of the trace of negativity that marks the aesthetic. Originality in the structural sense arises in negativity as the trace of origin crosses over, passing the frame into the center. The difference between the center and the extrinsic is marked by a frame. The inner discourse within the frame is defined by the exterior, outer discourse of metacriticism. Metalinguistic discourse, then, originates in the implied metacritical discourse that originates inside the frame.[68] While metalinguistic discourse begins within the frame that situates it, the authority of the discourse demands an external

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[65] Kant, *Philosophical Writings*, 177.

[66] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 198.

[67] Kant, *Philosophical Writings*, 182.

[68] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 198-99.

relation. The external metalinguistic authority depends on the way the internal discourse is folded with its own metalinguistic discourse. The process of enfolding inside and outside in a unified original structure is contested by the skepticism that structure is inherently heterodox and intertextual, even hypertextual; yet to define structure this way begs the question of relations both closer and farther. The closer the relation is between center and margin the more unified and thus the more singular. It is also paradoxical that the very claim of heterodoxy depends on the notion of unity, whether organic or conceptual.

Organic unity, the metaphor of the concept that is *original* in the structural sense, bears a strong kinship to a theological sense of oneness. This ideology is responsible for the hierarchical superiority-claims held historically for Western fine arts, a cluster of notions that rest upon a faith in freedom, beauty, and spirit: Originality, unity and organicism, rather than figures that become evicted or extricated by deconstruction, become problematic figures. Organicism privileges creation—originality as an analogy to nature—by re-naturalizing art, figuring artistic creativity in language invoking organic processes that find a metaphorical home in nature itself. In such a way, mimesis transforms explicit imitation of nature, corresponding between art and nature, to originality that mimics organic processes by troping mimesis with organic metaphors.

Skepticism towards organicism and its related concepts of unity and originality has operated in a system of literary criticism with a relation to theological concepts in the Western tradition. For Kant the "aesthetic" stands apart from nature and is superior to it for the reason that its freedom from determinants is posited to be grounded in "nature" in its transcendental sense. Art stems from free human creativity that can be premised upon

disinterest. Art, in this respect, should not be "mechanical nor mercenary," but free "as if" it were nature itself, and yet paradoxically, undetermined. If Kant could argue that the aesthetic object could be neutral and free of economic and social constraints, Derrida deconstructs such evasions in "Economimesis."[69] Derrida writes that "Pure and free productivity," following Kant's argument, "should resemble that of nature. It does so precisely because, if free and pure, it does not depend on [determinant] natural laws. The less it depends on nature, the more it resembles it."[70]

Derrida addresses the ideological "sequence" or genealogical historicism that subtends Kant's moral subjectivity and artistic autonomy. The upshot of Derrida's claim portends that originality, or specifically romantic originality is motivated by politics and "economimisis." Derrida's synthesis of mimesis and economics as a deconstruction of Kantian aesthetics points to Kant's "system" or *philosopheme* and its Copernican Revolution, which wished to constrain reason to accommodate the Enlightenment. And it is the construction of Kant's critical Idealism itself that resulted in a paradigm shift towards Romantic Theory. Leon Chai shows that the construction of Romantic theories themselves were part of a strategy, or narrative, of negation needed to accommodate revolution and the impact of empiricism and materialism on human morality.[71]

By definition, it seems, Romantic theory was addressing history both aesthetically and politically. Derrida, though, wants to focus on Kant's appeals to economics as they might persuade us regarding his aesthetic system. Kant accomplishes his argument for

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[69] Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis." *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 3–25.

[70] Qtd. in Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 200.

[71] Leon Chai, *Romantic Theory: Forms of Reflexivity in the Revolutionary Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006).

aesthetic autonomy by distinguishing practical from fine art; fine art must be categorically an entelechy, that is, free from mercenary constraints. We are immediately reminded of Plato's cautions towards mimesis in the *Republic.* If mimesis is resituated as a representation of the free imagination, as Coleridge argued, it would no longer be a degenerate copy of a copy in an economic world of dubious means. In Kant's formulation of aesthetics, art transcends nature. Freedom, or the desire for it, compels art to a loftier plane than *techne* or *physis* which are determined by necessity.

We must be careful with the word *nature.* As empirical reality nature is determined by its systems and laws; as an ontological concept Nature is the capacity of human reason to articulate possible freedom: Kant's fine art is the representation of that possible freedom. Bound to nature and technological materialism, human freedom is impossible. Nature, as a concept of reason, enters into a negative economy that strives to do battle with the Enlightenment, a battle symbolized by the French Revolution. Paraphrasing Derrida, the art/nature distinction is anthropologically hierarchical, and it is fine art that represents the delimitation of human freedom. This concept of aesthetic freedom takes on a representational character as a marker for human autonomy—Kant thought all human beings were equally capable of reason—notwithstanding a hierarchy that maps on to an economic order privileging an elite unencumbered by material constraint. The opposition between freedom and want seems, returning to economics, to be metaphorized by the appetite. Fine art is pleasurable just as it is disinterested; whereas commodified art appeals to enjoyment.

Originality as a self-referential and self-presencing process that mimics nature's generative processes that reside in the causal nexus of organic growth has led to the

values that have been embodied within the appeals for organic unity characteristic of New Critical thinking. The supposed enactment of self-creation instilled in the concept of an organic poem, for example, leads to a doctrine of self-containment and a fusion and wholeness of the work as free to itself, a concept analogous to the notion of anthropomorphic individual autonomy. Self-reference, what Cleanth Brooks described as a well-wrought urn, becomes a self-reflexivity that is coextensive with self-knowledge. This sort of self-reflexivity is likened to Kant's *parergon* in the framing of self-referentiality.[72] The logical problem arises in such self-presencing as to whether the aboutness that is promised by self-referentiality can be made simultaneously with the very notion of reference such that signifier and signified are one and the same identity. In terms of parergonality the content and the frame in such a case must be identical. Reading disrupts the claim of self-referentiality since the literary object is transacted through misreading. If a poem's self-referentiality lies to speak truth, we are left with a matter that is undecidable.

The organic metaphor, a misreading of self-referentiality paralleling the sublime, promises an oxymoronic "ontological originality" that in Kantian terms can only function on a transcendental level. The actual basis for organic origination is grounded in natural processes rather than in metaphysical concepts. The ontology of the signifier—the way flowers originate—becomes absorbed into the originality of the signifier—the way words originate. The image, says Paul de Man, "originates with the statement, in the manner suggested by the flower image, and its way of being is determined by the manner in

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[72] Culler, *On Deconstruction,* 201-02.

which it originates."[73] De Man distinguishes between two domains of understanding that describe on one hand that flowers originate due to their essence as natural objects, and poetic language, on the other, whose "intent…is to originate like the flower." The poetic word, since it means to distinguish itself from ordinary language that circulates without any claim of originality, "strives to banish all metaphor, to become entirely literal," by imitating the flower.

Poetic language precludes signs as names and as such, rather, functions in the act of naming, as a moment when the event of language originates a name for an experience. If words originate like flowers then the two concepts can be distinguished by the very analogic juxtaposition. The concepts are dissimilar with respect to identity and appearance, but alike in the way they unfold. The concept of 'flowers' reveals a choice of concept that points to an 'authentic' signifier for a being in nature whose 'highest function' is growth in terms of its 'presence'. The image of the word originating as flower constitutes its imaginative image.

De Man states that "[t]he image is essentially a kinetic process: it does not dwell in a static state where the two terms could be separated and reunited by analysis."[74] The zeugma of word and flower originates with the metaphoric statement, as the literal flower as thing in itself is said to grow spontaneously. The invocation of the metaphoric image "requires that we begin by forgetting all we have previously known about 'words'..." To think in terms of origination, we must forget (by metalepsis) the antecedent idea. Then, de Man suggests, in imagining the signification of the term, we instantiate it with a

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[73] Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

[74] de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism,* 3.

concept that universalizes the particularity of the flower with the universality of growth as an 'animation' of the concept word. "The metaphor is not a combination of two entities or experiences more or less deliberately linked together, but one single and particular experience: that of origination."[75] But originality is conceivable only in terms of difference: "the source springs up because of the need to be somewhere or something else than what is now here." Originality has a 'distancing' effect, and that effect "equates origin with negation and difference."

Concepts originating in consciousness arise from and through negation of foreign concepts, out of alterity. De Man argues that a "beginning implies a negation of permanence, the discontinuity of a death in which an entity relinquishes its specificity and leaves it behind, like an empty shell."[76] Natural objects arise completely from like beings.

All particular flowers and at all times establish an immediate identity with an original Flower, of which they are as many particular emanations. "The original entity, which has to contain an infinity of manifestations of a common essence [as a universal premise], in an infinity of places and at an infinity of moments, is necessarily transcendental.[77] The transcendental nature of the flower must reside in its formal cause rather than its ontology; "origination is inconceivable on the ontological level."[78] We find ourselves, de Man infers, confronted by the "poetic seduction of beginnings contained in the word…" We attempt to support our nostalgia for originality by invoking "the

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[75] de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 4.

[76] de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 4

[77] de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 4-5.

[78] de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 5.

ontological stability of the natural object." Ultimately, in de Man's argument in which mundane nature is made transcendental through nostalgia, and for a nostalgic feeling for originality, a feeling that necessitates the negation of its particularity, forgetting amounts to a decision that appears as a free choice. Emersonian *metalepsis* is founded on that sense of nostalgia for freedom. We shall now turn to the aesthetics of materiality as it intersects transcendent universal concepts associated with Romantic originality, noting that for Kant aesthetic judgment was a synthetic idea rather than a phenomenological one, and that Hegel reversed the disjunction.

Romantic Theory: Aesthetics

Aesthetics refers to a distinction between "the material and the immaterial."[79] Hence it is concerned with and attempts to reconcile the Cartesian subject/object bifurcation ultimately in a unification of the natural and the supernatural by conjoining art and nature, perception and sensation. In the Romantic view of aesthetics, sense and sensibility are joined through the link between imagination and sensation that Keats configured as truth and beauty. Underneath the emerging concept of the aesthetic in eighteenth-century Germany was the association between judgment and freedom on the side of reason, and of the association between taste and originality on the part of the imagination.

Kant's aesthetic view sought a third and middle term between radical subjectivity and the objective understanding. The principle of freedom is synthetic, in that the categorical imperative is universal under a synthetic third term: "The positive concept of freedom furnishes this third cognition, which cannot be, as in the case of physical causes,

[79] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 13.

the nature of the sensuous world, in the concept of which we find conjoined the concepts something as cause in relation to something else as effect."[80] The concept of a rational will stems from the idea of freedom. Kant argues that

> Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles, independently of foreign impulses; consequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being, it must regard itself as free. That is to say, the will of a rational being can be a will of its own only under the idea of freedom, and therefore in a practical point of view such a will must be ascribed to all rational beings.[81]

Such an intersubjective concept among the nineteenth-century European bourgeois was a response to the possibility of universal freedom in the positive sense. The bourgeois public sphere produced a new subjectivity that promised universality in which the subject "like the work of art itself, discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity....The liberated subject is the one who has appropriated the law as the very principle of its own autonomy."[82] Rather than positing an "ought" at the origination of positive freedom as Kant does, Hegel synthesizes the Kantian split between morality and sensuality by uniting contemplation and action through *political experience.* "Reason works out its own mysterious ends through human beings' sensuous self-actualizing activity in the 'real' of *Sittlichkeit* (concrete ethical life) or Objective Spirit."[83]

Eagleton sees a paradox in the aestheticization of the bourgeois individual. "Scientific knowledge of an objective reality is always already grounded in this intuitive pre-givenness of things to the vulnerable perceptive body, in the primordial physicality of

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[80] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 110.

[81] Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, 110-11.

[82] Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 19.

[83] Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 21.

our being-in-the-world."[84] At once transformed from a state of nature through *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel's social realm becomes comprised of autonomous individuals no longer obligated to a supporting giver of rights, but rather becomes a site of self-government. In such a way the bourgeois social sphere produces and reproduces itself as a "universal subject." Whereas for Kant, the aesthetic is an Ideal where judgment requires a natural order available to understanding, which subordinates particulars to universals, where the understanding has the specific requirement of fitting the particular as perceived to universal, for Hegel the universal is a grounded in political materiality.

Hegel's aesthetic theory of form and cultural practice and the relation of aesthetics to the structure of consciousness has been a key concept. M. H. Abrams considered Romantic theory as an expressive theory (as opposed to prior stages of mimesis and pragmatics), and was hence principally concerned with Romantic subjectivity. The contrast between the Enlightenment, which emphasized a semiotics of form, and Romanticism, with its emphasis on expression, required a mediating point. Kant provided the middle term between form and expression by limiting the capacity of the subject to aesthetic judgment, which defines the aesthetic as a synthesis of form and content. Consciousness is dependent on representation and representation defines consciousness. In semiotic terms, the signified, the content, obtains in a synthetic *a priori* relationship with the signifier, form. And the state of the absolute balance between signifier and the signified—the transcendental signified—balance is achieved with the classical and lost with the Romantic. Hegel's romantic theory, then, traces what becomes

[84] Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 18.

the deconstructive and unbalancing problematic of originality by denying history a dialectical synthesis.

Hegel "develops in the *Aesthetics* a thematics and semiotics of modes concerned with *non-identity* of form and content as expressions of an artistic consciousness that can be historically situated."[85] In his *Aesthetics* Hegel sets up three modes of art: the symbolic (ancient), the classic (Renaissance), and the Romantic (modern). Hegel's aesthetic vocabulary draws for materialist, idealist, and semiotic resources. Hegel's forms and modes are the structure through which absolute Spirit reveals itself in materiality and through history. Moreover, Hegel's modal structure acts as a relational basis between interiority and exteriority. As such the modes trace the Idea from its origin (whether in individual or transcendental consciousness) to its manifestation in phenomenality.[86] The modes also distinguish between the ideas of theme (form) and execution (content) in the sense of a processive movement that is understood phenomenologically. Hegel's phenomenological method involves three loci: it seeks to explain what is invariant in consciousness as form; it strives to understand form as movement of the Spirit in its self-understanding; and as a movement, it sees consciousness as understandable through its externalization which reveals itself historically and materially.

Aesthetics is framed in terms of a narrative shape that resembles a quest in search of self-identity that is revealed by objectified form.[87] In his *Theory of the Novel,* Georg

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[85] Tilottama Rajan, "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics." In *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer, 155–178 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 159.

[86] Rajan, "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics," 159- 164.

[87] Rajan, "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics," 164.

Lukács suggested that "[i]t is not absence of suffering, not security of being [that impels the soul towards negativity]…it is the adequacy of deeds to the soul's inner demand for greatness, for unfolding, for wholeness."[88] (30). Following Lukács, art is defined, through the allegory—*the parergon*—of the epic subject, as the search for, and the revelation of, Idea through content. Content is defined in terms of the relations between meaning and shape, which indicates that content appears in a contingent relation to form. These relations vary in history in a series of narrative stages. If meaning and shape appear in a harmonious relation of symmetry, then identity of the Idea is present: symmetry between form and content indicates completeness and presence. When the form and content, the outside and the inside are revealed to be asymmetrical, the result is an absence of the Idea to consciousness. Thus the asymmetry of meaning and shape, content and form becomes over-determined, and the Identity of the Idea becomes indeterminate.

Symbolic art shows its asymmetry in terms of an imbalance where self-consciousness is not revealed with respect to form. There is a deficiency of meaning and an excess of shape. Romantic art reverses the pattern, where self-consciousness is predominant and external form lacks the capacity to contain the Idea. Thus the classical phase of art represents the standard of an "adequate embodiment of the Idea." Tilottama Rajan notes that "the thing-in-itself or 'Idea' can be known only as it appears in phenomena and *is* nothing other than its appearances."[89] Rajan implies that in Hegel's Classical world phenomena and *noumena* were in balance. For Hegel the goal of art is a unity between meaning and shape, and when the standard of adequation is not present

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[88] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 30.

[89] Rajan, "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics."159.

then art is seen as dis-integrated. Integration of meaning and shape, then, is a unity, or closure, where both form and content are equally transcendent. In the middle phase of Hegel's historical aesthetic movement, only the Classical form becomes a moment of "pure" presence, a presence that becomes deconstructed through the over-determination of Idea by the multiplicity of *noumena*..

The larger scale historical movement beginning with symbolic art is characterized by a moment of negativity when the symbolic is deficient in containing the Idea, which transcends the symbolic through negation. Thus negation results in a balance between shape and meaning, but as consciousness exceeds shape another negation occurs which brings about a deficiency of shape to contain meaning. History, then, is expressed as the growth of meaning with respect to reality. This negative movement alludes to a phenomenological sense of negativity that can be stated in terms of a tendency towards subversion of aesthetics itself. This phenomenological structure is both semiotic, in its foregrounding of relations between signified and signifier, and expressive, as in the aesthetic conditions in which the Idea in consciousness becomes disclosed through creativity.

The *Aesthetics* presents two facets of discontendedness that undermine its own logocentricity, a discontentedness which seeks to resolve itself in the Idea of its own adequation. In Hegel's narrative the symbol that represents ancient art becomes iterative and reappears in inverted form in the late stage of the romantic. As a paradigm the symbolic/romantic structure produces a chiasmus where the Idea appears and disappears at the fleeting moment of the crossing of the two strands. In that structure the Idea remains indeterminate and absent due to the inverted asymmetries. The problem at work

here resembles the originality paradox in that an originating structure returns but in mutated form such that originality as a sign of closure is disrupted.[90] Another problem arising in romantic aesthetics concerns the instability of the classical mode that is self-dialectical. Conceived as a strand that at its terminal ends exists as an imbalance, the presence of instability shifts to an absence of stability at the center since the centeredness is unsustainable. Completion is impossible since the classical dissolves into the Romantic. The illusion of synthesis dissolves into futural asymmetry. The failure of the Classical to resolve itself amounts to a moment of Romantic irony, where the magnitude of the Idea, as compared to form, promises development but effectively becomes self-cancelling by destroying closure, and as a result art, which is promised an apotheosis, is negated in and by its own originality. Absence is imanent and originating despite a desire for centeredness that also takes the name originality. In this framework the Romantic becomes the incomprehensible *sublime* moment of Western history.

Romantic Theory: Temporality

The problematic of *temporality,* as we shall see momentarily, becomes a key matter in the relation of originality to Romantic theory. Originality is fundamentally an issue of temporality as it appears in space. The phenomenology of temporal experience becomes a difference in relation other than that of the relation between the artist and the cultural matrix. That difference in relation obtains in the distinction between possibility and probability. Whereas the latter assumes a diachronic movement the temporality of phenomenology is structural in a synchronic sense, and is thus spatial in concept. *During the period of the emergence of the concept of Romantic originality, the idea of self-*

[90] Rajan, "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics,"169-170.

origination, as we have seen, is coextensive with the notion of subject, the axis point between nature and art. Through art, the temporal relation between subject and object becomes reversible (transumption or *matalepsis*), and the linguistic paradox (generative originality) that presupposes temporal origins, shifts to a phenomenological paradox (structural originality), which appears in terms of *hypsos,* or height (as a spatial idea). Structural originality figures a relation characteristic of the concept of the sublime. Through art and the movement of the sublime the subject re-originates the self through a reversal of nature and art in the temporal order, a reversal conceived as a trope. The movement, or spatial metaphor, acts as the axis point at which generative originality converts to structural originality.

Generative originality, conceived in terms of temporal relations to past and future, is essentially a decentered concept searching in time for a center to signify it. Structural originality acts as an "organizing principle" in the structural relations of an event. In his essay "The Literary Self as Origin: The Work of Georges Poulet" (1970), Paul de Man articulates the difference between generative and structural originality from the point of view of whether our conception of originality is centered or decentered, and whether we conceive of originality in terms of space or time:

> Greater difficulties arise from the need to define the point of departure as center as well as origin. As its name indicates, it can function as a temporal origin, as the point before which no previous moment exists that, with regard to the work, has to be taken into account. In temporal terms therefore, the point of departure is a point entirely oriented toward the future and separated from the past. On the other hand, when it acts as a center, it no longer functions as a genetic but as a structural and organizing principle. Since the center organizes a substance that can have a temporal dimension…, it serves as a co-ordinating point of reference for events that do not coincide in time. This can mean that the center permits a link between past and future, thereby implying the active and constitutive intervention of the past. In temporal terms, a center cannot at the same time also be an origin, a source. The problem does not exist in the same manner in space, where one can

> conceive of a center that could also, as in the case of the Cartesian axes of analytical geometry, be an origin. But then the origin is a purely formal concept devoid of generative power, a mere point of reference rather than a point of departure. "Source" and "center" are by no means *a priori* identical. A very productive tension can develop between them.[91]

Leon Chai, in his *Romantic Theory,* considers the narrative pattern that is a *leitmotif* of the Romantic sublime as a movement. As a spatial metaphor, embodied under the concept structural originality, Romantic theory alerts us to the paradigm of classical and romantic music where sections of form are divided into movements and moments. Chai notes that the basic narrative pattern is "one of extension and consequent return." We shall see that the spatial organization of this metaphor maps onto the Hegelian dialectic culminating in the negativity and "movement of return."[92]

In describing the "Napoleonic Curve" that Hegel witnessed at the Battle of Jena, Chai describes the movement of return in terms that parallel the Romantic sublime. Chai notes that the determined effect of this cycle presupposes that the return will be inevitable. There is a basic truth in this faith, a sort of physical property, an absolute value having to do with proportions of mass, force, and weight. Once the rupture occurs equilibrium is no longer sustainable and coherence falters. In turn this rupture results in a sublimation of the moment into the larger developmental principle that is driven by physics. Part of that developmental process is that the ultimate rupture is forestalled in a sequence of back and forth motions that bring about psychological expectations and erasures. This looping formula emerges from a single spatial point and moves outward in a spiraling curve through its negativity, into its other, and then potentially returns into

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[91] Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight*. 2nd ed., Revised (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 82.

[92] Chai, *Romantic Theory,* 58.

itself at a higher stage. We have seen that in a phenomenological reading of Hegel's *Aesthetics,* which maps the movement of return onto a three-stage historical development of art, in the final Romantic stage the movement from form into content inverts the parergonal centering of the aesthetic by overwhelming it, in a Napoleonic-like curve, with materiality. It is that curve that brings about the collapse of Romantic synecdoche and drives a metaleptic revision of Romantic thought.

Adherents of Romantic originality "positive romantics" such as Wordsworth and Coleridge assumed intuitive reason to arise through the *translucence* of spirit, but Edward Young provides a model more closely related to *sublation,* where supervention of an antecedent occurs through negativity.[93] As Hegel suggests, "this ambiguous supersession [sublation, *aufgehen*] of its ambiguous otherness is equally an ambiguous return into itself...through the supersession, it receives back its own self, because by superseding its otherness, it again becomes equal to itself."[94] The negativity of structural originality, in other words, is inherently self-reflexive. Young's trope here is that of *metalepsis* since he is able to simultaneously originate and reverse cause and effect. The original benefactor (the other for the subject in Hegel's terms) is the prior and original precursor that is subsumed through the negativity of the structure as invented by the subject and becomes translated forward as an after effect of the trope: the original benefactor (in Young's

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[93] In his *Statesman's Manual* Coleridge writes: "An allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects to the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a symbol…is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the special in the individual, or of the universal in the general; above all by the *translucence of the eternal* through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative." *Portable Coleridge*, 388 (my italics).

[94] G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A.V Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111.

terms), is sublated through negativity, returns for the subject as an effect of an "originating impulse," which is also metaphorically conceived as a self-emerging likeness to an organic being, a being that is autogenerative. That analogy underscores the overdetermined sense of the term "genius" during the Romantic era. This *metaleptic* figure becomes the dominant trope of negative originality as it is structured through the Romantic sublime, the movement into negativity by the consciousness of the self that becomes the central concern of aesthetic phenomenology.

We recall that in the *Critique of Judgement* Kant says that "*Genius* is the talent (natural endowment) which gives rule to art. Since talent, as an innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to nature, we may put it this way: *Genius* is the innate mental aptitude (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives rule to art."[95] It is Kant's italicized "through which" that signals that structural originality becomes a phenomenological concern. And that concern emerges through Kant's concept of freedom, a close relation to his concepts of originality and universality. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Judgement* Kant shows that in the absence of a positive ground for choice, freedom is conceptually a negative idea; that is, consciousness remains unaware of the relationship between reason and determinism.[96] Because of the circularity of the concept of freedom in Kant, the inherent negativity of the concept parallels that of

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[95] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 224.

[96] In Section Three of the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that "As will is a kind of causality of living beings so far as they are rational, freedom would be that property of this causality by which it can be effective independently of foreign causes determining it, just as natural necessity is the property of the causality of all irrational beings by which they are determined in their activity by the influence of foreign causes ….The preceding definition of freedom is negative and therefore affords no insight into its essence." Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings,* 109.

the temporality paradox.[97] At any given point in time we are temporally both cause and effect. Moreover, in his discussion of the concept of genius, Kant shows that "nature in the individual (and by virtue of the harmony of his faculties) must give the rule to art."[98] Moreover, Kant holds that art "must not have the appearance of being intentional" and in fact the author "does not himself know how the ideas" for his work must unconsciously

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[97] Terry P. Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 59-62. The "essence" of freedom in a positive sense is explicated by Terry Pinkard as a "Kantian Paradox." Kant speaks of positive freedom (the Kantian paradox) in subjunctive mood: "[W]e ought to detach ourselves, i.e., regard ourselves as free in acting and yet as subject to certain laws, in order to find a worth merely on our person which would compensate for the loss of everything which makes our situation desirable." "There is a kind of circle here from which it seems there is no escape. We assume that we are free in the order of efficient causes so that we can conceive of ourselves as subject to moral laws in the order of ends. And when we think of ourselves as subject to these laws because we have ascribed freedom of the will to ourselves. This is circular because freedom and self-legislation of the will are both autonomy and thus are reciprocal concepts, and for that reason one of them cannot be used to explain the other and to furnish a ground for it" see also Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, 112-13.

[98] Kant maintains that "every art presupposes rules which are laid down as the foundation which first enables a product, if it is to be called one of art, to be represented as possible. The concept of fine art, however, does not permit of the judgement upon the beauty of its product being derived from any rule that has a *concept* for its determining ground, and that depends, consequently, on a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Consequently fine art cannot of its own self excogitate the rule according to which it is to effectuate its product. But since, for all that, a product can never be called art unless there is a preceding rule, it follows that nature in the individual (and by virtue of the harmony of his facilities) must give the rule to art, i.e., fine art is only possible as a product of genius." Further: "From this it may be seen that genius (1) is a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule; and that consequently *originality* must be its primary property. (2) Since there may also be original nonsense, its products must at the same time be models, i.e. be *exemplary;* and, consequently, though not themselves derived from imitation, they must serve that purpose for others, i.e. as a standard or rule of estimating. (3) It cannot indicate scientifically how it brings about its product, but rather gives the rule as *nature*. Hence, where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not himself know how the *ideas* for it have entered into his head, nor has he it in his power to invent the like at his pleasure, or methodically, and communicate the same to others in such precepts as would put them in a position to produce similar products. (Hence, presumably, our word *Genie* is derived from genius, as the peculiar guardian and guiding spirit given to a man at his birth, by the inspiration of which those original idea were obtained.) Nature prescribes the rule through genius not to science but to art, and this also only in so far as it is to be fine art." Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings,* 224-25.

"have entered into his head."[99] Coleridge, like Kant, stated in 1818 that genius partakes of an "unconscious activity" and that very activity is cause of the genius. *It is the unconsciousness of genius that leads to the disruption of reason in the Romantic sublime.* And in disruption is the seed of negation.

In the nineteenth century, the concepts of freedom, the self, and nostalgia for antiquity were dominant tropes. All were brought under the rubric of Nature. Friedrich Schlegel was concerned with Romantic irony and the metaphysical dialectic that the artist maintains with culture.[100] For Schlegel, poetry is the figure that signals the paradoxical (and ironic) figure of the temporal relation between nature and freedom. For Kant and his Romantic followers from Schelling to Coleridge it is the movement into the self through a negativity vis-à-vis nature that exhibits originality in temporality via the sublime. The Romantic sublime is fundamentally a concept of aesthetic materiality since its twin forces, the mathematical and dynamical sublime forces as analyzed by Kant, are inherently temporal. If the Romantic sublime is structured by temporality, its phenomenology resides in the cultural matrix.

Negative originality sees culture as the determining ground of nature.[101] According to Brian O'Connor, Adorno follows Hegel's idea of experience in the

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[99] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 167-69.

[100] In Fragment No. 42, Schlegel remarks: "Philosophy is the real homeland of irony, which one would like to define as logical beauty: for wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues—and is not simply confined into rigid systems—there irony should be asked for and provided … Only poetry can reach the heights of philosophy …" Friedrich Schlegel, "Critical Fragments." In *Classic and Romanic German Aesthetics,* 2003, 241 (239–245).

[101] For Adorno: "The artistic subject as such is social, not private …The productive artist always relates to his own immediacy in part negatively, which means he is unconsciously obeying a social universal: as he improves and corrects his work, a collective subject is looking over his shoulders, one that is badly in need of improvement. The notion of artistic objectivity goes hand in hand with social emancipation, the latter being a situation where something frees

Introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit.*[102] Adorno's assertion that "diremption" becomes the attribute of the cultural matrix into which negative originality is instantiated. Hegel's notion of consciousness seeks to understand the world as it is filtered through the mind and its "presuppositions." Consciousness is dynamic in its approach to objectivity in light of anthropology. Consciousness reacts dynamically to contradictions that demand a re-evaluation of assumptions about the world. Consciousness is transformed when its criterion for understanding fails to meet the demands of knowing.

The movement of transformation is inherently a *negative motion* from static and impoverished criteria to new forms of understanding, which results in what Adorno terms a "determinate negation." In his *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno argues that

> Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving towards a total-exchange society where everything is for-other. This social deviance of art is the determinate negation of a determinate society. To be sure, the rejection of society that we see reflected in the sublimation of autonomous art through the law of form, also lends itself to ideological abuse: art's distance from this horrifying society also betrays an attitude of non-intervention. It must be kept in mind that society is not co-extensive with ideology. Any society is more than sheer negativity to be indicted by the aesthetic law of form; even in its most objectionable shape, society is still capable of producing and reproducing human life. Art has had to take this aspect (no less than that of its critical task) into account . . . art has no way of separating affirmation and critique intentionally.[103]

The inertia of consciousness is an irrational condition and explains conformity of the self to social forces that destroy individuality. Negation, while alienating the self from

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itself on its own stream from social convention and control. Works of art cannot rest content with such vague and abstract universality as is typical of classicism. They depend on *diremption,* and that means that the concrete historical situation, art's other, is the condition. Their social truth depends on whether or not they open themselves to that concrete content, making it their own through assimilation. Their law of form for its part does not smooth over the cleavage, but concerns itself with how to shape it." Theodore Adorno, *The Adorno Reader,* ed. Brian O'Conner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 248.

[102] Adorno, *The Adorno Reader,* 11-13.

[103] Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*, 242.

conformity, produces a release from a state of consciousness in contradiction with itself, or false consciousness. Negation strives for more “effective” ways of knowing, where effect is a criterion for the correspondence of object to concept. The movement towards a more effective consciousness is contradicted by an inertia that prevents the return to a transformed dynamic consciousness. If Hegel and Emerson would hold experience as “irrevocable,” Adorno considers “experience” as coextensive with self-awareness of constraining contradictions.

The Romantic Sublime

As a “moment” the “sublime” event has a temporal structure; its “temporality is in the last analysis fictional or merely operative.”[104] In this sense temporality is structural. The Sublime becomes a metaphor for the power of greatness—in the sense of power or magnitude—stemming from the source of the mind. It is important to recall that Lockean materialism located reality in the object, resulting in a skeptical view of metaphysics. The sublime offered a recovery through the negation of mechanistic thinking, ironically by overpowering the imagination. Although, the tendency toward ontological skepticism in the eighteenth century oriented the perceiver towards the object, the subjectivity of the natural sublime called attention to the “darker implications” of Lockean philosophy of mind.

This concern about the dark implications of the sublime will return in the discussion of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville below. For these authors the sublime results in the unattainability of the transcendental object. Weiskel suggests that “[in] the sublime, a relation to the object—the negative relation of unattainability—becomes the signifier in

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[104] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 23.

the aesthetic order of meaning." This negative relation between subject and object presents the possibility through temporality for an overcoming of incomprehensibility, and points to the primary struggle for aesthetic order in Melville's *Moby-Dick.* Furthermore, and perhaps of ultimate significance in linking Romantic originality to negative originality in terms of semiotic function, we find that the structure of the negative sublime creates the "movement of return" that operates through the rhetorical trope of *metalepsis,* the master trope of negative originality.

The Romantic sublime implants into the mind a moment that produces a negation of the imagination. The sublime structure arises, perhaps—at least in terms familiar to Romanticism in general—where "God withdraws from an immediate participation in the experience of men . . . the problematic sublime is pervaded by the nostalgia and the uncertainty of minds involuntarily secular—minds whose primary experience is shaped by secondary causes."[105] Whereas beauty, the binary opposition to the sublime, is a humanistic quality, the sublime is by its definition "pure daemon"; as we shall see with Edgar Allan Poe, it is the intrusion of death into the domain of beauty. The sublime instantiates nature (*physis*) through language, but the sublime also suggests the possibility of transcendence. We shall see that possibility as the subtext in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun,* where Miriam and Donatello's crime brings about the possibility of moral transformation.

In the Romantic sublime, Longinus's rhetorical sublime, structured by the power of "great writing" is recast as a *natural* sublime that imposes a "terrible" power upon the self, and the transcendental movement comes about through an overcoming of that

[105] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 3-4.

feeling. Longinus's sublime provides the idea of *hypsos,* or height, a spatial and synchronic "metaphor presiding over illusions endemic to reading: we are uplifted as if instinctively, and our proud flight exalts our soul *as though we had created* what we merely heard."[106] For Weiskel, as in the terms negativity and originality, our primary concern here, is that the "[s]ublime is one of those terms like inspiration, vision, apocalypse, imagination, and daemonic--and, of course, transcendence—whose continual sublimation into metaphor makes thought possible by enabling us to grasp experience in terms sanctioned by the past." Curiously, as it is with the oxymoronic nature of negative originality, we find that "[b]ehind each act of intellectual metaphor is an imitation, and identification or *mimesis.*" Longinus's notion of *hypsos* calls forth the idea, beyond rhetoric and persuasion, of a "power struggle," a way language overwhelms another, a means of usurpation. The poet, as a recipient of language, enters a defensive (negative) relation to the past, whose literary power becomes a burden on individuality to overthrow the past through originality.[107]

The "aesthetic of the beautiful," as the core principle of positive romanticism, de-emphasized the dualism which structures the sublime by uniting imagination and reason in a moral imperative. The natural sublime, though, stressed the dualism between nature and the self by delimiting the imagination. The dualism between an aesthetic of beauty based on judgment, and the collapse of the imagination in the movement of the sublime by overwhelming the Self, corresponds to the intrinsic difference between Romantic notions of a positive versus a negative originality. The sublime represents to consciousness an "original moment" structured around a movement of negation that

[106] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 4.

[107] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 5.

became identified with Hegelian dialectical movement. The movement can be conceived as a temporal and syntagmatic structure, a structure that is a fiction serving to explain the way consciousness reacts to the phenomena of psychological defense.

We may identify the 'metaphorical sublime' as the mode of the sublime in which the absence of determinate meaning becomes significant, since it resolves the breakdown of discourse by substitution. This is, properly, the natural or "Kantian sublime."[108] It is characterized by associationist metaphors, which through substitution act as though the semiotic signs are the cause rather than effects of the sublime. We suspect this reversal since the sublime moment is resolved in substitution, but this feeling overlooks the actual cause of the sublime, which lies deeper in psychology. In this way the metaphorical sublime becomes hermeneutical in that it seeks a "map of misreading." The substitution of cause for effect produces the trope of *metalepsis,* or transumption, the central figure in Bloom's analysis of the "American Sublime." For Bloom, as we shall recapitulate, Emerson's American Sublime constructs the "American Unconscious."[109]

The metonymical sublime, differently, tries to resolve the excess of meaning in the second stage by revising the syntagmatic chain so that the problematic components are displaced or elided.[110] Where the metaphorical sublime tends toward verticality, the metonymical sublime tends toward linearity. Anaphora is a good example of the metonymical sublime; by repetition the mind recovers its power over the signifier and can assert the signified. In the metonymical sublime we shift from structural to generative originality. In both cases something is substituted for another thing, whether repressed or

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[108] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, 28.

[109] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance, 6.*

[110] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 28-29.

limited. Substitution occurs as a “transformation from the unconscious to consciousness just as the movement from poetic sublimation to poetic introjection (repression) or projection (sublimation) restores or returns representations to the unconscious.”[111] Limitation doesn’t return representation to the unconscious, whereas sublimation does. Repression is a negative originality as opposed to sublimation, which amounts to a fully articulated (and likely impossible) “movement of return.”

Here we have the description of a metaphysical structure familiar to us through Hegel—the Hegelian dialectical triad. Hegel states that “[t]he dialectical moment is the self-suspension of such determinations [as given to the Kantian understanding] and their transition into an opposing form.”[112] Hegel expresses his dialectical triadic concept as follows: “As simple self-relation it is a universal and in this universality the *negativity* that constituted its dialectic and mediation has collapsed again into *simple determinateness,* which can again be a beginning.”[113] Hegel considers the second term of the dialectical movement the *turning point* of subjective self-reflection. Metaphysically speaking it is the point at which negative originality arises. Hegel states that

> [a]s the first premise is the moment of *universality* and *communication,* so the second is characterized by *singularity,* which initially stands to its other in a relation of exclusion, independence, and diversity. The negative appears as the *mediator*, since it includes both itself and the immediate whose negation it is.[114]

As the movement of return ensues from the universal simple substance into its singular self-reflection, its subjectivity arises in negative originality. Hegel continues, stating that

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[111] Bloom, “Introduction.” In *The American Renaissance, 5.*

[112] Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, 57.

[113] Hegel, *Hegel Selections*, 255.

[114] Hegel, *Hegel Selections*, 254.

> for on this subjectivity alone rests the merging of the opposition between concept and reality, and the unity that is truth.—The *second* negative, the negative of the negative, at which we have arrived, is this merging of contradiction, but just as little [this synthesis] as the contradiction is it *an act of external reflection,* but rather the *innermost, most objective factor* of life and spirit, which results in a *subject, person, free being*.—The *self-relation of the negative* is to be regarded as the second premise of the whole syllogism. If the terms *analytical* and *synthetical* are employed in their opposition, the first premise may be regarded as the analytical moment, for in it the immediate stands in *immediate* relationship to its other, and hence passes over, or rather has passed over, into it.[115]

Hegel's formal syllogism introduces negative originality as the minor premise. Moreover, this three-part structure maps onto the structure of the Romantic sublime that presents to consciousness an element beyond the scope of the imagination, and the recovery of that displacement through intuitive reason. In other words, the sublime posits the minor premise as irrational and invokes intuition to reconnect reason and imagination.

For a supernatural being to exist in the Lockean empirical system it must belong to the natural world, and metaphors of that relation result in the ideas of infinity and immensity. These ideas are concurrent with the emergence of modern astronomy. During the post-Enlightenment, a psychology of the affections became associated with physical magnitude, where the subconscious became expressed in terms of the oceanic. Thus the supernatural being became an immanent presence in nature through the nexus of appearance.[116] But Locke's philosophy of mind also had the effect of dislodging the soul from the realm of essentialism, and replaced the spiritual with the material. Simply put, Lockean empiricism places the soul in a fundamental sense of doubt, the soul being neither necessary nor possible as an empirical reality; rather, the soul becomes an absence, a locus of negativity, an abyss, like the unconscious, the soul was soon to be

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[115] Hegel, *Hegel Selections*, 254.

[116] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 14.

viewed as incomprehensible. The soul becomes the circuit of repression and sublimation of psychological forms. The soul, in Kantian terms is reflective rather than constitutive; the soul reflects nature as a metaphorical association. If a sensation is the semiotic signifier, the soul becomes an arbitrary signified. The progress of the natural sublime shifts this semiotic relation that disempowers the soul towards a metonymic relation where the natural signifier points to a vast faculty beneath consciousness, a figure that constitutes its signified under the figure of originality. Originality is thus a syntagmatic function that is eventually expressed by Coleridge as an "esemplastic" chain or a paradigmatic function expressed by Emerson as a "transparent eyeball."

What overcomes Lockean doubt with respect to the soul is a shift from analogy, where there is a *correspondence between the sense perception and the secondary idea* through an agreement of meaning supplied by language as a conventional code, to a broader and expansive supra-correspondent associationism that recognizes the imagination rather than Nature as the constitutive function of meaning.[117] Locke's doubt over the faith in the correspondence between sensational reality and idea is thus negativised to give free play to signification. As a preliminary conclusion it is post-Lockean associationism that provides the structural framework for the negative sublime by universalizing the signified. Through a process of associating through metonymy, universality, and the natural signifier the role of signification expands in magnitude with respect to conventional codes. Sense becomes one end of a part for whole relationship with the universe, and thus the supernatural is restored through Nature. Clearly, under

[117] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 15.

this structure, the sublime is the fundamental function in conceptualizing originality as a post-sensational concept.

The negation implicit in Platonic mimesis, where copies are corruptions of forms, cast a long shadow over the suspicion that language is less an imitation of sense than a substitution.[118] It is that negativising of the *faith in imitation* that gives rise to the affective power of the sublime through the vision of the obscure, or incomprehensible. Passions, said Burke, are aroused by what is uncertain and clouded. Indeterminacy is at the root of incomprehensibility. The sublime, then, helps to signify irrational affective experience, and in turn, its signification creates a code with which to represent it without a form that identifies its imitation.[119] What results for Burke and Kant "is the affective correlative of a semiotic discontinuity in the inexplicable passage between one order of discourse and another."[120] Weiskel remarks that a study of the sublime suggests the "hypothesis" that a means of understanding that discontinuity calls for a semiotic methodology. Weiskel seeks to locate the sublime and the affections in the gap between the sensation and idea uncovered by Locke. The negation of the soul creates a feeling of anxiety involving an awareness of a lack. Burke's notion that the sublime fills a need admits to the possibility of absence in the mind, a striking sense of a "vacancy." Burke argues in "On Ambition" that

> when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind [finds itself] always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates. Hence proceeds what Longinus has observed of that glorifying and sense of inward greatness, that always fills the reader of such

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[118] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 16.

[119] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 17.

[120] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 17.

> passages in poets and orators as sublime; it is what every man must have felt in himself upon such occasions.[121]

Weiskel notices that the relationship between the will and the soul is essentially economic. Lockean materialism subverts the possibility of autonomy by preferencing sensation; the mind is simply *tabula rasa*. The vacancy, by means of the sublime, encounters a sense of anxiety which produces the need to fill the lack of being by means of repression of sublimation. The impact of Lockean sensationalism results in a vagueness in the idea of freedom, that the will was inert. Hence the feeling of disruption, a lack that becomes an awareness of itself through anxiety, which in turn produces a desire for filling the absence by means of the "affective correlative."[122] As the will strives to make itself autonomous through an act of freedom it becomes aware of its emptiness. The lack of substance in the will presents itself as desire.

The sublime, then, contravenes reason by a movement of return that eventuates a state of negativity that defies synthesis. Extempore originality becomes overwhelmed by sublime feeling. Kant's version of the sublime divides between the mathematical and the dynamical. The mathematical sublime is understood as the effect of magnitude (e.g., infinity) on the imagination; whereas, the dynamical sublime rests on the grounds of desire and power. Kant regards the sublime, whether mathematical or dynamical, as conditions of the subject (and its destiny) rather than the phenomenal object.[123] The sublime arises for Kant when the subject substitutes concern for humanity with an attention towards the object. While Kant's aesthetic judgment regards the sublime as a

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[121] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46-47.

[122] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 18.

[123] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 38.

subjective response, it is an *a priori* function because it is universal. This distinction separates Kant's transcendental aesthetics from previous empirical theories (Locke, Burke). The subjective sublime remains a final cause for the individual subject even as it is determined and therefore universal. For Kant, the mathematical sublime obtains when "extreme magnitude challenges the imagination (as the faculty of sensible representation) to an extraordinary effort."[124] The mathematical sublime ensues when 'apprehension', an intuition, realizes the magnitude presented to the imagination. In a temporal sequence of intuitions, apprehension normatively proceeds towards comprehension, or a synthetic intuition of the whole magnitude, but imagination stalls as comprehension reaches its limit. Imagination, then, begins to fragment, and what remains is an abyss, or "collapse of comprehension." Reason, then, must recognize a negation of imagination, and reason provides instead the idea of the supersensible and the subject admits that its destiny, too, is in negativity.

For Kant, "the sublime in nature is only negative…it is a feeling of imagination by its own act depriving itself of its freedom by receiving a final determination in accordance with a law other than that of its empirical employment."[125] Further, according to Kant, the subject experiences in the sublime a "power greater than that which it sacrifices. But the ground of this is concealed from it, and in its place it feels sacrifice or deprivation, as well as its cause, to which it has been subjected."[126] The sublime creates a negation of the imagination as apprehension fails to gain comprehension, yet reason is

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[124] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 39.

[125] Qtd. in, Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime, 39.* See also, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings,* 202-03.

[126] Qtd. in, Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime, 39.* See also, *"Analytic of the Sublime," in Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings,* 201-03.

forced to accept this negation. Reason must partition imagination. Weiskel notes that in this "alienation between imagination and reason" a feeling of power is gained through the absence of intuition. Even as reason feels a sense of power as it grasps what imagination lacks, that power arises in a feeling for negation. That feeling of power originates in the sublime as a negative originality. Negative originality, then, arises in the imagination depriving itself of freedom from a law beyond sense intuition. The law results from non-identity; reason must look to the supersensible for power, and freedom is deferred since its law is incomprehensible.

Weiskel notices that the negative sublime begins in a similarity disorder where denotative meaning is understood but metaphorical meaning eludes understanding.[127] In such a case the idea of allegory's dark conceits supposes a meaning beyond comprehension.[128] Meaning is often cast as veiled.[129] The continuity *disorder* that

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[127] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics" and "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Language and Literature,* ed. Kystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 62-120. Here we have reference to Roman Jakobson's correlation between aphasia and discourse. Jakobson notes that a 'similarity disorder' marks an incapacity to think metaphorically (substitute terms in a syntagmatic chain of discourse). In 'contiguity disorder' the subject fails to create syntagmatic chains. The relation between similarity disorder and the metaphorical sublime, and between contiguity disorder and the metonymical sublime, are clear. Recovery of the sublime moment or movement seems to take one or the other track of aphasia correction.

[128] Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1959), 3-4. The notion of denotative meaning (Coleridge's discursive reason) associates with the general demotion of allegory in Romantic thought, despite its reappearance in the American Romance genre. I suggest that the Romantic project as a whole is to invoke the sublime as a negation of contiguity. That is the trope of metalepsis associated with the American sublime. Edwin Honig points out that the "Romantics were the first to exploit theoretical distinctions between allegory and symbolism as part of a larger campaign they fought to disentangle themselves from all rationalistic predeterminations."

[129] Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*. 2nd Edition, Revised. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 192-94.For Paul de Man, Coleridge's Transcendentalism undermines the structural differences between symbol and allegory since the organicism of Nature is cast back to an originary absolute. Like Emerson's "transparent eyeball" the symbol becomes a window for the mind to access the spirit; allegory, like fancy, assembles representations from the particular. The influence of Coleridge's 'translucence' becomes for later writers 'synthesis,' in that perception obtains at the moment of sensation. De Man suggests that rather than look into the

disrupts normative syntactic order is spoken of as a positive sublime since a re-ordering of syntax suggests more subjective control. Weiskel considers the *negative sublime* a problem of effect and the positive sublime, a problem for creativity, but he also reminds us that the overlap is too vague to make the poet/reader binary meaningful.[130] We should remind ourselves that Kant's main objective in his notion of pure reason is to show the limits of reason constrained by understanding (aided by sense intuitions as they are given by imagination). Without the imagination to ground reason, reason becomes isolated, negating what originates in the world. The sublime raises a feeling of power in reason that it alone can restore to the imagination: it provides to consciousness ideas out of itself rather than in the world.

Reason is thus creative, but again, a mode of negative originality, in that origination is fabricated through a collapse of comprehension. If we regard the sublime moment as a semiological event we can see that the mental stasis that precedes the apprehension of the sublime acts as a conventional basis for signification. As signifiers collapse in the moment of defeat of the imagination all signifieds are negated; that is, meaning that is suggested or promised evaporates until the power of reason begins to recover the abyss of meaning by paradigmatic or syntagmatic substitution. Reason calls upon itself to provide meaning, and the act of negative originality involves a dynamic action where signifieds are both repressed and sublimated. In the restoration of meaning,

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relationship between "mind and nature" or subject and object—relationships internal to the concept of romanticism—an approach to romanticism as historical change stems from a reorientation of perspective is to look for ways language is figured by an appeal to Nature. Rather than seeking meaning in the veiled signification of nature de Man seeks meaning in the relation between rhetoric and trope.

[130] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 31.

the sublime eventuates a creative solution of meaning through negation. We could define the sign as an instantiation of negative originality.

Rather than view the Kantian sublime in terms of its "idealist metaphysics" Weiskel sees the Kantian sublime as a "psychological" event.[131] Weiskel remarks that "[w]e call an object sublime if the attempt to represent it determines the mind's relation to a transcendent order." An object as represented in the mind, when it exceeds the power of representation, will cause a "collapse" of the representation since the mind lacks the power to present it (such as the idea of infinity). Instead of a representation the mind produces an intuition of the objects as a thing "unattainable." Because the thing is "unconditioned" in that there is no concept available to the understanding, reason becomes aware of a condition of unattainability as a deficit or a negation. As a result of the imagination's inability to assign a representation to the object because of its unconditioned state, the mind becomes immediately aware of the limits of reason through the effect of negation.

The origination of the negative sublime coincides with the disruption of intuitive reason. There is a moment Wordsworth's *The Prelude* VI when the poet realizes that "Our destiny, our being's heart and home, / Is with infinitude, and only there.[132] The disruption of intuitive reason results from the sudden onset of the negative sublime: "Imagination—here the Power so called / Through sad incompetence of human speech— / That awful Power rose from the Mind's abyss / Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps

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[131] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 23.

[132] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth, William. William Wordsworth: The Major Works. Oxford World Classics (*Oxford: Oxford University Press*,* 2000), lines 605-606.

/ At once the lonely Traveller."[133] Negative originality becomes an "unfathered vapour." Wordsworth's *Simplon Pass* episode is illustrative of the desire to ascend to mountain heights yet to encounter a stream that blocks the passage:

> By fortunate chance, / A peasant met us, from whose mouth we learned / That to the Spot which had perplexed us first / We must descend, and there we should find the road, / Which in the stony channel of the Stream / Lay a few steps, and then along its banks, / And that our future course, all plain in sight, / Was downwards, with the current of the Stream.[134]

As Weiskel suggests, "The Romantic sublime was an attempt to revise the meaning of transcendence precisely when the traditional apparatus of sublimation—spiritual, ontological, and (one gathers) psychological and even perceptual—was failing to be exercised or understood."[135]

The economy of desire remains in a state of imbalance; the anxiety of absence always exceeds the ability of sensation or reflection to fill it; thus, we can never know the object through sensation or perception. The soul remains a tautology; subjectivity is bound to itself. It can never know itself through the subjectivity of the object except by its capacity for negative capability. So a reduction of will is the requisite means of understanding the economy of the soul: "Anxiety replaces the will as the principle of individuation."[136]

In his essay "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger discusses the relation of the sublime and its role through anxiety of opening to negativity:

> Such being attuned, in which we 'are' one way or another and which determines us through and through, lets us find ourselves among beings as a whole. The

[133] Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, lines 595-97.

[134] Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, lines 578-86.

[135] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 4.

[136] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 18.

> founding mode of attunement not only reveals beings as a whole in various ways, but this revealing--far from being merely incidental--is also the basic occurrence of our Dasein….Now we have come to share even less in the opinion that the negation of beings as a whole that re revealed to us in mood places us before the nothing. Such a thing could happen in a correspondingly original mood which in the most proper sense of unveiling reveals the nothing….Does such attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human existence?...This can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of anxiety. By this anxiety we do not mean the quite common anxiousness, ultimately reducible to fearfulness, which all too readily comes over us. Anxiety is basically different from fear. We become afraid in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that particular respect. Fear in the face of something is also in each case a fear for something in particular....Striving to rescue himself from this particular thing, he becomes unsure of everything else and completely 'loses his head'….Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a particular calm pervades it. Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of...., but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety is the face of...is always anxiety for..., but not for this or that. The indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it….Anxiety reveals the nothing….[In the sublime] Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the 'is' falls silent. That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of the nothing.[137]

Heidegger is suggesting here that it is the structure of the sublime, through a mode of attunement attributable to the mood of anxiety that permits consciousness to become momentarily aware of the fundamental negativity of being, or Dasein. The essay "What is Metaphysics?"(1929) postulates *nihil* as a transcendental signifier. While in Hegel's view negation was a mode of becoming in a movement of return, a century later Heidegger posited a *nihil originarium* as a horizon of temporality in which the world-structure originates as an "ecstatic happening."[138] Unlike earlier Romantic concepts of originality that unite the particular with the universal as in Coleridge's primary

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[137] Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 89–110. Revised and Expanded (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 100-104.

[138] Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, ed. William James Entwistle and Walter Angus Morison (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

imagination or Hegel's absolute spirit, both eternal concepts, Heidegger's temporality provides a theory of transcendence that is tangential and moves toward a fundamental ontology that is conceivable in the world. Temporality is phenomenological in that it is a mode of consciousness. Heidegger observes that the paradox of Kantian freedom, a spontaneous and disinterested relation to others, parallels time, in that both concepts arise *a priori* to will. Temporality is "primordial" and thus transcends reason and language, and acts as a *tabula rasa.* Reality becomes a temporalization due the awareness of oscillation, as Poe discussed in *Eureka,* and through this awareness temporality projects itself. In Melvillean terms that moment of projection becomes the instant when one may actually strike through the mask.

Yet if temporality is primordial to language the phenomenalization of temporality as temporalization originates in language. Heidegger's concept of presentness holds that communicative language is grounded in expressivity and signification. Robert Hughes notes that for Heidegger language transaction "does not exhaust itself in signifying."[139] Language, in its act of transaction, also discloses Being. Language makes the world present. Entities become revealed through language. Presentness has both general and particular aspects. Language discloses Being to phenomenal subjects. From the standpoint of the particular, then, originality is disclosed from it negativity through presentness. For Heidegger, says Hughes, poetry is the form of language most capable of disclosing Being. By poetry, Hughes clarifies, Heidegger means language as an art that

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[139] Robert Hughes, *Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Beyond of Language* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 74-77.

pursues truth.[140] Artistic language, which might include either prose or verse, is contrasted with "everyday" language. Like a dead metaphor, everyday language is a depleted form of poetics. Poetics alone has the power to disclose Being in its originality.

Hughes notices that Heidegger and Emerson share the view that everyday language originates in poetic language. Hughes summarizes that "the poetic word—language in all its original brilliance and power—calls forth the world (and the whole of what is) in a way that everyday language, fossilized and long since dead, can no longer do."[141] Hughes further clarifies that "for Emerson and for Heidegger, what is ultimately at stake in the poetic force of the each original word is not an isolated signified or referent, but rather the world that the poetic word summons into the open." Poetry and criticism are thus uniquely empowered to disclose Being through language. This disclosure amounts to an experience of Dasein in a momentary encounter with language, an encounter that temporarily unveils the unsayable. This unconcealment of originality as negativity approaches a redefinition of "truth" from its *apodeictic* and *epideictic* senses as rhetorical persuasion, to an *aletheic* sense of an essential truth.

What remains with presentness and unconcealment—the disclosure that takes place in this model of *nihil originarium*—is that the discernability between original and mimesis is itself premised on metaphysical distinctions. Mimesis and memory are related in that memory is a form of representation. Mimesis, when it is seen from the analogy of memory, rest on its relation to the concept of truth. According to Jonathan Culler, "when truth is conceived as *aletheia,* the unveiling or making present of what has been hidden,

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[140] See: Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 139–212. Revised and Expanded (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993).

[141] Hughes, *Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Beyond of Language*, 77.

then mimesis is the representation necessary to this process, the doubling which enables something to present itself." Yet, "when truth is not *aletheia* but *homoiosis,* adequation or correspondence, then mimesis is the relation between an image or representation and that to which it may truly correspond."[142] The relation between original forms from their representations remains unstable, conceptually; mimetic presentations proliferate such that mimesis weakens compared to an absolute original.

While Heidegger's transcendental concept of temporality suggests an a priori *nihil* originary to Being, its disclosure to beings appears in language, and with language thought enters the domain of mimesis. Mimesis splits into modalities that are essential and inessential. In the unveiling process the essential is retained, whereas in recollection the mimetic representation is no longer valued. Mimesis thus relates to truth on one hand, and imitation, on the other. Imitation becomes a devalued concept in the arts if such arts have recognized this distinction. Imitation implies further imitation and the concept gains weakness due to iteration. If the concept of originality turns to the relation between texts then the concept sets up the deconstructive problem of generative originality. If "the play of mimesis" shifts the concept of originality to a "(non)concept of originary mimesis," the hierarchy maintained between original and mimesis breaks down. Mimetic relations become fundamentally intertextual. "Texts that assert the plentitude of origin, the uniqueness of an original, the dependency of a manifestation or derivation of an imitation, may reveal that the original is already an imitation and that everything begins with reproduction." Texts are both unoriginal and too fully original.

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[142] Culler, *On Deconstruction:,* 186-187. We can define here that *aletheia* corresponds to structural originality, and that *homoiosis* corresponds to generative originality.

The Movement of Return

As a narrative of the psychology of negative originality the temporality of the Romantic sublime describes a three-phase structure. Hegel had employed the term "sublation" (*aufgehen*) to describe the dual process of negation and reflection. Hegel suggests that "self-consciousness…has a double object; one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however *for self-consciousness* has the character of a *negative*"[143] The negativity that defines the second term of the movement of return is posited as a stage where

> Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself…* it has lost itself, for it finds itself an *other* being…it has superseded the other, for it does not see the *other* as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self.[144]

Hegel's first term in the three-part structure of the dialectic is as follows: "Self-consciousness is, to begin with, simple being-for-itself, self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else...it is an individual."[145] In a post-Freudian rendering of the first stage of the movement of the sublime, the late Yale structuralist Thomas Weiskel suggests that the mind (for Hegel, it is unmediated being) originates "in a determinate relation to the object."[146] The impetus in negation is a recognition of the originary self as other. Hegel puts it that the first stage arises when "individuality appears on the scene as an original determinate nature: *original,* for it is implicit; originally *determinate,* for the

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[143] G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 105.

[144] Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111, my emphasis.

[145] Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 113.

[146] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, 23. The post-Freudian characteristics of the sublime have been developed by Harold Bloom. What is significant in both Bloom and Weiskel's work is that negative originality develops in the three-stage sublime "movement," a movement that is rooted in the Hegelian dialectic.

negative moment is present in itself..."[147] At that moment, the relation of mind to object is in a state of equilibrium and is thus preconscious. In structuralist's terms, Weiskel suggests that the movement of return at this stage can be described as "syntagmatic linearity"; the temporality of the mind finds a normative conscious state of comprehension. Representations of ideas to the mind are metonymic in that associations are paradigmatically unitary.

In the movement of the negative sublime, the second phase finds a *disruption* of normative consciousness and a *disjunction* between the object and the imagination. *These two conditions, disruption and disjunction, describe negative originality as they occur in the movement of return.* The imagination is unable to present to the understanding a representation of the object because the object has become incomprehensible due to a psychological block. Thus the syntagmatic continuity of consciousness loses its grip and by means of an obscure intuition that is "unconditioned," reason recognizes a paradigmatic absence of concept. The "affective correlative" results in a sublime state of bewilderment. There results in this moment a "disconcerting disproportion between inner and outer"[148] The relation between mind and object becomes indeterminate. There thus occurs a disjunction between a "residue" of a signified (the presumption of an idea that originated prior to the moment), and its negation (through the discovery in consciousness that there is no signified to attach to the signifier). The "excess" of the object, negativity to consciousness, "cancels the representational efficacy of the mind which can only turn, for its new object, to itself."[149] Weiskel adds that "self-consciousness too, can be prior

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[147] Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 238.

[148] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 23-24.

[149] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 24.

and can force the rupture when the object (or memory) represented is too insignificant (fails to signify)."

The second term of the dialectic is the crucial point in the movement of return. For Hegel negativity is a theory of the movement and development of thought. Hegel recognized that negativity itself might refer not simply to pure negation (contradiction as an intuition) but from ontological concepts where being becomes itself by negative movement.[150] Pure negativity (as contradiction) does provide the truth that contradiction is reciprocating: in reciprocity there is a movement of return. But ontological (negative originality) negation interposes an antithetical and enclosing sequence whereby being returns into itself already transformed and more actualized. Negative originality (in this metaphysical sense) is according to Hegel, "not an original unity" but a "reflection into otherness within oneself."[151] A significant passage from Hegel's *Science of Logic* deserves quoting in full:

> The second term, the *negative* or *mediated*, is further at the same time the *mediating* term…it is the negative *of the positive,* and includes the positive in itself [...] it is the *intrinsically other,* the *other of an other…*it includes *its* own other in itself, and is consequently, *as contradiction,* the *posited dialectic of itself*.—Since the first or immediate term is the concept in itself, it is therefore only *in itself,* the negative, and thus with it the dialectical moment consists in the *difference* which it *in itself* contains being posited in it. The second term, on the contrary, is itself the *determinate, difference* or relationship; hence with it the dialectical moment consists in positing the unity that is contained in it.—If, then, the negative, the determinate, relationship, judgement, and all the terms which come under this second moment of the method do not at once appear on their own account as contradiction and as dialectical, the fault lies solely with the thinking that does not bring the thoughts together. For the material, the *opposed* terms in *one relation,* is already *posited* and at hand for thought. Formal thinking, however, makes identity its law and allows the contradictory content before it to fall away into the sphere of representation, into space and time, where the contradictions are held asunder in juxtaposition and succession and so come

[150] Chai, *Romantic Theory, 68.*

[151] Qtd. In Chai, *Romantic Theory, 68.*

> before consciousness lacking the reciprocal contact. Formal thinking lays down the definite principle on this point that contradiction is unthinkable; but [...] the thinking of contradiction is the essential moment of the concept.[152]

The passage from the second to the third stage of the sublime moment can be characterized as an "instance of *sublimation.*"[153] Weiskel suggests sublimation is both a psychological idea and a chemical analogy, much as Eliot had done in the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The consequence of negative originality is that substance remains itself but within it the self develops through a series of negating moments into a developed (*bildung*) subject as a self-defining actuality. These moments collapse into a circular movement eventuating a return to self in a transformed state. This "labor of the negative" becomes a *bildungsroman,* a *narrative form of the individual*.[154]

Through sublimation a psychological disorder is supplanted by a higher order resolution. In the chemical analogy a solid state is directly transformed into a gas. The transposition of one condition from lower to higher modality seems to be accompanied by an implicit value schema. It is worth considering whether the lower position may be equally valuable. Originality is substantiated at the second stage when the lower order is in effect, and thus it is at that locus when origination happens. "To consider the problem of originality is to find the two kinds of sublimation, the poet's and readers', compounded or superimposed. In the sublime moment the poet will be 'daemonized,' or possessed by a power which seems to be merely mediated by the text or scene he reads"[155]

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[152] Hegel, *Hegel Selections*, 253.

[153] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 31.

[154] Chai, *Romantic Theory,* 69. The narrative form of the individual in the process of the negative sublime becomes the form that negativivity takes as it corresponds to originality.

[155] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 32.

The *recovery of the ego* in the movement of return proceeding to the third stage involves daemonization which involves both a metaphorical substitution of signifier and a metonymical displacement.[156] The free play that was imminent during the second stage becomes sublimated only at the cost of a negation of freedom. Recovery begins in originality but succumbs to self-binding: "Sublimation offers motility to one 'surface,' but it requires submission to a new control."[157] That control arrives as *sublation*.

Hegel describes the third phase of the movement of return as a *sublation* that restores the subject to a state of immediacy. He posits that

> The self-relation of the negative is, therefore, its return into itself; it is immediacy as the sublating of the negative; but immediacy simply and solely as this relation or as *return from a negative*, and hence a self-sublating immediacy. This is posited being or positedness, immediacy purely and simply as *determinateness* or as self-reflecting. This immediacy which is only as *return* of the negative into itself, is that immediacy which constitutes the determinateness of illusory being and which previously seemed to be the starting point of the reflective moment. But this immediacy, instead of being able to form the starting point is, on the contrary, immediacy only as the return or as reflection itself. Reflection therefore is the movement that starts or returns only in so far as the negative has already returned into itself.[158]

The third phase, or the recovery from the sublime moment that arose in stage two of the negative sublime, the state of incomprehensibility, results not in unmediated being in the pure sense it held in stage one of objective individuality, but a resulting state of "illusory being," or a reflective state that is mediated as a result of original negativity. In other words, consciousness has spiraled beyond its originary state as a result of

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[156] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95-96. For Bloom, "creative anxiety" involves a movement of return that structures his six revisionary ratios as a movement of dialectical binary relations: "*clinamen/tessera; kenosis/daemonization; askesis/apophrades.*" The movement ensues in a state of "limitation," which proceeds through a moment of "substitution," and resolves itself in "representation."

[157] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 32.

[158] Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 394-402.

negativity. Negative originality operates "in itself" and "for itself." This movement moves from instability, where the in-itself is as yet undefined, to a stable recognition of actuality for itself. Further, the in-itself lacks the insight to see the forms of alienation the individual will encounter in time and movement, and thus has a false sense of its outcome. The for-itself, on the other hand, traces the series of negations and chooses from possibilities what it can to achieve actuality. This is the volitional aspect of subjectivity permitted by negative originality. Negative originality is a form of mediation the self produces for itself. Mediation is the agency that reproduces identity through reflection. Through reflection the negated substance is reflected back on to itself in mediate form. The absolute end of this development is achieved when negation returns to simplicity and what was latent in the original is now consummated in the subject.[159]

The question arises for Weiskel, in terms of structural psychology, whether in the second structural phase of negation a further reconstitution or resolution of the structural paradigm is existentially possible. If not, the *negative is preserved*, such that the signified becomes an *aporia,* a gap between signifier and sign that is marked by negativity or absence. This "excess of the signified" creates and "overdetermines" a condition of metaphorical excess.[160] The second phase of the sublime moment can be represented as the Romantic "wasteland" motif, an apocalyptic scene that disrupts the syntagmatic flow of the sublime movement. A sense of "restorative action" becomes unavailable, except in the sense of what Friedrich Schlegel termed "permanent parabasis," and where "meaning is overwhelmed by an overdetermination which in its extreme threatens a state of absolute metaphor, a state of entropy or complete repetition" says Weiskel. The second

[159] Chai, *Romantic Theory,* 73-75.

[160] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 26.

phase is thus a sort of blankness or whiteness, in Melvillian terms, where the scene of reading is of such overwhelming signification that "the word dissolves into the Word." It becomes a Wordworthian "spot in time" and of extreme verticality or metaphoricity, an *abyss* of meaning produced by overstauration. "What threatens here is stasis, a kind of death by plentitude, which Wordsworth elsewhere calls an 'abyss of idealism,' which destroys the seeking for a signifier, the 'perpetual logic' in which alone the mind can continue to live."[161]

But the moment of the second phase produces a reactive third phase characterized by Bloom as *daemonization*, misprision, or misreading. It is tempting to assume a Hegelian synthesis, but it produces, rather, a "modal" rather than an antithetical dichotomy. The *affective power of the second phase is never fully overcome,* even as the third phase attempts to restore the disruption in one of two possible ways. One way is to break the syntagmatic chain and substitute a signifier that the mind can anchor to reason, as Emerson attempted. This substitution involves instantiating a new metaphor in place of the "significant absence" in the second phase. This 'presentation' of a Kantian sense of "unattainability" is aesthetic rather than transcendental, singular rather than categorical. "Perhaps being and depth have no independent ontological status; perhaps they are reifications of the signifying power, spontaneously created by the mind at the zero degree, in the mere reflex of making absence significant," Weiskel considers.[162] Originality seems, then, to arise out of negativity.

The third phase finds the mind in a reactive position to the moment of the *sublime intrusion*. The mind overcomes, potentially, its negativity, by symbolizing the

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[161] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 27.

[162] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 28.

incomprehensibility (indeterminacy) of the object by invoking a metaphoric or paradigmatic shift in consciousness. Consciousness bursts from its syntagmatic linear order and metaphorizes negation as a transcendental idea, as means of ascendance, a spiraling re-origination captured by Hawthorne. "This new relation has a 'meta' character, which distinguishes it from the homologous [syntagmatic] relation of habitual perception."[163] The perception collapses image into sign, and the "semiotic character of the sublime moment [...] preserves the sublimation" that is the resultant sign. The fictional structure of the Romantic sublime identifies in the transcendental moment of originality the instantiation of sublimation, which resolves the incomprehensibility of transcendence by resolving the dissonance of the self. Sublimation becomes an "intuition of depth," which Melville discovers momentarily in "The Mast-Head":

> In the serene weather of the tropics it is exceedingly pleasant—the mast-head; nay to a dreamy meditative man it is delightful. There you stand, a hundred feet above the silent decks, striding along the deep, as if the masts were gigantic stilts, while beneath you and between your legs, as it were, swim the hugest monsters of the sea, even as ships once sailed between the boots of Colossus at old Rhodes. There you stand, lost in the infinite series of the sea, while nothing ruffled but the waves.[164]

When this transcendental moment occurs relative to a preceding temporal moment, as it does in Emerson's sublime, the precedent becomes erased through disruption and partial recovery through the trope of *metalepsis.* Weiskel explains that "[t]he sublime moment establishes depth because the presentation of unattainability is phenomenologically a negation, a falling away from what might be seized, perceived,

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[163] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 24.

[164] Hermann Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford. 2nd ed, A Norton Critical Ed (W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 133.

known. As an image, it is the abyss."[165] The structure of the sublime moment that arises for the subject-object binary of Kantian metaphysics permits a dialectical structure of instantiation and negation that continues through Hegel. The semiotic reduction to signifier and signified permits a model where the relation between instantiation and negation can be mapped onto syntagm and paradigm. The syntagmatic chain is instantiated in the subject position. The possibility of a chain arises through the concept of repetition, and through iteration the mind arrives at the intuition, that is indeterminate and unconditional, of infinity. Thus the verticality of paradigm seems to arise from syntagm through extension of excess or magnitude.

Towards an American Sublime

Our concentration on the second term of the movement of return—negativity that originates out of its own originality—acknowledges the dilemma of individual determination in the context of a dialogic rather than a dialectical relationship with an existing order. It is clear that Kant and Shelling and their British and American counterparts, Coleridge and Emerson, sought a ground for transcendence through a completion of the movement of return into the universal spirit. Emerson held out for the promise of transcendence even as he exiled himself from the body of Unitarianism. Emerson's negative originality located itself, in Hegelian terms, by understanding that the "highest form of nothingness for itself is freedom, but freedom is negativity when it sinks into itself to its greatest intensity, and is itself also affirmation."[166]

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[165] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 24-25.

[166] G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler, Vol. 24, The German Library (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990), 70.

The idea that meaning arises out of signification through sign-systems and negotiations is another way of admitting that discourse has both dialectic and dialogic content. At issue is the way meaning arises in the American Sublime as a function of *metalepsis* and rhetoric. The American Sublime originates in a "poetic defense." Meaning becomes over-determined through misprision. Misprision is a form of repression that results as a "ratio of representation." The degree of repression results from the repression of one memory and a re-presentation of an alternative idea. As opposed to repression, on the other hand, "poetic sublimation" involves (rather than a representation of something putatively new through forgetting the old) a ratio of limitation, whereby something is recalled in order to expressly avoid presenting it. Another thing is instead presented that is always already presupposed by its precursor.

Greater than the Romantic Sublime in general, the American Sublime exposes a "deep structure" of defensive rhetoric. If de Man's reading of Nietzsche defines rhetoric as a "system of tropes," on one hand, and as a form of persuasion, on the other, there remains an interstitial *aporia* lacking definition. The "daemonic in Emerson [is] that apocalyptic frenzy of an American Sublime."[167] Bloom posits that *aporia* as a defensive system. When tropes relate, what "carries each trope from evasion to persuasion, is that trope's function as defense, its imagistic maskings of those detours to death that make up the highway map of the psyche from anterior fixations to entropic self-destructions." For Emerson, meaning and signification indicate different ideas. Whereas signification implies for deconstruction a structural system to be unpacked, meaning itself is not

[167] Bloom, "Introduction." In *The American Renaissance*, 5.

merely the instrumentality of deconstruction, but arises for Bloom, at least, in human existence and especially self-defense.

Negativity should not be confused with Hegelian negation, which is a dialectical process, and reveals self-consciousness through its synthesis. Rather, negativity is closer to Bloomian misprision which avoids reification through the deployment of tactical power towards texts. But negativity does not offer closure in the enabling sense that Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* does. Negativity is not merely a tool of the strong poet or individual artist. Differing from "nothingness" there is no state of negativity. Negativity is the unspoken meaning behind tranformation and is dynamic and fluid.[168] Negativity suggests that any singularity in appearance is actually multiple. Negativity resists the premise of singularity and points to plurality as a basic state. This makes negativity fundamentally different from negation. While negation eliminates plurality, negativity enforces it. Negativity resists closure and limits. Therefore it cannot be equated with the concept of essentialism. Where the notion of originality points directly to some essential quality enclosing on a concept, and offers a base of orientation, negativity de-essentializes the idea by pluralizing it.

Like originality, though, negativity operates to originate plurality against closure. Since originality is a self-referential concept it is reflexive only in a tautological sense, whereas negativity resists tautology in that is plurality in prolongation. Whereas Romantic originality sought a unifying essentialism as an absolute concept, negativity radically reorients originality so that rather than accept the possibility of an originating axis as an ideological point of grounding, grounding itself becomes a fallacy since any

[168] Sanford Budick and Iser Wolfgang Iser, eds. *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), xii.

idea of originality immediately becomes recontextualized in terms of another. Eric Carlson articulates the issue of an American sublime from the point of view of Poe's metaphysics, as we shall now explore. Carlson writes that

> In his "Colloquy of Monos and Una," however, Poe set forth a cultural and psychological diagnosis of the sick society of his day. He described it as a time of "diseased commotion, moral and physical." He saw "man's general condition at this epoch" as marked by "general misrule" resulting from false ideas about "universal equality"; by "huge smoking cities" and other blemishes of ugly industrialization; and by the "leading evil Knowledge" — i.e., abstract rationalism which, along with the mechanical arts, has led to "the blind neglect" of "Taste" in the schools. As a result, man lost his "sentiment of the natural" and, experiencing a kind of cultural shock or "future shock," as we call it, suffered acute psychic conflict and fragmentation. At this time, too, Poe described the "world of mind" as a delicate balance of intellect, taste, and moral sense. Anything that upset the delicate balance would disrupt the whole self.[169]

Poe's sublime, as Carlson suggests, arises in the "future shock" he recognizes in his negative relation to the mundane. And, as we shall see, Poe allegorizes plurality in the flux of the bipartite self. Unlike originality there no consolidation, but rather the self exists merely in a state of flux. As such negativity resists appropriation to any ideology. Whereas originality forms an ideological system that terminates in itself; negativity originates a tropic of combinatoriality. The tropic itself eludes spaciality but operates in temporality, and it cannot be hypostatized. In that sense, because it resists fixity, it resists negation. It is denial and admission at once. Negativity is inherently dialogical in character.

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[169] Eric W. Carlson, "Poe on the Soul of Man." *Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore* (1973).

Chapter 3: Poe's Pure Reason and Literary Morality

By the mid-1840s Edgar Allan Poe demonstrated a desire to initiate in America a literary criticism of quality in quantity. Mme. de Stael wrote in *De l'Allemagne* that

> One wishes to demonstrate everything, ever since the taste for the exact sciences became the fashion among intellects; and because the calculus of probabilities makes it possible to submit the uncertain itself to rules, one flatters oneself with having resolved mathematically all the difficulties presented by the most delicate questions, and with having thus made the spirit of algebra reign over the universe.[1]

With respect to Edgar Allan Poe, the issue of a ratiocinative universe is whether concerns of metaphysics, invoking Kant's "critical" reason, are matters of probability rather than possibility. In other words, for Poe, intuitive reason is subject to rule.

Poe seeks a state of intelligibility. The faculty of understanding is universal, he says, yet comprehension is not. The notion of God "is by no means the expression of an idea—but an effort at one. It stands for the possible attempt at an impossible conception."[2] Poe clearly finds transcendental reason unacceptable. He also questions reason from the perspective that deduction and induction provide a reliable means to truth.[3] Science progresses, Poe admits, by intuitive leaping rather than crawling. Part of the problem for Poe is a distrust of perception. Close observation arrives at facts about facts but has no means of attaining Law. Without reasons, facts alone limit any knowledge of truth. Axioms have never existed; they are castles in the air, he adds.[4]

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[1] Qtd. in Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 103.

[2] Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka." In *Poetry, Tales, & Selected Essays*, edited by G. R. Thompson. College Edition. (New York: Library of America, 1996), 1272.

[3] Poe, "Eureka," 1263.

[4] Poe, "Eureka," 1266.

Moreover, truth seems mixed with the problem of conception. If truth relied on an "ability to conceive" then "ninety-nine hundredths of what is undeniable in Heaven would be demonstrable falsity upon the Earth."[5] Poe distinguishes axioms from propositions, attempting to show that the law of non-contradiction is better regarded in terms of the latter. It may be a matter of conception that a thing and its opposite cannot both be true. But an "inability to conceive" cannot be axiomatic as a criterion for truth. The "impossibility to conceive" admits no degrees, and clearly it is possible to conceive, of say a tree, being both tree and non-tree. That, in fact, is exactly the premise behind Romantic figuration. The Romantic symbol by its very nature as metaphor purports to overcome contradiction. While perception may be seemingly aleatoric and conception fails to distinguish fact from fiction—Poe's essential criticism of Transcendentalism—through ratiocinative probability there is the possibility for an intuitive reason that might uncover truth through accident.

In *Eureka* Poe returns to the metacritical device of the *accidental letter*. This letter, appearing in a corked bottle on the "Mare Tenerarum" (or dark oceans) "little frequented in modern days unless by the Transcendentalists" is dated "two thousand eight hundred and forty eight," a millennium later than the time of Poe's writing.[6] Presumably this post-dating allows Poe to conjecture the outcome of the millennium. The hint at a transcendental apocalypse is immediately disrupted by an attack on reasoning from self-evident principles. Reasoning by deduction through maxims or axioms brings Poe to suggest that in fact "no truths are self-evident." Kant, Poe adds, as "the originator of that species of Transcendentalism which, with the change merely of a C for a K, now

[5] Poe, "Eureka," 1267.

[6] Poe, "Eureka," 1263.

bears his peculiar name." Poe's strategy of negating first principles on which Transcendental reasoning depends alerts us that he is quite dubious with regard to the Kantian paradox, that Kant's moral reasoning depends on self-evident reasons presumed to originate a priori.

Implicit in the futurity of the found letter in *Eureka* Poe reveals, ironically, an almost Emersonian rejection of the past. And anticipating Whitman by a quarter century, Poe proposes to cross the threshold of an American sublime by "scarifying" Emerson. Mimicking Emerson's call for newness in the *American Scholar* address, Poe has his future writer state:

> I do not quarrel with the ancients ... so much on account of the transparent frivolity of their logic … as on account of their pompous and infatuate proscription of all other roads to truth than the two narrow and crooked paths—the one creeping and the other crawling—to which, in their ignorant perversity, they have dared to confine the Soul—the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of 'path'.[7]

At the outset of Poe's quarrel with Emerson over the path to truth we are reminded that in "Self-Reliance," Emerson had spoken of character as a unique zig-zag pattern that disguises its consistency.

Here, Poe's "crooked paths," which are induction and deduction (materiality and spirituality) disguise the real consistency of truth. Poe's future writer demands we consider "the majestic highways of the Consistent," which demonstrate that "a perfect consistency can be nothing but an absolute truth."[8] Poe's quibbling over consistency is a red herring, mostly, since Emerson's point that we read inconsistency incorrectly by focusing on changes of direction rather than on the overall direction of the path. Poe's

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[7] Poe, "Eureka," 1268-1269.

[8] Poe, "Eureka," 1269.

real argument with Emerson seems not to be whether there may be an originality of absolute truth, or whether it can be arrived at by intuition, but whether truth is a matter of subjective Nature, or whether it is objective and rational. Poe's complaint about "the two boasted roads," deduction and induction, is that neither mode of reason has a claim to an absolute truth; whereas, an "unencumbered Consistency" amounts to "an absolute and an unquestionable Truth." This consistent truth, as Poe conceives it, is affirmed by the mere fact of gravity. Poe's writer of futurity, his "unknown correspondent," reminds us that Kepler "guessed" gravitational laws, laws which are "the basis of all (existing) physical principles."[9] And that these laws were discovered on the basis of an imagination confirms a metaphysical insight; Poe's future writer imagines Kepler might have boasted: "I do know the machinery of the Universe. Here it is. I grasped it with my soul—I reached it through mere dint of intuition."

But what is intuition? It is, according to the future writer, "but the conviction resulting from deductions and inductions of which the processes were so shadowy as to have escaped his consciousness, eluded his reason, or bidden defiance of his capacity of expression."[10] Poe's unknown correspondent makes the point that Kepler was essentially a theorist, an intellectual perspective "now of so much sanctity," but "in those ancient days, a designation of supreme contempt." And it is in futurity that humankind will "sympathize with the prophetical and poetical rhapsody of his ever-memorable words."[11] Kepler becomes the metaphysician of the scientific revolution, in the view of the

[9] Poe, "Eureka," 1270.

[10] Poe, "Eureka," 1270.

[11] Poe, "Eureka," 1270.

"unknown correspondent." As opposed to Newtonian physics based on induction, if Kepler

> could demonstrate that his 'celestial physics' was valid, he would be able to demonstrate that only the Copernican system of the universe made physical sense and that it was true. Since, as he believed, the heliocentric system was a material symbol of God in His creation, establishing its truth continued to have an important religious dimension as well.[12]

Poe's unknown correspondent's claim that it is shadowy reason rather than induction that led to the suggestion that there might be a binary split between reason and intuition. A central claim of Kuhn's work is that scientists do not make their judgments as the result of consciously or unconsciously following rules. Their judgments are nonetheless tightly constrained during normal science by the example of the guiding paradigm. During a revolution they are released from these constraints (though not completely). Consequently there is a gap left for other factors to explain scientific judgments. Kuhn himself suggests in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that "Sun worship may have made Kepler a Copernican and that in other cases, facts about an individual's life history, personality or even nationality and reputation may play a role."[13]

Laplace's *Essai philosophique* adduces that the relation of causes to events is a fractional number where the numerator attests to a probable number and the denominator includes all possible related events. The simple notion of a science of moral probability is that it is also a matter of epistemology. Human moral judgment is a matter of consciousness. Romantic views of science and thought seek an ontological understanding of phenomenon, and to understand nature in terms of a universal idea. Laplacean science

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[12] James R. Voelkel, *Johannes Kepler and the New Astronomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63.

[13] Alexander Bird, "Thomas Kuhn",*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2011 Edition)***,** Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

seeks within epistemological boundaries a comprehensive and general law of Nature; that is, it seeks an ontological understanding, as such. That binary—Romantic-epistemology—informs Poe's notion of a Romantic Science.[14] In Romantic Science the formalization of phenomena became, for Poe, the doctrine of ratiocination.

This sort of analysis depends on a breaking apart and synthesis of ideas to understand a thing's essential make up. The problem of ratiocination is that mathematical symbols deceive through the suggestion that such symbols are capable of signifying general truth. The lack of metaphor in science pushes the need for a more linguistic approach to understanding representation. It is the ambiguity of signifiers, the limitations posed by mathematics on ratiocination, that induces Poe to an epistemology of aesthetics, where the most universal term, which subsumes the sublime, is beauty.[15] For Poe, as for Keats, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

The essential bifurcation in Romantic biology, as propounded by Aggasiz, is the difference between mechanism and vitalism. In Poe's "Maezel's Chess Player" he asks how it is that an automaton can be at the same time not subject to fixed determinacy. "No one move in chess necessarily follows another…." he notices.[16] Poe's analysis of such a mechanized yet aleatoric instrument is centered on its movement, its process towards an indeterminate end. Chai argues that this analysis equally defines human behavior, and as such human beings are mechanistic. Yet Poe would argue that a chess game is not mere indeterminacy but a series of calculations that obtain in variability.[17] Such variations may

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[14] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 105.

[15] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 115.

[16] Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews.* (New York: Library of America, 1984) 1256.

[17] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 123.

be arbitrary. One might add that machines must operate with the limits of physical laws so that their performance derives part of its arbitrariness from the vagueries of operation. He also notices this to be true of human action in the physical world. As such, a clear distinction between organism and mechanism is not clear. What does distinguish the organism, particularly the human, from the mechanical, is the matter of variability which are self-generated, and pertain to speech and mind.

By 1842, however, Poe understood that the power of analysis that may distinguish between originality and imitation becomes coextensive with imagination itself. In Poe's concept of unity of effect, conception is remapped by the power of analysis. Analysis, the breaking into structural parts is a creative act. Like poems, facts proceed from theory. That is in essence what occurs in "The Purloined Letter:" Dupin's results obtain from a better theoretical model. Such a theory, for Poe, requires an account of extraordinary circumstances. Truth through ratiocination must account for the unusual or unexpected: the *outre.* This is what Dupin terms "analytical power," a power, not the "fancy" of the ingenious, but the "imagination" of the analytic.[18] This brings to mind Coleridge's distinction, and if we pay attention to Coleridge's analogy (in *Biographia Literaria*) of creativity to chemical processes we discern the principle of ratiocination in the processes of diffusion as *a priori* to creation.

Poe shows a bias toward quantitative thinking in his striving for a "unity of theoretical elegance."[19] Poe, says Chai, "asserts the primacy or essentiality of logical relations over material appearances."[20] For example, In "The Purloined Letter," Dupin,

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[18] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 114.

[19] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 106.

[20] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 107

rather than succumb to the Prefect's desultory inductions, deploys probability theory to discover the whereabouts of the missing letter. The more telling concern for Poe's desire for unity through ratiocination is that through mathematics and probability he can achieve absolute value.[21] Following Laplace, it is possible to argue that consistency of effects makes probable the analogy of causes. Leon Chai notes that Poe's interest in mathematics is not quantification, a formal representation of quality, but a "heuristic."[22] In "The Purloined Letter," Dupin admits that the Minister D— requires *poetry* to function as reason. Poe makes this same claim in his epilogue to *Eureka.*

Poe seeks to establish a universal basis for reason, but it is a condition of reason acting in the occasion of the particular. The notion of self-evidence lacks universality since it has an appeal to logic and lacks a more fundamental cosmic force, a force originating in the natural processes of attraction and repulsion. Human conception remains fixed in the particular, and Poe's view of fancy and imagination are not fully clarified since both are creative and matters of degree. The point is crucial to understanding Poe's metaphysics of originality, which is by and large negative:

> Novel conceptions are merely unusual combinations. The mind of man can imagine nothing which has not really existed … Thus with all which seems to be new—which appears to be a creation of intellect. It is resoluble into the old. The wildest and most vigorous effort of mind cannot stand the test of analysis.[23]

While matter appears limitless in its quantity of particulars Poe questions the permanence of its general condition. The concern has important ramifications for his aesthetic philosophy, and specifically his notion of originality.

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[21] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 107.

[22] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 108

[23] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*,1126.

Particularity, argues Poe in *Eureka,* exists in a temporal state of *irradiation* or diffusion, a movement away from an originating source. Yet its exact position is never fixed and ultimately collapses back into an original unity. Originality, then, is an ideal state never witnessed. Appearance is transitory with respect to time and space. Whereas Emerson's positive Romantic sense that a transcendent nature can be reasoned through art, language, and prospect, Poe's more negative revision of intuition holds that truth obtains only in the particular appearance, in temporality, and through ratiocination. In his "prose-poem" *Eureka* (1848) Poe writes:

> Never was necessity less obvious than that of supposing Matter imbued with an ineradicable *quality* forming part of its material nature — a quality, or instinct, *forever* inseparable from it, and by dint of which inalienable principle every atom is *perpetually* impelled to seek its fellow-atom. Never was necessity less obvious than that of entertaining this unphilosophical idea. Going boldly behind the vulgar thought, we have to conceive, metaphysically, that the gravitating principle appertains to Matter *temporarily* — only while diffused — only while existing as Many instead of as One — appertains to it by virtue of its state of irradiation alone — appertains, in a word, altogether to its *condition*, and not in the slightest degree to *itself*.[24]

For Poe quality is anything but an essential and atemporal form of Nature. Poe reverses the idea of a Platonic formal cause. Poe's idea of quality holds that quality is a matter of existence rather than essence. Quality describes material nature, and is likened to an instinct or power, but it is a power both temporary and discursive rather than a perpetual response. It is an instinct arising in a movement, an occasion, and the movement occurs only when matter is irradiated, that is, in a state of quantity. The effect of a movement towards and away from objects results in a temporal condition that is phenomenal rather than noumenal. Existence is dispersed and in a reactive flux within the

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[24] Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka." In *Poetry, Tales, & Selected Essays*, ed. G. R. Thompson, College ed. (New York: Library of America, 1996), 1348.

relation of matter to itself and metaphysics to itself. Applied to the literary field, Poe proposes that quality obtains in quantity, and that quantity is a fluctuating movement in time and space.

We might first state that a concept of atemporality or essence lying behind the concept of originality—a synthesis fundamental to much Romantic theory on poetic originality—evaporates under Poe's theory of "conditional" quality. Originality is thus for Poe a condition of rhetoric: it is not dialectical in that it seeks a fundamental consonance as a unity of effect that is ultimately a human conception whose intention originates in the mind of the receiver, but it is temporal in that it obtains in the occasion of language transmission. Further, as a form of speech act Poe's unity of effect recognizes as a basic matter of its concept, a negation of a claim to both transcendental originality and everyday actuality. In Poe's art a hoax is as real as a matter of fact.[25] Though quantity seeks resolution in quality through negativity—that is, the particular agent, for example, Ligeia, who becomes resolved in the abstraction of beauty through death—originality remains vulnerable to critique and analysis by the ratiocinative mind.

This is not to say that Poe's instinct for quality doesn't exist. In the *Poetic Principle*, Poe writes:

> An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful…It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us—but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone.[26]

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[25] Poe's aesthetics have a great deal of influence on Melville's *The Confidence-Man* in this regard.

[26] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 76-77.

It is just that an atemporal sense of quality remains a mere metaphysical possibility rather than an actual probability. It is a truism that Poe's idealization of essential beauty is always associated with the collapse of the particular in a cessation of irradiation. The end of repulsion culminates in the catastrophic movement of return by attraction to the quality of non-existence.

Eureka as a Metaphysics of Negative Originality

Poe's extended essay on metaphysical originality is subtitled a "Prose-Poem."[27] In the brief preface Poe addresses "the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities … the Beauty that abounds in its Truth."[28] The essay, he says, is to be thought of as a "Romance," and also as a "Poem." Remarkably, he adds in italics, "What I propound is true: —therefore it cannot die:—or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it will die, it will 'rise again to the Life Everlasting'." Then Poe retracts his truth-claim, stating that "it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead." Poe retracts his romantic prose-relation to the actual by positing his romantic science in the area of the poetic imagination. Poe states: "I design to speak of the Physical, Metaphysical, and Mathematical—of the Material and Spiritual Universe:—of its Essence, its Origin, its Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny."[29] In doing so, Poe admits, in effect, that he undercuts basic ontological assumptions and beliefs

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[27] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*. Edited by Joel Porte. Norton Critical, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) 590-597. Emerson and Poe seem to agree on the basic point that poetry amounts to reason acting in the particular. Given their apparent consensus where the particular understanding (fancy) originates to a degree in the Ideal, it is not surprising that Poe's notion of a "Prose-Poem," that is 'a particular ideal', has a precursor in light of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's review of Emerson's *Nature,* titled "*Nature*—A Prose Poem," in the *United Sates Magazine and Democratic Review* (February 1838).

[28] Poe, "Eureka." 1259.

[29] Poe, "Eureka," 1261.

propounded by Christian ideas. "In the beginning," he adds boldly, there is "no such thing as demonstration" but, rather only hypothesis, which is: "In the original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation." Here again we note a bifurcation between Emerson's 'positive' romanticism and Poe's alternative to it. In Emerson's "The Over-Soul," in the *Essays: First Series* (1841), we find confidence in a "Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other." Whereas in Poe's conception of the universal nature of things, rather than finding a more positive Emersonian eternal "One," we encounter a reciprocating flux of attraction and repulsion that re-instantiates each cosmic iteration with a negating catastrophic colliding of the forces of attraction and repulsion.[30] Due to the state of flux the particular is always carried by a cyclical negation and there is no direct connection to Unity. For Poe, the Universe is inherently bipartite.

Poe's subsequent "survey of the Universe" intends to discover through an examination via pure reason whether the mind may "perceive an individual impression."[31] He places that individual, in a gesture similar to the opening of Melville's *The Confidence-Man,* at the top of Mt. Aetna. The observer must take in the panorama of all that is before and behind to gauge the "extent and diversity of the scene." Such a universal vision is impossible due to the limits of subjectivity and the potential disruption of the romantic imagination by the sublime. Poe defines the term "Universe" as "the utmost conceivable expanse of space, with all things, spiritual and material, that can be

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[30] Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, 163.

[31] Poe, "Eureka," 1261.

imagined to exist within the compass of that expanse."[32] Conversely, Poe suggests that "ordinarily" the word is a "phrase of limitation." Taking the known universe as a "limited Universe," Poe offers a major premise that "is so taken to warrant deductions from its individuality." Yet the tendency toward generality unfortunately tends to "preclude all individuality of impression." Such an individual impression, necessary for a conceptual starting point, is prevented by the general. It is impossible to proceed metonymically from the particular to the universal if inhibited by the general (or categorical). Given the difficulty of squaring the particular with the general, Poe objects to both metaphysical and empirical thinking that masks contradiction through vagueness.

Turning Emerson on his head, Poe writes that "a perfect consistency can be nothing but the absolute truth."[33] Further, Poe demolishes Transcendental, intuitive reason as "resulting from deductions or inductions of which the processes were so shadowy as to have escaped [one's] consciousness."[34] The binary structure that distinguishes intuition as a form of reasoning dissolves when Poe admits that moral reasoning depends on false contradictions. Beyond such morality lies the Universe. Poe paraphrases Emerson's "Experience": "We may ascend or descend. Beginning at our own point of view, the Universe comprises what the individual comprehends: earth, sun, planets, systems, human habitation." The problem for the "individual Universe" (a mind) is the matter of magnitude. *Poe thus arrives at Kant's notion of the mathematical sublime*.

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[32] Poe, "Eureka," 1262.

[33] Poe, "Eureka," 1269.

[34] Poe, "Eureka," 1270.

In *Eureka* Poe posits that the concept of God amounts to the notion of an "original unity." The universe, as a creation, is thus a "plot" carried out by God.[35] Human activity becomes a subsidiary reverberation in which echoes the primary metaphor of originality as an aesthetic concept. Joseph Riddel suggests that the antecedent figure to such an original plot, conceptualized as a unity that is also a state of nothingness, can only be conceived through interpretation. In this sense, originality is incomprehensible; creation is unknowable and beyond understanding. The original plot, then, can be approached only through its repetitions as instances of a state of fallenness; human beings represent that original creativity as a supplement to the original machine of the universe. "Since the creation is completed," Riddel points out, "no image of it survives."[36] We might respond that twentieth-century astronomy has been more successful at seeing the effects of that creative event. Yet Poe recognizes the original creation is represented through an image that is manifested in the images that mark its repetitions.

Riddel argues that cosmology is only a history of interpretations that proves the limits of a representational or empirical system.[37] The cosmos, in other words, resembles a text through which the dimensions of space and time and the logic of induction and deduction behave as a logocentric interpretation of the original plot. And the cosmos acts as textual record representing the material universe as it encounters the movement of return, a return though the dual and reciprocal motions of attraction and repulsion. But while human beings may read the plot as a regional assemblage of signs distinct from the

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[35] Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

[36] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 136.

[37] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 136-7.

universal plot, the signification of the original plot is absent. Ironically, the only access to the original plot is through an incomplete regional plot whose figurations reveal its own fissures. Originality then is excess rather than essence. The general obscures the particularity that could be known with precision.

As the original poem the figure of the universe is already a synthesis, and as such already contains its own negativity. As a text it is already supplied with and internal critical dialectic and represents itself as a belated repetition. The transcendental signified is already grounded in its temporality. For Riddel, "*Eureka* is a diacritical text in which the criticism is primary and the imaginative is the secondary or representational dimension."[38] By positing the critical dimension as primary, a position that stresses the primacy of flux and oppositional forces; nature as a unity has already disappeared and the evidence of its loss reappears as a message "found corked in a bottle on the Mare Tenebrarum." Poe's original poem is merely a myth discovered belatedly in the year 2848 C.E., at which point in time, we suppose, diachronic literary originality (generative originality) is compressed into synchronic whole, *through which*—recalling Kant's concept of an "innate mental aptitude" or *ingenium*—we intuit that originality is figured as a poetic plot that is both temporal and structural. Riddel remarks: "The originality of an intuition lies in its deviance from, its discontinuity with, all previous interpretations. It represents discontinuity."[39] Original intuitions, then, are singular and factored in terms of their non-identity with universality.

In *Eureka* Poe perpetrates a "hoax" such that his parody of Western philosophy reduces truth to a "palimpsest" of discourses. The history of science itself is a sequence

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[38] Riddel, *Purloined Letter,* 136.

[39] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 137.

revisions and erasures such that the pursuit of fact likens to the pursuit of a myth that is encompassing of possibilities. As such, Poe admits that impossibility admits no degrees. An "impossible conception" amounts to an oxymoronic figure like negative originality itself. The fictive nature of poetic figures and of language in general presents the impossibility of unambiguous deciphering of meaning hidden in representation.[40] Interpretation and intuition conjoin in an opening of semiotic signification to the problem of signification. Poe and Melville, Riddel reminds us, share a suspicion that at the center of putative meaning negativity dissolves its originality in a masking of the theft that underlies all iteration. Riddel argues that the "nothingness at the center (unity) of Poe's cosmos is at once like and unlike the [blank and silent] nothing at the center of Melville's pyramid."[41]

In Riddel's view, interpretation by intuition becomes a supplement to and a substitution for the blank center of meaning. Thus interpretation amounts to a doubleness, both a reading and a misreading, of that which it supplements. Doubleness becomes both a centripetal and a centrifugal force. Irradiation corresponds with a movement of return. In other words, Poe's cosmology is an allegory, borrowed from Romantic science to describe the structural originality of intuition as a creative process of discovery in a continuum of theoretic change. *Eureka* shows that Poe views a future theoretical science not as a summation but as a disjunction, a radical *alterity* or negativity from its origins. Thus structural originality as a paradigm shift is structured on the principle of deviation. Poe's power of irradiation, an energy that forces the redefinition of originality by effacing it, produces the effect of negativity. Poe's poetic misprision, then, becomes a proleptic

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[40] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 137.

[41] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 138.

(prospective) fissure that begins and ends in myth. And the role of the poet is in detection of the myth lost through its *irradiation*.

Poe and Autorial Negativity

Poe's alterity as a writer arises in his concept of irradiation. Poe's career as a writer and critic traced what Bell terms the "deviant image."[42] Poe "displays all the anxiety of the outcast, torn between aggression and guilt…" Further, Bell argues that Poe's image is a result of his cultural experience. "His imaginative heroes almost uniformly succumb to the maladies conventionally associated with an 'ill-regulated imagination'." Poe's William Wilson admits that his "excitable temperament" is caused by his "disordered imagination." Bell notices an important distinction in Poe's critical vocabulary: "Poe moved the criteria of artistic legitimacy from matters of extrinsic 'truth,' of meaning, to the work of art itself, to appearances or effects…[;] he discusses art on its own terms."[43]

Anticipating New Criticism, perhaps, Poe repeatedly maintains that art is a self-enclosed world that is distinct from the social realm of material culture. Art and literature appeal to the faculty of the imagination rather than the understanding. Poe "effected a strategic shift in the grounds of the debate over the nature and function of imagination…"[44] Poe gives priority in his criticism to the work of art as a conception that produces a phenomenal structure characterized by formal autonomy. The autonomy of the work sets up a relation between the work and the world where the directness of the

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[42] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance* (Princeton University Press, 1971), 88.

[43] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 88.

[44] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 89.

rhetoric affects the reader's consciousness through the power of words. Aesthetic power, by this rendering, overwhelms reason, which is striking in its application of the Romantic sublime. With Poe judgment is undercut by imagination where words and meaning become disassociated. Poe's dualism, which situates ratiocination opposite supernal beauty, leads to a split definition of imagination, one noumenal and immortal, the other phenomenal and a matter of rhetorical effect.[45] Poe, says Bell, "was drawn to the new doctrines of Romanticism, which encountered in the philosophy and criticism of Coleridge (and through Coleridge, the Germans)."[46] Poe's interest in the Romantic imagination and in originality began, then, with Coleridge. Poe's interest in originality and its realm within the imagination pushed him to stress the autonomy of language and to determine the impact of originality in terms of its "unity of effect."

Poe anticipated the results of American Transcendentalism by prioritizing the power of the unseen over reality. While Transcendentalism, and Romanticism, generally, sought to discover substance in spirituality and to reestablish intimations of immortality against the orthodoxy of Common Sense reason, it did so by invoking Coleridge's idea of "intuitive reason" and its power over "discursive reason." Romanticism, as a general trend, legitimized the imagination as a means of approaching spiritual truth. Kant had linked reason with intuition and distinguished reason from understanding, which was a mainstay of Lockean and Common Sense empiricism. Emerson's notion of a "transparent eyeball" perceived spirit in intuitive reason, and hence imagination had become rational. Spiritualism pertained to moralism, which opened new questions about the subconscious and what Kant called the metaphysics of morality (positive romanticism).

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[45] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 90.

[46] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 90.

But the subconscious was not necessarily moral even if through the imagination it might pertain to a form of imaginative mimesis. As the unseen, spiritualism did not necessarily assure moral rightness. Imagination and fancy could produce images in language of the unconscious motives and drives that characterize human intercourse. Spiritualism drifted away from religion and towards psychology. This point underscores "the curious combination of spirituality and ghoulishness in Poe's fiction, for it was this climate of uncertain spiritualism that Poe set out to redefine; he sought to revalidate the 'supreme' faculty of imagination and to provide for its 'spiritual' claims the sort of philosophical support his contemporaries by and large neglected."[47]

Poe's relation to Coleridge is significant since Coleridge had re-assigned Common Sense psychology's demotion of imagination to what he termed "fancy." True imagination, instead, could be traced through the Kantian faculty of intuitive reason that leads to spiritual insight. In Poe's review of Thomas Moore's *Alciphron* (1840), in a strategy he replicated in many reviews, he interrogated underlying aesthetic theory, in this case Coleridge's theory of imagination and fancy. Poe simply rejected the distinction, arguing that mental combination (fancy) and creative originality (imagination) are equally synthetic. Conception depends, ultimately, upon experience. He seems to side with Kant that intuition supplies a limited degree of *a priori* synthesis. Poe is neither a full-fledged Lockean nor is he a card-carrying Coleridgean.

If the imagination requires prior experience there still may be extempore degrees of imaginative work. Poe putatively assigns the evaluation of imaginative work to the reader: a work has the potential to achieve its ideal, its unity of effect, through the power

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[47] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 92.

of invention by the original artist. The reader, presumably, knows intuitively the difference between the ideal and the counterfeit. Poe states that

> The truth is that the just distinction between the fancy and the imagination (and which is still but a distinction of degree) is involved in the consideration of the *mystic*... The term mystic is here employed in the sense of Augustus William Schlegel, and most of the other German critics. It is applied by them to that class of composition in which there lies beneath the transparent upper current an under or *suggestive* one.[48]

The ideal imagination is one that obtains in a submerged form of meaning. The submerged meaning of a work expresses its sentiment, and if ideal, it spiritualizes the work through its "*suggestive* force which exalts and etherealizes."[49] In a superlative imaginative work one encounters the most profound relationships between the "upper current" and the mystic level of conception.

Poe's conception of the mystic—Hawthorne borrowed the expression when he termed the discovery of the letter in *The Custom House* a "mystic symbol"—should not be taken with any religious significance. For Poe the mystic is simply the suggestive aspects of a discourse. Basically, then, the imagination is assigned to rhetorical invention that maintains a metaphoric current. But Poe's notion of the mystic seems designed to shroud his secular spirituality in an imagination bearing no specific relationship to immortality. The supernal imagination of the artist lies in his capacity to create the effect of spirituality in the mind of the reader by mimicking the absolute as a unity of effect. It is a symbol lacking a referent. In Poe's theory of originality, God is imaginary. Language thus loses its footing and originality becomes negated as a free floating mental game of

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[48] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 337. The passage occurs in Poe's review of Thomas Moore's *Alciphron, a Poem;* from *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine,* January 1840.

[49] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 338.

signifiers. The theory of imagination, in Poe's view, requires a complete sacrifice of relation. Originality is negativity.

Moreover, Poe's critical terminology is deployed with a cunning vagueness where ordinary connotations evaporate. Expressions such as "mystic," "spiritualizing," and "ideal" seem to be empty signifiers. After 1845 he likened imagination to the effect of "harmony," and originality was metaphorized as a chemical reaction resulting in combinatoriality, a device Eliot seems to have borrowed in his essay on originality, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

It is plausible that Poe dropped the terms "mystic" and "spiritual" because he could not square his theory of imagination with religious thought. Like materialism, spiritualism was another structure that threatened the autonomy of the artist. Negative originality was the only recourse for the artist seeking an unfettered imagination. Poe told James Russell Lowell in 1844 that he had "no belief in spirituality."[50] Yet, ironically, by jettisoning spirituality in a religious sense, Poe had to commit himself to an ontology of materiality. Imagination is the original combinatoriality of matter and spirituality is negated. Because spirit exists, if it does, as immateriality, it is "*therefore* not matter."[51] Poe speaks of spirit as "unparticled matter," which under rarefaction will eventually recompress and unify: "The unparticled matter, permeating & impelling, all things, is God. Its activity is the thought of God—which creates." It would be tempting to read Coleridge's primary imagination into Poe's unparticled matter, but Coleridge was obviously convinced that his notion of the primary imagination was Ideal and immaterial. Poe, on the other hand, posits thought in the material world. Abstractions such as

[50] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 94.

[51] Qtd.in Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 94.

“infinity,” ”spirit” and “God” are “impossible conception[s]...representative of but the *thought of a thought*.” While for Coleridge, spirit is grounded in existence, the relation of being to Being, for Poe, conversely, spirit is grounded only in thought, and thus in language, but without a spirit grounded in existence eternal truths evaporate.

In the chasm that Poe uncovers, where eternal truths become thoughts, Poe sets up a dualism between matter and the imagination that problematizes the materialism of the Common Sense school of thought. And by re-instantiating matter as the sole reality, Poe rejects it and thus severs imagination from reality completely. Poe’s autonomy of language insists that meaning is essentially arbitrary; language and nature, a relation so important to Emerson and Coleridge, are disconnected. Imagination is displaced into a realm of ideality where internal conceptual relationships are arbitrary and self-reflective. Meaning becomes propositional within a scheme of rhetorical assertions bound to a specific artistic conception. The work is its own world. This total *sacrifice of relation* points to Poe’s theory of negative originality.

Poe’s theory of negative originality can be observed in his tale *Ligeia* where the Ligeia, the symbol of supernal beauty, dies only to transubstantiate through the physical body of her antithesis, Lady Rowena. The reappearance of the original through death becomes the “spiritual” manifestation of negative originality. In “The Poetic Principle” Poe insists that “[i]nspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone.”[52] Poe’s struggle, here, is to square Romantic originality and its intimations of immortality

[52] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 96.

with the materiality of death. Timeless beauty becomes an "impossible conception" (*Eureka*) that can be thought only by means seeking "combinations" in Time. Poe's rhetoric of temporality functions as a negation of the infinite by materializing immortality as a living death.

As a form of negative originality, the idea of "etherealizing" nature or "spritualizing" material became a commonplace among alternative romantics like Poe and Hawthorne. In *Eureka* the idea of spirit becomes a "vision of the destruction of the material universe," according to Bell. Emersonian transparency becomes an effect of spirituality, and takes on the costume of a metaphysical principle. Death, the reversion of the living body into its material basis becomes a sublimation of the mind-body split which associated the body with its erotic or brute nature. The cost of exhausting a metaphysic of spirit into an aesthetics of matter resulted in death as the only outcome of originality.[53] Supernal beauty and ideal of beauty creates the aesthetic effect of erotic sublimation. Etherealization, then becomes a way of speaking about the body in terms of metaphysical vagueness.[54]

Poe structured the unity of effect around the internal consistency of his symbolic mode. "Before asking what this language means," suggests Bell, "the reader [of Poe] must ask how it means."[55] The essential problem in Poe interpretation is the correspondence between language and the world beyond the text. The language inside the text leaves a level of vagueness that leaves much of its mean unsayable. The sacrifice of relation between the denoted and connoted meanings in the text functions as a negativity

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[53] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 99.

[54] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 101.

[55] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 103.

of relation. Poe's mode of metaphor and its "suggestive indefiniteness" sets up a paradox between "revelation and concealment," argues Bell.[56] If the autonomous artist can be said to remain pure (or negative) with respect to the cultural matrix, Poe's impure purity rests on his paradoxical schism between suggestion and the indefinite. The structural gap between the two amounts to a chasm of negativity in which his aesthetic purity remains buried.

Poe's dual concept of his fiction as both Arabesque (the concealment of life) and Grotesque (distortion of character) represent the desire to be equally pure and impure.[57] By excising the Coleridgean symbol of its direct correspondence with spirit, Poe's strategy for representing an Ideal art rested on its effect. Since beauty is incomprehensible apart from immortality, direct reference to beauty in mortal terms is avoided. Truth becomes non-linguistic and hieroglyphic. "We may question the validity of non-linguistic 'purity' legitimized solely by the negation of language's normal function of meaning," says Bell, but any possibility for autonomy lies through the sacrifice of relation between language and meaning.

The question of purity, at the heart of the central question of negative originality, is incomprehensible. Beyond intention, words have a history in the cultural matrix, a history of language use that produces intersubjective linguistic experience. But the purity and concealment that is originality in Poe's sense of arabesque is more of a "secondary expression."[58] "To maintain the appearance of arabesque 'purity,' the reader must conspire with the author in the suppression of meaning; he must conspire with the author

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[56] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 104.

[57] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 104-105.

[58] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 106.

to not strike through the mask. The subjectivity of the term, which grows, after all, out of the specific taboo against representation (and recognition)...is a form of repression; it is the negative originality of the deviating force against the antecedent orthodoxy.

Emerson anticipates the problems inherent in the polarization within consciousness stemming from negative originality. Poe's *Eureka* seeks to posit an originary moment instantiating the "material and spiritual universe." Poe's "original Unity" deploys a God function embedded in an original monad or particle, and traces its creativity through "repulsion." Such a dispersion of the one to the many Poe considers "abnormal." The original universe is the normative attractive force, or steady state in unity. Dispersion into multiplicity is a negation of that unity and for Poe has an instinctual (for beings) mode of self-protection. Negative originality not only protects the self but it protects the original unity from self-destruction through irradiation.

The counterpoise to repulsion requires self-annihilation before a return to unity is possible. Original unity, or generative originality (in the sense of a beginning state), becomes annihilated by repulsion, or negative originality, and any subsequent attraction is the result of annihilation of negation. Because unity is the more powerful force the individual must preserve the singularity of identity or be annihilated by unity. For Poe's cosmogony individuality is therefore the unnatural state given the cosmic unity that is the universe. Poe's tale "William Wilson" presents that "essential desire…to be able to claim, and to have others recognize, his originality and singular dominion over himself and his environment."[59] Individuality can be maintained only through radical creativity through negative originality.

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[59] Evan Carton , *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 37.

Wilson's *doppelganger,* or double consciousness, maps onto the structure familiar as the mind-body split that points to the moral and metaphysical implications of individual will. "William Wilson is Poe's foremost exemplar of the self-reliant Emersonian individual, the creative sayer (and writer) who would enjoy a wholly original relation to the universe."[60] The base-stem of Wilson's struggle for individuality lies in the deviance of his actions. Originality has the imp of the perverse implicit within its core. Wilson and his double illustrate the vacillating interactions between metaphysical originality and imitation where the line between negative originality and the mimesis of the singular will collapses in the scene of self-destruction in the mirror that is the bathos of imitation.

Following Emerson's advice in *Nature* to direct his will Wilson struggles to affirm his originality through identity, but in naming himself his identity unravels. The irony that Poe sets up for Wilson is that in the act of self-naming he expresses his originality but ties himself to the precedent of the name through imitation. Negative originality is always tied to its antecedent. "Notwithstanding a noble descent," Poe writes through Wilson, who is talking about his name, "mine was one of those everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob."[61] Wilson's name, then, becomes the structural gap between originality (singularity) and multiplicity, the act of naming himself is an act of negative originality in that Wilson is using his power to instantiate his singularity and at the same time his name binds him to the "common property" antecedent to his self-

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[60] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 36.

[61] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, (cited 37).

negation. In attempting his originality through identity Wilson's negative originality already and ironically points to imitation.

The irony is already present in the name Wilson. Negative originality (following Kant's theory of negative freedom) demands an act of will. Will is by nature indicative of singularity, a gesture implicit in the act of negating an antecedent. Yet as Kant understood, behind the act of will must be another act of will, or willing to will. Choosing requires an antecedent decision to choose. Willing, then, invites the idea of infinite regression, and so Wilson as a name already bears its descent. The son of Will already admits to the weight of the father and Wilson's drive for negative originality commits him to destroy himself. Self-overcoming becomes self-annihilation. Wilson's narrative is couched in the privileged language of uniqueness. His inner contradiction begins by stating that "Notwithstanding a noble descent" his "everyday appellation" damns him to imitation. Thus he is divided in his consciousness between a will to originality and an internal drive to perversity that ultimately leads him to a face-off with himself.

Poe's Universe

When Poe arrives at his "legitimate thesis," which is "The Universe," hyperbolically allusive of Emerson, he suggests that his "thesis admits a choice between two modes of discussion:—we may ascend or descend."[62] Again, the proposition immediately recalls Emerson's essay "Experience." Emerson opens his essay asking "Where do we find ourselves? We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which

[62] Poe, "Eureka," 1271.

go upward and out of sight."[63] For Emerson, the forgetting that separates man from the past also threatens man's perception of the future, as if human life exists due to nature's "frugality." Poe reiterates Emerson's point. He reminds us that "[b]eginning at our own point of view—at the Earth on which we stand—we may pass to the outer planets of the system—thence to the Sun—thence to our system considered collectively—and thence, through other systems, indefinitely outwards; or, commencing on high at some point as definitely as we can make it or conceive it, we may come down to the habitation of Man."[64]

The descent to the "habitation of man" provides Poe with a "distinct conception of the individual universe."[65] In all probability Poe concurs with Emerson, who says in "Experience" that human originality admits a lack: "Ah that our Genius were a little more of a genius," Emerson recognizes. Poe says much the same idea:

> it is clear that a descent to small from great—to the outskirts from the center (if we could establish a center)—to the end from the beginning (if we could fancy a beginning) would be the preferable course, but for the difficulty, if not impossibility, of presenting, in this course, to the unastronomical, a picture at all comprehensible in regard to such considerations as are involved in quantity—that is to say, in number, magnitude and distance.[66]

Lacking a center, Poe's cosmos, then, is incomprehensible.

Poe arrives at his core argument, that the intelligibility of the Universe is a problem for a conception of infinity from the standpoint of an individual universe.

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[63] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (Modern Library, 2000), 307.

[64] Poe, "Eureka," 1271.

[65] Poe, "Eureka," 1271.

[66] Poe, "Eureka," 1271.

Infinity becomes an “impossible conception.”[67] In terms akin to Kantian categories, Poe suggests that infinity becomes a thought of a thought. Infinity, says Poe, is a term of relation between human beings and the intellect. For Poe, infinity appears coextensive with Kantian “freedom”: and with limitations upon human intellect, the “mind admits the idea of limitless, though the greater impossibility of entertaining that of limited, space.” Poe’s notion of an “impossible conception” mediating an absolute universe and an individual universe points to two important Kantian concepts. That the faculty of reason “is called upon to decide” between limitation and the unlimited alludes to a reading of the Kantian sublime. Poe has just pointed to the “impossibility of entertaining” magnitude. Here we find ourselves in the moment of the Kant’s mathematical sublime. Moreover, Poe implies that negative originality amounts to an existential paradox; here, he admits that there is no *a priori* reason available to intelligence to make sense of limitation as a finite constraint, or the unlimited as a non-empirical thought of a thought. We are in the midst of a conundrum of negative freedom. Poe admits that

> all this is undeniable: since the choice of the mind is to be made between impossibilities of conception; since one impossibility cannot be greater than another; and since, thus, one cannot be preferred to another: the philosophers who not only maintain, on the grounds just mentioned, man's idea of infinity, but, on account of such suppositious idea, infinity itself—are plainly engaged in demonstrating one impossible thing to be possible by showing how it is that some one other thing—is impossible too. This, it will be said is nonsense; and perhaps it is...the argument alluded to both proves and disproves its own proposition.[68]

If the notion of limited space is a property of a subjective individual universe, the notion of an unlimited dimension of freedom remains an impossibility; if the notion of absolute

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[67] Poe, “Eureka,” 1272.

[68] Poe, “Eureka,” 1273.

infinity is a result of the idea of limitless space, the constraints upon individuality limit reason's ability to understand its magnitude in any palpable sense.

The mind may try to imagine a "First Cause," which is to admit that the notion of generative originality arises as a reaction of reason when attempting to comprehend the beginning of things. Poe argues that it is impossible for a human being to have a conception of infinity. A less "introspective" thinker might fall into self-deception in imagining that she has a conception of infinity, but all this redounds simply to faith, or an "intellectual belief" in "mental conception."[69] Ideas of infinity as "thoughts of thought" originate as a negation of conception. Poe imagines infinity to be an incomprehensible "mental vision" lying outside the horizons of the "utmost 'conceivable expanse' of space."[70] The negation of these horizons is defined by Poe as "a sphere" comprised of an unlimited center and a null circumference.[71] The upshot of the conundrum of faith here outlined points back to the individual universe: we should have to be God ourselves, Poe realizes: the soul is "everlastingly condemned" to an intellect absent of God.

As Poe will argue, the absolute universe is comprised of matter resolved into the basic energies of attraction and repulsion. God becomes a sort of anti-matter, and as Spirit, the question of creation *ex nihilo* arises. It appears incomprehensible that matter can arise out of spirit. Poe is searching for a pure intuition through which he can comprehend originality. He conceives this originary state to be "simplicity" or "oneness." His thesis is as follows: "Oneness is a principle abundantly sufficient to account for the constitution, the existing phenomena and the plainly inevitable annihilation of at least the

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[69] Poe, "Eureka," 1275.

[70] Poe, "Eureka," 1275.

[71] Poe, "Eureka," 1276.

material universe."[72] The "primordial particle" is the originating source for the "conception" of Creation. It would seem that in Poe's definition the teleological conception of Creation originates a flux in which materiality can arise and decline, which is to suggest that the original particle is immaterial and an idea of absolute Universality. The first cause is conceived not as omniscience but as utter simplicity, or negativity—what Heidegger conceives of as *nihil originarium*[73]. Poe's "irresistible" yet "inexpressible" intuition is that negativity is the originary steady-state and it becomes conceptualized as a result of a reaction to the idea of infinity. Put another way, *originality becomes conceivable during the Kantian sublime moment*.

Poe states that the "constitution of the Universe" arises from the original "Particle." Since materiality (matter) can be annihilated by the "principle" of simplicity, it is unlikely that he means the particle to consist in matter alone, but rather must be—anticipating Heidegger—a transcendental idea. The Universe, then, is a state in which the original "condition" of oneness moves into multiplicity through a basic mode of action—irradiation (Heidegger's *nihil originarium*)—upon the simple particle so that if breaks into a multitude of atoms. The concept of originality arises by recognizing the "difference" between the state of diffusion and the state of origination.[74] Poe lists a number of categories of differences that mark the relations between originality and the original. Poe makes the point that in the flux from simplicity to complexity there is no cause for superergation, which is to say that there is no "design" other than contingency.

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[72] Poe, "Eureka," 1277.

[73] Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, William James Entwistle and Walter Angus Morison, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 210.

[74] Poe, "Eureka," 1278.

There are differences of kind, size, and form that result in a transformation or "disclosure" of "essential nature" as phenomenology[75]

Poe makes an effort to explain the relations and proximity of atoms that clearly harkens to Leibniz's *Monadology*. Poe is interested in explaining through the example of the atom how proximity and force create the motions of attraction and repulsion. The drive to multiplicity ultimately rests in "coalescence," when the movement of return ensues. The attraction to the original state is more powerful than multiplicity. And of course the analogue to this three-stage movement is Newtonian gravity and its laws of motion. Poe speaks of heterogeneity, electricity, and magnetism as analogous forces that presuppose individuality. He is attempting to account for singularity (as opposed to original simplicity). Poe's conception of individual universality as a "phenomenon of vitality" leads to the structure of attraction and repulsion as mapped by body and soul. To account for heterogenous consciousness—singularity—Poe sees that repulsion is a movement towards perception. But perception leads to the errors of "concentralization" and "*especiality*," presumptions that lead to thinking that heterogeneity as a normative state. The "vital truth," he says, is that Unity is the "source of the phenomena."[76] There are no things in themselves.

All differences strive to return to their point of origin. Poe confirms that the "point of origin" is not a locality but a principle.[77] The principle, he repeats, "the truth of original Unity as the source—as the principle of the Universal Phenomena."[78] Poe's

[75] Poe, "Eureka," 1279.

[76] Poe, "Eureka," 1285.

[77] Poe, "Eureka," 1287.

[78] Poe, "Eureka," 1288.

original unity anticipates what Heidegger regarded as an essential state of Being: *Dasein.* Poe is careful to forestall the possibility of a refutation of his theory. He denies self-evidence as premise of axiomatic thinking, a move which appears as a challenge to Kantian metaphysics. In order to bracket his own thesis he reserves one basic principle: Unity. This leaves open the ontological question of whether the sole instance of self-evidence is original Unity. Poe probes the question. It is immaterial whether original Unity is an attribute of simplicity, God, universal gravitation: originality lies in the *immeasurable diffusion* through space. The appearance of spatial phenomena through diffusion, radiation and luminosity allow for a Lockean understanding of primary qualities. Space reveals what is not in the mind. The mind employs rational procedures to measure space through the transmission of light. By measuring spatial distances and geometric relationships among heavenly bodies through a measurement of original radiation, Poe asserts he can determine gravitational relationships.[79]

We can now anticipate that Poe's idea of quantity resolves into the unitary idea of originality that must be disclosed through negativity. His idea of quality, furthermore, arises in an intuitive sense of the ratiocinative principle. Poe attempts to employ ratiocination as a way to overcome the mathematical sublime so as to conceptualize originality itself. In a series of three proofs Poe claims to show that radiation is proportional to distance, that motion follows a straight line, that his theory is in fact the first principle. And because he has proceeded to the absolute principle as a limitation of thought, he claims "My [original] Particle Proper is but Absolute Irrelation:" that is,

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[79] Poe, "Eureka," 1292.

negative originality.[80] Poe proposes that as galaxies situate space it is acknowledged that earth's solar system is not the center but off to one side of space. Earth's position, with respect to the center of space, is analogous with the structure of the sublime itself. Earth's position suggests a proximity to a cosmic abyss. Earth, metaphorically figuring 'nature' or 'mind', exists in isolation in the "wildernesses of Space."[81] Because of Earth's isolation the laws particular to earth do not have bearing on the rest of space, which opens the question of multiple universalities: metaphysics leads ultimately to an abyss where no primal unity exists. That thought causes us to "task our imagination" and we find ourselves "struck and overwhelmed."[82] Indeed, that is the very definition of the Kantian sublime.

The mind is always in a relational parallax to whatever fixed points it can grasp to situate itself within reason. In the recovery or movement of return, Poe states that "we have no difficulty in understanding the absolute accuracy of the Divine adaptations" to the sublime movement; he suggests that the movement has a predestined teleological structure. The goal of creation, the end, is premised on an "absolute reciprocity of adaptation."[83] Poe is suggesting here a ratio between the given and the ends and that the reciprocity between cause and effect operates analogously like a fictional text's perfect plot. For Poe, the solar system provides an analogical inference that describes poetry as a figure for metaphysical originality. "In the construction of a plot," he says, and within "fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the incidents that we shall not be able

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[80] Poe, "Eureka," 1303.

[81] Poe, "Eureka," 1329.

[82] Poe, "Eureka," 1335.

[83] Poe, "Eureka," 1342.

to determine, of any one of them, whether it depends from any one side or upholds it."[84] Although the conception remains for Poe *a priori*, the unity of effect requires suspension of disbelief. Disbelief reveals a "grasping for the infinite," and in turn the "poetical instinct of humanity"; the poetical instinct is an "instinct for the symmetrical," a "symmetry of surface: —this instinct, which the Soul, not only of Man but of all created things, took up, in the beginning, from the geometrical basis of the Universal radiation— impels us to the fancy of an endless extension of this system of cycles." The Galaxy is imagined to be a "cluster of clusters" revolving in a series of "agglomerations." The "infinite sublimity endlessly multiplied by the infinitely sublime…, continued in perpetuity, which the voice of what some people term 'analog' calls upon Fancy to depict and the Reason to contemplate."

Poe and the Sublime

Rather than depicting the sublime infinite "generally," Poe suggests that a specific analogy points to a system in the Galaxy where all objects revolve around a single center. Moreover, it is that center that becomes his direct point of contention. This central sun is invisible to us. It is "non-luminous." With invisibility the analogy falls away; "we have certainly no reason whatever for supposing that the non-luminous suns in question are encircled by luminous suns, while these again are surrounded by non-luminous planets."[85] The Cosmos, then, is for Poe an allegory of the ontological argument. "Admitting the thing to be so, we cannot help here picturing to ourselves how sad a puzzle the why it is so must prove to all *a priori* philosophers." So "we may still inquire how this orb, so enormous, could fail of being rendered visible by the flood of light

[84] Poe, "Eureka," 1342.

[85] Poe, "Eureka," 1344.

thrown upon it from the 100 millions of glorious suns glaring in all directions about it." In that inquiry "the idea of an actually solid central sun appears, in some measure, to have been abandoned."[86] "This idea of the circle—an idea which, in view of all ordinary geometry, is merely mathematical, as contradistinguished from the practical [moral] idea." The mathematical idea is the only practical idea "we have any right to entertain."

Poe argues that the ontological argument is a response to a psychological anxiety, a figurative aporia that seeks a centering term. The galaxy appears to be "rushing toward a great central mass in consequence of the action of some great power."[87] Yet, actually, "we find many groups of [stars] moving in opposite directions." So it remains improbable that visible clusters in the Universe "are revolving about any particular center unknown, whether luminous or non-luminous."[88] "It is but Man's longing for a fundamental First Cause, that impels both his intellect and his fancy to the adoption of such an hypothesis." Instead, Poe posits that the appearance of an "orbital movement about a centre" suggests "a state of progressive collapse."[89] It is "precisely this state in which alone we are warranted in considering All Things."

Poe maintains that the "tendency to collapse" and the gravitational effect of attraction are "convertible phrases"; either expression points to a reaction to a first cause; radiation is a temporary moment in the movement of return from the many to the One. The universe is a poetical allegory: "the Universe…is the most sublime of poems"; the "symmetry" of the Universe demonstrates its consistency: "A perfect consistency…can

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[86] Poe, "Eureka," 1344.

[87] Poe, "Eureka," 1346.

[88] Poe, "Eureka," 1347.

[89] Poe, "Eureka," 1348.

be nothing but an absolute truth."[90] Here, Poe, we note again, is jesting with Emerson, whose phrase "[a] foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," stands for a self-reflexivity Poe seems to charge with Transcendentalists, and Transcendentalism, in general, with incomprehensibility, labeling Bostonians, "Frogpondians", and Emerson, himself, one of "a class of gentlemen with whom we have no patience,…His present role seems to be out-Carlyling Carlyle."[91] The consistency Poe maintains here is not the absolute unity of which Emerson and Hegel shared an ultimate view, but an unresolving binary view of the universe which Poe saw as attraction and repulsion, a dialectical position that has been understood so far as a formal structure of negative originality. But if ideally Hegel's negation of negation would become transformed as absolute unity, Poe's perfect poem remains fundamentally dualistic. Emerson saw in nature this possibility, that the "me" and the "not me" might remain unreconciled. In *Eureka,* Poe's intuitive reason redounds to the ultimate truth that periodicity and reciprocity control reality. Poe's version of the movement of return holds that as a period becomes foreclosed, a new and different period originates negating the previous cycle. There is no absolute beyond cyclic reality. Poe's irradiation thus extends Hegel's second term indefinitely.

The intuition held by many that the Universe might retract into a central orb supposes a pre-existing central orb as the cause of the universe. The phenomenon of nature *as idea* is distinguished from the matter of the universe held in suspension by ether. Ether is the spirit of matter. As such, "the Universe has no conceivable end. The

[90] Poe, "Eureka," 1349.

[91] Edgar Allan Poe, "A Chapter on Autography [part III]," (*Graham's Magazine*, January 1842), 20:44-49.

lack of finality makes us view Creation as an "imperfect plot in a romance."[92] The "*dénouement* is awkwardly brought about by interposed incidents external and foreign to the main subject." The equilibrium between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of each system breaks down as the differences in atomic proximity shift the balance where equilibrium ultimately precipitates a catastrophic closure.[93]

Poe speaks of a "Reciprocity of Adaptation" or "the idiosyncrasy of Divine Art." In diffusion "matter is enabled to exist" in a state of multiplicity. Matter exists in such a state of heterogeneity to "influence" individual spirit, that is to say, consciousness. By analogy to diffused matter, consciousness and individual intelligence exist. Matter is a means, not an end.[94] Attraction and repulsion allow matter to be "manifested to Mind"; and therefore, "Attraction and Repulsion are Matter."[95] In absolute Unity, no attraction is possible and therefore "attraction implies particularity." Catastrophic closure results "on fulfillment of its purposes … Matter shall have returned into its original condition of One—a condition which presupposes the expulsion of the separate Ether," but Ether exists merely to promote the state of separateness of Matter in its state of Attraction; once expelled there is "Matter without Attraction"; or, "Matter no more"; or anti matter. So "we can readily conceive that a new and perhaps totally different series of conditions may ensue—another creation and radiation, returning into the self."[96] Catastrophe, allegorizing the sublime consciousness, is cyclic.

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[92] Poe, "Eureka," 1352.

[93] Poe, "Eureka," 1353.

[94] Poe, "Eureka," 1354.

[95] Poe, "Eureka," 1355.

[96] Poe, "Eureka," 1346.

The human imagination is guided by the law of periodicity, the iterative process of the movement of return; like a human heart, it is "a novel Universe swelling into existence and then subsiding into nothingness … It is our own."[97] For Poe, then, metaphysical originality is grounded in periodicity and flux. "The phenomena on which our conclusions must at this point depend, are merely spiritual shadows." Existence is the natural feeling of youth. "But now comes the period at which a conventional World-Reason awakens us from the truth of our dream. Doubt, Surprise, and Incomprehensibility arrive at the same moment."[98] The thinking self becomes perplexed by the paradox that it is both created by a superior intelligence that fosters existence, and the recognition of the "utter impossibility of any one's soul feeling inferior to another"; the "incomprehensibility of the paradox is overwhelming." The individual soul strives to return to the original unity, proving for Poe, that "no one soul is inferior to another—that nothing is, or can be, superior to any one soul—that each soul is, in part, its own God—its own Creator."

Poe and Attraction and Repulsion

Poe is not a pantheist but more akin to a presocratic; he is not a Spinozan who sees a single substance, but a dualist who sees flux in terms of attraction and repulsion.[99] Essence for Poe isn't a unitary substance—Wordsworth and Coleridge's oneness. Poe's idea of creation is one of flux and expansion. Pantheism refuses expansion because substance is already full. Poe's notion of originality is "physicalistic-spiritualistic" in that

[97] Poe, "Eureka," 1356.

[98] Poe, "Eureka," 1357.

[99] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations*, 273.

primordial creation of a particle of matter forms the cosmos through division.[100] Expansion is not simply a physical one but also teleologic, in that it implies a design towards relationships that are bound in flux, and ultimately indicate a desire to rejoin in a collapsing force. Repulsion prevents attraction from regaining unity.

The same force of repulsion that caused diffusion of particles acts to deter their attraction.[101] Attraction and repulsion are not divine properties adhering to substances and particles but forces acting on particles, and contingent. For Poe the forces of attraction and repulsion are a creative form of energy, and irradiating force flowing into and separating matter. Compared to Coleridge's *esemplastic power,* attraction is presented as a physical energy rather than a transcendental one. The shaping forces of energy, when classical in balance and pre-Christian in cosmic design, are aesthetically creative. Poe's notion of attraction and repulsion create a cosmos that invites comparison to an intelligent design redolent of Liebniz's monadology. Yet Poe synthesizes classical and Christian ideas. The motion caused by repulsion is countered by attraction producing a centrifugal and centripetal circularity, where upon attempting to return brings about a *transfiguration* of consciousness that resembles the Romantic sublime. This attainment of a transfigured consciousness at once classical and Romantic: reunification raises consciousness from the ideal through the material to ideal, thus producing the Romantic movement of return.

This movement that presupposes a value in symmetry moves beyond neoclassicism into Romanticism as the return by attraction brings consciousness into a

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[100] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 274.

[101] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 275.

higher plane.[102] Poe's mathematical formalism, as in "The Philosophy of Composition" becomes not an end in itself of formal aestheticism, but rather a symbol showing reason to be contingent to spirit, as demonstrated by the circularity of forces. Poe's cosmology is thus emanationist rather than pantheist. And unlike the transcendentalists, Poe's emanationism sees the soul as a part of Spirit only insofar as it distinguishes itself from the Absolute through the force of repulsion. God exists only as diffusion; each iterated gathering becomes the individual in the Universe. The "Divine Injustice" of "Inexorable Fate" produces evil. But fate is endurable insofar as through sorrow we see that joy is futile.[103] The individual seeks a capacity to expand and concentrate one's power. All is Life.

In *Eureka,* Poe states that ratiocination allows for the understanding that an "inner perfection of theory," as Chai terms it, to be a sufficient condition for truth.[104] The notion of inner perfection demands criteria, and we turn to the universe for models: symmetry, consistency, are the form of the universe, the perfection and completeness of which indicate absolute truth. Symmetry in turn implies a "correspondence between theoretical elements such as cause and effect, origin and end..."[105] Such a formal correspondence arises in the "aesthetic quality of thought," which means, by extension, that rationality is not a sufficient condition for consistency and beauty, but its theoretical "inner perfection" is. This correspondence sets up a division between theory and phenomena, "inner perfection" and "external confirmation." The paradigm case for this

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[102] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 277.

[103] Poe, "Eureka," 1357.

[104] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations*, "Beauty abounds in its truth, constituting its true." (Qtd. 130).

[105] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 131.

complementary concern points to the original of the universe, whose perfection is not verifiable but conceptualized as ideal beauty according to theories derived from it. Chai points out that "The origin of the universe is really the origin of the idea, which Poe traces to the origin of thought itself."[106] The problem of securing a basis for ideas resides in their relativity, or the "fluctuating principle," as Poe calls it: more reliable are ideas structured by Reason.

> It will now be readily understood that no axiomatic idea—no idea founded in the fluctuating principle, obviousness of relation—can possibly be so secure—so reliable a basis for any structure erected by the Reason, as that idea—(whatever it is, wherever we can find it, or if it be practicable to find it anywhere) —which is irrelative altogether—which not only presents to the understanding no obviousness of relation, either greater or less, to be considered, but subjects the intellect, not in the slightest degree, to the necessity of even looking at any relation at all.[107]

Poe's notion of irrelativity, parallels the "sacrifice of relation" that Michaeld Davitt Bell found in Henry James' juxtaposition between the real and the romantic. Poe's "unity of effect" amounts to an effect because it makes demands upon the reason of the subject, and unity, since the *singular form* is undivided and thus can bear no relation to itself or any other thing. This would have to be Hegel's "absolute." The only unity, conceptually, that could possess this quality would be the universal one, which must be a metaphysical idea only. Chai sums it up saying "The origin of the universe is really the origin of its idea…."[108] This is "pure reason" and there at least two problems. The unity of effect is an oxymoron since the notion of effect implies "apperception." Unity may be a "pure concept of the understanding" but effect seems to involve the operation of secondary imagination, which is an individual phenomenon. The original "idea" must be an absent

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[106] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 131.

[107] Poe, "Eureka," 1303.

[108] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations,* 131.

presence like the purloined letter; it exists in no place (utopia) since it must be irrelative, yet to demonstrate it, we must find it, and the only "place" it exists is in the mind. The intellect has to run through all the concepts and work to the top of the hierarchy. This is pure noumenality. Like the Prefect, any inductive search for originality will turn up nothing. Originality is pure intuition, but, it seems, not just anybody's. Otherwise the Prefect would have been successful.

And yet *irrelativity* is the most secure idea, even as it is non-existent. To exist it would be pure idiosyncrasy, ultimate peculiarity: singular form; form, itself being a 'being' and the result of a process, implies relation, so that singular form is fundamentally a conundrum, unless it meets the conditions of unity and idea. Singular form defines Poe's notion of Beauty, and Melville's notion of negative human exceptionalism. But even Ahab is divided and relational, split down the middle by lightning. The only unity—originality—like the whiteness of the whale, remains for Poe a negative originality because a movement of a return into absolute unity is impossible; it must remain different, which means originality is not irrelative. For Poe as it is for Hawthorne, relation is the primary force.

Poe: The Cultural Matrix and Negative Freedom

Poe's confrontation with the growing marketplace of literature resulted from his inability to find literary independence from the market.[109] Louis Renza reminds us that "In Poe's case, American-Republican literature existed in embryo, or as an issue more or

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[109] Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). Whalen sees Poe as working in a literary milieu that Poe characterized as a "magazine prison-house." Within the economic context of the literary marketplace and the political strictures of national literature Poe sought a critical relation to the publishing field that was ambivalent and yet highly invested in a position of literary elitism that can be figured by his concepts of cryptography and ratiocination.

less coming to the fore. His peer public largely consisted of geographically distant British writers, and in an era of delayed, scattered, and tenuously verifiable information."[110] In a situation shared by Hawthorne and Melville, Poe was

> forced by economic circumstances to write magazine journalism, Poe, whose ambition for honorific, literary recognition lay primarily in writing poetry, emplots and mocks his mass readers in his tales… Poe's fiction, that is, includes the fiction of both his public's reading of it, and his simultaneously witnessing, as if from some private or undetected position, the effect his emplotted readings will have on others.[111]

Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," points out, that "[t]he fact is, originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation."[112] Poe means, of course, that originality arises in an author's sense of negative freedom, the aesthetic position the author maintains in opposition to the cultural matrix. For Poe, one problem of negative originality centers on the situation in America during the 1840s on the question of a lack of international copyright. Poe argues:

> How we rob foreign authors, and how we argue in our legislative halls that it is an economical thing for us to pick the foreign pocket, are points too well understood to need discussion — but there are still found individuals who ask, innocently enough, in what manner the want of the International Law affects the pecuniary interest of the native American. The man who asks the question should first write a book or a magazine article, and then offer it to a publisher for sale.[113]

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[110] Louis A. Renza, *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 8.

[111] Renza, *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy*, 8.

[112] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 550.

[113] Edgar Allan Poe, "Pay of American Authors [Part I]." *Evening Mirror* (January 24, 1845), 2.

In his series of four articles on the "Pay of American Authors" published in the *Evening Mirror* in January, 1845, Poe argues that a lack of international copyright negates the originality of American authors, by driving them into an obsequious relationship with publishers (puffing); and, moreover, it undermines the precepts of democracy because it encourages American legislators in the interest of "expediency" to steal from British writers and at the same time to discourage authorship by undercutting its cultural value. Authors are driven to imitate the going fads of national literature, when in fact their autonomy as independent and original writers is hamstrung by false exceptionalism. As professional writers are forced into magazine writing, the vacuum is filled by wealthy and conservative writers who turn to British aristocratic models and therefore imitate that stilted discourse of *belles lettres.* Moreover, since it is democracy itself that has made a sham of national literature the writer is trapped between an American mass culture unsympathetic to intellectual work and prefers its highbrow commodities at a bargain rate (thereby thumbing noses at British Tories), and a conservative anti-progressive class of American bourgeois who have no sympathy for rational progress: on one side is an American anti-intellectualism, on the other an agrarian aristocracy. Poe idealizes, ironically, another hypothetical nationality of literati: "But of the need of *that* nationality which defends our own literature, sustains our own men of letters, upholds our own dignity, and depends upon our own resources, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt."[114] The squeezed middle finds the alternative romantic subverting the popular culture that pushes back against the negating effect of the

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[114] Edgar Allan Poe, "American Literary Independence," in *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 582.

copyright issue, and at the same acts to negate the contradictions and hypocrisies latent in the paradox of "democratic authorship."

The American antipathy to international copyright presents Poe's idealized literary community with three insurmountable problems for literary originality. It allows the circulation of British literature at an artificially low cost since British authors are uncompensated. This unfair market for British books and magazines undercuts fledgling American writers. American writers are, in turn, motivated to allow American publishers to "puff" their works, and hence such false advertising undermines American criticism. Thirdly, the unfair availability of British quarterlies allows for British literary opinion to maintain its literary hegemony over American writing, stilting the development of American literary criticism. Poe writes, scathingly:

> Yet here is the very point at which we are most supine. We complain of our want of an International Copyright, on the ground that that this want justifies our publishers in inundating us with British opinion in British books; and yet when those very publishers, at their own obvious risk, and even obvious loss, do publish an American book, we turn up our noses at it with supreme contempt (this as a general thing) until it (the American book) has been dubbed 'readable' by some illiterate Cockney critic". . . It is *not* saying too much, to say this.[115]

Poe points to the underlying problem for an original democratic authorship. When American democratic readers criticize their own national literature by snobbishly taking up British literary values they bolster what Sidney Smith meant when he asked: "Who reads an American Book"? In effect, Poe argues, potential literary originality in America is undercut by literary-nationalist ideology that forestalls international copyright. In a moment of ironic reversal, Poe yokes American independence from Britain with British African colonization, arguing, in effect, that like British colonization of parts of Africa,

[115] Poe, *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, 582.

British critics colonize American criticism. Poe's own "lurking" suspicion of democracy holds America itself to be responsible for its own servitude to Britain because of its blockading of American criticism from developing through its resistance to international copyright.

> There is not a more disgusting spectacle under the sun than our subserviency to British criticism…[It is] truckling, servile, pusillanimous … [it shows a] gross irrationality. We *know* the British to bear us little but ill will [and that they do not] utter unbiased opinions of American books … [If well treated by British critics it is because Americans have] paid homage to English institutions, or have lurking at bottom of their hearts a secret principle at war with Democracy…We do indeed the nationality of self-respect. In Letters as in Government we require a Declaration of Independence. A better thing still would be a Declaration of War—and that war should be carried forthwith 'into Africa.'[116]

In his biography of Poe published in *Graham's Magazine* during the height of Poe's career in 1845, James Russell Lowell noted that

> The situation of American literature is anomalous. It has no centre, or, if it have, it is like that of the sphere of Hermes. It is divided into many systems, each revolving round its several sun, and often presenting to the rest only the faint glimmer of a milk-and-watery way. Our capital city, unlike London or Paris, is not a great central heart, from which life and vigor radiate to the extremities, but resembles more an isolated umbilicus, stuck down as near as may be to the centre of the land, and seeming rather to tell a legend of former usefulness than to serve any present need. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, each has its literature almost more distinct than those of the different dialects of Germany; and the Young Queen of the West has also one of her own, of which some articulate rumor barely has reached us dwellers by the Atlantic. Meanwhile, a great babble is kept up concerning a national literature, and the country, having delivered itself of the ugly likeness of a paint-bedaubed, filthy savage, smilingly dandles the rag-baby upon her maternal knee, as if it were veritable flesh and blood, and would grow timely to bone and sinew… But, before we have an American literature, we must have an American criticism.[117]

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[116] Poe, *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, 582-84.

[117] James Russell Lowell, "Our Contributors: Edgar Allan Poe," (*Graham's Magazine*, February 1845), 27/2:49-53. In, Edgar Allan Poe. *The Selected Writing's*, ed. G.R. Thompson (NY: W.W. Norton, 2004), 656.

Lowell's point is that the diffusion of American literature in the 1840s, most of it in the form of a variety of magazines and gift books featuring a potpourri of reprinted articles by British and American authors, often published anonymously, belies a pretense based in an ideology for national literature. Lowell elects Poe as the critic who will "pass most erudite judgment upon the merit of thistles."[118]

Written concurrently to Lowell's biography of Poe in *Graham's Magazine*, Poe's four-part series in the *Evening Mirror* (January 1845), titled "Pay of American Authors," as we have already alluded, proposed that American national literature was being undermined by the literary piracy afforded by a lack of international copyright. In the first installment of the article Poe writes: "How we rob foreign authors, and how we argue in our legislative halls that it is an economical thing for us to pick the foreign pocket."[119] The "most momentous evil" caused by a lack of international copyright, says Poe, "is the bitter sense of wrong aroused in the hearts of all literary men." In Part 2 of "Pay of Authors in America," Poe argues that a lack of compensation given to American authors since British works are circulated freely results in "depressing our literature."[120]

And here we get an intimation of the hostility Poe felt for democratic institutions: "What nation has *ever yet* found it politic to inflict, for the sake of a seeming advantage, however general, avowed and continuous injury to even the humblest of her individuals?" Consequently, he says, "One thing is certain — the institutions are *not* safe which persist in insulting them." In Part III, Poe shows the result as what he regards as an injurious

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[118] Lowell, "Our Contributors: Edgar Allan Poe."

[119] Edgar Allan Poe, "Pay of American Authors [Part I]." *Evening Mirror* (January 24, 1845), 2.

[120] Edgar Allan Poe, "Pay of American Authors [Part I]." *Evening Mirror* (January 24, 1845), 2; "Pay of American Author [Part II]." *Evening Mirror* (January 25, 1845), 2.

policy: “The impossibility, in general, of getting pay from the booksellers for the copyright of books, has driven nearly all the American *literateurs* to Magazines contribution.” He adds that “in the content-table of one or more of our Monthlies: — the Quarterlies are anonymous, and for no better reason than that the British Quarterlies have been anonymous before them. Who, to-day, is so weak as to value an anonymous opinion and, unluckily, our reviews are for the most part either disingenuous essays concocted from the material of the book reviewed, or summaries of sheer opinion.”[121] In Part IV, the “Synopsis of the international copy-right question,” which we quote at length, Poe writes

> The immediate advantage to our people, so far as the pocket is concerned, is of course sufficiently plain. We get more reading for less money than if the International Law existed; but what we mean to say is, that the more remote disadvantages are of infinitely greater weight. In brief they are these: — First we have injury to our national literature by repressing the efforts of our men of genius: — for genius, as a general rule, is poor in worldly goods and cannot write for nothing. Our genius being thus repressed, we are written *at* only by our "gentlemen of elegant leisure," and mere gentlemen of elegant leisure have been noted, time out of mind, for the insipidity of their productions. In general, too, they are obstinately conservative, and the feeling leads them into imitation of foreign, especially of British models. This is the true source of the imitativeness with which as literary people, we have been justly charged . . . In the second place, irreparable ill is wrought by the almost exclusive dissemination among us of foreign, that is to say of monarchical or aristocratical sentiment, in foreign books: nor is this sentiment less fatal to Democracy because it reaches *the people* themselves, directly, in the gilded pill of the poem or the novel … We have next to consider the impolicy of our committing, in the national character, an open and continuous wrong, on the frivolous and altogether untenable pretext of expediency. Of this point we have spoken before … The last, and by far the most important consideration of all, however, is that sense of insult and injury to which, also, we have already alluded — *the animosity aroused in the whole active Intellect of the world* — the bitter and fatal resentment excited in the universal heart of Literature — a resentment which will not, and which cannot, make nice

[121] Edgar Allan Poe, “Pay of American Authors [Part III]” *Evening Mirror* (January 27, 1845), 2.

> distinction between the temporary perpetrators of the wrong, and that Democracy in general which not only permits but glories in its perpetration.[122]

Poe's criticism of puffing reveals the consequences of a literary market disadvantaged by the imbalanced trade position granted to British literature by American trade policy that saw international copyright as favoring British authors. American readers in the 1840s desired to have the advantage of British culture but were unwilling to reward British authors, and instead foisted the ideology of literary nationalism upon a market hampered by trade disadvantages and false advertising. If on one hand Poe's position toward international copyright maintained that it stifled American literary creativity, prioritized British hegemony, degraded national character, and promoted anti-intellectualism, on the other hand Poe was already on record criticizing such American publishers that did exist for the practice of puffing mediocre writing. If a lack of international copyright discouraged authors from expecting compensation, puffing encouraged authors to produce inferior work with respect to British examples. For an author to publish, Poe realized, he or she entered into the business of placing their works into the hands of unscrupulous publishers and unethical critics. Poe argued that

> The intercourse between critic and publisher, as it now almost universally stands, is comprised either in the paying and pocketing of black mail, as the price of a simple forbearance, or in a direct system of petty and contemptible bribery, properly so called — a system even more injurious than the former to the true interests of the public, and more degrading to the buyers and sellers of good opinion, on account of the more positive character of the service here rendered for the consideration received … To so great an extent of methodical assurance has the *system* of puffery arrived, that publishers, of late, have made no scruple of keeping on hand an assortment of commendatory notices, prepared by their men

[122] Edgar Allan Poe, "Pay of American Authors [Parts I- IV]" (A), *Evening Mirror* (New York), January 24, 25, 27, 31, 1845.

> of all work, and of sending these notices around to the multitudinous papers within their influence, done up within the fly-leaves of the book.[123]

Here we have Poe's concise argument for independent and original literary criticism. The problem redounds to the practice inherent in democratic authorship, and a practice inherited from the republican public sphere of the early national period for anonymous authorship. Poe writes:

> In a word, the press throughout the country has not been ashamed to make head against the very few bold attempts at independence which have, from time to time, been made in the face of the reigning order of things … But is this an age—is this a day—in which it can be necessary even to advert to such considerations as that the book of the author is the property of the public, and that the issue of the book is the throwing down of the gauntlet to the reviewer—to the reviewer whose duty is the plainest; the duty not even of approbation, or of censure, or of silence, at his own will, but at the sway of those sentiments and of those opinions which are derived from the author himself, through the medium of his written and published words? True criticism is the reflection of the thing criticised upon the spirit of the critic.[124]

As we shall see, anonymity was at the beginning of the nineteenth century and before a mode of democratic "publicity," a way for the public to voice its political will. As the market for literature enlarged the notion of publicity became a way for authors to circulate literature anonymously. Anonymous authorship was a key means in which individuals might enter the collective public sphere and contribute to the public interest, yet remaining unidentified authors could voice political views as a public voice. Anonymous authorship circulated without copyright identification through the practice of reprinting. But eventually the market interceded and demanded the identification of authors due to the increasingly important function copyright law played in highlighting individual authorship and the literary-critical issue of plagiarism.

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[123] Edgar Allan Poe, "Quacks of Helicon," *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Penguin Group, 2006), 564-65.

[124] Poe, "Quacks of Helicon," 564-65.

Poe's criticism clearly demonstrates the semantic shift that occurred in the use of the term publicity. What had been a term to describe a mode of print distribution originating anonymously in the democratic public sphere for the public's benefit, which had survived through the early national era into the Jacksonian era through "reprinting."[125] As the literary marketplace took hold of the term it shifted to its modern sense as a form of marketing.[126] Book advertising, or "puffing," had adopted anonymity as a means of book reviewing, and an outraged Poe states that

> We shall thus frown down all conspiracies to foist inanity upon the public consideration at the obvious expense of every man of talent who is not a member of a *clique* in power … Yet in the attempt at getting definite information in regard to any one portion of our literature, the merely general reader, or the foreigner, will turn in vain from the lighter to the heavier journals. But it is not our intention here to dwell upon the radical, antique, and systematized rigmarole of our Quarterlies. The articles here are anonymous. Who writes? who causes to be written? Who but an ass will put faith in tirades which *may* be the result of personal hostility, or in panegyrics which nine times out of ten may be laid, directly or indirectly, to the charge of the author himself?[127]

Poe was, as we can see, alarmed at the potential for fraudulently aggrandizing the originality of texts, a concept of originality that was based both in intellectual property and also in originality as a mark of literary value, a value saturated with Romantic schemas for imaginative originality. Such schemas, as we shall discover, had profound connections to British and European Romantic ideas about literary and metaphysical originality, ideas that would ultimately supersede democratic authorship among the alternative Romantics. By identifying the literary critic Poe could elevate universal critical values that could transcend literary nationalism, puffing, and the dependence on

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[125] Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

[126] Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[127] Poe, "The Quacks of Helicon," *Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, 566.

British taste. By confronting negative freedom, Poe could leverage negative originality and confront the pretense of originality he abhorred.

Plagiarism and Ratiocinative Originality

By the time Poe had amassed an oeuvre of literary reviews, essays on literary theory, and marginalia, he was in a pitched battle with the literary establishment. As much as he wished to gain intellectual control of concepts through ratiocination, Poe felt that concepts originate not in experience but in creativity. Literary originality ascended as his primary interest and he was determined to reveal its structure without having to resort to metaphysics. For Poe literary originality was in part quantitative through an investigation of plagiarism, a critical issue that became increasingly trenchant with the rise of the Romantic cult of originality in literature. Arguably, Poe was drawn to plagiarism as a critical ploy since its investigative process is inherently ratiocinative, a mood that fit his penchant for reasoned examinations of creativity.

Poe's ratiocination is essentially a matter of not simply mimesis or representation but *plagiarism.*[128] The original that comprises the purloined letter is a text figured as a crypt, a text lost to the moment. The desire for the text amounts to a desire for a *deus ex machina* that might through its power and machinery restore the text to its origin. In an act of duplication the theft of the text becomes its restoration through intuition, interpretation, and negation. The ratiocinative poet, like Dupin, a duple figure that deploys both intuitive reason and the irradiating power of possession, overpowers the signified with an irruptive assemblage of refulgent signifiers, that partially erase the traces of past signifieds. No transcendental signified can withstand the power of

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[128] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 140.

irradiation. With Dupin, says Riddel, the author becomes allegorized as a deconstructed detective and gambler, whose game is to discover and steal. For Riddel, in Poe's "The Purloined Letter*,*" "detection is repetitious theivery of animated substitutions and displacements that indicate the letter is never at the center, is never representational, except as a sign that is always everywhere."[129] Poe places the very symbol of authority under suspicion, where the Prefect is outwitted and for D_____ the letter loses the will to power. Dupin displaces D____ in a familiar trick of doubling redolent of William Wilson. The game depends on both since they share the same signifier but contrast in terms of the ambivalence of the signified. Authority oscillates between analysis and authorship and becomes resolved into theft by substitution. That same play of reversal applies to the lost letter itself.

The substitution of the author by the thief maps onto the substitution of the reversed fold that masquerades as the original fold. And it is the excess of the signifier as represented by the ambiguity of the folded paper that also disguises the original center that is evacuated through the excess of its exterior. The fold becomes the parergonal frame that overwhelms the center displacing it to the margins. The original, suffice to say, is lost to its iterative exterior. The original center is transgressed by a fictive history that overwrites its generative one. This repetition through erasure forms an allegory that maps onto the transition from classical thought that for Hegel and Said represents centered thought, to a modern thought, which surpasses classical thought by overmastering it. The genetic pattern that marks classical thought—what I have called earlier generative originality, an originality of beginnings—is overcome by a structural

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[129] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 143.

pattern of repetition, a paragenetic or structural originality more synchronic than diachronic. It is this paragenetic aspect that impels writing to produce more writing; closure is effaced by insurmountable openness.

In *Eureka,* Poe "celebrates his poetic will, which can overthrow the old, exhausted fictions of logic; and in the tales of ratiocination, decipherment produces differences that break up the prison house of 'antiquated narratives'."[130] Yet the very factor of doubleness exposes Poe's dilemma. In his acknowledgement of the fictiveness of generative originality, his own structural originality exposes his will to power as a center of his own fictive presence. Poe's "William Wilson" presents an allegory of this bipartite split personality, where the creative resolution of structure through negation of originality exposes its own original double that mirrors that negation in its own spiraling negativity, this again erasing its center in an iteration of negation.

The year 1845 opened promisingly with the publication of the poem "The Raven" in the *New York Evening Mirror.* The poem's author, Edgar Allan Poe, began editing *The Broadway Journal* that January, becoming its chief editor through the end of the year when the journal discontinued publishing due to financial hardships. During the spring and summer of that year Poe had taken up his "tomahawk" in a publically-held private skirmish with Longfellow over matters of plagiarism. If Poe desired to increase readership in Gotham by taking up a critical attack against the revered Harvard literati Longfellow, the idea backfired. Lowell in his satirical poem *A Fable for Critics* (1848)

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[130] Riddel, *Purloined Letters,* 147.

described Poe as "Three-fifths of him genius, and two-fifths sheer fudge."[131] Yet, in 1845, the year of Poe's ascent in *The Broadway Journal,* Lowell had described Poe as "at once the most discriminating, philosophical, and fearless critic upon imaginative works who has written in America."[132] The after effects upon Poe's career notwithstanding, the technical aspects of the Longfellow Wars show Poe's mastery of critical devices of plagiarism hunting. Moreover, Poe, it is likely, invents a straw man, which he names "Outis."[133] Outis's letter in defense of Longfellow was published in the *New York Weekly Mirror* (25 January 1845).[134]

In "Imitation—Plagiarism—Mr. Poe's Reply to the Letter of Outis," Poe cites Outis, who is identified under the anonym "a fourth friend of Mr. Longfellow," and who is addressing Nathaniel Parker Willis, editor of the *Daily Mirror,* thusly: "Dear Willis—Fair play is a jewel, and I hope you will let us have it."[135] Poe states in an article titled "Plagiarism" published in the *Evening Mirror* (47 February, 1845), that the editorial policy maintained by *The Broadway Journal* regarding plagiarism insists upon "no

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[131] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allen Poe*, ed. G. R. Thompson (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 697. Poe's review of *A Fable for Critics* appeared in *The Southern Literary Messenger,* March, 1849.

[132] Poe, *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allen Poe*, 656. Lowell's review appeared in Graham's Magazine, a publication that had removed Poe in 1842 as editor in favor of his future biographer, Griswold.

[133] Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Literary Theory and Criticism*, 84. ed. Leonard Cassuto (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999). According to Cassuto, "Many critics believe that Outis was really Poe himself, playing the trickster by torching his own tailfeathers in order to keep public attention on the affair. Such a hoax would have served to justify the prolonged blast from Poe that followed, an elaboration of the original charges against Longfellow along with a point-by-point refutation of Outis's accusations that spread across four issues of the weekly *Broadway Journal"* (84).

[134] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 702-705.

[135] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 709. Poe's reply to Outis ("nobody") was published in *The Broadway Journal,* March 8, 1845. The air of sadomasochistic projection is palpable.

resemblance."[136] Romantic critics and writers subscribed to the rubrics of plagiarism above and understood the matter as a discourse over "literary judgment."[137] Moreover, even as writers were principally concerned during the period with originality they were also equally aware of the way readers would apply standards of criticism to their works. British critics in the early nineteenth century distinguished between "culpable" and "poetical" plagiarism. The former involved deliberate attempts to pass off borrowing with neither improvement nor acknowledgment, whereas the latter was the result of unconscious borrowing.[138] Culpable plagiarism brought with it a charge of moral abasement; poetical plagiarism failed the minimum standard of Romantic aesthetics of originality: any borrowing required both acknowledgment and improvement to defend against charges of plagiarism. Claims of unconsciousness could counter charges of culpable plagiarism by suggesting that any similarity between two works might be coincidental.[139]

That is the tenor of the case that Outis makes to Willis against Poe's charge of culpable plagiarism with respect to Hood and Aldrich.Poe deploys DeQuincey's method of enumerating "points" of resemblance—or "identities," suggesting Longfellow's conscious and therefore immoral plagiarism. Poe lists the points, demonstrating his technique of evaluating plagiarism. The examples are drawn from poems by Thomas Hood and James Aldrich (both were given biographies by Poe in his reviews of American authors). Poe's charge of "culpable plagiarism" proceeds as follows:

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[136] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 708. Reprinted in *The Broadway Journal,* March 8, 1845.

[137] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 9.

[138] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 2.

[139] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 5.

> In the first place, then, the subject in both pieces is *death*. In the second it is the death of a woman. In the third, it is the death of a woman *tranquilly* dying. In the fourth, it is the death of a woman who lies tranquilly *throughout the night*. In the fifth it is the death of a woman whose "*breathing* soft and low is watched through the night" in the one instance and who "*breathed* the long night away in statue-like repose" in the other. In the sixth place, in both poems this woman dies just at daybreak. In the seventh place, dying just at daybreak, this woman in both cases, steps directly into Paradise. In the eighth place all these identities of circumstance are related in identical rhythms. In the ninth place these identical rhythms are arranged in identical metres; and, in the tenth place, these identical rhythms and metres are constructed into identical stanzas.[140]

Readers of Poe's literary criticism know his inconsistencies and equivocations on matters of plagiarism. Poe had charged Hawthorne for plagiarizing his tale "William Wilson." The charge was "groundless" since Poe composed "William Wilson later than Hawthorne's "Howe's Masquerade."[141] Poe's "fingerpointing highlights his definition of originality and the crucial role it plays in his critical and creative practice."[142] It is behind the mask of Outis ("nobody") that we have a glimpse of Poe's critical problem. In Poe's copy of Outis's letter—how he obtained is redolent of the "Purloined Letter"—we read Outis's defense of Hood and Aldrich's inadvertent and unconscious plagiarism, a mode of "imitation" or coincidental originality that had been the subject of a debate between DeQuincey and Coleridge in the 1820s. Poe, an avid reader of British Quarterlies certainly knew that case, and Outis here takes Coleridge's defense, while Poe makes DeQuincey's charge. Outis's appeal to Willis for mediation apparently predates Poe's insinuation of "fair play"; we read the passage in full:

> Some years ago, a letter was written from some part of New England, describing one of those scenes, not very common during what is called 'the January thaw,' when the snow, mingled with rain, and freezing as it falls, forms a perfect covering of ice upon every object. The storm clears away suddenly, and the moon

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[140] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 707-08.

[141] Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Literary Theory and Criticism*, 57.

[142] Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Literary Theory and Criticism*, 57.

> comes up. The letter proceeds '*every tree and shrub, as far as the eye can reach, of pure transparent glass—a perfect garden of moving, waving, breathing crystals*. * * **Every tree is a diamond chandelier, with a whole constellation of stars clustering to every socket*,' &c. This letter was laid away where such things usually are, in a private drawer, and did not see the light for many years. But the very next autumn brought out, among the splendid annuals got up in the country, a beautiful poem from Whittier, describing the same, or rather a similar scene, in which is this line 'The trees, like crystal chandeliers,'…was put in italics by every reviewer in the land, for the exceeding beauty of the imagery. Now *the letter* was written, probably about the same time with the *poem*, though the poem was not published till nearly a year after. – The writers were not, and never have been, acquainted with each other, and neither could possibly have seen the work of the other before writing. Now, was there any plagiarism here? Yet there are plenty of "*identities*."[143]

Culpable plagiarism thus redounds to the searching out of identities—similar figures and images ("points of resemblance") as they call up the creative conceptions of authorial invention. Poe's ratiocinative detective work, here, indicates how he traces through plagiarism for the evidence of "originality." He continues:

> The author of the letter, when urged some years after, to have it published, consented very reluctantly, through fear that *he* should be charged with theft; and, very probably, the charge has been made, though I have never seen it…May not this often occur? What is more natural? Images are not created, but suggested. And why not the same images, when the circumstances are precisely the same, to different minds? Perhaps your critic will reply, that the case is different after one of the compositions is published. How so? Does he, or you, or anybody read everything that is published? I am a great admirer, and a general reader of poetry. But, by what accident I do not know, I had never seen the beautiful lines of Hood, till your critical friend brought them to my notice in the Mirror. It is certainly possible that Aldrich had not seen them several years ago—and more than probable that Hood had not seen Aldrich's. Yet your friend affects great sympathy for both, in view of their better compunctions of conscience, for their literary piracies…But, after all, wherein does the real resemblance between these two compositions consist? Mr.— I had almost named him, finds nearly a dozen points of resemblance. But when he includes rhythm, metre and stanza among the dozen, he only shows a bitter resolution to make out a case, and not a disposition to do impartial justice. Surely the critic himself who is one of our finest *poets*, does not mean to deny that these mere externals are the common property of all bards. He does not feel it necessary to strike out a new stanza, or to invent new feet and

[143] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 709-10.

measures, whenever he would clothe his 'breathing thoughts in words that burn.'[144]

The matter deserves some consideration. The problem of literary property extends to identities only tenuously since identities may be thematic and formal, but also metaphoric and figural. If, as held generally in Romantic theory, that poetic tropes are the common point of relation between ideal universals and individual poets, they are identities only at the level of singularity—distinct in terms of immediate identity— but not at the level of *sui generis* originality in the sense of a Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow." The charge of plagiarism becomes a metacritical ploy to wrest control over originality in favor of wily literary critics. Poe, in promoting national literature by instigating a literary war over plagiarism using British critical procedures against Longfellow, a national poet with European sympathies, serves to obfuscate the whole question of literary originality in America. He seeks rational critical standards where he finds them, and these standards arrived through British journalism. Yet his concern for international copyright appears less concerned with British authority than it does with promoting an American literary criticism.

Literary Non-Independence

In a piece written for *The Evening Mirror* by Poe, the subject of imitation and literary dependence is raised. Poe argues that "The British reviewers have very frequently accused us of imitation, and the charge is undoubtedly well based. We imitate, however, chiefly the British models, and in doing this, we act only in a natural manner—just as it might have been demonstrated a *priori* that we should and must have acted under the circumstances. All colonies have shown a proneness to ape the mother country in arts and

[144] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 709-10.

letters"[145] Poe goes on to suggest that it is a conspiracy of conservatism satisfied in its imitation of British models that seeks to sustain its literary hegemony by suppressing original writers through a deliberate failure to enact international copyright. Poe argues that

> The want of an international copy-right law renders it impossible for our men of genius to obtain remuneration for their labors. Now since, as a body, men of genius are proverbially poor, the want of the international law represses their efforts altogether. Our sole writers, in consequence, are from the class of *dilettanti;* and although among this class are unquestionably many gifted men, still as a class—as men of wealth and leisure—they are imbued with a spirit of conservatism, which is merely a mood of the imitative spirit. But apart from this consideration, we must observe that to imitate is a matter of less effort than to originate; and we must not expect effort, as a general thing, certainly not as a continuous thing, from those whose condition is affluence and ease .[146]

In the literary-critical period leading up to the Longfellow Wars that raged in the New York literary journals in 1845, British critics and writers in the late eighteenth and early-to-mid nineteenth centuries had engaged in a pitched and contentious debate over plagiarism as a threat to originality. Mazzeo argues that the concern over plagiarism during the Romantic period defined the aesthetic dimensions of its critical field.[147] Plagiarism became "the determination of aesthetic failure" with respect to originality in authorship. Discourses in the literary-critical milieu, argues Mazzeo, "offer a sustained

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[145] Edgar Allan Poe, "Imitation – Plagiarism" (A), from *The Evening Mirror* (New York), February 15, 1845, p. 2, col. 1. This text bears similarities to "Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House," *The Broadway Journal,* Feb. 15, 1845. In writing the piece for the New York Evening Mirror Poe seems to have borrowed from his "Marginalia, II," in *Godey's Ladies Book,* Sept. 1845, 720-123. Items 139C on British literary borrowing and 843 on magazine literature appear in "Secrets." Here, the focus is on the effect of a lack of copyright on original national literature, which was the main concern of the Duyckinck circle and Melville in the late 1840s. http://www.eapoe.org/works/misc/mar0945.htm (15 March 2012).

[146] Poe, "Imitation – Plagiarism," (A).

[147] Tilar J. Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1.

account of the cultural negotiations that shaped literary expectations" of Romanticism.[148] Moreover, "contemporary debates regarding the legitimacy or illegitimacy of particular literary obligations masked a larger contest over how to come to critical judgment." A focus on plagiarism rather than originality as an aesthetic criterion allows one to focus on ways in which Romantic writers were involved in "assimilation, absorption, and appropriation," as opposed to the normative aesthetic vantage point that "Romanticism has been traditionally associated with the values of autogenous originality and invention."[149] Plagiarism studies provide a metacritical approach to Romantic originality.

The debate between DeQuincey and Coleridge over culpable and aesthetic plagiarism maps onto the dichotomy between epistemology and metaphysics. While culpable plagiarism charges that an author has in fact consciously appropriated another's work that is neither acknowledged nor improved, it also points to a fairly common practice of imitation in the Romantic era. Lockean epistemology suggests that originality is essentially imitative, and moreover, that the labor of writing results in the work to be a matter of material property. As we shall see, Coleridge was able to dismiss charges of culpable plagiarism by claiming an unconscious originality that resulted in his ideas bearing aesthetic similarities to Schelling. Poe sided with DeQuincey and Francis Hargrave, whose *Argument in Defence of Literary Property* (1774) insisted that "a literary work really original, like a human face, will always have some singularities . . . to characterize it and to fix and establish its identity."[150] But if literary originality arises in the context of unconscious creativity, its identity points to the metaphysical originality of

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[148] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 1.

[149] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 5.

[150] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 14.

the creator. Wordsworth, in his “Essay Supplementary,” suggested that “genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe.”[151]

The distinction between culpable and poetical plagiarism can be illustrated by contrasting Wordsworth’s emphasis on newness versus Emerson’s notion of transformation. In the “Essay Supplementary to the Preface” (1815), Wordsworth distinguished between "new" works (such as the *Lyrical Ballads*) and those which were “novel” or merely “popular.”[152] Wordsworth clearly accepted Kant’s idea that “*Genius* is the innate mental aptitude (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives rule to art.” Kant had also made the influential claim that “genius is a *talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule; and that consequently *originality* must be its primary property.”[153] Emerson made a similar point, except that this original “new element” is already in the air but unrecognized until the Genius transforms it:

> steals by this apology, that what he takes has no worth where he finds it, and the greatest where he leaves it. It has come to be practically a sort of rule in literature, that a man having once shown himself capable of original writing, is entitled thenceforth to steal from the writings of others at discretion. Thought is the property of him who can entertain it; and of him who can adequately place it.[154]

T.S. Eliot claimed, rather, that it is the *element* that is unchanged in the formation of a mix between talent and tradition, and consequently the “genius” is transformed by the literary tradition.. But in the Romantic period Wordsworth spoke for the era, stating that

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[151] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 9.

[152] William Wordsworth, *Selected Prose (*New York: Penguin Classics, 1988), 410.

[153] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 224-225.

[154] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1996), 114.

"every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original,* has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed."[155] According, to Tillar Mazzeo who restates the common consensus, it is Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* that "represents a sustained critical effort to recuperate the aesthetics of the new from the denigration associated with novelty in the eighteenth century."[156] In context, then, charges of plagiarism operated in the Romantic era to negate the work of another author and at the same time valorize originality as the *sine qua non* of Romantic creativity.

Inhabiting Desire

In 1834, Thomas DeQuincey published four articles in *Tait's Magazine* outlining instances of Coleridge's supposed plagiarisms in four works. Of particular interest is Coleridge's debt to Friedrich W. J. Schelling in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1815-17).[157] DeQuincey's critique of Coleridge's borrowing of Schelling outlined two criteria—culpable (conscious) and aesthetic (unconscious) modes, which would be canonized as a rubric for plagiarism. Culpable plagiarism is not present if an author has made an improvement on a source, if an author has borrowed from a widely known source that is easily recognized by informed readers, and when the borrowing has been unconscious.

By implication, then, Coleridge is guilty of culpable plagiarism of Schelling since these criteria are simultaneously not met.[158] Romantic plagiarism was forgiven if these

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[155] Wordsworth, *Selected Prose,* 408.

[156] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 9.

[157] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property*, 20.

[158] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 19.

criteria could be established.[159] The matter has a bearing on the concept of literary property, which in the 18th century redounded to the materiality of the text. For DeQuincey, though, plagiarism is present if one author is aware of the intellectual conceptions of another. Intellectual property is a matter of a writer's *ideas.* One can absorb another's ideas unconsciously, but intellectual work implies bringing ideas to consciousness. To avoid charges of plagiarism, critics demanded that a writer must improve upon the former. In the case of Coleridge's borrowings from Schelling, DeQuincey argued, the *Biographia Literaria* is a wholesale translation of Schelling's ideas.[160] Coleridge, said DeQuincey, neither improved nor acknowledged Schelling; moreover, Schelling, it is implied, was not familiar to British readers. Such marks Coleridge's culpability.

According to DeQuincey Coleridge's debt to Schelling involves "circumstantial plagiarism, of which it is impossible to suppose him unconscious."[161] And while DeQuincey admits that some of Coleridge's ideas may have arisen "from that confusion between things floating in memory and things self-derived which happens at times to most of us." Coleridge's text, though, must admit to, says DeQuincey, appropriating Schelling's "most profound speculations on the original relations *inter se* of the subjective and the objective, [that were merely] literally translated from the German, and stretching over some pages." The central contention put forward by DeQuincey shows that he understands the role of Romantic consciousness as nexus between originality and plagiarism.

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[159] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 20.

[160] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 22.

[161] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property.* 23. [*Tait's Magazine,* 1834-1835: 226].

If DeQuincey sees consciousness as a function of an individual's knowledge or intellectual wit, Coleridge could out-maneuver DeQuincey by expanding the role of the unconscious. While DeQuincey shared the basic tenets of plagiarism with his contemporaries as relative to the matters he charges against Coleridge—the culpability of individual writer, Coleridge, in chapter IX of the *Biographia Literaria,* pointed out the charge in anticipation of the charge of plagiarism: "In Schelling's *Natur-Philosophie* and the System *des transcendentalen Idealismus* I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do."[162] The notion of a "genial coincidence" between Schelling and Coleridge in terms of the basic tenets of transcendental Idealism rests upon the universality of truth as a form of common property, available to the writer who understands it and expresses it. The expression of the ideas of German Idealism, ideas Coleridge derived from reading Kant and Schelling suggest Coleridge's intellectual "habit."[163]

For DeQuincey the implication of habit is a negative one: Coleridge's plagiarisms are habitual and reflect a lack of originality in his character. On the other hand, Coleridge insisted as early as 1803 in his journal that "habit" becomes a "Desire to Fruition."[164] As a form of desire that leads to a palpable result, habit in effect becomes a mechanism that

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[162] Coleridge cautions "future readers that an identity of thought or even similarity of phrase will not be at all times a certain proof that the passage has been borrowed from Schelling, or that the conceptions were originally learnt from him. In this instance, as in the dramatic lectures of Schlegel to which I have before alluded, from the same motive of self-defense against the charge of plagiarism, many of the most striking resemblances, indeed all the main and fundamental ideas, were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German Philosopher; and I might indeed affirm with truth, before the more important works of Schelling had been written or at least made…" See, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 160-61.

[163] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 24.

[164] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 25.

erases the conscious desire, so as such it becomes a "desire of a desire," the initial desire retreating into the unconscious.[165] Habit becomes the conscious evidence of the desire, which erased from the conscious surface retreats into the unconscious to guide the imagination. Habit is the "means of return" to the moment of occurrence of the desire; desire points to subjective experience rather than an object desired: habit becomes a means of inhabiting the desire. This subjective notion of inhabiting desire—and negating originality—via conscious iteration absolves Coleridge of the material premises behind DeQuincey's idea that plagiarism resides in the sphere of acquisitiveness. Coleridge, rather, according to his claim, seeks to re-experience the moment when his imagination penetrated originality as a sphere of universal truth, a truth he can share with Schelling.[166]

In matters of supposed plagiarism, exemplified by the independent invention of calculus by Newton and Leibniz, it is possible that "it is part of their originality *that they both came to the same conclusion* (i.e., that they were *not original* in relation to each other)."[167] Clearly then there are two sorts of originality at hand here. In one sense there is an independent and self-generative mode of originality (*sui generis*) where the species is coextensive with the genus (structural originality). Relational originality (generative originality), on the other hand, point to the past or future as originating, and proposes a form of influence where one entity exhibits more uniqueness than another. At issue is how to assess priority in originality. The "idea of originality *qua* priority … is

[165] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property,* 24. My emphasis.

[166] Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property*, 25.

[167] John Vignaux Smyth, "Originality and the Enlightenment and Beyond." In *Originality and Intellectual Property in the French and English Enlightenment*, ed. Reginald McGinnis (New York: Routledge, 2009), 177.

ambiguous."[168] In cases like those of Hood and Aldrich or Schelling and Coleridge where the possibility of simultaneous originality, or at least coincidental influence, the problem of attribution, as both Poe and DeQuincey saw, redounds to quantification of identities, and as Outis—Poe's foil in the Longfellow Wars—noted the priority of criteria can seem arbitrary. It would seem then that relational originality would draw attention to forms of negation and misprision indicative of what Bloom calls an "anxiety of influence."

Critical Vocabulary

Poe's critical vocabulary is the foundation of his negative originality. His sacrifice of relation, the difference between mundane facts (actuality) and a theory of aesthetic beauty, became compelling by means of his insistent critical rhetoric. At the nexus of Poe's notions of actuality and his aesthetics is his theory of relation that comes under his central concept of "unity of effect." Originality obtains in the aesthetic relationships of temporal communication, and acts simultaneously, if its effect is unified, by negating the actual for the sake of the aesthetic. An important manifestation of Poe's negative originality lies in his idea of the "heresy of *The Didactic*."

In a striking passage from his *Poetic Principle*, an essay that appeared before the reading public shortly after Poe's death, Poe distinguishes between a didactic poetics that derives its morality from the current of Transcendental culture and a poetics of aesthetic effect. Poe states:

> While the epic mania — while the idea that, to merit in poetry, prolixity is indispensable — has, for some years past, been gradually dying out of the public mind, by mere dint of its own absurdity — we find it succeeded by a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined. I allude to the heresy

[168] Smyth, "Originality and the Enlightenment and Beyond," 178.

> of *The Didactic.* It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans especially have patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true poetic dignity and force: — but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified — more supremely noble than this very poem — this poem *per se*— this poem which is a poem and nothing more, this poem written solely for the poem's sake.[169]

The reference to the didactic tendency in Bostonian (Transcendental) poetry and the associated idea of Truth, an association he had made with regard to Wordsworth's didactic "metaphysical" originality in "Letter to B—" (1836), finds Poe stating in that letter that "A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having for its object an *indefinite* instead of a definite pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *in*definite sensations…."[170]

Through poetics Poe negates the actual of science (including a metaphysics of eternal truth) and the fancy associated with romance by negating definite pleasure (another critique of Wordsworth) and definite sensations associated with Lockean empiricism. What remains is a self-reflexive poetics mentioned in Poe's 1845 article in *The Daily Mirror* "Increase of Poetical Heresy," which concludes that "there exists *no* work more intrinsically *noble*, than this very poem, *written solely for the poem's sake*."[171] Furthermore, Poe's negation of the relation between the actual and the imaginary resides

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[169] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 75-76.

[170] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 11.

[171] Edgar Allan Poe, "Increase of Poetical Heresy." *The Weekly Mirror* (281AD): February 6, 1845.

in his employment of the concept of imitation. Beyond his critique of plagiarism that exploded in the Longfellow wars of the mid-1840s, which we shall examine in depth shortly, Poe's theory of the *unity of effect* broadens into the definition and application of the concepts of verisimilitude and *vraisemblance.*

Poe's critique of Hawthorne's penchant for allegory is a case in point. In allegory, the association of ideas appealing to "fancy," says Poe, which requires an "adaptation…of matters improper for the purpose, of the real with the unreal; having never more of the intelligible connection than has something with nothing, never half so much effective affinity as has the substance for the shadow." In essence, for Poe, allegory is a "fallacy." Like metaphor, he says, allegory destroys precise thinking because it depends on an "undercurrent" of "suggested meaning" that remains hidden until "called to the surface" by an act of will. The unity of effect occurs prior to willing, apparently, and it is a point reminiscent of Kant's *Critique of Judgement,* where "[t]he concept of fine art… does not permit of the judgement upon the beauty of its product being derived from any rule that has a *concept* for its determining ground."[172]

Furthermore, allegory operates only at a fictional level of reality, he says, and "must always interfere with that unity of effect" that unites reader and writer in the textual domain, because it causes "injury" to a text's "earnestness or verisimilitude."[173] Any successful use of allegory, Poe continues, will keep its undercurrent "judiciously subdued"; a reader's pleasure in a text will stand "in the direct ratio of his ability to keep

[172] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 224.

[173] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 582-83.

the allegory out of sight."[174] Poe describes judicious use of allegory metaphorically in figured as a "shadow" of the text's truth. By comparison an injudicious application of allegory would find it "obtrusive" in its "unpleasant appositiveness." For Poe the association of ideas that engenders "unity of effect" lies on a horizontal plane rather than one of competing levels of meaning.

Allegory, for Poe, is subservient to verisimilitude. "Under the best circumstances, [allegory] must always interfere with that unity of effect which, to the artist, is worth all the allegory in the world. Its vital injury, however, is rendered to the most vitally important point in fiction — that of earnestness or verisimilitude."[175] Yet, in 1846 Poe, in his essay on Richard Adams Locke in the serialized "Literati of New York City," he states:

> Reluctantly, therefore, and only half convinced, (believing the public, in fact, more readily gullible than did my friends,) I gave up the idea of imparting very close verisimilitude to what I should write — that is to say, so close as really to deceive. I fell back upon a style half plausible, half bantering, and resolved to give what interest I could…."

Later in the same essay he provides the sequence of his unity of effect as an applied theory.

In writing a literary hoax, a form of fictive deception that is at the core of the negation of actuality, Poe suggests that the writing process involves four stages: "The great effect wrought upon the public mind is referable, first, to the novelty of the idea; secondly, to the fancy-exciting and reason-repressing character of the alleged discoveries; thirdly, to the consummate tact with which the deception was brought forth; fourthly, to

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[174] Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 583.

[175] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 583.

the exquisite *vraisemblance* of the narration."[176] Verisimilitude is the rhetorical pivot-point in the movement out of the actual into the unity of effect; or to put it another way, the unity of effect disengages the imagination from the actual, which is a negation of the actual that has originated the *vraisemblance.*

Poe's main achievement as a critic is that he made overt the crisis in American literary aesthetics that could bind literary originality to national ideology, on one hand, and metaphysical originality within the scope of morality, on the other. Poe's negative originality is a double-edged sword, since his core axiom of a unity of effect could successfully trump moral didacticism and literal realism. Moral didacticism or metaphysical originality, the idea that art's purpose lay in moral instruction— that the source of originality is ultimately spiritual—was one of his pet fallacies. Another questionable fallacy that Poe's criticism raises pertains to the question whether realism—Nature—is itself art. The question places him in a curious relation to Emerson.

While Emerson agreed with Coleridge and Wordsworth that Nature is intrinsically linked to signification by means of a synecdochal schema where the sign in the particular is enclosed within the universally true, Poe's theory of art is based upon the effect aesthetic experience has on the receiver. Truth is this not based on an eternal essence but on the capacity of language to reproduce an impression, to invoke signification that resembles truth but is merely an aesthetic construct that is self-reflexive and morally inert. For Poe, the criticism of art must be based upon the response of readers to the art, not the received ideas that society presumes as facts given to it by Common Sense orthodoxy. Poe's critical stance places him in a precarious cultural position that finds him

[176] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1220.

in a passive-aggressive stance vis-à-vis other authors and literary culture. Poe’s role for the imagination finds most of his protagonists annihilated by their own insistence on their imaginative originality. Poe’s originality is literally negative. Psychological originality metaphorizes as the ‘Imp of the Perverse.’

Chapter 4: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* and the Negativity of Romance

With *The Marble Faun, Or The Romance of Monte Beni,* (1860), Nathaniel Hawthorne presents his "postconsular romance of corruption and redemption in Catholic Rome of the 1850s."[1] Upon the publication of the book in England, with the title *The Transformation, The Marble Faun* marks the point when Nathaniel Hawthorne returned from Italy via Southampton to his home "The Wayside" in Concord, MA. As an experiment in the aesthetics of originality within the scope of an American romance in the Roman ruins which immediately recalls a mythic Arcadia, the book is both Hawthorne's dénoument as a writer and Donatello's emergence as a pastoral figure who must contend with the actual. George Parsons Lathrop, who collected *The Complete Works of Hawthorne* in the 1880s, wrote of Donatello's transformation in *The Marble Faun* that Hawthorne

> also shows, in Donatello's final delivering of himself up to justice, the wisdom of some definite judgment and perhaps punishment bestowed by society. Thus avenues of thought are opened to us on every side which we are at liberty to follow out; but we are not forced, as a mere theorist would compel us, to pursue any particular one to the exclusion of the others. In all we may find our way to some mystic monument of eternal law, or pluck garlands from some new-budded bough of moral truth. The romance is like a portal of ebony inlaid with ivory, — another gate of dreams, — swinging softly open into regions of illimitable wisdom. But some pause on the threshold, unused to such large liberty; and these cry out, in the words of a well-known critic, "It begins in mystery and ends in mist."[2]

Lathrop assures us that Hawthorne's mode of Romance in *The Marble Faun,* and with qualifications, a commonplace of Romance in general, involves an imaginary sphere of

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[1] Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 161-62.

[2] George Parsons Lathrop, *A Study of Hawthorne* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1876), 260-61.

Romantic originality that offers up a freedom of interpretation grounded in a philosophical sense of moral truth.

The role of the imagination, “another gate of dreams,” borders on the edge of reality extending to a region of mystification. The question of society’s judgment of Donatello’s crime ushers in the central theme of societal responsibility in *The Marble Faun*, and thus we arrive at the central problem on the field of literary Romance: the degree to which the author is at liberty to criticize society by offering up an exemplum of the moral question at hand and teasing out through the “gate of dreams” a “mystery that ends in mist” such that society is unaware that it has been criticized. Behind that mist Hawthorne perhaps presumes an original “monument of eternal law” which engenders its metaphysical originality through “some new-budded bough of moral truth.”

Lathrop has swiftly led us to the precipice of Hawthornean originality, that society’s fatal flaw may be redeemed through its fortunate fall. Donatello’s *felix culpa* is also a *momento mori.* Miriam, the dark-complexioned lover and original artist notes that like the movement of return, Donatello “has travelled in a circle, as all things heavenly and earthly do, and now comes back to his original self, with an inestimable measure of improvement won from and experience of pain.”[3] Donatello’s moment of recognition (*anagnorisis*) and reversal (*peripeteia*) arises in the sublime moment of negativity that necessitates his originality, his transformation from an ahistorical Arcadian state to a temporal and moral world. Hawthorne’s sense of the term “moral” indicates a more

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[3] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 391.

expansive meaning than is customary, in that he is seeking to uncover through tragedy an "underlying human reality—vital, spiritual, and psychological."[4]

In this sense Hawthorne is seeking to explicate what is probable and general in terms of human nature. The effect of tragedy results in purgation that arises in what Aristotle terms the recognition scene. In the recognition scene, or *anagnorisi*s, the subject is immediately impressed by the sudden self-discovery of the inexorable nature of events. Hawthorne developed a strain of *anagnorisis* that concentrates on inner moral recognition. The subject in this case becomes self-aware of an internal presence of evil and considers justice in universal and self-reflexive terms. The subject becomes aware of a "purgatorial movement" that ensues with a "movement towards regeneration."[5] This movement of return approximates the movement of the romantic sublime: "Moral recognition is [...] central to the remorse of Miriam and Donatello."[6] Clearly *evil* for Hawthorne may be "irreparable," and that Miriam and Donatello's humanity is revealed through its fall. Thereby, "Hawthorne was most able to convey the strength of the heart, and so create a sense not merely of life's inexorability and sordidness, but of its possibilities of beauty and grandeur."[7] Matthiessen's "doubleness" thesis here suggests a

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[4] Darrel Abel, *The Moral Picturesque: Studies in Hawthorne's Fiction* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1988). Although Hawthorne accepted the Transcendentalists' idea of an Oversoul, he did not accept their view of a possibility of direct communication through intuition or Emersonian "tuition"; rather, "he looked for truth in a psychological undersoul." Hawthorne developed in his fiction the figurative mode of the "moral picturesque," a "preoccupation" with pyschologically inherent "archetypal experiences." Further, he "assumed an absolute as archetypal human experience enacting a providentially directed cosmic drama of which he had uncertain knowledge through sympathy with persons acting primordial roles" (1).

[5] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 350-51.

[6] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 350-51.

[7] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 350.

form of democratic redemption that, as we shall see, proves to be for Hawthorne quite ambiguous.

The transformation between the ideal and imaginary Arcadian spirit and the actual circumstances of the human condition points to a continuum in Hawthornean romance often structured as a bifurcation. On one hand Hawthorne regarded himself as "the obscurest man of letters in America" in his preface to *Twice-Told Tales* (1851), possessing a "native reserve," as he put it in "The Custom House," which Melville described as a sense of "melancholy [that] rests like an Indian Summer"; or on the other, what Melville saw in a singular point of view as "the hither side of Hawthorne's soul—like the dark half of the physical sphere…[his] darkness but gives more effect to the ever-moving dawn."[8] Hawthorne's dark side with its "touch of Puritan gloom," as Melville saw it, betrays the negativity Hawthorne held as "the inmost Me behind its veil," a characteristic through which he harbored what Melville suggested as a "great power of blackness." In this well-known passage describing Hawthorne's "Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity," Melville is suggesting that it is this "hither side" of Hawthorne that through the medium of Romance has the power of Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth."[9] "In a world of lies," exhorts Melville, Romance has the capacity to tell the truth about what is wrong with society by comparing the utopian spirit of imaginary Arcadia to the actual circumstances of the human condition.

[8] Herman Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. John Bryant (Modern Library, 2002), 51.

[9] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 53.

Hawthorne achieves imaginative control in *The Marble Faun* through the medium of 'iridescence'.[10] Hawthorne's mode of iridescence signals a shift from allegory to symbol. In allegory Hawthorne creates an alternative reality, as he created in the sketch "Alice Doane's Appeal." But Hawthorne's use of symbolism proposes that nature itself acts emblematically, as it does in *The House of Seven Gables*. For Hawthorne, light is symbolic of ideality. Thus the actual is saturated with the ideal.[11] What might be described as Hawthorne's visionary Romanticism, that the source of Hawthorne's allegorical thinking resides in phenomena, undergoes a shift to a form of symbolism through iridescence (or coloration) that is provided to the world by the subject. Iridescence, then, is for Hawthorne the psychological source of symbolism. This mode is saturated by an intuition that the real is also infused with the spiritual. Hawthorne's idea of iridescence is not a form of pantheism but sees spirit as a thing in itself. Hawthorne's "natural symbolism," rather than a mode of realism, is a mode of the relation between realism and the imagination; iridescence becomes a "fusion" of realism and supernaturalism.

Hawthorne symbolizes the human condition at the moment four principal characters of *The Marble Faun* assemble: There, exhibited in the

> sculpture-gallery, in the Capitol, at Rome…reclines the noble and most pathetic figure of the Dying Gladiator, just sinking into his death-swoon…Adjacent to the central image Pagan gods entombed in marble remain, still shining in the undiminished majesty and beauty of their ideal life. [Hawthorne suggests it is a] symbol […] of the Human Soul, with its choice of Innocence or Evil close at

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[10] Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 40.

[11] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance,* 41.

> hand, in the pretty figure of a child, clasping a dove to her bosom, but assaulted by a snake.[12]

Hawthorne redraws the function of art from its Kantian notion of an "Ideal" form to the artistic process, a process that serves as an allegory of the quest for spiritual growth.

The novel *The Marble Faun* remaps a Schlegelian hermeneutics of classicism, by way of Hegelian synthesis, to an attempted reconciliation of Classical art and Christian consciousness. The Faun of Praxiteles—Donatello, himself—presents a morphology of animalia through the figure of an idyllic creature that preexists a higher stage of consciousness. Donatello, as the human embodiment of that form, must endure the guilt of causing the fall of the Capuchin monk—"at Miriam's voiceless instigation"—and through the destruction of both Eden and the Capuchin, whose representation of Christ through metempsychosis, the possibility opens for reconciliation and transformation. The allegory of *The Marble Faun,* then, is that spirit must embody both *physis* and *nomos*, material and spiritual, body and soul, in order to create order. Nature and Art conjoin in the process of human spiritual development. But the question of the possibility of such a form of re-origination begs the question of the nature of the actual as it impinges on such a movement of return.

Hawthorne, says Chai, differs from Wordsworth in terms of their respective views of the role of Nature in moral consciousness. For Wordsworth, as for Emerson as a "positive" Romantic, the idea of Nature "participates in man's moral education" because it is the Kantian *a priori* synthesis that furnishes the understanding as practical reason. Hawthorne sees nature, instead, as only a first stage. In this sense, for Chai, Hawthorne resolves the dichotomy between Art and Nature in an ever ascending spiral towards

[12] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 3.

higher consciousness. Like Emerson, Hawthorne realizes that materialism is simply the platform for Idealism.[13] Furthermore, humanity is forever “unfinished”; Donatello remains bound to the likeness of the Faun. The very organicism of art, following Herder, as it is construed in Romantic terms, mirrors the human condition.[14]

Art undergoes “an organic process of development”; the artistic process is itself a spiritual quest.[15] And the impetus to artistic development, like character development, is that its inception obtains in the originality of its greatest guilt. Art as an allegory of human growth, and in spiritual—or psychological terms—traces the *movement of return* in its negation of the guilt which is only possible through the Fortunate Fall. In this sense, Hawthorne’s theory of negative originality argues that psychological development can proceed only through a synthesis of nature in spirit that becomes allegorized in the artistic process. Development, in other words, originates in the consequences and understanding of the Fall itself. The Fall, therefore, is incipient to a rise, which is a negation of the original prelapsarian innocence and its obligatory postlapsarian transformation. In this sense, following Hegel, transformation is negation.

Before the Fall

R.W.B Lewis, a noted “myth and symbol” critic of the 1950s, argues that “[i]n Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun,* the “Adamic myth is altogether central and controlling.”[16] The Adamic myth structures the myth of American exceptionalism by

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[13] Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 58-59.

[14] Hawthorne follows for Schlegel’s concept of aphorism.

[15] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 59.

[16] R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 6.

insisting that America could boast a new beginning to human life in a postlapsarian world.

> Unlike the Roman myth [of Virgil's *Aeneid*], which envisioned life within a long, dense corridor of meaningful history—the American myth saw life and history as just a beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening old world.

Described as “Our national birth” and “the beginning of a new history” by the *Democratic Review* in 1839, Lewis thus historicizes the Adamic myth in the context of democratic literature.[17] The issue underlying Lewis’s Adamic myth idea, an issue common with much criticism of American nineteenth-century literature written in the mid-twentieth century including Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance,* is that the argument is more circular than the literature it describes. While the effort to instantiate a Cold War totalization of American exceptionalism through myth and symbol analysis grafted onto the precepts of national literary originality as a figure, the premise functions as a tautology. By contrasting Milton Stern and David S. Reynolds’ dialectical arguments we have already considered ways that Hawthorne’s negative originality undercuts exceptionalism.

For Lewis, who accepts his own historicism as confirmation of the Adamic thesis, the new beginning was one “bereft of ancestry,” a “self-propelling” singular individual event “identified with Adam before the Fall”; the Adamaic “American” becomes the “archetypal” figure, who “in his very newness,” [was] “fundamentally innocent.” For the “Adamic American” all of the “world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the

[17] Lewis, *The American Adam,* 5.

scene about him."[18] For Lewis, the Adamic myth operates in a dialectic relation to tragedy. Contrasting the Adamic myth, "the ideal of newborn innocence" came to also be "deplored" by authors such as Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe (and later Henry James) who proposed instead "a new kind of tragedy…inherent in [Adamic] innocence and newness" that "established the pattern for American fiction."[19] (6). That is essentially the argument for "renaissance," which holds that democratic dissent defines an original American literature. Emerson, rather than recognizing a multi-voiced cultural dialogue, saw instead a "schism" between past and future, as well as between Understanding and Reason.

Hawthorne, on the other hand, reflected analytically and philosophically on the polarization of culture. Confirming what Friedrich Schlegel intuited as a problem arising in the *aporia* between the universal reason and the particular understanding, Hawthorne's sacrifice of relation is premised upon his acceptance of a permanent state of cultural parabasis. Lewis posits the idea of a step beyond Emersonian dualism by suggesting a third alternative: irony.[20] Lewis holds out the possibility—a possibility which is largely negative—that the American conscience might be innocent to the degree it was "unsullied by the past." If the American conscience might be free of the past, and in its ironic feelings of nostalgia for originality it might have remained optimistic; that optimism might at least be capable of rejecting the moral predestination of Calvinism. Such was Hawthorne's starting point.

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[18] Lewis, *The American Adam,* 5.

[19] Lewis, *The American Adam,* 6.

[20] Lewis, *The American Adam, 7.*

Hawthorne's view, a view neither absorbed by the past nor oriented toward the headlong future, found its direction in "a sense of the tragic collisions to which innocence was liable (something unthinkable among the hopeful), and equally by an awareness of the heightened perception and humanity which suffering made possible (something unthinkable among the nostalgic)."[21] Hawthorne's sense of a Golden Age found the possibility of redemption, ironically, constrained to the past. Hawthorne rejected an evolutionary model of progress since the spiral of spirituality is forever tied to continuities of human life as he understood it. Moreover, Hawthorne's ambivalence toward reform and transcendentalism can be seen in "The Old Manse" when he remarks about the sycophants of Emerson roaming the streets of Concord. For Hawthorne, truths remain ambiguous: he accepts the unavailability of "any angular or rounded truth…dug out of the shapeless mass of problematical stuff."[22]

The "new nostalgia" of the 19th century drives a cultural "veneration for the past in its pastness"; the "nation of futurity" in its distance from the past became in turn one more obsession with historical thinking.[23] Romanticism countered the Enlightenment idea of natural law and monolithic human nature by its inclination to historicism. German romantic irony and hermeneutics offered to writers the sort of historicism that sought understanding of history in terms of social context. The fiction of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville recognized an "organic relation between past experience and the living moment [that] became a factor in narrative—a recurring theme of narrative," which "revealed its

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[21] Lewis, *The American Adam,* 7-8.

[22] Frederick Newberry, *Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties: England and America in His Works* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 148.

[23] Lewis, *The American Adam*, 8.

design through an original use of discredited traditional materials."[24] (8). For Hawthorne, Lewis contends, this literary mode of historicism became an "essential means of human redemption."

The Adamic ideal came to be recognized in the American romantic dialectic as both dangerous and fallacious. At once it was seen as the "helplessness of mere innocence" to romantic novelists of the 1840s and 50s, and as well a "primary theme." These authors saw that the "vision of innocence and the claim of newness were almost perilously misleading," yet at the same time the theme of originality became itself an opportunity for "reflection and invention."[25] The "freedom from the past" came to be understood as a delusion, which in turn prompted a sense of ironic tragedy balanced between the illusion of originality and the "burden of the past." Lewis reminds us that youthful Romantic cheerfulness found in the Transcendentalists turned towards a "tragic understanding—paradoxically bred out of cheerfulness"—; Lewis maintains that it was a view shared by Hawthorne and Melville. That tragic sense combining with Poe's aesthetic ambiguity points toward a sense of negative originality.

According to Henry James Sr. "[d]emocracy...is revolutionary, not formative. It is born of denial. It comes into existence in the way of denying established institutions. Its office is rather to destroy the old world, than fully reveal the new."[26] Hawthorne's story "Earth's Holocaust" illustrates the idea. Hawthorne, in 1844, presented a fable wherein a young society committed the entire residual surplus of the past to a sweeping bonfire in

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[24] Lewis, *The American Adam, 8.*

[25] Lewis, *The American Adam, 9.*

[26] Qtd. in Lewis, *The American Adam,* 13. The passage is from "Democracy and Its Issues," 1853.

the "West." Yet, for Hawthorne, this ritual destruction is unable to eradicate the one human remnant that may threaten the new world: the human "heart," a realization Melville discovered in Hawthorne's psychological historicism.[27] It is that very tension between the concern for an eradication of the past and the persistence of human evil that becomes the allegorical subject of American alternative romantics, as well as the point that distinguishes them from positive romantics.

Iridescence

Evan Carton points out that Hawthorne's work of romance in *The Marble Faun* requires more than he allowed himself in *The House of the Seven Gables,* a romance which demanded a "minute fidelity" between representation and history even as the writer might be allowed a "certain latitude" with respect to depiction.[28] Hawthorne's imaginative *iridescence* that uncovers history as a "legendary mist" attempts a truth-telling prescience about the state of the human heart. The mundane condition of Hawthorne's present, as it is given in the Custom House, becomes in *The Marble Faun* a problematic of moral relativism mapped onto the structure of negative originality. Hawthorne's Roman "fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon" both doubles and supplements the moonlit room of the Custom House, given that the Rome of *The Marble Faun* is depicted with a guidebook-like realism that tests the actualities of the American remoteness in its grappling with the cultural discontinuities of a past originary scene. Carton suggests that Hawthorne's T*he Marble Faun* discovers both patterns of fragmentation and repetition. The originary mythos of Arcadia becomes

[27] Lewis, *The American Adam,* 14.

[28] Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), xxv.

fragmented in the actuality of a crime that transforms Donatello from the pure (simple and sentimental) faun figure to a more complex identity revealed through his conspiring in the murder with the equally guilty and mysterious Miriam. The repetition of the crime points back to the moral paradox of Beatrice Cenci's patricide and resultant capital punishment.

The theme of fragmentation, or "alienation" as Carton terms it, associates with the matter which is central to the Romance genre as a critical process that situates what Bell terms the "sacrifice of relation." Associated with fragmentation is the problematic in Hawthorne's narrative centering on the dualism of originality and repetition and the way art frames the transatlantic problem of an American originality.

In terms of an originary aesthetic in light of the originality of Roman art, Hawthorne's American artists Hilda and Kenyon frame a discourse of moral and artistic decline. Carton notes that Hawthorne scholars Roy Harvey Pearce, Frederick Crews, Nina Baym, and Kenneth Dauber share in the notion that *The Marble Faun* itself is emblematic of Hawthorne's decline as an author.[29] Edgar Dryden structures Hawthorne's romance writing as a theme of self-alienation from moral history and the "material environment," which conspire to isolate the writer. [30] Such a thesis amounts to a paradoxical situation for the writer. Dryden describes this situation in terms of the binary he calls enchantment and disenchantment, or what Milton Stern calls openness and closure. This mode of ironic duplicity that Perry Miller saw in Melville's relation to the literary scene as a kind of befuddlement suggests that bifurcation which we also

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[29] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 169.

[30] Edgar A. Dryden, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Poetics of Enchantment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

recognize in the criss-crossing that is structured into *The Marble Faun.* The Model's return from history in the catacombs, for example, confronts Miriam, whose own history is mysterious, and the Model is then cast off the precipice to become transformed into a Capucin monk. Thus the Ovidian theme of transformation supplements the romantic binaries at play in the text, allowing for greater movement leaving the question of negative originality at play in the narrative.

In the opening of "The Custom House" sketch Hawthorne speaks of the relation between his writing and his readers in terms of his cautionary revealing of "confidential depths of revelation." He desires, he says, to address "only and exclusively, to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy; as if the printed book, thrown at large on the whole world, were certain to find out the divided segment of the writer's own nature, and complete his circle of existence by bringing him into communion with it"[31] Hawthorne's desire for "self-fulfillment through the medium of the text," which parallels his imaginative technique of melding time and reality with originality in the neutral territory of light and shade, is central to his "structural effect of romance."[32]

In *The Marble Faun,* Hawthorne re-presents himself as an author before the public through the vehicle of a preface. This time Hawthorne narrows the scope of his receiver as

> a character with whom he felt entitled to use far greater freedom. He meant it for one congenial friend, —more comprehensive of his purposes, more appreciative of his success, more indulgent of his shortcomings, and, in all respects, closer and kinder than a brother, —that all sympathizing critic, in short, whom an author

[31] Qtd. in Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance,* 166.

[32] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 166.

> never actually meets, but to whom he implicitly makes his appeal whenever he is conscious of having done his best.[33]

The Marble Faun: Preface

In the preface to *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne recognizes that any unity between reader and author is unrecoverable, and as a result he accepts a state of alienation that is self-reflexive and extensive. This condition of negativity extends beyond any power to redeem itself since, due to the priority of privacy over publicity in Hawthorne's ethos, there is no longer the possibility of communion. Hawthorne's concept of Romance in *The Marble Faun* must accept an unrecoverable state of negation bounded by nothingness. "Romance and poetry," he admits, suggest metaphorically that like "ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, [artists] need ruin to make them grow." Hawthorne's organic metaphor is encrusted with decrepitude, and his originality becomes realized only through negativity. Romance, itself, no longer functions for Hawthorne as the intrinsically American paradigm. "Italy," he announces

> as a site of Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic of fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, not anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives.[34]

Carton finds this passage "disturbing…not merely for its contention that romance is a parasite upon physical and moral ruin but for its effort to disown, even to expunge, the local, familial, and personal history that has sustained and been sustained by

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[33] Qtd. in Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance,* iv.

[34] Qtd. in Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance,* xxv.

Hawthorne's literary career."[35] Hawthorne's reconfiguration of an American actuality represses the shadows he found in the Custom House. By repressing the shadows that were for him so palpable in the matter of Maule's curse in *The House of the Seven Gables,* Hawthorne presents the American actuality of 1859 as the ironically banal world Holgrave inhabits once he drops his progressive artistic vision and accepts his estate. If Holgrave could have "insisted upon…a country where there is no shadow" even as he is well aware of the consequences of an immoral past and the pollution of the American well-spring, Hawthorne proposes the question of a past that cannot be erased by American ideology. Rome's physical ruin, evident history, and its political turmoil contrast, for Hawthorne, a purported American "original relation" that requires a denial of its foundational crime, as allegorized in *The House of the Seven Gables,* and concentrates on the foundational and transatlantic relation between art and ethics in the Western continuum.

Rome, then, functions as the originary scene of a Western tradition that passes on the foundational crime to America, which in turn must be denied in order to found an original relation. As a romance of "transformation," Hawthorne becomes complicit in framing the disjunction between Roman ruin and American material reality, a reality that through the artists Hilda and Kenyon becomes an aesthetic repetition in a Western continuum bound in a paradox that wills copying, copying which is morally salvageable, and at the same time, negativizing Plato, wills a form of copying that condemns the structural framework in which the ambiguous moral system originated.

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[35] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 167.

Milton R. Stern explores the relationship between Hawthorne's guidebook-like passages and a more fundamental ethical conundrum underlying American originality. The guidebook passages, says Stern, recognize Hawthorne's obligations to American gift-book publishers, whose audience, many of whom were women, had a predilection for realistic sketches and travel journals.[36] It is the European painter Miriam who contrasts the Americanism represented by the copyist Hilda. For Hawthorne, argues Stern, "it was difficult, if not impossible…to do other than support Hilda's straight and narrow antithematic refusal to illustrate or endorse the utopian closure toward which the entire book moves."[37] It is Hilda's ideology that resists Hawthorne's theme of utopian closure as represented by the sublime recovery from the inherent catastrophe of the fall. In other words, Stern asserts that the figure of the fortunate fall is subordinated by Hawthorne's struggle between national literature and negative originality. Moreover, Stern claims, Hawthorne paints Hilda as a young woman of high Christian temperament familiar to the Unitarian and Middle Light bourgeois of New England. Ostensibly, then, for a book framed by a tragedy that ought to proceed in a movement of return toward Romantic openness due to Donatello's humanistic self-transformation, Hilda's conservatism over-determines the sense of utopian closure that defines national ideology in antebellum literary nationalism. Hawthorne's Classicist "essence" belies his relationship to the cultural matrix and thus undercuts his negative originality, his dissent from the contradictions and dogmas of the American marketplace.

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[36] Milton R. Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun and the Politics of Openness and Closure in American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

[37] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 107.

The preface of *The Marble Faun* immediately references the ambiguous relations between the poles of national literature and negative originality in the book's theme. For Milton Stern the issue is whether we take "Ruin" as a necessary condition for negative originality (sublime and radical openness), or the phrase "broad and simple daylight" as a redemptive condition (Classical closure).[38] This crucial interpretive question for Stern, which perhaps defines his argument as a whole, is whether the preface to *The Marble Faun* celebrates American exceptionalism or negates it. The question for Stern is not a spurious one, since for Hilda the American "broad and simple daylight," finally, is preferred over Roman Ruin. Indeed, the American sculptor Kenyon waxes nostalgically for home saying to Donatello that while America is a

> fortunate land, each generation has its own sins and sorrows to bear. Here, it seems as if all the weary and dreary Past were piled upon the back of the Present. If I were to lose my spirits, in this country—if I were to suffer any heavy misfortune here—methinks it would be impossible to stand up against it, under such adverse influences.[39]

Stern's question is whether Kenyon's nostalgia represents the text's dianoia or deliberately refutes it. Donatello's reply is inflected by his crime at the Tarpeian Rock: "The sky itself is an old roof, now…and, no doubt the sins of mankind have made it gloomier than it used to be."

Standing in St. Peters in Rome the two Americans reflect on their exceptionalism. Kenyon re-imagines the symbol of enlightenment and faith stolen by invading Romans from Jerusalem, where the seven-branched candlestick has been lost in the mud of the Tiber River. Hilda, more optimistically, suggests a predestined purpose for each branch of the candlestick and that the final purpose must be chiliastic; when the candle reappears

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[38] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 109.

[39] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 274.

"the whole word will gain the illumination which it needs."[40] When all branches of the candle, each of a different color, are lit the composite will be an "intense white light of Truth." Moreover, she adds, "the theme is better suited for verse than prose; and when I go home to America, I will suggest it to one of our poets." Hilda's chiliastic prose-poem suggests Poe's *Eureka* though it strongly contrasts the difference between a redemptive closure in unity and Poe's more ambiguous cyclical cosmic catastrophe.

Romantic timelessness and American exceptional originality compete for imaginative space within the sphere of Hawthorne's main theme of historical ruin. "Because the actualities of history and setting in the book indicate the underlying utopian truth of America's indistinguishable oneness with all fallen humanity," Hawthorne, Stern argues, "could not be true to his own actualities."[41] "[T]he underlying utopia was the book's *truth,* and Hawthorne presented the ideological details as though they were the book's truth"; in effect, Stern argues, Hawthorne "lost his hold on both Romance and novel." This struggle for coherence of theme, genre, and thesis appear through the scenes in the book that assert a mode of philosophical romance and at the same time contrast with the book's actual references to the historical past. The "original precipice" of the Tarpeian Rock, for example, certainly a reference to human fallenness, is composed of ancient masonry erected upon a natural geological formation. Here, Hawthorne unites an allegorical idea related to his larger concern for redemption and situates the figure in the context of tourist motif. The actuality of the formation becomes etherealized in a fashion characteristic of Hawthornean Romance: "Brightly as the Italian moonlight fell a-down the height, it scarcely showed what portion was man's work, and what was Nature's, but

[40] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 335.

[41] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 112.

left it all in very much the same kind of ambiguity and half-knowledge, in which antiquarians generally leave the identity of Roman remains."[42] For Stern, "[t]he sense of discontinuity arises from conflicting sources of the book's details," which are from utopian visions, on one hand, and stem from the desire for verisimilitude, on the other. It is worth suspending disbelief, since it is equally possible that Hawthorne's ambiguity is quite deliberate.

It is difficult not to suppose that Hawthorne is aware that the originary chasm of ruin might be the central dominant image of Romance, its portent for transfiguration, rather than a bridge to nowhere. Hilda comments that "there is no chasm, nor any hideous emptiness under our feet except what the devil within us digs. If there be such a chasm, let us bridge it over with good thoughts and deeds, and we shall tread safely to the other side."[43] The chasm of Curtius opens in a moment of sketch-like verisimilitude couched in a larger Romantic reference to human actuality. The chasm of Curtius functions as symbol of "the abyss of all human history." As a moral "picturesque," through verisimilitude the chasm provides details that satisfy the American readers' desire for travel narrative, which situates them by means of a Grand Tour in the ideological present of American exceptionalism. Kenyon's "fortunate land" where "each generation has only its own sins and sorrows to bear" escapes the abyss of history that demands that its "dreary Past were piled upon the back of the Present." In other words, at the moment when Hawthorne's romance unearths its utopian symbol of moral originality through the historicity of evil, the Americanism of the ideological distance from the past that situates Kenyon and Hilda as tourists in a travel sketch removes them from actuality and by

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[42] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 151.

[43] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 145.

extension American moral continuity. Stern argues that Hawthorne, in *The Marble Faun*, finds it necessary to "recoil from the demands of actualities."[44] The larger question is whether Hawthorne also recoils from Hilda and Kenyon's demands.

The contrast between actualities and Romance, which applies a strategy of verisimilitude, imaginatively conveys an ambiguous but utopian vision. That contrast of firelight and moonlight in "The Custom House" is a prototypical example. In *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne implies that his utopian vision overrides ideology by virtue of the level of foreground detail and history through which he enacts its utopian possibilities. The relationship between innocence and experience that underscores the narrative functions as a central tension in this Italian scene, yet that relationship also is meant to universally apply to the American context. Stern, however, argues that Hawthorne's obligations to the American literary marketplace locate his two idealized Americans in the foreground of that context, and their ideological relationship to the American status quo obstructs our entry into Hawthorne's otherwise central background theme.[45] Hawthorne explains that the details of the Roman scene "are the solid framework of the hills that shut in Rome and its wide surrounding Campagna; no land of dreams, but the broadest page of history, crowded so full of memorable events that one obliterates another, as if Time had crossed and re-crossed his own records till they grew illegible." Hawthorne's Rome centralizes the fundamental metaphysical problematic at the basis of Donatello and Miriam's dilemma and marginalizes, at the same time, Hilda and Kenyon's American Gothic.[46]

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[44] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 115.

[45] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 115.

[46] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 89.

The narrative avoids Classicist closure by disjoining his characters from an actual scene and he re-places them in the realm of the Romantic imagination. The avoidance of Realism, Stern suggests, raises the question of Hawthorne's unwillingness to directly confront American readers with his dissent from American ideology and the marketplace. "The transcription of records into emblems of meaning, of buried and reburied facts into generalized, universal essence, was the source of Hawthorne's creative strength, but the conflict between ideology of fact and utopia of meaning breaks the narrative into small moments of self-destruction."[47] Hawthorne announces that he wishes not to "meddle with that history."[48] The physical presence of Roman history and Ruin, Stern implies, is meant for guidebook-like verisimilitude but not as intrinsic allegories of Hawthorne's utopian vision. Admittedly, Hawthorne's central metaphysical concern, like the Romantic pretense itself, begs universal claims, and seeks in Roman ruin a metonymic relation. On the other hand, Stern is intent upon locating the relational conflict between utopia and ideology on American soil, where real universality is improbable.

Hawthorne maintains a disassociation between Classicist utopian vision and literary market ideology through a metafictional commentary that intrudes upon the main narrative thread, a thread which is itself a split between guidebook realism and Americanism. The center of this disassociation arises in the very role of representation in art and whether art has the power to communicate utopian meaning, or whether art is a sophistic rhetoric that obscures pure truth. The central figures in this bifurcation are Kenyon, the sculptor who captures the truth of the heart, and Hilda the copyist, whose paintings reproduce the very purity of truth intended by the original painters. "Hilda is

[47] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 116.

[48] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 89.

the embodiment of a marketplace that insisted on moral uplift, betterment, sunshine, spirituality, religion, and moonlight prettiness."[49] Hilda is the embodiment, in other words, of benign reform in antebellum America.

While Stern, and Charles Sellers, make a strong case for the view that American ideology in the antebellum northeast was under the ideological power of bourgeois middle-light Christians, a point reinforced by considering the influence on the literary market of gift books and annuals, David S. Reynolds argues, in contrast that utopian reform in America of a Romantic rather than a Classicist strain, found resources in popular literature that he terms "subversive fiction." Such writings competed for American originality and "took the side of oppressed or minority groups while exposing what was seen as secret corruption among the pillars of society."[50] Reynolds, in other words, contests Stern's view of Hilda as a representative of Hawthorne's ultimate acquiescence to benign reform ideology, by reminding us that with Hawthorne's romance he transformed reform into subversion.

Stern advances the notion that the ideology held by pillars of society also represents Hawthorne's market; Stern reminds that "it is precisely those sentiments with which Hawthorne agrees in the auctoral voice."[51] Central to the problem for Hawthorne's middle-light readers is the doubted morality of the artist. Raphael's art, as a paradigm case, is exposed as morally ambiguous since his humanism allowed him both sensuous and pious strains. What sort of spirituality allows depictions of both the Virgin

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[49] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 117.

[50] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 200.

[51] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 117.

and the naked woman in her earthiness?[52] It is the copyist Hilda, Hawthorne seems to propose, whose intrinsic purity of vision and moral rectitude allows her to transform moral ambiguity within Roman painting that exists in a fallen state, to a prelapsarian state of moral cleanliness. The irony is that as a copyist Hilda obviously engages in imitation, but as a spiritual visionary Hilda re-originates representations that conform to the market's pious ideology. The dove-like Hilda, the symbol of the mythos of Puritan America becomes the exemplum of American middle-light ideology, whose exceptionalism ultimately rejects Rome as the seat of a Christian God. Certainly it is evident that Hawthorne is engaged in a subversive use of Hilda as a pure copyist by creating through her an oxymoronic symbol.

Miriam, in contrast, the Jewish classicist and painter, is pursued by evil in the form of "the Model," the Capuchin monk-monster that stalks her in the catacombs. To relieve themselves of this Satanic pursuer, Miriam and Donatello reenact the Edenic Fall into knowledge and send the Model over the precipice. The opening image of the book sets the struggle between good and evil before the reader. The image seems to suggest that Nature itself is Fallen and that that fallenness is without exception. America too is damned, as it is in *The Scarlet Letter,* by iteration.

Hawthorne's metafictional and metacritical commentary interspersed through the narrative, a commentary which struggles with the tension between Miriam's Classicist utopian humanism and Hilda's Puritan ideology, as Stern argues, reveals by means of a large-scale allegory a conflict within Hawthorne's own imaginative consciousness. The moral ambiguities of sublime art undercut a conflicted sense for both a closure through

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[52] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 118.

Classicist utopia and a desire for the approval of his "gentle reader." Such a view, I suggest, requires one to accept the preface at face value. The deeper question underlying the universality or ambiguity of morality in art, a question that transcends or undercuts American proprieties, recognizes that the possibility of transcendent closure premised on morality immediately forecloses on any assertion of American historical exceptionalism. The example of Hilda overwhelms Hawthorne's own utopian example in Miriam, who embodies (like Poe's Ligeia, who is also a dark classicist spirit), the very utopian vision that threatens Americanism's pretenses.

The central image of the fortunate fall resulting from the appearance and death of Memmius captures the cyclical nature of original sin and redemption, and with redemption, spiritual transformation, as Donatello and Miriam grow through their self-aware humanism. Here is the nexus of the classicist utopian moment arising in the sublime recognition of human growth. Donatello's growth extends back in time to prehistory and the mythology of Arcadia, through his likeness to the Faun of Praxiteles. Donatello's ascent then traces the metaphor of the Hawthornean sublime, where Hilda inflects the stasic conditions of Hawthorne's authorial dilemma, Miriam and Donatello enact their negative originality by reenacting the Edenic Fall. This catastrophe, which creates the disjunction between Hawthorne's utopian vision and his moral historicism, then follows with a movement of return from a Fallen Arcadia to Rome.

This movement of return finds Hilda seeking absolution from a Catholic priest who is an American expatriate in the body of St. Peter's Cathedral. In attempting transcendence in contrast to Miriam's more earthly natural sensualities and otherness, Hilda seeks through her Catholic confession a Puritan outcome. Ironically she desires a

transcendence that undercuts the authority of the Church by her enactment of *sole fide*. But by doing so she in turn implicates what Melville had noted in his image of whited sepuchres, for she is that image of the sin of the Pharisees (Matthew 23:27-28), which sports the pure exterior vision as a transcendent copy of art, yet masks its humanistic and morally ambiguous heart, a heart which her Catholic confessor is well aware of. Hilda's smug rejection of humanism portrays a more ominous vision of American exceptionalism.

Hawthorne, finally, sets up the image of Hilda's purity in an acid test that begs the question of American patriarchy and the inequality of women. Hilda's reverence for the paintings of Fra Angelico exemplifies the moral idealization of True Womanhood, and at the same time she is unable to accept the human paradoxes of the story of Guido's *Beatrice Cenci*, known to Hawthorne also through Shelley's tragic drama: raped by her father and then murdering him, Beatrice Cenci is decapitated in a public showing. Hilda sides with the judgment, while Miriam charges that Hilda's "innocence is like a sharp steel sword. [Her] judgments are often terribly severe, though [Hilda] seem[s] all made up of gentleness and mercy."[53] Miriam adds, "[i]f I could but clasp Beatrice Cenci's ghost, and draw it into myself! I would give my life to know whether she thought herself innocent, or the one great criminal since time began." Whether as moral ambiguity or emblematic original sin, Miriam's power of humanistic sympathy subverts Hilda's charge that "Her doom is just." Since Guido's *Beatrice Cenci* has been copied by Hilda, the original sin in it has been whitewashed by the noonday materialism of Hilda's American ideology: Saying to Miriam, whose ironic feeling for pathos is enraptured by the

[53] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 57.

paradoxical painting, "What an actress you are! And I never guessed it before!" Miriam captures the irony of Hilda's imitation, and by extension American originality: "It is strange, dear Hilda, how an innocent, delicate, white soul, like yours, has been able to seize the subtle mystery of this portrait; as surly you must, in order to reproduce it perfectly." Miriam's subtle but evident excoriation of Hilda's hypocrisy amounts to a damning metonym of any American "original relation to the universe."

The ideology of American exceptionalism, in other words, copies the original without transforming it, and denies that the morally problematic content of the original imposes responsibility upon the receiver. Miriam implores Hilda, asking, "would you sacrifice this great moral consolation, which we derive from the transitoriness of all things—from the right of saying, in every conjecture, 'This, too, will pass away'—would you give up this unspeakable boon, for the sake of making a picture eternal!"[54] Miriam recognizes that in Hilda's purity lies the destruction of the possibility of a humanistic movement of return. Her substantiality admits no negation, no other.

Donatello, as opposed to the allegory of Hilda, is the example of transformation. Kenyon asks, opening the central question:

> Here comes my perplexity…Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him. Is sin, then—which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the Universe—is it, like Sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier Paradise than this?[55]

Here, Kenyon parts from Hilda's excessive piety momentarily. Hilda derides his willingness to ask such a perplexing question about the logic of moral freedom, which Hawthorne had recounted in his Journal entry about Melville in Liverpool in 1857. Hilda

[54] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 134-35.

[55] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 414.

charges Kenyon with making a "mockery" of religion and morality since the question opposes faith: "it annuls and obliterates whatever precepts of Heaven are written deepest within us…"[56] Hilda infers that morality is a copy of an *a priori* precept already having originated in human beings. Kenyon gives up by foreclosing on his own question:

> I never did believe it! But the mind wanders wild and wide; and, so lonely as I live and work, I have neither pole-star above, nor light of cottage-windows here below, to bring me home. Were you my guide, my counselor, my inmost friend, with that white wisdom which clothes you as with a celestial garment, all would go well. Oh, Hilda, guide me home!

For Stern, this is the *aporia* between utopia and ideology. "Either [Hawthorne] must give the palm to Hilda, or he must repudiate her. To repudiate her he must deliberately make all potential irony explicit in revealing that everything Hilda stands for is Dracula hidden in a masquerade of Pollyanna. But he denies the irony and so denies his own utopia."[57] For Stern, then, Hawthorne's negative originality is an eclipse of nerve. But is his presentation of Hilda an ironic allegory intended as a case of subversive romance?

Ambiguity: The Preface

David S. Reynolds makes the case that Hawthorne's engagement with the American literary marketplace was a form of "benign subversion," turning over otherwise low-brow popular literary materials—tales and sketches—and imbuing them with a high-cultural sense of literary ambiguity.[58] The dialectical problems of the literary culture, what Matthiessen called the doubleness of democracy and anarchy, in Reynolds' view do not resolve in Hawthorne. Milton Stern goes a step farther, suggesting the ambiguity is undercut by the problem of Hilda as an emblematic symbol of national literature, a

[56] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 415.

[57] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 133.

[58] Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 113-128.

symbol that Hawthorne's own ethos depends upon.[59] That, indeed, is the point of difference between Melville's more fully articulated negative originality and Hawthorne's subtle complicity with—or dissent from—his context. Hawthorne had the vision of a subversive, but a subversive without the will to power. He wished for a positive sense of freedom and originality, but his commitments left him, following in Poe's commentary, a "peculiar" writer.

Hawthorne's response is typical of alternative romanticism. In the preface to *The Marble Faun,* he writes that although the book is "addressed nominally to the Public at large."[60] It is in fact addressed to "one congenial friend…that all sympathetic critic, in short, whom an author never actually meets, but whom he implicitly makes his appeal, whenever he is conscious of having done his best…."[61] Hawthorne goes on to suggest that such a reader has evaporated after a four-year absence from America. Given his critique of the possibility of a romantic art in America that began with his essay "The Old Manse," and his dubious attitude toward commercial writing success in the expanding mass market, he recognizes his once hoped for Public (as an abstraction of "publicity") finds him alienated. He defines the boundaries between public and private. Moreover, Hawthorne's friend Melville, author of the anonymous "Hawthorne and His Mosses" also abandoned the notion of a sympathetic reader after a decade of negative reviews.

Professional authorship in the American "renaissance" then came to indicate a site of bifurcation between literary art and the possibility of a sympathetic reader sensitive

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[59] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne*, 46-47; 107.

[60] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, xxiv.

[61] Qtd. in Michael Newbury, *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 7.

enough to understand the depth of a writer's thinking. Ironically, even as the market for literature was rapidly expanding due to a rising literate population and a broadening middle class thanks to urban industrialism, romantic aesthetics often found itself in a negative relationship to mass culture. Still, the profession of authorship found it necessary to accommodate itself to the market and addressed labor as an American trope.

Authors, in America particularly alternative romantics, found their relation to originality ironized by the cult of genius on one hand, and the call for an original literature, on the other. The only response seemed to be to evade commercial success, undercut the presuppositions of literary nationalism, and to negate originality itself, which thus deflects the false expectations of originality by an uninformed bourgeois readership. The alternative romantics therefore allegorized their complex relationship to their contemporary society by thematicizing it discursively. The nexus of this discursivity for alternative romantics was the evident polarity arising from material circumstances that were affecting the value of romantic aesthetics for authors influenced by Idealism, and the semantic values presumed to underlie the authorial poetic purpose.

Hawthorne's notion of the romance genre stipulates that it "is radically different from the novel in not concerning itself with the possible, probable, or ordinary course of experience. It is not an imitation of nature, as nature generally appears, but an exposure of the 'truth of the human heart'"[62] According to Joel Porte, Poe's "

> interest in those 'psychal fancies' that belong to the realm 'where the confines of the waking world blend with the world of dreams' is precisely analogous with that 'neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imagination' meet and cross-fertilize one another, actual

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[62] Joel Porte, *The Romance in America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 95.

> experience providing material for fantasy and fantasy exposing the hidden truth lurking in actual experience."[63]

Porte argues that Hawthorne's preface to *The Marble Faun*, in a phrase that ironically states that "ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need ruin to make them grow," points back to the "submerged suffering" that evokes meaning through art: Porte notes that in "all of Hawthorne's romances, the problems of art and the problem of past suffering or guilt are commingled themes."[64] Hawthorne's interest in an art of moral psychology invokes the past as a source of value for present interpretation. Emerson, in contrast, sought a direct break with the past in order to originate a new universe, and, of course, an American one. Porte reminds us that "Romance art for Hawthorne is not just one way of looking *at* experience; it is a metaphor for a particular kind of experience. The question of romance-versus-novel turns into and illuminates a moral question: the meaning and value of the inner life."[65] The central question, then, of *The Marble Faun* is to ask whether for the romance as a portal of meaning in the psychic life of the individual consciousness, whether America lacks a firm basis for an original relation to the moral universe.

The Marble Faun in Context

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* has been noted generally for its setting in the environs of Rome and Tuscany, and the central images of Italian art and Classical mythology. The notion of placing its American characters in such a setting was groundbreaking in American literature since it is one of the few American novels preceding Henry James's *The America*n to explore art and originality in a European

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[63] Porte, *The Romance in America*, 95.

[64] Porte, *The Romance in America*, 96.

[65] Porte, *The Romance in America*, 97.

context. The four central characters in the novel (or romance), include two Americans, the sculptor Kenyon and the painter-copyist Hilda, Donatello, an Italian with a striking resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles (itself an Italian copy of a third century BCE Greek marble sculpture now lost), and the painter Miriam, whose origins are ambiguous. Hawthorne provides suggestive but conflicting conjectures of her background, hinting she may be Jewish, German, the daughter of a Southern planter, and even possessing a "burning drop of African blood."[66] Although she has an affinity with Beatrice Cenci, the subject of a number of literary treatments, Hawthorne leaves Miriam's identity quite ambiguous. The mystery that surrounds Miriam adds to the "psychological effect" of her character. Matthiessen suggests that through her mysterious nature Miriam's impalpability adds to the unity of effect of horror.

The central crisis in the book surrounds the moment of the fall from the precipice of the Tarpeian Rock and the death of the Capuchin monk by the hand of Donatello and Miriam. Miriam's character explores "a background of ambiguous guilt" through what Matthiessen describes as "Hawthorne's tragic technique."[67] For Hawthorne, Miriam and Beatrice, represent the "inevitability of suffering." Where Shelley's *The Cenci* concentrates on the injustice paid to Beatrice, Hawthorne explores both the guilt of parricide and the moral ambiguity of revenge. "Hawthorne's intention in suggesting through Miriam's likeness to Beatrice her unwilling entanglement in a criminal past was to emphasize the inescapability of destiny. What he was after was not uncertainty or obscurity, but breadth of effect."[68]

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[66] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 19.

[67] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, (Oxford University Press, 1941), 352.

[68] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 354.

In committing this act Miriam and Donatello initiate a *felix culpa,* or Fortunate Fall, which enacts a sublime moment when the death of the monk, who has been stalking Miriam in the Catacombs, brings about a sudden humanization of the Arcadian Faun and a bond of love in mutual sin between Donatello and Miriam. “All readers agree that the central idea is one in which Donatello's development shows that suprahistorical innocence is magically beautiful but inevitably evanescent, and that the effects of sin can lead to an anguished ennobling understanding of isolation from community within the magnetic chain of humanity.”[69] Donatello’s taking of the Capuchin’s life enacts a chiasmus such that his literal fall to death signals the end of the evil that has pursued Miriam, whereas Donatello’s Fall into the sin of murder becomes the agency for his rising from a state of innocence to a mature understanding of the human condition and the paradoxes of morality. In protecting Miriam Donatello leaves a state of innocence and isolation (implied by Arcadia) and joins Miriam in a state of community.

Donatello’s act, we learn, has been witnessed by the Puritan painter-copyist Hilda, whose moral self-righteousness allows her no latitude of forgiveness for her friend Miriam. Miriam’s very impalpability becomes stark in the scene when Hilda discovers in Mariam's visage the deep sorrowful expression of Guido's *Beatrice Cenci*. Beatrice’s expression, for Hawthorne, bears the appearance “of being unhumanized by some terrible fate, and gazing at me out of a remote and inaccessible region where she frightened to be alone, but where no sympathy could reach her.”[70] In other words, Hilda is morally dogmatic, and her emblematic Puritanism paints her as a tightly-bound exponent of Calvinist precepts. Hilda transplants her City on a Hill to a Roman redoubt in an isolated

[69] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 106.

[70] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 353.

dove-tower. Given Hawthorne's frequent references to American readers in the novel, and on the strength of the book's expressed preface—"the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow," surely a reference to American exceptionalism—Hilda's typology in *The Marble Faun* is that of a metonym of American nationalism as "a force of ideological closure."[71]

Hilda's "representational function" in *The Marble Faun* amounts to a figuration of Young America itself; her piety, innocence, Protestant ethics, and New England purity conform to the American nationalist ideology. Indeed, Hawthorne nominalizes her as a "young American girl."[72] As a "daughter of the Puritans," she admits to Miriam as they sit in her "dove-cote hermitage" that it is possible for her to "pay honour the idea of Divine Womanhood, without giving up the faith of her forefathers."[73] The point is subtle but Hilda is saying that she, by denying her faith in the Catholic Virgin may have purity without mercy. To deny Catholicism is to promote Protestant exceptionalism. Yet Hawthorne remains ambiguous about Catholicism.

Levine notes Hawthorne's "attraction to 'artistic' and 'sumptury' Catholicism," which involves the "institutional availability of confession."[74] As Hilda enters St. Peter's Cathedral her impression shifts from a prosaic American otherness, from which point of view she sees the edifice as a "gay piece of cabinet work," to an interiorized recognition that she has entered a "magnificent, comprehensive majestic symbol of religious faith."[75]

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[71] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 106.

[72] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 47.

[73] Stern, *Contexts for Hawthorne,* 46.

[74] Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 163.

[75] Qtd. in Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance,* 162.

Hilda's confession, during which she "poured out the dark story which had infused its poison into her innocent life," her momentary catharsis shifts to a wariness of the Catholic institution: Hawthorne alerts us that "[h]ad the Jesuits known the situation of this troubled heart, her inheritance of New England puritanism would hardly have protected the poor girl from the pious strategy of those good Fathers."[76]

Following the confession it is revealed that the priest does betray Hilda using his authority to force her to betray Miriam and Donatello. The complicity between the police and the Church reveals Hawthorne's own democratic propensities, adding thereby nuance as to the question of the role of art in a despotic society. Moreover, Hawthorne's mixed feelings for Catholicism parallel his criticism of American society at that moment. In the face of the anti-Catholic movements in American cities, elites in American literary circles rejected anti-Papism in favor of a Gothic revival which might serve as a model for institutional integrity in a period of social disintegration.[77] Hawthorne seems to have recognized that the power of the Catholic hierarchy during the revolutionary era of the late 1840s in Europe presented a reaction to the consequences of social and political revolution.

Symbolic of the revolutionary attitude, Miriam sublimates her revolutionary feeling into her art. That her crime ultimately links her both with the fate of Beatrice Cenci and her own ultimate political exile by authorities, Hawthorne argues that it is through art, the imagination, and the *carnivalesque* that revolutionary temptations can be channeled. Hawthorne's social conservatism recognizes that the carnival provides an outlet for social pressure to be preferred over war and weapons. The moral and aesthetic

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[76] Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance,* 163.

[77] Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance,* 163.

improvement of society is better handled by personal redemption than by revolution. That is why Hilda, as a New England Puritan, must copy only the morally perfect matters of art rather than permit herself the risk of full-scale originality, the aesthetic equivalent of social revolution.[78]

Felix Culpa and Negative Originality

In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne creates a Roman setting where history and nature intermix with "romance" where art and ruin become the structure of the narrative's moral picturesque. As a pastoral romance that supplements and displaces the American "broad and simple daylight" that lacks adequacy for romance, it is the age and mystery of the Roman landscape that provides the context for a discourse on originality and decay. The pastoral villa, and escape to a suburban tower and its faux setting figures a palimpsest that reconfigures and American redoubt. By analogy, the "villa is a metonymic displacement of Rome" where Donatello is transfigured from a mythical faun-like creature into a living Count of Monti Beni.[79]

In *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne uses the context of Rome as a site of ruin that layers past and present as an "evanescent moment." The layering of past and present, myth and symbol, as an allegory of the conflict between nature and art relies on layering personas: Miriam represents Beatrice, Donatello the Arcadian faun; these two are set against modern typologies: Kenyon the Romantic artist and Hilda the American Puritan. The "ruin" in which he traces his conjecture allows Hawthorne to measure the subjectivity of his characters against the objectivity of their temporality, by situating

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[78] Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance,* 164.

[79] Joseph Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 106.

them in the exigent scene that allegorically frames the actual world in which they inhabit. Rome, for Hawthorne's four central characters, has consequences.

By locating his scene in Rome Hawthorne proposes to shift his penchant for philosophical romance to a place of actualities that are far removed from the ordinary. Hawthorne's "*The Marble Faun*, like *The House of the Seven Gables,* both pursues and resists the implications of its predecessor."[80] True to his romance technique, Hawthorne places his discourse in the layered actualities of historical description and aesthetic conjecture. Hawthorne alerts us to his technique of representation in his prefaces where fancy and reality play in a shifting light of original and copy. Hawthorne, in *The Marble Faun,* has Hilda challenge Catholicism on the basis of its form. For her Puritanism reflects the pure symbol, the morally accurate copy of the historically ambiguous masterwork. Yet in the preface Hawthorne makes it clear that America lacks the richness of history and art in which to create a poetics that reaches beyond the prosaic.[81]

Hawthorne writes that Rome produces

> a vague sense of ponderous remembrances; a perception of such weight and density of a bygone life, of which this spot was the center, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere. Viewed through this medium, our narrative--into which are woven some airy and unsubstantial threads, intermixed with others, twisted out of the commonest stuff of human existence--may seem not widely different from the texture of all our lives.[82]

Hawthorne's metaphorical "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the actual and the imaginary meet," becomes the "aesthetic space," the

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[80] Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 252.

[81] Bainard Cowan and Joseph G. Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature: Hegel, the Sign, and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 180.

[82] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 253.

Arcadian space near Rome, a space where "imagination etherealizes the physical world and textualizes historical event[s]."[83]

The central issues of the text involve the aesthetics of art and its moral implications, and the critique of ideology as it is represented through art and identity. The nexus between prehistory and an Arcadian utopia and the historical fallenness represented by Rome and Donatello's crime is interrogated through the relationship between Donatello and Miriam, who become elevated through their mutual sin, and the antithesis between Hilda and Miriam figured in Hilda's copy of Guido Reni's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. Matthiessen notes perceptively that Hawthorne "resented the massiveness of antiquity that made his moment seem less real in Rome than it did elsewhere"; Hawthorne's "American" finds Europe as an "estate" where the past is beyond American self-conception.

The European past reaches back beyond the circle which American traditions can posit their renaissance.[84] Hawthorne reconfigures his "neutral territory" in the figure of the Marble Faun. Donatello, the Italian friend of the three artists resembles the Marble Faun of Praxiteles. Hawthorne notes that

> [t]he resemblance between the Marble Faun and their living companion had made a deep, half-serious, half-mirthful impression on these three friends, and had taken them into a certain airy region, lifting up, as it is so pleasant to feel them lifted, their heavy earthly feet from the actual soil of life. The world had been set afloat, as it were, for a moment, and relieved them, for just so long, of all customary responsibility for what they thought and said.[85]

Whatever such passages of romance offer in terms of a utopian moment, such passages are constrained by the ideology of Americanism. Leon Chai notes that Hawthorne had

[83] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 355.

[84] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 355.

[85] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 12.

written in his *French* and *Italian Notebooks* an entry (March 14, 1858): “The Clay is the Life; the Plaster is the Death; and the Marble is the Resurrection.”[86] In the “Artist of the Beautiful” Hawthorne had been concerned as “the spiritual of matter,” where “visionary intuition” may be expressed through “material form.”[87]

Sensing perhaps that Kenyon’s analogy between gravity and the solidity of a natural law having the moral certitude of Puritanism, a certitude that informs Kenyon and Hilda’s inclinations to Americanism, Miriam presents the counter-argument that painting is more capable of capturing representations of a rhetoric of temporality and irony. Miriam argues that

> You think that sculpture should be a sort of fossilizing process. But, in truth, your frozen art has nothing like the scope and freedom of Hilda’s and mine. In painting there is a similar objection to the representation of brief snatches of time; perhaps because a story can be so much more fully told in picture, and buttressed about with circumstances that give it an epoch.[88]

Of course we later realize that Miriam and Hilda’s approaches to painting are dialogic: Hilda represents a form of imitation that purifies the subject; Miriam represents the form of originality that humanizes the subject.

Hilda’s rejection of Miriam, because of her unwillingness to understand the human dimension of Miriam's--and by extention, Beatrice’s--dilemma, points to the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace: salvation demands unconditional purity. Yet Hilda walks in the shadow of ruin from which she cannot escape, except through a longing that sublimates her desire to return to American sunshine. Entering St. Peter’s she tells her story of the crime to her confessor, an

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[86] Qtd. in Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance, 55.*

[87] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 55.

[88] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 13.

expatriate American Catholic who regards her Protestantism as heretical. Here we have the Christian relativism that centers on the divide between the Catholic Church and dissent. Hilda's pride in her Puritan election (American exceptionalism) requires her to reject absolution, and by extension the blessings of the Church. She remains fixated on the promise of a direct relation to God, a relation apart from the human condition. Kenyon, who has taken a Byronesque sojourn to Donatello's tower, recants his liberalism, and tells Hilda, "Were you my guide, my counselor, my inmost friend, with that white wisdom that clothes you as a celestial garment, all would go well. O Hilda, guide me home!"[89]

Hilda appears desultorily on the Tarpeian Rock just as Donatello sends Miriam's persecuting "model" over the cliff. The scene precipitates the transformation of both Donatello and Miriam. Donatello is transformed by the act from a prelapsarian Arcadian innocence into a modern isolato atop his lonely tower; Miriam becomes laden with the guilt of Beatrice, and has Hilda for her adjudicator. Hilda is "terrifying." In her interview with Miriam Hilda confesses that by witnessing the murder she too is "stained with guilt." Miriam counters that though in despair she remains a part of the human condition; she, despite the act, remains a human. Her sin seeks redemption in sympathy and fellowship. Hilda, though, rejects Miriam. Hilda is "merciless" and with no "conception" of human failing. Miriam tells her that "as a human creature, and a woman among earthly men and women, you need a sin to soften you."[90]

Private morality engenders the possibility of preservation of the self, and in the discovery of self through recovery from loss of self, there is the possibility of a

[89] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, Cited 359.

[90] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, Cited 358.

redemptive spiritualization that by degrees overcomes the loss and leads to the possibility of spiritual growth. The sacredness of human interaction lies in the possibility for spiritual progress through interaction and willing submission to the other who reciprocates that willingness. Hawthorne bases his moral historicism on the "notion of collective guilt."[91] In so doing he acknowledges a new conception of humanism that is at once secular and spiritual. The idea has its foundation certainly in Kant and Herder, who located reason (Kant) and spiritual vitality in humanity. As a subtext, the concept of humanism rests on a dialectic between the masses and individualism. The Romantic negation of self-consciousness implied in Keats "negative capability" throws its light on humanity as an 'other' in Nature. Hawthorne shows an interest in the physical aspects of nature (as the forces of electricity) as essentially psychological.[92] Thus spiritual energy is a form of physical energy.

Hilda's Puritanism, moreover, requires her to obey the tenets of Calvinist Tulip, with its beliefs in total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, preservation of the saints. While Hilda shares with Miriam the notion of predestination that underlies total depravity, Miriam and Donatello's crime of murdering the Model initiates a spiraling movement toward grace by facing their guilt and overcoming it. In this way Hawthorne views subjective psychology in a part-for-whole relationship with the universe as physical unity. Human nature shares the properties of the whole. The affections become the mechanism of "elective affinities" that work on the principle of attraction. At its broadest attraction is a universal property so that affection is a spiritual unity with the world. For Hawthorne guilt results from non-participation in the

[91] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 203.

[92] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 204.

world spirit. And the non-participation makes the individual responsible, in part, for universal suffering, to which affection seeks to help relieve it. Only through addressing human suffering can the individual gain access to the infinite.[93] When the individual observes suffering there comes about a moment of *metanoia* where the soul undergoes a transformation to a higher state of sympathy, which becomes for the individual an act of salvation.[94]

This spiritual progression becomes a spiraling ascent to a higher consciousness. It is a bilateral correspondence between self and other. For Hawthorne the development of higher consciousness and spiritual fulfillment is derived from a recovery of Self available in human relationships. That recovery constitutes a romantic cyclic "movement of return" to an originary Self antecedent to loss, but at the same time accretes to a higher sense of self. In juxtaposition to Transcendentalism, then, Hawthorne's spiritualization abjures the sort of self-reliance that results in psychic singularity, and instead rediscovers originality through a willing submission to the other, a gesture of negative capability similar to Keats's idea of a negation of self. Assimilation of the other into the self is a creative act. The soul of the other remains a distinct object from that of the subject and so the subject must create the soul of the other from its own affective will.[95] Therefore, a sin of the heart is a matter of private rather than public morality, which is of course Hawthorne's central thesis in the irony of *The Scarlet Letter.*

Hawthorne invests Hilda and Kenyon with a sense of a Hegelian 'unhappy consciousness' that rests on a historical framework that sacrifices originality for purity.

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[93] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 204.

[94] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 205.

[95] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 207.

Hilda's *good* is a Puritan God and her innocence and *sole fide* requires of her to admit that "while there is a guilty person in the universe, each innocent one must feel his innocence tortured by guilt. Your deed, Miriam, has darkened the whole sky."[96] Such is exactly the concern held by the first generation Puritans who feared that any human backsliding might bring down God's wrath on the entire community. The Puritan covenant required complete obedience, and by extension Hawthorne is suggesting that American exceptionalism demands moral subservience, as well. Matthiessen notes that in this context "moral laws, whether under the aegis of Destiny or Providence, are by their nature relentlessly inhuman." In such a context it is apparently obvious that Kenyon and Hilda, the two representative Americans in the state of ruin too deep for their youth to penetrate, become entwined with events that force upon them that conditions of moral ambiguity, and Hawthorne seems to suggest that their moral dogmas are too limited to understand the depth of moral ambiguity in human consciousness.

The America to which Hilda and Kenyon long for, where Hilda remains hopeful of seeing "sunlight on the mountain-tops" is also an America where Kenyon admits to Donatello:

> The cloud-scenery gives such variety to a hilly landscape that it would be worth-while to journalize its aspect, from hour to hour. A cloud, however, (as I myself have experienced,) is apt to grow solid, and as heavy as stone, the instant you take in hand to describe it. But, in my own art, I have found great use in clouds. Such silvery ones as those to the northward, for example, have often suggested sculpturesque groups, figures, and attitudes; they are especially rich in attitudes of living repose, which a sculptor only hits upon by the rarest good fortune. When I go back to my dear native land, the clouds along the horizon will be my only gallery of art.[97]

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[96] Qtd. in Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 358.

[97] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 239.

Kenyon's vision of America thus contrasts with Hilda's. Donatello, as the Faun, points to antiquated, ahistorical, and sylvan beings that "have no longer any business on earth."[98]

If sculpture metaphorizes the notion of a universal morality, painting, particularly Miriam's, "is aligned with the mysteries of becoming, the pleasures and terrors of an ongoing story."[99] Miriam appears in two "critical scenes" that bridge the murder scene on the Tarpeain Rock. Visiting his studio Miriam finds Kenyon's sculpture of Cleopatra revealing of what she thinks is his sensitivity to women. She confesses to him as if he, because of his representation, were also himself sympathetic. "There is a secret in my heart that burns me," she admits. "Ah, if I could but whisper it to only one human soul!"[100] Miriam's dilemma is suddenly revealed. She is unable to tell Kenyon her secret. Surely Kenyon's cool, reasoned character lacks the passion to hear her secret. Miriam realizes Kenyon is "as cold and pitiless as…marble."

Miriam's mysterious nature resides in the ambiguity of her multi-ethnic identity whose origins are unknown. Hilda's Americanness trades it power of representation for the desire to copy classical art, and loses her originality as a consequence. The sculptor Kenyon represents an aesthetics of imitation. When the four central characters converge in the sculpture gallery, we identify through their presence the negative dialectics of their relation to the statue of the Dying Gladiator. Surrounding the figure are numerous depictions from antiquity, and in the center, a child allegorizing the "Human Soul, with its choice of Innocence or Evil close at hand...clasping a dove to her bosom, but assaulted

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[98] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 361.

[99] Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 255.

[100] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, Cited 357.

by a snake."[101] Nearby, a staircase descends through the Capital, as if regressing in time, to the "triumphal arch of Septimus Severus" and in the background an ancient Forum is presided over by contemporary peasants washing linens clean.

Like Miriam, Donatello figures a series of significations that lead back beyond time to unknowable origins. His uncanny resemblance to a faun-creature that is antecedent to humanity can only be affirmed by comparison to a marble statue, itself a copy of a now lost original Faun of Praxiteles. As a future present Donatello, as the Count of Monte Beni, is already determined through the crisis on the precipice. Donatello marks a trope that is structured by the transformations already inscribed in his negative originality, the moment when he must suffer the necessary transformation from his faun-state to his human-state, an catastrophic event of violence that marks his mortality and his movement of return through the negation of the sublime. The aspect of the sublime that forestalls interpretation arises in the non-identity of the victim, which is only later to be revealed as a Capuchin monk. This shock of recognition forms the figure of a chiasmus with respect to Donatello's *sublation.* Donatello's ascent from faun to guilty man opposes the descent of specter to monk, and in their antithetical negative originality they foreclose upon any possibility of comprehending originality per se. The world, says Donatello, "has grown so sadly serious, that such men must change their nature, or else perish, like the antediluvian creatures, that required, as the condition of their existence, a more summer-like atmosphere than ours." Hawthorne, says Matthiessen,

> was meditating likewise on the theme of cheerless decay. Hawthorne was always aware of how in his Yankee world, 'no life now wanders like an unfettered stream; there is a mill-wheel for the tiniest rivulet to turn. We go all wrong, by too strenuous a resolution to go all right.' It was the competitive America to which

[101] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 5.

> Hawthorne, with his usual startling frankness, told Ticknor that he had no desire to come back. After his long sojourn in Europe he declared that he still loved his country: 'The United States are fit for many excellent purposes, but they certainly are not fit to live in'.[102]

Hawthorne's concern about "the slow disintegration of the bases upon which the earlier moral values had depended" prompts him to admit that "I find that my respect for clerical people, as such, and my faith in the utility of their office, decreases daily. We certainly do need a new revelation—a new system—for there seems to be no life in the old one."[103] Beneath such utopianism Hawthorne, through the sculptor Kenyon, questions the Dying Gladiator as a valid moral representation of America since its inner paradoxes mark its impermanence.

> Fitting moments, imminent emergencies, imperceptible intervals between two breaths, ought not to be incrusted with the eternal repose of marble; in a sculptural subject, there should be moral standstill, since there must of necessity be a physical one. Otherwise, it is like flinging a block of marble up into the air, and, by some trick of enchantment, causing it to stick there. You feel that it ought to come down, and are dissatisfied that it does not obey the natural law.[104]

Ignoring the inherent critique arising from the juxtaposition between the Dying Gladiator figure and an American "new system," Hawthorne's American artists in Rome, Kenyon and Hilda, portray an atmosphere of sentimentalism and piety that gives the "impression of self-righteousness and prigishness."[105]

There is a bifurcation set up in this division between matter and spirit. In *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne abandons that Platonic split between form and mimesis. Instead, Hawthorne turns to the quest narrative traversing from a state of innocence to a state of

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[102] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 361.

[103] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 361.

[104] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 13.

[105] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 356-57.

experience that is clarified by a “Fortunate Fall”; the pagan beginning of “primitive happiness” is unsustainable, as is clear in “The May-Pole of Merrymount,” as well. There, summery Eden gives way to Puritan *nomos.* Yet even in Puritan *nomos* a divine comedy is possible through marriage. Marriage, which represents postlapsarian mortality in its most exalted form, love, offers “the intuition of a higher, more spiritual existence,” that becomes available to consciousness through the symbolism of art.”[106]

As we have seen, Hawthorne’s Rome “is situated at the catastrophic crossroads of history and geography.”[107] Hawthorne figures American artistic thinking in the form of a sculptor and painter, who, as they become absorbed in the aesthetics of place in Rome, discover that their own artistic resources lose themselves in an *aporia,* where because of an “affair of Nietzschean moral indeterminacy,” lose also their sense of aesthetic independence. Kenyon and Hilda, the American artists, become entwined in the events perpetrated by Miriam and Donatello resulting in the death of Capuchin monk, who, at the same time, is revealed to be a timeless persecutor of Miriam, the original and brilliant pan-European artist. Donatello, her companion, carries with him the lineage of the Faun of Praxiteles and the romance of Arcadia. Miriam and Donatello “are emblematic of the deep groundlessness of European culture, of the submersion and indeterminacy of its historical origins.” Donatello is represented as a descendent of the Pelasgian creation

[106] Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 56.

[107] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature*, 48. Note: Joseph Riddel, in "Reading America/American Readers," Modern language Notes," XCIX (Sept. 1984), 903-27. Riddel shows that to nineteenth-century American writers, including Hawthorne, Rome was a central concept in the understanding of originality as it extended beyond national literary claims

myth, whereas Miriam is an amalgam of African, Jewish, and Germanic heritage that has been lost in her radical temporality.[108]

Ancient myth provides Hawthorne with a sense of continuity for American culture to align itself with European literary traditions that lead to Goethe and Rousseau. Hawthorne recaptures from early Christianity a sense of place for American utopianism within the context of theological debate. Hilda's confession at St. Peter's, a moment when she both feels a sense of grace in the clarity of the church's history, but she also rejects Catholicism in preference for Puritanism on institutional grounds. What happens by means of Hilda's interview with her confessor is the unity of a historicity that conjoins ancient, renaissance, and romantic thought in a fusion that is synchronic and reflects upon aesthetic problems of originality. The phases of history that are presented in the process of Hawthorne's survey of Rome amount to a syllogistic form that ultimately demonstrates the negation of originality in American aesthetics.

The Model, the Capuchin monk sent to his death at the hands of Miriam and Donatello on the Tarpeian Rock, represents a timeless persecution of Miriam, who bears the guilt of a crime metaphorized as Beatrice Cenci's murder by self-defense. Indeed, a central theme in the book asks the question of a morality of survival from decidedly narrow terms of Puritan moral thought, and the question turns on Miriam's friendship with Hilda who cannot accept Miriam's recovery from sin on grounds decidedly refusing Hawthorne's humanistic speculations. Kenyon and Hilda, who witness the murder that is done in self-defense, become involved in the prevailing concern of whether American self-righteousness might withstand European moral indeterminacy. In choosing Puritan

[108] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 48-49.

righteousness Kenyon and Hilda reject the possibility of accepting Miriam and Donatello's moral recovery and growth, and in so doing lose their artistic and creative originality. Tracing out the romantic stage of Hegelian aesthetics Hilda and Kenyon represent the fall of classical balance through an overdetermined romantic ideology that undermines utopia.

While the murder of the Model acts as the central crisis of the novel, the crisis becomes an effect caused by the appearance of the specter in the Catacombs during the moment when Miriam disappears. This complication has the effect of separating the community of friends and fostering their resultant division. The appearance of the specter requires of each member that he or she create an identity for it by attempting to apply an explanatory signified. Upon Miriam's reappearance "everyone tries to identify the figure by referring him to a coherent context, to fables and myths the meanings of which are supposedly, or which have been made evident by the orthodoxy of historical exegesis. The problem is to give the figure a name, a role. But every attempt to identify the 'model' by reference only multiplies the mystery."[109]

The haunting of Miriam by the "pagan phantom" posits the presence of a pre-Christian nature in the *aporia* that separates an ahistorical Arcadia, a nostalgia for a utopian nature, and the ruin of Rome that results from historical forces. The nature that is represented by the specter figures a regression to a savage nature that Miriam's art attempts to overwrite. Miriam attempts to represent a humanism that as appearance over form, the specter cannot be negated unless by death itself. But through the killing of the specter Donatello and Miriam become entangled, like the snake and dove in the child,

[109] Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature*, 109.

with the very savage nature they cannot reimagine. This entanglement, then, which occurs in the catacombs, begins with the disappearance of Miriam when alone she is confronted by the Model, a figure who grafts Catholic actual history with an allegorical and ancient dread of evil. Hilda invokes Wordsworth's Lucy Gray, thus bringing the context of Romantic originality into the Puritanical presentness of American exceptionalism.[110] And ultimately in the fourth moment Hawthorne invokes the revolutionary context of the Italian present and the *carnivalesque* mode of resistance to the institutional pressure wielded by the unity of church and state. Hilda's confession of her struggle to come to terms with Miriam's sin ultimately becomes an indictment against disunity that justifies Miriam's imprisonment by the gendarmes.

Hawthorne's Mimetics and Negative Originality

In *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne explicitly poses the problem of American art as an art of copying. Miriam tells Kenyon, the American sculptor, that "you sculptors are, of necessity, the greatest plagiarists in the world." Sculpture, Miriam insists, is an art which has been eclipsed by language. Kenyon, who works in plaster, creates models that his marble-cutters will realize by his verbal instructions. As such Kenyon's art is conceptual rather than tactile and it is the marble worker who shapes the concept. The marble product copied by the stone cutters in effect negates Kenyon's creative influence. The marble-cutters, too, are alienated from their correspondence to nature by taking direction from Kenyon. Property rights and the contest over ownership in *The House of the Seven Gables* parallels *The Marble Faun* by Hilda's discourse over copying masters.[111]

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[110] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 48-50.

[111] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 168.

Hegelian historiography, as Hawthorne applies it in *The Marble Faun,* consists of four “moments” that ensue with the appearance of Donatello as an Arcadian faun as his companions see him. Donatello's faun-like “furry ears” are the physical reminder of his metonymic links to Arcadia. Donatello signifies a double transformation from myth into an ancient and lost historical aesthetic object to a copy of such. Donatello is thus the figure that has undergone a metamorphosis from an Arcadian prehistory, through pagan ritual and mythologizing, and has become an incipient human; half creature, half human, Donatello can be symbolized as a point of origination, a horizon of culture, and looking back as a pre-human object of sentiment, lacking modern complexity, and he will be transformed once again into a modern political animal, as it were, through the intersession of Miriam’s specter, a crossing from another trajectory of interpretation.

Hilda, because she is no longer confident in her originality, becomes a copyist. In Italy, she has come too close to the original creators of art she respects, and thus she attempts to gain control over the originals she copies by isolating aspects of an original by capturing the essence of a moral spirit even more strongly than it might have represented for her in the original. She sought to distill the *immaculate* conception in the work that could not be possessed by the worldly originator. The question, then, is whether Hawthorne is foregrounding an aesthetic of mimesis as a more fundamental consciousness of art than creativity itself. If so, he privileges fancy over imagination as he seems to in his subtly self-deprecating prefaces. Hawthorne’s caution about imagination and its risk of a sacrifice of relation can be anchored in the ground of mechanical praxis, where *poesis* is present but not dominant. This relation to art allows

the artists to remain tethered to the social and actual while allowing a creative role in the performance of *spiritualizing the material*.

As Hilda externalizes the originator's conception it transitions through a state of alienation into her memory, where the conception is copied and transumed. In that detached state as a free original its state of freedom is “merely existential,” according to Hegel. The existential conception remains identified with its producer as an intellectual and technical product. As a copy it becomes, as it was for Hegel, a “material kind” of sign where originality is bound in the sign itself rather than in its act of signification. While one would suppose that the claim of the producer over the product lies in the act of *poesis* and *praxis,* yet in its alienation the sign becomes attached to the copy simply because the material cannot distinguish the material difference between original and copy. Identity is thus erased. And Hilda’s distillation of the original conception into a new embodied spirit suggests that as a copyist she is also a re-originator with respect to the sign.

Hilda copies by imitating content over form; Kenyon imitates by copying form rather than the material content—marble. In both cases originality is merely partial and the product is fundamentally impure as a creative whole, yet conceived in a rhetoric of purity in the spiritual sense. In both cases the premise of originality is cast in a state of ambiguity and contradiction. Kronick argues that “Hilda’s sacrifice [of originality] is a pure negation that transforms desire into the purely material form of the work.”[112] As Hilda transforms her desire into the material she displaces her own mortality into spirituality at the expense of her own creativity. Hilda’s strategy of negative originality is

[112] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 188.

a retrograde form. Her negativity, in the Hegelian sense, runs from becoming back to self-annihilation. In her own self-denial she resurrects the living spirit of the originals she copies, but in their essence rather than their existence. Thus she displaces life for ideal, an ideal she justifies according to her own ideology as a self-denying copyist. Her own survival, then, is premised on a form of misprision, or *deamonization,* that transumes her Model through a form of spiritual consummation that performs an embodiment and materialization of death into a spiritual essence too pure to live. In her own artistic act of self-sacrifice she restores the sacred thus re-originating the spirit embodied in the art but not the humanity of the absent precursor artist and thus performs a double negation where the original artist must die again.

Rome's art in *The Marble Faun* becomes reinterpreted through the specter figure as a transformation of its "specular aesthetic" through "interpretive mechanisms" motivated by the *felix culpa.* The appearance of the specter in the Catacombs instantiates an iteration of a primordial conflict that in turn predicts further repetition. The specter's appearance evades reason but it does cause Miriam's separation from her sympathetic community. The moment of the meeting signals a sudden instance of negative originality. It forces Miriam to interpret her relation to an appearance that itself has no apparent origin other than the catacombs itself. From the dust of death and darkness appears a harbinger of her own destiny which she must supersede.

The scene in the Catacombs presents Miriam alone face to face with the "specter," an ancient artist, a "pagan phantom" who once promised to teach the "secret" to Miriam of ancient fresco painting. The anomalous specter-artist is recoverable only through a hermeneutics of mythology and "monstrous fictions" that are both menacing yet provide

the only primordial *urtext* to the scene's belated context. Grounding modernity in an ancient and universal relation to art hopes to gain a centeredness lost through representation in art. That hope of completion rests on the *telos* of the artistic tradition in the reuniting of American originality and ancient originality. The original fresco paining cannot establish its originality without its belated representation through which the specter figure haunts Miriam in the Catacombs, and through whom Miriam becomes the primary agency of resistance to Hilda's purity.

Hawthorne's rendering of the crime, though, offers the opposing narratives of the *felix culpa,* the movement of return, as opposed to Hilda's condemnation of all impurity. In Miriam's allegory of the fall of man there is the possibility of redemption; in Hilda's purity there is not. Both contest for an ontological paradigm that presents a universal paradigm of originality. The *felix culpa* is a negation of crime through redemption; Hilda's moral picturesque of imitative purity—an erasure of all impurity—is a negative originality of the possibility of evil. Riddel suggests that the crime becomes "displaced" through reinterpretation as romance. It becomes a metonym of Hawthorne's interpretation of Rome as a place of ruin through which the imaginative work of romance can supplement its "specular economy."[113]

Hilda's tendency toward moral absolutism becomes a central interpretive device. As Hawthorne invokes interpretation as a central mode of reading he stresses not the narrative mode as carried by his characters but rather a metafictional stance of reflection upon his characters own interpretations as they react to circumstances.[114] The interpretive dilemma that Hawthorne discovers, via Hilda's purity and innocence as a copyist and

[113] Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature*, 108.

[114] Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature*, 108.

who denies herself of her own originality, is how to interpret Roman ruin from the point of view of innocence, and, moreover, how to claim American originality through the self-denial of a copyist. Hilda discovers that she might originate a new mode of symbolization by copying only parts of paintings, and only the most morally pure scenes, as well. And she can account for her American innocence by reducing the complex humanistic depictions of Renaissance art by limiting herself to pure essences that mark her efforts as mode of transumption. She is able to extract only the original painter's most pure moral intentions and thus bury the moral ambiguities intrinsic to the original painter's live experiences. Hilda's copied work thus symbolizes her intention to copy and translate, to perform an act of displacement that is not original but "pre-original" in that it idealizes an ahistorical essence that might pre-exist the aesthetic masterwork. Moreover, Hawthorne's interpretation necessarily shapes the symbolic object by framing it ideologically as it originates.[115]

In this "allegory of writing," as Kronick puts it, Hawthorne narrates the abolition of the distinction between meaning and name."[116] Hilda's act of copying reproduces the original through her own intelligence. The sign is thus reconceived and remade representing no longer the original but the re-original. Representation becomes not just transferred but re-signified. Moreover, since the transumption is motivated by desire, the consciousness of the copyist enacts a form of destruction willed by the copyist's own desire to re-originate. The metaleptic event becomes a sublime act where the original intuition is consummated by the subsidiary intuition for its own desires. Allegory reconfigures mimesis into representation, and the mark of the representation—the graphic

[115] Riddel, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature*, 108-09.

[116] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 190.

character—constitutes an act of individual will. The act of will in the formation of the mark of representation is invested with the materiality of nature. It is through the mark, then, that representation transfers nature through an act of mimesis. Thus nature, as a thing in itself, becomes possessed as human thought, through the mediation of mimesis. For Hegel the process is "more or less accidental"; it is a "concatenation produced by the subjective activity of the poet, by the immersion of his spirit in an external experience."[117]

In American romance originality "lies in a self-reflexive totalizing of consciousness and nature" bifurcated by rational and irrational domains of consciousness. For Hegel, the rational seeks to negate the Other through rationality. Consciousness deploys negative originality and incorporates the other into itself.[118] If "American writers demystify the metaphysics of pure origin" then they may point to a discourse involving a "transgression of the self-reflexive unity." That discourse affirms the transgression, which is a movement away from pure origins involving negative originality. If Emerson argues that "everyman is a quotation" it becomes contradictory to also argue for an Adamic mythos that underscores the idea of a supposed American originality. In this regard, Emerson, who begins in a transgression of the cultural matrix in a moment of the American sublime, comes to affirm the principle of repetition through the notion of quotation.

Literary property requires that a text imports signification from the outside of itself, which becomes planted in its materiality. "As a purely external embodiment of thought, romance remains the allegorical undoing of the foundation of the inalienable self

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[117] Qtd. in Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature, 190. See Hegel's Aesthetics. 378. Hegel, G. W. Friedrich. Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art.* Translated by T.M. Knox. Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[118] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 191.

in property."[119] Literary property cannot be conceptualized without admitting that representation acts to represent thought. For Hegel, says Kronick, allegory utilizes an aesthetics recognized within the domain of romantic bourgeois individualism. That sense of aesthetics replaces pure mimesis by dissolving it into allegory, and subsequently investing it with representation. In this process the notion of the inalienable individual, rather than negativising originality as a step away from the cultural matrix becomes even more entwined in it. "Whenever realistic fiction is spoken as a mirror to the world, the critic has confused mimesis with referentiality—language cannot imitate anything but language."[120]

The American cultural matrix comprises two non-parallel domains: a prosaic and spiritless world of mundane mercantile exchange, and a world that is coextensive with the Hegelian notion of the state. The national ideology that sought to portray itself as separate from European social hierarchies was also a place that struggled with its literary identity. Romance promised an alternative world, a world shaped by and contrasted with social ideologies. The prosaic and material aspects of textuality that point to the exteriority of language as syntax contrasts with the aesthetic aspects of language marked by semantics and ideology, the interiority of language. The aesthetic, then, acts as the mediating space between exterior and interior domains of language, and becomes the "phenomenalization of the idea but also to link consciousness to history."[121] "The aesthetic and prosaism exist in a chiasmatic relation wherein the latter is the suppressed trace of the former."

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[119] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 190.

[120] Cowan Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 190.

[121] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature,* 191.

The chiasmus that marks the relation between Donatello and the specter is signified by Miriam's guilty pleasure in being an agent of transformation. Miriam, in other words, becomes the agent of originality--in the sense of a spontaneous immediate originality that marks the moment of negativity--and takes upon herself the transitive function of movement through the sublime from guilt to redemption. But it is a redemption that comes at the cost of breaking the community. The consequences of this realization are stark for Hawthorne. Kenyon and Hilda realize they can only partially re-originate an American art by doubly copying its European antecedents. Miriam and Donatello may ascend in a spiral of redemption from fall of man but only at the cost of breaking apart the community of man that is itself unsustainable in its need for purity as a mechanism of binding.

If Hawthorne discovered through Miriam the moment of negativity that might decipher originality itself, he found only repetition. And in that recognition he discovered that without an origin, ruin offered no basis for transcendence but only the possibility of an iteration of negative originality. Hawthorne centralizes the world of art in order to create a mode of self-reflexivity. Yet in Hawthorne's aestheticizing of philosophical romance, Kronick, who amplifies Milton Stern's concern for internal coherence in *The Marble Faun,* suggests that "reflexivity is just an effect of the chiasmatic relation between aesthetics and prosaism."[122] For Kronick a text is necessarily a doubling where the simultaneity of inside and outside collide. Aesthetic reception must be transgressed by negativity such that consciousness erases phenomenal appearance and replaces it with ideal content. This suggests that there is no possibility of a non-thematic reading.

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[122] Cowan and Kronick, eds. *Theorizing American Literature.* 191.

Is reading constrained by Hegelian thought, which is to ask whether negative originality is a prevailing principle of reading? In the concept of property, as the will is exteriorized to subsume the text as thing in itself, the subject recognizes the other through the medium of allegory. The thematicization of allegory instantiates the representations of self and other. Through a move from a Hegelian reading to a deconstructive and non-reflexive one, the content of the double allegories involved in the dialectic must remain negativized in order to move from prosaic to critical modalities. Yet, Tilottama Rajan argues that whereas

> for Hegel the symbol is ambiguous, the allegory is conceptually complete. The ambiguity of the symbol amounts to a sphere of negativity that corresponds to Kant's theory of the sublime in the third *Critique.* Hegel's sublime goes beyond the Kantian mathematical and dynamical sublime in that Hegel eschews 'premature foreclosure'; the true notion of the sublime operates beyond visibility and phenomenality, and is pure idea, a mode of romantic inwardness.[123]

Rajan's position on Hawthorne's allegory of writing transcends a negative dialectic, or doubleness, in that the allegory attempts to express an aesthetic phenomenology prior to a material one. If that is the case Hawthorne's own ambiguity remains phenomenologically open to interpretation vis-à-vis the dialectic between ruin and utopia.

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[123] Tilottama Rajan and Arkady Plotnitsky, eds. *Idealism Without Absolutes: Philosophy and Romantic Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 50.

Chapter 5: Melville and Negative Originality

> "There is infinite nonsense in the world on these matters; hence blame me not if I contribute my mite. It is impossible to talk or to write without throwing oneself helplessly open; the Invulnerable Knight wears his visor down."[1]

In the well-known "Emerson's rainbow" letter to Evert A. Duyckinck (3 March 1849) Herman Melville writes: "And never will the pullers-down be able to cope with the builders-up."[2] While Melville acknowledges that as one of the "pullers down," Emerson "is more than a brilliant fellow," he also claims that "notwithstanding his merit, [Emerson has] a gaping flaw." It is likely that Melville's acknowledgement of Emerson's putative "gaping flaw" is in part a hyperbolic response to Duyckinck's conservative view of Transcendentalism. Yet, Melville's negative assessment of Emerson's transcendental ideas is grounded in his distrust of Emerson's rejection of predestination in favor of a self-originating benign spirit in nature.[3]

Melville allegorizes the point in *The Confidence-Man* (1856). In the chapter "A Mystic" Melville presents the mystic surely as a parody of Emerson.[4] The mystic Mark

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[1] Herman Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities (*Northwestern University Press, 1971), 353.

[2] Herman Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. John Bryant (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 32.

[3] It is important to recognize the bifurcation in the idea of origins as held by Emerson and Melville. While Emerson regarded originality as transcendental and teleological, Melville dismissed such romantic originality by insisting that human nature is static with respect to its original human conditions. For Melville transcendental originality, while a philosophical possibility, lies beyond existential reality. In Pierre human temporality is described as "horological" whereas cosmic temporality is described as "chronometrical." For Melville, Emerson's error is that he thought it possible to blend essence and existence.

[4] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Northwestern University Press, 1984), 290-91. In their "Historical Note" Watson Branch, Herschel Parker, and Harrison Hayford note that "Melville might reasonably have expected alert readers to see Mark Winsome as a caricature of Emerson, given the 'mystic' Winsome's close physical and philosophical resemblance to him, and essays on 'Friendship' by both Winsome and Emerson." Moreover, they acknowledge Winsome's "disciple" Egbert to likely be intended as a caricature of Thoreau. They also recognize Poe as the

Winsome tells 'the cosmopolitan': "When any creature is by its make inimical to other creatures, nature in effect labels that creature, much as an apothecary does a poison. So that whoever is destroyed by a rattle-snake, or other harmful agent, it is his own fault."[5] Clearly, then, Melville regards Emersonian self-reliance together with the idea of an apotheosis of nature interpenetrating humanity—that character "teaches above our wills"— as inherently untrustworthy.[6] Indeed, the primary theme of *The Confidence-Man* shows that nature, in fact, cannot and does not "label" a "harmful agent." Melville thus undermines Emerson's theory in *Nature* ("Language"), a theory which states that "Nature subserves to Man" and that "Nature is the symbol of the spirit."[7] For Melville, then, Emerson's idea that "Words are signs of natural facts" redounds to the natural fact of moral ambiguity where words themselves remain semiotically ambiguous, and that ambiguity is predestined by an absent Creator. In *Pierre,* Melville noted that "[o]ne does not vitally believe in a man till one's own eyes have beheld him," and that very problem of evaluation becomes compounded in *The Confidence-Man,* where any possible moral judgment of men present to evaluation becomes problematized by disguise.[8]

In a letter to publisher Evert Duyckinck following the attendance of a lecture by Emerson, Melville confesses sardonically that he was "agreeably disappointed" upon

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unnamed figure appearing in the same chapter and peddling a tract "in the transcendental vein." Winsome warns the cosmopolitan that the peddler of the tract (perhaps *Eureka*) may be a "Mississippi operator."

[5] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Northwestern University Press, 1984), 191.

[6] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (Modern Library, 2000), 139.

[7] Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 13.

[8] Herman Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities (*Northwestern University Press, 1971), 292.

hearing Emerson lecture because, in contrast to his reputation, Emerson was "quite intelligible." Playfulness aside, with regard to Melville's characterizations of Emerson for Duyckinck's sake, Merton Sealts, in the chapter "Melville in Emerson's Rainbow," shows that Melville's increasing familiarity with Emerson's books paralleled a tendency to become less "hospitable" to Transcendentalism.[9] But Melville's own transcendentalist explorations in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* during the period between 1847 and 1851, when Melville broke his ties to Duyckinck and the *Literary World,* suggest that Emerson's sacrifice of relation with the New England orthodoxy may have been a factor in Melville's own literary singularity. The context of the "Emerson's rainbow" letter reveals a good deal about Melville's 'sacrifice of relation' with the literary milieu represented by Duyckinck. Michael Davitt Bell terms the "sacrifice of relation" as a disjunction between what is actual (represented here by Duyckinck) and what is imaginary.[10] It is a significant claim in this chapter to say that *Melville in effect sacrificed his relation to the New York literary establishment on the basis of his own originality, and thus accepted the negation of that relation.*

As the editor of the *Literary World,* the New York journal that would publish Melville's (anonymous) essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses" the following year, Duyckinck, Melville's letter makes clear, wedged the author of *Mardi* between the literary orthodoxy of Young America and Emersonian Transcendentalism. If Duyckinck warned Melville that Emerson is "a denizen of the land of gingerbread," Melville appears to be reassuring his editor and mentor that he would "not oscillate in Emerson's

[9] Merton M. Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville 1940-1980* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 250-277.

[10] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 7-10.

rainbow." That he would "prefer rather to hang [himself] in [his] own halter than swing in another man's swing" becomes for Melville a mode of self-reliance that must have troubled Duyckinck; Duyckinck must have pondered whether Melville was among the "pullers-down" sharing the "gaping flaw" with Emerson, as different as were the New York literati from the Transcendentalists of Concord.

The break with Duyckinck might have been anticipated even in the summer of 1850 in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in its zeal to universalize the problem of originality within the ideology of national literature. In a letter to Duyckinck dated 16 August 1850 Melville complains that he noticed "two ugly errors" and that "no one sees them, I suppose, but me."[11] The errata might in fact have been his editors and their figurative reifying of a critical position Melville would be forced to reject: speaking of the two editors of the journal, Duyckinck and Mathews, he asks, "Are you making mortar? … I have a horrible presentiment that you are even now hanging around City-Hall … There is one thing certain, that, chemically speaking, mortar was the precipitate of the Fall."[12] Melville's "horrible presentiment" suggests that Duyckinck and Mathews' mortar-making might precipitate and cement an imminent split. The moment arrived when Evert Duyckinck reviewed *Moby-Dick* in the *Literary World* (November 22, 1851) unfavorably, stating that Melville had been "reckless" with respect to "propriety." Titled "A Friend does his Christian duty," the review was criticized by Hawthorne; who

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[11] In the essay Melville says he has not met Hawthorne, while Hayford (1945) argues he had. For a discussion of the question of whether Melville wrote "Hawthorne and His Mosses before or after he met Hawthorne in August of 1850, see: *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860*. Ed. Harrison Hayford, et al. The Writings of Herrnan Melville, The Northwestern-Newberry Edition (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 655.

[12] Melville, *Correspondence*, 167.

objected to Duyckinck's dismissal of *Moby-Dick,* a dismissal which ultimately characterized the book as being fraught with "painful contradictions."[13]

Eighteen months or so following his review of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* in Duyckinck's *Literary World,* Melville wrote a letter from Pittsfield to that journal stating to the "Editors" bluntly that he wished them to "please discontinue the two copies of your paper to J.M. Fly at Brattleboro, and to H. Melville…Whatever charges there may be outstanding for either or both copies, please send them to me, & they will receive attention."[14] The split, then a *fait accompli,* showed that Melville was ready to parody Duyckinck and Mathews in *Pierre,* as we shall see.

In the "Emerson's rainbow" letter to Duyckinck, in which Melville's pretense of unfamiliarity with Emerson appears, the degree of familiarity is presented by Melville such that he "had only glanced at a book of his once at Putnam's store—that was all [he] knew of him till [he] heard him lecture." That understatement anticipates a similar dissimulation at the time of writing "Hawthorne and His Mosses," when he claimed to have not yet met Hawthorne. Harrison Hayford argues that Melville had met Hawthorne during a visit by Mathews and Duyckinck in August, 1850, after which he subsequently wrote his review essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses" for Duyckinck's *Literary World.* Dissimulation or not, there is something "instinctively perceptible" in Emerson; "for the sake of argument," writes Melville, "let us call him a fool;—then had I rather be a fool than a wise man.—I love all men who dive." Merton Sealts points out that "[d]espite

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[13] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford. 2nd ed, A Norton Critical Ed (W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 611-13.

[14] The editor of Melville's letter (14 February 1852) states that the immediate cause of his break with Duyckinck "can only be conjectured" though she describes the letter as an "open rupture" between Melville and Duyckinck; see Melville, *Correspondence*, 222-23. ed. Lynn Horth, Northwestern Newberry edition, Vol. 14, of *The Writings of Herman Melville,*

Melville's disavowal to Duyckinck, he too has been charged repeatedly with swinging 'among the stars' in books such as *Mardi,* then in the press, and later in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre.* None of them was a favorite with contemporary reviewers, who preferred straightforward 'narrative voyages'."[15] Yet, Sealts continues, "Duyckinck's own *Literary World* found in *Mardi* 'poetical, thoughtful, ingenious moral writing…which Emerson would not disclaim'." And after *Mardi,* "*Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852) again brought down the wrath of those reviewers who deplored Melville's penchant for what one of them called 'philosophy and fantasy'."[16]

Sealts notes that whatever Melville may have gleaned from Emerson's writings prior to his attendance at Emerson's lecture in Boston in 1849, and whatever essays he may have read in Putnam's bookstore (excluding *Nature,* which by 1847 was out of print until late in 1849), he was "obviously minimizing his knowledge of Emerson when he wrote Duyckinck" in March of 1849.[17] Sealts argues that Melville had heard Emerson lecture (February 5, 1849) and notes that the lecture was titled "Natural Aristocracy." In that lecture Emerson stated that "[t]he existence of an upper class is not injurious, as long as it is dependent on merit."[18] Merit, for Emerson, notes Sealts, involves talent or Genius, which is "the power to affect the Imagination, as possessed by the orator, the poet, the novelist or the artist." Genius, Emerson continues, "being itself representative and accepted by all men as their delegate…raises men above themselves, intoxicates them

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[15] Merton M. Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville 1940-1980* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 252.

[16] Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville,* 253.

[17] Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville,* 255.

[18] Qtd. in Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville,* 259.

with beauty."[19] Moreover, says Emerson: "The highest good of rational existence is always coming to such as reject mean alliances." That rationale, Sealts argues saturates *Moby-Dick*. Quoting Melville in *Billy Budd*, Sealts suggests that Emerson "brought Melville ample 'confirmation of his own more reserved thoughts'."

Here, Melville sets the terms of the sacrifice of relation—his negative originality—vis-à-vis Duyckinck. Reacting to Duyckinck's complaint in the *Literary World* (in his review of *Moby-Dick*) that Melville was guilty of violating "sacred associations" and a "piratical running down of creeds," Melville responds in chapter 14 ("Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering") of *The Confidence-Man,* by addressing the "prejudice against inconsistent characters in books," the inconsistency that apparently disturbed Duyckinck's "sacred associations." Here, Melville exposes his "reserved thoughts" such that he cancels both Duyckinck's national literary orthodoxies and Emerson's idealisms. Both perspectives, for Melville, contradict "fixed principles." It is a question of "the revelation of human nature on fixed principles," which, contrasting Emerson's self-reliant 'character' in non-conformism, opposes a principle that forgets that "[t]he grand points of human nature are the same to-day [as] they were a thousand years ago."[20] Moreover, Melville distinguishes his own difference of relation vis-à-vis Emersonian non-conformism through the "rainbow" letter to Duyckinck: Melville, *clothed* in the persona of the Shakespearean fool, attacks the wisdom of Young America by undercutting Duyckinck's "*habits* of thought"; in his

[19] Qtd. in Sealts, Jr., *Pursuing Melville,* 260.

[20] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Northwestern University Press, 1984), 70-71.

previous letter, he confesses, "I seemed, but only seemed irreverent."[21] Here, as he does in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville plays the cult of Shakespeare against the tenets of literary nationalism:

> I would to God Shakspeare had lived later, & promenaded in Broadway. Not that I might have had the pleasure of leaving my card for him at the Astor, or made merry with him over a bowl of the fine Duyckinck punch; but the muzzle which all men wore on their souls in the Elizabethan day, might not have intercepted Shakspeare's full articulations.[22]

By analogy Melville suggests a relation between Young America's literary nationalism, via Duyckinck's *Literary World,* and the Elizabethan cultural matrix that muzzled its original authors. Melville expresses his indirection, here, by means of a paradox: "I hold it a verity," he admits, "that even Shakspeare, was not a frank man to the uttermost. And, indeed, who in this intolerant Universe is, or can be?"[23] We recognize Melville's "verity" here as a foreshadowing of Frank Goodman, one of the identities of his central character "the cosmopolitan" in his last romance-novel *The Confidence-Man*. In chapter 29, "The Boon Companions," Frank Goodman explains to his associate Charlie Noble the "most singular theory" that

> Humor is, in fact, so blessed a thing, that even in the least virtuous product of the human mind, if there can be found nine good jokes, some philosophers are clement enough to affirm that those nine good jokes should redeem all the wicked thoughts, though plenty as the populace of Sodom.[24]

This satire through which the presence of ironic humor is interposed as redeeming the "intolerant universe" anticipates the entrance of Mark Winsome, the parody of Emerson

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[21] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 32. My italics.

[22] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*. 33.

[23] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 33.

[24] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Northwestern University Press, 1984), 167-68. The "nine good jokes" likely point to the confidence-man's nine aliases.

in chapter 36 of *The Confidence-Man,* whose disciple Egbert (Thoreau) puts his philosophy satirically into practice. Winsome says to the cosmopolitan, “yours, sir, if I mistake not, must be a beautiful soul—one full of all love and truth; for where beauty is, there must those be.”[25] The cosmopolitan retorts: “I am pleased to believe that beauty is at bottom incompatible with ill, and therefore am so eccentric as to have confidence in the latent benignity of that beautiful creature, the rattle-snake.” Winsome’s benign sense of nature is unable to pull down the absurdity posed by a naturally benign rattle snake, a contradiction that figures *The Confidence-Man’s* “original genius” who, as a “mysterious imposter,” releases onto the steamboat the *Fidele* a host of shape-shifting con men.

Winsome personifies the Emersonian rainbow that might confuse beauty with ill. Thus we have, in the “Emerson’s rainbow” letter to Duyckinck, Melville’s sacrifice of relation to both Duyckinck’s literary world and Emerson’s rainbow. Emerson’s “gaping flaw” is that “latent benignity” that would pull down a Manichean world where the Transcendental good is ascendant. With that “insinuation” Melville chides that “had he lived in those days when the world was made, [Emerson] might have offered some valuable suggestions.”[26] Of course Melville considers that world eclipsed by Sodom, and for that reason Transcedentalists “are all cracked right across the brow.” Against the Transcendentalists, Melville’s “pullers-down” (of the mask that separates the actual from the imaginary), cannot “cope with the builders-up,” the mass of mankind iterating through the human condition the predestinated original sin present in reality from the beginning.

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[25] Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, 191.

[26] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 32.

But such suggestions as Emerson might have provided the moment of Genesis amount, in the millennialistic consciousness of the 1840s, to an attempt at "pulling down" a construction too formidable to rebuild.[27] Melville's point is clear; he writes that "this pulling down is easy enough—a keg of powder blew up Brock's monument—but the man who applied the match, could not, alone, build such a pile to save his soul from the shark-maw of the Devil" (122).[28] Emerson's optimism toward "an original relation to the universe," stated as a rhetorical question in the "Introduction" to *Nature,* rests on the premise that "we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable."[29] But Melville's unanswered question asks whether a new "original relation" will not merely mimic the old. We can trace Melville's unanswered question by turning to Ahab's quest for an "original relation." Like Emerson's character of non-conformism, Ahab's enigma finds it impossible to discover "fixed principles" lying behind the mask since it is the sublime that disrupts the quest.

Kant's view of the sublime suggests a fiction useful for analysis but his focus on transcendence masks "noumenal" causes."[30] Shaun Thomson argues that Melville's Ahab "disturbs the timeless ideal of poetry, encountering supernatural havoc and preternatural forms that cannot be understood."[31] Ahab's "enigmatic" desire for a feeling of "mystical freedom and unlimited self-potential," that might be possible via a "transcendental act"

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[27] Note the conceptual similarity to Hawthorne's notion of Roman ruin in *The Marble Faun.*

[28] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 32.

[29] Lawrence Buell, ed. *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 35.

[30] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime,* 38.

[31] Shaun Thomson, *The Romantic Architecture of Herman Melville's Moby-Dick* (Madison, NJ. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 43.

through the loss of the self in a “mythic space,” reveals in an instant of self-conscious irony that the “heightened idealism” (the negative sublime) of Romantic being is fraught with “an awful and destructive fatalism.” As Ahab appears “[f]ixed in the quarterdeck, he embodies Shelley’s “tree of life,” the idea of high poetry, and the mythic point of origin and symbol of return of Ahab’s quest.” Ahab’s momentary stance at the height of his heroic feeling subsumes temporarily the fundamental savage irony of his quest. In that moment on the quarterdeck through the rhetorical power of his speech that expresses his desire to “strike through the mask” in order to bridge the particular to the universal through mystic power and freedom; through the allegory of Ahab, Melville admits to the fundamental irony situated in phenomenological materiality.

Melville’s insinuation suggests that a prevailing metaphysical originality tinged with Calvinism preexists and surmounts attempts at renewal. Melville's suggestion of an inscrutable physical and metaphysical force lying “behind the unreasoning mask,” as Ahab puts it in his speech in “The Quarter Deck” in *Moby-Dick,* forms the substance of an embryonic originality.[32] In the same chapter, Stubb whispers of Ahab to Flask: “mark him...the chick that's in him pecks the shell. T'will soon be out.”[33] As if to identify the authorial presence of such a threat, Melville has Ahab acknowledge “some unknown but still reasoning thing [that] puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask.”[34] Like Poe, Melville posits an ominous, originary agency behind the “great apparition” of nature that is the source of what Melville named “this great power

[32] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, 2nd ed, A Norton Critical ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 140.

[33] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 137.

[34] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 140.

of blackness."[35] This "unreasoning thing" lying famously behind the mask compels Melville's Ahab to attempt to strike through its apparition but the power is unyielding since it lies beyond human experience.

This necessitarian determinism, which Melville conceptualizes in terms of Calvinist predestinarianism, presents a theme of negative originality that contravenes transcendentalism. Transcendental re-origination, according to Melville's thought, is doomed by its misunderstanding of the human condition. Specifically, in coming to terms with the idea of an American philosophy on par with American economics and politics, the ideal of transcendental re-origination invites questions about the source of its philosophical ideas. Melville's contemporary Orestes Brownson urged that "providence, in the peculiar circumstances" of the American scene, could show a "practical demonstration" of an emerging "ideal man."[36] This ideal originates in the "harmonious development" of "the human soul" possible in the duty to bring about the "well-being of humanity." Melville countered that despite such "wonderful mirages…it is through the malice of this earthy air, that only by being guilty of Folly does mortal man in many cases arrive at the perception of Sense."[37] Moreover, Melville's guilt—his negative originality—undercuts literary nationalism in that Young America, as we will show momentarily, fails to see the metaphysical problems of exceptionalism, problems hidden behind the literary orthodoxies of the cultural matrix.

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[35] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 51.

[36] Perry Miller, ed. *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Harvard University Press, 1950), 108.

[37] Herman Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities (*Northwestern University Press, 1971), 165-66.

Emerson's optimism turns on the exceptionalist claims of Americanism that holds, as Whitman would, that "new lands, new men, new thoughts…demand our own works and laws and worship."[38] If, for Emerson, the human condition reveals itself in a benign "hieroglyphic" of nature, for Melville that hieroglyphic masks an inscrutable and pernicious nature. And if Melville's incredulousness toward Emerson's view of the self-reliant individual as a hieroglyphic of nature marks it as a "gaping flaw," his criticism of that optimistic view of the hieroglyphic stems from its very negativity. Emerson's construct of nature as "the great apparition that shines so peacefully around us" becomes, in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket,* difficult to ignore; with its polar "white curtain," the social reality figured in Poe's *Pym* signals the antebellum significance of such hieroglyphics.[39]

In August of 1850, when Melville wrote his review "Hawthorne and His Mosses" anonymously as a "Virginian Spending July in Vermont" for Duyckinck's *Literary World,* he was adding to the cluster of critical pieces on the matter of American national literature by Margaret Fuller, Cornelius Mathews, and Poe. Melville's Virginian provides an allusive panegyric to Poe, who died during Melville's European sojourn the prior year. During that trip Melville had contracted for the publication in England of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket,* and returned to New York with a deeper understanding of Platonic philosophy through his company with George Adler. Melville's "Hawthorne and His Mosses" indicates a shift to negative originality—building on Poe's reviews of

[38] Buell, ed, *The American Transcendentalists,* 33.

[39] Harry Levin writes, "Taking for granted the obvious America thesis, the cheerfully confident trend of a practical and prosperous culture, it is the antithesis that we find in our greatest writers." It is the "chill of empty space," says Levin," which appalled Melville." Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1958), 35, 100.

Hawthorne—and turns from the developing philosophical speculations on originality in *Mardi,* which was written as Melville began to wear the mantle of the American author the Young Americans were seeking, to a more ambiguous tone of dark reform.[40] Poe's foray into the dark reform impulse in his only romance, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), by foregrounding the issue of race, shifts the discourse over national literature into a realm of ambiguity that influenced Melville from *Typee* forward.

In the editor's "Note" in Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* appended to the foreshortened narrative, the "editor" credits the half-breed Dirk Peters, Pym's sidekick, with having noticed hieroglyphic markings in the chasms of Tsalal. The markings acknowledge the racial conflicts—abolition, paranoia over slave revolts such as the 1831 Nat Turner uprising, arguments for recolonization, and Southern justifications for slavery—of the period where the Tsalal islanders metaphorize that paranoia: the editor translates from "Ethiopian" the words "To be shady" and from Egyptian, "To be white," and there is the final "white curtain of the South" behind which Pym cannot escape.[41] But the appended italics suggest a more inscrutable presence: lacking attribution at the end of the editor's "Note" are the quoted words: "I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock."[42] Poe's satirically racist anxieties, which have been commented upon by John Carlos Rowe and others, become transfigured

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[40] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 59. David S. Reynolds suggests that dark reform is "largely responsible for transforming a culture of morality into a culture of ambiguity." Dark reform, he adds, is a form of immoral didacticism, which leveraged moral decline as an exemplum for reform. It is through the subversive application of dark reform that immoral didacticism might slip into a mode of ambiguity.

[41] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Modern Library, 2002), 181.

[42] Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* 182.

through metalepsis into Melville's sublime critique of transcendentalism in his chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale."[43] Melville undercuts the notion of appearance in all its connotative aspects. "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all appalled me," Melville writes in metanarrative stance.

The association of whiteness and imperialism is palpable in Melville's reconsideration of its ambiguity. Its benign associations imbricate what is primordially savage and terrible, he argues. In the nostalgia for whiteness, forgetting that Coleridge's albatross is merely a symbol of the "pale dread" of Nature, Melville implies—by referring to the snow-peaked Rocky Mountains—that, America desires a "most imperial and archangelical apparition of that unfallen world, western world, which to the eyes of the old trappers and hunters revived the glories of those primeval times when Adam walked majestic as a god."[44] But the underlying suggestiveness of whiteness is that it exaggerates what is already terrible by denying it through a disguise that appeals to a false sense of universality. Melville summarizes that "by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and this stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation." The "essence of whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors."[45] Whiteness is "a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color

[43] John Carlos Rowe argues that Poe was a "pro-slavery Southerner" who, as editor of the Southern Literary Messenger in 1836 may have contributed anonymously two reviews of pro-slavery texts by Paulding and Drayton. Authorship of these reviews is disputed. However, Rowe suggests that Pym reveals Poe's racism. Beyond normative antebellum attitudes towards race, Rowe insists that "Poe's proslavery sentiments are fundamental to his literary production"; see John Carlos Rowe, "From Antebellum Slavery and Modern Criticism: Edgar Allan Poe's *Pym* and "The Purloined Letter." In *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. G. R. Thompson, 904–920 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 905.

[44] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 161.

[45] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 165.

of atheism." Moving from ethnocentrism to the annihilation of an essential signifier that might represent a universal value rather than a relative one, nothingness is a blank page, upon which Pantheism is written. Upon that point, Poe would agree.

In his preface to *The Snow Image* Hawthorne reiterated William Ellery Channing's democratic call for a secular "common nature" by seeking truth in the psychological "depths" of that nature.[46] Romantic spiritualism provided a means of liberation from the formal cause of American materialism. The romantic turn towards revolution was a turn towards the imagination, in general, though Poe's imagination eclipsed the political ramifications of romanticism. "Poe's hostility to popular democracy" as well as his anxiety over race, explains the ahistorical tendency in his oeuvre. The counter-reaction by romance authors towards the ideological absorption of the revolutionary impulse into dogmatic nationalism gave them a "negative prominence."[47]Such a mode of negativity with respect to America revolutionary mythologizing registers a tendency to acknowledge and promote the degree of deviation alternative romantics held for reified narratives, principally national literature, they found untenable. Romance writing became a structure for dissent.

Authorship in the 1840s was split over the fulcrum of romance and revolution, a split many authors such as Hawthorne felt compelled to mediate. The social consequences of literary deviance, or negative originality, were too ominous to accept. At bottom, the truth of the revolutionary impulse for Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville was that negative originality was ultimately a savage impulse and to ignore that truth was self-

[46] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne: Tales and Sketches*, Library of America College ed. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1982), 1154.

[47] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance* (Princeton University Press, 1971), 166.

deception. Negative originality, then, "required a sense of internal control that mirrored the social control of the cultural matrix toward its revolutionary impulses."[48]As much as Emerson challenged Americans to embrace nonconformity the more conservative Hawthorne was split between his intuition of negative originality and his understanding of the risks of social ostracization. For Melville, in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," negative originality becomes a form of "madness."[49] In a letter to Duyckinck sent a month after his "Emerson's rainbow" missive, Melville remarks about Charles Fenno Hoffman, the original editor of the *Knickerbocker* and editor of the *Literary World* from 1847-49, when the insanity set in. Melville writes:

> I remember the shock I had when I first saw the mention of his madness.—But he was just the man to go mad—imaginative, voluptuously inclined, poor, unemployed, in the race of life distanced by his inferiors, unmarried,--without a port or haven in the universe…And he who has never felt, momentarily, what madness is has but a mouthful of brains. What sort of sensation is may very well be imagined—just as we imagine how we felt when we were infants, tho' we can not recall it. In both conditions we are irresponsible & riot without fear of fate.[50]

Silently acknowledging the condition of madness that results from the recognition that in a sacrifice of relation, as Hoffman represents, no "rainbow" can insulate one author or another from the ambiguity that results from "the builders up" determined by an amoral predestination that suggests transcendence through purported truth but promises nothing.

Pierre and Young America

In a letter to Hawthorne in November of 1851 written about the time of the Duckinck review of *Moby-Dick* in the *Literary World,* Melville alludes to his upcoming

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[48] Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 167.

[49] Melville writes, "Through the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them."Qtd. in Bell, *The Development of American Romance*, 166.

[50] Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, 34.

writing of the romance novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities,* telling Hawthorne that a "Leviathan is not the biggest fish; – I have heard of Krakens."[51] The comment recalls Melville's admission to Duyckinck in the "Emerson's rainbow" letter of 3 March 1849. There he said "I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more...I'm not talking of Mr. Emerson now – but of the whole corps of thought divers, that have been diving & coming up again with blood-shot eyes since the world began."[52] Melville, after the disappointing reception of *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*, moved beyond and below the Duyckinck circle in the writing of *Pierre.*

In two consecutive metanarrative chapters in *Pierre* beginning with book xvii titled "Young America in Literature," Melville declares his authorial autonomy. He curiously states in the chapter "Young America in Literature" that he sees the romance as a sort of history of his literary development. In writing history, he explains, an author may choose among two "grand practical distinctions." There is the duty to contemporaneous events, on one hand, he says, or that an author will obey the "stream of the narrative" with respect to events, on the other. Upon which, he declares, "I am *careless* of either; both are well enough in their way; I write *precisely* as I please." Melville cares not to be bound by either facts or rules of genre; rules, ironically, amount to an original basis thwarting his originality. But he wishes to alert the reader that he means precisely what he says. The chapter returns to Melville's own self-satire of the folly of youthfulness, and examines what amounts to a retrogressive *bildungsroman* of

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[51] Melville, *Correspondence*, 213.

[52] Melville, *Correspondence*, 121.

Pierre as a poet. For Pierre, reaching maturity amounts to a reflection of the satirical irony of youth.

The compact allusiveness of the first few paragraphs of “Young America in Literature” shows just how precisely Melville wants to demonstrate the problematic of originality as a thematic continuum in Anglo-American writing. He addresses this problematic by means of an ironic subterfuge of the trope of youthfulness. “In short,” Melville punningly chides the reader, “Pierre had frequently done that, which many other boys have done—published.”[53] Pierre, he notes, “possessed the poetic nature; in himself absolutely, though but latently and floatingly, possessed every whit of the imaginative wealth which he so admired, when by vast pains-takings, and all manner of unrecompensed agonies, systematized on the printed page.”[54] Melville clarifies that Pierre’s “young and immature soul” had not yet been “accosted” by the ideology of Romantic originality, even as Pierre was being courted by a congratulating publishing industry. Melville compresses this idea into a highly allusive passage. He writes that Pierre’s “soul had [not] been accosted [yet] by the Wonderful Mutes, and through the vast halls of Silent Truth, had been ushered into the full, secret, eternally inviolable Sanhedrim, where the Poetic Magi discuss, in glorious gibberish, the Alpha and Omega of the Universe.”[55]

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[53] Herman Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities (*Northwestern University Press, 1971), 244. (My italics.)

[54] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 244.

[55] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 244-45.

Wonderful Mutes

Melville "looked on the individual as passing through various stages of enlightenment."[56] From infancy (an "unconscious spell") to youth (and its "thoughtless faith"), to adolescent doubt, skepticism, disbelief, and the ultimate question 'If', Melville asked: "Where lies the final harbor, where we unmoor no more?" In "this world of lies,…Truth is forced to flee like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself."[57] In *Pierre* "there is specific warning against the domination of literary sources....Melville evidently made a deliberate effort to perfect his own ideas and style…."[58]

Melville's "Wonderful Mutes," a referent that William Spengemann describes as a "mystery,"…"resemble the Fates" that "accost the maturing Pierre."[59] Melville writes in quasi-metanarrative:

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[56] Sealts, *Pursuing Melville, 4.*

[57] Qtd. in Sealts, *Pursuing Melville,* 4.

[58] Sealts, *Pursuing Melville,* 26- 28. Sealts notes that "Melville's interest in philosophy began about 1847 and 1848[;] its most striking manifestation being his alteration of *Mardi*." "...*Moby-Dick* likewise contains striking reminiscences of Plato's phrasing and imagery and of [Thomas] Browne's prose cadences..." After *Mardi,* and through the writing of *Moby-Dick*, "[t]he ideas he had found in in Plato and Browne—preexistence, innate ideas, poetic inspiration, metempsychosis, ethical and metaphysical dualism, and the like—were no longer new and strange, but part of his own habits of thought." It is the period of the writing of *Mardi* that reveals Melville at his most interestedness in metaphysics. "Critics who stress Melville's preoccupation with metaphysics have too often overlooked the increasing bitterness of his attitude toward philosophy in books which followed *Mardi*." Melville had "realized that the influence of philosophy upon his manner of writing in *Mardi, Moby-Dick,* and *Pierre* had alienated his reading public. [And] he had come to look upon further speculation as unprofitable." Sealts notes that "among the ancient philosophers Melville's favorites are seen to be those who wrote least like system-builders and most like authors of creative literature." Moreover, "though Melville came to reject Plato and the Platonic system, he never uttered a harsh word concerning Plato's greatest literary creation, his portrayal of Socrates."

[59] Herman Melville, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities*, ed. William Spengemann (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 376.

> Not that as yet his young and immature soul had been accosted by the Wonderful Mutes, and through the vast halls of Silent Truth, had been ushered into the full, secret, eternally inviolable Sanhedrim, where the Poetic Magi discuss in glorious gibberish, the Alpha and Omega of the Universe. But among the beautiful imaginings of the second and third degree of poets, he freely and comprehendingly ranged.[60]

Pierre is introduced to the "vast halls of Silent truth" and is "ushered into the full, secret, eternally inviolable Sanhedrim," a Mosaic court of universality.[61] The pun on Poe's "The House of Usher" is apparent. Poe's silent truth sees the decrepit house sink into a dark tarn on the vale as the narrator guest escapes having witnessed the sister Madeline exact revenge on her brother Roderick for burying her alive. And it is clear also that Melville's "silent truth," which we will see is that absence of transcendence, is redolent of Hawthorne's sketch, "The Hall of Fantasy," whose narrator writes "In niches and on pedestals, around about the hall, stood the statures and busts of men, who, in every age, have been rulers and demi-gods in the realisms of imagination …"[62] In gathering up these threads, then Melville allusively systematizes, as an ironic construction, the youthful writer, saddled metaphorically on an aimless horse, precipitated between cliff and stars, silenced by Fates masquerading as Muses, and puzzled by the edifice of an imagination of genius, corrupted by its own fatalism.

Melville adds, "But it remains to be said, that Pierre himself had written many a *fugitive thing*."[63] The expression appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in July 1847. In an anonymously written article titled "Life of Jean Paul Frederick Richter," Jean Paul's "exertions" says the author, were "mainly directed to awaken in the children a

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[60] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 244-245.

[61] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 244.

[62] Hawthorne, *Hawthorne: Tales and Sketches*, 735.

[63] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 245. (My Italics.)

reproducing and self-creating power; all knowledge was therefore the material out of which they were to form new combinations..."[64] The Romantic imagery of originality finds in the "small leaf, with a little dust on it" a "fugitive thing" upon which "fancy built a whole paradise of joy…."[65] Melville treats Jean Paul's "paradise of joy" in a doubly ironic sense. That youth has little capacity for "self-creating power" can be seen in youth's limitations of experience; moreover, the youth's limited awareness of the politics of system of originality controlled by the "Poetic Magi," as he calls them, turn what might be potential originality into a fugitive thing. By publishing, Pierre discovers he is admired, not for his original capabilities, but for his youthful attempts at composition. He discovers the silent truth, therefore, that "whatever is new is false"[66]

In the tradition of *belles lettres,* Melville cites "one" editor as saying that "He has translated the unruffled gentleman from the drawing-room into the general levee of letters; he never permits himself to astonish; is never betrayed into anything coarse or new; as assured that whatever astonishes is vulgar, and whatever is new must be crude."[67] Melville's metanarrative commentary has it that Pierre's imposing editor says, finally, that "it is the glory of this admirable young author, that vulgarity and vigor—two inseparable adjuncts—are equally removed from him." And so it goes that even before he

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[64] "Life of Jean Paul Richter." In *Blackwood's Magazine*, 62:39–40 (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1847).

[65] "Life of Jean Paul Richter." In *Blackwood's Magazine*, 62.

[66] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 245. Oliver Goldsmith is credited by Melville for the idea, and is of course meant ironically. According to Boswell, Goldsmith wrote "When I was a young man being anxious to distinguish I was perpetually starting new propositions but 1 gave this over for I found that generally what was new false." According to John Mitford, editor of *The Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith* (publ. Pickering, London, 1851), "These two passages Goldsmith expunged from his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*" (lviii).

[67] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 245.

may write a mature work the critics have forestalled Pierre's originality and "removed" the very organ of his genius.

In a metanarrative chapter titled "A Juvenile Author, Reconsidered," Melville suggests that the publishing world of New York has "imputed" by "indirect intimations" that his protagonist Pierre has a "natural genius."[68] These intimations, which promise the juvenile author an extraordinary "natural genius" of the poetic stuff of, say, Wordsworth's "Ode," suggests something "predestinated" for the juvenile writer's literary immortality. Yet, "to drop all irony," Melville quips drolly, Pierre has to this point published the "merest magazine papers" containing "nothing uncommon." Pierre's "fugitive things," Melville adds "were the veriest common-place."

Nature, states Melville, "had blown her wind-clarion" in Pierre's direction from the "blue hills" of the Berkshires. Nature "murmured melodious secrecies to him by her streams and her woods."[69] But, Nature, Melville adds, though it nurtures the genius it is also "very late in tutoring us as to the proper methodization of our diet." Melville changes his metaphor: the youthful artist stands by "immense quarries of fine marble" but has not the instruction to shape it. If the artist-genius aspires to erect a temple of the marble, then the intervention of tools is required: the artist "must go and study architecture." Echoing Coleridge's well-known passage from *The Statesman's Manual,* Melville metaphorizes a continuum from source to work: "Now the quarry-discoverer is long before the stone cutter; and the stone cutter is long before the architect; and the architect is long before the temple; for the temple is the crown of the world."

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[68] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities*, 257.

[69] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 257.

The youthful Pierre, in “digging for precious metal in the mines” found that “much earthly rubbish has first to be troublesomely handled and thrown out….” [70] For the writer, then, “in digging in one’s soul for the fine gold of genius, much dullness and common-place is first brought to light.” The artist has no internal place to put such “rubbish” and is forced to bring it into the open. The artist’s commonplaces cannot be removed unless they are placed into the art, itself. Then, Melville says, such commonplaces may be destroyed. No artist can be sure, moreover, when the work is rid of rubbish: the wiser an artist is the more “misgivings” one has. Melville’s misgivings about the genius of the artist again complicate the Wordsworthian trope of youth. At best, the intellect produces its best work in immaturity; such work fails as art but grants admission to “the great University of God after death.” Vanity in worldly artistic production damages the sincere artist. The lesser artist toils at producing mediocrity as a “social necessity.” Art brought into the world by the need of income produces a feeble product by a false producer.

The sadness of this recognition is “alluring” since it produces a psychological comfort in its presence. But behind that sadness is the matter that one’s artistic rubbish may in fact more simply be “unavoidable first fruits of genius.” What looks like youthful genius in others may disguise the wisdom of an artist who “previously published to the flames.”[71] The literary success of youthful writers “will almost invariably…[be] indebted to some rich and peculiar experience in life.” That is the cause of much that is considered originality in young authors.

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[70] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 258.

[71] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities*, 259.

> For though the naked soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visible world of experience being the procreative thing which impregnates the muses; self-reciprocally efficient hermaphrodites being but a fable.[72]

What is taken for originality in books may be the product of "very unoriginal minds"; and the danger is that the presumption of false originality foisted by an uncircumspect public produces vanity. "The world is forever babbling of originality; but there never yet was an original man, in the sense intended by the world."[73] To possess originality, for Melville, one must be silent. God is the only original author, he adds.

> All profound things and emotions of things are preceded and attended by Silence. What a silence is that with which the pale bride precedes the responsive *I will* to the priest's solemn question, *Wilt thou have this man for thy husband?* In silence, too, the wedded hands are clasped, Yea, in silence the child Christ was born into the world. Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Pontiff's hands upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the Reserved Forces of Fate. Silence is the only Voice of our God…Nor is this so august Silence confined to things simply touching or grand. Like the air, Silence permeates all things, and produces its magical power, as well during that peculiar mood which prevails at a solitary traveler's first setting forth on a journey, as at the unimaginable time when before the world was, Silence brooded on the face of the waters.[74]

And there remains an aporia between the horologic of terrestrial earth and the chronometric of extra-terrestrial space. That gap is silence, and when horizontalized across temporality and language, what remains is silence where originality is thought to be. In this sense, as Melville argues, originality is pure negativity.

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[72] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 259.

[73] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 259.

[74] Melville, *Pierre or The Ambiguities,* 204.

Melville and Negative Originality

A month after Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* appeared in its final serialized installment in *Harper's, Putnam's Monthly Magazine* presented Melville's *Bartleby, The Scrivener*.[75] In Melville's punning subtitle, "A Story of Wall Street," a Lawyer, characterized as an "eminently safe man," we find a description that invites comparison to Evert Duyckinck, Melville's erstwhile friend and publisher. That reading has important consideration for understanding Melville's rejection of Young America. Bartleby, the recalcitrant copyist dies a slow death by rejecting the expectations of the office, proffering the famous response "I prefer not to." This reading also has important considerations for negative originality.

In "Bartleby, The Scrivener; A Tale of Wall Street," Melville's short story of the impossibility of transcendence in a mercantile democracy, the text has been variously interpreted as a critique of the Duyckinck literary circle and the artistic conformism of national literature; it has been regarded, persuasively by Weisbuch, as a Dickensian satire of English morality and of Dickens as a shallow liberalist; H. Bruce Franklin has explicated the story as a Biblical allegory; Christopher Sten has shown the close ties in the story to Emerson's essay "The Transcendentalist," a reading to which Dan McCall gives substantial support; and these four strains interweave to contextualize the story as an allegory of negative originality. The central bifurcation between the Lawyer-narrator as an Enlightenment figure (the "eminently safe man") and the Idealist Bartleby who

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[75] Dickens' *Bleak House* was serialized in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* from April 1852 through October 1853. Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* appeared in *Putnam's Magazine* in Novemeber, 1853. See, Jaffe, David. "*Bartleby the Scrivener* and *Bleak House*: Melville's Debt to Dickens", March 1981. http://web.ku.edu/~zeke/bartleby/jaffe.html. See also, Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 43.

"would prefer not to" copy, situates the essential conflict between materialism and idealism that is the basic structure of Romantic theory.[76]

There are rich parallels between Bartleby's character "development" and the denouement of *Pierre,* the negative *bildungsroman* of the previous year. Weisbuch gives a Bloomian reading of Bartleby as an example of *clinamen,* where the strong poet Melville excorporates and excoriates Dickens as a sentimentalist. Franklin shows the strong ties between the Christ-like ethos of self-sacrifice and Socratic self-deprecation that underscores the concept of Romantic irony. Sten and McCall show that the example of Bartleby portrays Melville at his most critical of Emerson and Idealism.[77] There are strong parallels to Hawthorne here.[78] In a letter to Hawthorne (April 1851) in which *The House of the Seven Gables* is considered, due to its tragic situation, given as "Hawthorne: A Problem," Melville posits that:

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[76] See, Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*; H. Bruce Franklin, *The Wake of the Gods* (Stanford University Press, 1963); Christopher W. Sten, "Bartleby the Transcendentalist Melville's Dead Letter to Emerson." *Modern Language Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 30–44; and, Dan McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[77] Sten reads Bartleby as a "critique of the materialism," a cultural condition which cannot be overridden in America. McCall explores the relation between Bartleby and alienation. Both conditions problematize Emerson's "The Transcendentalist" (January 1842), which Melville must have read—McCall suggests in a hand-copied manuscript of the lecture— somewhat dubiously: "sturdy capitalist, no matter how deep and square on the blocks of Quincy granite he lays the foundation of his banking house or Exchange, must set it last, not on a cube corresponding to the angles of his structure, but on a mass of unknown...solidity."

[78] Richard H. Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 18-19. Brodhead writes that Melville saw in Hawthorne the possibility of authorship as an identity, different as it was from his influences among the Young Americans. In fact Melville's critique of Young America's designs on authorship could only be possible through Hawthorne's example. "Melville used Hawthorne to reveal what literature in its most fully realized form could do, and so too to know what he, as a writer, could aspire to achieve," say Brodhead. Melville's "burst of creativity and sustained exploration" after *Moby-Dick* reflects his conception of an authorial self gained through his exposure to Hawthorne, but it moreover has abiding historical interest in terms of the culture of authorship emerging at that moment in antebellum America.

> There is a certain tragic phase of humanity which, in our opinion, was never more powerfully embodied than by Hawthorne. We mean the tragicalness of human thought in its own unbiased, native, and profounder workings. We think that in no recorded mind has the intense feeling of the visible truth ever entered more deeply than into this man's. By visible truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do strike worst to him,--the who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating all Powers upon an equal basis.[79]

Both authors, if one accepts this anti-transcendentalist stance, recognize the delicate and ambiguous balance between individuality and community; that the Idealistic and ironic subject is forced to resolve the materialist-idealist duality by retrogression into the self, which is tantamount to death. In this realization of negative originality, the movement of return to self exceeds the boundaries of what is possible in mortality. Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe had similar views in this regard.

Gilmore states that Bartleby presents the first full-length representation in American literature of the alienated modern artist.[80] Chase sees Melville as "a man carefully probing new areas of experience..."[81] The story pits the writer Bartleby as a creative mind unwilling to partake of a middle-class economic system based on worker submission to the elite class; instead of resenting the Lawyer the partly unproductive scriveners dismiss Bartleby because of his unwillingness to submit. It is not fully tenable to view Bartleby as an author, however.[82] As a scrivener he is a copyist. In the context of

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[79] For the discussion concerning this passage in, see Richard Brodhead, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 199. The letter is found in, Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, ed, Lynn Horth. Northwestern-Newberry (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 185.

[80] Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 145.

[81] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 92.

[82] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 93.

the law and the duplication of law documents, Bartleby represents an unwillingness to transmit deeds to property and inheritance. One could regard this as rejection of the textual authority of property. Could this be a denial of copyright, or the fate of one who denies copyright? It is probably both. As such, the Lawyer mediates to help preserve the authenticity of text but by doing so forecloses on originality since the language passes into new material in a fungible way.

If we take transcendentalism to be a case of incomprehensibility, a radical disconnect between phenomenal and Ideal reality that cannot be overcome in action and in language, and so results in denial and regression, then we get a clear sense that for Bartleby, negative originality attempts to overcome its ambivalent nature, where negation as becoming cannot overcome itself except by retrogression. The central dynamic shape of the narrative is that of chiasmus, framed by two pairs that intersect perpendicularly. Bartleby's movement suggests a descent, a fall that ensues in a law office and concludes in death. The phenomenal movement then is a movement of negation. The transcendental Ideal, however, promises a movement of return, an ascent beyond negation to a telos of becoming. But the reality of Bartleby, and the axis point of the chiasmus is that between originality and negativity is an existential paradox situated in the cultural matrix: the walls that imprison the alienated self.

Ironically, though, McCall argues that Melville intended the reader to be unsympathetic towards the Lawyer-narrator. As a Wall Street lawyer the narrator enters the field already implicated in the connotations of the inhuman consequences of the market. Yet this emblem of high places precipitates a personal tragedy for the Lawyer as much or more than for Bartleby, who is already committed to his un-ironic descent. By

inverting the figure, the overall *chiasmus* that sees Bartleby ascend in character through self-denial and social autonomy as a Christ figure is set against the decline and fall of the Lawyer who witnesses his own humanity implicated by its inability to include the Bartleby type, best expressed in Emerson's "The Transcendentalist." The Lawyer transcends the market only through his self-recognition as a fallen being.

Tracing McFarland's "originality paradox" Bartleby represents the paradox of imitation and individuality, whereas the Lawyer represents group convention and social tradition; moreover the Turkey/Nippers dichotomy traces a transatlantic disjunction as well as recognizing that imitation produces varying manifestations of alienation in each. Both Turkey and Nippers are reduced by forms of dependency: Turkey, the British scrivener, loses his capacity by overindulgence in the afternoon; Nippers is out of sorts in the morning: their diminutions are complementary.[83] Turkey and Nippers function in three ways in the story: they express the results of degrading conformity to the marketplace, exemplifying by analogy the difference between fancy and imagination; they provide confirmation that Melville is implementing the figure of *chiasmus* as his formal critical and allegorical structure; and they show by example how copying can become a social trait that reveals the cultural inclination to conformity in a democratic marketplace.

The central figures are the Lawyer-narrator and Bartleby. The Lawyer's *dianoia* is a tragic one. He begins in a hubristic state and suffers a shock of recognition, and with the denouement reveals that he has come to see the dualism between the real and the Romantic as a central human condition. Bartleby acts as the rigid fool, and has none of

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[83] Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985).

the fluidity assumed by the Romantic ironist. There is no moment when we witness a Promethean self-annihilation. We have in Bartleby a type closer to a Nietzshcean Socrates: self-destruction by bad faith. That self-destruction testifies to conformity, not to Idealism (though it exemplifies some ironic traits), but to a rejection of intimations of immortality; his self-negations has no negative capability. Ironically the Lawyer who insists on the proprieties of civil society comes to understand the vagaries of Bartleby's pathology and learns to exhibit Christian virtues, though he also shows strains of Emerson's avoidance of pity. He understands that he cannot free Bartleby by denying him his freedom. Bartleby's famous response "I would prefer not to" brings to mind Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience."[84] The expression "passive resistance," while it is not Thoreau's does appear in Bartleby. The Lawyer does say "Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance."[85]

McCall notes that the article places the emphasis not on the noun 'resistance' but on the modifier "passive." Bartleby's passivity strongly contrasts the sort of resistance of John Brown, whose raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 became infamous.[86] Bartleby's passivity becomes an emblem for a stance that refuses to engage an alienating economic system, and his tragic self-denial becomes a metonym as the Lawyer states in his final aside "Ah Humanity." H. Bruce Franklin writes convincingly that part of the scaffolding framing Bartleby's self-denial stems from *Matthew* 25:34, which reads: "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."[87] The imperative is to

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[84] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 59.

[85] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 60.

[86] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 60.

[87] *The Bible Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford World Classics, 1997).

clothe and feed the needy, and the irony Bartleby finds is that the economic system in which he “prefers not to” engage has become the foundation that scripture condemns. And following McCall and Weisbuch we can see a “refractory” image of character drawn from both Thoreau and Hawthorne. Further, there are elements of Emerson as well as Duyckinck in the figure of the Lawyer. Bartleby’s character is not a representation of Hawthorne or Thoreau so much as a literary extension of the “moral picturesque” of Hawthorne’s “Old Apple Dealer” and Thoreau’s anti-establishmentism. In that sense Bartleby acts as a reflection of the consequences of a world in which the Lawyer defines the structure of originality. Bartleby is a test case of a beneficent form of Transcendentalism that cannot account for society and self-preservation; he makes emblematic the ramifications of asceticism. The lawyer's detachment exemplifies Emerson as a law giver and philosophical leader. Beyond which,

> The first thing we have to say respecting what are called *new* views here in New England, at the present time, is, that they are not new, but the very oldest of thoughts, cast into the mould of these new times. The light is always identical in its composition, but it falls on a great variety of objects, and by so falling is first revealed to us, both in its own form, for it is formless, but in theirs; in like manner, thought only appears in the objects it classifies. What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism….[88]

According to Emerson, culture is divided between “Materialists and Idealists”; the former basing on experience, the latter, consciousness: “the senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell.”[89] Idealism is ostensibly of a “higher nature”; events are “spirits”; the Idealist does not deny

[88] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 81. [Emerson, “The Transcendentalist: A Lecture read at the Masonic Temple,” (Boston, Jan. 1842.).

[89] Herman Melville, *Melville’s Short Novels*, ed. Dan McCall. Norton Critical ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 185.

“the presence of this table” but sees it as “the completion of a spiritual fact.”[90] This mode of consciousness “transfers every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without” into a subjective idea. As for Materialists, a “sturdy capitalist, no matter how deep and square on the blocks of Quincy granite he lays the foundation of his banking house or Exchange, must set it at last, not on a cube corresponding to the angles of his structure, but on a mass of unknown…solidity.” Whereas the “materialist takes his departure from the external world….The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance.”[91] In the chapter “The Reliable Narrator” McCall attempts a reconsideration of the character and function of Melville's Lawyer, the narrator of Bartleby. McCall dismisses Weisbuch's notion that in the figure of the Lawyer we may read Melville and Hawthorne's rebuke of Dickens.

The story is more an allegory in the mode of Romantic Irony. The bifurcation that ironizes Bartleby's “will” as an ascetic shows Bartleby's self-starvation in contradistinction from the other scriveners' appetitive identities: the allegorical names Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut, metonymize their acceptance of the terms of their own self-alienating submission to the economic system. In “Hawthorne and his Mosses” Melville analyzes Hawthorne's sketch “The Old Apple Dealer.”[92] Melville notes Hawthorne's mode of “moral picturesque” where "[t]hose short, quick probings at the very axis of reality” identify the Old Apple Dealer's singularity as a “hueless object” who is “poor, neglected, friendless, unappreciated.” And through the austerity of the Lawyer's

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[90] Melville, *Melville's Short Novels*, 186.

[91] Melville, *Melville's Short Novels*, 187.

[92] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 82. See also Herman Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. John Bryant (Modern Library, 2002).

social distance a “good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep.” Melville adds that the Old Apple Dealer becomes “a naturalized citizen of my inner world.”[93] The Old Apple Dealer’s wares, his apples and gingerbread, duplicate the apples and ginger cakes in the scrivener’s office. These simple objects become the affective correlative of poverty.

Leo Marx suggests that there is a clear parallelism between Bartleby’s “dilemma” and Melville's authorial crisis.[94] “Bartleby,” as a tale, “allegorizes a writer testing Emersonian non-conformism and failing because of it since society and the marketplace do not allow freedom of preference, whether to engage in commerce or to write as one pleases. Melville, by representing writing in terms of the allegory of Bartleby,” shows the stakes of rejecting conventions in order to pursue “baffling philosophical questions”[95] Marx reads the symbolism of Wall Street as metaphor of obstruction. The wall, its social, economic, and ontological status that Bartleby configures as a “mask,” reveals Melville’s own struggle with authorial freedom and his bamboozlement by literary nationalism and Romantic originality. The windows of the law office in which Bartleby resides as a sometime scrivener look out on a coal-blackened brick wall and another white one. The colorless exterior, offering only the hues of print, like the legal documents Bartleby copies, suggest the scrivener's work as devoid of imagination. Inside the office, Bartleby sits in isolation hemmed in by a translucent glass wall. Bartleby’s exposure to original

[93] McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby*, 83.

[94] Leo Marx, “Melville’s Parable of the Walls.” In *Melville’s Short Novels*, ed. Dan McCall. Norton Critical ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 239-245.

[95] Marx, “Melville’s Parable of the Walls,” 240.

writing is limited to copying other's "social property." Moreover, he must make a "faithful copy."

Sten argues that Emerson's 1843 essay "The Transcendentalist" (published in *Putnam's Monthly*) motivates the *dianioa* of Melville's *Bartleby.* Melville, Sten reminds us, had been critical of aspects of transcendentalism (as had Hawthorne and Poe).[96] In *The Confidence-Man* Melville offers the most apparent caricature of transcendentalism through his deployment of Mark Winsome and his friend and supplicant Egbert. We see Melville's take on transcendentalism emerging in a letter to Duyckinck (1849) and then in *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852). Sten's contention that Bartleby is partly a response to Emerson lies in the similarities of the phrases "I would prefer not to" in Bartleby, and Emerson's statement "Unless the action is necessary, unless it is adequate, I do not wish to perform it."[97] The former is, says Sten, "Melville's rendering of the idealist's refusal to act in complicity with the monotonous and spiritually bankrupt world of the materialist"[98] After all, the Lawyer admits that scrivening is "a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair."[99] Melville's duality of "Want" and "Have" points to

> another of [Melville's] visions of the essential tragedy of the human condition, the very dualism and tragedy which Emerson himself tried to come with his peculiar brand of idealism and his theory of "correspondence," but an idealism and a theory which Melville found to be naive and fallacious because ultimately life-denying. For Melville, as demonstrated by the fate of the scrivener, death becomes the only escape from this dualism and tragedy. The 'correspondence'

[96] Christopher W. Sten, "Bartleby the Transcendentalist Melville's Dead Letter to Emerson." *Modern Language Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 1974), 30–44.

[97] Sten, "Bartleby the Transcendentalist, 31.

[98] Sten, "Bartleby the Transcendentalist, 32-33.

[99] Qtd. in Sten, "Bartleby the Transcendentalist, 33.

> between the ideal and the material worlds is at best only an occasional phenomenon and so cannot be trusted as an absolute principle.[100]

The linguistic analogy between language and 'spirit' and 'nature' that Emerson hoped for in *Nature* is not assured in a political world where some men die as forgotten texts in a Dead Letter Office in Washington. What promises a positive transcendent Idealism in Emerson's thinking assures a corresponding negation in the Real.

Bartleby's slow death exemplifies the endless drudgery of a law clerk's mindless copying. The Lawyer, of course, watches with studied distance. Bartleby, once "a subordinate clerk in a Dead Letter Office in Washington," gives cause to the Lawyer to quip "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?"[101] The Lawyer, after all, is a Chancery attorney, the office of inheritance. Weisbuch reminds us that literary influence involves inheriting.[102] The scope of originality within this lawyer's purview is limited to hiring "an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet, nothing, that I know of, has ever been written—I mean, the Law copyists …"[103]Melville's law copyists, caricatures of American mercantile types, are also "triumphs of Dickensian portraiture"[104] Melville's ridicule of the limitations to individualism placed on law copyists is embodied in the lad Ginger-Nut, who saw that "the whole noble science of law was contained in a nut shell."[105] In the last defiant gesture of non-conformity Bartleby endlessly rejects cooperation in the alienating system, subjunctively declaring

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[100] Sten, "Bartleby the Transcendentalist," 33.

[101] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross,* Cited*,* 42.

[102] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross,* 43.

[103] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross,* Cited, 43.

[104] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross,* 45.

[105] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross, 44.*

hopelessly "I would prefer not to": in other words, in the American system, originality is impossible, and the author who attempts it becomes a dead letter. If the Lawyer represents Duyckinck we have a statement on the impossible status of the claim of originality with respect to the prescriptions of national literature. But with the Lawyer as a caricature of Dickens Melville offers a second critical subtext. The self-reflexivity of British social criticism is less penetrating than is possible in the more starkly capitalist American literary scene. Melville's view of America is simply more barren that Dickens' England. Of the two scriveners Turkey and Nippers, the corpulent Turkey is ineffective after the meridian (noon); whereas, the hungover Nippers, the representative sanguinary American comes to life after noon: the juxtaposition becomes a metonymy for an ironic American anxiety of exceptionalism that dooms originality as it negativises it.

Weisbuch writes: "In all of this, Melville is seconding Dickens in a critique of an absurdly abstracted system that not only ignores but attempts to replace an organic society." So doing, Melville "chronicles the Lawyer's attempts to salvage Bartleby, attempts that risk his 'eminently safe' status not at all and mean to domesticate Bartleby into his unthinking world"[106] Yet even as Melville's "grotesqueness of humor," as a reviewer in the *Boston Daily Herald Traveller* wrote in 1856, might be "equal to anything from the pen of Dickens, whose writing it closely resembles," as Bartleby himself pushes the Lawyer into self-doubt, Melville's writing shifts to the style of Poe. Melville's Lawyer confesses:

> Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was by his behavior, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my office, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to

[106] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross, 44.*

> carry out my purpose, and denouncing me as a villain if I dared to breathe out one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind."[107]

The ratiocinative self-reflection here serves to redeem the nuance psychology that Dickens trivializes melodramatically. Dickens' social liberalism is constrained to a register of satire that cannot resolve the profound questions of human suffering at its insufficient depth. Dickensian moralism is too unambiguous to resolve the inscrutable presence of an Ishmael-like sufferer who fails to thrive amid the promises assumed of Wall Street. It is that paradox that registers the linguistic problematic and signals the sense of negative originality projected in *The Confidence-Man.*

The Confidence-Man and Negative Originality

In *The Confidence-Man,* his tenth novel in as many years, Melville frames the matter of originality furtively. With a cunning gesture worthy of a hoax by Poe, the book opens "At sunrise on a first of April."[108] Melville's Adam, in other words, as we are warned, is a fool. The trope of the original genius that had been the lodestar for Young America since the mid-1840s is now figured as a "mysterious impostor." The singular individual—Melville will remark further on the idea of "singular form" in chapter 44—appearing as a confidence man, a typology of the urban con artist then prowling the streets as in Poe's "A Man of the Crowd," arrives on the steamboat *Fidèle* (faith) as "a man in cream-colors, at the waterside in the city of St. Louis." Melville's man in cream-colors, a youthful isolato character with "chin downy," is, "in the extremest sense of the word a stranger." The stranger has "recently arrived from the East," and Melville undermines his potential originality, noting that his genius lies in his appearance, "though

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[107] Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross, Cited, 46.*

[108] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 9.

wherein his originality consisted was not clearly given." Since the stranger is described as "quite an original genius"—it is an epithet given to writers and is already reified by Americanist magazine publishing—and the question of "vocation" is already implied to be central to the book's thesis, a point anticipating the metanarrative chapters that deal directly with literary originality.

The "strange kind of simpleton" who proffers "charity" on an otherwise blank slate turns his downy cheek to the abuse of the crowd on the boat's deck. The stranger's "lunacy" results from his "muteness."[109] His voiceless inability to defend charity complements the barber's exclamation "NO TRUST." This antithesis, between faith in Christian charity, on one hand, and mercantile distrust of the unknown customer, on the other, illustrates Melville's own predicament as a writer whose highly original and psychologically penetrating books have met with critical distrust by reviewers. Melville's vocation has in effect been "shaved."

One of the central issues in *The Confidence-Man,* extending a continuum of a concern for literary originality that reaches back to the failure of *Mardi* is the matter of a faith in human goodness as a result of Nature. Offering a methodology for tracing transcendental faith in Nature, which might offset originary evil in the Calvinist sense, is the literary collision between imagination and appearance in fiction. Melville's interest in the empirical foundations of appearance is evident in incomprehensible parade of disreputable characters on board the boat. He negativises Kant's premise of *a priori* apperception whereby the faculty of understanding might cognize the empirical. Melville explores Kant's "cosmopolitan" idea that, beyond metaphysical considerations,

[109] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 12.

appearances result from universal human actions.[110] Given Kant's premise that reason is inherently categorical in nature, the individual's growth and development are not instinctual but a matter of will.[111] This one point has vast implication in terms of the philosophical exemplification on the boat full of fallen figures. Genius, on the other hand, is for Kant a "natural endowment" and would seem to be a peculiar instinct of the artistic person. This bifurcation, between human falleness as a matter of reason, and innate imagination of genius that (under the tenets of Idealism) promise some transcendental good, breaks into absurdity. That is the basis for the satire of originality in *The Confidence-Man.*

The Confidence-Man is a theatrical farce of representative figures. The narrative shifts from symbolism to allegory, and back, turning away from pantheism and nature to problems of trust and authenticity. Originality is negativized as a fallacy, placing originality and realism in diametrical opposition. Melville rejects individualism for social typology in the antebellum southwest. Like Hawthorne's story "The Celestial Railroad," characterization involves stock positions. Romanticism had rejected this view of types (often associated with Cervantes) in favor of individualism and the unique self. Melville reverses the negative associations of allegory and uses its insubstantiality as a means to show the ambiguity of character. The novel is erected on a series of structured bifurcations. The day/night division of the novel maps on to the "symbolism of light and darkness" that opens the work. In turn this polar structure maps the opposition between materialism and spirituality that underscores the concern for faith, trust, confidence, and

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[110] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings*, 249.

[111] Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 53.

knowledge. The dualities pervading the book recall the pamphlet in Pierre where we encounter the incommensurability of horologicals and chronometricals; here divine and wordly aspects are exaggerated and ironized.

In chapter XIV, titled "Worth the Consideration of Those to Whom it May Prove Worth Considering," Melville raises the question in a metafictional passage that explains the book's allegory. The author, Melville says, is faced with two expectations; one, he will not deviate from the consistency of character in fiction, which means that audiences expect a degree of realism; two, on the other hand, fiction assumes "some play of invention."[112] Melville advances the premise that "all fiction based on fact should never be contradictory to it." The question of fact reappraises Emerson's notion of a consistency of character. Since *Pierre,* at the latest, Melville had resisted and resented the assumptions held by the Duyckinck circle that the ideology of Americanism in literature must be based on themes of a consistent national character. Duyckinck had written in an unsigned review of *Moby-Dick* in the *Literary World* (22 Nov. 1851) that Melville had taken up the "conceited indifferentism of Emerson": the perspective of the narrator-isolato Ishmael behind Melville's book was "dangerous...to the world [whose] most sacred associations of life [are thereby] violated."[113] In other words, by adopting the stance of what Reynolds terms the dark "visionary mode," Melville's subversive reform appeared to Duyckinck as a criticism of conventional modes of decency.[114] Duyckinck's

[112] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 75.

[113] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick,* ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford. 2nd ed, A Norton Critical ed. (W.. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 612.

[114] Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance,* 47.

concern about Melville's pantheism in the face of his own Christian conformity resulted in a break between the two.

Even as Duyckinck read *Moby-Dick* as an Emersonian book, a text that is "half essay, half rhapsody" he was, in effect, criticizing Melville for abandoning the Young American program of a democratic literature based on Christian principles. Emerson's redefinition of the trinity under the auspices of Idealism and self-reliance threatened Duyckinck's major premise for national literature. For if Emerson could announce that "If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God."[115] And if the Transcendentalist might worry the Young Americans that Jesus Christ was but a great man, Melville's view held to one consistent fact: in an anecdote among his papers along with *Billy Budd,* he wrote "I bless his story, The Good Being hung and gone to glory."[116] The statement upsets an antebellum national ideology based on an orthodox middle-light Christian value schema that put little faith in human justice.

Melville's literary problem is to negate both Emerson's originalism, based on Transcendental Idealism, a view that raises the individual parallel with the oversoul, and consequently seeks to push his search for facts beyond those convenient to Duyckinck's literary project. Agreeing with Emerson, Melville asks "is it not a fact, that, in real life, a consistent character is a *rara avis*?"[117] But even the "acutist sage,"—Emerson—struggles to explain "living character" in "Self-Reliance"; so readers, "who are not sages" will be unable to "read character in those mere phantoms which flit along a page, like shadows

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[115] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "An Address." *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (Modern Library, 2000), 64.

[116] R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 127.

[117] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 75.

along a wall." Melville takes his point from Plato's allegory of the cave, and the allusion is important to understand Melville's general distrust of enlightenment. Melville shares Plato's distrust of image: "If reason be the judge, no writer has produced such inconsistent characters as nature herself has." There is a disjunction between noumena and phenomena at the interstices of practical reason and judgment: "experience is the only guide; but no one man can be coextensive with *what is."* But experience is limited. Melville writes that "if these waters of human nature can be so readily seen through, it may be either that they are very pure or very shallow."[118] Reading character though experience, he analogizes inconsistency with the "contrasts of the divine nature"; in other words, it may be proposed that though originality is inscrutable it does appeal to the conceit of genius. Yet writers are often credited (like Bulwer and Poe) for being adept at unraveling inconsistencies and so doing create astonishment (Poe's unity of effect). Admiration for such authorial control is likened to analogies to the "Creator."

Melville moves towards ironic satire, stating that authorial "ingenuity" pretends to understand human nature from "fixed principles" of "the ranks of the sciences"; mockingly, he mentions palmistry and phrenology. Such claims, he says, are evidence of an "ignorance" of human nature. The proof of this is that "after poring over the best novels professing to portray human nature, the studious youth will *still* run the risk of being too often at fault upon actually entering the world."[119] Melville's objections seem to be three fold. First, he argues that literary originality is not coextensive with psychology. Psychology betrays a metaphysical inscrutability, because it taps the unconscious, more akin to an ontological creator who originates *sui generis*, than a

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[118] Melville, *The Confidence-Man, 76.*

[119] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 76-77, my emphasis.

literary one, which is imitative in kind. Secondly, Melville criticizes a head/heart dichotomy that promises empirical understanding but which falls short of ontological facts. Human moral relativism undercuts the promise of moral absolutes. And thirdly, readers mistake literary originality for metaphysical originality. It is the incommensurability between variation and singularity—particularity—and a universality of human nature that creates the confusion. The moral relativism that is the consequence of an eternal and fallen human condition remains incomprehensible for readers who expect originality to conform to familiar and conventional norms of the cultural matrix. An excess of originality causes readers to suspect an author of inconsistency. In this sense Melville reminds us of Emerson's discussion in "Self-Reliance" of a "foolish consistency." The romance author is not being original, Melville argues, just because he or she creates a peculiar character. Human nature is ripe with peculiarity and the root of it is in human fallenness. The human form is coextensive with its genus. Real singularity is an impossibility. Melville regards the criticism of authors for their inconsistency as *ignoratio elenchi,* and lauds the prospect of "infallibly discovering the heart of man."[120] That discovery is possible through dialectic, for he proposes to "pass from the comedy of thought to that of action."

The penultimate chapter of Melville's *The Confidence-Man* begins: "Quite an Original. A phrase, we fancy, rather oftener used by the young, the unlearned, or the untravelled, than by the old, or well-read, or the man who has made the grand tour."[121] Originality, again in a theme developed in *Pierre*, undercuts Wordsworthian Romantic originality as an attribute of youthful naivete. "Certainly," Melville chides, "the sense of

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[120] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 77.

[121] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 236.

originality *exists at its highest in an infant,* and probably at its lowest in him who has completed the circle of the sciences"[122] According to Melville's view as one develops a more empirical view of experience originality becomes untenable as an ontological idea. Moreover, literary originality demonstrates the paradox of originality where even fiction as a probable means of demonstrating ontological originality runs aground upon the author's experience. "As for original characters in fiction, a grateful reader will, on meeting with one, keep the anniversary of that day."[123] But Melville is being playful here. The "day" is important to *The Confidence-Man.* The narrative transpires during a twenty-four hour period on April Fools' Day.

At the outset, when the "man in cream-colors arrives empty-handed in St. Louis and boards the *Fidèle,* the ship of fools named "faith," we see "in the same moment as his advent" the "mysterious imposter" described as "quite an original genius."[124] In contrast to this shape-shifting man in cream colors, this "original genius" whose originality remains vague, the Missourian in chapter 23 is overcome by the "powerful effect of natural scenery"; the Missourian, peering into the "dank twilight, fanned with mosquitoes," into a "dubious medium [of] that swampy and squalid domain," recovers to find that he has "been betrayed into being an unphilosophical dupe."[125] Melville's cynicism toward Romantic originality portrays nature as a sign of Emersonian originality that obscures reason. "But where slipped in the entering wedge?" the Missourian wonders: "Philosophy, knowledge, experience" became disrupted by the dynamical

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[122] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 236-37. (My emphasis.)

[123] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 237.

[124] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 9.

[125] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 134.

sublime (Kant) that overpowered the Missourian's guard: "the enemy stole on the castle's south side" due to the Missourian's too "companionable nature."[126] Melville's point is that positive Romanticism's ideal of human beneficence through intuitive reason breaks down by an over-abundance of good will. Kantian practical reason is no assurance of trust. Freedom is negative, and the negative sublime re-originates as permanent parabasis.

"The River" and Impure Originality

Melville's unpublished sketch "The River" makes emblematic a number of threads gathering together his concept of originality. The river originates as it does quietly flowing forth like a well-spring from the frozen paradise of Itasca, Minnesota; the Mississippi meanders south gaining current from the numerous tributaries that join it.[127] As the Mississippi River joins the Missouri and Ohio Rivers marking the entrance to the American South the Mississippi is transformed from a pure stream to a muddy multifarious current populated by steamboats and roustabouts at the St. Louis docks. The northern stretch of the river, above St. Anthony Falls, remains a pure stream "so clear that the deepest fish have the visible flight of the bird."[128] On its banks wildlife exists in natural abundance, and "man is remote." The land and river coexist in a "Golden Age" of "Unsung Time. Nature's "sacred river" remains protected by a "long China Wall" until the silt of the Missouri pumps into the current at St. Louis, a muddying likened to an "ambush."

Melville, in "The River," ironizes the Mississippi River as an emblem of exceptionalism. The west bank of the river points to a frontier of Manifest Destiny. As

[126] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 134.

[127] Longfellow's poetic epic, *The Song of Hiawatha* was published in 1855.

[128] Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, 259.

the river descends southward it collects all the impurities of the empire into a single stream. One could read the trope of the river in terms of an anxiety of originality; the destiny of Americanism is a negation of its Puritan history as it accepts a futurity driven by transformation. Or we might read the metaphor of the river as inevitable necessity of self-definition through diversity, equality and dispersion. Patricia Wald seems to side with the former: "Melville hypothesizes the democratic subject as orphaned from history, the consequences of exceptionalism that result in Romantic anxiety."[129] For Wald, it is exceptionalism that underscores a feeling of romantic anxiety by threatening the self with a loss of individualism. In this negative sense originality is not a cultural construct as much as it is a particularization of its antithesis. It is a rejection of a dominant narrative derived from originality as exceptionalism. That form of originality is oxymoronic, since, in the schema of exceptionalism, originality must be conventionalized.[130]

Negative originality, in figurative terms, is self-annihilation. Yet considering Melville's figure of the orphaned isolato, a figure that results paradoxically from the "intrusion" of diversity, we might consider his point of view more ambiguously as perhaps an ironic trope. Reynolds argues that "Reform imagery has eventually become for Melville a comfortable shell, largely devoid of political or didactic content, that can be arranged at will in the overall mosaic of a subversive novel."[131] Melville's dark reform impulses comprise a clustering of ironic images, with complex cultural sympathies. "Dark reform imagery retains its subversive impact but at the same time feeds the purely

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[129] Patricia Wald, *Constituting Americans* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 188.

[130] Wald, *Constituting Americans,* 107.

[131] Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance, 153.*

literary." The darker side of Melville's "visionary mode" recognizes, as an individual negative reformist, the "ineffectuality of virtue in a Satanic world."

Negativity and the River of No Return

The question of "recovery" or a movement of return, as Leon Chai calls it, concerns whether the state of Romantic irony—the isolation and alienation of the human subject whose self-reflexivity creates a condition of cathexisis—might be resolved. Resolution seems available in a nostalgic hope for the infinite, to a state of unity. But reflexivity creates a reading of the self from another metacritical vantage point which is a fictionalization of the self that the self creates to gain objectivity over itself. But that self-objectification results in a fictive standpoint that is a negation of the prior self. And that state of negativity cannot recover the prior self because of its necessary negativity, a negativity without a reunification becomes self-destructive. If irony gains its power through negativity the mind becomes helpless to deny itself the freedom to return to reconciliation; to do so would bring a halt to the dialectical nature of consciousness; the mind must accept no point as resolved since it has no temporal power over future states. Although the dialectic of the ironic consciousness is therefore one of infinite succession, it is bounded by mortality, and the consciousness must contain the self as substance and as subject.

Originality, if it were to present itself, would arise beyond human experience. Character conforms to human nature; it cannot originate outside itself. As opposed to the invention of characters in novels, "they are not, in the truest sense, original at all. They are novel, or singular …" (237).[132] Such "odd characters" are typical. "Every great town

[132] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 237.

is a kind of man show, where the novelist goes for his stock." In fiction, Melville argues, original characters are a "rarity." Human types are simply representative men. In human character, he suggests, there are idiosyncratic "singular forms." "Singular forms" remain singular as a genus within the species of character. Originality, however, demands "original instincts," the uniqueness of a "prodigy," the "new law-giver," a "revolutionizing philosopher, or the founder of a new religion." Melville's bifurcation between singular form and original instinct can be conceptualized in terms of Kant's dichotomy of subject and object:

Kant states that there are

> two ways in which finality may be represented in an object given in experience. It may be made to turn on what is purely subjective. In this case the object is considered in respect of its form as present in apprehension prior to any concept; and the harmony of this form with the cognitive faculties, promoting the combination of intuition with concepts for cognition generally, is represented as the finality of the form of the object. Or, on the other hand, the representation of finality may be made to turn on what is objective, in which case it is represented as the harmony of the form of the object with the possibility of the thing itself according to the antecedent concept of it containing the ground of this form.[133]

The former deals with aesthetic pleasure; the latter is a matter of the understanding, only. The Romantic sublime incapacitates the understanding. As originality is a product of Nature and the concept of form, of the understanding, originality can arise as creativity when reason arrives at originality through negativity, and form disappears, momentarily. Original characters exhibit, says Melville, "a discernible something prevailingly local, or of the age."[134] The very time-boundedness contradicts the notion of originality. A singular character is not original but peculiar or idiosyncratic. Melville recognizes that

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[133] Immanuel Kant, "VIII. The Logical Representation of the Finality of Nature," *Critique of Judgement, Immanuel Kant: Philosophical Writings.* ed. Ernst Behler (The Continuum Publishing Company*, 1986),* 154.

[134] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 237.

singular characters are self-reflexive. Singularity is “confined.” Originality, on the other hand “is like a Drummond light, raying away from itself all round it—everything is lit by it, everything starts up to it (mark how it is with Hamlet), so that, in certain minds, there follows upon the adequate conception of such a character, an effect, in its way, akin to that which in Genesis attends upon the beginnings of things,”[135] “For much the same reason that there is but one planet to one orbit, so there can be one such original character to one work of invention. Two would conflict to chaos...” Indirectly Melville is suggesting that the shape-shifting characters on the *Fidèle* are but one character.

Reading individual originality is to broach chaos. The point directly argues with Emerson’s self-reliance since Melville suggests that non-conformity does not produce ontological uniqueness but rather the absurdity that whim might result in moral goodness. For authors, creating a “new, singular, striking, odd, eccentric” species of character (non-conformism) means that one must have “seen much.” The point seems to direct a criticism towards Emerson who tended to his own circle. On the other hand, to produce a truly original character, and author “must have much luck.”[136] Originality redounds to chance. The source is outside the individual creative imagination. Melville infers a “point in common” between literary originality and ontological originality: the “phenomenon” (deliberately using Kant’s term) of originality “cannot be born in the author’s imagination—it being true in literature as in zoology, that all life is from the egg.” Ontological originality is for Melville fundamentally aleatoric.

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[135] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 238.

[136] Melville, *The Confidence-Man,* 238.

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