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J O H N D O L I S

## Domesticating Hawthorne: Home Is for the Birds

For Edgar A. Dryden

### (Bird) HOUSE

AT THE HEAD (“Custom-House”) of a tale (*The Scarlet Letter*), where its author (“Hawthorne”), as we discover at “The End”—in the rear, if you will—has been missing from the outset, decapitated up front, in a pre-face whose face is missing (even more so) once this headless talking body turns around, on this pretext alone, this rear-end disclosure, it should come as no surprise to learn that the House of Custom is always and everywhere a chopping block. This hors-d’oeuvre prefigures the dirty work (oeuvre) in advance, announces—in good taste, nonetheless—the body of the work to follow, whose main course would be most unsavory were it to arrive with its head still on. At the head of this scenario (*The Letter*), the head(less: body [of Hawthorne])—lacking nothing of foresight—previews a veritable panorama of butchery: “One fine morning, I ascended the flight of granite steps, with the President’s commission in my pocket, and was introduced to the corps of gentlemen who were to aid me in my weighty responsibility, as chief executive officer of the Custom-House.”<sup>1</sup> For “corps of gentlemen” we’d best be advised to read, instead, “corpses of gentlemen.” For what, after all, is this “patriarchal body of veterans” (1:12) upon which Hawthorne’s authority is brought to bear if not a brain-dead body as a (w)hole, a body whose head has never been present in the first place: “They seemed to have flung away all the golden grain of practical wisdom, which they had enjoyed so many opportunities of harvesting, and most carefully to have stored their memories with the husks. They spoke with far more interest and unction of their morning’s breakfast, or yesterday’s, today’s or tomorrow’s dinner, than of the shipwreck of forty or fifty years ago, and all the world’s wonders which they had witnessed with their youthful eyes” (1:16).

From the outset, the head of this (uncivil) “body” has lost its sense, feeds on the husk rather than the grain. Its heart (*Kern*) keeps pace with nothing, survives upon a kernel of nonsense, the idle chitchat that inhabits the heart of

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this house, the inarticulate murmur of custom. Its body hasn't a grain of sense, this body of old crows whose custom it is to align itself along a wall—like a row of birds along a fence—and chirp: “it was pleasant to hear them chatting in the back entry, a row of them all tipped against the wall, as usual” (1:15). Hawthorne will have a crow to pluck regarding this chatter: “it would have been nothing short of duty, in a politician, to bring every one of those white heads under the axe of the guillotine” (1:14). Yet Hawthorne will keep a cool head. The discourse will prevail, will talk things out. If there's an axe to grind, the pen itself will be the (s)word that lops things off, that cuts to the bone. Upon this site, these heads will talk, wag their tongues, recite the scene in which all discourse will be missing (from) itSelf.

Here talk turns the table, to table talk. Around its customary decor, within the bounds of propriety, the discourse will come to roost. Its representative, the rooster, ironically appears in the (dis)guise of a hen. “The father of the Custom-House,” its “patriarch”—“a certain permanent Inspector”—betrays a matriarchal disposition at heart: “he seemed—not young, indeed—but a kind of new contrivance of Mother Nature in the shape of a man” (1:16, 17). And like the rest of this impotent (patriarchal) body, his head is missing—his discourse nonetheless puffed up: “His voice and laugh, which perpetually reechoed through the Custom-House, had nothing of the tremulous quaver and cackle of an old man's utterance; they came strutting out of his lungs, like the crow of a cock” (1:17), a cock that crows most vocally of feathered friends. Indeed, where and whenever talk turns (around) the tables, a bird's not far away. Here, the custom of the house dictates that table talk itself (re)turns always and everywhere to dinner:

One point, in which he had vastly the advantage over his four-footed brethren, was his ability to recollect the good dinners which it had been no small portion of the happiness of his life to eat. His gourmandism was a highly agreeable trait; and to hear him talk of roast-meat was as appetizing as a pickle or an oyster. As he possessed no higher attribute, and neither sacrificed nor vitiated any spiritual endowment by devoting all his energies and ingenuities to subserve the delight and profit of his maw, it always pleased and satisfied me to hear him expatiate on fish, poultry, and butcher's meat, and the most eligible methods of preparing them for the table. His reminiscences of good cheer, however ancient the date of the actual banquet, seemed to bring the savor of pig or turkey under one's very nostrils. There were flavors on his palate, that had lingered there not less than sixty or seventy years, and were still apparently as fresh as that of the mutton-chop which he had just devoured for his breakfast. I have heard him smack his lips over dinners, every guest at which, except himself, had long been food for worms. (1:18–19)

It's not by chance the house of custom serves only what culture cooks up: that is, (good) taste itself. The re-collection of its sense re-members only the sensation. Hence, disappointment resembles an after-taste in one's mouth:

a particular chicken, or a remarkably praiseworthy turkey, which had perhaps adorned his board in the days of the elder Adams, would be remembered; while all the subsequent experience of our race, and all the events that brightened or darkened his individual career, had gone over him with as little permanent effect as the passing breeze. The chief tragic event of the old man's life, so far as I could judge, was his mishap with a certain goose, which had lived and died some twenty or forty years ago; a goose of most promising figure, but which, at table, proved so inveterately tough that the carving knife would make no impression on its carcass; and it could only be divided with an axe and handsaw. (1:19)

The axe and handsaw return again and again in this tale without a head. Those who fall under its spell, within the path of the blade, will be cut to the quick, just as those bodies at the opposite end of a bayonet "at Chippewa or Fort Erie" (1:22) succumbed to the blade of "the Collector, our gallant old General" (1:20)—indeed, "had fallen, like blades of grass at the sweep of a scythe" (1:22). Among the instruments of bureaucracy, its "inkstands, paper-folders, and mahogany rulers," the old General might seem as much out of place "as an old sword—now rusty, but which had flashed once on the battle's front, and showed still a bright gleam along its blade" (1:23). What's missing from the scene of such bureaucracy, from the site of its political domestication—its inkstands, paper-folders, and rulers—is, of course, the very instrument by means of which bureaucracy as such recites itself, carves out the space of its perpetuation. Regarding the path of the sword, its curvature, the space of its cut (*coup*), the pen takes (up) its place. Here nothing will escape the chopping block, the *niche* of a pen, its (pen)manship—"the bright gleam along its blade." Those heads it cuts become the meat of its discourse:

after living for three years within the subtle influence of an intellect like Emerson's; after those wild, free days on the Assabeth, indulging fantastic speculations beside our fire of fallen boughs, with Ellery Channing; after talking with Thoreau about pine-trees and Indian relics, in his hermitage at Walden; . . . after becoming imbued with poetic sentiment at Longfellow's hearth-stone;—it was time, at length, that I should exercise other faculties of my nature, and nourish myself with food for which I had hitherto had little appetite. Even the old Inspector was desirable, as a change of diet, to a man who had known Alcott. (1:25)

If these impotent, emasculated, castrated—that is, beheaded—birds within this hen house of custom speak only of what they eat, Hawthorne eats the very thing of which his discourse speaks (cannibalism is not far off). His pen cuts up (*coup*) these birds, dismantles the chicken coop to which they have become accustomed: the hens will be served up as tasty morsels, these headless birds his nourishment. In the meantime, talking heads will croak. In between time, Hawthorne eats their words. Between time, within the timeless (non)duration of custom, confined to the paucity of its diet—its fowl taste—Hawthorne eats crow.

Beyond the frame of this hen house, “The Custom-House,” the narrative, moreover, will not forget its talk of birds, the bird talk of its *récit*. Birds configure several scenes within *The Letter*—not to mention the central scene of Hawthorne’s letters (the primal scene [*hors*] of the oeuvre), where a bird (re)turns with a vengeance as but the supplement of talking heads (but I’m ahead of myself). At one point, separated from Hester, Pearl, perceiving “a flock of beach-birds,” gathers pebbles in the apron of her dress and, “creeping from rock to rock after these small sea-fowl, displayed remarkable dexterity in pelting them. One little gray bird, with a white breast, Pearl was almost sure, had been hit by a pebble, and fluttered away with a broken wing” (1:177–78). In (the) light of its desire, its metonymic displacement, this moment simultaneously figures Pearl’s hostility toward Hester as well as its effect upon herself, for “the elf-child sighed, and gave up her sport; because it grieved her to have done harm to a little being that was as wild as the sea-breeze, or as wild as Pearl herself” (1:178). This identification is reinforced, as James Mellard observes, when Pearl returns to her mother, “flitting along as lightly as one of the little sea-birds” (1:178)—an identification whose desire, in turn, reveals its symptom as a chain of metaphoric substitutions.<sup>2</sup> Up ahead, the forest scene of *The Letter* will further reconfigure this scenario. Here, the “great black forest” puts on “the kindest of its moods” to welcome Pearl: “It offered her the partridge-berries, the growth of the preceding autumn. . . . These Pearl gathered, and was pleased with their wild flavor. The small denizens of the wilderness hardly took pains to move out of her path. A partridge, indeed, with a brood of ten behind her, ran forward threateningly, but soon repented of her fierceness, and clucked to her young ones not to be afraid. A pigeon, alone on a low branch, allowed Pearl to come beneath, and uttered a sound as much of greeting as alarm” (1:204).

It would be hasty, however, to think such birds are yarded by the confines of *The Letter*. The gourmandizing bird talk of “The Custom-House,” for instance, parrots the insignificant chatter of another scene whose bird-brained scenario chirps endlessly of birds (and of a certain bird chirping), a scene whose figures rec(o)operate those brainless birds at the head of Hawthorne’s tale who figure the headless body of custom—a senseless corpse, a body that

doesn't figure—cannot make sense of signs. In "Circe's Palace," such chatter becomes the very stuff(ing) of myth: a tale, moreover, in which a king-transformed-to-bird peeps unheeded warnings at sailors who—rather than bite—would eat the hand that feeds them: "This troublesome and impertinent little fowl . . . would make a delicate tit-bit to begin dinner with! Just one plump morsel, melting away between the teeth" (VII:272). Here talk turns everywhere to table: Ulysses's crew of "terrible gormandizers" (VII:266) speaks only of dinner—and "any hour of the day was dinner-time with them" (VII:279). Here, too, significance is found only in the promise of food: hence, the general failure of the crew to read signs—above all, those of danger.

Ironically, the purple bird itself appears as the first sign of danger: the sailors, as usual, see only food. Ulysses, on the other hand, unable to interpret its chirping, nevertheless reads into its appearance the possibility of being other than it seems. When the gluttonous crew, perceiving only growls of the stomach, insists it search the island, despite its previous encounter with the Sirens, "those bird-like damsels" (VII:276), Ulysses gives in: mother hen must feed her brood. Little wonder that Circe so easily turns them into swine, transforms them into the very dinner they desire, despite Ulysses's caution: "if we go to yonder palace, there can be no question that we shall make our appearance at the dinner-table; but whether seated as guests, or served up as food, is a point to be seriously considered" (VII:270).

Unlike "The Custom-House," however, narration here (a)voids the (primal) scene, the site of sightlessness, the failure of insight, blindness to signs and their significance, what's missing (a/head). No heads need fall where cool heads prevail. In keeping with this logic, Circe must be defeated, as Laura Lafrado suggests, "but she need not—either in traditional myth or in Hawthorne's version of it—be decapitated."<sup>3</sup> Thus, seizing Circe by her ringlets, Ulysses "made a gesture as if he meant to strike off her head at one blow" (VII:291) unless she restore his crew to human form. Yet even the body might be a form of deception: "When men once turn to brutes, the trifle of man's wit, that remains in them, adds tenfold to their brutality" (VII:293). In the wrong place, wit breeds absolute brutality. To wit, wisdom requires the subject's displacement from the heart of nature to the nature of (its) heart, the heart of (its) reason, reason's heart—the security (that lies) ahead of its voyage: hearth and home. Missing (what's) a/head (the voyage), nature is left behind. With this reversal, hospitality (re)claims its customary ("unnatural") place within the "enchanting" confines of the house and its domestic "charms": "they all made themselves comfortable in Circe's enchanted palace, until quite rested and refreshed from the toils and hardships of their voyage" (VII:295).

Birds similarly (re)appear elsewhere and otherwise to populate Hawthorne's oeuvre, his House of Fiction. I needn't recall you to another house, beside whose seven gables, in its backyard, its rear (if you've been following

me), appears a certain “hen-coop, of very reverend antiquity” (II:88), with its inhabitants, whose descendants “had existed . . . ever since the House of the Seven Gables was founded, and were somehow mixed up with its destiny” (II:89). Mixed up with its destiny indeed: this scene—primal, if you must (a tergo, no less)—this backyard scene is but the scenic behind of the barnyard itself, the *derrière* of Hawthorne’s oeuvre, and in whose name an-Other bird takes (its) place, displaces the discourse of “Hawthorne”—in the end. But here, too, I’m ahead of things. For the moment, I recall you to the discourse at hand (what’s in the bush comes later). Regarding this “feathered society,” their “generally quiet, yet often brisk, and constantly diversified talk, one to another, or sometimes in soliloquy . . . had such a domestic tone, that it was almost a wonder why you could not establish a regular interchange of ideas about household matters, human and gallinaceous” (II:150–51). These hens are now the end of a line whose talking heads had long since fallen in order to still the likes of the mouths of those very heads talking around the table. This ironic inversion will stimulate but further talk, will itself become the topic of conversation. The body of these birds will offer yet another occasion for discourse. Dinner, here, stops short of the cannibalism taking place just beyond this barnyard scene (the backyard of the House itself), just beyond the confines of Hepzibah’s shop, where other heads have fallen for less—to wit, the gingerbread “Jim Crow,” whose fate it was to fall into the hands of little Ned Higgins: “No sooner had he reached the sidewalk (little cannibal that he was!) than Jim Crow’s head was in his mouth” (II:50). All talk stops here.

At the end of this scenario (*The House*), what once brought up the rear—the behind—of The House (the hens and their head, Chanticleer) is sent ahead of Clifford, Hepzibah, Phoebe, and Holgrave, into the future, to another house, the country-seat of the late Judge Pyncheon: “Chanticleer and his family had already been transported thither; where the two hens had forthwith begun an indefatigable process of egg-laying, with an evident design, as a matter of duty and conscience, to continue their illustrious breed under better auspices than for a century past” (II:314). Repression stages this recuperation, its own return: these previously barren hens take up the line precisely where the sterile Pyncheon women drew its end. In turn, Phoebe will follow their lead: more eggs will be hatched. Hawthorne’s Gentle Reader discovers its ecstasy, its *jouissance*, in this (Oedipal?) intersection of story line and destiny, its (own) end. Finally full, replete, stuffed, it identifies as a (w)hole with this biological arrangement, this coup/coop, the domestic scene (at the heart) of The House (*The House*): *Propter solum ovarium mulier est id quod est*: solely because of the ovary, a woman is what she is.<sup>4</sup>

This country theme anticipates an urban variation in both *Blithedale* and *The Faun*. Across from his hotel room in town, Coverdale espies, on the peak of a dormer-window, a dove: “looking very dreary and forlorn; insomuch that

I wondered why she chose to sit there, in the chilly rain, while her kindred were doubtless nestling in a warm and comfortable dove-cote. All at once, this dove spread her wings, and launching herself in the air, came flying so straight across the intervening space, that I fully expected her to alight directly on my window-sill. In the latter part of her course, however, she swerved aside, flew upward, and vanished, as did likewise the slight, fantastic pathos with which I had invested her" (III:152). Coverdale's "pathetic" investment, here, silhouettes another bird nestling in the "comfortable dove-cote" of *Blithedale*—Priscilla, whom Coverdale, we can imagine, envisions alighting at the window that opens onto his own domestic dream. This vision will likewise vanish. And if this correspondence is too easy, too facile, as Kenneth Dauber suggests, since "there is practically no dove imagery elsewhere in *Blithedale*," the dove maintains a constant vigil in Hawthorne's oeuvre, just as, after Priscilla had disappeared from the boudoir, "the dove still kept her desolate perch, on the peak of the attic-window" (III:159).<sup>5</sup> It's neither the first nor last time this love bird comes calling in the House of "Hawthorne": its coo (coup/coop) reverberates throughout the oeuvre (but I'm ahead of things once more).

*The Faun* (re)marks the scene of homecoming, the site of the dove's return, recites this bird until it knows it by heart, knows that the dove, at heart, reverberates the heart of a virgin—Hilda, "the Dove, as her well-wishers half-laughingly delighted to call her" (IV:59). Domiciled in her tower, Hilda keeps a vestal vigil—no home fire as such, no heart(h)—trimming the lamp before the Virgin's shrine, ceaselessly paying homage "to the idea of Divine Womanhood" (IV:54) while "keeping a maiden heart within her bosom" (IV:328). Here chastity transfigures the domestic scene, transforms motherhood into the "purity" of an idea(l), just as Hilda's occupation as copyist, handmaiden of "Art" (to wit: "The Handmaid of Raphael, whom she loved with a virgin's love" [IV:61]), translates art into the sterile space of imitation. Genealogy here disdains (its own) experience, owes nothing to itSelf, hands over its technique(s) of reproduction to another.

Hilda's avocation similarly reflects this test-tube technology, its occupation as proxy, standing in for another, ensuring hereditary succession, the success of a (family) "line." Here she fails to draw the line. For "handmaid" read, instead, "housemaid": connected with Hilda's tower and its lofty shrine, "a lamp has been burning before the Virgin's image, at noon, at midnight, and at all hours of the twenty-four, and must be kept burning forever, as long as the tower shall stand; or else the tower itself, the palace, and whatever estate belongs to it, shall pass from its hereditary possessor, in accordance with an ancient vow, and become the property of the Church" (IV:52). In (the) place of keeping the home-fire burning, Hilda tends (to) a lamp, the heart(h) of a bird house, the space of a dove-cote: "Here she dwelt, in her tower, possessing a friend or two in Rome, but no home-companion except the flock of doves,



whose cote was in a ruinous chamber contiguous to her own. They soon became as familiar with the fair-haired Saxon girl as if she were a born sister of their brood; and her customary white robe bore such an analogy to their snowy plumage, that the confraternity of artists called Hilda The Dove, and recognized her ærial apartment as The Dove-cote" (IV:56). Similarly, Miriam remarks of Hilda, "how like a dove she is herself, the fair, pure creature! The other doves know her for a sister, I am sure" (IV:52–53). Even her "art" betrays a bird-like quality, her copies revealing a "*flitting* fragrance, as it were, of the originals" (IV:58, italics mine).

It's not for nothing the Gentle Reader takes her to heart: she's one of them, one of the flock, part of that con-maternity of gentle readers: the readerly counterpart of Hawthorne's "scribbling women." They can produce but chicken scratch. Just so, it's best they stick to "reproduction." So too, the world is better off with Hilda's copies: "Would it have been worth Hilda's while to relinquish this office, for the sake of giving the world a picture or two which it would call original; pretty fancies of snow and moonlight; the counterpart in picture, of so many feminine achievements in literature!" (IV:61). Notice, in passing, the exclamation point: this is not a question. So much for (popular) taste: hardly a cuisine. Similarly, the anonymous portrait of Hilda reflects the vaudevillian variation of this popular "snow and moonlight" sentiment, its contamination, the defloration of this hen house, the rooster as part of the scene. Despite the disruption of this idyllic cliché, itself a cliché, the "modern artist" nevertheless "strenuously upheld the originality of his own picture, as well as the stainless purity of its subject, and chose to call it, (and was laughed at for his pains,) 'Innocence, dying of a Blood-stain' " (IV:330). We'd do well to call it, instead, "The Gentle Reader Deflowered." The rooster's been at work, has ruffled some feathers and would be finished with the cackling. Unlike the archangel Michael, whose feathers remain untouched in his fight with Lucifer (IV:184), The Gentle Reader's not a saint. Its reputation's on the chopping block.

The text inters this issue, lays the issue of getting laid (to rest): the hens croak. In its final chapter, *The Faun* recites the (primal) scene of "Art" at the site of a coincidence: the Pantheon—where Western art transfigures pagan religion, its figures domesticated now as household deities. It's not by chance the text recuperates the "Gentle Reader" in sight of this domicile—the house of (dead) Artists, the tomb of art. On first glance, this house possesses all the earmarks of home, including "a very plump and comfortable tabby-cat . . . [that] had established herself on the altar" (IV:458). Kenyon, however, recalls its unhomely (uncanny?) resemblance to other figures that populate the oeuvre, figures without heads. The Pantheon, too, is missing its head, has a hole in its roof: "I think . . . it is to the aperture in the Dome—that great Eye,

gazing heavenward—that the Pantheon owes the peculiarity of its effect. It is so heathenish, as it were;—so unlike all the snugness of our modern civilization” (IV:457). The end of *The Faun* returns the Gentle Reader to (the) dispossession (of) itSelf: no homecoming here—and this in face of nothing but talk about home: “I have neither pole-star above, nor light of cottage-windows here below, to bring me home. Were you my guide,” beseeches Kenyon, “with that white wisdom which clothes you as with a celestial garment, all would go well. Oh, Hilda, guide me home” (IV:460–61). Hilda concurs: “We are both lonely; both far from home” (IV:461). The same desire thus structures both the forward glimpse of domestic serenity and a backward glance toward the “mother” land, to recollect, to return, home—to inhabit, once again, the homeland:

So, Kenyon won the gentle Hilda’s shy affection [not to mention the Gentle Reader’s], and her consent to be his bride. Another hand must henceforth trim the lamp before the Virgin’s shrine; . . . they resolved to go back to their own land; because the years, after all, have a kind of emptiness, when we spend too many of them on a foreign shore. We defer the reality of life . . . until a future moment, when we shall again breathe our native air; but, by-and-by, there are no future moments; or, if we do return, we find that the native air has lost its invigorating quality. . . . Thus, between two countries, we have none at all. . . . It is wise, therefore, to come back betimes—or never. (IV:461)

Upon the site of the Pantheon, in this uncanny home, in sight of the gods, Hilda (ex)changes “place,” transforms from maid to deity—a household god: “for Hilda was coming down from her own tower, to be herself enshrined and worshipped as a household Saint, in the light of her husband’s fireside” (IV:461). The hen comes home to roost, becomes herSelf (the rooster of the coop). In this coup, we know who wields the blade and who wears the pants.

The Gentle Reader, likewise, wants nothing more than to be in on this game, the promise of domestic bliss—to be part of Hawthorne’s House (of Fiction), let into its most intimate space, its sacred mystery, the Author’s intention. The Author, however, refuses to parrot this (domestic) scene, to traffic in this coo(p), bearing the balm of sympathy like Hilda’s doves, “uttering soft, tender, and complaining sounds, deep in their bosoms” (IV:331). Instead, the Author claims ignorance of his (own) text: “Hawthorne” claims ignorance of itSelf. In the “Postscript,” questioning his characters “with a curiosity similar to that which he has just deprecated on the part of his readers,” Hawthorne tells us that, *once upon a time*, he took occasion “to cross-examine his friends, Hilda and the sculptor, and to pry into several dark recesses of the story” (IV:464). Inquiring of Hilda, for example, about the contents of Miriam’s mysterious package, Hawthorne remarks of her answer, “it is clear as a London

fog” (IV:465). Regarding the disappearance of Miriam and Hilda, and Kenyon’s reply (“with a glance of friendly commiseration at my obtuseness”), Hawthorne ironically concedes, “How excessively stupid in me not to have seen it sooner” (IV:465). When he asks of Hilda’s whereabouts during her disappearance, “Hilda threw her eyes on all sides, and seeing that there was not even a bird of the air to fly away with the secret,” responds so inconclusively that Hawthorne once again remarks, ironically, “The atmosphere is getting delightfully lucid” (IV:466). If ignorance, here, removes the Author from the work, it similarly removes the Gentle Reader from the oeuvre, evicts the hens from the House itSelf. Within the Post Crypt, the Author “lies”—forever interred. Intentionality is set against itSelf, beside itSelf, beyond itSelf: the Author is dead—and with him, the Gentle Reader as well. The Reader has traveled this infinite “distance,” the space of the oeuvre, only to be refused admittance. In sight of its mysteries, of sharing the Author’s insight into the text, Hawthorne’s refusal to let the Gentle Reader in on these secrets incites hysteria. Denied this entr(é)e (“if only you had told me; I too can keep a secret”), domestic civility defenestrates the scene. The hens go wild.

### (Hen) COOP

In itSelf, the Gentle Reader does nothing if not consume. Consumption fuels its own desire, becomes, indeed, the reader’s own “issue.” In taking the “Author” to heart, the Gentle Reader recuperates the heart(h) of its domestic topography: colonialization, incorporation as a whole. At home, amid the alchemy of the coop, the heart(h) of the love-nest, the “two” become “one” (Plato’s not far behind [*hen*]: Fuller’s up ahead). Domestic economy demands as much. And yet, in “Hawthorne,” domesticity intrudes upon the oeuvre, usurps its space, creates an occupied territory—at times, a battle zone. I recall you to Dorcas, in “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” whose song of “domestic love and household happiness” amid “her preparations for their evening repast” is interrupted “by the report of a gun”—her husband killing their son (X:357–58). There’s something dangerous, immanently threatening, about “home” in “Hawthorne,” something uncanny. Over and against the sentimental tranquility of nineteenth-century domestic ideology, “Hawthorne” stages a different scene, one implicated in passion, disturbed by violence. Witness, for instance, the band of dead Puritans, in “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” who “groaned horribly and gnashed their teeth,” beholding their “homes of bliss” with “glances of hatred and smiles of bitter scorn” (XI:276).

More often than not, the domestic “cannibalizes” the oeuvre, disrupts “Hawthorne” from without. Just so, the discourse of cannibalism anxiously mirrors domesticity’s desire to feed on itself, its will to self-sufficiency, to secure a space of its “own,” its “proper” space, entirely within, secured, its property cut off from outside, from without, from what is other than its own.

Distancing itself from the “other” (the foreign, the exotic, the alien, the uncivilized, the unfamiliar), domestic economy repeats the very thing it would exclude, the duplicity of its incestuous desire—reflects it in the discourse of an “other” taboo. Cannibalism lies outside the domestic scene, and yet inhabits its discourse from the inside out as well, the heart(h) of its desire—that is, the desire to have no outside. (Is “Melville” behind [the staging of] this scene?) Domestic economy capitalizes on itself.

### (Bird) HOUSE (cont.)

So too, the Gentle Reader seeks intercourse with the “Author,” wants to be invited in, wishes for “familiar terms,” desires to know the narrative itSelf, the narrative’s desire, the “inside” story, the story from within, its (hidden) meaning, its secret. These house-bound hens would gobble up “their” Author, devour him (something he disagreed with ate him). Incorporation hence characterizes the Gentle Reader’s delusion, the delusion of the Gentle Reader it-Self—being ONE with the Author as a whole. Nothing foreign must remain, nothing outside—nothing “other” whatsoever. The scope of such desire does not exclude its own ironic inversion: “Now, there aren’t any more cannibals in our region. Yesterday we ate the last one.”<sup>6</sup> “Hawthorne” will have nothing to do with this yoke (zeugma). *The Faun* thus turns the tables on this crack-brained idea(l), serves up the Gentle Reader as entrée—its (point of) departure the main course. I’ve done this elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> By placing the Author in the post-script of his text, “Hawthorne” returns as but the ghost of himself: entombed in its Post Crypt, the Author is always already dead. Outside the script, beyond the text, “Hawthorne” knows nothing of its secret(s). Narration falls apart, loses its thread—its ideal commun(ica)tion scrambled. The post does not arrive, has gone astray. Romance re(as)sembles nothing (if not a dead letter office), entombs the oeuvre itself. Meaning lies buried in the post. Indeed, the office of *The Letter* has always already positioned it thus: delayed, belated, postponed. *The Faun* buries the plot, denies narration its end, recites its very time (*récit*) as yet an “other” plot, an empty plot, a vacant space, the grave. The story knows nothing, not even itSelf; the author knows nothing, not even his story. The tale (“The End”) now leaves the Gentle Reader hanging by its tail, likewise bereft of its head, squawking, beside itself, dispatched. His readership disowned, the “Author” finds *jouissance* in impropriety. Precisely here, where nothing is proper, the Gentle Reader gets it (in the end), becomes itself antique, remaindered, the “antique fashion of Prefaces” that “Hawthorne” has always already fashioned as out-of-fashion from the outset, old-fashioned from the start: “If I find him [the Gentle Reader] at all, it will probably be under some mossy grave-stone” (IV:1–2).

Hospitality aside, the “Author” no longer indulges the (over) “Indulgent

Reader,” no longer dispenses free meals. Like Hilda’s “eleemosynary doves” (IV:52), these birds depend upon the Author’s charity, require mothering, just as Hilda finds solace in the Virgin—“a child, lifting its tear-stained face to seek comfort from a Mother” (IV:332). Such gratuity emasculates the Author, transforms paternity to baby-sitting the text. Notice, furthermore, the “capital” (Mother) in the above quote on which depends this vertical configuration (the child left hanging) and that, ironically, sustains this “column” from above (its head, if you will). A similar structure mirrors the “columns” supporting the Custom House, those mother hens nurturing (the) custom, inhabiting “The Custom-House.” The House of Custom replicates the custom of “the house,” the cult of domesticity, the cult(ure) of (Mother) hens and Gentle Readers, the cult of The Virgin, the sterile culture of the Motherland. The rooster’s flown the coop: those foolish enough to stick around must lose their heads. Such is the defining gesture of (a) culture transported to the kitchen, transfigured as cuisine, transformed by *popular* “taste”: the dominion of women, as Catherine Beecher would have it, whose influence “the heart is proud to acknowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

Lest we linger in the rear, I return you to the head of “The Custom-House” (now dispossessed) and to the Head of the house (whose head is missing). Here custom itself is for the birds. It’s not for nothing that Hawthorne recalls this birdhouse (and the “point” of its pillars) at its peak: mother hen transformed to eagle, transfigured as symbol of the nation. This icon guards the entrance to both House and text. I give you the quote whole. Chew it slowly.

Its front is ornamented with a portico of half a dozen wooden pillars, supporting a balcony, beneath which a flight of wide granite steps descends towards the street. Over the entrance hovers an enormous specimen of the American eagle, with outspread wings, a shield before her breast, and, if I recollect aright, a bunch of intermingled thunderbolts and barbed arrows in each claw. With the customary infirmity of temper that characterizes this unhappy fowl, she appears, by the fierceness of her beak and eye and the general truculency of her attitude, to threaten mischief to the inoffensive community; and especially to warn all citizens, careful of their safety, against intruding on the premises which she overshadows with her wings. Nevertheless, vixenly as she looks, many people are seeking, at this very moment, to shelter themselves under the wing of the federal eagle; imagining, I presume, that her bosom has all the softness and snugness of an eider-down pillow. But she has no great tenderness, even in her best of moods, and, sooner or later,—oftener soon than late,—is apt to fling off her nestlings with a scratch of her claw, a dab of her beak, or a rankling wound from her barbed arrows. (I:5).

“If I recollect aright”: he doesn’t: on purpose. This feigned amnesia performs the work of condensation and displacement. In (the) place of an olive branch,

thunderbolts echo the malignity of “Mother,” her incipient violence—treacherous, traitorous, ready at the moment to “fling off her nestlings.”<sup>9</sup> Dispossessed, evicted, the citizen is *de trop*, the *homeland* defunct. Such is the House of State, the state of the nation, divided against itself: (the temple of) Olympian Zeus reduced to national bird. This overgrown hen portrays the nation as a (w)hole: emasculated, lifeless, without direction or purpose: the nation runs in circles—a rooster with its head cut off, Uncle Sam in drag. To vary the theme, Uncle Sam and National Bird play house: Mother’s at home; so is Uncle. Their very treachery points to what has always already been missing: where’s the father? The “where” of this Hamletesque scenario, however, resembles child’s play in light of a more serious question that raises the “issue” of National Identity: *who* is the Father? There’s only the Uncle (Sam). To further mix the metaphors (symptoms), this “play house” parrots a burlesque variation of “Leda,” gender reversal and all. Here Uncle Sam beds down with Mother. Make no mistake: the country’s going to the birds. No wonder the Citizen feels betrayed, a cuckold in his own house—a house, moreover, wherein presides the icon of (the power of) Rome (Romance), and in whose maternal bosom reside its patriarchal castrati, mere ghosts of men transformed to (Mother) hens. The chicken coop is dark; the lights are out. How ironically Melville positions that dimension of blackness he attributes to Hawthorne’s oeuvre which, as he remarked in his review of *Mosses*, the “eagle-eyed reader” perceives.<sup>10</sup>

Ahead of this tale, in a preface ahead of another tail (the tales [*Mosses*] that follow), Hawthorne already faces the double-edged *coup* of this bind, the cut that goes both ways. Already he holds “The End” in sight. The menacing presence of the chopping block steals the scene (of writing) from the outset. Nonetheless, despite (in spite of) the Gentle Reader’s demand, here Hawthorne refuses to lose his head. He’ll not go off half-cocked. In “The Old Manse,” he cautions the reader: “So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face; nor am I, nor have ever been, one of those supremely hospitable people, who serve up their own hearts delicately fried, with brain-sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public” (X:33).

We’ve fallen behind again. I’d best make headway the reality, returning to the head of this scenario, the (headless) figure (no longer head of house) at the head of the Custom-House. Once in the house of custom, on the hither side of the cutting edge, as it were, the scene appears upside down, turned on its head (or so it seems). Here Hawthorne forewarns his Gentle Reader in advance: “Some authors . . . indulge themselves in such confidential depths of revelation as could fittingly be addressed, only and exclusively, to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy; as if the printed book, thrown at large on the wide 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. It is scarcely decorous, however, to speak all, even when we speak impersonally" (I:3–4). That is to say: even when we speak without a head. At any rate, the unity of this ideal communion between "Author" and "Gentle Reader" betrays the shape of its delusion, its desire to be an undivided whole, to be One with itSelf: to be no one in particular. Short of this, the Gentle Reader must settle for talking meat, must take its cannibalism to heart, the desire to incorporate the Author's body—the body of the Author's text—as its own: it's good to eat meat that talked with us.

"The Custom-House" regurgitates this scene: "It is a little remarkable, that . . . an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me, in addressing the public. The first time was three or four years since, when I favored the reader . . . with a description of my way of life in the deep quietude of an Old Manse. And now . . . I again seize the public by the button" (I:3). For "button," read, instead, an object close to the "heart" of the Gentle Reader's "lips" by means of which (manipulation) the Gentle Reader, now given (over) to ecstasy, is nothing but a whore. Upon this site, Hawthorne recites the scene of the whole within the space of a hole—that very place in which the head is missing. Once caught in this bind (the Gentle Reader's "lips"), the logic of the double-edge, the cut that goes both ways, Hawthorne would appear to be its victim. The missing head's his own—or so it seems. In its ironic inversion, however, the cut will go both ways. Hawthorne loses interest, the penalty for early withdrawal. Without a head, the Gentle Reader, left to its own devices, spread-eagled and panting, now occupies the site of a gaping hole.

Despite its desire to be one, to be whole, to be stuffed, the Gentle Reader will never be full. Full-figured? Verily! To be correct, this gentle one's a being of size, indeed—its stomach bigger than its eyes. Its appetite exceeds all bounds, knows nothing of desire itself. The Gentle Reader occupies, in fact, the place we would expect to see appear this matriarchal body of patriarchs who have come to inhabit the hen house of custom. Upon this site, the sight of its domicile, these birds will nest; in sight of the erotic, these birds recite the scene of taste. Yet in the nest of custom, bliss—if such there can be—is not paroxysmic. Here everything vegetates. Desire itself is absent from the head of this lethargic scenario. Hawthorne observes as much: "Literature, its exertions and objects, were now of little moment in my regard. . . . A gift, a faculty, if it had not departed, was suspended and inanimate within me. . . . [T]his was a life which could not, with impunity, be lived too long; else, it might make me permanently other than I had been, without transforming me into any shape which it would be worth my while to take" (I:25–26). At present, the course of Hawthorne's shape will run to fat, obesity. At every turn, the table's but an elbow away, its talk within earshot. In custom's house, digestion

is (mis)taken, misconstrued, for life itself. Yet, lust and gastronomy (Brillat-Savarin, where are you?) know nothing of each other, as Roland Barthes suggests: “between the two pleasures, a crucial difference: orgasm, i.e., the very rhythm of excitation and its release. Pleasures of the table include neither ravishments nor transports nor ecstasies—nor aggressions; . . . no mounting of pleasure, no culmination, no crisis; nothing but a duration; as if the only critical element of gastronomic joy were its expectation; once satisfaction begins, the body enters into the insignificance of repletion (even if this assumes the demeanor of gluttonous compunction).”<sup>11</sup> The headless environment of the custom house leaves room for only the stomach, knows only repletion, the fullness beyond desire: these birds sense nothing but torpor, timelessness, constipation. No wonder the Letter turns up as simply one of the innumerable pieces of *dead weight* which clutter the House itself: mere ghosts of men who through the repetition and redundancy of bureaucratic scribbling have come to occupy this *dead letter office*. It is, indeed, their office to repress—by means of idle chitchat and procrastination—the very thing bureaucracy perpetually defers: the *dead line*. Here it is (mis)construed, of course, that life goes on forever. How else are we to understand the overpowering lethargy that befalls Hawthorne in “the” place of dead being (*l'être mort / lettre morte*), these dead letters (being[s]-of-no-consequence) who because they always talk can therefore never write (a thing): a veritable *dead end* which by its impotence leaves everything unfinished?<sup>12</sup> Thus, time stops cold. Regarding the fullness, the oneness, the uniformity, of this body of custom, moreover, Hawthorne is but a remainder, a supplement, a leftover. His goose is cooked.

### (Love) NEST

The step (“trans-”) is short from (custom) house to home. The space is one and the same: from kitchen to hearth: the space of the Freudian *fort-da* (0,1). In “Hawthorne,” the step (*pas*) beyond (*au-delà*) stumbles, is “other”-wise, mistaken, a mistep; it returns, always and everywhere, home. Movement, here, repeats the progress of the “proper,” the properly familial, the homely (*Heimlichkeit*), trans-forms eventuality to advent of one’s “own,” issues of propriety.<sup>13</sup> Home knows simply the (shortest way to a man’s) heart(h). Forget the head. The Custom House both stages and (re)enacts this scene: domestication in “Hawthorne,” the oeuvre as a (w)hole, a headless corpse. Its domesticated fowl know nothing of the wild, care only for security, the lethargy of the nest, the indolence of incubation, and return us to that Other bird I mentioned in back of this scene, behind the scenic backyard of the barnyard, the homely bird of Hawthorne’s letters that hovers over *The Letter*, that hovers over the scene of domesticity itself—yet hovers behind it as well, that constitutes its very end, the *derrière* of Hawthorne’s house of fiction, regarding whose “feathered society,” like the Pyncheon fowl, has always already been given to



coo(p)s, to chatter, to bird talk: whose “generally quiet, yet often brisk, and constantly diversified talk . . . had such a domestic tone” (II:151–52).

What does “The Custom-House” conceal, behind the space of a bird house, if not the (primal) scene of domesticity as such? Is not the bird house, in effect, a love nest? Is not the bird in the bush the very one that sends two love birds on their way—the *chick* behind *Geschick*? Here discourse is always already reduced to silence, the dumbness of a chirp, the murmur of a coo. Let’s nestle into a familiar instance: “Boston, October 23d. 1839—1/2 past 7.—P.M. Dear little Dove, Here sits your husband, comfortably established for the evening in his own domicile, with a cheerful coal-fire making the room a little too warm. I think I like to be a very little too warm. And now if my Dove were here, she and that naughty Sophie Hawthorne, how happy we all three—two—one—(how many are there of us?)—how happy we might be!” (XV:357).

To wit: to woo: those familiar with Hawthorne’s letters know all too well the frequency with which this appellation appears. “Dove” stages the scene of culture, custom, propriety: Sophia as health provider, hospital room; the oeuvre as patient—anaesthetized, sanitized. “Dove” stages the scene of domesticity: Sophia as hen, housekeeper, homemaker; the oeuvre as hen-house. I recall you to Sophia’s editorial broomplay.

### (Nest) EGG

Lest feathers get ruffled, I caution you in advance: when the table is turned, the genders reversed, those readers with axes to grind will snatch their *jouissance* from pleasures that exceed the table’s borders, that border on excess, pleasures that border the border, rites of passage. The border patrol secures its own, its own propriety, its precinct: the liminal, the sanctity of the hymen. Disowning ownership, gender nonetheless still claims propriety. Fuller harps on this. Reworking Plato, working him over, Fuller will sanitize his thought, transport the sage to Sparta—whose women “were as much Spartans as the men.” In that community, he’d not have thought the souls of “vain and foppish men will be degraded after death, to the forms of women, and if they do not there make great efforts to retrieve themselves, will become birds.” Transmigration disfigures itself: “By the way it is very expressive of the hard intellectuality of the merely *mannish* mind, to speak thus of birds, chosen always by the *feminine* poet as the symbols of his fairest thoughts.”<sup>14</sup> (By the way) sex is power—always and everywhere.

### (Broom) CLOSET

The oeuvre’s overworked, worked over by domestic manipulation both within and without. In sight of this handiwork, a privileged bird abridges

"Hawthorne" from oeuvre to homework, reduces writing to housework, reworks the house of fiction as a (w)hole, transposes public to private, masculine to feminine, head to heart. "Hawthorne," here, is but another name for dirty-work, the oeuvre (re)moved indoors, tamed, cleaned up: Hawthorne deferred to woman's work, referred to feminine domains, domiciled, grounded: "Hawthorne" in transit, prior to public scrutiny, itself a rite of passage, translated at the threshold, (re)produced, a captive of the hymen. This spectre (re)claims the oeuvre from the inside out: a Dove transfigures technique, eliminates the "dirt," disinfects (the) language, transforms a "public" transaction to matters of propriety, reduces the oeuvre from marketplace to housebound work. Restoring "Hawthorne" to the proper, love cleans house, returns the "Author" to its proper self, redeems the "Author" from the wild: domestic ideology now hands the "Author" over to the nest, settles "Hawthorne" down, discards the inappropriate, secures the oeuvre from within—against the threat of all contamination without, what doesn't belong. The Author's under house arrest.

### (Bird) CAGE

Custom, likewise, knows its own domestic technique: subscribes to those advantages ascribed to good housekeeping. After all, what generates the Custom House if not the politics of cleaning? This gesture, ironically, now opens up desire, frees Hawthorne for *jouissance*, frees "Hawthorne" for its self (Hawthorne), enables "Hawthorne" to reflect (about) itSelf, the generation of *The Scarlet Letter*, its gestation, incubation: how the plot is hatched. The "Author" inscribes itSelf, makes its self at home in the work. With *publication*, moreover, the "Author" exposes itSelf, emerges to the public, to popularity: "Hawthorne" becomes a household word. Prescribing a domestic ideology, the need to clean (Uncle Sam's) house, he is accused of impropriety. "The Custom-House" breaches decorum. How could it not? Like the custom house itself, publication is, by definition, open to the public—the oeuvre an open house. Housework thus reworks these scenes from top to bottom, a politics of the person(al)—and of empowerment—"at home." Once set in place, domestic ideology—"an ideology of love proffered throughout the 1850s as a solution to inequalities of power"—controls the oeuvre in its entirety.<sup>15</sup> The "house" holds sway (*oikonomia*: at once both "home" and "cage" [especially for domestic birds]). This house-hold captures "Hawthorne" entirely. Indeed, it governs the site on which arises the institution of the (Gentle) "Reader."

If "Hawthorne" (con)figures the "Author" within the confines of the "Reader," that Reader is yarded as well, produced by reading's own techniques, techniques whose very lessons engender the installation of an ideological apparatus: domestic ideals: the home(stead), love's domicile. Staging this scene involves duplicitous scenarios. It's custom's way to capture the subject thus.

SCENE 1 (child's play): let's set the stage. *McGuffey's Reader*, Lesson #23 (woodcut): in the foreground, a young boy kneels next to an open bird cage, hands open, arms outstretched, gazing toward the middle ground; in the middle ground, above and beyond the boy, a bird in flight approaches the left-hand border of the frame; in the background, a house recedes toward the horizon, diminished in size by the distance that places it in opposition to the open, unoccupied bird cage of the foreground.

SCENARIO: "it would be cruel to keep the bird."<sup>16</sup>

SCENE 2 (adult's only): let's set the stage. *Graham's Magazine*, "The Willing Captive" (engraving): in the foreground, lower right, an open bird cage sits, unoccupied; in the middle ground, a young boy, seated, gazes at a bird perched on his hand, eye-level: the bird returns the gaze, wings poised for flight; in the background, there is nothing—no horizon, no "distance" beyond the central scene which monopolizes the space of the image, captures it.

SCENARIO: (there's only the caption) "The Willing Captive."<sup>17</sup>

### (School) HOUSE

Lesson #23: "I hope that no boy who reads this book, will ever rob a bird's nest. It is very cruel and wicked and none but naughty boys will do so."<sup>18</sup>

### (Play) HOUSE

Return of the Repressed: The Old Manse: 10 October 1842, three months after Hawthorne's marriage: "Just now, I heard a sharp tapping at the window of my study; and looking up from my book (a volume of Rabelais) behold the head of a little bird, who seemed to demand admittance! . . . This incident had a curious effect on me; it impressed me as if the bird had been a spiritual visitant—so strange was it that this little wild thing should seem to ask our hospitality" (VIII:363). Rabelais indeed!

### (Post) CRYPT

Forget the New Historicist ca(w)-ca(w). Desire is on the outside looking in (the Wolf Man's here). It looks toward hearth and home, the (primal) scene where nothing takes place, takes up its place, and does so from the outset, the scene that engenders a scenario. Domesticity and emptiness are not "extremes," as Douglas Anderson suggests, "between which human existence is poised."<sup>19</sup> Rather, they configure the same event. Nothing (always already) happens at home. It happens by surprise (*die Unheimlichkeit*): nothing happens by surprise. In "Hawthorne," home configures the space that anxiously awaits

some “thing” (*res*), something that “matters,” that waits for something to take place, to begin, the space that knows not (what it awaits), the space that waits for discourse, the space that engenders narration itSelf: the site of lethargy, ennui, incubation. Home itself is nothing, nothing in itself. It simply waits (for something): it waits (for life to begin): the nothing that waits for something. In this, it waits for nothing. Let’s hurry to catch up.

In “Hawthorne,” nothing happens at home. It happens by surprise. In the meantime (for all time), everyone walks on eggs. Sublime, inhuman, monstrous, original, unspeakable, literal: at heart, the home—its heart(h), the heart of domesticity—embraces (nothing [but ghosts, skeletons]) death. Literally, nothing (*fort*) is there (*da*). Death occupies home, preoccupies the oeuvre, inhabits (the heart of) Hawthorne’s house (“Hawthorne”), just as the figure (the dead [Judge]) of nothing occupies the heart of the House, its last judgment.<sup>20</sup> Doubly so for *The Faun*: death inhabits the very heart of the “Eternal City.” Its ruins contain, within themselves, the ruins of (human) ruins (skeletons): death itself is haunted, the specter beside itself, ghost of a ghost.<sup>21</sup>

It’s (not) for nothing that the Custom-House is haunted by ghosts—and by the specter of the “Author,” the shadow of Hawthorne, whose very presence is (itself) uncanny, absent, always already dead, beheaded, missing (from) itSelf. Thus, in *The Faun*, the “Author” returns (to itSelf) too late, belated, missing (from) the story, missing (its own) meaning, missing (out on) itSelf from the outset. Here nothing belongs to the Author—not (the fiction of) itSelf, not even the fiction (itself): nothing is rendered to Hawthorne. The “Author” surrenders itSelf. Author-ity pays with its head. “Hawthorne” knows only this: the “Author” knows nothing.

Dying to know, however, the Gentle Reader demands “further elucidations respecting the mysteries of the story,” regarding which the “Author,” likewise “troubled with a curiosity similar to that which he has just deprecated on the part of his readers,” now looks to the imaginary (characters) for answers; he cross-examines Hilda (who circumspectfully consents, “seeing that there was not even a bird of the air to fly away with the secret”) and Kenyon “to pry into several dark recesses of the story,” promising his characters “it shall be kept a profound secret” while instantaneously entrusting their revelations to writing, the public, the “Reader” (IV:463, 464, 466, 464, 466). If the “Author” cannot keep a secret, perhaps there’s nothing to keep. Nothing is hidden. To this effect, Hawthorne defenestrates the frame of the *récit*, abandons the body of this tale, hangs itSelf at “the end,” outside—a ghost—as an appendage, its tail, its “postscript”: a crypt to which the “Author” now re-signs itSelf (a dead letter, a block-head, a dummy). Secrecy but marks the place of containment to which the Gentle Reader is dispatched. *The Faun* entrusts this secret to its (post) crypt, and hence enshrines (inters) itself in the Pantheon at its end (in The End): the temple of “Artists,” tomb of “Authors.” Such is the scenario to

which (the identity of) the Gentle Reader has been appended from the head of this tale. Such is its destiny, its fate, its end. For with the disappearance (death) of the Author, the (Gentle) Reader now loses its head.

Out of its mind from the beginning, the disembodied head of this tale (Hawthorne's preface) consigns the Gentle Reader, this Ideal "other" ("this Representative Essence of all delightful and desirable qualities which a reader can possess" [IV:1]), to the grave, its proper home, "to the Paradise of Gentle Readers" (IV:2). In returning, it does so as a ghost ("under some mossy gravestone"), a dead letter ("inscribed with a half-obliterated name"), and from some point in time so prior that the author, the name "Hawthorne," can be only the belated image of itSelf—"I cannot precisely remember the epoch" (IV:2, 1). The epoch is, of course, the very scene of its own decapitation: The (Custom) House of *The Letter*. Rehearsing those halcyon days, *The Faun* now lays (to rest) the Gentle Reader. Amnesia this is not. Hawthorne will not remember the "Hen" (Plato's "One"). The honeymoon is over. Thus with authority, the "Author" (un)dresses these chickens with a *coup (de grâce)* regarding which the flirtation, the courtship, the seduction is cut off—regarding which the Gentle Reader itSelf is disregarded, taken from behind, upended, stuffed from the rear. Hawthorne inters, forthwith, all presumptuous familiarity, dispatches this "familiar," disposes of this ghostly double once and for all with but a single gesture of formality. Here, night falls like a curtain: "I stand upon ceremony, now, and, after stating a few particulars about the work which is here offered to the Public, must make my most reverential bow, and retire behind the curtain" (IV:2). Amid their cackling, the hens will never hear this swan song.<sup>22</sup>

The oeuvre represents the act of representation (narration) in its abysmal de-sign: to (k)not the tail of its tale, the head must have been missing, severed, from the beginning—rendering up its secret of the executioner's block, a crypted remainder.<sup>23</sup> "Hawthorne" (re)iterates that tale to which is appended the remnant of itSelf: the "Author" is (nothing but this) tail. Hawthorne is, at best, to call upon Lacan, an *hommelette*—at worst, a limp soufflé(e).<sup>24</sup> Beneath its plot, Romance conceals a "dead" line ("Ha[w]thorne"): the "Family Romance," The Fall of the House of "Hawthorne"—a haunted house. Romance is ruined; it lies (in ruins)—"The End" its ruination. There's nothing (more) to know. Commemorating the (Gentle) Reader's demand to know (the truth), (the truth of) Romance gives (up) itSelf; it gives to be rendered.<sup>25</sup> The "Author" endures this separation—surrenders to nothing.

P.S(sssssssst).

Salem, 20 January 1850: "My dear Fields, I am truly glad that you like the introduction. . . . If 'The Scarlet Letter' is to be the title, would it not be well

to print it on the title-page in red ink? I am not quite sure about the good taste of so doing; but it would certainly be piquant and appropriate—and, I think, attractive to the great gull whom we are endeavoring to circumvent” (XVI:308).

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### Notes

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1. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. William Charvat, et. al, 23 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962–1997), 1:12. Subsequent references to Hawthorne are hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number.
2. James M. Mellard, *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 75.
3. Laura Laffrado, *Hawthorne's Literature for Children* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 120.
4. See Thomas Laqueur, “Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology,” *Representations* 14 (1980): 27, and Cathy N. Davidson, “Photographs of the Dead: Sherman, Daguerre, Hawthorne,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89 (1990): 696.
5. Kenneth Dauber, *Rediscovering Hawthorne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 183.
6. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 233.
7. John Dolis, *The Style of Hawthorne's Gaze: Regarding Subjectivity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 196–211.
8. Catherine E. Beecher, *Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education* (Hartford, 1829), 53.
9. Cf. Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 169–70.
10. Herman Melville, *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839–1860* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 250.
11. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 267.
12. Dolis, *The Style of Hawthorne's Gaze*, 194.
13. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 397.
14. Margaret Fuller, “*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*” and *Other Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 32.
15. Lesley Ginsberg, “‘The Willing Captive’: Narrative Seduction and the Ideology of Love in Hawthorne’s *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*,” *American Literature* 65 (June 1993): 271.
16. William H. McGuffey, *McGuffey's Newly Revised First Eclectic Reader* (Cincinnati: Winthrop B. Smith, 1848), 42–43.
17. “The Willing Captive” (engraving), “by Deshay’s, W. E. Tucker, S.C.,” *Graham's Magazine* 41 (July 1852): 41.
18. McGuffey, *McGuffey's Reader*, 42–43.

19. Douglas Anderson, *A House Undivided: Domesticity and Community in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 200.
20. John Dolis, "Hawthorne's Circe: Turning Water to (S)wine," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 24.1 (1998): 42–44.
21. See Edgar A. Dryden, *The Form of American Romance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 41.
22. Dolis, *The Style of Hawthorne's Gaze*, 205–11.
23. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 381–82.
24. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 197.
25. Cf. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 382.