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ANCIENT SUPERSTITION STEEPED IN THE HUMAN HEART:
RUMORS OF THE SUPERNATURAL AS RESISTANCE
NARRATIVE IN *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Marie Elizabeth Horne in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

ANCIENT SUPERSTITION STEEPED IN THE HUMAN HEART:
RUMORS OF THE SUPERNATURAL AS RESISTANCE
NARRATIVE IN *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

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Master of Arts

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* continuously plays with the idea of narrative authority to explore concepts of class and power within the novel. Since these concepts of class and power are also a central focus of Subaltern Studies, applying some of this body of scholarship to the novel brings into focus these concepts and sheds light on the motivations and types of resistance in the novel. The upper class characters, including the Pyncheons, construct and maintain a narrative based on the declarations of professionals and officials of the state and church. It discusses only the most noble characteristics and events of the upper classes and relies solely on rational, empirical thought. They create this narrative to maintain their authority and dominance. The lower classes, including the Maules, construct an alternate narrative to resist the upper class that is collected and passed down through rumor. Supernatural elements like

ghosts and curses figure prominently in this narrative. It is only when the Pyncheon and Maule families begin to listen to and validate multiple narratives that class and power become less important and the reconciliation between families happens.

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At his execution, Matthew Maule utters the death knoll for the Pyncheon family when he declares, “God will give him blood to drink” (8). Many years later, when Phoebe hears a “queer and awkward ingurgitation” in the throat of Judge Pyncheon, she involuntarily starts in fear. Phoebe has heard the legend of the curse and cannot help but imagine Judge Pyncheon “drinking blood.” The narrator explains how the story of the curse came to affect her so much: “But ancient superstitions, after being steeped in human hearts, and embodied in human breath, and passing from lip to ear in manifold repetition, through a series of generations, become imbued with an effect of homely truth.” The curse was passed on in rumor for so many years that it began to seem like the truth. He continues, “By long transmission among household facts, they grow to look like them, and have such a familiar way of making themselves at home, that their influence is usually greater than we suspect” (124). Phoebe started because the curse, which contradicts what should be fact, after such repetition, seemed a fact to her. The narrator depicts the influence of rumor repeatedly throughout the novel. By multiplying rumors more than facts, the narrator of Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* seems to indicate a certain allegiance to events not readily explained by science or recorded in the history books. In this the narrator seems to side with the lower classes, for it is they that accept the viability of these supernatural events. On the other hand, the upper classes validate narratives passed down in historical accounts written with a claim to objectivity

and statement of fact. Recognizing this class conflict played out in the struggle for narrative authority is crucial to understanding the novel.

Both Allan Emery and Michael Dunne analyze how Hawthorne strategically manipulates narrative to both undermine and provide an alternative version to established historical accounts of Salem. Dunne suggests that in *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne wanted to undermine the authority of official histories. After pointing out that in the novel official documents offer no evidence of any surviving Maules, Dunne claims that “[s]urely most readers have guessed Holgrave’s connection to the Maules long before this revelation and have consequently also guessed that history may be an untrustworthy source of authority in this book” (120). Likewise, Emery asserts that in writing *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne was creating an alternate history of Salem. He mentions several historical texts that Hawthorne checked out of the library while writing: Joseph Felt’s *Annals of Salem* and Thomas Hutchinson’s *History of New England*. He then points out portions of the novel’s narrative which differ from these historical accounts and suggests that Hawthorne sought to write an alternate history of Salem that would “demolish Felt’s general thesis regarding the sanctity of Salem’s early history” (135).

Both of these critical works center on comparing actual historical narratives with the alternate narrative of Hawthorne’s fictional story, but they fail to explore the parallel focus on alternate narratives within the novel itself. In *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne presents and validates an alternate narrative in contrast to a more official and historical narrative. Other scholars have commented on Hawthorne’s use of multiple narratives, or as F. O. Matthiessen called it, “the device of multiple choice” (276).

Harshbarger comments on the scholarship surrounding this device: “Over the years, critics have provided various, often conflicting accounts of Hawthorne’s custom of providing various, often conflicting accounts of a narrative situation or event.” He continues saying that scholars have used this ambiguity to reveal more about “Hawthorne’s metaphysics, moral beliefs, or politics . . .” (30). Harshbarger himself attributes the use of multiple narratives as a device to create intimacy with the reader. This body of scholarship, however, does not discuss the general divide in these narratives along the lines of power and class that is a clear focus of the novel. Emery does suggest that the alternate history Hawthorne writes is a history of “the primordial conflict between the wealthy and powerful Colonel Pyncheon and the plebian but defiant Matthew Maule . . .” (132), or in other words, a class struggle, but that is the extent of his analysis of class in the work. In my view, *The House of the Seven Gables* incorporates two distinct narratives separated along lines of class. The narrator relates an upper class narrative devoted to objectivity and rationality, but resists the authority of that narrative by suggesting the reader listen to and understand another narrative, a lower class narrative filled with multiple subjective voices and supernatural events.

Previous Hawthorne scholars have come close to combining the elements of narrative authority and class, but it perhaps took borrowing aims and methods from Subaltern Studies, a sub-field of Postcolonial studies, to bring these elements to the forefront. Since Lawrence Buell’s seminal article “American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon,” it is not unusual to see scholarship dedicated to combining the field of postcolonial studies with Hawthorne. The scholars are divided into various camps. One places Hawthorne squarely on the side of the colonizer and reads his texts

against the grain for his treatment of Native Americans and African Americans. As one of the most outspoken of these critics, John Rowe combines Sacvan Bercovitch's influential *The Office of The Scarlet Letter* with postcolonial studies and declares that Hawthorne practices "cultural colonialism" and his work "serves expansionist political and cultural purposes" (91).¹ Another small group of scholars such as Mara Dukats, insist that Hawthorne and some of his contemporary writers display sympathy with or admiration of those on the margin but do not ultimately push beyond a colonizer's view. The other side, exemplified by Buell, views Hawthorne and other early nineteenth-century authors as writing in a postcolonial moment. Buell "appropriate[s] Ashis Nandy's diagnosis of the intellectual climate of colonial India" as he states that the American literary traditions "cannot be understood without taking into account the degree to which those traditions arose out of 'a culture in which the ruled were constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter'" (415).² He proceeds to list characteristics of contemporary postcolonial literature that are shared with nineteenth-century American literature and that allow the "emergence of a flourishing national literature" to "be brought into focus" (411). Buell does acknowledge some of the difficulties in practicing this sort of cultural politics as he declares that "even mildly liberal academics will suspect the possible hypocrisy of an exercise in imagining America of the expansionist years as a postcolonial rather than proto-imperial power . . ." (411). He clearly explains the difficulties in writing any criticism that views Hawthorne in light of postcolonial studies. My reading relies on both Buell's assumptions and his cautions. Hawthorne can be seen as a postcolonial writer, but a reader must not neglect to search for those elements of the text that might be colonizing as well, a task that has both been

done by the several scholars mentioned and is outside the scope of this article. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne is depicting the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor. Subaltern Studies is useful here because of its emphasis on narrative authority and writing history from below and though worlds and years apart from Hawthorne, it brings into focus the motivations and types of resistance that are not plainly evident in the novel.

Subaltern studies, a branch of postcolonial studies, started with history professors whose study of the history of India left them continually frustrated in that among most of the documents collected and utilized by the academic community the voice of the native lower classes was missing. The available historical records were created by the British colonizers and the Indian Nationalists and they failed to record or acknowledge the daily lived experience of a vast majority of the population in India. They naturally failed to lend credence to supernatural causes and events that the majority believed in. They told one view of history and let that record determine material consequences. Subaltern studies scholars began to write history from below and to search for narratives that indicated conscious political resistance by the subaltern, or peasants, in India. Just as the term *subaltern* has come to mean nearly any group of people dominated in some way by another group, the search for sites of resistance in narratives has expanded to nearly every type of discourse, including literature. Building on the ideas of Derrida and Foucault, Subaltern scholars focus on discourses and narratives that determine power relations, finding dominance and resistance in areas not just political in nature. Rosalind O'Hanlon explains this when she encourages scholars to "look for resistances of a different kind: dispersed in fields we do not conventionally associate with the political" (111); ones that

“are modest in the extreme: inscribed in small everyday acts, made in fields apparently quite disconnected from the political as it is conventionally understood” (101).

Two of the texts most relevant to the themes in Hawthorne explore the non-political resistance that O’Hanlon refers to: Guha’s *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* and Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*. Ranajit Guha explains that subaltern narratives are passed along through rumor in the places most frequented by the lower classes in order to maintain subjectivity and ambiguity, in contrast to elite narratives that strive for objectivity and accuracy. Chakrabarty asks all academic scholars to consider “gods and spirits to be existentially coeval with the human, and [to] think from the assumption that the question of being human involves the question of being with gods and spirits” (16). He points out that histories involving the supernatural are treated as subaltern histories, but scholars should seek to understand and validate these narratives, not silence them. Hawthorne in *The House of the Seven Gables* similarly emphasizes the aspects of narrative difference between classes and the supernatural dimensions of experience as explained by Guha and Chakrabarty. The narrator of the novel presents the subaltern narrative as an alternate history, a history that resists through transmission methods and content the narrative of the elites in the novel. This alternate history is created and transmitted by rumor and focuses largely on the supernatural, and acts as a counter narrative to the elite Pyncheons, destabilizing their narrative authority.

Of course, no interpretation of Hawthorne’s work tells the whole story. Though this article emphasizes the aspects of class and resistance in Hawthorne, this interpretation is one of the few with such a focus. Many of the themes and passages highlighted in this article have been thoroughly discussed mostly in terms of Hawthorne’s

many literary and aesthetic purposes. But this article delves into insights gained by looking to the work of scholars who are also interested in writing a history of those on the margins, in writing a similar “history from below” as postcolonial scholars call it.

Before beginning an analysis of these narratives, the roles of the subaltern and elite within *The House of the Seven Gables* need to be defined³. Hawthorne clearly establishes the power hierarchies of elite and subaltern from the start by repeating the words *prominent* and *powerful* (7) in relation to Colonel Pyncheon and his other descendants. In other places, the narrator speaks of the Pyncheon’s “rank, wealth, and eminent character” (17). True to subaltern theory, those in power are usually those tied to systems of governance. The various powerful Pyncheons served in their several judicial positions and the Judge specifically “had engaged in politics, and served a part of two terms in Congress, besides making a considerable figure in both branches of the state legislature” (24). These positions allow them to more easily exploit those under them. In fact, the narrator describes the domineering Pyncheon presence in great detail: “There is something so massive, stable, and almost irresistibly imposing, in the exterior presentment of established rank and great possessions, that their very existence seems to give them a right to exist; at least, so excellent a counterfeit of right, that few poor and humble men have moral force enough to question it, even in their secret minds” (25).

By contrast, the narrator lists several types of people among the lower classes: plebian classes, tradesmen, laborers (12). There are a few listed in specifics as well. The street urchin by his very name qualifies as lower class and others such as Uncle Venner are described as a “humble resident” (61). Most importantly, the Maules are included in this lower class group. Matthew Maule is described as “an obscure man” (7), and he and

the generations after him are “generally poverty-stricken; always plebeian and obscure; working with unsuccessful diligence at handicrafts; laboring on the wharves, or following the sea, as sailors before the mast; living here and there about the town, in hired tenements, and coming finally to the alms house . . .” (25).

Typically, Hawthorne complicates this simple binary by placing some members of the two families in a space where they have potential to be both subaltern and elite. Hawthorne centers the novel on a few Pyncheons that could be defined as subalterns. Though they may have the elite name, they are reduced in circumstances and fall under the dominance of their Pyncheon relatives. Phoebe grew up in “poor circumstances” and has “no family and no property” (24). Clifford likewise has no money and was placed in prison through the machinations of Judge Pyncheon. Hepzibah is described as “wretchedly poor” and feels great shame over having to “be transformed into the plebeian woman” (38) by opening a cent shop to support herself and Clifford. She gives away items to her first two customers “for her old gentility was contumaciously squeamish at sight of the copper-coin” (50). Holgrave also crosses the boundary between subaltern and elite, or at least feels its pull. Though he claims that he “was not born a gentleman, neither . . . lived like one” (45), he still shares some of the rational leanings of the elite and the temptation to exercise control over others, like his predecessor Matthew Maul with Alice Pyncheon. This contrast in economic situation between the elite Pyncheons and the subaltern Maules plays out in the contest for narrative authority between the families.

Source and Transmission of Elite and Subaltern Narratives

Similar to the competing lower class narratives identified by subaltern scholars to be read alongside the elite historical record, the narrator of *The House of the Seven Gables* sets up both elite and subaltern narratives that run parallel throughout the novel. The elite narrative is gathered from the records of trusted authority. For example, the “funeral discourse” of the clergyman (121) extols the sterling reputation of Colonel Pyncheon. As testament to the current Judge Pyncheon’s upstanding character, the narrator refers to similar sources saying that no “clergyman, nor legal critic, nor inscriber of tombstones, nor historian of general or local politics” (122) could slander the Judge. He also says elsewhere that the Judge was a respectable man and that “[t]he church acknowledged it; the state acknowledged it” (228). The trusted authority figures are clergy and legal officials and they are looked to for the record. The elite narratives concerning the cause of death among the Pyncheon men is likewise given a specific, verifiable source. The cause of the first Pyncheon’s death, the Colonel, was determined by John Swinnerton “a man of eminence,” and by a “coroner’s jury” (16-17). When his descendant Judge Pyncheon dies, the narrator presents the elite account that comes from the “highest professional authority” (309). Guha’s discussion of the elite records in Indian history brings to light why the narrator is so careful to cite sources for the elite narrative: accountability and verification. He asserts that elite narratives or records have a source that is “necessarily identifiable: its message is open to verification by being retraced to the point of its origin and the bearer is considered accountable for its accuracy in most cases” (*Elementary* 259). The elites demand knowing the source, hence the narrator of the novel gives four specific titles and at least one name of the contributors to

this narrative. The record is valid for them because it comes from a “professional,” someone who has meet certain standards that the elites have required and can then be considered a professional, and the capacity for verification also lends the account authority in the elite estimation.

In contrast, the narrator indicates that the source of the subaltern narrative is originless by passive voice and the ambiguous pronoun *it*. When relating the Colonel’s tale the narrator begins, “There is a tradition—” (16). This rumor just exists; there is no source. He also says, “it was remembered” and “it was well known,” and “it was understood” (8). Events are simply known, the source is not apparent. On another occasion, he states that “there was a story, for which it is difficult to conceive any foundation” (20). Stouck and Giltrow comment on this pervasive rhetorical device in Hawthorne. They claim that the “terms of speech, cognition, and perception [which are] abundant in Hawthorne’s prose are very often agentless” (565), and this passivity creates an “indeterminacy” that accounts for Hawthorne’s appeal to critics of all ages. In light of Guha’s text, this ambiguity serves a different purpose. Guha describes the subaltern narrative of rumors as “necessarily anonymous and its origin unknown.” He explains it is important that “its message cannot be authenticated by any reference to a source nor can its purveyor be asked to guarantee its accuracy or answer for its effects in any way” (*Elementary* 259, 260). The oppressed prefer sources that cannot be narrowed down to a single, verifiable source; they prefer to pass on information gathered on the rumor chain. They resist the authority figures looked up to by the elite and create their own source of authority and knowledge for their stories.

This originless nature of the rumors passed on by the lower classes allows it the freedom to move from person to person and become multi-voiced, in opposition to the uni-vocal, deterministic elite account believed and perpetuated by the Pyncheons. In fact, the narrator serves as a gossipmonger for the reader including himself and the reader among the subaltern. He is collecting different versions of the story and repeating them; he uses *we* to tell his story, making his voice multiple. The first lines of the novel start with the plural, “Half-way down a by-street of one of *our* New England towns . . .” (5, emphasis added). This continues until the narrator actually begins the tale proper by using the word *we*: “we shall commence the real action of our tale at an epoch not very remote from the present day” (6). Though this was a typical method of addressing readers in Hawthorne’s day, here it is part of a larger narrative structure. The narrator informs his audience that he is passing on a collection of stories that are contributed to and transmitted by a multi-voiced “we.” Another multi-voiced example occurs when the urchin comes into Hepzibah’s shop and demands to know “how Old Maid Pyncheon’s brother does? Folks say he has got home!” (53). According to Guha, the collective voices’ “anonymity permits its message to be contaminated by the subjectivity of each of its speakers and modified as often as any of them would want to embellish it in the course of transmission” (*Elementary* 261). This illustrates that “the people” in general wish to pass on a different version of history than that which has been recorded. They want to pass on their own narrative, one they have contributed to. The narrator wants to pass on his version of the events. The “folks” of Salem want to know their own version of the story, so they send one of their own as a representative to find out. They sense the power inherent in narrating the history of their community.

The competing Pyncheon and Maule narratives are also passed on in different locations and methods, allowing each to flourish within a space. The elites create and transmit their records in places of official business, while the subalterns transmit theirs in more private locations. The narrator speaks of the elite record being passed on through tombstones and through “history, so far as he holds a place upon its page . . .” (122). Not only is the elite record concerned with having an actual physical representation of the words in order to pass them on to future generations but they utilize locations in which the voice of the subaltern is rarely recorded.

However, the narrator records voices of the subaltern in places more closed and less visible. He speaks of “private diurnal gossip” (122), and he emphasizes the location of this gossip is in the “private and domestic” and in the “stories, murmured” as well as “whispered” (122-23). As quoted earlier, O’Hanlon looks for the resistance to the elite “inscribed in small everyday acts, made in fields apparently quite disconnected from the political” (101). Contrary to being located on tombstones or in history, subaltern narratives are found where the subaltern daily live and work.⁴ The narrator even utilizes the word *diurnal* to make the event more “everyday” and “small,” to borrow O’Hanlon’s words. The narrator emphasizes that the location of this gossip is in the “private and domestic” and in the “stories, murmured” as well as “whispered” (122-23). These forms and locations are in direct opposition to the elites and their attempt to control or suppress other narratives. The subaltern are not concerned with having a permanent physical representation of the work, but desire a more transitory narrative or folk lore that is merely murmured or whispered allowing for their record a more fluid transmission and subjectivity.

The Maules and other lower class characters of the novel participate in resisting the sources and transmission methods of the elite narrative in order to play a more active part in meaning creation and in being able to express what goes unrecorded in the pages of history. Perhaps Hawthorne is creating a space for a history from below. Not only does this space come from different locations and travel different paths, it also contains a much different history. Perhaps the subaltern narrative resists the elite narrative most in its content.

Content of Elite and Subaltern Narratives

The Maule and Pyncheon narratives differ dramatically concerning the nature of people and their metaphysical perspectives. The elites of Salem deify the Pyncheons and other men of learning and the subaltern town people resist that account by passing on disparaging rumors concerning the Pyncheons. The subaltern also persist in granting agency and existence to supernatural curses and ghosts despite all rational, empiricist narratives the elites produce otherwise. The resistance allows them a voice and an existence that would otherwise be silenced or forgotten.

After the death of Colonel Pyncheon, the narrator compares the elite and subaltern view of the intellectual and moral similarities between Colonel Pyncheon and Judge Pyncheon. First, the narrator discusses the elite versions of history in which both characters come out sterling:

The clergyman absolutely canonized his deceased parishioner [Col. Pyncheon]. . . . On his tombstone, too, the record is highly eulogistic; nor does history, so far as he holds a place upon its page, assail the consistency and uprightness of his character. So also, as regard the Judge

Pyncheon of to-day, neither clergyman, nor legal critic, nor inscriber of tombstones, nor historian of general or local politics, would venture a word against this eminent person's sincerity as a Christian, or respectability as a man, or integrity as a judge, or courage and faithfulness as the often-tried representative of his political party. (122)

Both of them are reputed by every elite account to embody virtue. But the narrator proceeds with the subaltern account and informs the reader that "there were traditions about the ancestor, and private diurnal gossip about the Judge, remarkably accordant in their testimony" (122). He then lists things like greed, false warmth, lasciviousness, and domestic abuse as some of the traits tradition or rumor has recorded about the Colonel, but not history (122). Of the same traits the current Pyncheon, the narrator says that "we must not stain our page with any contemporary scandal, to a similar purport, that may have been whispered against the Judge" (123). The fact that murmur and whisper are used point out that these are still closeted facts that will be passed orally and not written down even still. In "Touching the Body" David Arnold, a Subaltern Studies scholar, discusses a similar trend in the rumors prevalent during a plague crisis in India. Most of the rumors circulated dealt with "the underlying character and intentions of British rule" (411), claiming "British self-interest and spite, a readiness to victimize and sacrifice Indians for the preservation of British power" (412). He reveals that the British however, accord themselves the best intentions for their actions. From this perspective it seems that, though Hawthorne does not explicitly state it, gossip serves the purpose of giving voice to the lower classes' beliefs about the intentions of the elite which the elite themselves do not recognize. This degradation of the Pyncheons in rumor resists the elite

narrative and ideologies concerning themselves. The gossip passed on by the people records a history of immoral behavior that the elites wish silenced in order to maintain power. Hawthorne is using multiple narratives to illustrate that unofficial accounts may contain powerful seeds of resistance to a dominant voice and can provide information that may be lacking in a one-sided view of history.

Not only do the accounts differ about people's reputations, the two accounts in *The House of the Seven Gables* reveal differing metaphysical perspectives: the elite Pyncheon narrative consisting of persistent rationality and materialism, while the lower class Maule narrative revolving around a belief in the supernatural. The first chapter of the book is one of the clearest and longest comparisons of the two belief systems outlined in the narratives. Colonel Pyncheon desires the land that Matthew Maule owns and under the pretence of witchcraft has Maule executed. Maule acknowledges the injustice and utters a curse upon the Pyncheons, illustrating the Maule belief in the supernatural. The narrator then describes Colonel Pyncheon as "endowed with common-sense, as massive and hard as blocks of granite, fastened together by stern rigidity of purpose, as with iron clamps" (9), which prevents him from believing anything contrary to rational thought or empirical evidence. So disregarding the curse, he builds a house on the property without fear of rumors of Maule's ghost haunting the ground. The narrator explains that "had he been told of a bad air, it might have moved him somewhat" from his purpose to build a house on the land, but an "evil spirit" would not (9). The bad air could be proved by physical evidence, but a spirit cannot.

This comparison of narratives continues through the ambiguous circumstances surrounding the death of Colonel Pyncheon. The narrator first puts forth the official

medical record of the elites: “One—John Swinnerton by name—who appears to have been a man of eminence, upheld it, if we have rightly understood his terms of art, to be a case of apoplexy” (16). The narrator goes on to relate that “[t]he coroner’s jury sat upon the corpse, and, like sensible men, returned an unassailable verdict of ‘Sudden Death!’” (17). There is not necessarily consensus among the elites as he explains some of their reactions: “His professional brethren, each for himself, adopted various hypotheses, more or less plausible, but all dressed out in a perplexing mystery of phrase, which if it do not show a bewilderment of mind in these erudite physicians, certainly causes it in the unlearned peruser of their opinions” (17). Though they may have come to different conclusions regarding the specifics, Swinnerton’s “eminence,” the “sensible” coroners, and the “professional” brethren all share a common characteristic of attributing the death to a physical cause. There is nothing supernatural in their explanations. Many hundreds of years later at Judge Pyncheon’s death, the verdict is the same. It “came to be understood, on the highest professional authority, that the event was a natural, and—except for some unimportant particulars, denoting a slight idiosyncrasy—by no means an unusual form of death” (309). In this case the elites downplay the things they cannot explain as being slight. This allows the elite to appear to acknowledge the supernatural, but then silence it by claiming those events as trifles. The narrator clearly establishes the elite history as one of rationality and materialism.

The subaltern Maules and townspeople, on the other hand, prefer to pass down a different history, one that usually involves the supernatural. Though there is one set of rumors implicating the Maules in the actual murder of the Colonel without any supernatural elements: the narrator declares, “There were many rumors, some of which

have vaguely drifted down to the present time, how that appearances indicated violence; that there were the marks of fingers on his throat, and the print of a bloody hand on the his plaited ruff . . .” (16). These were followed by rumors that “only a few minutes before the fatal occurrence, the figure of a man had been seen clambering over the garden-fence, in the rear of the house” (16). This version of the Colonel’s death would likely be equally interesting to the subaltern because it exemplifies the physical resistance of the Maules to the Pyncheons’ domination. But the narrator declares that this version should be given as little credit by the elite as the version that involves the supernatural (16). He also makes sure to include the other subaltern narratives that speak of the supernatural adding that tradition also speaks of a “fable of the skeleton hand, which the Lieutenant Governor was said to have seen at the Colonel’s throat, but which vanished away, as he advanced farther into the room” (16). The phrasing of the fable is important: the narrator does not say that the Lieutenant Governor passed on the story of seeing a skeleton hand, but the narrator uses passive voice again—“was said to have seen.” This story is also shared with another supernatural version: the death was caused by the curse. The narrator says hesitantly, “There is a tradition—only worth alluding to, as lending a tinge of superstitious awe to a scene, perhaps gloomy enough without it—that a voice spoke loudly among the guests, the tones of which were like those of old Matthew Maule, the executed wizard: —‘God hath given him blood to drink!’” (16). The death of the Colonel in either version is attributed to a supernatural source—it is either a curse calling on the power of God that comes true or a skeleton that makes an appearance to strangle him. These are the various accounts passed down through rumor, tradition, and fable by the people each adding their subjectivity and contributing to the multi-vocal nature of the

subaltern narrative. The anonymous source speaks of the supernatural. The people persist in spreading this narrative in direct contrast to the elite account. They continue to believe their version of events and not be silenced by the rationality of the elite record.

Criticism surrounding the incorporation of the supernatural into Hawthorne's works largely agrees that it is a disguise for economic motives,⁵ serves allegorical purposes either for art or storytelling,⁶ or allows him to keep a foot in both realism and romance, as Buitenhuis points out. He states the Hawthorne "provides two sets of explanations for some events, a natural and a supernatural (74), but he attributes that to allowing "Hawthorne to take advantage of both romance and realism" (79).⁷ Very few scholars go so far as to agree with Wentersdorf in taking seriously and literally the supernatural in the books (139). Even Wentersdorf in the end suggests that Hawthorne might have been using the supernatural events in his writing as a metaphor for storytelling. But by applying the theoretical foundations found in Subaltern Studies, the reader realizes that Hawthorne might be pointing out a lack of validation and acceptance for beliefs and events that a majority of people believe in. In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty describes how historians and the elite Euro-centric academic records they write, relate narratives about the past: they operate on the assumption that "gods and spirits are in the end 'social facts,' that the social somehow exists prior to them" (16). The elite relegate the concept of supernatural and gods to a creation of society, thus making any histories and narratives that include gods and spirits "subaltern pasts"⁸—oppressed, silenced and altered in the official accounts to conform to elite standards and beliefs. He states that those who record events "cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/describing an event" (105-06). The townspeople's traditions and stories about

the Pyncheon curse and the skeleton hand are relegated as a subaltern past and silenced by the elite.

Many examples of these subaltern pasts surface in the subaltern studies scholarship. Gyanendra Pandey remarks on this difference in the narratives he analyzes from Indian history. He points out that the elite narrative written by the British colonizers deals with events and actions pertaining to “law and order” (100), and that the subaltern narrative is religious in nature; it is “clearly a Muslim account” (108). He continues stating that the events which are most important in the lower class accounts involve religious symbols or the violation of religious beliefs. Arnold also discusses that when a plague struck India, the subaltern attributed it to supernatural causes.⁹ Guha discusses how the leaders of the rebellions attributed their victories to the aid of gods in their narratives, while the British cite more empirical and rational reasons such as the peasants being “innocent dupes of crafty men armed with all the tricks of a modern Indian politician” (“Prose” 81). These rationalizations parallel closely the scholarly interpretations of the supernatural in Hawthorne’s works. The lens that Subaltern Studies suggests academics look through might be the same that Hawthorne was proffering as he wrote the novel. Viewed in this light, readers of the novel are confronted with some difficult questions about their judgments and biases. Could Hawthorne really be asking readers to believe in the supernatural and to accept it as part of a legitimate approach to the world?

Implications of Multiple Narratives

Some of the answer lies in how the narrator treats the supernatural in the novel. At first it appears that he condescends in addressing the supernatural occurrences of the past.

The narrator continually emphasizes that to regard the superstitions he speaks of as true is pre-modern and unempirical. In a particular instance the narrator describes “a package of Lucifer-matches, which, *in old times*, would have been thought actually to borrow their instantaneous flame from the nether fires of Tophet” (36, emphasis added). The fact that he uses *old times* here reminds the reader that superstitions such as this belong to old times; they belong to time before this one of progress and empirical evidence with no room for a supernatural concept such as hell. The narrator again points out the superstitions when describing the portrait of the Colonel that “remained affixed to the wall” of the house. The narrator says that because the portrait cast such gloom “no good thoughts or purposes could ever spring up and blossom there.” He then goes on to qualify that, of course, “[t]o the thoughtful mind, there will be no tinge of superstition in what we figuratively express” (21) in attributing evil influence to a portrait. A thinking, rational person would only interpret the evil influence of the portrait as a metaphor or allegory—a figure of speech. This condescending view towards a belief in the supernatural was practiced by the British towards the Indians.

The British generally followed a Eurocentric Christian secularism which doubts the intellect of peasants because they believe in and guide their lives by the supernatural. Guha explains, “Since the Ideal [consciousness of the peasant] is supposed to be one hundred percent secular in character, the devotee tends to look away when confronted with the evidence of religiosity as if the latter did not exist or explain it away as a clever but well-intentioned fraud” (“Prose” 83). The elites’ Enlightenment secularism puts those who do believe in something beyond empirical evidence on the intellectual development scale below Ideal. Shahid Amin also highlights this condescending attitude when

discussing the British view of the peasant belief in Gandhi as supernatural being. He quotes British newspapers referring to the rumors of Gandhi's miracles circulating among the peasants: "All these events admit of an obvious explanation, but they are symptoms of an unhealthy nervous excitement such as often passed through the peasant classes of Europe in the Middle Ages, and to which the Indian villager is particularly prone" (292). The British were equating the belief in miracles with those beliefs of the English during the Middle Ages. They placed the Indians on a perceived intellectual development scale in a position far beneath the perceived contemporary British position on that scale, as the Pyncheons do the Maules. The narrator points out this exact belief when discussing the matches and the power of the portrait. The belief in matches from the nether fires of Tophet belongs to a time in the past and the thought of ghosts and spirits haunting a house belong to an irrational, undeveloped intellect.

Importantly however, Hawthorne's narrator is speaking tongue-in-cheek about these superstitions being a sign of an undeveloped intellect and warns of the dangers of blindly pursuing one point of view. In relating the two narratives he speaks with a distinctly ironic tone about the "highest professional authority," or of the "thoughtful mind" entertaining no suspicions. He seems to sympathize with the elite reader, but then he undercuts this attitude with his tone and by ultimately making the Pyncheons and his ilk the villains of the novel and subject to severe consequences of pursuing a haughty, exclusionist attitude of rationalism. One of the most severe consequences the Pyncheons suffer because of this attitude occurs when Matthew Maule brings Alice under his control. Matthew Maule counted on the rationality of the Pyncheons to dismiss any supernatural powers they might have, and thereby he could execute some revenge on the

family through the subtle, non-political means discussed by O'Hanlon. Holgrave begins by explaining that "Mr. [Gervayse] Pyncheon's long residence abroad, and intercourse with men of wit and fashion—courtiers, worldlings, and free thinkers—had done much towards obliterating the grim, Puritan superstitions, which no man of New England birth, at that early period, could entirely escape" (203). Supposedly the superior, enlightened education Gervayse attained abroad has advanced him beyond what he views as the backward ways and beliefs of those in America. Though this education advanced his learning and supposedly liberated him from ignorance, the story reveals that this one-sided pursuit makes him vulnerable. Gervayse Pyncheon chooses to not believe the rumors told by the people of the supernatural powers of the Maules and so he disregards the threat of Matthew Maule.

Clearly on the defensive because of his family's low status and deprivations, Matthew desires to exact revenge on the Pyncheons. Gervayse Pyncheon fuels Maule's desire by constantly reminding Matthew of his elevated station: he smiles while pointing out his Goodman status, refers to himself as a gentleman, and speaks of the "disagreeableness" of speaking with someone of Maule's "station and status" (197). Alice also takes part in this condescension and humiliation by looking askance at Matthew as he enters and the narrator explains that she is playing the harpsichord mournfully because, being "of foreign education," she "could not take kindly to the New England modes of life, in which nothing beautiful had ever been developed" (192). Hence, Alice and Gervayse are hyper-elites, condescending to the ignorance and superstition that is part of the new world. But believing, unlike his oppressor Mr. Pyncheon, that there are powers that cannot be explained by the secular rational, Maule

brings Alice Pyncheon under his spell; he uses mesmerism to subjugate Alice, temporarily crossing the subaltern boundary. Various motivations are set forth in the novel for Maule's spiritual seduction of Alice, but all of them have a basis in resistance to the domination of the Pyncheons and revenge for past oppressions enacted by that family. Because of Gervayse's faith in rational, empirical thought, he gives permission for his daughter to be used by Matthew Maule. This disregard costs him the life of his daughter.

This scene illustrates that the Pyncheons and the Maule's can both embody the "monomania," as it was called in Hawthorne's time, which continually renews the curse upon the family. The Pyncheons must give up their single-minded pursuit of rationalism, secularism and their "common-sense" application of power to escape the curse and the revenge of the Maules. Hawthorne's skepticism for those single-mindedly in pursuit of a vision has been the topic of much scholarly discussion. In one of the earliest articles, Miller discusses the "consuming passion, or monomania, in which all values are sacrificed to a single overruling purpose" and by which a character "imposes his will, without regard for the sanctity of the human heart and soul, on others, diabolically forcing them to do his bidding" (95). Seen in light of subaltern theory this monism carries additional application. In "Historiography of Colonial India," Ranajit Guha expresses the goal of the subaltern studies field to add voices to history to prevent the monomaniacal vision. He broadens the definition of history to include "an alternative discourse based on the rejection of the spurious and unhistorical monism characteristic" of the history of the elites (43). He wishes to see various points of view and voices allowed into the canon to compete with and disrupt the proclaimed universal history that really only speaks from one point of view. When the narrator reveals the decay of both

families based on this insistence for monomaniacal pursuits, Guha's words become very applicable. In fact, it is only when the characters choose to give up the single-minded pursuit of a one-sided vision and learn to accept the other family as human beings that hope for reconciliation comes.

This reconciliation comes at the turning point of the story when members of both sides of the feud are willing to listen to multiple histories. Holgrave, a Maule, and Phoebe Pyncheon as previously discussed, both cross over the boundaries of elite and subaltern. However, the most complete transformation comes when they are talking together in the garden. Phoebe, unlike Alice and Gervayse Pyncheon, listens to Holgrave, a Maule, and his ideas and opinions on the subject of the past, of ownership, of her own family even. The narrator states that in talking to her “[h]e poured himself out as to another self” (182). In fact, she is listening so intently and closely to his story that she begins to fall under his powers. When Holgrave listens to Phoebe instead of telling his own story, he sees a “remarkable drowsiness” and that she “seemed almost to regulate her breath by his” (211). With her breath as symbol for her individuality, Holgrave recognizes that he almost has a dominion over her soul and instead of taking away her dignity and individuality by overcoming her spirit, he shows “reverence for another’s personality” (212). The narrator explains the desire for Holgrave to rule over another: “To a disposition like Holgrave’s, at once speculative and active, there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit . . .” (212). He feels the attraction and pull to become an elite—to rule over someone else—but unlike the Pyncheons or his previous ancestors, “he forbade himself to twine that one link more, which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble” (212). In “Radical

Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism” Chakrabarty speaks of developing the “capacity to hear that which one does not already understand” (275). He puts forth an attempt to listen to and understand another’s beliefs, life, and dignity as the highest aim. When Holgrave allows Phoebe to retain dominion over her own spirit, he becomes in Chakrabarty’s words, “the ideal figure who survives actively, even joyously, on the assumption that the effective instruments of domination will always belong to somebody else and never aspires to them” (276). He has relinquished his opportunity for dominion through his spiritual powers, unlike his ancestors, and declares that he has never felt as much joy as he does that night (214). Though he has refrained from using his powers, it is because he no longer seeks resistance and rebellion against the Pyncheon family. He seeks to listen and respect their individual dignity. It is this that causes the new heart and spiritual rebirth in Holgrave.

By making the comparison of these two narratives the focal point of the novel, Hawthorne creates an alternate history. He pits subaltern narrative against the “official” record to reveal rumor as “a powerful vehicle of the hopes and fears, of visions of doomsdays and golden ages, of secular objectives and religious longings, all of which [make] up the stuff that fired the minds of men” (Guha, *Elementary* 256). When the motivations for the Maules and the lower classes using rumor to counter the elite method are developed, it becomes more clear that Hawthorne was doing several things: 1) creating an interest and literary effect on readers who must consider the ambiguities of alternative accounts, 2) complicating the usually one-sided accounts of official New England history and 3) giving a voice to a group who, while not officially recognized as having anything pertinent to add to history, show the possible truth underlying the rumors

and gossip that becomes a living folklore and an alternate history. Perhaps too, he also wanted the elites, the officials, and the wealthy of his day to acknowledge that spirits and gods are part of a valid narrative that reveals its own kind of truth. Most importantly, the text seems to indicate that acknowledging multiple narratives, without allowing one to dominate the other is the most ethical mode of living.

1. See Anthony, Bentley, Herzog, Luedtke, and Reynolds for further discussion of Hawthorne's treatment of people on the margins.

2. See Kemp and Mackenzie for further treatment of Hawthorne writing in a postcolonial moment.

3. See Guha's note at the end of "Historiography" for his definitions of subaltern and elite.

4. Subaltern studies usually places gossip in the realm of the public (*Elementary* 258), and Hawthorne puts it in the private, but they both consider it an everyday act occurring in places the where subaltern live and work.

5. See Kaul who suggests that Hawthorne reduces the supernatural experiences of the Puritans to a front for economic motives.

6. See Kleinman's discussion of the supernatural in Hawthorne's works being an allegory for storytelling.

7. Another version of this assertion is given by Dunne, who maintains Hawthorne offers both narratives to enable him to add gothic elements to his fiction without stretching the reader's suspension of belief too far.

8. Chakrabarty's definition of subaltern pasts is found on page 101 of *Provincializing Europe*.

9. See Arnold who states, "Opposition to Western medical intervention was strong, too, among those Indians who saw the plague as a form of divine punishment, as a visitation against which the use of Western medicine was bound to be either impious or ineffective" (339).

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