<u>Abstract</u>

This thesis will examine images and ideas of decay and ruin in the writing of Nathaniel
Hawthorne within a transatlantic context. In doing so, it will address the ways in which the
time Hawthorne spent in Europe in the 1850s altered how decay and ruin figure within his
writing. In nineteenth century American culture and politics, the idea of ruin is significant for
the way in which it relates to particular myths of American nationhood. In my first three
chapters, looking at "The Custom-House," <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> (1850) and <u>The House of the
Seven Gables</u> (1851), I will demonstrate how Hawthorne's American romances challenge
myths of American exceptionalism in which a decaying Old World stands in contrast to an
innocent and ruin-free New World. I will argue that ruin is an essential quality of
Hawthorne's specific brand of romance and that decay and ruin within these texts, far from
situating America in opposition to Europe, in fact suggests a complex system of transatlantic
influence and awareness. The fourth and fifth chapter of this thesis will examine Hawthorne's
European writing – first <u>The English Notebooks</u> (1870), followed by a final chapter on both
<u>The French and Italian Notebooks</u> (1883) and <u>The Marble Faun</u> (1860). I will argue that
Hawthorne's personal encounters with and responses to the ancient material decay of Europe
altered the way in which he viewed and wrote about ruin. I will then build upon my analysis
of his responses to European ruins described in his notebooks as I examine his final romance
<u>The Marble Faun</u>. I will argue in this chapter that while the relationship between ruin and
romance remains fundamental to <u>The Marble Faun</u>, Hawthorne's encounters with European
decay, along with the impending American Civil War, profoundly altered his attitude towards
American ruin.

Transatlantic Ruin in the Writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne

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PhD Thesis

University of Strathclyde
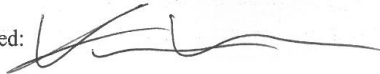
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I would also like to acknowledge my father Alan Wilson who has supported me emotionally and financially over many years. My dad worked hard all of his life and I strive to match the dedication which he showed to his occupation during his working years. Although I know he was probably tempted to at times, he never got on at me about finishing and he was always there to help me when I was really in need of support.

In terms of professional academic support, my PhD supervisor Dr Tom Furniss has been the most unbelievable source of encouragement and inspiration to me over the years. I would always leave our supervision meetings feeling reenergised and with my drive and confidence in the project reaffirmed. Tom's thoroughness, although it could leave a document covered in corrections and suggested changes, was ultimately a source of reassurance to me since I knew that if my work could stand up to Tom's scrutiny then it would likely stand up to the critical glare of even the harshest examiner. Time and time again Tom went above and beyond the requirements of his role as supervisor in order to ensure I submitted my PhD. I will never forget the assistance I received from Tom. He is a credit to the university and to his profession as a whole. If I am to work in the field of academia, I will strive to uphold the standards which Tom has shown me during our time together.

I must also thank Jenifer Ross, who during the final months of my PhD, worked tirelessly with me to set targets and goals in terms of writing and editing. She even read all of Hawthorne's work in order to get a better sense of what I was doing. Her help in these final few months and her encouragement in the years before were essential to me completing my PhD and I will always be grateful to her for this. Her friend, and mine, Dorte Pape, was

<u>Referencing</u>

This thesis will adhere to the conventions of the Chicago footnote referencing style in the main. However, any reference to Hawthorne's writing will, after an initial footnote reference, cite the Roman numeral and page number of the corresponding volume of <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne</u> published by Ohio State University Press. For example (I:54) for page 54 of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>; (II:178) for page 178 of <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, and so on.

Contents

Introduction

<u>Introduction</u>

In the preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u> (1860), his last completed romance, Nathaniel Hawthorne, referring to himself in the third person, discusses the apparent merits of writing a romance about Italy rather than America:

> Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear and native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow.[1]

The reference here to writing a 'Romance' rather than a novel is founded upon the well-established, and at times problematic, distinction between the two genres which, as I will outline later in this introduction, would become one of the cornerstones of American literary national identity. Hawthorne refers to all of his long fictions as romances, which, in his formulation, differ from novels in the sense that while the latter are a purely realist mode of fiction, the former allows scope for deviation from the 'actualities' of everyday life. It is the occasionally fantastical or possibly supernatural events, occurrences which are at odds with a realist depiction of the world such as the unsettling painting of Colonel Pynchon in <u>The</u>

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. IV: The Marble Faun</u>, ed. William Charvat et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968) 3.

House of the Seven Gables or the "A" which certain townsfolk claim to have seen upon the reverend Arthur Dimmesdale's chest at the climax of The Scarlet Letter, which give Hawthorne's writing the quality of romance.

In the above passage, Hawthorne appears to claim that America unlike Italy, lacks those elements of 'shadow,' 'antiquity,' 'mystery,' a 'gloomy' and 'picturesque wrong,' which seemingly underpin the dislocation of romance from reality. In making this claim, Hawthorne, through the comparison between 'ivy, lichens, and wallflowers' and 'Romance and poetry,' condenses the essential ingredients for romance into one single notion – 'ruin'. Taken literally, and outwith the context of his previous writing, Hawthorne appears to be claiming that present day America, the 'stalwart Republic,' lacks the forms of ruin which are essential to romance writing. This statement can be read both as a complaint about the lack of American materials for romance writing and a celebration of the innocence and purity of the American Republic. For instance, Teresa A. Goddu uses this passage to support the notion that 'While Hawthorne complains about the lack of gothic materials in America, he turns this lack into the sign of the country's uniqueness as a commonplace, daylight world with no gloomy past'.[2] Critics taking Hawthorne's statement at face value often place it alongside James Fenimore Cooper's complaint in Notions of the Americans (1828) of the 'poverty of American materials' against which 'American literature has to contend'. 'There is,' Cooper writes, 'scarcely an ore which contributes to the wealth of the author, that is found, here, as rich as in Europe'.[3] Unlike Hawthorne's statement, there is no scope for reading Cooper's

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[2] Teresa A. Goddu, Gothic America: Narrative, History and Nation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 54.
[3] James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor, Vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1828) 142.

complaint about the dearth of American materials for romance as a positive characteristic of American society.

In his literary biography of Hawthorne, Henry James supports his forebear's statement in <u>The Marble Faun</u> preface, affirming that reading Hawthorne's <u>The American Notebooks</u>

> I seem to see the image of the crude and simple society in which he
> lived…We are struck with the large number of elements that were absent
> from them [the notebooks], and the coldness, the thinness, the
> blankness…present themselves so vividly that our foremost feeling is that of
> compassion for a romancer looking for subjects in such a field. It takes so
> many things, as Hawthorne must have felt later in life, when he made the
> acquaintance of the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle – it takes such
> an accumulation of history and custom, such a complexity of manners and
> types, to form a fund of suggestion for a novelist.[4]

Understanding Hawthorne's preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u> literally, as James does, is to view it as an artistic lament about the lack of American materials for romance, qualified by a celebration of America's relative freedom from the forms of decay present in Europe. However, this interpretation appears to be entirely undermined when examined within the context of Hawthorne's previous American literary output. As Thomas R. Moore states:

> Hawthorne, the author of three first-rate American romances, outtricks
> himself in this preface. Overly ironic, he cannot have us believe that "the

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[4] Henry James, <u>Hawthorne</u> (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997 [1879]) 39-40. An abridged version of Hawthorne's personal notebooks from 1837 to 1853 was first published in 1868 under the title <u>Passages from the American Notebooks</u>. It was in 1932 that <u>The American Notebooks</u> were first published in their entirety. As with all of Hawthorne's writing examined in this thesis, I will be referring edition of <u>The American Notebooks</u> published within the <u>Ohio State Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne</u>.

common-place-prosperity" of his "dear native land" makes romance

impossible. Nor can he have us believe that "the annals of our stalwart

Republic" hold no theme for romance writers. He has already proved

otherwise.[5]

Taking into account Hawthorne's previous literary output does appear to make an ironic

reading of the preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u> more possible than a literal reading. However,

when this preface, and the novel it introduces, are considered within the context of

Hawthorne's transatlantic travels, the question of how to interpret this statement on the

absence of American ruin becomes even more complex.

Between 1853 and 1860, Hawthorne resided in Europe, spending the first five years working

as American consul in Liverpool before leaving for Italy, where he spent a year and a half

between 1857 and 1859 living between Rome and Florence. He then returned to England

before finally departing for America in 1860. It was during the final three years of

Hawthorne's European sojourn that <u>The Marble Faun</u> was written. Hawthorne's European

journals demonstrate, as we shall see and as James intimates above, that Hawthorne was

profoundly influenced by his encounters with European culture. It is possible then that while

Hawthorne may not have thought of America as free from ruin before he travelled to Europe,

his experiences in Europe altered his attitude towards his home country. This is the manner in

which John P. McWilliams reads the preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u> and the novel more

generally:

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[5] Thomas R. Moore, <u>A Thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, Prefaces and Essays,</u>
(Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994) 84-5.

> The energy, blackness, and intelligence that once constituted the American
>
> Puritan character are now associated with Rome, Catholicism, and
>
> Europeans….In previous fictions, Hawthorne created a New England at least
>
> as ghost-ridden as old England; from within the perspective of Rome,
>
> however, Hawthorne accepts…[the] treasured assumption that the blessed
>
> American Republic is the sole exception to a fallen world.[6]

McWilliams points to one certainty which any comprehensive reading of Hawthorne cannot ignore: Hawthorne's previous American romances, in particular the two I will examine in this thesis, The Scarlet Letter (1850) and The House of the Seven Gables (1851), are replete with images of decay and ruin which underlie the concerns of the characters and drive the events of the narratives. The central aim of my thesis is to compare and contrast Hawthorne's depictions of decay and ruin in his American romances with those in his later European writings (The English Notebooks, The French and Italian Notebooks and The Marble Faun). This project will enable me to examine whether Hawthorne's European experience allowed him to envisage an America free from ruin and decay and completely at odds with his earlier American romances. And, if there is a shift in the way in which ruin figures within his later writing, I will ask, with particular focus upon his extensive European notebooks, how his transatlantic travel may have affected his ideas about ruin and, consequently, its role in his unfinished English romances and The Marble Faun.

For an artist such as Hawthorne who was so fascinated by ideas of ruin and decay, Europe brought him into contact with the kind of ancient material ruins which are completely absent from the American landscape. His European journals are populated with descriptions of the

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[6] John P. McWilliams Jr., Hawthorne, Melville and the American Character: A Looking-Glass Business (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 124.

decaying castles and abbeys of Britain and the even older ruins of Medieval and classical

Rome. Previous to this, Hawthorne's American romances demonstrate a keen interest in

picturing forms of material ruin within an American context, most notably the decaying

house in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>. However, as demonstrated by the above passage

from <u>The Marble Faun</u> preface, Hawthorne is equally interested in ruin as an abstract

concept, as 'mystery,' 'shadow,' 'picturesque and gloomy wrong.' Consider the following

passage from <u>The American Notebooks</u>, a collection of Nathaniel Hawthorne's notebooks

spanning almost twenty years, between 1835 and 1853. These notebooks contain numerous

examples of ideas Hawthorne hoped might eventually be developed into a new stories or

sketches for periodicals. In one notebook entry from 1836 he writes:

> An article might be made respecting various kinds of ruin, - ruin as regards
>
> property, - ruin of health, - ruin of habits, as drunkenness and all kinds of
>
> debauchery, - ruin of character, while prosperous in other respects, - ruin of
>
> the soul. Ruin perhaps, might be personified as a demon, seizing its victims
>
> by various holds.[7]

Hawthorne never expanded this note into a particular short story or article but the central idea

contained within it, that ruin may manifest itself in a variety of forms, informs many, if not

all, of his major works. My thesis will examine many of the various forms of ruin which are

evident in Hawthorne's writing, from forms of material ruin (such as ruined buildings or

physically deteriorating characters), to abstract notions of ruin (such as spiritual ruin or a

character's ruined hopes). But this central thread of my thesis, Hawthorne's depictions of

decay and ruin, provides its most prominent methodological difficulty. Examining decay and

ruin across different types of writing, non-fiction notebooks and imaginative romances,

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[7] Nathaniel Hawthorne, <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. VIII: The American Notebooks</u>, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1972) 30.

necessarily involves the consideration and comparison of different genres as well as diverse forms of ruin. Such an analysis requires all concepts of ruin to share some common property. At the most basic level, what unifies all of these seemingly disparate manifestations of ruin is the notion of decline or deterioration from a previous state of relative fullness or completion. A recent study of ruins in modern urban spaces asks whether 'a ruin [is] an object or a process?'[8] Ruin may be both and an object and a process, but it is important to distinguish between them. While ruin can be used to describe both a process of deterioration and a ruined object, I use the term 'decay' to refer to the *process* of deterioration. Some things may be ruined which have not been subject to the processes of physical decay. For instance, a war may turn a city or town to ruin by shelling, or the abbeys which were destroyed in Britain during the Reformation and reduced to ruins by violence rather than the process of decay, which always implies a more gradual deterioration (although the process of decay has subsequently deteriorated abbeys originally ruined by violence).

American Exceptionalism

In his essay "The American Scholar" (1837), Ralph Waldo Emerson describes the limitless artistic and intellectual potential of nature for the American: 'What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself'.[9] Emerson's essay signifies a belief in the inherent uniqueness of the American condition and experience, a belief in American exceptionalism which is evident throughout American culture from the Colonial era, to the

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[8] Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, introduction to <u>Ruins of Modernity</u>, eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Michigan: Duke University Press, 2010) 6. See also Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir, eds., <u>Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past</u> (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[9] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," <u>The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson</u>, ed. Robert Earnest Spiller (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971 [1837] 54).

Revolutionary period and on into the Antebellum period, evident in movements such as Emerson's Transcendentalism. Deborah L. Madsen argues that this notion of American exceptionalism 'permeates every period of American history and is the single most powerful agent in a series of arguments that have been fought down the centuries concerning the identity of America and Americans'.[10] The conceptions of America proposed through notions of American exceptionalism, I would argue, nearly always involve some relationship to ideas of decay and ruin. Often ruin and decay exist within the rhetoric of American exceptionalism in the form of a contrast: America as the world's new beginning contrasted with the perceived decay and ruin of the Old World. For instance, the immediate precursors to the transcendentalist conceptions of American exceptionalism are poets of the revolutionary period such as Philip Franeau, who in the poem "America Independent" (1778) defines America in direct opposition to the corruption of Europe:

> From Europe's realms fair freedom has retired,
>
> And even in Britain has the spark expired –
>
> Sigh for the change your haughty empire feels,
>
> Sigh for the doom that no disguise conceals!
>
> Freedom no more shall Albion's cliff's survey;
>
> Corruption there has centered all her sway (33-38).[11]

In pointing to the political and moral decline of Europe, especially that of Britain, Freneau aims to characterise America's separation and difference from the corrupt Old World. In "A Poem on the Rising Glory of America" (1772), another famous revolutionary poem of

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[10] Deborah L. Madsen, <u>American Exceptionalism</u> (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) 1.
[11] Philip Freneau, "America Independent," The <u>Poems of Philip Freneau, Vol. 1</u>, ed. Fred Lewis Pattee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 280-281.

Frenau's written with Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Europe has only corruption and decline, while in the newly independent United States:

> Paradise anew
>
> Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost,
>
> No dangerous tree with deadly fruit shall grow,
>
> No tempting serpent to allure the soul
>
> From native innocence (441-45).[12]

This poem asserts that America is a new prelapsarian world, free from the spiritual ruin brought on by Adam's sin and from all the other kinds of ruin which followed on from it. In this formulation of America as a new Eden, the new republic, 'nature's nation', becomes the polar opposite of the Old World and its declining societies. Myths of America's exceptionalism were promoted by poets like Freneau and, latterly, Walt Whitman and were linked to the country's status as a new kind of democratic Republic and visa versa. The combination of America's political system with its expanses of unbounded nature and its apparent perpetual newness induced hopes that that the Renaissance model of *translatio emperii*, in which civilisation progresses westward in cycles of birth, growth and decline, would come to a halt in America before the final stage. In other words, as Dorothy Ross puts it, 'The cyclical view of history in classical republicanism began to give way to the possibility of perpetual life'.[13] An essential part of the myth of *translatio emperii* was the notion of *translatio studii*, evident in the poems of Brackenbridge and Freneau, which imagines that 'civilisation and the arts not only travelled westward but gained with each movement in the transit. Consequently America was destined not only to achieve the

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[12] Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau, "A Poem on the Rising Glory of America" in <u>The Poems of Philip Freneau</u>, 82-3.
[13] Dorothy Ross, "Historical consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," <u>The American Historical Review</u> Vol. 89, No. 4 (Oct 1984) 912.

greatness of the past but to surpass it'.[14] The assumption that America would be the final and

supreme beneficiary of *translatio studii* was evident long before the founding of the

American Republic and was given one of its earliest, and perhaps most famous, embodiments

in George Berkeley's "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America"

(1728) :

> Westward the course of empire takes its way;
>
> The four first acts already past,
>
> A fifth shall close the drama with the day:
>
> Time's noblest offspring is the last (20-24).[15]

According to Berkley, America is the youth of the world, born apart, both in terms of

geography and history, from everything that has come before. The lack of physical ruins in

America could be seen as evidence to support such concepts of America's unique potential,

as Larzer Ziff writes, 'The absence of ruins argued for an American history undetermined by

the past, a history that could actually begin at the beginning'.[16] Thus, the dearth of physical

ruins in America, such as the decaying feudal castles and abbeys found in the Old World,

could be seen as a symbol of America's virtuousness, the absence of the moral and spiritual

ruin associated with Europe.

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[14] Robert E. Shalhope, The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760-1800 (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990) 67. For a further discussion of the theme of *translatio emperii* in the national consciousness and rhetoric of revolutionary America, see Eran Shalev, Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009) 28-35.

[15] George Berkeley, "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America," in The Works of George Berkeley Vol III, ed. A. A. Luce (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1955 [1728]) 369.

[16] Larzer Ziff, Writing in the New Nation (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1991) 47. Another, even more recent example of such thinking is Woodward's statement that: 'In the generation after independence in 1784 Americans believed that their nation was God's chosen people and that the New World would be free of decay as if, like an infectious contagion, it could not cross the Atlantic….Thomas Jefferson studied monuments, not ruins'. Christopher Woodward, In Ruins (New York: Vintage Press, 2001) 196.

While, it is certainly true that many artists and thinkers strove to reinforce the exceptionalist myth of an America entirely free from ruin, the reality is that this argument is far too reductive. Certainly, while there were artists of the Revolutionary age who did create representations of America as a land of perpetual newness, free from the material and societal decline of the Old World, many American artists were far from averse to imagining supposedly European forms of decay and ruin within their new republic. As Ross explains, such idealised notions of American national destiny continued to be haunted by the spectre of ruin: 'The fear that republics must decay was not entirely vanquished by the idea of progress. For many, the secular conditions that maintained the republic postponed rather than eliminated the possibility of decline'.[17] Many artists could not adhere to Berkley's contention that 'Time's noblest offspring is the last,' that America's perpetual youth would necessarily spell the end of the westward progression of Empire. Thomas M. Allen's recent study of American perceptions of time illustrates the fact that notions of American ruin figure prominently in the work of some American artists. Allen places particular emphasis upon the work of the painter Thomas Cole, whose series of paintings The Course of Empire (1833-36) depicts the progress of civilisation through individual artworks titled The Savage State, The Arcadian or Pastoral State, The Consummation of Empire, Destruction, and Desolation.[18] This series, set against backdrops which move from unbounded nature to populous civilisation, imagines America within a model of stadialist history, an essential aspect of the myth of *translatio imperii*, which argues that the decline of previous empires, most notably the classical Roman Empire, to have occurred in the stages depicted in Cole's paintings. Allen argues that Cole's series of paintings responds to the rhetoric of American exceptionalism and in so doing 'reflects the characteristic antebellum concern that America

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[17] Ross, "Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," 913.
[18] See Appendix A for images of Cole's series of paintings.

had already progressed beyond its Republican origins, that through its very success it had paved the way for its own destruction'.[19] For Allen, far from being prone to imagine the glory of an America free from ruin, the propensity to imagine the Republic in decline is a fundamental trait of many American artists. Hawthorne's tendency to imagine various forms of ruin in an America setting could lead to him being classed as such an artist. My thesis will, in part, examine how Hawthorne's depictions of decay and ruin can be seen to interact with and contradict the myths of American exceptionalism which represent America as a land entirely free of ruin. Although some critics, such as Madsen, argue that Hawthorne 'savagely criticised optimistic predictions for America,' I will demonstrate that although he invests his depictions of America with forms of decay, these forms do not always necessitate the failure of America or its inevitable decline.[20] Indeed, this thesis will go beyond the confines of such American myths and attempt to show that while they are often invoked by images of ruin in Hawthorne's writing, these images also exist within a much wider scheme of thought and influence, a scheme which can be understood through the prism of transatlantic literary studies.

The Transatlantic Perspective

In much of the American literary criticism of the mid-twentieth century, the myths of American exceptionalism described above were used to construct an image of a typically American attitude towards history. For instance, in <u>The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century</u> (1955) R. W. B. Lewis discusses the manifestations in American literature of the myth of the 'American Adam' for whom

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[19] Thomas M. Allen, <u>A Republic in Time: Temporality & Social Imagination in Nineteenth Century America</u> (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) 49-50.
[20] Madsen, <u>American Exceptionalism</u>, 78.

'Everything associated with the past should be burned away. The past should be cast off like dead skin'.[21] Texts such as Lewis's are part of a wider critical tradition of the mid-twentieth century in which the burgeoning field of New Criticism seized upon myths of American exceptionalism and used them as the governing principles of their studies of American literature. Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor call such myths within these critical texts, 'powerful because radically simplified descriptions of American identity clustered around a series of resonant phrases and images: manifest destiny, the frontier spirit, the "American Adam", the credo of progress'.[22] While it is true that such myths did permeate the culture of antebellum America, by overstating the function of such myths within to the literature of the period such critics looked to endow nineteenth century American literature with its own exceptionalist qualities.

Transatlantic literary studies is not a distinct theory within itself but rather a way of thinking about how texts operate outwith the geographic and cultural borders implied by ideas of nation and national literature. As Manning and Taylor suggest,

> Nations, and in particular the nation-state, are as categories largely the
>
> invention of a Romantic interest in origins and the organic integrity of
>
> identified groups. They tend to be imagined as monolithic, static entities with
>
> characteristic or essential features which may be compared (or more usually
>
> contrasted) with those of others, but are rarely affected by them. To imagine
>
> the transatlantic, on the other hand, is to conceive of spatial practices as

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[21] R. W. B. Lewis, <u>The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1955) 21. See also Henry Nash Smith, <u>Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth,</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1957).
[22] Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, "Introduction: What is Transatlantic Studies" in <u>Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader,</u> ed. Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007) 1.

dynamic and unfolding; it is to posit both a geographical area and an

intellectual arena in which material and conceptual goods circulate and are

exchanged. [23]

Transatlantic studies can involve the examination of literatures from anywhere in the Atlantic

region; thus Caribbean, African and Latin American texts can be studied alongside those of

Europe and North America.[24] However, my thesis, governed as it is by the writings and

travels of one specific author, will consider the transatlantic connections and influences

between the United States and Europe in Hawthorne's writing. Transatlantic studies are

particularly pertinent when it comes to the study of literature from the United States because,

as John Carlos Rowe contends,

> [American] Culture was from the outset fantastically conceived as unified, in
>
> order to legitimate the indisputable fiction of a union of states previously
>
> held together primarily by means of British colonial foreign policies and
>
> laws, many of which varied drastically to regulate different regions and
>
> economies in British North America.[25]

Thus, examining how American texts also operate outwith the confines of conceived national

perspectives of separation and isolation, such as Manifest Destiny, can help to illuminate the

problems involved in viewing any text as epitomising a distinctly American way of thinking.

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[23] Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, "The Nation and Cosmopolitanism: Introduction" in Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader, ed. Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 17.

[24] See Joselyn M. Almeida, Reimagining The Transatlantic 1780-1890 (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) for a discussion of the 'pan-Atlantic', a notion which stretches the boundaries of previous transatlantic studies: 'the pan-Atlantic challenges us to think outside national cannons, and allows for the inclusion of hispanophone, francophone, and lusophone texts alongside anglophone ones' (8).

[25] John Carlos Rowe, "Nineteenth-Century US Literary Culture and Transnationality," PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America Vol. 118, No.1 (2003) 80.

While the construct of American exceptionalism remains an important factor when considering images and ideas of ruin in American art, my aim in this thesis is to examine decay and ruin within a much wider system of transatlantic awareness and influence. Hawthorne, I will argue, largely avoids the binary oppositions of Old World ruin and New World purity; nor does he imagine decay in America simply as a lament or contrast to the ideal state of American exceptionalism, which would be, in effect, simply another way of reaffirming the power and scope of such a myth. In Hawthorne's American romances, ruin is also an essential material for the artist, and in particular the romancer. Hawthorne's American romances often depict America as a land of ancient natural decay, or as a country where ruin and decay are an inevitable part of societal growth and progress. After establishing the complexities of Hawthorne's depictions of ruin in his American romances, I will then look to his European writing to examine the degree to which Hawthorne's travels in Europe affect the depictions of ruin and decay within his writing. In this respect, another aspect of transatlantic studies which is valuable to my thesis is this significance of travel writing within this field. Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor describe how travel writing is relevant to transatlantic studies because

> travel accounts write distance, transience, departure and arrival into
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> narratives of personal journeys that may be more or less typified; to travel is
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> to be in motion, to see the world from a series of dynamic, shifting
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> viewpoints. For the traveller, it has the effect that all knowledge,
>
> subsequently, is comparative and everything is perceived from (at least) two
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> perspectives.[26]

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[26] Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, "Travel: Introduction," in <u>Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader</u>, ed. Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 281.

The notebooks Hawthorne composed during his time in Europe are the account of a traveller, constantly comparing his new experiences in the Old World to the life he knew on the other side of the Atlantic. In addition, Europe gives Hawthorne a new perspective on ruin. First in Britain and then in France and Italy, he comes into contact with vast sites of physical ruin such as the huge decaying abbeys of Britain and the vast ruins of ancient Rome.

Some of the most influential critical texts in the field of transatlantic studies utilise comparison to demonstrate the connections and influences which exist between British and American literature. For instance in his Transatlantic Insurrections (2001), Paul Giles argues that 'the development of American literature appears in a different light when read against the grain of British cultural imperatives, just as British literature itself reveals strange and unfamiliar aspects that are brought into play by the reflecting mirrors of American discourse'.[27] My thesis will demonstrate the way in which European ruin writing influenced American conceptions of ruin. For instance, many American writers and thinkers would have been well acquainted with the work of Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf, count de Volney, whose The Ruins was popular with American travellers in Europe and a text which exemplifies the national-historical reflections that ruins can generate.[28] Volney's radical text, produced in the early years of the French Revolution, focuses on the lessons which can be learned from the temporality of ruins: 'Ah! how has so much glory been eclipsed? How have

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[27] Paul Giles, Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) 1. Another critical text which operates in a similar mode of transatlantic comparison is Robert Weisbuch, Atlantic Double-Cross: Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). Although Giles, argues that Weisbuch's analysis, unlike his own, ultimately works to 'reinforce a doctrine of American romanticism' rather than to demonstrate the interconnections which exist between literature on both side of the Atlantic (8).

[28] Volney visited America a few years after his book was first published in France in 1791. The Ruins was translated partially by Thomas Jefferson and Joel Barlow and became a best seller in America in 1795 and remained in cheap editions for a century after. A. Irving Hallowell, "Introduction: The Beginnings of Anthropology in America", in American Anthropology, 1888-1920: Papers from the American Anthropologist, ed. Federica de Laguna (University of Nebraska Press, Nebraska, 2002) 60.

so many labors been annihilated? Thus perish the works of men, and thus do empires and nations disappear!'.[29] In The Ruins, Volney offers hope to the oppressed of the world through the images of ruins which, in highlighting the impermanence of man's endeavours, suggest that empires, no matter how powerful, will always eventually fall to ruins. In The Ruins, contemplation of the historicity of ruins allows the viewer to witness the rise of the values of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity from the corruptions of the old regime. Ruins are read as symbols of the moral and political issues of nationhood. Such moral and political responses to the historical decline associated with ruins were two of the most common threads of eighteenth and nineteenth century ruin writing.[30] However, in terms of the kind of comparisons which Giles undertakes, ruin writing was, due to the absence of physical ruins in America, a much more one sided field of literature. There was simply no scope for British or European literature to be influenced by American theory about ruins, in the same way that Americans could be influenced by their Old World counterparts. However, I would argue that the focus upon transatlantic travel which exists within my thesis does involve a degree of comparative analysis. This comparison exists, not between the writers of two country's literary traditions, but instead between Hawthorne's own writing: I will examine Hawthorne's ruin writing before he visited Europe, with his writing once he began his travels in the Old World.

Susan Manning proposes that Hawthorne's 'work is transatlantic in conception, form and theme';[31] however, to date there have been only a few studies which have examined

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[29] Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf, count de Volney, The Ruins, or, Meditation on The Revolutions of Empires: And the Law of Nature, (New York: G.Vale, [1793] 1853) 24.
[30] Malcom Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800 (Aldershot: Scolar, 1987) 46.
[31] Susan Manning, "Transatlantic Historical Fiction," in Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830, ed. Eve Tavor Bannet & Susan Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 260.

Hawthorne's work within a transatlantic context. The most important of these are Frederick

Newberry's <u>Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties: England and America in his Works</u> (1987) and

Kumiko Mukai's <u>Hawthorne's Visual Artists and the Pursuit of a Transatlantic Aesthetics</u>

(2008).[32] For the purposes of my thesis, Newberry's study is perhaps the most relevant of

these. He argues that the second generation of Puritan settlers enacted a severing of Old

World connections which saw the aesthetic and cultural traditions of English and European

culture eradicated in America. Hawthorne, Newberry maintains, seeks to reestablish these

connections through his writing. While Newberry's study is of particular relevance to the

early chapters of my thesis, his focus upon Hawthorne's Puritan heritage means that much of

my own argument occurs independent of his. In addition to these monographs, two essays

from the collection of Hawthorne criticism, <u>Hawthorne and the Real</u> (2005), address the

transnational and transatlantic in Hawthorne's writing: John Carlos Rowe's "Nathaniel

Hawthorne and Transnationality" and Lawrence Buell's "Hawthorne and the Problem of

"American Fiction".[33]

There have been a number of important critical studies of the cultural and literary

significance of ruins, many focusing on the meaning of ruins in British Romanticism.[34]

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in the study of ruins, as illustrated by Tate

Britain's recent exhibition entitled "Ruin Lust"(2013). This retrospective examined many of

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[32] See also Maeve Pearson, "Bloodlines and Abortions: Heredity and Childhood in Hawthorne," in <u>The Materials of Exchange Between Britain and North East America, 1750-1900</u>, ed. Daniel Maudlin & Robin Peel (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013) 17-36.

[33] <u>Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays</u>, ed. Millicent Bell (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005) 88-106 ;70-87.

[34] The foremost twentieth century critical texts on ruins are: Rose Macaulay, <u>The Pleasure of Ruins</u> (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953); Stuart Piggot, <u>Ruins in a Landscape: essays in antiquarianism</u> (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976); Thomas McFarland, <u>Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Modalities of Fragmentation</u> (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); Laurence Goldstein, <u>Ruins and Empire: The Evolution of a Theme in Augustan and Romantic Literature</u> (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); and Anne Janowitz, <u>England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and National Landscape</u> (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

the forms of ruins, such as ruined Gothic abbeys or classical Roman ruins, which enthralled ruin enthusiasts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and up to the present day.[35] This exhibition's inclusion of bombed out buildings of the Second World War and ruined tower blocks of the 1970s reflects a more recent critical focus upon what MacCaulay terms 'New Ruins'.[36] As Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor point out: 'With the turn of the century, the ruin gaze suddenly broadened, and the ruins of the recent past, dynamic and unsettled, became the focus of cross-disciplinary study'.[37] This recent interest in 'New Ruins' has enabled scholars to investigate ruins in America. Recent studies have focused, for example, on the urban decay of Detroit after the decline of its automobile industry and the older, but largely unrecognised, ruins of the American Civil War.[38]

While the critical shift to a focus upon more recent forms of ruin has seen American ruins given a greater focus, the lingering influence of New Critical conceptions of American immunity and aversion to ruins means that the only comprehensive study of American ruin in pre-Civil War America to date is the first half of Nick Yablon's <u>Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity</u> (2009).[39] Yablon aims to overturn previously held views on American ruins, arguing convincingly that 'far from being absent or marginal, ruins were in fact ubiquitous across diverse cultures and landscapes of the United States

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[35] For an overview of the exhibition, see http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ruin-lust. Also see: Brian Dillon, <u>Ruin Lust</u>, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2014).

[36] MacCaulay, <u>The Pleasure of Ruins</u>, 454.

[37] Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor, "Reckoning With Ruins," <u>Progress in Human Geography</u>, Vol. 34, No. 4 (August 2012) 466.

[38] See Camilo Jose Vergara, <u>The New American Ghetto</u> (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Megan Kate Nelson, <u>Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War</u> (Georgia: Georgia State University Press, 2012).

[39] The second half of Yablon's book also examines the ruins of American Civil War and beyond into the early twentieth century.

during the nineteenth century'.[40] My thesis accepts Yablon's central claim that ruins were

extant in nineteenth century American culture. I aim to build on Yablon's research in two

interconnected ways: first, is my focus on Nathaniel Hawthorne, an author mentioned only

five times within Yablon's book, despite being, as I will demonstrate, the nineteenth century

American cultural figure whose work reveals perhaps the most sustained fascination with

ruin. The reason why Hawthorne is so rarely mentioned in Yablon's study may be inferred

from its subtitle: 'American Urban Modernity.' Yablon focuses primarily on the notion of the

American city and the ruins which appeared in its associated literature and art. Yablon's

study is therefore less relevant to many of the forms of abstract decay which Hawthorne

depicts in his romances. The second way in which I will build upon Yablon's research is to

widen the scope of American ruin and examine more abstract concepts of decay alongside the

kind of material manifestations of ruin upon which he primarily focuses.

The most comprehensive study specifically discussing Hawthorne's work in relation to ideas

of decay and ruin is Deanna Fernie's Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American

Art (2011).[41] While Fernie's study is unique in its sustained focus upon decay in Hawthorne's

writing, her discussion takes place primarily in relation to American art. Her study provides

illuminating insights into the manner in which the incomplete acts as an inspiration for

Hawthorne's own writing, something which I will discuss in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Fernie

also attends to the images of unfinished busts and of decaying painting in The Marble Faun.

However, the ruins of Europe do not feature very prominently in her work. Equally, her focus

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[40] Nick Yablon, Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 5.
[41] Deanna Fernie, Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

upon American art means that she does not offer sustained discussion of the more abstract types of decay which will form the basis of much of my own thesis.

<u>Thesis Structure</u>

My thesis will be divided into two distinct sections in order to reflect Hawthorne's own transatlantic movements. Hawthorne was born in 1804 and died in 1864, and spent most of his life living and working in New England, but in 1853 he accepted the post as US consul in Liverpool. Hawthorne spent the next five years living and working in England, before travelling, with his family, through France and into Italy, where they lived for a full year in Rome and Florence, finally returning to England for a few months in anticipation of their return to the United States in 1860.

Robert Milder's excellent <u>Hawthorne's Habitations: A Literary Life</u> (2013) focuses upon Hawthorne's relationship with specific geographical locations during the course of his life and has been invaluable to my research. Milder, discusses what he terms Hawthorne's 'habitations':

> four geographic places that were the scene and literal or figurative subject of
> Hawthorne's writing: Salem, Massachusetts, his ancestral home and ground
> of identity; Concord, Massachusetts, where he lived from 1842 to 1845 and
> came into contact with the Adamic spirit of the American Renaissance, and
> to which he returned in 1852-53 and again in 1860; England where he served
> as consul in Liverpool from 1853 to 1857, absorbing an element of

Englishness himself and envisioning a new direction for his work; and Italy,

where he lived through most of 1858-59 and was challenged, like Henry

James's Americans, by the obliquities of an older, denser civilisation morally

and culturally distinct from his own.[42]

Milder's argument concerning the significance of these four separate localities to

Hawthorne's writing has played an important role shaping my own thoughts about how

images of ruin and decay within Hawthorne's writing are governed by his transatlantic

movements.

The first three chapters of my thesis will examine two of Hawthorne's three American

romances. Chapter 1 focuses on "The Custom-House," the introductory preface to The

Scarlet Letter; Chapter 2 moves on to examine the main body of The Scarlet Letter; and

Chapter 3 analyses The House of the Seven Gables. In these chapters, I will argue that

understanding the various images of ruin within these texts reveals the various ways in which

Hawthorne's American romances are not simply a product or reflection of a purely American

experience. Instead, these depictions of decay and ruin illustrate how Hawthorne's America

always exists within a position of transatlantic influence and awareness. The second half of

my thesis consists of two further chapters. Chapter 4 examines Hawthorne's The English

Notebooks, while Chapter 5 reads The French and Italian Notebooks alongside The Marble

Faun. This structure will help reveal that movement from America to Europe has a significant

bearing on the way in which ruin figures in Hawthorne's writing. In England, Hawthorne

visited numerous ruined abbeys and castles, while in Italy he visited many of the classical

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[42] Robert Milder, Hawthorne's Habitations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) ix.

ruins still extant in the country. Ruin in Europe is more material and considerably less imaginary and abstract than it is in the American romances. This shift, from imagined ruin to actual ruin, is reflected in the shift in my thesis between what is primarily an examination of imagined ruin within Hawthorne's American fiction (although I will make some reference to The American Notebooks) and an analysis of Hawthorne's reflections on ruins in Europe, where his non-fiction notebook writing becomes a much more central focus. Indeed, even in the European romance, The Marble Faun, many of the instances of ruin and decay are examples of real instances of ruin which Hawthorne encountered during his time in the Old World. Ultimately, by tracing Hawthorne's depictions of ruin from his American romances, through his European notebooks, and finally to his Italian romance, I will ask whether Hawthorne's ideas of American ruin are altered by his experiences of European ruin - whether the assertion, that America is a country free from ruin, in the preface to The Marble Faun quoted above, can be taken at face value. I will question whether his earlier perceptions and representations of American ruin have been overturned in favour of a myth of American exceptionalism, or whether The French and Italian Notebook and The Marble Faun can be seen to imply the existence of ruin in America, albeit on very different terms than his American romances imagined.

I have made the decision not to examine Hawthorne's third American romance The Blithedale Romance (1852) in this thesis for two reasons. This narrative is concerned with the failure of a Fourierist utopian community and is based on Hawthorne's own time spent at a similar venture at Brook Farm in Massachusetts. It therefore does have at its core a central theme of decline similar to that communicated by the impending failure of the utopian venture of Puritan Boston in The Scarlet Letter. Yet, while there are individual images and

ideas of ruin in the romance, most notably the corpse of Zenobia at the conclusion of the story, in comparison to the other texts examined in this thesis, The Blithedale Romance is relatively ruin-free. In addition, the idea of societal withdrawal inherent in The Blithedale Romance makes it, I would argue, the one romance of Hawthorne which is least concerned with the interconnectedness of Old and New World. Finally, and informed by these reasons, I chose to omit The Blithedale Romance from my study for reasons of balance. As it is, I have three chapters on Hawthorne's American romance writing and two on his European work. I feel that to include another chapter on his American writing would not necessarily have contributed much more to an answer to the essential question of the differences between his American ruin writing and that of his European ouvre.

In Chapter 1 I will argue that "The Custom-House" fictionalises Hawthorne's search for the appropriate forms of ruin for American romance in contemporary Salem. The lower floor of the Custom House and its surrounds appear to offer little in the way of imaginative inspiration for Hawthorne, although in General Miller, he presents a detailed study of a human ruin who can be understood in terms of the moral or noble picturesque. On the upper floor, however, in the imaginative realm associated with romance and the crossing of transnational boundaries, Hawthorne discovers the ruined 'A' of the scarlet letter which acts as catalyst for his imaginative creation. "The Custom-House" effectively finds the enabling ruins for American romance in the Puritan past, a historical period which offers many themes and images of ruin. This story of how the discovery of the decaying scarlet letter underpins the creation of Hawthorne's most famous romance is, therefore, also a story about the relationship between romance and ruin in Hawthorne's writing. Beginning my thesis with an examination of "The Custom-House," rather than the many short stories Hawthorne wrote

before this point in his career gives my thesis a certain symmetry since the relation between ruin and romance described in "The Custom-House" is explicitly returned to in the preface to The Marble Faun, the final text I will look at in this thesis.

In Chapter 2, I will focus upon the romance supposedly created from the discovery of the ruined scarlet letter. I will examine Hawthorne's romance within the context of a call by the nineteenth century American lawyer, orator and Congressman Rufus Choate for the creation of a series of New England romance novels comparable to Sir Walter Scott's Waverley Novels. Hawthorne's seventeenth century Boston Puritans can be compared with the noble savages of the writing of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. This is because Hawthorne imagines a Puritan past which is ruined from its very inception. However, The Scarlet Letter is a novel replete with ambiguity and the decline of the Puritans is not as straightforward as the decay of the noble savages of Cooper and Scott, since the Puritans are not only Hawthorne's direct ancestors but, in the myth of the Puritan founders discussed in Chapter 2, they are seen to be the descendant of the founding fathers and therefore essential to the foundation of the American Republic. Hawthorne's Puritan Boston is endowed with a complex system of transatlantic ruin which not only undermines notions of Puritan new beginnings but also, using images of decay, emphasises the idea of Europe as America's cultural origin and home.

In chapter 3 I will discuss Hawthorne's approach in The House of the Seven Gables to writing a romance about contemporary Salem, something which had, in "The Custom-House," seemed impossible. Hawthorne endows Salem with enabling forms of ruin by transferring the Governor's House from The Scarlet Letter into the centre of this new

romance. This chapter will focus in particular upon the Gothic elements of this romance, arguing that as well as crossing the divide between past and present, ruin transcends the divisions of romance, between real and imaginary. Once again, Hawthorne's visions of ruin in this romance continually point to America's place within the context of transatlantic history. Finally, the ending of the romance sees the narrator replace the idealised American democratic rejection of decay, championed by Holgrave, with his own, more conservative sense of ongoing and gradual change through decay and growth.

Chapter 4, on The English Notebooks, attends to the shift from fictionalised ruins to real ruins in Hawthorne's on the spot focus upon the aesthetics of British ruins. Hawthorne finds himself both attracted to and repulsed by the weight of history in Britain, which induces both a home-feeling in him and a fear of stagnation. Hawthorne's responses to British ruins are characterised by a lack of historical contemplation and, instead, foreground the picturesque aspects of the most aesthetically pleasing ruins he can find. British history is so stable, it seems, that it rarely registers in any meaningful way in these accounts. Ruins become symbols of permanence and even, through their assimilation into nature, symbols of the new. This chapter concludes by arguing that it is possible that the pure aesthetic enjoyment of British ruins perhaps underlies Hawthorne's failed attempts to write an English romance. In his earlier American romances, decay and deterioration underpin his narratives. In England, the stability of history, evident in the pure aestheticism of his responses to ruins, suggests that he did not find in the 'old home' the required materials for artistic creation.

Chapter 5, which reads The French and Italian Notebooks and The Marble Faun alongside one another, examines Hawthorne's responses to the ruins of Rome. Unlike British ruins,

these ruins do not induce aesthetic appreciation. Rather, they stand as symbols of a history which is, at times, deeply troubling to Hawthorne. The huge timescales involved in the contemplation of such ruins unsettle him. Rome, more generally, has a pervading atmosphere of decay which blurs the lines between disease, ruin and artistic inspiration. Hawthorne attributes the illness of his daughter Una to this atmosphere of decay. Yet, in spite of, or perhaps because of, this atmosphere of decay, Hawthorne is able to produce his final completed romance. The Marble Faun, through its division of ruined old world characters and innocent Americans, allegorical Italians versus New World actualities, suggests that Hawthorne's ideas about ruin in America have changed. The end of the novel seems suggest that America is a land completely free from ruin, an idea which Hawthorne had entirely rejected up until this point. I will argue, however, that while America is depicted in this light, it is more in hope than in truth. Although Hawthorne had been affected by the oppressive decay of Rome, he was also well aware of the approaching American Civil War.

Hawthorne's Theory of Romance

In each of the prefaces of his four full length narratives, Nathaniel Hawthorne classes these texts specifically as 'romances.' As we saw at the beginning of this introduction, and as I shall demonstrate throughout my thesis, the notion of ruin can be linked to this genre of romance. I will also show that this romance-ruin relationship is continually shaped by Hawthorne's transatlantic considerations of how a nation's propensity for and proliferation of ruin affect the situation of the romance writer. In order to be able to examine Hawthorne's fascination with ruin and decay within his novels, it is therefore essential to discuss what it

means for a novel to be classified as a romance. As we shall see, the complexity of the genre and the differing interpretations of what constitutes romance makes it a problematic and even controversial subject within the field of Hawthorne studies and American literary studies more generally.

Hawthorne writes what he, and subsequent writers and critics, term to be romance novels. A very general definition would class a nineteenth century romance novel as 'any tale or novel that acknowledged itself to be a work of invention rather than imitation, of "fancy" rather than "reason"'.[43] Demonstrating that romance essentially meant fiction in the nineteenth century, Walter Scott, whose romance novels greatly influenced Hawthorne's fiction, wrote: 'We now use the term romance as synonymous with fictitious composition'.[44] While the type of romance which most influenced Hawthorne's own romance writing, and indeed the romance writing of generations of American novelists, were the European gothic novels and historical novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, romance existed in other forms long before the novel came to prominence. Indeed, the origins of romance writing are often traced back to medieval literature.[45] The quality of romance which connects Chaucer and Spencer to Walpole and Scott is the propensity of these texts to veer away, to greatly varying degrees, from the artistic mimesis of a commonplace reality. As Gillian Beer states,

> The romance, however lofty its literary and moral qualities, is written
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> primarily to entertain…It absorbs the reader into experience which is
>
> otherwise unattainable. It frees us from our inhibitions and preoccupations

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[43] Michael Davitt Bell, The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980) 9.
[44] Sir Walter Scott, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition" in Ioan Williams, ed., Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction (London: Routledge 1968 [1827]) 223.
[45] See Gillian Beer, The Romance (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1970) for a history of the romance. Beer even argues that the medieval romance has 'antecedents far back beyond twelfth-century Europe' (4).

by drawing us entirely into its own world – a world which is never fully
equivalent to our own although it must remind us of it if we are to
understand it at all. It oversteps the limits by which life is normally
bounded.[46]

The study of the romance novel has been a prominent part of Hawthorne studies and, indeed, American literary studies as a whole since the mid-twentieth century. After the Second World War, studies of American literature became increasingly shaped by the desire to demarcate the great canon of American literature of the antebellum years, as critics attempted to define the texts which could be considered the cornerstones of American literature and somehow representative of American experience as a whole. Most of all, the American literary studies of this period are shaped by a desire to demonstrate what is unique about American literature, for it was proposed that the literature of this superpower could no longer be considered as a simple offshoot of its older, and now declining, former colonial parent across the Atlantic. To support such claims of originality, American academics of the quarter century following the Second World War seized upon an apparent predilection for romance writing among American novelists as the defining sign of the uniqueness of American literature. This view of American romance writing has its basis in an essay, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in Lionel Trilling's <u>The Liberal Imagination</u> (1950), which argues that while the English or European novelistic tradition primarily dwelt on society and manners, such a novel

never really established itself in America. Not that we have not had very
great novels but that the novel in America diverges from its classic intention,
which, as I have said, is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning
in the social field. The fact is that American writers of genius have not

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[46] Beer, <u>The Romance,</u> 3.

turned their minds to society. Poe and Melville were quite apart from it; the

reality they sought was only tangential to society. Hawthorne was acute

when he insisted that he did not write novels but romances – he thus

expressed his awareness of the lack of social texture in his work.[47]

Trilling's essay outlines what became more or less the standard view of American literature

in English departments on both sides of the Atlantic, namely that American writers tended to

avoid attempts to directly represent the fullness and complexity of social life.

Trilling's essay was meant as a critique of the American writer's failure to engage with

society. However, in Richard Chase's The American Novel and its Tradition (1957),

Trilling's analysis was used to identify and to celebrate the distinctive and unique qualities of

American literature. What had once made American literature seem trivial and slight,

suddenly became what made it profound and culturally bold. Chase's study, like some of

those it influenced, became a foundational text of American literary studies for the next

twenty years. Chase accepted that the romance novel was not concerned with representing the

reality of the everyday social world, but he celebrated the freedom that this entailed. He

demonstrated the conventions of the romance novel as follows:

an assumed freedom from the ordinary novelistic requirements of

verisimilitude, development, and continuity; a tendency towards melodrama

and idyl; a more or less formal abstractness and, on the other hand, a

tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness; a willingness to

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[47] Lionel Trilling "Manners, Morals, and the Novel" in The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008 [1950]) 212.

abandon moral questions or to ignore the spectacle of man in society, or to

consider these things only indirectly or abstractly.[48]

The romance genre, it is argued, suits the American writer because in his or her country there

is no substantial social scene about which he or she can write. According to this viewpoint,

the relative youthfulness of nineteenth century American society and the absence of

traditional class tensions meant that America could not be the setting for the traditional realist

novel. In The Eccentric Design (1959), Marcus Bewley, a proponent of Chase's theory,

claims that:

> the American novelist had only his idea with which to begin: ideas which,
>
> for the most part were grounded in the great American democratic
>
> abstractions. And he found that these abstractions were disembodied, that
>
> there was no social context in which they might acquire a rich human
>
> relevance. For the traditional novelist, the universal and the particular come
>
> together in the world of manners; but for the American artist there was no
>
> social surface responsive to his touch.[49]

As a consequence, the American romance is defined as a text which represents American

society only tangentially, rejecting any significant attempts to realistically depict and

comment upon American life and manners. It was instead the pursuit of 'moral truths of

universal validity' and the representation of 'personalities who transcend among other things

the amenities and discipline of social intercourse' which characterises the uniqueness of

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[48] Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1958) xi.
[49] Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959) 15.

American fiction.[50] The lack of engagement with society in such literature was not something to be concerned about, as Trilling had been; in fact, the romance novel is characterised by

> its wilful disregard for consistency in characterization and plotting, and its
> direct, forceful expression of imaginary desire which captures the conflicts –
> and thus the "realities" – of American society much more accurately than the
> smoothly controlled surface of the novel of manners and its realistic mode of
> representation.[51]

Some of the great American novels (which are always, Chase argues, romances) may appear to offer the 'observation of manners and the painting of the social scene,' but such traits are likely to be 'a by-product of the romance that really engages the author's mind'.[52]

Intrinsic to much of the romance-centric American literary criticism quoted above is the notion that the romance novel exists in opposition to the realistic or traditional novel which, in Chase's account,

> renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. It takes a group of
> people and sets them going about the business of life. We come to see these
> people in their real complexity of temperament and motive. They are in
> explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own

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[50] Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, xi, 159.
[51] Winfried Fluck, ""The American Romance" and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary," New Literary History Vol. 27, No. 3 (1996) 416.
[52] Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, 160.

past. Character is more important than action and plot, and probably the

tragic or comic actions of the narrative will have the primary purpose of

enhancing our knowledge of and feeling for an important character, a group

of characters, or a way of life. The events that occur will usually be

plausible, given the circumstances.[53]

This distinction between the romance and the novel is fundamental to Chase's theory and to

the theories of those critics whose studies he influenced. Such critics focus on this distinction

in order to support their arguments concerning the uniqueness of American literature: while

American literature is marked by an abundance of romance writing and an absence of realist

novels, British literature is the opposite – the novel of manners or society is foremost in

British literature, while the romance novel is much less abundant. Indeed, the unique

conditions within which the nineteenth century American writer worked means that,

according to this theory, his or her brand of romance is itself inherently different from that of

the English romance writer:

the best American novelists have found uses for romance far beyond the

escapism, fantasy, and sentimentality often associated with it….They have

used romance to introduce into the novel what one may roughly describe as

the narrow profundity of New England Puritanism, the sceptical, rationalistic

spirit of the Enlightenment, and the imaginative freedom of

Transcendentalism. In doing so they have created a brilliant and original, if

often unstable and fragmentary, kind of literature.[54]

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[53] Chase, <u>The American Novel and its Tradition</u>, 12.
54 Chase, <u>The American Novel and its Tradition</u>, x.

The unique qualities of Chase's American romance would become central to a host of influential studies of the 1950s and early 1960s, which would characterise American literature in a variety of ways as 'a literature in flight from civilization and the claims of society…a literature, in other words, of individual self-assertion'.[55]

Romance was undoubtedly an important aspect of nineteenth century American literature. However, the claim that romance was representative of an all-encompassing American mind-set and experience has been questioned and over-turned by more recent critics. Initial critics of Chase's theory argued that his definition of romance was not precise enough to serve as the foundational concept of an entire American literary tradition. Subsequent studies then pointed towards his problematic claims for the representativeness of romance when considered in the light of those many significant omissions necessitated by his version of the American literary tradition. In more recent years, some literary critics began to recognise that the post-war criticism of the American New Critics, consciously or not, evinced forms of 'American cultural imperialism functioning to consolidate and define the cultural dominance of the United States'.[56] In fact, the notion that the American romance is distinct from other novelistic forms and should be considered the definitive marker of America's literary

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[55] Fluck, ""The American Romance" and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary" 418.
The most significant studies which continued the tradition established by Chase are; Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design. Form in the Classical American Novel (1959); Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967); Daniel Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966); John Caldwell Stubbs, The Pursuit of Form: A Study of Hawthorne and the Romance (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Michael D. Bell, The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
[56] Russell J. Reising, The Unusable Past: The Theory and Study of American Literature (New York: Methuen, 1986) 218. Some of the most prominent of these opponents to Chase's theory are Nina Baym, "Concepts of Romance in Hawthorne's America," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 38, No 4, (Mar. 1984) 426-443; and in "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," American Quarterly Vol. 33, No. 2 (1981) 123-139; also John McWilliams, "The Rationale for the "American Romance,"" boundary 2, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1990) pp71-82; and George Dekker, "The Genealogy of American Romance," ESQ 35 (1989) 69-83.

independence (and even superiority) was challenged as far back as 1973 by Nicolaus Mills, who argued that nineteenth century American and English (actually British) fiction had much more in common than Chase's theory of American romance allows. Mills states:

> we cannot classify American fiction as romantic and English fiction as novelistic and on that basis accurately distinguish between the two traditions. American fiction is not so free from societal concerns and English fiction is not so weighted down with history that such a comparison makes sense…I find the similarities far more important and the differences far less important between nineteenth-century American and English fiction than is customary…what I am contending is that these works have a complexity that defies easy categorization and makes it necessary to see their uniqueness in far subtler ways than their division into genres allows.[57]

The central concept which Mills rails against in his study, namely Chase's wide ranging theory of the clear distinction between American romance and British novel, owes much to Hawthorne's own comments upon the difference between his own brand of romance and the novel form. In the introduction to <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, Hawthorne makes the following distinction between romance and novel:

> When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very

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[57] Nicolaus Mills, <u>American and English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: An Antigenre Critique and Comparison</u> (Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1973) 3-4.

minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary

course of man's experience. The former - while, as a work of art, it must

rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may

swerve aside from the truth of the human heart - has fairly a right to present

that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing

or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium

as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the

picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the

privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the marvellous rather as a

slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual

substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however,

to commit a literary crime, even if he disregard this caution (II:1).

I will return to this passage in due course. My reason for quoting it at length here is primarily

to make a point about Chase, who also quotes this entire passage. His grounds for doing so

are in order to show that 'Hawthorne was in effect announcing the definitive adaptation of

romance to America'.[58] He uses Hawthorne's distinction between novel and romance as a

kind of foundational observation upon the distinction between American romance and

English novel, an observation which supposedly encapsulates the uniqueness of American

literature of the Antebellum period. However, as Nina Baym has since demonstrated, through

an examination of 'those texts in which ideas about fiction current in Hawthorne's time are

most often discernible – specifically, reviews of long fiction appearing between 1820 and

1860 in a variety of major American magazines,' there is a problem with using Hawthorne's

own distinction as the foundation of a theory of a national genre:

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[58] Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, 19.

Hawthorne's distinction between romance and novel which has carried so

much weight for subsequent criticism, was idiosyncratic, his own. In fact the

term romance turns out to have been used so broadly and so inconsistently in

the era that in any given instance of trying to fix its meaning the critic or

writer was evidently indulging in a creative rather than a descriptive

activity.[59]

Accepting Baym's argument about American romance, although I will on occasion make

reference to the American romance-centric criticism of Chase and others, my study of ruin in

Hawthorne's writing will treat the concept of romance primarily within the context of

Hawthorne's own definitions of it.[60] That said, my thesis will also retain an interest in the

most wide-ranging critical definitions of romance, those which are not intent on using

romance to segregate American literature from other national literatures. My reason for

retaining this interest in the macro history of romance is because situating Hawthorne's own

brand of romance within the context of a history of Western romance literature will help to

develop my own arguments about the ways in which ruin and decay can be viewed as

indicators of the transatlantic qualities of Hawthorne's writing.

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[59] Nina Baym, "Concepts of Romance in Hawthrone's America," 430.
[60] Although the majority of recent critical writing on the subject has attempted to move away from Chase's theory of the American romance, there are some recent exceptions, such as G.R Thompson and Eric Carl Link, Neutral Ground: New Traditionalism and the American Romance Controversy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999) who argue that the distinction between the romance and the novel was one of the central issues in American letters from 1790s to the 1890s.

Now that I have established the wide-ranging, and at times controversial, context of romance criticism, I will look at Hawthorne's own personal discussions of romance. As suggested by the above quotation from The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne became such a key figure in the critical theory of American romance not only because he wrote novels which appear to fit within the romance genre or which are explicitly subtitled 'A Romance,' but because in each of the prefaces to his four novels he ruminates upon the nature of the romance genre and upon the process of romance writing. The comments upon romance within these prefaces share the same central ideas, but they do not provide a unified theory of romance. Rather, there are variations between the preface in terms of their account of romance and in terms of the terminology used to describe it. Therefore, in the remainder of this introductory chapter, rather than offering any direct analysis of Hawthorne's romance theory, I will map out Hawthorne's comments upon romance in the four central prefaces, demonstrating both the consistencies and variations of his influential interpretation of romance and romance writing.

In light of the romance-centric criticism of the mid-twentieth century, which argues that the genre is the natural expressive form for American writers, one noteworthy aspect of the descriptions of romance within Hawthorne's prefaces is that they always feature some discussion of the difficulties faced by the romance writer and, in particular, the romance writer in America. The significance of national setting, which becomes increasingly important in later prefaces, is not wholly explicit in "The Custom-House," the introductory section of The Scarlet Letter, in which the Hawthorne-narrator describes a personal struggle to develop the story of The Scarlet Letter: 'So little adapted is the atmosphere of a Custom-House to the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility, that, had I remained there through ten

Presidencies yet to come, I doubt whether the tale of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> would ever have been brought before the public eye' (I:34). "The Custom-House" sets the tone for subsequent prefaces in its extended discussion of the narrator's struggle to write even after he has left the seemingly oppressive atmosphere of the Salem Custom House at the end of his working day:

> The same torpor, as regarded the capacity for intellectual effort, accompanied me home, and weighed upon me in the chamber which I most absurdly termed my study. Nor did it quit me when, late at night, I sat in the deserted parlour, lighted only by the glimmering coal-fire and the moon, striving to picture forth imaginary scenes, which, the next day, might flow out on the brightening page in many-hued description (I:35).

The description of the Hawthorne-narrator's moonlit parlour is perhaps Hawthorne's most often cited comment upon romance writing. The above quotation is a short extract from what is Hawthorne's longest and most comprehensive statement upon romance, functioning both as a description of the imaginative processes involved in writing romance and as a metaphor for the makeup of romance itself.

 These moonlit conditions, we are told, should normally be the most conducive to producing romance because 'Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly, - making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility, - is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests' (I:35). The significance of moonlight to Hawthorne's discussion of romance lies in the new 'visibility' it creates. Everyday objects and scenes are

altered by moonlight and invested with 'a quality of strangeness and remoteness'. In the 'domestic scenery of the well-known apartment' which the Hawthorne-narrator describes in "The Custom-House," moonlight alters even the most mundane of objects:

> the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre-table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the book-case; the picture on the wall; - all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby (I:35).

The changes affected by moonlight create certain contradictory conditions, whereby appearances are altered but remain familiar; objects appear to lose their 'actual substance' and yet everything within the scene is 'still almost as vividly present as by daylight' (I:36). The ultimate effect of the moonlight is to create 'a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other' (I:36). The imagination is fundamental to this 'neutral territory.' The moonlit objects of the parlour which are now, at least partially, detached from their everyday associations become 'things of the intellect' within a scene which is itself no longer completely real nor completely imaginary. It is under these conditions, with this scene in front of him, that the romance writer's imagination should be spurred into life, for 'at such an hour, and with this scene before him, if a man, sitting all alone, cannot dream strange things, and make them look like truth, he need never try to write romances' (I:36). The reason that such a 'neutral territory' should inspire the romance writer to produce his fiction is that the atmosphere it creates, 'somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the

Actual and Imaginary meet,' is the very compositional balance by which Hawthorne, by varying degrees, defines the romance novel.

In the preface to Hawthorne's second novel, <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, the discussion of romance shifts from the abstract theories of "The Custom-House," which describe the initial moments of romance composition, communicated by the metaphor of the moonlit parlours, to reflections upon the concreted and complete art work. In the passage quoted in full earlier in this introduction, Hawthorne uses the distinction between novel and romance to clearly define his work as the latter. In doing so he appears to be drawing on similar ideas from those in "The Custom-House." The novel, or realist-novel, he states, generally aims 'at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience.' Such a novel is, in effect, equivalent to the sunlit parlour, a vision of what we would perceive to be scenes and events which could only exist in the real world, or in a common-place reality. The romance, while it must still present authentic emotional and moral responses, what Hawthorne terms 'the truth of the human heart,' has the capacity 'to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.' The romancer has the opportunity to imagine a different version of reality, and in so doing may 'manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows, of the picture.' Finally, Hawthorne warns against overstating the unreality of this new reality; the balance between the real and the unreal, the actual and the imaginary, must be maintained: 'He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public' (II:1).

Yet, the comments concerning The House of the Seven Gables as romance do not fit entirely with what Hawthorne had written about romance in "The Custom-House." Hawthorne warns the reader against any desire to 'assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative' because to do so 'exposes the Romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment' (II:3). This complaint about the danger of associating the romance with any real place or people is at odds with the idea that romance has a foundation in both the real and the imagined. Indeed, he goes on to state that he would be happy if 'the book may be read strictly as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex' (II:3).[61] Ostensibly, there is a shift here in the nature of romance: while it was previously located halfway between common-place reality and the realms of pure imagination, Hawthorne seems now to locate romance much more in the latter. Or, at the very least, he is suggesting that the realities which romance is based on should not be real people or places but should be the essential truths of human life – 'the truth of the human heart.' However, just when this apparent contradiction has been identified, we must also take into consideration the fact that the voice of the Hawthorne-narrator of the prefaces must be viewed as another of Hawthorne's own creations: playful, mocking and potentially unreliable. As a consequence, the reader must always be wary of assuming that this voice is speaking truthfully or for Hawthorne himself. For instance, he appears to be pleading with the reader not to associate the people and events of the texts with real places and persons, and yet, by telling us at the end of the preface not to think of the 'County of Essex' in relation to his story, he potentially influences us precisely to

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[61] The County of Essex is the county in Massachusetts which includes Salem.

make that association as we read the first description of the house of the seven gables on the first page of the novel itself.

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The notion of the 'atmospherical medium' mentioned in the preface to <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> is highly significant in relation the whole of Hawthorne's writing and especially to his theory of romance. The presence and effects of various kinds of atmosphere is a theme which permeates nearly all of his fiction and his journal writing. As well as describing the atmosphere of romance as something within the novel itself, as he does in the preface to <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, Hawthorne, in the preface to <u>The Blithedale Romance</u>, also talks of an 'atmosphere' external to the text within which the author composes his work. Hawthorne begins this preface by describing how he utilised his own experiences at Brook Farm, Roxbury, in his depiction of the fictional Blithedale Farm, but he also stresses that the reader should not consider his novel as a comment upon the Brook Farm experiment itself. Instead, 'his present concern with the Socialist Community is merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives'.[62] The advice offered to the reader here represents another development in Hawthorne's romance theory in the prefaces. Just as in the previous preface to <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, Hawthorne is ostensibly asking the reader not to associate the people and places described with anyone in the real world, but he is less forceful in these assertions this time round, admitting that Brook Farm offered a template but should not be considered the explicit setting of the story which follows. In this respect, the romance of <u>The</u>

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[62] Nathaniel, Hawthorne, <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. III: The Blithedale Romance</u>, ed. William Charvat et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1962) 1.

Blithedale Romance, 'a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel,' is reminiscent of the more balanced 'neutral territory' of romance in "The Custom-House."

The pressing need to ensure some degree of detachment between what is represented and what is real informs the majority of the preface to The Blithedale Romance. Hawthorne states that for the European romance writer, using a real life situation as the subject for a romance would pose no difficulty because 'In the old countries, with which Fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day Probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby' (III:1-2). Circumstances are, however, different in America where 'there is as yet no such Faery Land.' The use of 'Faery Land' here is significantly ambiguous. In "The Custom-House," the 'fairy-land' of romance is the realm of pure imagination; it is one side of a balance, along with its polar opposite of 'the real world,' between which 'the neutral territory' of romance sits. However, in The Blithedale Romance preface Hawthorne's terminology has shifted and the 'Faery Land' has become more akin to the liminal 'neutral territory' of "The Custom-House"; it is a 'Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own.' It is this 'atmosphere of strange enchantment' (III:2) which 'the American romancer needs,' but in this preface Hawthorne says that it is sorely lacking in his country. Again, there is some degree of ambiguity here. Although we know that this 'Faery Land' is equivalent to the 'neutral territory' of "The Custom-House," it is not exactly clear what it means for such a 'Faery Land' and its associated 'atmosphere' to be absent from America. In one respect, these

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missing American conditions appear to relate to the materials which the American romancer has at hand and which are to be used in the creation of his fiction; it is in the American setting of the American romancer's work that the atmosphere of romance is absent, meaning that 'the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible' (III:2). However, there is a further implication here about the difficulties for the American romance writer, which is that the problems with the American materials for romance are linked to the way in which a national readership reads and understands a romance. Therefore, the 'atmosphere' which Hawthorne claims the 'American romancer needs' also refers to the climate in which he writes, and the ability, or willingness, of his readership to accept that there is a necessary detachment between what is represented in the American romance and what occurs in the everyday reality of American life.

This is one instance where we must be wary of examining Hawthorne's theory of romance in one of his prefaces outwith the context of Hawthorne's own life. The insistence upon the romance's detachment between represented events and real life situations is beneficial to Hawthorne as a kind of disclaimer to those who might perceive The Blithedale Romance as a comment upon the Brook Farm experiment in which he took part. Certainly, he was criticised for his depiction of Judge Pyncheon in his previous novel by those who saw the character as a slanderous depiction of a real Salem politician. However, the idea that in America 'the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals' is not confined to The Blithedale Romance, his most biographically relevant novel, and the one where he might therefore have the most cause to insist upon some distinction

between the real and the represented. In the preface to his final novel, <u>The Marble Faun</u>, we see a similar assertion about the benefits of writing European romance compared to America romance: 'Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him [the author] as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America' (IV:3). This preface appears to claim that the experiences of living and writing in Europe, and in particular Italy, have further enlightened Hawthorne to the difficulties of writing romance in his own country, for the American romance writer must attempt to write 'a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity,' which he declares 'is happily the case with my dear native land' (IV:3). He goes on to state that 'It will be very long, I trust, before romance writers may find congenial and easily handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers, need ruin to make them grow' (IV:3). The suggestion that the essential subjects of romance (shadow, antiquity, mystery, picturesque and gloomy wrongs) cannot exist where there is no ruin, where there is nothing old or declining which might somehow form the context for such themes, the idea that romance in some way requires ruin, is an idea which I will continually return to in my examination of Hawthorne's longer-fiction.

During his time in Italy and England, Hawthorne, as my examination of his European notebooks will show, was fascinated by the ruin and decay he observed; similarly, <u>The Marble Faun</u> is a novel in which images of decay and abstract notions of ruin and decline play an integral part. The decay and ruin of Rome provides the backdrop of and atmosphere for his novel; but as well as this, ruin, in the form of a retelling of the fall of man, is also the

subject of this romance. The composition of <u>The Marble Faun</u> therefore appears to confirm Hawthorne's assertion in its preface that ruin is somehow essential to the creation of romance literature. And yet, as I discussed at the beginning of this introduction, what Hawthorne says about romance in <u>The Marble Faun</u> preface does not quite fit with the actualities of his three previous novels. It is clear that for the American novels, particularly the two I will examine, <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> and <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, elements of shadow, antiquity, mystery, picturesque and gloomy wrongs, the elements which he would later claim to be essential to romance and yet lacking in America, are central. Furthermore, in each romance, ruin, both as an abstract concept entwined with the central themes of each romance and as explicit images, is present throughout.

The idea that writing romance in and about America is difficult compared to European romance because America lacks any kind of ruin is, at the very least, problematic when considered in light of Hawthorne's early American romances. Yet, the notion that ideas of ruin and decay are entwined with romance as a transatlantic genre is one which forms the starting point of my research and allows me to consider in the rest of my thesis how decay and ruin fit within the intricacies of the imagination-reality balance of romance and whether understanding ruin in Hawthorne's writing can help to shed light upon the ways in which Hawthorne's brand of romance was governed by a distinctly transatlantic conception of ruin.

Chapter 1: Ruins of "The Custom-House" –

The Upper and Lower 'Stories'

Ruins of "The Custom-House" – The Upper and Lower 'Stories'

I will begin my analysis of images and themes of decay and ruin in Nathaniel Hawthorne's

The Scarlet Letter (1850) by looking first of all at his introductory sketch, "The Custom-

House," which serves as a preface to The Scarlet Letter. In "The Custom-House" Hawthorne

gives an account of the time he spent working in Salem's Custom House between April 1846

and June 1849. The central narrative of The Scarlet Letter is set in Boston between 1642-

1649 and depicts the aftermath of the affair between the married Hester Prynne and her

pastor, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, where Hester is punished by the Puritan

community, which judges that she must wear a scarlet 'A' upon her chest. "The Custom-

House" section of the text serves as a kind of preface to the central narrative through

Hawthorne's fictionalised account of his discovery, a century or so after the fictional events

in The Scarlet Letter, of the scarlet letter in the second floor record room of the Custom

House. But, this introductory section offers much more than a fictional explanation of the

basis of Hawthorne's tale or an autobiographical account of the time he spent working in the

Custom House. I will approach "The Custom-House" in two ways. Firstly, I will look at how

Hawthorne's complex relationship with his hometown of Salem can be understood through a

system of ruin images in the text. Central to this analysis will be the significance of the

narrator, ostensibly a version of Hawthorne himself, whose often elusive position situates the

text somewhere between autobiography and fiction. Secondly, as I examine the significance

of ruin imagery in this represented relationship between Hawthorne and Salem, I will also

point to the ways in which "The Custom-House" can be seen to introduce many of the

important conceptions of decay and ruin which will be central to my analysis of The Scarlet

Letter. Furthermore, the transatlantic scope of "The Custom-House" places these notions of

decay and ruin within a context which will become increasingly pertinent within this thesis.

As I shall demonstrate in due course, many of the notions of decay and ruin introduced within

"The Custom-House" are relevant to Hawthorne's later romances as ideas and images which are either reinforced or, at times, subverted, especially by his later encounters with European antiquity. My analysis of "The Custom-House" will be based on an already established critical model which views the text as bifurcated between a lower and an upper story, reflected in the structure of the actual Salem Custom House building. In this sense I will argue that there is a distinct difference between the effects of the ruin imagery on the lower story, more readily associated with the autobiographical facts of Hawthorne's life, and those of the upper story, where the tale of the discovery of the scarlet letter takes places and where ruin no longer suggests notions of decline and stagnation, as in the lower floor, but artistic inspiration and new, more positive, formulations of historical relations.

"The Custom-House" Introductory Preface

Comparing "The Custom-House" to the prefaces of Hawthorne's other romances, it is clear that this text is markedly different from those much more conventional prefaces. The prefaces to The House of the Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun are all conventional in the sense that they outline Hawthorne's intentions and also often his reasons for writing the text in the way that he did.[1] Indeed, with the publication of the second edition of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne added a new and more conventional preface, indicating that "The Custom-House," subtitled 'Introductory to The Scarlet Letter' and described as the 'Custom-House sketch' (I:4), is unmistakably something different. While different from

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[1] For instance in the preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne states: 'When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod, - or, rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly, - thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude. A high truth, indeed, fairly, finely, and skilfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work of fiction, may add an artistic glory, but is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first' (II:3).

Hawthorne's other prefaces, "The Custom-House" does bear close resemblance to another piece of writing by Hawthorne named after another significant building from his life, namely, "The Old Manse" preface to his collection of short stories <u>Mosses from an Old Manse</u> (1846).[2] "The Custom-House" and "The Old Manse" are similar in that they are both extended autobiographical prefaces in which Hawthorne looks back upon a period of his life characterised by his time spent in or around one specific building. Since "The Custom-House" was supposed to be part of a series of sketches/short stories which were to be included in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, its initial function was the same as "The Old Manse." However, in its final role as a preface to a full-length romance rather than a series of stories, "The Custom-House" functions differently. "The Old Manse" is about the building where the stories which follow were written, while "The Custom-House" has a much more complex relationship with the text which follows it, introducing themes and ideas which will recur in the central narrative.[3] The greater part of "The Custom-House" preface consists of Hawthorne's recollections of the time he spent working as an executive officer in the Salem Custom House up until his acrimonious departure from the position in June 1846.[4] As James R. Mellows states in his biography of Hawthorne, "The Custom-House" had incensed many of the local Whigs through its 'acid sketches of the sleepy and parochial politicians of his

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[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne, <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. X: Mosses from an Old Manse</u>, ed. William Charvat et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1974).

[3] For a further discussion of the connections between "The Custom-House" and "The Old Manse" preface, see Newberry, <u>Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties</u>, pp134-166; James M. Cox, "<u>The Scarlet Letter</u> through the "Old Manse" and "The Custom-House,"" VQR, Vol. 51, No. 3, (1975) 432-47.

[4] Hawthorne was granted the role as surveyor of Salem Custom House through his contacts among the Salem Democrats, especially the historian George Bancroft and the future president Franklin Pierce. With the election of the Whig Zachary Taylor, Hawthorne, who was not directly involved in the Democrat Party, found himself at the centre of a party struggle as the new administration looked to replace him with someone from their own party. Despite his protests that he had not been appointed 'as a reward for political services,' Hawthorne was duly replaced, but only after a rather angry and public quarrel with some of the local Whig politicians. Nathaniel Hawthorne to George Hillard, March 5th, 1849, in Nathaniel Hawthorne, <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. XVI: The Letters 1843-1853</u>, ed. Thomas Woodson et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1985) 263. For an account of Hawthorne's dismissal from the Salem Custom House and how these events influenced the writing of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> see, Stephen Nissenbaum, "The Firing of Nathaniel Hawthorne," <u>Essex Institute Historical Collections</u>, Vol. 114 (April 1978) 57-78. See also, Arlin Turner, <u>Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 177-188.

home town, and his urbane and condescending treatment of his own removal from office'.[5]

Indeed it was the objections of so many of his fellow Salemites which led Hawthorne to add

the preface to the second edition of The Scarlet Letter in which he defends his inclusion of

"The Custom-House," playfully stating that he had considered removing the preface because

'the public disapprobation would weigh very heavily on him, were he conscious of deserving

it' but that, after consideration, it appeared to him 'that the only remarkable features of the

sketch are its frank and genuine good-humour, and the general accuracy with which he has

conveyed his sincere impressions of the characters therein described' (I:1). As we will see,

however, "The Custom-House" does contain controversial character sketches of some of

Hawthorne's colleagues in the Salem Custom House.

The status of "The Custom-House" as an introductory sketch rather than a preface offers a

number of interpretive difficulties. Since the mid-twentieth century, the importance of "The

Custom-House" to The Scarlet Letter has been established by a number of modern critics.

However, as Marshal Van Deusen points out, up until the 1960s, many critics had 'pretty

consistently seen "The Custom-House" as an inappropriate introduction to The Scarlet Letter,

trivial in matter and unworthy in manner; and thus [they]…shrugged it off as irrelevant to the

"masterpiece" which follows it'.[6] The dismissal of "The Custom-House" as irrelevant to The

Scarlet Letter stems mainly from the fact that it is so extensive in its description of

Hawthorne's home town of Salem, its Custom House, and the men who worked there. Apart

from Hawthorne's account of his supposed discovery of the scarlet letter in the upper floor of

the Custom House and his description of the imaginative processes intrinsic to the creation of

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[5] James R Mellows, Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980) 316.
[6] Marshal Van Deusen, "Narrative Tone in "The Custom-House" and The Scarlet Letter," Nineteenth Century Fiction (1966), 61.

the novel, it is not immediately obvious why the bulk of "The Custom-House" should be relevant to the main text of The Scarlet Letter. The fact that critical perception of "The Custom-House" has changed so much over time is itself an illustration of the problems concerning how it should be read. Hawthorne himself heightens these difficulties by stating in his preface to the second edition of The Scarlet Letter that 'The sketch might, perhaps, have been wholly omitted, without loss to the public or detriment to the book' (I:1). I would suggest, however, that this is an example of Hawthorne being characteristically elusive; the fact that he added a preface to the second edition which tells the reader of his considerations about removing the introductory sketch and his decision to include it anyway, indicates that Hawthorne believed "The Custom-House" to be as important to The Scarlet Letter as many modern critics do. The importance of "The Custom-House" in contemporary criticism can be seen from the work of eminent Hawthorne critics such as Nina Baym who claims that 'The Scarlet Letter can be read without "The Custom-House," "The Custom-House" without The Scarlet Letter. When read together, however, the two produce a whole that is different from either part'.[7] Similarly, Richard H. Millington argues that, since "The Custom-House" 'enacts and recommends a particular stance towards the experience of inhabiting a community,' an idea central to Millington's wider thesis, it 'establishes...the spirit in which the book it introduces should be read'.[8] In what follows, I will examine the way in which the nineteenth century set "The Custom-House" introduces many of the complexities surrounding the notion of American ruin, complexities which will, in turn, be unpacked and reworked within the seventeen century setting of The Scarlet Letter.

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[7] Nina Baym, The Scarlet Letter: A Reading (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 101.
[8] Richard H. Millington, Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 64.
For further discussions of the importance of "The Custom-House" to The Scarlet Letter, see
Christine Brooke-Rose, "A for But: "The Custom-House" in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter," Word and Image, 3, Vol. 2 (1987) 143-55; David Stouck, "The Surveyor of "The Custom-House": A Narrator for The Scarlet Letter," The Centennial Review 15 (1971) 309-29; Jerome Loving, "Hawthorne's Awakening in the Custom House," in Lost in the Customhouse: Authorship in the American Renaissance, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1993) 19-34.

At the beginning of "The Custom-House," Hawthorne describes how in writing this preface

he was struck once more by 'the autobiographical impulse' (I:3) which inspired "The Old

Manse." And yet, this new 'autobiographical impulse' is contradicted by the fact that "The

Custom-House" ends with the fictional discovery of the scarlet letter. As a consequence, it is

difficult to categorise "The Custom-House" as either autobiography or fiction. Hawthorne

gives one of the most telling descriptions of the text in a letter to his friend Horatio Bridge,

where he talks of writing 'an introduction to this book [The Scarlet Letter], giving a sketch of

my Custom-House life, with an imaginative touch here and there'.[9] As we will see, such

imaginative touches are supplemented by the use of an elusive and playful narrator. Thomas

R. Moore argues that 'in a preface or introduction readers usually expect to believe what they

read; the preface is supposed to be the writer speaking honestly to the reader, without

assuming the pose of character or mask of narrative persona….But Hawthorne is not

straightforward here, and the "truth" is an elusive evolving entity'.[10] Given that "The

Custom-House" is narrated by a narrative persona who only partially coincides with

Hawthorne himself, my analysis will maintain a necessary and, unless stated otherwise,

implied distinction between the 'Hawthorne' narrating the text and the Hawthorne who wrote

"The Custom-House" and The Scarlet Letter.

The Ruined Wharves of Salem

In my analysis of decay and ruin in "The Custom-House" I will examine the text within the

context of Newberry's statement that 'The structure of "The Custom-House" preface is

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[9] Nathaniel Hawthorne, Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XVI: The Letters, 1843–1853, ed. Thomas Woodson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980) 159.
[10] Moore, A Thick and Darksome Veil, 86; for a further discussion of the elusive nature of truth in "The Custom-House," see Zachary Turpin, "Hawthorne the Unreliablist: His Epistemology in "The Custom-House" and Other Prefaces," ESQ, Vol. 60, No. 4, (2014) 487-520.

bifurcated, a division reflecting the two-storied structure of the Custom-House itself".[11] In doing so I will argue that the lower story of "The Custom-House" encompasses not only the lower floor of the building, but also Hawthorne's descriptions of Salem. This lower 'story' constitutes all of the aspects of "The Custom-House" which have their foundation in reality: the condition of contemporary Salem, Hawthorne's hereditary connections to the town's Puritan history, and life in the Custom House itself, including Hawthorne's colleagues. The upper 'story' of the Custom House is also the realm of the imagination, in which Hawthorne discovers the scarlet letter. John Carlos Rowe describes the upper floor as 'a marginal space,' an 'explicitly liminal place,' 'the locus classicus of the aesthetic, transnational space,' which 'marks precisely the national border as the model for other boundaries, such as those dividing past from present, civilisation from wilderness, divine from human, spiritual from material'.[12] In short, I suggest, the contrast between lower floor and upper floor marks the distinction between reality and romance. I want to explore this split in terms of how Hawthorne seems to understand the possibilities and meanings of ruin and decay on each level. I will show that on the lower 'story' Hawthorne conveys his problematic and fundamentally restrictive relationship to his hometown of Salem through a series of images of present day American ruin both implied and direct. In contrast, the upper floor is Hawthorne's 'imaginary realm' where he discovers the ruined scarlet letter and its accompanying manuscript; here we see a ruined artefact which Hawthorne endows with artistic and historical potential.

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[11] Frederick Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 152.
[12] John Carlos Rowe, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and Transnationality," 91.

The depiction of Salem in the lower 'story' of "The Custom-House" constitutes one of the most prominent images of ruin within this preface. Salem was founded in 1629, initially as the first specifically Puritan settlement in America. By the early nineteenth century, Salem had become one of the busiest commercial ports in America. The pinnacle of the town's prosperity came in 1807 when, as a cosmopolitan seaport, its population numbered ten thousand and its fleet around two hundred vessels. However, the War of 1812 with Britain, coupled with changes in global trade and the growth of other American ports such as New York, meant that by the mid-nineteenth century Salem was a town in economic decline.[13] Thus, in Hawthorne's depiction of Salem's dockside, what was 'in the days of old King Derby…a bustling wharf' is now a place 'burdened with decayed wooden warehouses, and exhibits few or no symptoms of commercial life; except, perhaps, a bark or brig, halfway down its melancholy length, discharging hides; or nearer at hand, a Nova Scotia schooner, pitching out her cargo of fire-wood' (I:4).[14] These decaying wooden warehouses of Salem's dockside stand as impermanent monuments to the decline of a relatively new town. But these wooden warehouses present a stark contrast to the kind of ruined edifices left by the declining cities of Europe because they will have disappeared long before the ruined abbeys of England or the ancient ruined monuments of Rome which would later fascinate Hawthorne on his European sojourn. As such, the ruined wharves and warehouses of Salem are illustrations of what Nick Yablon calls 'the most glaring anomalies of America's ruins, their temporal properties,' which he terms their 'untimeliness'.[15] Salem's ruins are untimely in that they are 'lacking in the temporal distance and discontinuity afforded by ancient ruins,' meaning that

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[13] Wendell Garrett, "Nineteenth-Century Salem" in Hawthorne Revisited, ed. Gordon Hyatt (Massachusetts: Lenox Library Association 2004) 31-38. For a detailed examination of Salem's decline, see: Robert Booth, Death of an Empire: The Rise and Murderous Fall of Salem, America's Richest City, (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2011)

[14] 'King Derby' was Elias Haskett Derby (1739-1799), son of Captain Richard Derby, the maritime merchant who started the business that helped establish Salem as an important centre of maritime trade in the late eighteenth century.

[15] Yablon, Untimely Ruins, 10.

they thwart 'the pleasures of nostalgia and antiquarianism'.[16] Although Salem's ruined

wharves and warehouses do stir up thoughts of past glories, the decline which they signify is

far too recent to offer any nostalgic pleasure; these are ruins which signify Salem's ongoing

deterioration, as opposed to ancient European ruins, which often stand as memorials to great

societies and civilisations of the past.

Lawrence Buell claims that the depiction of a ruined Salem in "The Custom-House" 'portrays

a nineteenth-century already moribund…the sense that the whole new world experiment may

be fizzling out'.[17] But although it is possible to view Hawthorne's depiction of Salem as an

indictment of the entire New World, further analysis seems to demonstrate that this kind of

decline is specific to Salem.[18] Hawthorne describes his home-town as 'scorned…by her own

merchants and ship-owners, who permit her wharves to crumble to ruin, while their ventures

go to swell, needlessly and imperceptibly, the mighty flood of commerce at New York or

Boston' (I:6). Salem's rise and fall had been governed by its overseas trade which saw it

grow into a hugely prosperous port in the early years of the Republic, only to fall into decline

as foreign (and domestic) trade was more readily undertaken with Boston and New York.

Therefore, while the wharves and warehouses of Salem may typify what de Tocqueville

called America's 'day-old' ruins, they nonetheless demonstrate the way in which ruin in

Hawthorne's writing very often sits within a transatlantic (and in this case global) context.

The Salem Custom House, although not a ruin itself, stands as reminder of Salem's former

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[16] Yablon, Untimely Ruins, 10.

[17] Lawrence Buell, "Hawthorne and the Problem of "American" Fiction: The Example of The Scarlet Letter," in Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays, ed. Millicent Bell (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005) 78.

[18] Nancy Lusignan Schultz argues that the image of mid-nineteenth century Salem in decline was, to some extent, Hawthorne's own construction but a construction which in turn 'contributed to the mythology of Salem's history' (168). Schultz, "Salem as Hawthorne's Creation," in Salem: Place, Myth and Memory, ed. Dane Anthony Morrison & Nancy Lusignan Schultz, (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Northeastern University Press, 2004) 163-84.

significance as hub of transnational trade. As Rowe notes, on the lower floor of the Custom House, 'the identification of products according to their national origins is crucial for the imposition of duties and tariffs and the general regulation of what is permissible and forbidden within the republic'.[19] As conduits of Salem's global commerce, the building, and Hawthorne's official role within it, help to maintain America's geographic identity within a transnational, transatlantic context.

While Salem's recent past is important in understanding its status in "The Custom-House" as a site of contemporary American decay, its Puritan heritage is equally significant. Salem's Puritan history is inexorably linked to Hawthorne's artistic identity. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, Robert Milder identifies Salem as the 'ancestral home and ground of [his] identity' and one of the key geographical places that were the scene and literal or figurative subject of Hawthorne's writing. Milder goes on to describe Salem, where Hawthorne resided for the first thirty years of his life, as his 'formative' habitation, one which would be 'with him, *in* him, and in his writing until the last, even during his European years'.[20] The relationship between Hawthorne and Salem described in "The Custom-House" is one based on a return to the town of his birth after an extended absence. While Salem holds great significance for Hawthorne both personally and artistically, "The Custom-House" demonstrates that this association is far from straightforward. Hawthorne writes that 'though invariably happiest elsewhere, there is within me a feeling for old Salem, which, in lack of a better phrase, I must be content to call affection' (I:8). In attributing his ambivalent relationship with Salem 'to the deep and aged roots which my family has struck into the soil' (I:8), Hawthorne introduces an important metaphor which runs throughout the course of his

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[19] Rowe, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and Transnationality," 91.
[20] Milder, Hawthorne's Habitations, 30.

writing. This metaphor of roots becomes prominent in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> as a way of describing and then subverting, through association with images of ruin and decay, the Puritans' desire to 'plant' their society in the New World. In "The Custom-House" root metaphors describe Hawthorne's own connections to Salem and its Puritan past. Hawthorne understands these metaphorical roots as stretching back 'nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement which has since become a city' (I:8). The 'original Briton' Hawthorne refers to here is William Hathorne (Hawthorne added the 'w' to the ancient spelling of his name sometime after he left college), who was part of the Puritan migration to New England and a member of John Winthrop's Massachusetts Bay Colony. Hathorne arrived in New England between 1630 and 1633, first settling in Dorchester, before moving to Salem by 1636.[21] Hawthorne attempts to further explain the connection he feels to Salem through reference to the fact that Hawthorne and his descendants' bodies have become part of Salem's soil:

> And here his descendants have been born and died, and have mingled their
> earthy substance with the soil; until no small portion of it must necessarily be
> akin to the mortal frame wherewith, for a little while, I walk the streets. In
> part, therefore, the attachment which I speak of is the mere sensuous
> sympathy of dust for dust (I:8-9).

Ostensibly, the two systems of metaphors which Hawthorne utilises, the metaphors of ruin and plantation, are semantically opposed. The former denotes a process of decline through degeneration, while the latter signifies a process of natural growth. But the above passage

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[21] Mellows, <u>Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times</u>, 11.

represents an example of the way in which the planting metaphors of "The Custom-House" and The Scarlet Letter often interlink and overlap with a series of ruin metaphors, to construct a bipartite system which reflects the complexities of historical and transatlantic relations. Hawthorne's ancestors came from Britain and put down roots in Salem, and when they died their decayed bodies added to the soil and made it receptive to new roots. In his collection of essays, Our Old Home, published in 1863 after his return from Europe, Hawthorne restates his idea of Puritan roots in an explicitly transatlantic context:

> When our forefathers left the old home, they pulled up many of their roots, but trailed along with them others, which were never snapt asunder by the tug of such a lengthening distance, nor have been torn out of the original soil by the violence of subsequent struggles, nor severed by the edge of the sword. Even so late as these days, they remain entangled with our heart-strings.[22]

Certainly Hawthorne's time spent living and working in England enhanced his perceptions of his English heritage, as is evident in this idea of transatlantic roots, a point which will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this thesis. However, as my analysis of the depiction of the lingering English character of the Puritan settlers in The Scarlet Letter will demonstrate, even before his time in England, Hawthorne understood his connection to Puritan history as one which stretched across the Atlantic, back to the Puritans' ancestral home in Old England.

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[22] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. V: Our Old Home, ed. William Charvat et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970) 18-19.

Thus far we have attended to the way that as Hawthorne looks back to his time in the Custom House, he attributes his bond with Salem to 'that home feeling' he experiences in the town's history. And yet, while this connection to the past, communicated through the metaphorical link between himself and the soil of Salem, arouses in him something which he is 'content to call affection,' Hawthorne also indicates his need to escape from the connection that ties him to the town of his birth. Coming to work in the Custom House after six years' absence from Salem seems to have re-alerted Hawthorne to the perpetual cycle of birth and death in the same location which makes his familial connection to Salem seem oppressive as well as familiar. The possibility that he might live and die in Salem as his ancestors did is taken as

> evidence that the connection, which has become an unhealthy one, should at last be severed. Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted for too long a series of generations in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth (I:11-12).

The roots or plantation metaphor is revisited here in order to suggest that the inevitable result of his family's continual cycle of birth and death in Salem would be the stagnation of 'human nature.' As we will see, Hawthorne articulated a similar ambivalence, using similar metaphors, in contemplating an English country churchyard in Our Old Home. In both cases, the cycle which, through the decay of previous generations' bodies, results in the soil becoming a metaphor for a family's connection to one place, simultaneously becomes a vehicle for articulating the threat that this repeated sequence of birth and death in one location poses to such a family. The ruined wharves and warehouses of Salem can, in this

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context, be read as a symptom of the stagnation which Salem threatens in the lower floor of

"The Custom-House." These decaying structures are symbols of the economic stagnation of

the town, but they can also be read as metaphors for the potential stagnation and decline of

Hawthorne and his family were they to remain in Salem. The only way to escape this threat

of stagnation, Hawthorne proposes, is through relocation to a new place; he and his family

must move away from Salem and begin again in a new location. Hawthorne states that this

kind of 'frequent transplantation is perhaps better for the stock' (I:9) and therefore preferable

to remaining in one place for too long. Hawthorne's use of 'transplantation' in this manner is

essential to my analysis of "The Custom-House" and The Scarlet Letter because it allows us

to begin to understand the complexities which, in these texts, accompany the attempt or

desire to move away from a specific location. The extended metaphor of transplantation

entails the relocation of Hawthorne and his family from the stagnating soil of Salem to

'unaccustomed earth.' Henry James sees Hawthorne's attitude towards his hometown as a

typically American response to history: 'it is only in a country where newness and change

and brevity of tenure are the common substance of life that the fact of one's ancestors having

lived for a hundred and seventy years in a single spot would become an element of one's own

morality'.[23] In one sense, Hawthorne's modern day American attitude to his forebears,

demonstrated through the use of root and soil metaphors, effectively reverses the motivations

of those 'original' Britons whose main motivation was to ensure the effective 'transplanting'

of their society to the virgin soil of the New World. It seems that while Hawthorne retains

some sense of affection for his ancestral home of Salem, he feels that the soil which once

offered his ancestors hope of a new beginning has become stagnant and deadening. Yet, in an

illustration of Hawthorne's complex relationship with Salem, this very desire to remove

himself from the place of his ancestors necessarily highlights a lasting connection with them,

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[23] James, Hawthorne, 32.

since Hawthorne's hope that his children will 'strike their roots into unaccustomed earth'

echoes the motivations of his Puritan forefathers, those original Britons who wished to escape

the oppression of Britain and transplant themselves to a promising New World.

The stifling effect of the Custom House upon Hawthorne's imaginative faculties does not

only exert itself during his daytime work in this building:

> The same torpor, as regarded the capacity for intellectual effort,
>
> accompanied me home, and weighed upon me in the chamber which I most
>
> absurdly termed my study. Nor did it quit me, when, late at night, I sat in the
>
> deserted parlour, lighted only by the glimmering coal-fire and the moon,
>
> striving to picture forth imaginary scenes, which, the next day, might flow
>
> out on the brightening page in many-hued description (I:35).

"The Custom-House" thus suggests that Hawthorne's role as Surveyor of the Salem Custom-

House is incompatible with his artistic ambitions. Indeed, Hawthorne fears that the

atmosphere of the Custom-House does not simply suppress his imaginative capabilities, but

actively weakens them: 'it is any thing but agreeable to be haunted by a suspicion that one's

intellect is dwindling away; or exhaling, without your consciousness, like ether out of a phial;

so that, at every glance, you find a smaller and less volatile residuum' (I:38). Hawthorne's

'dwindling' imaginative capabilities thus present another image of ruin (or at least

forthcoming ruin) in "The Custom-House" – that of his own intellectual or imaginative ruin.

In a letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow dated 11th November 1847, Hawthorne writes, 'I

am trying to resume my pen; but the influences of my situation and customary associates are

so anti-literary, that I know not whether I shall succeed. Whenever I sit alone, or walk alone,

I find myself dreaming about stories, as of old; but these forenoons in the Custom-House undo all that the afternoons and evenings have done' (XVI:215). Hawthorne was not completely unable to achieve any artistic output during his time in the Custom House, but it was much reduced:

> Hawthorne's literary efforts during his three-year term as surveyor were scant. His published pieces consisted only of his introductory sketch, "The Old Manse"; a short story, "The Unpardonable Sin" (later retitled "Ethan Brand"), which he regarded as a fragment of a longer work; and a lengthy but routine historical sketch "Main Street." Quite possibly, he may also have begun work on two other stories, "The Great Stone Face" and "The Snow Image," both of which were published in 1850.[24]

Hawthorne's representation of himself in "The Custom-House" as someone under threat of intellectual ruin therefore had its foundation in the realities of his literary output during his time as surveyor. Yet the fear of intellectual decay expressed in "The Custom-House" can also be read ironically: Hawthorne may have felt his artistic faculties leaving him during his time in the Salem Custom House but the reader is aware of the fact that this fear is being expressed in the preface to a novel, the existence of which shows that his fear of intellectual ruin was unfounded. What is certain, though, is that Hawthorne did experience creative decline towards the end of his career before and after the publication of The Marble Faun in 1860 when he made a number of failed attempts to write another novel. Thus, this thesis, focused as it us upon the themes and images of ruin within Hawthorne's romances, is bookended by discussion of his own intellectual decay.

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[24] James R Mellows, Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980) 291

Human Ruins of the Lower Story

As well as detailing Hawthorne's complex relationship to Salem through images of decay, soil, roots and (trans)plantation, the story of the lower story of the Custom House also contains descriptions of some of Hawthorne's fellow Custom House workers. Descriptive sketches of the Collector and Inspector of the Salem Custom House articulate, again through images of ruin, a certain anxiety about the possible consequences of a life spent working as a Custom House surveyor. These descriptions are important not only because they indicate Hawthorne's fears over what his own future might have been had he remained working as Surveyor, but because of what they say about an individual's relationship to his or her own personal or collective history. These sketches, particularly the one of the Custom House Collector, General Miller, are also valuable to my analysis because of the manner in which ideas of ruin figure within them. The depiction of the General anticipates the notion, so central to The Scarlet Letter, that humans, as well as buildings and other physical structures, can be viewed as ruins. However, as we shall see, the General's decay differs from that of the human ruins of The Scarlet Letter in many ways. The General's physical decay is itself much more reminiscent of the decay of a building than the more abstract notions of human decay which are evident in The Scarlet Letter.

The extended depiction of the Collector, General Miller, is called both 'a sketch' (I:19) and a 'portrait' (I:21) by the Hawthorne-narrator. He was a former soldier who served with distinction during the War of 1812 and worked with Hawthorne in the Salem Custom House. The General was about seventy years old and had occupied his position at the Custom House for twenty years previous to Hawthorne's arrival. He is represented in the text as an old man whose body has become physically ruined over time:

It was only with the assistance of a servant, and by leaning his hand heavily

on the iron balustrade, that he could slowly and painfully ascend the Custom-

House steps, and, with a toilsome progress across the floor, attain his

customary chair beside the fireplace (I:20).

In this sentence, the General is figured as a physical ruin whose present condition is a result of degeneration over time. The primarily physical nature of the General's ruin allows him to be repeatedly compared to the ruined American fortress of Ticonderoga, which Hawthorne describes as 'the most appropriate simile' for the General because of their shared characteristics of 'stubborn and ponderous endurance' (I:22). Fort Ticonderoga, formerly Fort Carillon, was a large eighteenth century fort built at a narrows near the south end of Lake Champlain in upstate New York. It was constructed by the French between 1754 and 1757 during the Seven Years' War (often referred to as the French and Indian War in the USA) and was of strategic importance during the eighteenth century colonial conflicts between Great Britain and France, and again to a lesser extent during the American Revolutionary War. As well as being linked by their similarly important roles in military history, the General and Ticonderoga are connected by their refusal to succumb completely to the destructive effects of time: both are enduring ruins, which, rather than being completely decimated by decay, go on functioning, despite their deteriorative condition.

Through their prominent roles in America's early history, the general and the fort have, as Fredrick Newberry states, 'shared heroic moments in the nation's history'. In addition to this, Newberry argues,

The tight chain of metaphoric associations connecting the two also relates to

Salem. Having been the first strictly Puritan settlement in the New World, a

preeminent community in Puritan times second only to Boston, and once

having boasted a renowned port of trade, Salem, like General Miller and Fort

Ticonderoga, formerly commanded the spotlight of history but has since,

except for an annual month or two of flourishing trade, suffered from shifts

of commercial centres and from the decaying effects of its own history.[25]

While Hawthorne repeatedly utilises the comparison between the General and Ticonderoga in

order to illustrate the similar characteristics of ruined man and ruined fortress, he also argues

that, aesthetically, the process of decay is very different for man and building. Hawthorne

claims that while decay only detracts from the human, the same process can have a different,

supplementary effect upon a building. As the human body ages, nature does not 'adorn the

human ruin with blossoms of new beauty, that have their roots and proper nutriment only in

the chinks and crevices of decay as she sows wall-flowers over the ruined fortress of

Ticonderoga' (I:22). In this formulation of how buildings decay, there are two separate and

contrasting effects. On one hand, the process of decay destroys the building, causing parts of

the walls to crumble and leaving 'chinks and crevices.' On the other hand, the process of

decay simultaneously allows for something to be added to the building since it is within these

gaps in the walls of the ruined building that wall flowers take root. Thus, although the process

of decay in a ruined building destroys the building's physical form, it simultaneously

enhances the building's aesthetic appearance.

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[25] Fredrick Newberry, <u>Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties</u>, 155.

This comparison between human ruin and ruined buildings demonstrates the degree to which picturesque aesthetics govern Hawthorne's representations of material ruin. As we will see, such picturesque aesthetics, in particular the relationship between the ruin and nature, are evident in both The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables. However, it is in The English Notebooks that we will see Hawthorne's most concentrated discussions of picturesque ruins. Hawthorne's time in Britain sees him encounter many ruined castles and abbeys, the kind of historic ruins which simply do not exist in America. The description of the General's ruin in "The Custom-House" is a significant early example of Hawthorne applying his interest in the aesthetics and meanings of ruins, inspired by his reading of Scott and other European Romantic writers, to the conditions of the largely ruin-free American scene.

The depiction in "The Custom-House" of the General as a human ruin is an ambiguous one. Despite the fact that the General is represented in a degenerative state of decay, this is not a wholly unfavourable portrait of Hawthorne's former colleague. The General is characterised as retaining his nobility in spite of his decay: 'Weight, solidity, firmness; this was the expression of his repose, even in such decay as had crept untimely over him' (I:21). In spite of his physical degeneration the General still communicates ideas of physical presence and permanence. In fact, Hawthorne tells us that such is the gravity of the General's physical presence that he can imagine the old soldier might yet be 'capable of flinging off his infirmities like a sick man's gown, dropping the staff of old age to seize a battle sword, and starting up once more a warrior' (I:21). The insightful observer is able to see past the General's physical decay in order to reveal the persistence of the General's character:

If his notice was sought, an expression of courtesy and interest gleamed out

upon his features; proving that there was light within him, and that it was

only the outward medium of the intellectual lamp that obstructed the rays in

their passage. The closer you penetrated to the substance of his mind, the

sounder it seemed (I:20).

This depiction of the General might be understood to prefigure what Ruskin would, in a

chapter of his Modern Painters Vol. VI, titled 'The Turnerian Picturesque,' term the 'noble

picturesque.' Ruskin's noble picturesque is a counter to what he saw as the inferior, surface

picturesque, defined by picturesque theorists such as William Gilpin. Ruskin argues that the

surface picturesque is 'eminently a *heartless* one: the lover of it seems to go forth into the

world in a temper as merciless as its rocks. All other men feel some regret at the sight of

disorder and ruin. He alone delights in both'.[26] The lover of the surface picturesque is

detached from any moral responsibility; scenes of picturesque decay are viewed exclusively

for aesthetic enjoyment and questions of poverty or degradation are largely ignored. Ruskin

explains the distinction between the noble and surface picturesque through comparing a

windmill sketched by Turner and another by Clarkson Stanfield. Turner's windmill 'depends

upon largeness of sympathy' and 'communion of heart with his subject,' whereas Stanfield's

represents 'the low school of the surface picturesque,' which is 'heartless' because 'Stanfield

is not in the least sorry for it'.[27] Ruskin goes on to give an account of 'the old tower of Calais

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[26] John Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. VI, Part V: Of Mountain Beauty (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1856) 10. For a further discussion of Ruskin's distinction between the surface and noble picturesque, see: Frances S. Connelly, "John Ruskin and the Ethics of the Picturesque," in Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg, eds. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu & Laurinda S. Dixon, (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2008) 103-109; John Macarthur, "The Heartlessness of the Picturesque: Sympathy and Disgust in Ruskin's Aesthetics," in Assemblage, No. 31 (April 1997) 126-141.
[27] Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. IV, Part V, 9-10.

church' which he often visits in France:

> The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it, the record of its years written
>
> so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and
>
> gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea
>
> grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and yet not falling; its desert
>
> of brickwork full of bolts and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a
>
> bare brown rock; its carelessness of what any one thinks or feels about it,
>
> putting forth no claim, having no beauty or desirableness, pride, nor grace;
>
> yet neither asking for pity; not, as ruins are, useless and piteous, feebly or
>
> fondly garrulous of better days; but useful still, going through its own daily
>
> work - as some old fisherman beaten and grey by storm, yet drawing his
>
> daily nets: so it stands, with no complaint about its past youth, in blanched
>
> and meagre massiveness and serviceableness, gathering human souls
>
> together underneath it.[28]

The enduring presence of the General, his nobility in spite of his decay, can be compared to

Ruskin's nobly picturesque tower. Neither the General nor the tower can be termed beautiful

in the traditional sense, but both can be appreciated by a viewer with sympathetic faculties

who is able to perceive decay or suffering 'nobly endured by unpretending strength of

heart'.[29]

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[28] Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. VI, Part V, 2-3.
[29] Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. VI, Part V, 6.

Although Hawthorne had read the first volume of Ruskin's Modern Painters when he wrote

"The Custom-House" in 1849, the fourth volume, containing Ruskin's distinction between

the noble and surface picturesque, was not published until 1856. Nonetheless, Hawthorne's

description of the General reveals a similar approach to picturesque decay to Ruskin's,

particularly to instances of human decay. In Hawthorne's writing, this approach is often

understood in terms of the moral picturesque, which Darrel Abel defines 'as an attempt to

express meanings through figures rather than explicit statement.' Hawthorne, Abel argues,

did this,

> because much of the meaning he wanted to convey was unconscious and not
>
> otherwise expressible. The technical problem involved was how to make
>
> notation of fact, the picture, graphic and solid enough to be convincingly real
>
> without obscuring intimations of deeper meaning.[30]

Abel's interest in the moral picturesque is, for the purposes of his wide ranging essays on

many different aspects of Hawthorne's writings, intentionally broad. Where his definition of

the moral picturesque relates to my interest in the human ruin, and in particular the depiction

of General Miller, is in the opposition between the material or surface elements of an object

and the 'unconscious' or spiritual aspects in which Hawthorne is so often interested. For the

General, this opposition occurs between his physical decline and his noble, enduring

character.

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[30] Darrel Abel, The Moral Picturesque: Studies in Hawthorne's Fiction (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1988)
2.

In his discussion of the moral picturesque, John Conron points to the journal entry in The American Notebooks, dated Wednesday 26th July 1837, where Hawthorne describes a scene he witnessed in a tavern where a man of 'a depressed neglected air, a soft simple-looking fellow with an anxious expression,' faces the ridicule of the establishment's patrons for enquiring about the whereabouts of his wife, a prostitute. Hawthorne writes of witnessing 'a moral picturesqueness in the contrasts of the scene, - a man moved as deeply as his nature would admit, in the midst of hardened, gibing spectators, heartless towards him' (VIII:59).[31] Conron analyses Hawthorne's moral picturesque in terms which are more directly related to the kind of aesthetic theory that Ruskin proposes. In Hawthorne's moral picturesque,

> the values of beauty and sublimity are extended to the immaterial phenomena – moral and intellectual character – that work behind and express themselves through the visible mask of the body. Moral picturesqueness is "the mark God sets on virtue": a state of virtuous (or vicious) feeling made manifest in facial expressions and body language, even in tones of voice. Its presence elicits love or sympathy or respect from viewers even before they understand what they are seeing. What makes this picturesque, Nathaniel Hawthorne suggests, is that beauties of virtuous feeling are typically complicated, even made grotesque (human nature being flawed), by physical or moral deformations. It is a beauty therefore incomplete and complicated but not yet overcome by imperfection.[32]

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[31] The character from Hawthorne's "The Old Apple Dealer," discussed briefly in Chapter 3 of this thesis can also be understood in terms of the moral picturesque.

[32] John Conron, The American Picturesque (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000) 29.

The noble and enduring character of the General can be understood as incomplete in this manner, obscured as it is by his physical deterioration. The moral picturesque demonstrates one of the ways in which Hawthorne's interest in the forms and meaning of ruin is not hampered by the absences of ancient historical sites in America. In particular, Hawthorne's writing continually returns to the various ways in which a human can be understood as ruined. However, while the moral picturesque is an appropriate lens through which to examine the General's decay, I would argue that many of Hawthorne's fictional human ruins in his romances cannot be understood in these terms. As we shall see, this is because the human ruins of the romances are very often devoid of the kind of sympathetic qualities described above. Instead, in characters such as Chillingworth and Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter and Governor Pyncheon in The House of the Seven Gables, decay does not mask inherently sympathetic qualities so much as reflect various kinds of inner moral or social corruptions.

Ruins and the Imagination

While the passage from "The Custom-House" describing the moonlit parlour is an extended metaphor for Hawthorne's process of artistic creation, it is also true that 'the essay as a whole,' its 'themes and the structure…are derived from his conception of the imagination and its requirements'.[33] It can therefore be argued that Hawthorne's depiction of the General is as much an illustration of the artistic processes and difficulties involved in representing human ruin as it is a depiction of such a ruin. In the case of the General we are told that his ruined state affects Hawthorne's ability accurately to represent his character: 'Many characteristics –

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[33] Paul John Eakin, "Hawthorne's Imagination and the Structure of "The Custom-House,"" American Literature, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Nov. 1971) 347.

and those, too, which contribute not the least forcibly to impart resemblance in a sketch –
must have vanished, or been obscured, before I met the General' (I:22). This statement
reveals the narrator's desire to achieve 'resemblance' in his verbal sketch of the General.
Hawthorne's attempt to do so has itself been foregrounded by the detrimental effects of ruin
upon the General's character. Hawthorne's apparent struggle accurately to represent the
General's character in "The Custom-House" can be seen more clearly in the most extended
comparison between the General and Ticonderoga:

> To observe and define his character, however, under such disadvantages [the
> obscuring of his character by his physical decay], was as difficult a task as to
> trace out and build up anew, in imagination, an old fortress like Ticonderoga,
> from a view of its grey and broken ruins. Here and there, perchance, the
> walls may remain almost complete; but elsewhere may be only a shapeless
> mound, cumbrous with its very strength, and overgrown, through long years
> of peace and neglect, with grass and alien weeds (I:21).

The difficulty in imaginatively reconstructing the General's character lies in the fact that it is
a reconstruction which has a responsibility towards veracity; the fact that the General is a real
person means that this imaginative reconstruction is bound to the constraints of the present
and observable reality. Because he is unable to create an accurate picture of the General's
character in the face of his decay, Hawthorne instead begins to speculate about the General's
past: 'He had slain men with his own hands, for aught I know; – certainly, they had fallen,
like blades of grass at the sweep of his scythe, before the charge to which his spirit imparted
its triumphant energy' (I:22). Hawthorne has more knowledge of the General's past, as
opposed to his inner character, but the contemplation of the General's historical endeavours

also appears to be more suited to creative interpretation. In Hawthorne's sketch "Old Ticonderoga: A Picture of the Past," truth and reality are equally problematic. The narrator of this story describes how he is shown around the ruined fortress by 'a young lieutenant of engineers, recently from West Point'.[34] This young officer has great knowledge of the site; he 'fathomed the meaning of every ditch, and formed an entire plan of the fortress from its half-obliterated lines' (XI:187). However, the narrator finds these precise explanations unhelpful: 'His description of Ticonderoga would be as accurate as a geometrical theorem, and as barren of the poetry that has clustered round its decay' (XI:187). The narrator then embarks upon his own distinctly imaginative reconstruction of the fortress's rich history: 'I closed my eyes on Ticonderoga in ruins, and cast a dream-like glance over pictures of the past, and scenes of which this spot had been the theatre' (XI:189). As in the case of the General, the historical background of the ruined fort provides an opportunity for the writer's imaginative faculty to go to work.

Hawthorne knows of the General's past because he was an eminent figure from early American history. A soldier of 'brilliant military service' (I:20), the General fought with distinction during the war of 1812. His most famous moment came during the Battle of Lundy's Lane near Niagara, New York, when he was ordered by General Jacob Jennings Brown to storm a battery of seven British cannons positioned on a hilltop. Miller's reply to General Brown, 'I'll try, sir,' became forever linked with his name'.[35] In "The Custom-House," Hawthorne claims that these words were the one thing that aided him 'in renewing and re-creating the stalwart soldier of the Niagara frontier' (I:23). He recalls 'those memorable words of his – "I'll try, Sir!" – spoken on the very verge of a desperate and heroic

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[34] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Old Ticonderoga: A Picture of the Past," in The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. XI: The Snow Image, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1974) 187.
[35] David Stephen Heidler & Jeanne T. Heidler (eds), Encyclopaedia of the War of 1812 (Annapolis: First Naval Institute Press, 1997) 352.

enterprise, and breathing the soul and spirit of New England hardihood, comprehending all perils, and encountering all' (I:23). The General's famous words demonstrate his place within a collective consciousness: as a human ruin, he is a living relic of a shared, national history. We might compare this monumentalising of a person to the beggar in Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar." Wordsworth's 'aged Beggar' (1) is also a human ruin, described in the introductory note as belonging to a class of beggars consisting of 'poor, and mostly, old and infirm persons'.[36] This ruined individual is so physically decayed that he walks 'bow-bent, his eyes for ever on the ground' (52). Wordsworth describes how, as the beggar goes from door to door asking for money or food,

> The villagers in him,
>
> Behold a record which together binds
>
> Past deeds and offices of charity
>
> Else unremembered, and so keeps alive
>
> The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years,
>
> And that half-wisdom half experience gives,
>
> Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
>
> To selfishness and cold oblivious cares (87-95).[37]

The beggar unites the villagers through their collective memories of the many times over the years when they have presented him with charity. So powerful is the effect of this collective memory that it keeps alive in these villagers a sense of community and a willingness to be kind to others. As Laurence Goldstein states, 'He [the beggar] is not only antiquity himself

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[36] William Wordsworth, "The Old Cumberland Beggar," in William Wordsworth: Selected Poems, ed. John O. Hayden (London: Penguin, 1994 [1798]) 72.
[37] Wordsworth, "The Old Cumberland Beggar," 74.

but he binds the past of each member of the community by the sympathy he enforces in them'.[38] The similarities between Hawthorne's and Wordsworth's human ruins can therefore be found in the way in which both characters have the power to unite communities though a shared history and memory. While Wordsworth's beggar connects a small village community which has given him charity over the course of many years, the General unites the people of a whole state, the majority of whom would never have seen or met him. Hawthorne's depiction of the General allows that those who know the history of the heroic deeds of one of their fellow New Englanders might recognise in those deeds the idealised qualities which constitute their shared identity as New Englanders.

As a human ruin, the General appears to offer some possibility that ruins might be valuable in the otherwise enervating atmosphere of the lower floor of the Custom House. As a noble ruin who points to a great deed of the American past, the General stands in contrast to the stark deterioration of the hollow 'day old ruins' of Salem's wharves. However, while the General 'was as much out of place' in the Salem Custom House 'as an old sword—now rusty, but which had flashed once in the battle's front, and showed still a bright gleam along its blade— would have been, among the inkstands, paper-folders, and mahogany rulers, on the Deputy Collector's desk' (I:23), he nonetheless remains associated with the oppressive reality of the lower floor of the Custom House. The General represents a historical reality too close at hand to offer any sustained escape into the more imaginative realm of romance. Lauren Berlant notes that the historical immediacy of the scene similarly disrupts the narrator's historical imaginings in 'Old Ticonderoga':

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[38] Laurence Goldstein, Ruins and Empire: The Evolution of a Theme in Augustan and Romantic Literature (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977) 117.

at the end of "Old Ticonderoga," the narrator is wrenched out of his imaginative engagement with this consecrated spot by the tolling of a bell. This bell, "given by the steam-boat Franklin," forces him to return to the scene of his present "realities"….The narrator has been called back to the law of post-revolutionary America, by a reminder of its forefather: Benjamin Franklin (who made the famous military expedition to Champlain [the site of the fort]).[39]

Hawthorne's submersion into the contemporary political life of the Republic as Custom House surveyor and the Post-revolutionary history associated with this environment offers nothing to his artistic tendencies. The threat of imaginative decline associated with his Governmental position can also be read as a scathing political critique, founded on his own acrimonious dismissal from the Salem Custom House in 1849.[40] The lower-floor of the Custom House has begun to detach him from a literary life altogether: 'Literature, its exertions and objects, were now of little moment in my regard. I cared not, at this period, for books; they were apart from me' (I:25-6). The presentness, the commonplace reality, of the ruined wharves of Salem and the General is characterised by a materiality which denies artistic conception because it does not offer the interplay between imagination and ruin which allows for the creation of romance. In the lower floor,

It was a folly, with the materiality of this daily life pressing so intrusively upon me, to attempt to fling myself back into another age; or to insist on creating the semblance of a world out of airy matter, when, at every moment,

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[39] Lauren Berlant, The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 174-5.
[40] See Larry J. Reynolds, Devils & Rebels, The Making of Hawthorne's Damned Politics, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013) 158-65.

the impalpable beauty of my soap-bubble was broken by the rude contact of

some actual circumstance (I:37).

Since 'Materiality….resists the work of romance, opposing to its magic the real as immovable substance,' Hawthorne would seemingly be doomed to intellectual ruin and artistic oblivion had he remained surveyor of the Salem Custom House.[41] However, this is, of course, not where the story ends; rather, it is where the real story begins. Hawthorne's acrimonious dismissal from his role as Surveyor allows him to return to his vocation as artist and create the famous novel which follows. "The Custom-House" describes how, while investigating some of the documents in the record room in the upper floor of the Custom House, Hawthorne comes across a small package containing, among other things, 'a certain affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded' (I:31) and 'a small roll of dingy paper' (I:32). He discovers that the papers, which give 'a reasonably complete explanation' (I:32) of the circumstances surrounding this piece of red cloth, were written by the former Surveyor of the Custom House, Mr Pue. The papers reveal that the piece of cloth, in the shape of a capital letter "A", had belonged to Hester Prynne, who in her old age dictated her story to Surveyor Pue, which he then transcribed to the aforementioned document.

"The Custom-House" represents the discovery of this scrap of cloth and accompanying manuscript as the beginning of the process that will lead to Hawthorne writing The Scarlet Letter. Immediately upon discovering the scarlet "A", and without noticing the accompanying manuscript, the narrator of "The Custom-House" begins to imagine 'how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times were signified by it' and

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[41] Neill Matheson, "Depression and Materiality in The Marble Faun," The Journal of Narrative Technique, Vol. 24, No. 3. (1994) 240.

considers 'whether the letter might not have been one of those decorations which the white men used to contrive, in order to take the eyes of Indians' (I:32). By speculating about the story behind this 'greatly frayed and defaced' (I:31) rag, this ruined piece of cloth, the narrator has begun the imaginative process by which he will construct a new story for this object. As Fernie puts it, 'the fragmentary remains afford something to work with, some basis for rumination and embellishment (not necessarily completion)'.[42] Thus, "The Custom-House" moves from being a story about the deadening decay of contemporary Salem to an examination of the imaginative possibilities of historical ruins.

As Hawthorne's speculations about the letter's function and meaning demonstrate, upon discovering the scarlet letter he has begun an attempt to imaginatively reconstruct the history of the object. Yet this process of constructing a new history of the scarlet letter cannot be achieved with only the ruined object itself. After his initial discovery of the scarlet "A" Hawthorne describes its intended use, and thus its history, as 'a riddle which…I saw little hope of solving' (I:31). As Charles Swann states, 'while the reader is told that the letter is an artefact containing considerable power, as long as its meaning remains unknown, as long as it lacks a placing narrative, it can only communicate itself to Hawthorne's "sensibilities" while "evading the analysis of" his "mind"'.[43] Deanna Fernie, who has produced the most detailed discussion of the relationship between the incomplete and the imagination in Hawthorne's account of the upper floor of the Custom House, writes that 'The letter's survival from a distant past makes it fascinating to Hawthorne, yet specifically, its survival as a fragment provokes the sort of open-ended musings that might become the basis of a fiction. Though the Surveyor's papers answer some of the factual questions….its "riddle" goes beyond simply

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[42] Fernie, Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art, 114.
[43] Charles Swann, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 79.

supplying the historical facts that would explain it'.[44] Only once Hawthorne notices Surveyor Pue's accompanying documents is he able to begin the process of imaginative reconstruction. However, this is not simply the reconstruction of the letter's history as outlined by Surveyor Pue's papers. Rather, Hawthorne uses Surveyor Pue's notes about Hester Prynne's life as the framework for his own much more comprehensive version of the events surrounding the scarlet letter. As the Hawthorne-narrator of "The Custom-House" states,

> I must not be understood as affirming that, in the dressing up of the tale, and imagining the motives and modes of passion that influenced the characters who figure in it, I have invariably confined myself within the limits of the old Surveyor's half a dozen sheets of foolscap. On the contrary, I have allowed myself, as to such points, nearly or altogether as much license as if the facts had been entirely of my own invention. What I contend for is the authenticity of the outline (I:33).

The reality is, of course, that the 'facts' – those concerning the discovery of the scarlet letter and those detailing Hester's story – are all inventions of the real Hawthorne. "The Custom-House" is a story in which the Gothic literary device of the found manuscript is appropriated as an 'outline' for the story of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>. It is the suggestive potential of the manuscript, combined with the ruined letter, which allows it to be appropriated in this manner. In this sense, the manuscript is comparable to the kind of pictorial sketch which also often functions as an outline for a larger more developed artistic work. Surveyor Pue's manuscript is, as a historical account, 'a reasonably complete explanation of the whole affair,' but to Hawthorne as an artist it offers only 'the groundwork of a tale' and thus shares

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[44] Fernie, <u>Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art</u>, 114.

similar qualities to the imperfect pictorial sketch.[45] It is here, on the upper floor of the

Custom House, that we see the imaginative engagement with ruin which Hawthorne

struggled to find on the lower floor. In the less constricting atmosphere of the upper floor,

Fernie suggests that the 'fragment or sketch forces the beholder to actively engage his or her

imagination, beginning the process by which the work becomes incorporated into the self,

and resulting in the interpretation of subject and object'.[46] Fernie goes on to claim: 'It is as if

the effort of "The Custom-House," a sketch about a place deadening to the imagination, and

at the same time, the fertile ground in which it could germinate, is directed at emphasizing the

difficulty of literary creation. It is the piece in which Hawthorne justifies his existence as

writer, and as a writer of historical Romance'.[47] And the history of the letter itself and of the

accompanying manuscript is essential in allowing this act of imaginative engagement. The

contemporary ruins of the lower floor are defined by a sense of oppressive materiality; by

contrast with the moonlit parlour of romance writing recounted in my introduction, these are

ruins of a nineteenth century American 'actuality' which offer no stimulus to the literary

imagination. Conversely, due to the historical distances involved, the ruined scarlet letter and

Surveyor Pue's sketch are ruins which, provide conditions for the confluence 'of the Actual

and the Imaginary.' It is in what Rowe terms the 'explicitly liminal place' of the upper floor

that the imagination, through its encounter with the incomplete, can engage with a more

distant and suggestive actuality - that of the Puritan past. The imaginative freedom

engendered by the ruins found on the upper floor transcends geographic as well as temporal

space. Rowe sees the upper floor as the space which defines the 'transnational' quality of the

text, its ability to not only 'go beyond the "nation"' but also 'to consider the great variety of

different social formations and personal identities excluded by a particular nation and

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[45] In Chapter 5 of this thesis I will discuss the suggestive potential of the pictorial sketches which fascinated Hawthorne during his time in Europe.

[46] Fernie, Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art, 100.

[47] Fernie, Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art, 116.

nationalism in general'.[48] In the novel which will follow, the Puritan heritage is also an Old World heritage. For Newberry, who has written at length about the significance of English heritage in The Scarlet Letter,

> Underlying the primary attention given to New England history in the novel, there resides a subsurface of English history that Hawthorne has carefully structured in order to examine American Puritans within a framework larger than the provincial boundaries of New England. This subsurface of English history alternatively interprets the condition, consciousness, and subcounsiousness of that early group of Puritan immigrants comprising the Great Migration.[49]

Newberry suggests that the genesis of the transatlantic scope of The Scarlet Letter is encoded within the discovery of Surveyor Pue's fragmentary sketch, since these 'antiquarian papers' are 'British documents, enclosed by a parchment – signed and sealed by the appointee of George II, Governor Shirley'.[50] Thus, the Puritan past, which on the lower floor threatened to oppress and stagnate Hawthorne, becomes, through the creation of a fictional ruin upon which to project his imaginative faculties, a source of artistic inspiration. We should, for this reason, Weisbuch argues, never be in doubt that the Hawthorne of "The Custom-House" is not the true Hawthorne:

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[48] Rowe, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and Transnationality," 91.
[49] Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 168.
[50] Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 162.

The Hawthorne-character *is* a character, a presented persona….We are made

too busy wondering how anyone can escape the Puritan past to doubt

whether that past really is so deep and inclusive. The Hawthorne-character

suffers Puritanism; for Hawthorne as subject searching author, Puritanism is

pure joy.[51]

In this fictional story of discovery we can see how the relationship between ruin and romance

takes place against a backdrop of (trans)national histories and origins. The association

between ruins and national identity in English literature has been examined in Anne

Janowitz's England's Ruins. Landscape ruins, in Janowitz's formulation, are icons of British

heritage which frame history and the nation. Her argument is based around the ability of

poetry, through 'the assertion of the permanence of art,' to counter the 'ruinous claims of

time'.[52] In ruin poetry,

The connection between poetry and the nation is established within the

tradition of the ruin theme, which was often closely linked to the ancient

poetic *topos* of the immortality of poetry. From the Anglo-Saxon poem

written about the ruins of what would become Bath, through the Anglo-

American Eliot asserting that he will shore his poetic fragments against ruin,

the ruin subject has been integral to the thetic life of English poetry, and in

the immortality-of-poetry *topos* was a ready vehicle for asserting the

immortality of the nation.[53]

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[51] Robert Wiesbuch, Atlantic Double-Cross (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) 156-57.
[52] Janowitz, England's Ruins, 4.
[53] Janowitz, England's Ruins, 6.

Such arguments about the importance of ruins to English poetry and national identity provide valuable contrast to the ruin themes of "The Custom-House" and The Scarlet Letter. Hawthorne's narrative can, in these respects, be seen to use ruin to link art to nation through the image of the ruined scarlet letter, rather than the ruined castle or abbey. In addition, ruins in America, as discussed in my introduction, have a complex relationship with American identity, not least because the notion of ruin often has transnational significance, thus complicating stable delineations of national identity or historical origins. Similarly, any attempt to associate ruin with permanence or immortality is inevitably complicated by myths of American exceptionalism, which, while never subscribed to in their most reductive forms by Hawthorne, can never be entirely separated from images of American ruin. Finally, the questionable actions and attitudes of the Puritans themselves mean that a ruin such as the scarlet letter can represent both national heritage and national shame, thus problematizing present day responses to it. The discovery of the scarlet letter in the upper floor of the Custom House is therefore only the beginning of Hawthorne's representations of Puritanism as a source of American ruin. In the next chapter of this thesis I will explore how ruin becomes a central and complex theme within Hawthorne's romance of the American Puritan past in The Scarlet Letter.

"The Custom-House" as Sketch

It is useful to end this chapter by returning to the definition of "The Custom-House" as 'introductory sketch.' That the suggestive potential of Surveyor Pue's ruined manuscript is comparable to the pictorial sketch raises obvious questions about the classification of "The Custom-House" as a literary sketch. Indeed, the literary sketch was a genre which Hawthorne wrote in extensively prior to becoming a writer of full length romances. In his preface to a

collection of Hawthorne's short stories, James McIntosh outlines the difference between a 'tale' and a 'sketch': 'A tale in Hawthorne's time tended to mean a self-contained short story or miniature romance, while a sketch tended to mean a short essay or essayistic story'.[54] Roy Harvey Pearce elaborates further on this, stating that:

> The sketch consists essentially of a descriptive and/or historical essay grounded on what may be called scenic pathos. That is, the writer describes in detail something he has or might have seen or reconstructs a segment of the past in a narrative of slight dimensions, and draws from his description or reconstruction a mood, or even a vaguely philosophical conclusion. The important thing is the end-product, which is always of indefinite texture – general wistfulness, polite awe, a shudder at the mysteriousness of life, resignation to mutability, and the like.[55]

Pearce goes on to examine Hawthorne's literary sketches within the confines of this definition, arguing that the sketch emphasises a 'satisfying yet "safe" emotional response' which becomes a substitute for 'specific meaning'. Kristie Hamilton argues that Hawthorne's literary sketches are more valuable than Pearce views them, precisely because of their 'ephemeral' quality. She also posits that Hawthorne's literary sketches share similar qualities to the artistic sketches he admired in Europe in that imperfection of each kind of sketch, 'created by its inception in haste, places its mode of expression in the arena of suggestion'.[56] Both of these critics' ideas about the literary sketch are useful, however, both also become

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[54] Nathaniel Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales, ed. James McIntosh (Norton: New York, 1987) ix.
[55] Roy Harvey Pearce, "Hawthorne and the Twilight of Romance" in Historicism Once More: Problems & Occasions for the American Scholar, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 194.
[56] Kristie Hamilton, "Hawthorne, Modernity, and the Literary Sketch" in The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Richard H. Millington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 100.

problematic when we attempt to apply them to "The Custom-House" 'introductory sketch'. I would argue that "The Custom House," with its complex view of history and its problematic formal elements, does not fit with Pearce's definition of the literary sketch, a point which he acknowledges, to some degree, when he states that

> In The Scarlet Letter itself only the curious "Custom House" Preface can be taken simply as a sketch. But not too simply, since Hawthorne, in setting his historical perspective, is virtually parodying that too popular, too easy form – as though to take advantage of his reader's expectations and, as it were, deliberately to turn the genre to the advantage of his romance.[57]

Pearce stops short of explaining exactly how "The Custom-House" parodies the conventions of the sketch genre but does seem to imply that this is achieved through the inherent difficulties of the text, which contrast with the genre's traditionally 'easy' qualities. Similarly, Hamilton's notion of the incomplete or hastily completed literary sketch does not fit well with "The Custom-House." Nevertheless, it could be argued that the complexity and ambiguity of "The Custom-House," is, in fact, comparable to the suggestive potential of the incomplete sketch which similarly requires or encourages imaginative engagement and multiple interpretations.

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[57] Pearce, "Hawthorne and the Twilight of Romance,"195.

Chapter 2: The Scarlet Letter and the Birth of American Ruin

The Scarlet Letter and the Birth of American Ruin

"The Custom-House" dramatizes Hawthorne's search for the kind of ruin from which

romance can be created. The discovery of the decaying scarlet letter in the upper floor of the

Custom House illustrates how the Puritan past has supplied Hawthorne with the imaginative

materials for romance, thus dispelling the threat of his own intellectual decline in present day

Salem. Yet, the Puritan decay which Hawthorne imagines is not simply that of a relic of the

discovered past in the contemporary present; rather, Hawthorne imagines colonial New

England as a time and place replete with its own forms of ruin and decay. By situating ruin

within the context of the colonial past, Hawthorne draws upon, in order to interrogate and

undermine, myths of Puritan beginnings and of American exceptionalism. In this chapter I

will place The Scarlet Letter within the generic context of the historical romance in order to

demonstrate, with reference to Sir Walter Scott's Highlanders and James Fenimore Cooper's

Indians, the significance of decaying cultures within this genre. I will then discuss the

metaphors of planting and ruin which Hawthorne appropriates from Puritan rhetoric, and

examine how these are redeployed in The Scarlet Letter to create an impression of a Puritan

settlement which, in spite of its relative youthfulness, is already characterised by decline. I

will then discuss the way in which the ruin of the characters Hester and Dimmesdale reflects

the duality of Hawthorne's romance, a narrative which functions on the scale of individual

and of nation. By examining images of ruin which relate to these two characters, I will argue

that Hawthorne depicts seventeenth century Boston as a community which exists between,

and is contrasted with, two regions of comparable ruin: to the east, the ruinous Old World and

to the west, the ancient decay of the primitive New England forest. Finally, I will suggest that

images of new growth upon decay found in these regions, particularly the recurring image of

moss-growth, suggests a formula for gradual historical progress which can be used to link

seventeenth century Boston to both the nineteenth century American present and to the Old World past.

The American Historical Romance

In 1833, Hawthorne attended a lecture in his home town of Salem by the prominent American lawyer and orator Rufus Choate. The title of the lecture was "The Importance of Illustrating New-England History by a Series of Romances like the Waverley Novels." Choate's plea centred upon the notion that such a series of novels

> would be valuable for the light they would shed upon the first one hundred
> and fifty years of our Colonial existence. They would be valuable as helps to
> history, as contributions to history, as real and authoritative documents of
> history. They would be valuable for the same reason that the other, more
> formal and graver records of our history, are so, if not quite in the same
> degree.[1]

In particular, Choate felt that the production of such American historical fiction was necessary in order to illuminate the New England Puritan past and to demonstrate the manner in which the Puritans' 'spirit of liberty....was strengthened and reinforced, until at length, instructed by wisdom, tempered by virtue, and influenced by injuries, by anger and grief and conscious worth and the sense of violated right, it burst forth here and wrought the wonders of the Revolution'.[2] Puritan history, Choate argues, should be venerated in the form of the historical romance in order to demonstrate the essential role this heritage played in the

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[1] Rufus Choate, "The Importance of Illustrating New-England History by a Series of Romances like the Waverley Novels," in <u>The Works of Rufus Choate, Vol 1</u>, ed. Samuel Gilman Brown (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862) 321.
[2] Choate, "Of Illustrating New-England History," 353.

construction of the present day American character and of the founding of the American Republic. The nineteenth century American historian George Bancroft similarly stressed the notion that New England's Puritan past was the foundation of the Republican present:

> the New England immigrants were the servants of posterity…the men who, as they first trod the soil of the New World, scattered the seminal principles of republican freedom and national independence…[Thus] America developed her choice from within herself…A revolution, unexpected in the moment of its coming, but prepared by glorious forerunners, grew naturally and necessarily out of the series of past events…[When the] hour of the American revolution was come….[the] people of the continent….obeyed one general impulse, as the earth in spring listens to the command of nature.[3]

This belief in the essential role of the Puritan character in the founding of the American Republic demonstrates the way in which the eighteenth and nineteenth century myth of American exceptionalism can be traced back to myths concerning the Puritan forefathers. The Puritan is honoured as a visionary of liberty and individualism, the same values which would be celebrated as the defining characteristics of those Americans who looked to break from British oppression during the American Revolution.

Choate's entreaty resonated with Hawthorne not least since Sir Walter Scott was perhaps Hawthorne's greatest literary hero. He had read all of Scott's novels as a youth, and

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[3] George Bancroft, <u>A History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent</u>, quoted in Sacvan Bercovitch, <u>The Office of the Scarlet Letter</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 37.

continued to read them to his family into his old age.[4] Hawthorne's tales and short stories,

written in the years before he took up the position in the Salem Custom House in 1846,

constitute a detailed examination of Puritan history. However, it was with The Scarlet Letter,

his first full length romance, published in 1850, that Hawthorne responded to Choate's call

for the creation of a tradition of American historical romance.[5] As we shall see, however, the

historical romance of The Scarlet Letter was far from the celebration of the historical

progression from Puritan colony to American Republic called for by Choate.

The historical romance is a multifarious genre which, like its parent genre the romance,

encapsulates a number of different approaches. As such, delineating the conventions of the

historical romance is a difficult task. However, a broad definition will at this point be useful.

Helen Hughes writes that:

> Romantic writers use the past as an exotic setting to add to the 'escape' value
>
> of their stories; but it also functions as a mirror for the present. Partly
>
> because of their very difference from that of the reader's familiar world,
>
> forms of past society can be represented as ideal in some of their aspects
>
> without losing their verisimilitude.[6]

Scott's series of historical romances, often referred to as the Waverley Novels after the first

novel of the series, take place across a wide range of British and wider European historical

settings. These romances span from the twelfth century to the nineteenth, and adapt the

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[4] Such was Hawthorne's love of reading Scott's romances that he 'once expressed a wish that he hadn't so that he "might have the pleasure of reading them again."' Mellows, Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times, 41.
[5] For the most detailed examination of Hawthorne's engagement with Puritan history in his the writings before The Scarlet Letter, see Michael J. Colacurcio, The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).
[6] Helen Hughes, The Historical Romance, (London: Routledge, 1993) 5.

sensationalism and excitement of the gothic romance into distinct but identifiable scenes from the past. This 'pageantry of the past' combined with 'the adventure of heroic life, the beauty of spacious scenery, and a dramatic conception of human relations' enthralled the reading public and made Scott a global celebrity.[7] Scott's writings were hugely popular in early nineteenth century America, and ever since 'the biggest bestsellers, the favourite fictions of succeeding generations of American readers, have been historical romances'.[8]

The detailed and informed sense of history pervading Scott's novels played a significant role in attracting his American readership. Part of Choate's admiration of Scott is based upon his skill as antiquarian:

> he goes on to collect and treasure up the artificial, civil, historical features of
>
> the country. He explores its antiquities, becomes minutely familiar with
>
> every city and castle and cathedral which still stands, and with the grander
>
> ruins of all which have fallen, - familiar with every relic and trace of man
>
> and art….He gathers up all the traditions and legendary history of the place, -
>
> every story of "hopeless love, or glory won," – with the time, the spot, the
>
> circumstances, as particularly and as fondly as if he had lived there a
>
> thousand years.[9]

Ruins and other antiquities play an important role in endowing Scott's romances with a sense of historical verisimilitude. However, as well as utilising antique settings, such as ruined castles or abbeys, Scott's novels are often built around more abstracted forms of decay in

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[7] James David Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste, (London: University of California Press, 1950) 73.
[8] George Dekker, The American Historical Romance, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 1.
[9] Choate, "Of Illustrating New-England History," 322.

which societies and ways of life are depicted as antiquities. In the General Preface to the

1831 edition of The Waverley Novels, Scott writes:

> I had been a good deal in the Highlands at a time when they were much less
>
> accessible and much less visited than they have been of late years, and was
>
> acquainted with many of the old warriors of 1745, who were, like most
>
> veterans, easily induced to fight their battles over again for the benefit of a
>
> willing listener like myself. It naturally occurred to me that the ancient
>
> traditions and high spirit of a people who, living in a civilised age and
>
> country, retained so strong a tincture of manners belonging to an early period
>
> of society, must afford a subject favourable for romance, if it should not
>
> prove a curious tale marred in the telling.[10]

The clansmen provide the materials for historical romance through their lingering

connections to a disappearing mode of life and through their stories of adventure and valour.

For instance, Scott's novel Waverley (1814) takes place against the backdrop of the Jacobite

uprising of 1745, which ended with the defeat of the Jacobite cause at Culloden in 1746. The

failure of the Jacobite cause and the resulting decline of the clan system provides the texture

of decay for many of Scott's novels centring upon this historical period. It was their tenuous

existence which appealed to the historical romancer; the clans were attractive because they

lay under 'threat of extinction, fighting for a way of life that was menaced by modernity'.[11]

Scott's clansmen can be understood as a form of the noble savage, a notion identified with

the turn against Enlightenment values and the onset of the Romantic movement. Scott's noble

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[10] Sir Walter Scott, "General Preface" in Waverley, (London: Penguin, 1985 [1814]) 522.
[11] Beatriz Oria Gomez, "Rob Roy an Anti-English Hero," in Heroines and Heroes: Symbolism, Embodiment, Narratives & Identity, ed. Christopher Hart, (Kingswinford: Midrash, 2008) 198.

highland savages come 'to stand as the symbol not only for the personal savage virtues, but also for social virtues – organic ties of fellowship and leadership – and even for a sense of tribal and national identity'; such figures 'helped to make nineteenth century readers aware of their national histories, and aware also of the part played in those histories by the wild men who were their ancestors'.[12]

Scott exerted a strong influence upon many American authors of the nineteenth century, perhaps none more so than James Fenimore Cooper, whose work at times closely mimics the form of Scott's historical romances. While some Anglo-Saxon readers may have been able to view the ruined past of the noble highland savage as part of their own heritage, the writings of Cooper deal with a ruined past which was entirely distinct from the cultural background of most nineteenth century readers. Cooper's most famous romances were his <u>The Leatherstocking Tales</u> (1823-1841). This series of five historical romance novels feature the hero Natty Bumppo, a child of white American parents raised by Native Americans, known by turn as 'Leatherstocking,' 'The Pathfinder' and 'Deerslayer.' The tales are chronicles of, for the most part, the American frontier during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. <u>The Leatherstocking Tales</u> therefore tell the story of the American past, but not the history of seventeenth century Puritan New England which Choate argued would provide perfect material for historical romance.

In <u>The Last of the Mohicans</u> (1826), Cooper laments the decline of the Native American culture from which he drew much of the material for his historical romances: 'There are remnants of all these people still living on lands secured to them by the state; but they are

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[12] Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., "The Wild Man's Revenge," in <u>The Wild Man Within</u>, eds. Edward Dudley & Maximillian E. Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973) 293-4.

daily disappearing, either by deaths or by removals to scenes more congenial to their habits. In a short time there will be no remains of these extraordinary people, in those regions in which they dwelt for centuries'.[13] In The Leatherstocking Tales, Cooper utilises this backdrop of a decaying Native American culture, whose ruin runs in tandem with the decline of the white frontiersmen's way of life. Like Scott, Cooper saw the noble savage as the most poignant image of this ruined culture. Most notable of Cooper's noble savages is Chingachgook, the ever present companion to the frontiersman Hawkeye, who outlives his only son, the titular character of Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans. In The Pioneers (1827), chronologically the fourth novel of the series, Chingachgook is given a noble and poignant death:

> Hawkeye! My fathers call me to the happy hunting ground! The path is clear and the eyes of Mohegan grow young. I look – but I can see no whiteskins. There are none to be seen but kind brave Indians. Farewell, Hawkeye! You shall go with the Fire Eater and the Young Eagle to the whiteman's heaven, but I go after my fathers.[14]

Chingachook imagines his death as a return to the world of his youth before the white settlers arrived. His death would therefore reverse his own ruin and the ruin of his people, restoring the way of life that has been denied to them by American colonisation. However, this reversal can necessarily only occur in the afterlife, and Chingachook is romanticised precisely

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[13] James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans (Reading: Penguin, 1994 [1826]) 23. Other writers also saw the plight of the Native American peoples as a form of typically American ruin. In his short story, "Otter-Bag, the Oneida Chief" (1829), John Neal writes that: 'There may be no such ruins in America as are found in Europe, or in Asia, or in Africa; but other ruins there are of a prodigious magnitude – the ruins of a mighty people….in America, there are things which are to be found nowhere else on earth now – the live-wreck of a prodigious empire that has departed from before our face within the memory of man; the last of a people who have no history, and who but the other day were in possession of a quarter of the whole earth'. John Neal "Otter-Bag, the Onedia Chief" (5-6) quoted in Goddu, Gothic America, 58.

[14] James Fenimore Cooper, The Pioneers, (New York: Signet, 1964 [1827]) 401.

because of his status as last of his people. As Fielder notes, 'It must be remembered that Cooper asks of his reader not sympathy for the Indian people in general but for the Indian chief, the aristocrat at the end of his line'.[15] In contrast to the romanticised noble savage of Chingachook, the native antagonists of <u>The Last of the Mohicans</u>, the Huron tribe, are still populous. As such, they are devoid of the noble qualities of the Mohicans, as demonstrated by the brutality of the massacre of women and children at Fort William Henry, where 'The flow of blood might be likened to the outbreaking of a torrent; and as the natives became heated and maddened by the sight, many among them even kneeled to the earth, and drank freely, exultingly, hellishly, of the crimson tide'.[16]

The correlation between Scott's noble highland savage and Cooper's noble Indian savage is outlined by Scott himself, who, in the preface to his 1820 novel <u>The Monastery</u>, compares his own writing to 'the narratives of my friend Mr Cooper.' Scott also attempts to explain the appeal of Cooper's noble savage to the modern reader:

> We sympathize with his Indian chiefs and back-woodsmen, and
> acknowledge, in the characters which he presents to us, the same truth of
> human nature by which we should feel ourselves influenced if placed in the
> same condition. So much is this the case, that, though it is difficult, or almost
> impossible, to reclaim a savage, bred from his youth to war and the chase, to
> the restraints and the duties of civilized life, nothing is more easy or common
> than to find men who have been educated in all the habits and comforts of

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[15] Leslie Fielder, <u>Love and Death in the American Novel</u> (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) 172.
[16] Cooper, <u>The Last of the Mohicans</u>, 207-8.

improved society, willing to exchange them for the wild labours of the hunter and the fisher.[17]

Cooper's noble savage is therefore an adaptation of the model offered by Scott in earlier historical romances. Furthermore, the nature of Cooper's heroes allows for a literature which helped define an American cultural heritage which centres around the interaction between the individual and the vast American wilderness. American readers could view these tales as accounts of their own romanticised past by means of the cultural bridge of the character of Hawkeye, or Natty Bumppo, 'the half-Indian, half-Christian hero of the wilderness, seen in youth and age, in the age of tribal innocence and new American empire building'.[18] It can therefore be argued that American historical romance such as Cooper's played an important role in the process of cultural colonization. As Budick states,

> the temporal and geographical settings of the novels not only romanticize the early years of the proto-nation and serve as a means of Americanizing the genre through the use of indigenous materials, but perform the important cultural and ideological work of disseminating a vision of Americanness based on the appropriation of safe and sanitized traces of indigenousness, thereby allowing their white characters to be the 'authentic' native Americans and stake their claim to the land.[19]

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[17] Sir Walter Scott, The Monastery (Leipzig: Berhard Tauchnitz, 1859 [1820]) 11.

[18] Malcolm Bradbury, Dangerous Pilgrimages: Trans-Atlantic Mythologies & the Novel (London: Stocker & Warburg, 1995) 50.

[19] Emily Miller Budick, "The American Historical Romance: From James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne to Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, and E. L. Doctorow," in A Companion to the American Novel, ed. Alfred Bendixen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012) 148.

Just as he avidly read and enjoyed the historical romances of Scott, Hawthorne was also a keen reader of Cooper's work. In the rest of this chapter I will argue that, while Hawthorne's Puritans are not the noble savages of Cooper and Scott, Hawthorne nonetheless similarly generates romance from the perceived decay of a past society in The Scarlet Letter. As the narrator of The Marble Faun comments, 'there is reason to suspect that a people are waning to decay and ruin the moment that their life becomes fascinating either in the poet's imagination or the painter's eye' (IV:295-6). However, the proximity of the Puritans to American culture creates complexities which are not present in the work of Hawthorne's fellow romancers. The Puritans are not examples of the 'indigenous materials' described by Budick. While the Native Americans, and the highlanders to a lesser degree, are indigenous cultural 'others' whose decay allows them to be adequately distanced from the present day white-Protestant status quo, the Puritans are often viewed as the direct descendants of prevalent white-Protestant culture in modern day New England. For Choate, the link between Puritanism and modern New England culture is clear: the words of the Puritans are 'inscribed upon all the sides of our religious, political, and literary edifices, legibly and imperishably'.[20] In this reading, the Puritans are fathers of the American Revolution. However, while Hawthorne accepts Choate's challenge in his American romances, we have already seen in the previous chapter that his attitude in "The Custom-House" towards his own Puritan heritage, and his account of the links between seventeenth century Puritanism and present day New England, are much more complex than Choate's. As Bell states,

> there were real problems involved in applying this revolutionary reading to
> New England history. For had not these champions of liberty, these
> precursors of the American Revolution, expelled Roger Williams and Anne

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[20] Choate, "Of Illustrating New-England History," 334.

Hutchinson, clear representatives of individual liberty, as heretics? Had they

not even hanged Quakers and so-called "witches"? These founders, who fled

from persecution (the religious variety of "tyranny") to establish a nation in

which persecution would no longer exist –had they not been the worst

persecutors of all?[21]

For Choate, an American romance tradition would gloss over the negative aspects of early

Puritanism in order to ensure that their culture was recognised in the present day as the

foundation of the Republic. It might be true that much of history 'chills, shames, and disgusts

us,' but the romancer 'records the useful truth therefore, only, - gathering only the wheat,

wine and oil, into his garner, - leaving all the rest to putrefy or be burned'.[22] While The

Scarlet Letter identifies the importance of the Puritan past to the Republican present,

Hawthorne's historical consciousness differs greatly from Choate's sanitising perspective. As

we shall see, The Scarlet Letter does not evade 'chills, shames and disgusts.' Furthermore,

the notion that ruin existed within and stems from America's Puritan past has much wider

reaching implications than it does for the declining cultures of Scott and Cooper.

Hawthorne's vision of a Puritan society invested with decay from its very beginning

problematizes the nineteenth century myths of American Puritan heritage by appropriating

and subverting the exceptionalist rhetoric of the early Puritan settlers.

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[21] Michael Davitt Bell, Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971) 10. Roger Williams was a Puritan minister banished from Massachusetts for, among other things, his belief that there should be a separation between church and state. Anne Hutchinson was also banished from the colony during what was known as the Antinomian Controversy. Hutchinson was a charismatic and influential female member of the colony. Parallels are often drawn between her and the female protagonist of The Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne. For a further discussion of these parallels, see Michael J. Colacurcio, "Footsteps of Ann Hutchinson: The Context of The Scarlet Letter," ELH, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Sep 1972) pp.459-494.
[22] Choate, "Of Illustrating New-England History," 339, 340

Decay and the New World in Puritan Rhetoric

As Hawthorne's depiction of ruin in Puritan New England exists in a dialogue with New England Puritan rhetoric, consequently it is important to give an initial outline of some aspects of this rhetoric. Firstly, The Scarlet Letter's Boston setting is essential to understanding the significance of ruin within the novel because of the prominence of Boston within the history of American Puritanism and the city's enduring role within the myth of American exceptionalism. Boston was founded by John Winthrop who was one of the central figures in the fleet which sailed to New England in 1630 to begin a new Puritan settlement and who became the first Governor of Boston. When the fleet arrived in New England, Salem was already an established settlement, having been founded some four years earlier. However, a preliminary exploration persuaded Winthrop and his colleagues that Boston Bay, rather than Salem, should be the centre of population and government.[23]

The Puritans who embarked upon the Great Migration of 1630 to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony believed that this settlement represented a special covenant between themselves and God. They understood that the opportunity they had been afforded to establish a colony in New England had been divinely granted to them and that they had effectively been entrusted with the responsibility of founding a new Israel. We can see such ideas in the many sermons and tracts composed by the early Puritan leaders, including Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity." In this famous sermon, given during the transatlantic voyage to the New World in 1630, Winthrop states that emigrants to the new colony must consider their new home to be 'as a city upon a hill' and that

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[23] Samuel Eliot Morrison, Builders of the Bay Colony (Boston: Kessinger Publishing, 2004 [1930]) 74.

the eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our

God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his

present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the

world.[24]

Winthrop's sermon alludes to the 'Sermon on the Mount,' in which Jesus tells his listeners:

'You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden'.[25] However,

while Jesus' words were addressed to all who would listen, Winthrop's idea of a city upon a

hill was very much specific to the New England Puritans, who believed themselves to be

God's new chosen people, the new Israelites. Winthrop's use of the 'a city upon a hill' image

has become so famous that the term itself has become the sermon's alternative title. The

Puritans' belief that the whole world would be watching their colony is significant in the

manner in which it acknowledges the pressure upon the Puritans to maintain the necessary

devotion to God and succeed where the Israelites had failed. Furthermore, Winthrop's

rhetoric is a precursor of the rhetoric of the American exceptionalism of the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, described in my introduction, and on into the twentieth century.[26]

In the "City Upon a Hill" sermon, Winthrop announces that

> The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people,
>
> and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways. So that we shall see
>
> much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we

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[24] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in <u>The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology</u>, ed., Andrew Delbanco and Alan Heimert (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985[1649]) 91.

[25] Matthew 5:14.

[26] In the twentieth century, John F Kennedy and Ronald Regan would, in their own political rhetoric, both invoke Winthrop's image of 'The City Upon the Hill'.

have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us,

when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when he

shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations,

"the Lord make it like that of New England".[27]

Winthrop's declaration of a special association between Puritans and God, along with the

inferred parallels with the ancient Israelites, demonstrates the commonly held Puritan belief

in the divinely ordained nature of their transatlantic emigration westward. Moreover, evident

in Winthrop's speech is the Puritan endeavour to define the New England colony in

opposition to the land which has been left behind. As Baritz notes, the New England Puritans

believed that the success of their community would be essential to the future of mankind:

Should they succeed, their example would help even Europe to begin the

work [of the Reformation] anew, to try and rid itself of the Antichrist.

Should they succeed, the place they planted would become the hub of the

universe, whose light and wisdom would radiate out in all directions for the

utility and comfort of men and the glory of God.[28]

In their new colony, the Puritans assume that they will see more of God than they had

formerly 'been acquainted with.' This belief reveals another essential aspect of this rhetoric,

the distinction in the Puritan mind between the corrupt Old World and divine New England.

This distinction is, as we shall see, highly significant to The Scarlet Letter.

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[27] Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," 91.
[28] Loren Baritz, City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1964) 17.

Much of the New England Puritan rhetoric of the seventeenth century promotes the idea that the English Church, and English society more generally, was subject to deteriorating moral and social values. These fears of English decline had their basis in the accession of Charles I, who married a Catholic princess and was suspected of being lenient towards Catholicism, which the Puritans saw not as a different version of Christianity but as antithetical to Christianity. The Puritans looked to parliament to halt what they saw as a tide of Catholic influence as well as the growing fears about the rise of Arminianism in the Church (Arminianism claimed that human beings could achieve faith and salvation by their own will power – a belief at odds with Calvin's theory of predestination). Parliament had supported these Puritan fears and passed a resolution in 1629 that anyone who attempted to bring in either popery or Arminianism should be accounted an enemy of the King and the kingdom. Charles saw this as a direct attack upon himself and dissolved parliament, making it clear that he did not intend to call another.[29] For the Puritans this meant that 'the last bulwark against heresy and sin [had] crumbled. Without parliament there was scarcely a hope left of enforcing the will of God'.[30] Added to this was the reality that in Germany and France, Catholic forces had regained vast territory through violence, meaning that for the Puritans 'it looked as though God had given over all Europe to the forces of evil, preparatory to wholesale destruction'.[31] In accordance with these fears about the threat of Catholicism, much of the Puritan writing of the time depicts England as under threat of, if not already in the process of, ruination. In a sermon titled "The Danger of Desertion" (1649), Thomas Hooker, another of the eminent New England ministers, states that as the Protestant churches in continental Europe are 'made heaps of stones' by the Catholic forces 'and those Bethels wherein God's name was called upon, are now defiled Temples for Satan and superstition to

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[29] Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop (Boston: Little, Brown and Company: 1958) 28-29.
[30] Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma, 29.
[31] Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma, 29.

reign in,' so in England 'all things are ripe for ruin'.[32] In Hooker's sermon, the buildings which are ruined in the violence of seventeenth century sectarianism become emblems of a much wider-ranging and intangible ruin which threatens 'all things' in England. Such rhetoric acted as a reminder for the New England Puritan settlers about the importance of their mission in the New World. Furthermore, such notions of Old World decline would, in time, be incorporated into later myths of American exceptionalism in which the ruin of Europe became detached from these religious foundations.

The Prison and the Graveyard – Planting Decay

The central narrative of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> tells the story of a woman named Hester Prynne, who had left Europe for a new life in the recently settled Puritan community of Boston. Hester has left behind her husband, who we know in the text as Roger Chillingworth, although his true name is never revealed. She arrives in the new community alone, and after a number of years without any word from her husband Hester embarks upon an affair with the Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale. Hester bears an illegitimate child, Pearl, and, as a result, is imprisoned as an adulteress according to the harsh laws of the Puritan community. All of this takes place before the opening of the novel, which begins with Hester's release from prison in order that she may be publicly punished and then thereafter wear a scarlet letter 'A' as testament to her sin. Hester never publicly reveals that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father and the reader only learns of this fact later in the narrative.

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[32] Thomas Hooker, "The Dangers of Desertion" in <u>The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology</u>, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985 [1649] 66.

The Scarlet Letter opens with a scene in which a group of Puritans have gathered in front of a prison door to await Hester Prynne's imminent emergence from the building. The narrator states that:

> The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and
> happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among
> their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a
> cemetery, and another portion as a prison (I:47).

In this, the second paragraph of the novel, we can see early evidence of the text's historical irony. The provision for the inevitability of sin and death in this and all other utopian ventures undercuts any notion that the founders of Boston may succeed in establishing a society which differs from all others by making 'virtue and happiness' intrinsic. In other words as Donald Ringe puts it, 'man is fallible and mortal, and on these rocks the utopian society will always founder'.[33] There is a fatalism in the narrator's words which suggests the inevitable perpetuation of these essential aspects of humanity. Thus the opening image of the narrative sets the pattern for the rest of the novel which will continually remind the reader of the eventual decline of the Puritans.

As well as images of ruin, The Scarlet Letter employs metaphors of plantation which echo the widespread use of such imagery in the rhetorical tracts of many of the eminent seventeenth century New England Puritan ministers. For Winthrop, and for many of the other prominent Puritan figures whose speeches and pamphlets helped recruit emigrants to the New World,

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[33] Donald A. Ringe, "Romantic Iconology in The Scarlet Letter and The Blithedale Romance" in Ruined Eden of the Present, ed. G.R. Thompson And Virgil L. Lokke (New York: Purdue, 1982) 103.

the Massachusetts Bay Colony is referred to as a 'plantation.' The term 'plantation' is not specific to the New England Puritans: many other colonial enterprises of the period were termed plantations, such as those in the West Indies and in Ireland.[34] For such overseas ventures, the term plantation means 'The settling of people, usually in a conquered or dominated country; *esp.* the planting or establishing of a colony; colonization'.[35] However, the Puritans utilised the idea of the plantation both in this secular sense and as a metaphor, or series of metaphors, designed to convince the listener or reader both of the divine purpose of the Puritans' migration and to warn them of the need to adhere to a certain way of life in the new colony. Essential to the Puritans' metaphors of plantation is the notion that the establishment of their new colony in the American wilderness is an act of plantation undertaken by God's own hand. We can see the extent to which this metaphor permeates Puritan rhetoric in "Gods Promise to his Plantation" (1630) by John Cotton, another of the principal New England Puritan ministers. In this sermon, Cotton indicates God's answer to the question 'what is it for God to plant people?':

> It is a Metaphor taken from young Imps; I will plant them, that is, I will
> make them to take root there; and that is, where they and their soil agree well
> together, when they are well and sufficiently provided for, as a plant sucks
> nourishment from the soil that fitteth it.[36]

Cotton's sermon, which was preached at the departure of the Winthrop fleet from Southampton in 1630, relies heavily on the metaphorical notion of providential planting to

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[34] For a discussion of the British plantations in Ireland see <u>Plantation Ireland: Settlement and Material Culture c.1550–c.1700</u> edited by James Lyttleton and Colin Rynne.
[35] OED.
[36] John Cotton, "God's Promise to his Plantation" in <u>The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology</u>, 79.

convey to the departing Puritans what they should expect and what will be expected of them in their new colony. The basis of the extended planting metaphors in Cotton's sermon is God's words to the Israelites in 2 Samuel 7:10: 'Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their owne, and move no more.' Cotton's use of the biblical planting metaphor thus helps to strengthen the New England Puritans' claims of being the new chosen people of Israel. In Cotton's sermon, the 'Imps' are the Puritans themselves, meaning that they are imps, an archaic term meaning both a scion or offshoot of a plant or tree, and an offspring. That 'Imps' are young shoots or saplings, indicates how the Puritan migration is represented as a metaphorical transplantation: the colonists, irrespective of their age, are the young shoots of the society which they are attempting to found. Interestingly, it is not a society which grows from a completely new beginning such as a seed, but one in which, as 'saplings,' its members have begun their lives somewhere else and then transplanted to a new location.

Cotton's emphasis that the young 'Imps' and new 'soil' need to 'agree well together' is also significant. The fascination with soil displayed in much of the New England Puritan rhetoric of this period is echoed by the literal images and figurative language of Hawthorne's text; indeed, soil is an important metaphor throughout much of his writing since it is regularly used to describe his home-feeling with a specific location, as I have demonstrated in "The Custom-House" and as I shall discuss later in Chapter 5 on The French and Italian Notebooks and The Marble Faun. Soil was important to new Puritan settlers because its varying quality defines a new community's potential for agricultural production. As a result of this, in the Puritan rhetoric of New England soil becomes a significant metaphor for the individual or society's ability to form a lasting and meaningful connection to their new location. For John White, an English Puritan minister, although the soil of New England was virgin soil, it was not a rich

soil as might be found in other new plantations further south, like those in the West Indies. The soil in the southern plantations was much more fertile, meaning that farming and cultivation were much easier. The absence of such comforts as might be gained from a colony founded on rich soil had important implications for the New England colony's ability to maintain its devotion to God. White, who played an essential role in the formation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony despite never making the journey across the Atlantic, wrote a pamphlet called "The Planters' Plea" (1630) in which he contends that excessive toil and hardship were a necessary requirement when establishing a community in which devotion to God was primary:

> If men desire to have a people degenerate speedily, and to corrupt their
>
> mindes and bodies too…..let them secke a rich soile, that brings in much
>
> with little labour; but if they desire that Piety and godlinesse should prosper;
>
> accompanied with sobriety, justice and love, let them choose a Countrey
>
> such as this is; even like *France,* or *England,* which may yeeld sufficiency
>
> with hard labour and industry: the truth is, there is more cause to feare
>
> wealth then poverty in that soyle.[37]

White promotes a literal correlation between the harshness of a country's soil and the righteousness of the people attempting to farm it; having to work harder to cultivate the land helps settlers to the necessary qualities required of individuals and communities devoted to God. The Puritan emphasis on their struggle with the New England soil is also connected to the wider conflict between the Puritans and the wilderness of New England which features

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[37] John White, "The Planters' Plea, Or the Ground of Plantation Examined and, Usual Objections Answered" in American Colonial Tracts Monthly, No. 3 (London: William Jones, 1898 [1630]) 19.

both in the Puritan sermons and in The Scarlet Letter: the attempt to tame nature is necessarily an attempt to master the unforgiving wilderness of New England into sustainable farmland.

The Scarlet Letter's emphasis on the two necessary, but unwelcome, aspects of early Boston (its site for burial and its building for incarceration), brings together the seemingly disparate notions of plantation and ruin.[38] Both the prison and the graveyard have been allotted 'a portion of the virgin soil' (I:47). The Puritans' interaction with the soil of New England in the opening scene of The Scarlet Letter does not reflect the righteousness of their mission as outlined in Puritan rhetoric; rather, it is an ongoing interaction with the soil which highlights the human frailty of the colonists, and their community, in the presence of sin and death. The image of the graveyard in The Scarlet Letter offers a distinctly morbid alternative to the notion of Puritan plantation, combining the metaphors of plantation and ruin, since the action of burial is the necessary act of concealment of the decay which destroys the human body after death. The Puritans' work of plantation - both the metaphorical plantation of their society and the literal plantation of their crops - is ironically mirrored by the act of burial, in which they must deposit the decaying bodies of the deceased townsfolk into this 'virgin soil'. The inevitable 'planting' of bodily decay in this new society somewhat undermines the Puritans' utopian venture. Thus, the first chapter of The Scarlet Letter reminds us that in spite of their utopian aspirations, the new Puritan society remains inexorably linked to the rest of humanity by these most essential aspects of human nature – mortality and sinfulness. These forms of human decay, physical and moral, inevitably link the Puritans back to the Old World from which they had striven to detach themselves. Wendy Piper suggests that these

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[38] For a detailed structural analysis of The Scarlet Letter focusing upon the prison, the cemetery and the rosebush, see Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971) 126-160.

transatlantic connections of ruin create 'narrative irony regarding the Puritan project of starting over, of cleansing human nature of its complexity, its sexuality, and the limitations imposed by mortality'.[39] Taken within the wider historical context offered by "The Custom-House," the focus on the burial of these first Puritan emigrants gains further significance. As we have seen in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the burial and subsequent decay of Hawthorne's ancestors defines his own problematic identification with the soil of New England: Hawthorne's ancestors 'have been born and died, and have mingled their earthy substance with the soil; until no small portion of it must necessarily be akin to the mortal frame wherewith, for a little while, I walk the streets' (I:8-9).

In the description of the prison found in the opening chapter of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne also marries the notions of planting and of decay. Although only constructed 'fifteen or twenty years' ago, 'the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the New World. Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era' (I:47). The signs of impending physical decay upon the prison can be understood as a metaphor for mankind's innate sinfulness, man's fallen and thus ruined state, which again undermines the Puritan venture. As Stern suggests 'the ubiquitousness of sin in time as well as space…these symbols do away with Puritan society's assumptions about the New World moral clearing in the wilderness, blessed as the exclusive "righteousness of the Massachusetts"'.[40] The prison and its decaying aspect is another reminder that this Puritan society remains linked to the rest of mankind by sin, death and decay. Once more the

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[39] Wendy Piper, Misfits and Marble Fauns: Religion and Romance in Hawthorne and O'Connor (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2011) 42.
[40] Milton R. Stern, Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun and the Politics of Openess and Closure in American Literature (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 154.

connection is understood in terms of human ruin and degeneration, although this time it is not physical decay, as with the image of the graveyard, but rather moral and spiritual decline which explicitly links Puritan society with the rest of humanity through the universality of original sin.

Significantly, the prison, this indication of mankind's propensity towards sinful ruination, is also described in terms which seem to have their basis in the Puritan metaphor of plantation. In front of the building

> was a grass plot, much overgrown with burdock, pigweed, apple peru, and
>
> such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the
>
> soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilised society, a prison
>
> (I:48).

The Puritans' interaction with the soil of New England therefore not only involves planting a colony, plants, and dead bodies, but also planting a prison in the American terra firma. Thus, Hawthorne once again appropriates the Puritan metaphor of plantation to portray a vision of seventeenth century New England which seems to undermine the Puritans' own conception of their venture in the New World. The image of the weeds growing before the prison also has significance in terms of Puritan rhetoric. In an extension of their metaphors of plantation, Puritans saw their community as 'the well-ordered Garden of the Saints,' shielded from 'the untamed wilderness of the unredeemed' by the 'ecclesiastical Hedge'.[41] Puritan ministers in America often 'elaborated on the idea of the wilderness as an unregenerate state and

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[41] Carroll, Puritanism and the Wilderness, 112, 110.

compared the unrestraint of reprobate souls to the uncultivated lands around them'.[42] Images of American wilderness are significantly complicated by this dual Puritan vision of America as at once a virgin soil to sustain their plantation, and an unregenerate (and hence fallen) land whose wilderness needs separated from pure plantation. John Cotton argued that sins are like 'the weeds that are cast in over the pale into a man's garden' and that they 'are not the weeds of the garden, till the soil give rooting to them, that is, consent';[43] similarly, John Hooker suggested that sinners 'are like wildernesses overgrown with weeds'.[44] The prison, which is the 'black flower of civilised society,' and its association (by means of the soil) with the weeds which grow before it, imply that the Puritans are failing in their mission to plant their virtuous garden; they have, as Abel writes 'cultivated the weeds and neglected the flowers of human nature'.[45] Thus, we see once more how Hawthorne utilises the Puritan metaphors of plantation to create a vision of seventeenth century Puritan America which appears to be invested with decay from its inception.

Yet, while Hawthorne seizes upon the metaphors of sinful weeds and corrupted gardens in his opening scene, he also offers another, more ambiguous symbol of the forest expanse beyond the settlement, which is perhaps less easily defined. On the threshold of the prison is 'a wild rose-bush' which 'by strange chance, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it, or whether…it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson as she entered the prison-door, we shall not take upon us to determine' (I:48). That the rose-bush might be a remnant of the American wilderness or

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[42] Peter N. Carroll, Puritanism and the Wilderness, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) 112-13.
[43] John Cotton, A Brief Exposition Upon Ecclesiastes, (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003 [1654]) 72.
[44] Thomas Hooker, "Culpable Ignorance, Or the Danger of Ignorance under Meanes," in The Saints Dignitie and Dutie. Together with the Danger of Ignorance and Hardnesse, (Montana: Kessinger Publishing 2003 [1651]) 206.
[45] Darrel Abel, "Hawthorne's Hester," College English, Vol. 13, No. 6 (March, 1952) 306.

somehow linked to Ann Hutchinson who, like Hester, was a sinner punished by Puritan society, suggests that the forest of The Scarlet Letter may indeed be the dark and sinful place of the Puritan imagination. And yet, it is the 'sainted' Ann Hutchinson who entered this prison. Thus the harshness of this Puritan society is brought to the fore; to be a sinner in the eyes of this community, may not mean an individual is truly corrupted. Leo B. Levy calls the rose-bush 'the most enigmatic of Hawthorne's symbols' and, as we shall see, Hawthorne's vision of the seventeenth century wilderness, suggested by this symbol, is highly ambiguous.[46]

Just as Hawthorne appropriates the planting metaphors of New England Puritan rhetoric in this representation of seventeenth century Boston, so his vision of inevitable spiritual and bodily ruin in this society also has its basis in the beliefs of Puritanism. While the Puritans may have viewed their community as an opportunity to break from the corruptions of Europe, they nonetheless believed that mankind necessarily existed in a fallen world due to Adam's original sin:

> Total depravity is the extensive ruin of man's nature in which his mind,
> heart, thoughts and actions are "opposite to all good" as the 1647
> Westminster Confession teaches….Total Depravity teaches that both the
> body and soul are extensively corrupted as a result of the curse of God on the
> fall of man. This does not mean that people are as bad as they can be in
> actual sins, but rather, that the effects of the fall have completely ruined the
> total being of man. It is not just that man's mind is ruined, or that his body is

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[46] Leo B. Levy, "The Landscape Modes of The Scarlet Letter," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 23, No. 4 (March, 1969) 382.

ruined, or that just his soul [is] ruined. This teaches that the whole man is

corrupted with sin. As a result of this fall…man cannot fundamentally do

anything to please God.[47]

In this respect Puritan Boston's inevitable scenes of ruin correspond to mankind's own

inescapably fallen state. The prison and the graveyard become symbols of the constituent

properties of total depravity – spiritual in the image of the prison, where religious law

breakers in a theocracy would be interred, and bodily, in the decaying bodies of the

graveyard. Hawthorne was certainly no Puritan himself, he could not, as Dekker writes,

'accept the ideas of Original Sin and Providence in their Calvinistic formulations.[48]

However, he was, as the above discussion has shown, deeply versed in the rhetoric and

doctrine of Puritanism. In The Scarlet Letter this knowledge provided him with the artistic

materials to create his romance of New England origins.

Body and Soul: Dimmesdale's Decay

Unlike, the romances of Scott and Cooper, The Scarlet Letter does not take place across

varied and exotic locations, or feature scenes of fast moving and exhilarating action. Instead,

the events of The Scarlet Letter unfold over a few detailed and measured scenes, and in only

a handful of localities; the narrative has, what Darrel Abel calls 'the static consecutiveness of

a series of lantern slides, with interspersed commentary'.[49] The story told within these scenes

is one of human drama, involving only four main characters. Yet as the above discussion of

the opening scene of the romance demonstrates, The Scarlet Letter can also be read on a

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[47] C. Matthew McMahon, Augustine's Calvinism: The Doctrines of Grace in Augustine's Writings (Florida: Puritan Publications, 2012) 42-3
[48] Dekker, The American Historical Romance, 134.
[49] Abel, The Moral Picturesque, 226.

much wider scale, as a story of national beginnings. Of this bipartite narrative structure, Dekker writes:

> On the one hand, the story of Dimmesdale, Hester, Chillingworth and Pearl…[is] private, fictitious, universal and yet firmly anchored in the social context of seventeenth-century New England. On the other, their story is inseparable from the public history of the Puritan people in America…a story of emerging nationhood.[50]

Through an examination of the images of decay and ruin in The Scarlet Letter, I will highlight the correlation between these two stories - the individual and the national. Of the four main characters, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is the character who most clearly epitomises how the personal drama of The Scarlet Letter corresponds to a wider story of national beginnings.

While Hester is nominally the central character of The Scarlet Letter, some, like Henry James, consider Dimmesdale as the chief protagonist of the romance: 'The story…is in a secondary degree that of Hester Prynne; it is not upon her the dénouement depends. It is upon her guilty lover that the author projects most frequently the cold, thin rays of his fitfully moving lantern'.[51] The narrative light which Hawthorne continually sheds upon Dimmesdale is often used to illuminate his inherent and increasingly debilitating ruination, which becomes more pronounced and complex as the story progresses. Dimmesdale is, we are told, revered on both sides of the Atlantic; born in England before emigrating to Puritan Boston, his

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[50] Dekker, The American Historical Romance, 160.
[51] James, Hawthorne, 109.

'scholar-like renown still lived in Oxford' (I:120), while in his New World home he is 'considered by his more fervent admirers as little less than a heavenly ordained apostle, destined, should he live and labour for the ordinary term of life, to do as great deeds, for the now feeble New England Church, as the early Fathers had achieved for the infancy of the Christian faith' (I:120). The Boston Puritans' veneration of Dimmesdale therefore not only demonstrates his importance within this community, but also the possibility of rejuvenation he offers for a theocracy which is seemingly already, only ten years after its establishment, in decline. Dimmesdale, however, like the society to which he offers such hope of revitalization, is equally doomed to decay. Just as the Puritans' utopian venture in New England is invested with ruin from its inception by the inevitability of sin and death, so Dimmesdale is correspondingly doomed to ruin by events which occur offstage and prior to the main events of the narrative, leading Susan Manning to call The Scarlet Letter 'a completely predetermined story…the perfect narrative of postlapsarian Calvinist existence…all consequence, all reaction against an action inaccessibly beyond the confines of the plot'.[52] It is Dimmesdale's tryst with Hester in the forest wilderness, before the narrative proper of The Scarlet Letter begins, which sows the seeds of his decline. Tortured by the guilt of what he has done, Dimmesdale's inner turmoil begins to manifest itself outwardly, degrading his physical frame and making him seem increasingly 'haggard and feeble, and betrayed a nerveless despondency (I:188). By the end of the closing section of the novel, Dimmesdale's physical condition has degenerated to such a degree that he resembles an elderly man, even though he is only seven years older than he was when we first see this 'youthful clergyman' (I:66).

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[52] Susan Manning, The Puritan Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 182.

The machinations of Dimmesdale's inner turmoil are decidedly ambiguous. While he describes his own 'ruined…polluted soul,' (I:191) there are other suggestions that his decline could, in part, be attributed to a mental state which has been deeply affected by his sense of guilt. Other critics have examined Dimmesdale's mental condition in much greater detail and for the purposes of my argument I will examine his ruin within the realms of body and soul.[53] This dichotomy of ruined body and ruined soul which becomes increasingly evident in Dimmesdale reflects, once more, Hawthorne's fascination with the Puritan concept of total depravity. As a study of human ruin, Dimmesdale's condition is not a Puritan sermon on the innate sinfulness of man so much as an artistic appropriation of the relationship between body and soul which is suggested by this doctrine; it is an example of kind of technique which leads Giles to claim that in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne 'aestheticizes modes of Puritan consciousness'.[54] The narrator describes how Dimmesdale's condition, as fantastical as it becomes, can be seen to represent a truth of the human condition, which has its basis in natural law rather than religious doctrine: 'Wherever there is a heart and an intellect, the diseases of the physical frame are tinged with the peculiarities of these' (I:124). Hawthorne delves deep into Dimmesdale's spiritual and physical make-up to expose the mechanics of his progressive decline. The situation is endowed with a romantic Gothicism in the figure that Hawthorne employs to carry out much of the dissection and amplification of Dimmesdale's ruin, Hester Prynne's estranged husband, the physician Roger Chillingworth. Chillingworth is often regarded as the villain of the romance, but he begins the story as something of a sympathetic character. Initially, it is he who has been wronged by the illicit affair of

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[53] Richard Millington presents a Freudian analysis of Dimmesdale's mental turmoil, arguing that, 'Dimmesdale, as a defence against his guilt has come to identify most powerfully not with his actual but with his desired self, not with the man who sinned but with the figure of authority who repudiates that sin. Like a child playing at being a harsh parent, the minister becomes, in imagination, the punisher rather than the punished.' Millington, Practicing Romance, 76. Millington's theory of Dimmesdale's psychological struggle is itself a response to the seminal work of Fredrick C. Crews, whose study is perhaps the most renowned Freudian dissection of Hawthorne's oeuvre; see, Fredrick C. Crews, Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).
[54] Giles, Transatlantic Insurrections, 179.

Dimmesdale and Hester. Yet, when he first speaks to Hester in her prison cell, the physically ruined Chillingworth, 'mishapen from his birth-hour' and a 'man already in decay,' is apologetic to his much younger wife: 'Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay' (I:75). However, ultimately Chillingworth's physical ruin foreshadows a deep moral corruption which is set off by the indignity of finding that he has become a cuckold. While he forgives Hester's transgression, he cannot forgive the lover who Hester refuses to name. Chillingworth dedicates himself to unmasking the man he feels has wronged both himself and Hester:

> I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books: as I have sought gold
>
> in alchemy. There is a sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall
>
> see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner
>
> or later, he must needs be mine (I:75).

This becomes Chillingworth's all consuming, monomaniacal pursuit which, like Captain Ahab's pursuit of the White Whale in Melville's Moby Dick (1851), will eventually culminate in his own demise. Although Chillingworth initially displays a degree of moral complexity, he is ultimately more a cipher than a fully realised character; indeed, D. H. Lawrence writes that 'The character of Chillingworth is purely symbolistic, not personal at all. He is like the dark figure in a mystery-play, an influence rather than an individual'.[55] In this respect, Chillingworth's ruination does not offer the same complexities as the other two adult characters; fundamentally, Chillingworth's ruin is symbolic of his malevolence and

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[55] D. H. Lawrence, "Nathaniel Hawthorne (II)" in Studies in American Literature, Volume 2, ed. Ezra Greenspan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 [1923]) 309.

cannot be read in wider (trans)national terms in the same way that the images of decay linked to Hester and Dimmesdale can.

In due course, Chillingworth begins to suspect that Dimmesdale is the man he seeks. Chillingworth is able to use his social standing as a respectable physician to easily gain access to Dimmesdale's life. He soon moves into the minister's home, ostensibly to offer his medical expertise to a man who is beginning to show physical symptoms of an unknown aliment. Chillingworth becomes, through endless questioning and probing of the minister's heart and mind, Dimmesdale's secret tormentor. As Hester observes:

> She doubted not that the continual presence of Roger Chillingworth - the
> secret poison of his malignity, infecting all the air about him, and his
> authorized interference, as a physician, with the minister's physical and
> spiritual infirmities – that these bad opportunities had been turned to a cruel
> purpose. By means of them, the sufferer's conscience had been kept in an
> irritated state, the tendency of which was, not to cure by wholesome pain, but
> to disorganize and corrupt his spiritual being (I:193).

As the romance progresses, the fates of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale become entwined. The deep connection between doctor and minister becomes yet another example of the body-spirit duality which is evident in the opening scene of the romance. Hawthorne uses architectural arrangement to underline this binary concurrence. In the accommodation they share, Dimmesdale's 'front apartment' is his library, 'rich with parchment-bound folios of the Fathers, and the lore of Rabbis, and monkish erudition,' while on the other side of the house 'Chillingworth arranged his study and laboratory…with a distilling apparatus and the means

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of compounding drugs and chemicals' (I:126). The house becomes a composition of the two men: minister and doctor, spirit and body. The correlation between the two characters is emphasised by the way in which the respective states are mirrored in one another. Dimmesdale initially possesses a ruined soul which gradually degrades his physical condition, while Chillingworth is, to begin with, only a physical ruin whose obsessive pursuit of Dimmesdale's guilt leads to the corruption of his own soul.

Returning to the opening images of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, the prison, the graveyard, and the weeds which sprout from these edifices, we can view the planting of decay in the Puritan wilderness to be a foreshadowing of Dimmesdale's inner corruption. Chillingworth presenting a story which remains unverified by the narrator, arrives in Dimmesdale's chamber one day with a new type of weed he has discovered in the forest:

> I found them growing on a grave, which bore no tombstone, no other
> memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds, that have taken upon
> themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and
> typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which
> he had done better to confess during his lifetime (I:131).

Whether true or not, the story constitutes another of Chillingsworth's means of tormenting Dimmesdale, and reminding him of his inescapable and ruinous transgression. We might understand the components of the novel's opening scene in terms of what Brodhead calls 'The novel's…rigid law of conservation, such that whatever appears in its physical world is

bound to reappear, before long, in the figurative language describing its mental world'.[56] Just as these symbolic weeds foreshadow the planting of ruin within Dimmesdale's soul, so they prefigure Chillingworth's eventual demise. When Dimmesdale eventually dies, Chillingworth, 'the parasitic conscience' as Nina Baym terms him, 'deprived of a host on which to feed,' loses 'All his strength and energy – all his vital and intellectual force' and is left, 'like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun,' dying soon after.[57] Thus, Hawthorne ends the entangled stories of the ruin of these two characters with the metaphor which he utilised in the opening of The Scarlet Letter to demonstrate the inevitability of decay in this utopian venture. That the image of planted weeds links Dimmedale's inner ruin to the decay of the Puritan mission is given greater significance by the fact that Dimmesdale is seen as one of the last hopes for the success of this utopian enterprise.

Hester's Ruin

The first time the reader of The Scarlet Letter observes Hester Prynne, she is facing her punishment for committing adultery. Having borne a child to an as yet unknown man, despite having an estranged husband who, to her knowledge, has not made the journey to join her in the New World, Hester is made to stand on the scaffold of the pillory in front of the entire town, wearing an embroidered scarlet 'A' and holding her illegitimate child, Pearl. Hester's ignominy and very public shame mark her as another of Hawthorne's studies of human ruin. The perceived corruption of her purity through an extra-marital affair means that Hester can be viewed as a refiguring of the common Victorian trope of the fallen woman. T. Walter Herbert describes how, in British and American fiction of the time, 'Dramas of lost purity,

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[56] Broadhead, Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel, 53.
[57] Nina Baym, "Passion and Authority in The Scarlet Letter," The New England Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun., 1970) 229.

both personal and literary, became a cultural obsession'.[58] The fallen woman in such fiction is often 'a young girl whose corruption is related to her feminine weakness, her poverty or her isolation. She is an outcast because of her sin'.[59] In British fiction, the ruin of such female figures is frequently connected to the degradation of the Victorian city, in which stifling social conditions led to the abandonment of the nineteenth century principles of female virtue.[60] This is true of Nancy from Charles Dickens's <u>Oliver Twist</u> (1831), a prostitute 'free and agreeable' in her manners who, despite possessing many redeeming qualities, inevitability dies at the end of the novel - the fate suffered by many such ruined women in literature.[61] It is also true of the titular figure of Thomas Hardy's poem "The Ruined Maid" (1901) whose sexual ruin is explicitly associated with her move from rural poverty to the 'Town'. This allows Hardy to comment ironically on the gaudy elegance of the ruined woman and its contrast with the unrecognised degradation of rural poverty:

> - "You left us in tatters without shoes or socks,
>
> Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;
>
> And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!" –
>
> "Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined" (5-8).[62]

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[58] T. Walter Herbert, "Hawthorne and American Masculinity," in <u>The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne</u>, 71.

[59] George Watt, <u>The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel</u>, (London: Croom Helm, 1984) 9. For further discussion of the fallen woman in Victorian society, see also, Amanda Anderson, <u>Tainted Souls and Painted Faces</u> (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[60] The theme of feminine virtue threatened by sexual transgression is also prominent in the eighteenth century novel. Samuel Richardson's <u>Clarissa</u> tells the story of the title character, a young woman who 'noblest principles of virtue and religion' are compromised by her relationship with the roguish Lovelace, which leads to her rape and eventual death. Samuel Richardson, <u>Clarissa, Vol 1.</u>, (London: Harrison & Co., 1784) iii. Early European Gothic fiction also sees virtuous and pure female heroines face the threat of moral ruin.

[61] Charles Dickens, <u>Oliver Twist,</u> (New York: Oxford World Classics, 2008 [1837]) 68.

[62] Thomas Hardy, "The Ruined Maid," <u>Hardy's Selected Poems</u>, ed. Bob Blaisdell (Ontario: Dover Thrift, 1995 [1901]) 30.

Such literature also applies the threat of ruin to women in a stable domestic situation. A single transgression could, as Herbert describes, see such women aligned with the debased females of the Victorian city: 'For women aspiring to be domestic angels, a single deviance from absolute purity was "ruin," since the line separating pure women could only be crossed once, and only in one direction'.[63] In Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) Thomas Hardy, tells the story of how Tess's rape leaves her irrevocably stained in the eyes of society, thus critiquing the predisposition of Victorian society to prohibit the fallen woman from transcending her ruined state.[64]

For Hester, this nineteenth century concern with female purity is transposed into, and then amplified by, the strict moral code of seventeenth century Puritan society. As Richard H. Brodhead puts it, 'The Puritan pageant casts Hester as Iniquity; the A they impose on her is the symbolic badge of her office, that of Adulteress. Their strict symbolism moves to rigidify experience into formal categories of virtue and sin, and they conceive of their symbols as having sanction for their meaning in divine principles of good and evil'.[65] And yet, although she is ostracised by the society which applies her punishments so vehemently, Hester comes to embrace wearing the scarlet 'A' on her breast. She appropriates this symbol of her ruination, conferred upon her by society and lavishly embroiders it, even becoming proud to wear it; as 'Hester rejects their pageant she also rejects the code on which it is based'.[66] Newberry argues that through her needlework, Hester is associated 'with the Old World and, more specifically, with its aristocratic (even ecclesiastical) art, presumably inimical to

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[63] Herbert, "Hawthorne and American Masculinity," 71.
[64] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented (New York: Penguin, 1994 [1891])
[65] Richard H. Broadhead, Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 45.
[66] Broadhead, Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel, 45.

Puritanism'.[67] Hester's exclusion from Puritan society and her continued association with the Old World, appears to contextualise her ruin, dependant as it is upon the laws of this specific religious settlement, within a system of transatlantic opposition. Later in the story, Hester recalls 'that village of rural England, where happy infancy and stainless maidenhood seemed yet to be in her mother's keeping, like garments put off long ago' (I:80). That her purity appears to remain somehow intact in rural England reverses the Puritan opposition between depraved Old World and virtuous New World. After her punishment, Hester has the option to leave the settlement, but decides to remain:

> Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil. It was as if a new birth, with stronger assimilations than the first, had converted the forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester Prynne's wild and dreary, but life-long home (I:80).

Millington argues that Hester decides to stay because 'she has made her guilt into her identity – but not in the way the Puritan fathers intended when they sentenced her to wear the A. For Hester's new birth, with its "stronger assimilations," does not link her to the official community but to the marginal "forest-land," the wild place on the town's edge where she makes her home'.[68] Indeed, through this somewhat ambiguous notion of Hester's metaphorical plantation, Hawthorne reverses the New England Puritans' key metaphor. For the Puritans, to become rooted meant to honour God through morality and faith, as John Cotton states in "God's Promise to His Plantation": 'God is said to plant a people more

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[67] Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 174. For further discussion of the transatlantic system of meaning and influence communicated by Hester's needlework, see: Kumiko Mukai, Hawthorne's Visual Artists and the Pursuit of a Transatlantic Aesthetic, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008) 59-98; and for a general discussion of Hester's needlework as art form, see Evan Carton, The Rhetoric of American Romance: Dialect and Identity in Emerson, Dickinson, Poe and Hawthorne (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 196-99.
[68] Millington, Practicing Romance, 83.

especially, when they become *Trees of righteousnesse'*.[69] Hester's metaphorical rooting

ironises this Puritan notion of planting, since her rooting comes about as a direct result of her

'sinfulness' rather than righteousness.

The fact that Hawthorne utilises this system of planting metaphors to communicate Hester's

decision to remain in, or at least around, the settlement, suggests that we can also read this

decision, however ambiguous it seems, in terms of the wider themes of national beginnings.

Hester remains an Old World figure through her embroidery and her memories, but her

exclusion appears to have allowed her to transplant herself in a manner which is free of the

ruination endemic in the rest of the Puritan settlement: the prospect of her successful planting

is, it seems, facilitated by her ruin. At this moment, Hester appears to offer the possibility of

an American future free from ruin and decay, in a manner which the Puritans themselves

cannot. In one of the most recent transatlantic readings of The Scarlet Letter, Laura Doyle

sees Hester's ruin as comparable to the ruin imposed upon the American Indians by the act of

colonisation. Doyle argues that Hawthorne 'sets up a correlation between Hester's departure

from home and her loss of innocence (and thus conforms to the Atlantic narrative tradition

that merges sexual and colonial ruin)'.[70] Doyle's insightful analysis of The Scarlet Letter as a

depiction of the planting of colonial ruin intersects with my own argument in its view that

images of ruin in the novel often highlight the narrative's transatlantic scope – the manner in

which Old and New World remain connected, in spite of the ostensible Puritan desire to sever

such associations. Hester, Doyle argues, 'is the paradigmatic figure for an Anglo nation's

future on this land'.[71] At this moment in the narrative, Hester appears to be something of a

hopeful ruin. Through her status as social outcast, she offers the possibility of a successful

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[69] Cotton, "God's Promise to his Plantation," 76.
[70] Laura Doyle, Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008) 302.
[71] Doyle, Freedom's Empire, 321.

transplantation of Old World culture into the soil of the New World, one which counters the Puritan desire for a new plantation which is defined by its disconnection from Europe.

While Hester's purity is associated with her English home, this is not to say that Hawthorne has simply reversed the conventional binary opposition between Old World decay and New World virtuousness. For while the Old World may retain connections to Hester's innocence, it is not free from decay. Hester's thoughts of her English home also situate the idea of *material* ruin in a transatlantic context. As she stands before the Puritan crowd she pictures 'her native village, in Old England, and her paternal home; a decayed house of grey stone, with a poverty-stricken aspect, but retaining a half-obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility' (I:58). Unlike the situation of Hester's personal, social ruin, which ties her virtue to England, Hester's decaying family home suggests the more familiar notion of an Old World in a state of ruin and decline. The coat of arms above the door of Hester's home is a sign of English aristocratic lineage. This house therefore appears to stand as a symbol of the forms of societal organisation and governance which are entwined with the American myths of Old World ruin, in both Colonial and Republican eras. This fleeting glimpse of English decay might initially seem to reflect the concept of *translatio imperii*, described in the introduction to this thesis, where the decaying home of a presumably aristocratic lineage proves Berkeley's notion of 'The first four acts already past.' However, in The Scarlet Letter, although the Old World is certainly home to prominent images of material decay, it is not the debased realm of Puritan rhetoric, nor is it the exhausted dominion depicted in myths of nineteenth century American exceptionalism. While Hester's English home is certainly an image of Old World decay, this image of ruin is one which offers comfort and solace. Her home may have a 'poverty-stricken aspect' but the notion that this stone house 'retains' its associations with historical lineages communicates an impression of

decay which is, paradoxically, infused with permanence and durability. This depiction of enduring English decay anticipates Hawthorne's own responses to British ruins described in The English Notebooks and discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. In both cases, English decay sits against a backdrop of historical stability, which counters any wider impressions of historical decline or degradation.

The vision of Hester's ancestral home is not the only image of Old World decay which rises in her mind during her time on the scaffold:

> Next rose before her, in memory's picture gallery, the intricate and narrow thoroughfares, the tall, gray houses, the huge cathedrals, and the public edifices, ancient in date and quaint in architecture, of a Continental city, where a new life had awaited her, still in connection with the misshapen scholar; a new life but feeding itself on time-worn materials, like a tuft of green moss on a crumbling wall (I:58).

At his moment, Hester recalls her time spent in Amsterdam, one of the centres of the Protestant revolution in Europe, before she crossed the Atlantic to America. She moved to the city with her new husband, and another human ruin, Roger Chillingworth. This image of Hester's new beginning in Europe as one which was in fact devoid of the opportunity for a new existence is a reflection of her troubled relationship with Chillingworth. Her youthfulness is at odds with his decay, seemingly dooming the marriage from its inception. Yet, the simile comparing Hester's new life in Amsterdam to a 'tuft of green moss on a crumbling wall' can be understood as a vision of a culturally rich Old World. Hester's 'picture gallery' memories of the city convey a sense of artistic and cultural heritage,

reinforced by the cathedrals and architecture. Although negative when applied to Hester and Chillingworth's union, the simile of the moss on the crumbling wall can be understood to convey an alternative meaning when applied to the question of European cultural heritage. Hawthorne, Male writes, 'habitually, almost compulsively, referred to himself and his work as organic'.[72] Most regularly, Hawthorne utilises the picturesque image of moss growing upon an old or decaying structure as a metaphor for artistic creation. The metaphor is perhaps most prominent in his biographical essay "The Old Manse," the opening piece in his 1846 collection of short stories and essays pointedly titled Mosses from an Old Manse. "The Old Manse," like "The Custom-House" and The House of the Seven Gables, is a work in which a building stands at the centre of the text. The Old Manse was a building in Concord, Massachusetts, built in 1770 by Reverend William Emerson, grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The Hawthornes lived here for three years from 1842 onwards, renting the home from Emerson. In the preface-like essay, "The Old Manse," Hawthorne details some of the time he resided in the house with his family and days spent exploring the garden and travelling the surrounding countryside; he also describes how and where he wrote many of the essays and short stories that would eventually make up Mosses from an Old Manse. He refers to his literary output during this peaceful period of his life as the 'few tales and essays, which had blossomed out like flowers in the calm summer of my heart and mind' (X:34). This simile, in which creative literary output is compared to some form of plant growth, is common throughout Hawthorne's writing. While the flowers in this passage are explicitly likened to his 'tales and sketches,' the connection between the mosses of the title and the works contained within the volume remains implicit; and yet the 'Mosses' which the title offers to the reader are unquestionably those works contained within the volume. It is an

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[72] Roy R. Male, ""From the Innnermost Germ": The Organic Principle in Hawthorne's Fiction," ELH, Vol. 20, No. 3, (Sep., 1953) 218-9.

association which John C. Willoughby highlights in his comparison between the characteristics of mosses and some qualities of Hawthorne's writing:

> That Hawthorne should have referred to his works as "mosses" seems particularly appropriate - mosses being unobtrusively beautiful plants, hardy and tenacious, yet requiring conditions for survival that are not present in all atmospheres. Moreover, they are associated with age, the passing of time, and history.[73]

The notion that moss stands for the confluence of decay and growth for Hawthorne is evident in "The Old Manse," where he describes the view from his study in the Old Manse on a rainy day: 'The old, unpainted shingles of the house and out-buildings were black with moisture; and the mosses, of ancient growth upon the walls, looked green and fresh, as if they were the newest things and after-thought of Time' (X:15). The juxtaposition here of the ancient and the new in the same object supports Willoughby's suggestion that 'the idea of moss is for him symbolic at once of decay and regeneration, of the reality of the past in the present, of "Time's vicissitude"'.[74] In his famous essay, "Hawthorne and his Mosses" (1850), Melville seizes upon Hawthorne's metaphor of mosses and expresses his admiration for a writer who he feels possesses 'a great, deep intellect, which drops down into the universe like a

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[73] John C. Willoughby, ""The Old Manse" Revisited: Some Analogues for Art" <u>The New England Quarterly</u>, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Mar., 1973) 53.

[74] John C. Willoughby, '"The Old Manse" Revisited," 53. As a letter to Evert Duyckinck, dated February 22, 1846 demonstrates, Hawthorne did contemplate the other names he might have given to this collection of short stories; however, ultimately, it was the image of mosses which seemed most appropriate: 'I have bestowed much and solemn consideration upon the title of the book. 'Wall-Flowers from an Old Abbey' occurred to me; but it is too fine. "Moss and Lichens from an Old Parsonage"; - that does not go off trippingly enough. "Mosses from an Old Manse" suits me rather better; and if my wife agrees with me, so shall the book be christened' (XVI:173).

plummet'.[75] Calling Hawthorne 'this most excellent Man of Mosses,' Melville's veneration

of the 'mystical depth of meaning' produced by these stories, further highlights the fact that

Hawthorne's mosses can be read as metaphors of his distinctive brand of romance.[76]

Newberry argues that in The Scarlet Letter, 'England and Europe, not America, are cast not

only as the cultural sources but also the ultimate repositories of art'.[77] In light of Hawthorne's

propensity to utilise moss growth upon old material as a metaphor for artistic creativity, and

particularly the creation of romance, the depiction of decaying Amsterdam is one which,

despite its negative significance for Hester personally, strengthens this impression of the

cultural and historic wealth of the Old World.

American Antiquities

The richness of European decay contrasts with Puritan Boston, where ruin appears to signal

only sin and death and the potential failure of the Puritan project. However, in the forest

wilderness which borders the settlement, Hawthorne portrays a realm of natural American

decay which, unlike Boston, endows America with a sense of venerable antiquity comparable

to the decay of the Old World. In my discussion of the weeds of the overgrown prison, I

highlighted how the Puritans viewed the wilderness as a place of evil and degeneration; in

this 'savage wilderness,' as Carroll says, 'the Puritan settlers saw the Devil lurking…they

were convinced that America, the land of spiritual darkness, was the realm of the

Antichrist'.[78] To some extent, the wilderness of The Scarlet Letter *is* such a land of sin and

transgression. It is in the forest, before the events shown in The Scarlet Letter, that Hester and

Dimmesdale's initial sinful tryst takes place, and it is Hester's fallen state which presents her

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[75] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales, ed. James McIntosh (New York: Norton, 1987 [1850]) 340.
[76] Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," 338, 340.
[77] Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 180.
[78] Peter N. Carroll, Puritanism and the Wilderness, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) 11.

with the opportunity seemingly to convert 'the forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into [her]…wild and dreary, but life-long home.' Yet, in comparison to the forest of Hawthorne's tale "Young Goodman Brown," the wilderness of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> is not a realm of total depravity. In this short story, published in Hawthorne's "Mosses from an Old Manse," a young man living in seventeenth century Salem, the titular Goodman Brown, discovers the secret and depraved lives of his townsfolk in the New England forest; 'Evil' he is told by one of the witches he encounters 'is the nature of mankind' (X:88). The forest in this story embodies the Puritan fear of the American wilderness described above.[79] When Dimmesdale and Hester secretly meet towards end of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, the forest setting where they come together is 'wild' and 'heathen' but also seemingly a place of deep and ancient natural history. The natural decay of the forest therefore suggests a possibility for life which is contrary to the Boston settlement.

We can see such an example of American nature as a response to, or refraction of, Old World decay when Dimmesdale encounters Hester in the forest 'standing beside the tree-trunk, which some blast had overthrown a long antiquity ago, and which time had ever since been covering with moss' (I:214). America, Hawthorne proposes, has its own moss-grown past which mirrors the antiquity of the Old World. Decay and ruin become, in such a formulation of the New World, not a quality which suggests transatlantic dissimilarity but instead, comparison and continuity; as Hawthorne writes in a semi-biographical sketch called "The Canal Boat," from "Sketches from Memory" published in "Mosses from an Old Manse": 'In other lands, Decay sits among fallen palaces; but here, her home is in the forest'(X:437).

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[79] For a detailed reading of the significance of the wilderness setting in "Young Goodman Brown," see Reginald Cook, "The Forest of Goodman Brown's Night: A Reading of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown,"" <u>New England Quarterly</u>, Vol. 43, No. 3. (Sep. 1970) 473-481.

The American Notebooks, which cover a period from 1835-1853 give some indication that during the formative years of his writing career, Hawthorne took a keen interest in scenes of natural decay in the American landscape. He often took the time to note the composition of decaying tree trunks and logs. One passage, dated July 7th 1837, details his visit to a lake with his friend Horatio Bridge; Hawthorne describes how 'the shore was covered with tall trees, among which I particularly remarked a stately pine, wholly devoid of bark, rising white in aged and majestic ruin, thrusting out its barkless arms. It must have stood there in death many years, its own ghost' (VIII:38-9). This not only demonstrates Hawthorne's tendency to see forms of antiquity in American nature but also emphasises the creative romantic mind which would imagine such a ruined tree as 'its own ghost.' Hawthorne was not alone in seeking ruin in the primeval forests of the American wilderness which might rival the kind of European ruins he would have read about in his treasured Waverly novels. For instance, the painter, Thomas Cole, who imagined European style ruins in the American landscape in the final stage of his series of paintings "The Course of Empire," also believed that the American wilderness could provide picturesque scenes of ruin comparable to those of the Old World. Yablon described how in American nature,

> Cole found numerous surrogate ruins: dead trees represented in his earliest
> Catskill landscapes as shattered and mouldering columns, some prostrate and
> others still standing…Cole and his contemporaries could finally claim
> monuments of even greater antiquity than Europe's. That assertion was
> substantiated by European geologists who were beginning to question earlier
> assumptions about the newness of the American continent.[80]

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[80] Yablon, Untimely Ruins, 45.

One such painting of Cole's, titled <u>Lake with Dead Trees</u> (1825), depicts a scene in the

Catskill Mountains.[81] Here the dead white trees, analogous to the ghost tree of <u>The American</u>

<u>Notebooks</u>, evoke the grandeur and antiquity of ruined Old World marble columns. In this

scene, as Martin Procházka points out, 'it is the ruggedness of American nature that bears the

imprint of time immemorial'.[82] Similarly, the landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing

writes that 'If we have neither old castles nor old associations, we have at least, here and

there, old trees that can teach us lessons of antiquity, not less instructive and poetical than the

ruins of a past age'.[83] The ancient forest of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> possesses similar qualities to

the 'poetical' trees Downing describes:

> All these giant trees and boulders of granite seemed intent on making a
>
> mystery of the course of this small brook; fearing, perhaps, that, with its
>
> never-ceasing loquacity, it should whisper tales out of the heart of the old
>
> forest whence it flowed, or mirror its revelations on the smooth surface of a
>
> pool (I:186).

Hawthorne's ancient decaying forest suggests an atmosphere of romance comparable to what

Washington Irving would describe as the 'storied and poetical association' of European

historical sites.[84] Although here, in the American forest, nature's stories are more mysterious

and inscrutable than those which might be gleaned from European decay; here the forest

holds stories which are of another epoch entirely, a time period which exists beyond the grasp

of human comprehension. When Downing comments upon the 'instructive' potential of

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[81] See Appendix B for an image of Cole's painting.
[82] Martin Procházka, <u>Ruins in the New World</u> (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia Books, 2012) 66.
[83] Andrew Jackson Downing, quoted in Paul Shepard, <u>Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetics of Nature</u> (New York: Knopf, 1967) 186.
[84] Washington Irving, <u>The Complete Works of Washington Irving: The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent,</u> ed. Haskell Springer (Boston: Twanye Publishers, 1978 [1820]) 67.

antiquity, he is likely referring to what Shepard describes as the potential for ruins to confront 'human consciousness with a time stream of sublime cyclic flow in which empires grew, flourished, and decayed'.[85] The ancient decay of the American forest also offers 'instruction' to Hester and Dimmesdale. In contrast to the intolerance and restrictions of Puritan society, the two characters experience 'the sympathy of Nature—that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law' (I:203). Nature seems to offer the potential of an existence, away from the constrictions of Puritan society; suddenly, in the context of the ancient decay of the forest, their own conditions of ruin no longer seem absolute. It is Hester, more than Dimmesdale who, invigorated by the forest scene, believes that they may cast off their ruin entirely: '"Leave this wreck and ruin here where it hath happened,"' she pleads with him, '"The past is gone! - Wherefore should we linger upon it now?"' (I:202). Hester's impassioned speech is reminiscent of the revolutionary rhetoric described in the introduction to this thesis. Her fervour inspires her to remove the symbol of her ruin, the scarlet letter, and throw 'it to a distance among the withered leaves' (I:202). Hester and Dimmsesdale debate whether to follow the forest track 'deeper into the wilderness' until they are free of the constraining society and Chillingworth's villainous influence, or whether they should return to the richness of Europe to '"Begin all anew"' in their '"native land, whether in some remote rural village, or in vast London—or, surely, in Germany, in France, in pleasant Italy"' (I:197). Although they ultimately settle on the latter option, since 'its crowds and cities, offered them a more eligible shelter and concealment' (I:214) the moment of deliberation once more demonstrates the symmetry, communicated through images of decay, which exists between Old World culture and New World nature in The Scarlet Letter.

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[85] Shepard, Man in the Landscape, 251

However, it transpires almost immediately that Hester is mistaken in her belief that she can ever truly escape her ruinous past. Pearl, the living symbol of Hester's ruin returns the letter to her, seemingly unable or unwilling to recognise her mother without it. Hester may have become detached from society and 'roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods,' but it was, paradoxically, her ruin which had offered her this freedom in the first place, since: 'Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil.' Stern writes that Pearl therefore 'becomes a metaphor for the concept of sin's continuity in Hawthorne's classic utopia… she [Pearl] signals the central problem that Hawthorne's utopia creates for his endings: there is no redeemed New Life free from the parenting sins of the past'.[86] Hester's mistake was, I would argue, to assume that an entirely new beginning, free from the decay of the past can ever exist. Levy claims that these woods suggest inevitable decline for these individuals; the forest, he argues, 'fixes an impression of time inexorable in its action, ever tending towards decay and death'.[87] But the scene which is presented in the woods is one of ancient and decaying nature which in turn offers the growth of new materials. Hester and Dimmesdale meet next to 'a luxuriant heap of moss; which at some epoch of the preceding century, had been a gigantic pine' (I:185-6). If the forest suggests the potential of a new life, it is a new life grown from the ruin of the past. This image of American nature can be found in Hawthorne's other American writing. For instance in his short story "Main Street," the narrator describes the New England forest as 'the ancient and primitive wood – the ever-youthful and venerably old – verdant with new twigs, yet hoary as it were, with the snowfall of innumerable years' (XI:50). [88] Giles claims that in The Scarlet Letter, 'the Old World and

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[86] Stern, Contexts for Hawthorne, 155.
[87] Leo B. Levy, "The Landscape Modes of The Scarlet Letter," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 23, No. 4 (March, 1969) 378.
[88] The same passage of "Main Street" also contains a description of the 'massy [sic] corpse of a giant of the forest, which had lived out its incalculable term of life, and been overthrown by mere old age, and lies buried in the new vegetation that is born of its decay (XI:50). Emerson also noted such ancient cycles of growth from decay in America's 'deep, echoing, aboriginal woods, where the living columns of the oak and fir tower up

the New come to be seen as refractions of each other's consciousness'.[89] In the cycles of

growth and decay of the ancient American forest, we see such a refraction of 'new life but

feeding itself on time-worn materials' used to describe Hester's life in Amsterdam. On both

sides of the Atlantic, the fundamental truth is that decay cannot be escaped or eradicated, and

that any new life necessarily exists upon the ruins of the old. As we shall see in the following

section of this chapter, such a concept of new growth from the decay of the past is

particularly significant in relation to the future life of the Puritan settlement of Boston.

Dimmesdale's Jeremiad: Decay and the American Future

When he leaves Hester in the forest, Dimmesdale's intentions are to return to the Old World

on a ship leaving Boston harbour four days later. In the meantime, Dimmesdale concludes

that it will be a fitting end to his career as Puritan Minister to give the election sermon, an

annual occurrence which 'formed an honourable epoch in the life of a New England

Clergyman' (I:215).[90] However, like Hester, Dimmesdale's plan to escape his ruin is

ultimately doomed. As the minister returns to the settlement, it becomes clear that his

encounter with Hester in the forest, and the possibility of breaking entirely from the

constraints of tradition and society which were suggested by this meeting, has caused within

him 'a revolution in the sphere of thought and feeling…nothing short of a total change of

dynasty and moral code' (I:217). Dimmesdale is struck by strange impulses to speak or act in

an immoral way as he makes his way through the town. Shaken by these urges, he returns to

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from the ruins of the trees of the last millennium.' Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Literary Ethics," The Collected
Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson Vol. I ed. Robert Earnest Spiller (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,
1971 [1838]) 106.
[89] Giles, Transatlantic Insurrections, 177.
[90] For a collection of such sermons accompanied by relevant criticism, see A. W. Plumstead, ed, The Wall and
the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Day Sermons, 1670-1775 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 1968).

his apartments, where he encounters Chillingworth who, it subsequently transpires, has deduced his plan to leave with Hester. Dimmesdale then sets down to rewrite his election day sermon. The sermon is an important moment in the examination of notions of ruin within The Scarlet Letter as it is here that Dimmesdale's ruined condition and novel's conceptions of American nationhood intersect most clearly.

On election day, the reader, like Hester must remain outside of the church in which Dimmesdale's sermon is being conducted. The narrator reports the sermon second-hand to the reader, relaying the townsfolk's discussions as they leave the church:

> His subject it appeared, had been the relation between the Diety and the
> communities of mankind, with a special reference to the New England which
> they were here planting in the wilderness. And as he drew towards the close,
> a spirit as of prophecy had come upon him, constraining him to its purpose
> as mightily as the old prophets of Israel were constrained; only with this
> difference, that whereas the Jewish seers had denounced judgements and ruin
> on their country, it was his mission to foretell a high and glorious destiny for
> the newly gathered people of the Lord (I:249).

When we last saw Dimmesdale as he sat down to write his sermon, he appeared ready to abandon the Puritan errand in the wilderness and to return to the Old World. However, this sermon suggests that Dimmesdale has rediscovered his dedication to the Puritan mission in New England. Returning to the metaphor of planting, his prophecy of the high and glorious destiny of his colony correlates not only with Puritan rhetoric concerning God's chosen people, it also appears to prefigure the nineteenth century convictions of Choate and Bancroft

regarding the Puritans' essential role in the glorious beginnings of the American Republic. Immediately after the sermon, Dimmesdale confesses his sin to the populace, finally acknowledges Hester and Pearl in public, and reveals a scarlet letter seemingly burned into the skin of his own chest. Dimmesdale is willing to finally embrace his divine punishments, to accept his ruined soul and body; he proclaims: "'Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be His name! His will be done! Farewell!'" (I:257). His confession is symptomatic of his restored faith in the Puritan venture. He is willing to submit to the will of God in the hope that his own ruin will show the true path to the rest of his community, that they might fulfil the 'high and glorious destiny' of the community.

Bercovitch argues that Dimmesdale's Millennial vision places his speech within the Puritan tradition of the jeremiad in which 'preachers had warned their flocks of their dire plight…so as to terrify them into turning….from the vanities of this fallen world to the glories of the next'.[91] Through his jeremiad, Dimmesdale aims, as real-life seventeenth century ministers did through their jeremiads, 'to lead the way, as God's new chosen people in this new promised land toward the millennium'.[92] However, while Dimmesdale's speech meets this criterion of the jeremiad, it is notable for its seeming absence of warnings and denunciation of ruin which were also key element to this form. New England Puritans expected to be told of God's punishments for their backsliding and sinfulness; indeed, because they held the conviction that their venture had been ordained by heaven, they saw God's punishments as evidence of the sanctity of their venture. As Bercovitch writes, 'Here, as nowhere else, His vengeance was a sign of love, a father's rod used to improve the errant child. In short, their punishments confirmed their promise'.[93] Dimmesdale's sermon appears to contradict

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[91] Sacvan Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002 [1978]) xii.
[92] Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad, xii-xiii.
[93] Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad, 8.

everything we have seen of the Puritan community thus far. His speech is, as Bercovitch writes, 'shot through with irony,' since both Dimmesdale and the wider community have been shown to be suffused with ruination from the beginning of the story.[94]

While Dimmesdale believes in the sanctity of his death, his demise can be read as further evidence of the decline of the Puritan venture – it was he who was supposed to offer new hope to the now 'feeble New England Church.' While the founding fathers of the colony 'had fortitude and self-reliance, and in time of difficulty or peril stood up for the welfare of the state like a line of cliffs against a tempestuous tide' (I:238), the following generation, those Puritan elders who enact Hester's punishment, 'wore the blackest shade of Puritanism' (I:232). Dimmesdale's death eradicates any hope that a new generation might succeed in achieving the potential of the first Puritan settlers.[95] The minister's demise therefore appears to deny the possibility that Hawthorne's New England romance achieves Choate's stated objective of demonstrating the manner in which American Puritanism 'burst forth here and wrought the wonders of the Revolution.' However, I would argue that Hawthorne's vision of Puritan decline does not entirely break with Choate's desired romantic continuum. Hawthorne did not share the view that the Puritan character underpins the principles of the revolution in the manner which Choate does; Hawthorne's depiction of the harshness of the second generation of Puritans ensures this is not the case. But neither, I would propose, does Hawthorne depict the Puritans as a ruined society which fades into the past in the same manner as Cooper's Indians and Scott's Highlanders. Rather, while Hawthorne insists on the decay of Puritanism in New England he nonetheless implies, through his images of decay, in

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[94] Bercovitch, The Office of the Scarlet Letter, 62.
[95] For a further discussion of this 'myth of decline' (23) in The Scarlet Letter, see Bell, Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England.

particular the recurring images of new growth upon old materials that his own nineteenth century American present grew from the ruins of the Puritan endeavour.

Buildings, we are beginning to see, have important symbolic functions in Hawthorne's writing, and it is the most prominent building in The Scarlet Letter which demonstrates that the continuity between the Puritan past and the nineteenth century American present can be understood in terms of new growth upon the ruined past. Governor Richard Bellingham was a real historical figure who features in The Scarlet Letter. In Hawthorne's romance, Bellingham is the patriarch of the intolerant second generation of Puritans. In one scene, Bellingham threatens to remove Pearl from Hester's care, only to be convinced otherwise by Dimmesdale. The scene takes place in Governor Bellingham's mansion, a building linked to the Old World by its structural form. It is a building which 'with many variations, suggested by the nature of his building materials, diversity of climate, and a different mode of social life, Governor Bellingham had planned after the residences of gentlemen of fair estate in his native land' (I:104). It is thus a building which, although constructed out of the materials of the New World, as Newberry says, 'specifically recalls Old World connections to the new colony'.[96] Although the Puritans may have ostensibly claimed that their intention was to break free of the influences of the Old World entirely, the mansion demonstrates that in some respects, these settlers could not bring themselves to leave behind European influences entirely. Crucially, the description of the Governor's mansion also affords us a glimpse forward in time. The mansion is described as

> a large wooden house, built in a fashion of which there are now specimens
>
> still extant in the streets of our elder towns now mossgrown, crumbling to

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[96] Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 178.

decay, and melancholy at heart with the many sorrowful or joyful

occurrences, remembered or forgotten, that have happened and passed away

within their dusky chambers (I:103).

The Puritan experiment may have been doomed to failure from its inception but Hawthorne's glimpse of the future demonstrates a continuity between the Puritan past and the nineteenth century present. Hawthorne suggests that the lingering Old World influences which existed in the Puritan community play an essential role in this continuity, which stretches back in time and place across the Atlantic and unites the nineteenth century American present with the Old World past. Hawthorne returns to his favoured images of moss-growth to highlight the historic and cultural value of such connections. Hester and Dimmesdale's mistake was to believe that the ruin of the past could, or indeed should, ever be entirely cast off. Although Hester departs the colony with Pearl soon after the deaths of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, she eventually returns alone to her small cottage on the edge of the settlement, wearing the scarlet letter; she has 'returned, and taken up her long-forsaken shame' (I:262). Here, in her cottage, Hester, while still living on the periphery of society, begins to help members of the community:

people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel,

as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble. Women, more

especially—in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged,

misplaced, or erring and sinful passion—or with the dreary burden of a heart

unyielded, because unvalued and unsought came to Hester's cottage,

demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester

comforted and counselled them, as best she might (I:263).[97]

Thus, while Hester has a new role in society, this new beginning is one which is firmly built upon the ruin of her old life. Indeed, it is her own condition of ruin which provides her with the insight and sympathy necessary to comfort and instruct such people. Hester's return to the community at the conclusion of The Scarlet Letter reinforces the notion that the present grows from the ruin of the past, and that any attempt to break from this cycle is doomed to failure.

New growth from old decay is the necessary path of individual and collective history in The Scarlet Letter. This cycle allows Hawthorne to reject Choate and Bancroft's veneration of Puritan values into the American present, while simultaneously maintaining a continuity between the Puritan past and the American present which, through images of decay, also stretches back across time and space to draw upon the richness of the Old World. This continuity in turn provides the artistic materials for further romance, and allows Hawthorne to negate the problems outlined in "The Custom-House" where the nineteenth century American present lacks the suitable forms of ruin for the creation of romance. As we shall see in the

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[97] Hester's return to Boston and her resumption of the scarlet letter has been the cause of much critical debate over the years. For instance, Nina Baym sees her return as an indication of incremental social progress: 'Hester has in fact brought about a modest social change. Society expands to accept her with the letter – the private life carves out a small place for itself in the community's awareness. This is a small, but real, triumph for the heroine. Nina Baym, The Shape of Hawthorne's Career (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1976) 130. Alternatively, Bercovitch views Hester's return as something of a capitulation which emphasises 'the need for law and the limits of free will. Having abandoned the hope of erasing the past, Hester internalizes the past in all its shame and sorrow.' Bercovitch, The Office of the Scarlet Letter, 15. In contrast to both of these views, Charles Swann argues that the significance of the revolutionary spirit demonstrated by Hester earlier in the romance cannot be discounted. Even after her resumption of the scarlet letter, Swann argues that Hester is 'genuinely subversive in that she desires and prophesies a radical subversion of the patriarchal structures of the society and, most significantly, of the religion that legitimates that patriarchy. Swann, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution, 90.

next chapter of this thesis, the glimpse forward in time of Governor Bellingham's decaying

mansion means that this house can be viewed as the prototype for the house of the seven

gables, a decaying house which would provide the setting for Hawthorne's second full length

romance.

Chapter 3: Ruin, Romance and Commonplace Realities: Decay in The House of the Seven Gables

Ruin, Romance and Commonplace Realities: Decay in The House of the Seven Gables

In The Scarlet Letter Hawthorne creates an image of the American past which insists on Puritan decline, while still suggesting a continuation in historical progression between Old World, Puritan Boston and the present day. Hawthorne's second full length romance, The House of the Seven Gables (1851), is set primarily in mid-nineteenth century New England. This is a striking setting, given Hawthorne's previous inability to find the materials for romance on the lower floor of the Custom House. In this chapter I will argue that Hawthorne utilises the decaying house of the seven gables as the central image of his romance since it links the present with both the Puritan and the Old World past. These associations with distant pasts, particularly the European past, underpin the specifically Gothic decay of the house, which gives the novel its atmosphere of unreality. However, decay and ruin in this novel also relate to the present day realities of nineteenth century America, as Hawthorne shows in the human ruins of Hepzibah and Jaffrey. Hawthorne also politicises decay in this novel, making the rejection of time-worn decay one of the central ideals of his radical reformer Holgrave. In the novel, decay and ruin span the divide between the actual and imaginary while continually working to remind us of the transatlantic qualities of ruin, even those qualities apparently associated with the commonplace reality of antebellum Salem.

As with most of Hawthorne's fiction, The House of the Seven Gables deploys decay and ruin in a variety of forms, from abstract ideas of generational decay and human ruin to the images of material decline so evident in the titular house, or from decay which takes place gradually over time, to that which occurs instantaneously or which has seemingly existed forever. My aim in this chapter is to examine the various effects and meanings communicated by these disparate forms of ruin, while demonstrating that although these forms are diverse,

understanding that they share in the fundamental condition of deterioration from a complete or ideal state can help us to understand the overall significance of this concept within Hawthorne's writing. In particular, I will focus upon how this overarching fascination with ruin demonstrates the inherently transatlantic qualities of Hawthorne's fiction, whereby American history, culture and politics are continually infused with notions and images of decay which are not restricted by national boundaries.

While The Scarlet Letter offers a brief glimpse of the American present in the introductory essay "The Custom-House" before looking back to the Puritan past of New England, The House of the Seven Gables effectively reverses this movement between past and present, beginning with a short segment describing the legend which underlies the construction of the titular house before shifting forward in time to the mid-nineteenth century where the majority of events of the narrative take place. In a letter to his publisher James T. Fields, dated October 1st 1850, Hawthorne described his novel thus: 'the story...is little less than two hundred years long; though all but thirty or forty pages of it refers to the present time' (XVI:369-70). The majority of these contemporary events take place in and directly around the titular house, with its 'seven acutely peaked gables facing towards various points of the compass, and a huge clustered chimney in the midst' (II:5). In the nineteenth century portion of the narrative, the grand house has become 'dilapidated and rusty-visaged' (II:56), with a 'weather-beaten edifice' (II:5) upon which the 'infirmity of age gathered' over the decades (II:20). In these respects, and taking into account the prominence of the building as a setting within the novel, the house of the seven gables is the predominant image of physical decay within the story. Indeed the house is the convergence point for nearly all of the different forms of ruin which Hawthorne presents in this depiction of nineteenth century America: its

state of deterioration hangs over practically every scene of the novel and, as we shall see, for those central characters that may, in differing ways, be considered human ruins, their conditions are directly or indirectly connected to the history of this decaying house.

The deteriorating condition of the nineteenth century house of the seven gables is a physical manifestation of a ruinous past, creating a scene of modern decay which is somewhat at odds with popular conceptions of American national prosperity and unfettered progress summed up by the speaker of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass (1855), who 'sings' of

> How America is the continent of glories, and of the triumph
>
> of freedom, and of the Democracies, and of the fruits of society,
>
> and of all that is begun;
>
> And how The States are complete in themselves – and how all
>
> triumphs and glories are complete in themselves, to lead
>
> onward (20-25). [1]

Whitman's language of Manifest Destiny, illustrating the prosperity of America through its seemingly endless lands, could not be more different to the claustrophobic and decrepit setting of Hawthorne's novel. [2] The almost ever present decaying house reflects the ruin of two families, the Pyncheons and the Maules, whose decline is interlinked with the house's legendary past. This legend, outlined in the first chapter of the novel, tells the story of how the house was built after a dispute between the original settler, Matthew Maule, and one of

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[1] Walt Whitman, "Thoughts," Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose, ed. Ellman Crasnow (Vermont: Everyman, 1994 [1855]) 424-5.
[2] For an extended discussion of Whitman's use of this rhetoric of American progress, see: Henry Nash Smith, "Walt Whitman and Manifest Destiny," Huntington Library Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Aug 1947) pp373-389.

the early Puritan patriarchs, Colonel Pyncheon. Pyncheon's ultimate goal is to guarantee the continuance of his posterity in the New World. His pursuit of familial permanence is defined by the two houses he looks to establish - the material house of the seven gables and the figurative house of the Pyncheon name. In order to dispossess Maule of his valuable land, the Colonel exploits the religious fanaticism of the Puritan witch trials of 1692 and1693, denouncing Maule as a wizard and encouraging his eventual execution. In locating the origins of this story in this shameful period in early American history, Hawthorne foregrounds the sort of 'dark and gloomy wrong' whose absence in America he would ostensibly lament in the later preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u>. The wrongful acts of the witch trials create a pervading atmosphere of 'various ruin' (II:8) in which reputations and lives are destroyed as people are both accused and executed.

The witch trials bring about Matthew Maule's complete personal ruin. Denounced as a wizard, his character is destroyed before the ultimate act of human ruin, execution, is enacted upon the gallows, where, in his final moments, he proclaims a curse upon the Pyncheon family and their posterity. After Maule's ruin and death the remaining Maule family fails to establish itself in the New World and 'after creeping, as it were, for such a length of time, along the utmost verge of the opaque puddle of obscurity…[the Maules] had taken that downright plunge, which sooner or later is the destiny of all families' (II:25). Matthew Maule's ruin, then, becomes the precursor for the ruin of an entire family. Once again Hawthorne places the theme of ruin at the centre of his story and shows how this ruin manifests itself in different forms. Once more, Hawthorne shows how this ruin manifests itself in different forms, both instantaneous occurrences of destruction, as suffered by

Matthew Maule, and the gradual deterioration illustrated by the 'creeping' disappearance over time of the Maule family.

The Gothic House of the Seven Gables

In analysing the diverse kinds of ruin of The House of the Seven Gables, I want first of all to locate the novel and its treatment of ruin within the genre of the Gothic. Certainly both "The Custom-House" and The Scarlet Letter as a whole, as discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, can be understood as Gothic texts: the preface presents a building haunted by the ghosts of Hawthorne's Puritan ancestors, while the latter narrative presents the mysterious villain Chillingworth and his psychological torment of Dimmesdale.[3] Yet The Scarlet Letter is very different to the European Gothic novels which precede it. Eric Savoy, argues that in "The Custom-House":

> Hawthorne approaches the legacy of Gothic Literature – a set of conventions
>
> with which the audience was familiar – as a set of representational practises
>
> that can now be used figuratively, in the spirit of irony or parody, within a
>
> narrative that is not, strictly speaking, a Gothic story.[4]

Although The House of the Seven Gables retains the spirit of irony and parody which typifies the Gothicism of The Scarlet Letter, it can be seen as a more characteristically Gothic text. Lawrence Buell calls The House of the Seven Gables 'one of the last and most self-conscious nineteenth-century Anglo-American examples of a thoroughgoing gothic plot, replete with all

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[3] For a discussion of The Scarlet Letter (and its introductory preface "The Custom-House") as a Gothic text see Eric Savoy, "The Rise of American Gothic," in The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 167-180; and Jane Lundblad, Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Tradition of the Gothic Romance (New York: Haskell House, 1964) 56-61. See also Neal Frank Doubleday, "Hawthorne's Use of Three Gothic Patterns," College English Vol. 7. No. 5 (Feb. 1946) 250-262.

[4] Savoy, "The Rise of American Gothic," 179.

the usual appurtenances'.[5] In his second romance, Hawthorne employs some of the most recognisable conventions of Gothic literature, such as the grand and decaying house, the ancient aristocratic family and the ancestral curse.

Hawthorne's use of overtly European Gothic conventions in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> has, more recently, been the focus of critics approaching the novel from the perspective of the transatlantic. Indeed, recent studies of Gothic themes in American literature in general have focused upon their transatlantic dimension. Sian Silyn Roberts argues that previous criticism, while ostensibly focused upon the Gothic as a transnational genre, has nevertheless remained 'largely committed to exceptionalist national distinctions – "British" vs. "American" Gothics'.[6] According to Roberts this approach assumed that 'the Gothic in America liberates itself from the burden of British history and thought to create unanticipated and experimental new possibilities at the level of form and ideology'.[7] Roberts argues for the abandonment of such nationally delineated Gothic modes, stating that it 'seems more likely that the tradition of Gothic letters [in America] developed not from an originary national culture but through the ongoing negotiation with and appropriation of British forms'.[8] Other critics, such as Lesley Ginsberg, have focused on these transnational elements, specifically in Hawthorne's use of European Gothic conventions in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>. Ginsberg states that 'the novel holds up a tarnished mirror to the Gothic conventions of the past'.[9] Ginsberg focuses upon 'Hawthorne's anxieties over the transatlantic origins of his Gothic house of

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[5] Lawrence Buell, <u>New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance</u> (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 354.
[6] Sian Silyn Roberts, "A Transnational Perspective on American Gothic Criticism," <u>Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century</u>, ed. Monika Elbert and Bridget M. Marshall, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013) 19.
[7] Roberts, "A Transnational Perspective on American Gothic Criticism," 23.
[8] Roberts, "A Transnational Perspective on American Gothic Criticism," 24.
[9] Lesley Ginsberg, "Hawthorne's Transatlantic Gothic House of Fiction: <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>," <u>Nathaniel Hawthorne Review</u> Vol. 38, No. 2 (2012) 35.

fiction,' arguing that 'the novel…rests uneasily on top of the unquiet traditions of British Gothic conventions'.[10] An understanding of the Gothic genre not as nationally defined but as a transnational mode, involving fluid interchange and appropriation of ideas across national boundaries, is particularly appropriate to any discussion of ruin within Hawthorne's American fiction, since it circumvents exceptionalist binary oppositions between Old World decay and New World innocence and allows us to see how the transatlantic qualities of such themes are essential to the constitution of Hawthorne's specific brand of romance.

The early British Gothic novels from which The House of the Seven Gables appears to borrow Gothic conventions, such as Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764), are predominantly set in Catholic Southern European locations where feudal Princes imprison their enemies; those set in Britain also draw upon the foreignness of Catholicism to British readers by locating Gothic events in ruined abbeys. In both cases these Gothic novels use unfamiliar or alien historical settings to create an atmosphere which would, to a British Protestant readership, seem highly appropriate for the sensational occurrences of a Gothic narrative. As early Gothic critic Augustus Montague Summers puts it, 'These authors employed abbots and convents, friars and cloisters, "cowled monks with scapulars," "veiled nuns with rosaries," because such properties were exotic, they were mysterious, and capable of the highest romantic treatment'.[11]

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[10] Ginsberg, "Hawthorne's Transatlantic Gothic House of Fiction," 35, 42.
[11] Montague Summers, The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel, (London: Fortune Press, 1938) 195-6. Walter Scott, commenting on Ann Radcliffe's tendency to use such exotic geographical and temporal locations, saw this technique as a means to provide an element of truth to the sensational Gothic narrative, since in such settings: 'the human passions, like the weeds of the climate, are supposed to attain portentous growth under the fostering sun;…and where feudal tyranny and Catholic superstition still continue to exercise their sway over the slave and bigot…These circumstances are skilfully selected, to give probability to events which could not, without great violation of truth, be represented as having taken place in England'. Walter Scott…Cited in Victor Sage (ed.) The Gothic Novel: A Casebook (London: Macmillan, 1990) 59.

For American writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the production of

Gothic fiction was more problematic. Few American writers chose to draw directly upon the

foreignness of a European setting for their Gothic fiction, possibly because in doing so they

would have been simply recreating the European Gothic rather than appropriating it as an

American genre.[12] Some, like Edgar Allan Poe, stopped short of setting their novels in

distant Europe but achieved an atmosphere conducive to the Gothic by utilising what Allan

Lloyd Smith calls 'an indeterminate quasi-European setting'.[13] For instance, "The Fall of the

House of Usher" (1839) contains many of the same classic European gothic elements as The

House of the Seven Gables (1851), such as the decaying aristocratic family and their ruined

home, but takes place in a location and period which is never explicitly defined. In using such

settings, Poe's work is often highly symbolic and, unlike Hawthorne's version of the Gothic,

'divorced from any social or historical resonance'.[14] Poe's use of some of the most

recognisable conventions of European Gothic fiction in his writing can be contrasted with

Charles Brockden Brown who attempted to produce novels which were entirely free of such

European themes and images. Brown set out to create suspenseful narratives from the new

American materials of 'The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western

wilderness,' in contrast to the 'Puerile superstition and exploded manners' found in European

'Gothic castles and chimeras'.[15] Unlike Brown, Hawthorne utilises the conventions of the

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[12] Hawthorne's short story "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844) is one exception to this trend. Set in medieval Padua, this story is, other than The Marble Faun, Hawthorne's only complete tale set outside of America (he also attempted three times to write an English-set full length romance, although abandoned each one). As well as the Gothic setting, in Catholic Italy and the Medieval past, "Rappaccini's Daughter" contains distinctly Gothic elements, such as the malignant figure of Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini, whose poisonous garden has made his own daughter similarly poisonous to touch. See Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" in The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. X: Mosses from an Old Manse, 91-128. Wendy Graham contends that due to the combination of this foreign setting, distant time period and the supernatural events, "Rappaccini's Daughter" is Hawthorne's "most Gothic" tale. Wendy C. Graham, Gothic Elements and Religion in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fiction (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1999) 25.
[13] Allan Lloyd-Smith, American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction, (New York: Continuum, 2004) 46.
[14] Lloyd-Smith, American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction, 46.
[15] Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly, Or Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker, (New York: Penguin 1988 [1799]) 3.

European Gothic in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, and since he places these conventions within a contemporary nineteenth century setting, one which is explicitly located in 'one of our New England towns' (II:5), his version of the Gothic is also distinct from Poe's. Hawthorne's romance situates the recognisable conventions of the European Gothic, the ancient decaying dwelling, the ancestral curse and the declining aristocratic family, within the historical framework of an American Puritan past but shows that they continue to haunt present day America. In doing so, however, Hawthorne creates a Gothic novel which is distinctly understated when compared to European Gothic texts or those of Poe and Brown. It is here where Hawthorne's Gothicism and his definition of romance overlap.

With its narratives of suspense and terror and its tolerance of the supernatural, the Gothic novel can be understood as an offshoot of the wider tradition of the romance novel, which is characterised by the creation of a world which 'oversteps the limits by which life is normally bounded'.[16] Those narrative occurrences which make <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> a Gothic text, the ancestral curse, mysterious deaths and haunted house, are precisely those which make it a romance novel. The convergence between the Gothic novel and romance has been noted by Ann Williams: 'Gothic prose narratives are flagrantly non-Realistic, and another way of saying "non-Realistic prose fiction" is "romance"'.[17] Yet, Hawthorne's notion of romance, and by association his conception of the Gothic, is one in which the writer should 'make a very moderate use of the privileges' of a genre which allows the sensational or supernatural and where in fact he should 'mingle the marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor' (II:1). As a consequence, Hawthorne employs the conventions associated with the early European Gothic novels in a distinctly understated manner. The

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[16] Beer, <u>The Romance</u>, 3.
[17] Ann Williams, <u>Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic</u>, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 2.

everyday, contemporary setting for The House of the Seven Gables lacks the sensationalism

of British Gothic fiction such as The Castle of Otranto, from which it nonetheless borrows

some of its central narrative devices. Hawthorne's achievement in utilising the conventions of

the European Gothic within a contemporary American setting, while maintaining his

carefully observed balance between the real and the imagined, is due in no small part to the

atmosphere he creates, often through images of decay and ruin, in his descriptions of the

house of the seven gables. This house has the effect of endowing an otherwise rather ordinary

depiction of nineteenth century America with an understated sense of abnormality or

strangeness, creating the perfect conditions for his specific brand of romance.

The notion of 'atmosphere' is key to understanding how decay and ruin relate to Hawthorne's

genre of romance (or the Gothic). Almost nothing flourishes 'in the cold, moist, pitiless

atmosphere' of the house and its surrounds, only 'the dry-rot and the damp-rot in its walls,'

and 'it was not good to breathe no other atmosphere than that' (II:223, 174). Here decay and

ruin are literally part of the atmosphere as they contaminate the air in and around the house.

The notion that decay and ruin can somehow infect the air becomes much more pronounced

in Hawthorne's later writing about Rome in The French and Italian Notebooks and The

Marble Faun. [18] As well as focusing on the atmosphere created by decay and ruin, Hawthorne

also often uses the term 'atmosphere' in a less literal manner when discussing the conditions

for romance itself. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, Hawthorne uses 'atmosphere'

to describe the compositional balance of The House of the Seven Gables. In the preface, for

example, he talks of the author managing his 'atmospherical medium' as he finds the right

balance of 'light' and 'shadow' in the arrangement of his fiction (II:1). More generally

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[18] In part it would seem that this idea becomes more prevalent due to the illness of Hawthorne's daughter Una, which, it was assumed, could have been brought on by the poor air quality in Rome.

though, as Millington points out, the atmosphere of romance is 'the conceptual and psychological borderland where' Hawthorne's 'work takes place'.[19] In these cases, 'atmosphere' is intrinsically linked to the ideal conditions for romance, either those within the novel or those in which the romance is composed. The idea that the Gothic author 'develops a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror' against which the 'macabre or melodramatically violent' events of the narrative can unfold is common throughout Gothic writing and criticism.[20] What I will argue in the following section is that images of decay and ruin are important in creating the conditions, or atmosphere, in which Hawthorne is able to place his very specific blend of romance (or Gothic) fiction, because these images of European inspired deterioration endow the commonplace reality depicted with a sense of the unfamiliar or alien.

While it is an American house and not a European abbey or castle, the house of the seven gables nonetheless conveys certain European influences which suggest its foreignness within a nineteenth century American scene.[21] The 'long-past epoch' of which the house's architecture is a specimen is the American colonial period, which inevitably means that the house must retain some stylistic connection to the heritage of the Europeans who built it. If we compare the house of the seven gables to the Governor's mansion in The Scarlet Letter, a building which was designed 'after the residences of gentlemen of fair estate in his native land' (I:104), we find significant similarities between them. The decaying house of the seven gables is compared to 'a great human heart, with a life of its own, and full of rich and sombre

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[19] Millington, Practicing Romance, 51.
[20] M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012) 152.
[21] For a discussion of the use of Gothic castles in nineteenth century American painting, see Kerry Dean Carso, "Gothic Castles in the Landscape: Sir Walter Scott and the Hudson River School of Painting," Gothic Studies Vol. 14, No. 2, (2012) 1-22.

reminiscences' (II:27), while, as we saw in the previous chapter, the Governor's mansion is described as

> a large wooden house, built in a fashion of which there are now specimens
>
> still extant in the streets of our elder towns; now moss-grown, crumbling to
>
> decay, and melancholy at heart with the many sorrowful or joyful
>
> occurrences, remembered or forgotten, that have happened and passed away
>
> within their dusky chambers (I:103).

This portrayal of the Governor's mansion in Hawthorne's first novel is strongly reminiscent of the house of the seven gables, and should perhaps be considered as its prototype. The glance forward in time which we are offered in The Scarlet Letter echoes the description of the house of the seven gables as a dwelling which has at its 'heart' the stories and experiences of the people who have lived there. Further similarities can be seen in the extravagant outer decorations of both buildings. The house of the seven gables is 'ornamented with quaint figures, conceived in the grotesqueness of a Gothic fancy, and drawn or stamped in the glittering plaster, composed of lime, pebbles, and bits of glass, with which the woodwork of the walls was overspread' (II:11), while the walls of the Governor's mansion are 'overspread with a kind of stucco, in which fragments of broken glass were plentifully intermixed' (I:103). The ornate decoration of each building is explicitly Gothic in its architectural style. By dwelling on the appearance of the house of the seven gables, Hawthorne connects this building, one of many like it in Salem, to the tradition of the Gothic revival, a nineteenth century movement which itself stretches back in time and place to Medieval Europe. In doing so, Hawthorne is able to endow his setting with a sense of foreignness and exoticism, without

ever compromising the contrary impression that this is a recognisable contemporary American reality.

The similarities between the house of the seven gables and the Governor's house highlight Hawthorne's interest in the notion of ruin in America as a theme which persists regardless of the time or place in which his American novels are set. That a building so similar to the decaying Governor's mansion, briefly glimpsed in the far future of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, has become the central setting and symbol for an entire novel demonstrates the depth of Hawthorne's interest in the notion of decayed buildings in America; it is an interest which implies both an awareness of the relative wealth of European history and the influence of European literary traditions. Indeed, the depiction of the house of the seven gables also bears similarities to that of another house in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, Hester's childhood home. As we saw in the previous chapter, Hester's home in 'Old England' is 'a decayed house of grey stone, with a poverty stricken aspect, but retaining a half-obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility' (I:58). Similarly, the house of the seven gables has an 'arched window, imparting a look, if not of grandeur, yet of antique gentility, to the broken portal over which it opened' (II:285). Although the repetition of the phrase 'antique gentility' does not necessarily suggest that <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> is specifically referring to Hester's house, it does at least show that Hawthorne sought to create a similar impression of the house of the seven gables as he did for Hester's ancient paternal home. Comparing the decaying house of the seven gables to Hester's ruinous English home lets us see the American house as embodying a literary strategy which Robert Weisbuch terms 'stretched time' or 'stretched history'. Weisbuch argues that Hawthorne's 'explicit burden concerns the subtle connections between the long-ago and today; but to make those connections significant

is really the job of his insinuating technique by which the past is cajoled backward, made to look more distant, so that the connections between past and present may have an impressive route of travel'. This means that Hawthorne has to 'stretch time to make that past seem more long-distant than the actual number of years in themselves would suggest'. [22] As the primary setting for the novel, the decaying house, alluding to the deep history of Europe, becomes the vehicle for achieving this sense of 'stretched time'. Hawthorne's narrator insists that the house stands 'as a specimen of the best and stateliest architecture of a longpast epoch, and as the scene of events more full of human interest, perhaps, than those of a gray feudal castle' (II:10). Calling it 'exactly that house of associations that the British had assumed America could not create,' Weisbuch argues that Hawthorne's titular house is one of the clearest examples of an American writer stretching history. [23] Thus the decay of the house of the seven gables works in tandem with its Gothic exterior to endow the contemporary setting of the romance with a sense of the unusual and foreign.

The house of the seven gables is, of course, a vestige of the American Puritan past. It is this period of American history in which Hawthorne locates the crime which initiates his narrative, the story of Matthew Maule's dispossession. However, as the analysis above demonstrates, the house of the seven gables also communicates a transatlantic connection to a more distant Old World heritage and its state of decay exaggerates and elongates its age, meaning that this remnant of the American Puritan past seems to be an artefact from a much more distant time and location. The house is the familiar made faintly unfamiliar and, as such, it allows us to understand the function of decay in the house in terms of the uncanny, an idea often referred to in discussions of the Gothic. The notion of the uncanny is especially

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[22] Weisbuch, <u>Atlantic Double-Cross</u>, 154, 158.
[23] Weisbuch, <u>Atlantic Double-Cross</u>, 157.

relevant in this instance because Freud's influential analysis of the uncanny builds on the fact that the German term for the uncanny, 'das Unheimliche,' means the 'the unhomely.' In creating this sense of the unfamiliar in what is, for the most part, an unremarkable, everyday depiction of nineteenth century America, the decay and ruin of the house can be said to play an essential role in the creation of an atmosphere which is conducive to Hawthorne's specific strain of romance. We cannot imagine Hawthorne ever creating the kind of castle that Poe uses as his setting in The Fall of the House of Usher because this would not fit with the nineteenth century American scene depicted in The House of the Seven Gables. In terms of Hawthorne's particular brand of romance, his house is an adequate replacement for the European feudal castle because it fits with his American scene while also seeming unfamiliar or out of place. The latent unreality of this house provides a backdrop against which the conventions of the Gothic can be peppered 'as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor' (II:1) without destroying the careful balance between the real and the imaginary which underpins his Hawthorne's style of romance. Within this understated Gothic setting Hawthorne places familiar Gothic conventions such as the curse bestowed upon Colonel Pyncheon by Matthew Maule as he stands upon the gallows awaiting his imminent execution: '"God," said the dying man, pointing his finger with a ghastly look at the undismayed countenance of his enemy, "God will give him blood to drink!"' (II:8). The curse haunts the Pyncheon family to the present day, as evidenced not only by the mysterious death of the Colonel on the day his grand house is completed but by subsequent cases of mysterious Pyncheon deaths. In the nineteenth century the curse lingers in the background of the narrative, coming once more to the fore with Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's mysterious death at the end of the novel. David Punter calls this theme 'the revisiting of the sins of the fathers upon their children,' which

connects Hawthorne's novel with <u>The Castle of Otranto</u>, and is 'perhaps the most prevalent theme in Gothic fiction'.[24]

Heretofore, I have stressed the role of decay and ruin in creating an atmosphere which is distinct from a patently realist representation of mid-nineteenth century New England society. Starting with Henry James's complaint that 'Hawthorne never attempted to render exactly or closely the actual facts of the society that surrounded him,' some critics have denied that Hawthorne's novels, including <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, bear any direct relation to a distinct social reality.[25] In the mid-twentieth century many New Critics favoured this approach to Hawthorne's fiction in which his writing is understood to represent universal or moral truths rather than any distinct depictions of social reality. Darrel Abel argues that Hawthorne's 'endeavour' was to 'interpret….the visible world, not as the sociologist does, by drawing abstractions which would have their whole truth grounded in the tangibles from which they derived, but as a transient projection of an ideal world beyond, as merely phenomenal'.[26] More recently, however, critics such as Millicent Bell, far from seeing Hawthorne's writing as devoid of any engagement with nineteenth century society, have focused 'upon Hawthorne's relation to the social reality he sometimes claimed to find uninteresting or unpresentable'.[27] In her introductory essay, Bell argues that 'despite its Gothic features – ancestral curse, decaying old mansion, hidden document, mysterious painting, and the rest,' Hawthorne's <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> 'faces the reality of the

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[24]David Punter, <u>The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day</u> (New York: Longman, 1980) 52.
[25] James, <u>Hawthorne</u>, 98.
[26] Abel, <u>The Moral Picturesque</u>, 255.
[27] Millicent Bell, preface to <u>Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays</u> (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005) viii.

present directly'.[28] Indeed, as Jerrold E. Hogle stresses, while the Gothic genre is often

associated with the fantastical or supernatural, it must not necessarily be viewed as detached

from the concerns of everyday society: 'The longevity and power of Gothic fiction

unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most

important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to

the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth

century'.[29] Such arguments underpin my claims in the following section that decay and ruin,

far from being qualities which work only to create a Gothic or unreal atmosphere in The

House of the Seven Gables, also play a central role in the text's engagement with the realities

of life in nineteenth century New England. In this respect, just as ruin spans the gap between

past and present and the distance between Old World and New World, it also bridges the gap

between the real and the fantastical, two elements in Hawthorne's fiction which have been

the focus of much critical debate over the years.

Hepzibah's Ruin

By the nineteenth century, the sole Pyncheon occupant of the house of the seven gables is the

old maid Hepzibah whose decision, in the first nineteenth century chapter of the novel, to

reopen a cent-shop in one of the front rooms of the house is testament to the present day

decline of the Pyncheons. Hepzibah, 'a gaunt, sallow, rusty-jointed maiden' (II:41), is

another example of Hawthorne's interest in exploring the variety of ways in which a person

can be considered ruined. Hepzibah's condition as human ruin is entwined with the history of

the house and the Pyncheon family name. In establishing his two houses in Colonial America

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[28] Millicent Bell, "Hawthorne and the Real," in Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005) 17.
[29] Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture" in The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction, ed. Jerrold E Hogle, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 4.

(the house of the Pyncheon name and the literal house of the seven gables) the Colonel

endows his decedents with aristocratic pretensions, the sense of inherited privilege and status

which will become increasingly obsolete as time wears on. The financial necessity of opening

the cent shop indicates the perilous financial position in which Hepzibah finds herself at the

opening of the nineteenth century portion of the novel and the fact that her pretentions to

inherited status and wealth are wholly illusory. Other townsfolk come to the shop to witness

'what sort of a figure a mildewed piece of aristocracy, after wasting all the bloom and much

of the decline of her life apart from the world, would cut behind a counter' (II:54). In

Hepzibah, Hawthorne explores the idea of a ruined aristocrat in nineteenth century American

society. Aristocracy is a common theme in European Gothic novels of the late eighteenth

century. While such novels are often set in the Medieval past, the power struggles of the

aristocratic families which are depicted in them would have resonated with contemporary

British readers because of 'the economic upheavals which characterised Britain in the

eighteenth century, ones in which aristocratic power was replaced by the new economies

largely generated through international trade which were controlled by, and helped to

consolidate, the new middle classes'.[30] Often the decay of the feudal castle, that 'symbol of

the power and wealth of the landowner and more broadly the social, cultural and political

hegemony,' can be understood as analogous to the declining power of the aristocracy itself. [31]

The castle of Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), spread 'along a vast extent

of rock, and now partly in decay' is perhaps the archetypal decaying Gothic castle.[32] Such

decaying castles, with mysterious hidden rooms and the threat of confinement or death,

provide both the plot devices and atmosphere necessary for such Gothic romance. The Gothic

heroine Emily's sense that it 'seemed as if her fate rested here, and was by some invisible

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[30] Andrew Smith, Gothic Literature (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 23.

[31] Dana Arnold, "The Country House: Form, Function and Meaning," Architecture and Design in Europe and America, 1750-2000, ed. Abigail Harrison Moore and Dorothy C Rowe (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006) 69.

[32] Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980[1794]) 241.

means connected with this castle' highlights the importance of the castle in such a romance.[33] For writers such as Radcliffe, Gothic conventions could be appropriated for means beyond plot and atmosphere; the ruined aristocrats and their decaying castles of the Gothic provided a platform for the promotion of social reform: 'in Radcliffe's Gothic…castles are structures of oppression, of confinement and curtailed liberties…their very dilapidated condition signifying such "manorial" powers as feudal vestiges, with no energy of their own, save for what they extract from their immured victims'.[34] Ruined aristocrats can also be found in the writing of more politically moderate Gothic authors such as Walpole. The Castle of Otranto depicts a struggle for aristocratic legitimacy and by the end of the novel the family of Manfred is deposed by the rightful heir, Theodore, and Manfred's castle is utterly destroyed. Yet, despite the restoration of a legitimate aristocratic power in Theodore, the novel does not end on a positive note, as Theodore, being deprived of his true love Matilda, settles with another, Isabella, and the novel concludes with the statement that 'he was persuaded he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom he could forever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul'.[35] This is far from a happy ending, and allows the novel to 'be read as an allegory of political decline, in which the restoration of a form of legitimacy does not in itself re-empower the aristocracy'.[36] So while Walpole does not directly criticise the structures of aristocratic power in Britain as Radcliffe would decades later, he does, through this depiction of a Medieval struggle for aristocratic legitimacy, create a novel which is decidedly ambivalent about the decline of the aristocracy.[37]

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[33] Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, 250.

[34] Robert Miles, Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 78.

[35] Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964 [1764]) 110.

[36] Andrew Smith, Gothic Literature, 23.

[37] Ellen Malenas Ledoux argues that although Walpole was an observer of political process rather than an advocate of reform his fiction is a precursor to the novels of later, radical Gothic authors: 'His willingness to experiment with mode and genre is one later authors embrace with alacrity' such as in the Revolutionary era when 'authors such as Eliza Fenwick and William Goodwin deploy Gothic motifs to advocate for specific forms of social change and to acknowledge the reader's agency in determining a text's political impact'. Ellen Malenas

In Hepzibah and her ruined domicile, Hawthorne presents the European Gothic convention of ruined or declining aristocracy in a new American light. The idea of an American aristocracy would have been a provocative one for Hawthorne's nineteenth century readers. To the Americans who fought for freedom from monarchical rule during the War of Independence, the aristocratic structure of society was one of the injustices which they sought to eradicate from the New World. Thomas Paine in Common Sense (1776) denounces aristocracy along with monarchy: 'To the evil of monarchy we have added that of hereditary succession; and as the first is a degradation and lessening of ourselves, so the second, claimed as a matter of right, is an insult and an imposition on posterity'.[38] Subsequently the framers of "The Articles of Confederation" and then the Constitution prohibited inherited aristocratic titles and status from their new republic: '[no person] holding any office of profit or trust under the United States, or any of them [shall] accept of any present, emolument, office or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince or foreign state; nor shall the United States, in Congress assembled, or any of them, grant any title of nobility'.[39] In spite of this historical reality, Hepzibah continues to retain aristocratic pretensions and an enduring sense of privilege which she associates with her family name. The decaying aristocratic villains of the British Gothic tradition reflect the changes and anxieties within British society concerning the rising middle class and the remnants of the feudal aristocratic system, but in America, since the rejection of aristocracy is absolute, Hepzibah's sense of her own aristocratic heritage makes her nothing more than a faintly ridiculous anachronism. Unlike those European Gothic villains who still wield some semblance of power, Hepzibah's ruin is unequivocal.

Hepzibah's status as another of Hawthorne's ruined individuals, a person incomplete or

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Ledoux, Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change 1764-1843 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 26.

[38] Thomas Paine, Common Sense in Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings, ed. Mark Philip (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995 [1776]) 15.

[39] Various Authors, "The Articles of Confederation" in The American's Guide (Philadelphia: Hoagn & Thompson, 1833) 8.

deficient in comparison to the rest of society, is therefore due to her geographical and temporal location: in no place can the aristocrat be more ruined than in the new American Republic. The possibility that Hepzibah's ruination is due to her incongruity with the reality of nineteenth century American society is supported by the transatlantic nature of her aristocratic airs. Hepzibah does not merely see herself as an aristocrat, but as an *English* aristocrat: she is 'the immemorial, lady - two hundred years old, on this side of the water, and thrice as many on the other, - with her antique portraits, pedigrees, coats of arms, records and traditions' (II:38). Desperately holding on to the Old World heritage of her forefathers in the belief that it somehow retains its value and meaning in America actually perpetuates her ruin. Indeed, she not only holds onto the Old World aristocratic heritage which underlies her ruin, but she actively imagines that this heritage may be the antidote to her decline, that 'some harlequin trick of fortune would intervene, in her favor' and perhaps

> the member of Parliament, now at the head of the English branch of the
> family, - with which the elder stock, on this side of the Atlantic, had held
> little or no intercourse for the last two centuries, - this eminent gentleman
> might invite Hepzibah to quit the ruinous House of the Seven Gables, and
> come over to dwell with her kindred at Pyncheon Hall (II:64-5).

In another of Hawthorne's inversions of the American exceptionalist myth of a ruin free America, the decaying old world versus the pristine new world, Hepzibah looks to the Old World to free herself from present day American ruin. That this example of an individual's ruin involves considerations of American and European contexts is an illustration of how depictions of decay and ruin in Hawthorne's writing are often markers of the transatlantic framework which is evident even in this apparently provincial setting.

Hepzibah's sense of aristocratic entitlement, like many Pyncheons before her, is perpetuated

by a belief that the Colonel had all but secured a claim to 'a vast, and [in the seventeenth

century] as yet unexplored and unmeasured tract of eastern lands' which could potentially 'be

the source of incalculable wealth to the Pyncheon blood' (II:18). However, the Colonel dies

before the veracity of the claim is established, leaving successive generations of Pyncheons to

fantasize about the existence and rediscovery of a legal deed confirming the family's

ownership of lands which comprise 'the greater part of what is now known as Waldo County,

in the state of Maine' (II:18). This long sought-after document is itself transatlantic in its

initial conception and in the qualities it reveals in subsequent generations of Pyncheons, both

before and after the American Revolution. The document has its genesis in a combination of

Old and New World law. It is an 'Indian deed, confirmed by a subsequent grant of the

General Court [the Massachusetts colonial legislature]' (II:18).[40] But it is also said to be

'more extensive than many a dukedom, or even a reigning prince's territory on European

soil' (II:18), and is continually described in terms which evoke the grand landed estates of the

Old World. Indeed, as the above quotation illustrates, the expansive claim of land in the

seemingly limitless New World means that the Pyncheons aspire to even greater estates than

those found in the Old World. This lost deed becomes synonymous with the Pyncheon sense

of entitlement, while also illustrating how Hepzibah's aristocratic privilege is a symptom of

her enduring sense of an antiquated English heritage. In dreaming of discovering this ancient

deed, in spite of the fact that by the nineteenth century the land which it demarcates is 'no

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[40] The consideration of Native American decline is conspicuous by its absence within The House of the Seven Gables. Hawthorne's novel tells the story of the ruin which befalls two families, the Pyncheons and the Maule, due to an instance of land seizing. However, the ruin of the Native Americans, whose eradication comes hand in hand with the seizure of their land by the early settlers and subsequent American Governments do not figure within this novel. Despite its absence from The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne was far from ignorant of the plight of the American Indians. Indeed, Hawthorne, as Larry J. Reynolds notes, 'rejected the notion that Indians deserved to be driven from their lands' in his children's historical story A Whole History of Grandfather's Chair (1841). Larry J Reyonlds, Devils and Rebels: The Making of Hawthorne's Damned Politics (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2008) 37. See also Michael Colacurcio, "'Red Man's Grave': Art and Destiny in Hawthorne's "Main Street,'" Nathaniel Hawthorne Review, Vol. 31, No. 2, (September, 2005) 1-18.

longer a wilderness, but a populous fertility' (II:38), Hepzibah imagines that instead of working in her cent shop she could 'build a palace, and look down from its highest tower on hill, dale, forest, field, and town, as her own share of the ancestral territory'(II:65). That Hepzibah dreams of building a palace, a symbol of monarchical power and wealth, within the confines of Republican nineteenth century America, highlights her lingering Old World mind-set and is another example of how her ruined condition is, at least in part, dependent upon geographical and historical context.

As a study of human ruin, Hepzibah illustrates the way in which Hawthorne's characters can embody differing forms of ruin simultaneously and how these ruined conditions are themselves dependent upon subjective perceptions. She embodies two interrelated, but nonetheless distinct, forms of ruin. The first, her financial ruin, is a quantifiable kind of deterioration. Hepzibah's condition is entirely dependent upon the amount of money she possesses and has a real, measurable quantity. However, as a decayed aristocrat, her ruined condition is also determined by the absence in America of the social structure of hereditary succession. Because European-style aristocratic rank is at odds with the founding principles of the Constitution, other American citizens will not recognise such status. But, equally, her ruination has its roots in her persisting perception of herself in these aristocratic terms. In respects to her status, Hepzibah to some degree perpetuates her own ruined condition by continuing to yearn for the forms of Old World aristocracy. Hawthorne utilises Hepzibah's compound ruin, social rank and financial health, to make a wider comment about the capriciousness of life in Antebellum America. The narrator states that:

> In this republican country, amid the fluctuating waves of our social life,
>
> somebody is always at the drowning-point. The tragedy is enacted with as

continual a repetition as that of a popular drama on a holiday, and,

nevertheless, is felt as deeply, perhaps, as when an hereditary noble sinks

below his order. More deeply; since, with us, rank is the grosser substance of

wealth and a splendid establishment, and has no spiritual existence after the

death of these, but dies hopelessly along with them (II:38).

It seems that individual or familial ruin can be even more destructive for some in America

than in Europe because 'The capitalist who loses everything loses everything, whereas the

nobleman, losing everything material, retains his nobility, which has a "spiritual

existence"'.[41] It is implied that if Hepzibah had found herself in a similar predicament in

England, her loss may not have been as total since she would have retained the aristocratic

rank and status originally associated with the Pyncheon name. Her circumstance at the

opening of the novel, working in a cent shop in a converted room of the house of the seven

gables, depicts an America which, although free from the limiting societal structures of

hereditary rank, is far from being a land of endless opportunity and prosperity; Hepzibah's

situation reflects the realities of nineteenth century America where rapid economic expansion

and development made individual financial ruin more prevalent:

The antebellum decades witnessed an acceleration in the growth of market

relations that made bankruptcy a social, cultural, and political problem of

particularly great intensity. During these years, American entrepreneurs

forged an increasingly national "credit system" and ever more integrated and

competitive markets for goods and services, all of which helped usher in the

modern business cycle. Together, these processes democratized the spectre

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[41] Walter Benn Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate," in The American Renaissance Reconsidered, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald Pease (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 160.

of insolvency, bringing its anxieties and perplexities to a greatly expanded

population of market-oriented proprietors.[42]

Hepzibah's financial ruin, illustrated by the opening of the cent shop, reflects the kind of

situation faced by a proportion of Americans during the Antebellum years when the country

was so rapidly expanding. Therefore in spite of, or perhaps because of, her incongruity with

nineteenth century New England, Hepzibah's longings for European aristocratic status

provide a transatlantic context in which Hawthorne is able to make a direct comment upon

the reality of individual financial ruin in Antebellum America. In Hepzibah we see how

Hawthorne uses the notion of decay not only to provide a Gothic atmosphere for his romance

but also to represent the stark reality of a nineteenth century present in which progress and

expansion can leave some people and places behind; ruin is therefore key to the way in which

this novel, populated with the conventions of the European Gothic tradition, nonetheless, in

Bell's words quoted earlier, 'faces the reality of the present directly'. This is a representation

of America and the American in which

> Enlargement, expansion and freedom are real enough for the nation, but not
>
> necessarily for the single individual. 'Going ahead' immerses one in boiling
>
> agitation; Progress demands that all be swept away, ground to nothing, and
>
> reformed'.[43]

We can also see this idea of the individual left behind by progress, and specifically

technology, in Hawthorne's short story "The Old Apple Dealer" (1843). Here, the narrator

describes an old man who sells apples, and other small items, next to a railway platform. The

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[42] Edward J. Balleisen, Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 5.

[43] McWilliams Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character, 18. McWilliams makes this comment about the written observations of French engineer, statesman and economist, Michael Chevalier, whose ideas about the fluctuating nature of American fortunes, McWilliams notes, bear a similarity to Hawthorne's, particularly in the use of water imagery.

old man is another of Hawthorne's studies of the human ruin, a man in 'his chill decline of life, earning scanty bread by selling cakes, apples, and candy'. The old man's decline is at odds with the frantic activity of the contemporary scene around him: 'It seems as if the whole world, both morally and physically, were detached from its old standfasts, and set in rapid motion. And, in the midst of this terrible activity, there sits the old man of gingerbread, so subdued, so hopeless, so without a stake in life' (X:455). Hawthorne utilises the symbol of the locomotive, emblem of movement, expansion and progress, as the direct counterpoint to the man's ruin and another example of the way in which the rapid progress of the American nation comes at the detriment of some individuals: he and the train 'are each other's antipodes; the latter is the type of all that go ahead - and the old man, the representative of that melancholy class who, by some sad witchcraft, are doomed never to share in the world's exulting progress' (X:455).

Towards the end of <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>, Hawthorne similarly utilises the symbol of the steam-engine to illuminate the realities of American ruin when Hepzibah and her brother Clifford flee the house of the seven gables. Almost the only portion of the narrative which occurs outwith the house and its surroundings, the chapter of the novel titled "The Flight of the Two Owls" narrates the aging siblings' attempt to escape from the locale of the house by means of the locomotive. Clifford engages another passenger in a lengthy discussion concerning the benefits of technical progress and how the new innovations of the period will lead to a new "'nomadic state'" in which, rather than being restricted by one place and home, people will "'live everywhere, and nowhere'" (II:259,261). However, Clifford's frenzied oration on how technology and progress will free the American from the

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cumbersome burden of provincial history is eventually undermined in the scene which greets

him when they disembark from the train:

> At a little distance stood a wooden church, black with age, and in a dismal
>
> state of ruin and decay, with broken windows, a great rift through the main
>
> body of the edifice, and a rafter dangling from the top of the square tower.
>
> Farther off was a farm-house, in the old style, as venerably black as the
>
> church, with a roof sloping downward from the three-story peak, to within a
>
> man's height of the ground. It seemed uninhabited. There were the relics of a
>
> wood-pile, indeed, near the door, but with grass sprouting up among the
>
> chips and scattered logs. The small rain-drops came down aslant; the wind
>
> was not turbulent, but sullen, and full of chilly moisture (II:266).

With this stark vision of the decline of American religion and agriculture in the shadow of

technological progress, Hawthorne once more demonstrates that America's swift growth does

not come without a cost. This ruined church and farm therefore illustrate another example of

how The House of the Seven Gables utilises images of decay and ruin in order to comment

upon the realities of nineteenth century American life.

In Untimely Ruins Nick Yablon discusses the ruins of Cairo, Illinois, 'a speculative town site

promoted as the future "Metropolis of the West" in broadsides, maps, and lithographs of the

late 1830s' that by the early 1840s had been wrecked by 'a devastating flood' which 'had

recently breached the jerry-built levees and engulfed the unfinished town, destroying property

and infrastructure and prompting all but a hundred of its citizens to flee'.[44] Although

destroyed by the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, Yablon demonstrates that the

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[44] Yablon, Untimely Ruins, 63.

ruin of this town can be traced to economic and legal hazards which lay at the heart of American expansion. Therefore, much like the ruin which Hawthorne envisages, first in Hepzibah's condition and then in the decaying church and farm buildings, the ruins of Cario, Illinois are evidence of 'the contingencies and contradictions that appeared to mark the process of urban growth throughout the nation'.[45] The ruinous repercussions of progress which Hepzibah's situation illuminates and which the farm-house and church embody can be understood in the same terms as Procházka's 'ghost towns' in his Ruins in the New World (2012). Much of Procházka's thesis focuses upon the abandoned American town and how the ruins of such towns generate different meanings from ruins in the Old World. Procházka talks of the 'ghastliness of the ghost town, constantly haunting the myth of progress'.[46] The argument that 'American ruins often function as subversive heterotopias, unsettling discourses of progress and other ideological views of history and demonstrating the working of modern economic or technological power' can also be applied to the depictions of decay and ruin in The House of the Seven Gables which, in Hepzibah and then the scene Clifford beholds, undermine or comment upon American progress and expansion.[47]

"The Flight of the Two Owls" chapter ends with Hepzibah and Clifford praying upon the platform, a scene which, as Charles Swann argues, suggests a degree of ambiguity as to the overarching significance of these images of ruin:

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[45] Yablon, Untimely Ruins, 64.

[46] Procházka Ruins in the New World, 78.

[47] Procházka, Ruins in the New World, 72. Procházka often discusses ruins in terms of Foucault's idea of 'heterotopias': 'emplacements….that have the curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected or represented by them'. Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces" in Michel Foucault, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, quoted in Procházka, Ruins in the New World 7-8.

> *That* church, *that* farm may no longer possess social relevance owing to the
>
> coming of the railroad but that does not mean that agriculture and religion
>
> are redundant – as Hepzibah's prayer indicates. And Clifford's transport
>
> about the nomadic life ignore the necessary stasis of agriculture: it is indeed
>
> hard to conceive of Clifford as hunter/gatherer. It is difficult to read the
>
> conclusion of "The Flight of the Two Owls" without considering the social
>
> costs which have inevitably been incurred in making those particular
>
> symbols of necessary institutions redundant.[48]

Rather than being symbols of the end point of any particular institution, or standing as a warning about where such progress may ultimately lead society, these images of decline can instead be read as examples of the individual instances of ruin and decline which come hand in hand with American advancements. This idea that the process of decline is part of the ongoing movement of history rather than its end point is an essential one within this chapter and within my wider thesis. It is a concept which is evident in Hawthorne's depictions of ruin within the historical setting of The Scarlet Letter, where the American Republic grows from the ruinous foundations of Puritan society. In the following chapters, I will consider whether Hawthorne's encounters with European ruin alter this conception of ruin and decay as ongoing process rather than final outcome

The Judge and the Palace

The character of Hepzibah modifies the European Gothic convention of the decaying aristocrat in that, unlike the novels of Walpole and Radcliffe, Hepzibah is not the villain of

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[48] Charles Swann, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 113.

Hawthorne's romance. Hepzibah is described in an unforgiving manner: she is 'not a young

and lovely woman, nor even the stately remains of beauty, storm shattered by affliction – but

a gaunt, sallow rusty-jointed maiden, in long-waisted silk-gown, and with the strange horror

of a turban on her head!' (II:41). And yet, in spite of this harsh description and the

ridiculousness of her aristocratic pretensions, Hepzibah is very much a sympathetic character

whose mundane situation could apparently still make her the novel's hero since

> if we look through all the heroic fortunes of mankind, we shall find this same
>
> entanglement of something mean and trivial with whatever is noblest in joy
>
> or sorrow. Life is made up of marble and mud…What is called poetic insight
>
> is the gift of discerning, in this sphere of strangely-mingled elements, the
>
> beauty and the majesty which are compelled to assume a garb so sordid
>
> (II:41).

Nina Baym argues that 'Through this rhetoric, and more to come, the narrator tells readers

that Hepzibah is both a heroic character and *his* heroine'.[49] Central to Baym's argument for

defining Hepzibah as not only the novel's main character but its heroine, is the fact that she is

'the only character who actually clashes' with the novel's villain, and her own cousin, Judge

Jaffrey Pyncheon.[50]

Jaffrey is the one character in the novel who appears, on the surface at least, to counter the

idea that the Pyncheons are a family in decline. Jaffrey presents an outward impression of

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[49] Nina Baym, "The Heroine of The House of the Seven Gables; or Who Killed Jaffrey Pyncheon?" The New England Quarterly, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Dec. 2004) 609. Anthony Trollope claimed that 'the personage we like best in the book is certainly Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon' because 'her timidity, her affection, her true appreciation of herself, her ugliness, her hopelessness, and general incapacity for everything...are wonderfully drawn.' Anthony Trollope, "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review 129 (1879) 215.
[50] Baym, "The Heroine of the House of the Seven Gables," 608.

success and respectability and, unlike Hepzibah, he has achieved success though individual achievement:

> Applying himself, in earlier manhood, to the study of the law, and having a
> natural tendency towards office, he had attained, many years ago, to a
> judicial situation in some inferior court, which gave him, for life, the very
> desirable and imposing title of Judge. Later, he 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 (II:24).

In spite of the dubiousness of his title acquired in 'some inferior court,' his status has been attained rather than inherited. The Judge thus embodies something pertaining to the American ideal of the self-made man, a notion celebrated by, among others, Benjamin Franklin, who promotes the idea of America as a land where personal endeavour could replace hereditary succession as the pathway to success: in America, 'We may make these times better if we bestir ourselves….If we are industrious we will never starve'.[51] Franklin's ideals are often understood as the foundational concepts of what would become the notion of the American Dream.[52] However, in spite of the national reverence of Franklin's ideals, Hawthorne's earlier children's story about Benjamin Franklin contained within his Biographical Stories for Children (1842), ends with a cautionary statement about Franklin's principles in a manner which has a particular relevance for the character of the Judge. After being told the story of Franklin's childhood by his father, young Edward states that he has read some of Franklin's

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[51] Benjamin Franklin, "The Way to Wealth: The Sayings of Poor Richard," in A Benjamin Franklin Reader, ed. Walter Isaacson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003 [1757]) 176. In an episode from his autobiography, Franklin contrasts the positivity of his outlook with others who foresaw decline rather than prosperity: 'There are croakers in every country, always boading its ruin.' Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and Other Writings (New York: Bantam, 2008 [1791]) 71.
[52] See J. A. Leo Lemay, "Franklin's Autobiography and the American Dream" in The American Dream, ed. Harold Bloom & Blake Hobby (New York: Chelsea House, 2009) 21-36.

proverbs 'but I do not like them. They are all about getting money or saving it'.[53] His father

replies that these proverbs 'were suited to the condition of the country; and their effect, upon

the whole, has doubtless been good, although they teach men but a very small portion of their

duties' (VI:274). Certainly, we should not identify Benjamin Franklin too closely with Judge

Pyncheon but, as we shall see, the notion that Franklin's ideals can be beneficial to national

progress but detrimental to individual morality is something which can be directly applied to

Jaffrey Pyncheon.

The Judge, unlike the Old World relic Hepzibah, is shaped by and continues to shape the

New England society in which he lives and works. Peter J. Bellis sees him 'as an embodiment

of the interlocking political, social, and economic elites that dominated antebellum

Massachusetts'.[54] In spite of his affluence and prominent social position, the Judge harbours a

secret obsession with the illusive Waldo County Claim and its promise of 'incalculable

wealth to the Pyncheon blood' (II:18). While Hepzibah's dreams of the deed and her

transatlantic longing for Old World aristocratic status make her a faintly ridiculous character,

it is the Judge's belligerent pursuit of this claim which illuminates his true character and his

status as the novel's villain.[55] Hepzibah, is one of the few characters to recognise the Judge's

true motives and personality: she sees Jaffrey as the present day reincarnation of the Colonel,

stating that 'nobody would doubt that it was the old Pyncheon come again!' (II:59). The

narrator tells us that 'In almost every generation…there happened to be some one descendant

of the family, gifted with a portion of the hard, keen sense, and practical energy, that had so

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[53] Nathaniel Hawthorne, Biographical Stories for Children in The Ohio State Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol VI: True Stories, ed. William Charvat et al (Ohio: Ohio State University Press) 274.
[54] Peter J. Bellis, Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman and Thoreau (The University of Georgia Press: Athens, Georgia, 2003) 43.
[55] As a villain, Luecke sees Jaffrey second only to Hawthorne's 'greatest villain' Roger Chillingworth in terms of 'artistic importance.' Jane Marie Luecke, "Villains and Non-Villains in Hawthorne's Fiction," PMLA Vol. 78, No. 5, (1963) 556.

distinguished the original founder' (II:19). The similarities between Colonel and Judge

suggest that the novel depicts history as a cyclical process; as Bell argues, 'It is Judge

Pyncheon's symbolic function to represent the repetition of the past in the present, to

represent the cyclical…view of history'.[56] McWilliams sees Colonel Pyncheon and Judge

Pyncheon as illustrations of 'the dominant Puritan spirit, past and present' since they 'possess

a physical solidity and imposing bearing that enable them to dominate family and

community. In both men the Puritan devotion to the common weal serves to cloak an

aggressive materialism that taints their region's character'.[57] McWilliams understands the

ultimate goals of the Colonel and Judge to be the same although 'differences between their

eras...force them to adopt different means towards the same ends'.[58] However, it could also

be argued that while the Judge's own 'aggressive materialism' can be viewed as the modern

incarnation of the Colonel's Puritan spirit, there are notable differences between these

characters. Although McWilliams claims that material wealth is the goal of both characters, I

would argue that the Colonel's materialism suggests a different objective to the Judge's. The

Colonel seizes Maule's land and works towards the appropriation of the larger Waldo County

area in order to ensure that 'his race and future generations [will be] fixed on a stable basis,

and with a stately roof to shelter them for centuries to come' (II:17).[59] By contrast, in the

political and cultural landscape of the recently formed American Republic, Jaffrey Pyncheon

pursues material wealth in order to support the enlargement of his public reputation. The

narrator tells us that the Judge is of that category of men

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[56] Michael Davitt Bell, Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971) 222.

[57] McWilliams Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character 109.

[58] McWilliams Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character 109.

[59] Abel argues that 'Colonel Pyncheon should not….be regarded as an incarnation of evil. Though not amiable he was a strong and respectable character in terms of the tradition then valid. In private life he was capable of tenderness, as is indicated by mention of his feeling towards his grandson; in public life, he was a respected embodiment of strict authority.' Abel, The Moral Picturesque, 260.

to whom forms are of paramount importance. Their field of action lies among the external phenomena of life. They possess vast ability in grasping, and arranging, and appropriating to themselves, the big, heavy, solid unrealities, such as gold, landed estate, offices of trust and emolument, and public honors. With these materials, and with deeds of goodly aspect, done in the public eye, an individual of this class builds up, as it were, a tall and stately edifice, which, in the view of other people, and ultimately in his own view, is no other than the man's character, or the man himself. Behold, therefore, a palace! Its splendid halls and suites of spacious apartments are floored with a mosaic-work of costly marbles; its windows, the whole height of each room, admit the sunshine through the most transparent of plate-glass; its high cornices are gilded, and its ceilings gorgeously painted; and a lofty dome - through which, from the central pavement, you may gaze up to the sky, as with no obstructing medium between - surmounts the whole. With what fairer and nobler emblem could any man desire to shadow forth his character? (II:229).

Paradoxically, wealth and status, those material and measurable concerns which the Judge (and the Colonel) so ruthlessly pursues are 'unrealities' here. This highlights the different ways in which the concept of reality can be read in Hawthorne's writing. I have discussed Millicent Bell's focus upon reality as the social conditions which existed at the time Hawthorne was writing, yet Hawthorne is also interested in a different, Platonic understanding of reality in which the material world is only an imperfect copy of an ideal reality beyond the ordinary world of sensory perception. The narrator of Hawthorne's short story "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1846) proposes that the artist should seek to 'attain to the

ideal, which Nature has proposed to herself, in all her creatures, but has never taken pains to realise' (X:466). The artist's relationship with the ideal is an important concept in Hawthorne's journal accounts of decay in European art objects, discussed in Chapter 5. Such theories of reality underpin Hawthorne's criticism of a materialism which prizes the physical over spiritual or ideal forms; for instance in his sketch "A Book of Autographs" Hawthorne's narrator asserts that 'Human nature craves a certain materialism, and clings pertinaciously to what is tangible, as if that were of more importance than the spirit accidentally involved in it' (XI:359-60). This distinction between material and spiritual provokes the scathing critical tone of the above passage, suggesting in the Judge what Neal Frank Doubleday calls a 'confusion of spiritual values with material possessions, the hollow self-satisfaction of an aristocracy of wealth'.[60]

In the above description of the Judge, Hawthorne returns to the language of architecture, which punctuates much of his work, to demonstrate the parallels between the Colonel's desire to build the literal and figurative Pyncheon houses and Jaffrey's desire to build 'the palace' of his character. The 'costly marbles,' 'high cornices,' 'ceilings gorgeously painted' and 'lofty dome' of this metaphorical palace reflect the scope and grandeur of the Judge's reputation. The metaphor of the palace also implies, through the strength of its materials and the extent of its scale, that Jaffrey, like the Colonel, pursues a form of permanence and longevity, although this time for his own public reputation rather than that of his family. Indeed, Jaffrey's lack of concern for his progeny is highlighted by the fact that he has already 'frowned upon, and finally cast off, an expensive and dissipated son' (II:231). That Jaffrey's character is represented as a palace is also significant because it links his own achievements

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[60] Neal Frank Doubleday, "Hawthorne's Criticism of New England Life," College English Vol. 2, No 7 (1941) 644.

to Hepzibah's naïve aristocratic and transatlantic longing. Clearly Jaffrey is a citizen of nineteenth century America in the manner that Hepzibah will never be; he is 'certainly more capitalist than nobleman'.[61] While the Constitution ensured that there could be no hereditary aristocracy in America, the rapidly growing capitalist society saw the emergence of a class of moneyed elite which, to many lower-middle class Americans, seemed to embody a new form of aristocracy, one equally threatening to the values of the Republic. The <u>Democratic Review</u>, a periodical of the time which set out to promote Jacksonian Democracy, highlights the anxiety concerning the rise of an American moneyed aristocracy: 'We have, indeed, a privileged order, a numerous privileged order, a most powerful privileged order, and the only kind of privileged order which can, in the nature of things, exist in the United States'.[62] To the proponents of such a viewpoint, the emergence of an American moneyed elite creates social inequalities almost identical to the those produced by the aristocracies of Europe:

> in the United States the many live and labor for the benefit of the few, as
> certainly as they do so in Great Britain. In the one country as in the other, the
> palace and the poor-house rise side by side. With us, as with them, splendid
> wealth and sordid poverty jostle one another in the streets.[63]

In a similar manner to Hawthorne's depiction of Judge Pyncheon, this editorial piece from the <u>Democratic Review</u> invokes the image of palaces in the United States in order to stress the incompatibility of such privilege with the principles of American democracy. Such concerns about the rise of a moneyed aristocracy in America were, however, not new to American society. In 1816, Thomas Jefferson, also citing Britain as the negative example, wrote 'I hope we shall take warning from the example and crush in it's [sic] birth the

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[61] Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate," 160.
[62] "Thoughts on Times," <u>Democratic Review</u> 6 (November 1839) 454.
[63] "Thoughts on Times" 452.

aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a

trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country'.[64]

The European connotations of the palace of the Judge's character suggest that his pursuit of

public reputation can be seen as an aspect of the Old World aristocratic desire to perpetuate

status and wealth, displayed by the Colonel and then ironised in Hepzibah's ruin, adapted to

the conditions of American capitalist society. While the principles of hereditary aristocracy

and the ability to guarantee a family's entitlement to rank and status have been eradicated by

the Constitution, subsequent increases of individual liberty and opportunity have seen, in

personages such as Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, the rise of a new privileged class. For this new

breed of aristocracy, an obsession with building a grand and durable public character is

comparable to the desire of European aristocracy to perpetuate their own linage through

hereditary succession.

With the villainous Jaffrey representing a new kind of moneyed aristocracy, the novel's

relationship to the European Gothic tradition is once more evident. Unlike the novels of this

tradition, The House of the Seven Gables 'is not a middle class myth of the aristocracy, but a

lower-middle-class myth of an overpowerful *haute bourgeoisie* which has tried to usurp

democratic privileges'.[65] Hepzibah's dreams of hereditary aristocratic privilege are

completely out of place in nineteenth century New England, underlining the fact that such

societal structures are not compatible with an American setting and that geographic locale

can therefore dictate the way in which certain literary conventions, such as the Gothic

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[64] Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, November 12, 1816, in The Works of Thomas Jefferson Vol. 12, ed.
Paul Leicester Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904) 44.
[65] David Punter, The Literature of Terror: Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition (New York: Routledge, 2013) 175.

concern with aristocracy, are utilised. Hepzibah is a transatlantic character in her continual thoughts of English aristocracy, but the utter failure of her dreams only serves to strengthen the idea of national distinctions. In the case of the Judge, however, Hawthorne finds his aristocratic Gothic villain in the new circumstance of an emerging American capitalist elite. As an aristocratic Gothic villain, the Judge also highlights the transatlantic nature of Hawthorne's use of the Gothic. In this case, the Gothic conventions are not completely contradicted by the national context but are instead adapted or stretched to suit it, demonstrating something like the 'transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchange' which Gilroy talks of in his foundational study of transatlantic cultures in The Black Atlantic (2003).[66] As a building with such obvious Old World connotations, the metaphorical palace of Jaffrey's character therefore reinforces the idea that this prominent American citizen can nonetheless be seen as a transatlantic construction.

Just as the familial permanence pursued by Colonel Pyncheon is ultimately undermined by decay, so Jaffrey's pursuit of a similarly grandiose and permanent public reputation is also contaminated by a form of decay. In spite of its outward splendour and stability, the palaces which such men construct out of their public lives conceal a ruinous secret:

> Ah! but in some low and obscure nook, - some narrow closet on the ground-
> floor, shut, locked and bolted, and the key flung away, - or beneath the
> marble pavement, in a stagnant water-puddle, with the richest pattern of
> mosaic-work above, - may lie a corpse, half decayed, and still decaying, and
> diffusing its death-scent all through the palace! The inhabitant will not be
> conscious of it, for it has long been his daily breath! Neither will the visitors,

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[66] Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, (London: Verso, 1993) 87.

for they smell only the rich odors which the master sedulously scatters

through the palace, and the incense which they bring, and delight to burn

before him! Now and then, perchance, comes in a seer, before whose sadly

gifted eye the whole structure melts into thin air, leaving only the hidden

nook, the bolted closet, with the cobwebs festooned over its forgotten door,

or the deadly hole under the pavement, and the decaying corpse within. Here,

then, we are to seek the true emblem of the man's character, and of the deed

that gives whatever reality it possesses to his life. And, beneath the show of a

marble palace, that pool of stagnant water, foul with many impurities, and,

perhaps, tinged with blood,- that secret abomination, above which, possibly,

he may say his prayers, without remembering it, - is this man's miserable

soul! (II:229-30).

The palace metaphor therefore works to illuminate the Judge's own ruined condition, the

hidden decay of his soul. As yet another examination of the human ruin in Hawthorne's

American fiction, the Judge is comparable to Arthur Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter. Both

of these characters are understood to have ruined souls. For Dimmesdale, the ruin of his soul

is inexorably tied to his physical condition which deteriorates over time as he wrestles with

his secret guilt. For the Judge, the metaphor of the palace and the hidden corpse depicts the

relation between his public and private selves - his external and internal condition is

comparable to the connection between Dimmesdale's physical and spiritual conditions. The

key difference between the Judge and Dimmesdale is that, for the majority of The House of

the Seven Gables, the Judge appears to be free of the interlinked ruin which is so intrinsic to

Dimmesdale's condition. Despite his decaying soul, Jaffrey exhibits no outward signs of ruin;

his reputation is untouched by his corrupted inner self because the public remain unaware of

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the 'death-scent' of decay which infects the palace. Instead the public is duped by his outward pretensions of civic duty and responsibility, 'the rich odors which the master sedulously scatters through the palace.' It is a concealment which the people of the town aid through 'the incense which they bring, and delight to burn before him' in their praise and reverence for his status. Dimmesdale's internal ruin, reflected in his outer physical ruin, is related to his status as a religious figure; in this character, Hawthorne offers a study of sin and spiritual ruin within the already fraught context of Puritan society where every individual is burdened with the Puritan fear of total depravity and the eternal crisis of predestination. But although the metaphor of the corpse and the palace represents the Judge's ruined soul, Jaffrey's ruined soul is less a reflection upon a spiritual condition than an illustration of his corrupt relationship with the society in which he lives.

To Jefferson, there is a clear and essential distinction between the rising moneyed aristocracy and the conscientious governors and legislators of the American Republic. In the character of Judge Pyncheon this distinction is blurred. While the Judge can be seen as the 'capitalist entrepreneur par excellence' he also has political aspirations, namely to become Governor of Massachusetts. [67] Towards the end of the novel, Jaffrey suddenly and inexplicably dies after finally gaining entrance to the house of the seven gables in search of the elusive Waldo County deed. As he sits lifeless in a chair, Hawthorne's narrator explains that the Judge is late for a meeting with men who would look to facilitate his rise to political power:

> They are practised politicians, every man of them, and skilled to adjust those
>
> preliminary measures which steal from the people, without its knowledge,
>
> the power of choosing its own rulers. The popular voice, at the next

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[67] Susan M. Mizruchi, The Power of Historical Knowledge: Narrating the Past in Hawthorne, James Dreiser (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988) 113.

gubernatorial election, though loud as thunder, will be really but an echo of
what these gentleman speak, under their breath, at your friend's festive
board. They meet to decide upon their candidate. This little knot of subtle
schemers will control the Convention, and, through it, dictate to the party
(II:274).

That these few men, rather than the wider electorate, wield so much political power is testament to the corruption which infects American democracy. Reynolds argues that this is 'Hawthorne's contemporary version of what happened in Salem in 1692' during the witch trails, when men in positions of authority 'exerted undue influence on people and contributed to their fears and hatred'.[68] As well as marking the Judge out to be a deceitful politician, his inner ruin, his decaying soul, hidden as it is beneath the grand palace of his public character, is emblematic of a hidden corruption at the heart of all of modern American politics, where the public voice is really controlled by the whispers of a few select men. As Bellis puts it, 'Politics here is a matter of property and theft, the theft of popular choice rather than its representation. For all the ostensible "democracy" of antebellum political conventions, political candidates were still selected by a small group of party leaders'.[69] The Judge's exposure reminds us of Whitman's words in Leaves of Grass: 'Of the frivolous Judge – of the corrupt Congressman, Governor/ Mayor – or such as these standing helpless and exposed' (6-7).[70] While the exposure of the Judge appears to reflect Whitman's democratic idealism, there are perhaps more personal reasons for Hawthorne's vindictive treatment of the judge.

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[68] Reynolds, Devils and Rebels, 173-174.
[69] Bellis, Writing Revolution, 43.
[70] Whitman, "Thoughts," Leaves of Grass, 413-414.

The unsavoury picture of the American political system which is communicated through the character of Judge Pyncheon is often understood to have its basis in an unpleasant episode in Hawthorne's life during which he found himself ousted from the role of surveyor of the Salem Custom House because of his connections to the Democratic Party. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon is often identified with the Whig politician Charles Upham who led the calls for Hawthorne's removal. Turner states that 'Hawthorne could have been expected to declare that no character in the book was modelled on any person, as he declared when readers identified others of his characters with persons in real life; but he probably would have been willing for readers to identify Upham with Judge Pyncheon'.[71] The fact that this fictional human ruin can be so readily identified with a real person is even more striking considering the manner in which the dead body of Judge Pyncheon is treated in the chapter ironically titled 'Governor Pyncheon'; for almost an entire chapter, the narrator mocks the dead Judge, performing what Carton calls 'a wild rhetorical witch dance around his corpse'.[72] At the end of this long sequence, a fly 'which has smelt out Governor Pyncheon…alights now on his forehead, now on his chin, and now, Heaven help us, is creeping over the bridge of his nose, towards the would-be chief-magistrate's wide-open eyes!' (II:283). The episode of the fly highlights the fact that, with the Judge's death, the onset of physical decay has now taken hold of his body. The insult of the Judge's bodily decay is compounded by the almost instant deterioration of his public renown following his death, which the day after his demise has already begun to fade into obscurity as 'the public, with its customary alacrity, proceeded to forget he ever lived' (II:309-10). Where Hepzibah's ruin can in part be understood as an examination of decline as an inevitable part of national progress, in the character of Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne uses the idea of the human ruin as a scathing social critique. The

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[71] Arlin Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 229.
[72] Carton, The Rhetoric of American Romance, 221.

Judge's ruined soul, decaying body and obliterated public character combine to form an attack upon a specific individual politician and the machinations of American government in general. The Judge's ruin is therefore another illustration of the way in which decay and ruin in The House of the Seven Gables often work to communicate an impression of the social reality of antebellum America.

The Judge's ruined soul might also be understood to have its basis in his propensity to commit 'one questionable deed, among a thousand praiseworthy…ones' (II:231). Specifically, the Judge's treatment of own cousin, Clifford Pyncheon, is illustrative of the kind of deed which reflects Jaffrey's true character. The final chapter of the novel outlines how Jaffrey allowed Clifford to be wrongly convicted of the death of his uncle. The old man died when startled by Jaffrey who was searching for the Waldo County deed in his elder's private drawers. In the act of allowing Clifford to be wrongly imprisoned for murder, the Judge is himself implicated in the complete ruination of another character within the story. Described as 'a wasted, gray, and melancholy figure - a substantial emptiness, a material ghost' (II:105), Clifford is perhaps the most explicitly ruined character in all of Hawthorne's fictions. And yet, the extent of his ruin and its circumstances leave him somewhat at odds with the other human ruins I have and will examine in this thesis. Unlike the majority of Hawthorne's human ruins whose conditions of decay can often be linked to wider national or transnational themes, Clifford, other than in his temporary escape onto the train, is almost entirely cut off from the meaning of the world around him. Indeed it his decay, brought about by his wrongful imprisonment which underlies this separation from everyday life; it is as if 'a dim veil of decay and ruin betwixt him and the world' (II:106). Thus, unlike Hester or Hepzibah, whose ruination relates to their societal positions and national origins, Clifford is

an almost child-like recluse, whose decay suggests simply complete deterioration of the self and the spirit.

The characters of Jaffrey, Hepzibah and Clifford demonstrate that <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> is as much concerned with the idea of the human ruin as it is with more conventional Gothic images of architectural decay. Of all the various forms of ruin exemplified by these characters, only the imminent decay of Jaffrey's corpse can be classed as an expression of material ruin, analogous to that of the house. Although the timescales involved are entirely different, the corpse and the house are physical ruins which decay over time; they embody what is perhaps the most conventional conception of ruin – ruins as decayed relics, reminders of a past condition of completeness. More generally, the three ruined Pyncheons embody more abstract forms of decay: moral decay, political corruption, economic ruin and mental deterioration. There is, I would argue, a direct connection between these apparently disparate forms of ruin: although the abstract forms of decay which affect the Pyncheons appear different to the material, time-worn decay which impinges on the house of the seven gables and which will soon destroy the Judge's corpse, the decay of Jaffrey, Hepzibah and, tangentially, Clifford, can also be understood in terms of temporality. Each of these characters is, either directly or indirectly, ruined by their familial tendency to cling onto and repeat the past. Hepzibah's status as ruined aristocrat hinges on the fact that she continues to retain a belief in the Pyncheon name based on the status it conveyed during the Colonial era. Through the great wrong perpetrated against Clifford in pursuit of the Waldo County deed, Judge Jaffrey replicates, in the present, the sins of his forebear Colonel Pyncheon who seized the land of Matthew Maule and hence ruined him. In short, while these characters are not temporal ruins in the manner of the house, they are ruined by their obsessive connections to

history and, in particular, a pre-revolutionary past defined by strong links to English heritage. The human ruins of The House of the Seven Gables are therefore also symptoms of the cycle of repetitive history, stemming back in time to the Puritan epoch and across space to the Old World, which informs the Gothic decay of the house of the seven gables.

In discussing the Anglophilia of nineteenth century America, Jennifer Clark points out that 'Perhaps simply by definition, the conservative mind [in America] was politically and culturally sympathetic to England'.[73] This historical relationship between American conservatism and a reverence for England can be applied to the representation of the Pyncheons as a family whose desire to preserve and perpetuate the forms of the past is often communicated in terms associated with an Old World English culture. The Judge's move into conservative American politics can be viewed as the logical contemporary development of the Pyncheon family's conservative impulse. Depictions of decay and ruin in The House of the Seven Gables appear to show the failure of this Pyncheon conservative impulse; any attempt to preserve the past or to build for posterity is, it would seem, doomed to ruination. Identifying the conservative impulse with inevitable decay would seem to align the novel with a radical democratic ideology, in particular the kind of attitude towards politics and history espoused by the character of Holgrave.

Holgrave and the Politicisation of American Decay

Renting a room from Hepzibah Pyncheon, Holgrave is the only other resident of the house of the seven gables at the opening of the nineteenth century portion of the novel. A chapter of

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[73] Jennifer Clark, The American Idea of England, 1776-1840: Transatlantic Writing (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) 26

the novel entitled "The Daguerreotypist" presents the most detailed examination of Holgrave's character and ideas. Holgrave, the narrator tells us, is an archetypal figure, purportedly standing 'forth as the representative of many compeers in his native land' (II:181). In part, Holgrave's representativeness comes from the unrestrained disparateness of his early life. At only twenty-two Holgrave has already held a number of differing occupations: 'first, a country-schoolmaster; next, a salesman in a country store; and in either at the same time or afterwards, the political-editor of a country newspaper' (II:176). After these occupations he 'had subsequently travelled around New England and the middle states as a pedler, in the employment of a Connecticut manufactory of Cologne water and other essences,' 'studied and practised dentistry,' acted as 'supernumerary official, of some kind or other, aboard a packet ship,' 'spent some months in a community of Fourierists,' 'been a public lecturer on Mesmerism,' and finally, in his 'present phase' is a practitioner of daguerreotypy, an early form of photography (II:176). As Judith N. Shklar says of Holgrave, 'This youth has no fixed place in society, nothing inherited, does not stick to a single role in life, and rejects all efforts to restrict and bind him to a place and status. He is self-created because he is totally unfettered, immensely self-reliant, and the master of many skills'.[74] So while Jaffrey embodies the qualities of the American conservative, a product of contemporary America, but still a disciple of tradition and status quo, Holgrave's innate freedom makes him Hawthorne's 'portrait of a perfect young American democrat'.[75]

I argued above that Jaffrey embodies the American ideal of the self-made man in terms of his rise to social and political prominence. Holgrave exemplifies a different kind of self-reliance, one which is measured more by the qualities of his character than by his status or wealth.

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[74] Judith N. Shklar, <u>Redeeming American Political Thought</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 183
[75] Shklar, <u>Redeeming American Political Thought</u>, 183.

This is the self-dependence of the ideal American democrat celebrated in Ralph Waldo

Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (1841). Holgrave's unfettered early life matches Emerson's 'lad

from New Hampshire or Vermont, who in turn tries all the professions, who *teams it*, *farms*

it, *peddles*, keeps school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township,

and so forth, in successive years, and always, like a cat, falls on his feet' and who is, Emerson

asserts, 'worth a hundred of these city dolls' because 'He walks abreast with his days and

feels no shame in not "studying a profession," for he does not postpone his life, but lives

already. He has not one chance but a hundred chances'.[76] Another characteristic of Holgrave

which links him to Emerson's self-reliant man and to the notion of a representative American

is his enduring sense of self; we are told that 'what was most remarkable...in the young man,

was the fact, that, amid all these personal vicissitudes, he had never lost his identity' (II:177).

The primacy of the self over the constraining customs, traditions and histories of the outer

world is perhaps the single most important principle of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and of

Trancendentalism more generally; Emerson says 'Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of

your own mind. Absolve you to yourself and you shall have suffrage of the world'.[77]

It is not only through his character and his personal history that Holgrave is identified with

this particular kind of American democratic idealism. In the chapter entitled "The

Daguerrotypist," the language of Holgrave's long speeches, in which he rails against the

influences of tradition and custom in America, defines him as the most radical of democrats:

> a dead man, if he happens to have made a will, disposes of wealth no longer
>
> his own; or, if he die intestate, it is distributed in accordance with the notions

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[76] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in <u>Self Reliance and Other Essays</u>, ed. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover, 1993 [1841]) 32.
[77] Emerson, "Self-Reliance", 21.

of men much longer dead than he. A dead man sits on all our judgment-seats;

and living judges do but search out and repeat his decisions. We read in dead

men's books! We laugh at dead men's jokes, and cry at dead men's pathos!

We are sick of dead men's diseases, physical and moral, and die of the same

remedies with which dead doctors killed their patients! We worship the

living Deity according to dead men's forms and creeds. Whatever we seek to

do, of our own free motion, a dead man's icy hand obstructs us! Turn our

eyes to what point we may, a dead man's white, immitigable face encounters

them, and freezes our very heart! And we must be dead ourselves before we

can begin to have our proper influence on our own world, which will then be

no longer our world, but the world of another generation, with which we

shall have no shadow of a right to interfere (II:183).

In his denunciation of the past, Holgrave evokes the notion of 'dead' generations, a metaphor

which is also present in the rhetoric of some of the most prominent early proponents of

American democracy. Dead generations also symbolise the oppressive influence of the past

upon the present in the writing of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine. Jefferson, in a letter

to Samuel Kercheval dated June 12, 1816 states 'The dead have no rights. They are nothing

and nothing cannot own something. Where there is no substance, there can be no accident.

The corporeal globe, and everything upon it, belongs to its present corporeal inhabitants,

during their generation'.[78] This desire to remove the influences which past or 'dead'

generations continue to exert upon the living through long established laws and modes of

governance is also prevalent in Paine's Rights of Man (1791) where he contrasts his own

belief in the need for each generation to choose its own form of government with Edmund

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[78] Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, June 12th, 1816, in The Essential Jefferson, ed. John Dewey
(Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006) 244.

Burke's argument in <u>Reflections on the Revolution in France</u> (1790) that old institutions

should be venerated and only reformed gradually and naturally. Paine announces that

> I am contending for the rights of the living, and against their being willed
>
> away, and controlled and contracted for, by the manuscript assumed
>
> authority of the dead; and Mr Burke is contending for the authority of the
>
> dead over the rights and freedom of the living.[79]

For Jefferson and Paine, the idea of dead generations encompasses the many different

traditions, customs and laws which may continue to affect the affairs of the present

generation. Holgrave embodies an even more radical form of this democratic idealism; in his

rhetoric, we see this notion of the 'dead' opened up to cover practically every possible way in

which past generations might be understood to affect the affairs of the present one.

In Holgrave's radical democratic rhetoric, his utter repudiation of the past manifests itself in a

disgust towards signs of temporal decay; he yearns for 'the moss-grown and rotten Past…[to]

be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses

buried' (II:179). In the preface to <u>Leaves of Grass</u>, Walt Whitman, in elevating American

futurity over European feudalism, talks of the past as a 'corpse' which 'is slowly borne from

the eating and sleeping rooms of the house' of the nation.[80] Similarly, in "Self-Reliance,"

Emerson talks of the 'corpse of your memory' which 'scares us from our self-trust' by

encumbering each person with 'reverence for our past act or word'; it is such desire for

'conformity' which hinders any possibility of 'genuine action' for the individual. Holgrave's

rhetoric builds upon this transcendentalist tendency to depict the past as a corpse. For

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[79] Thomas Paine, <u>Rights of Man</u> in <u>Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings</u>, ed. Mark Philip (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995 [1791]) 15.
[80] Whitman, <u>Leaves of Grass</u>, "Preface," 711.

Holgrave, the corpse becomes a colossal encumbrance which 'lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body…as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant, his grandfather, who died a long while ago, and only needs to be decently buried' (II:182-3). Holgrave's metaphor of the corpse of the past endows Jefferson's and Paine's notions of dead generations with an impression of weighty physicality, which reinforces the sense of an oppressive, corrupting past. In Holgrave's radical democratic rhetoric, time worn decay works as the negative opposition against which an idealised vision of an ever-new America is defined as notions of decay and ruin become politicised. As Holgrave fiercely extols the Jeffersonian ideal of an America unencumbered by history, decay is held as the negative consequence of the conservative impulse. In light of these ideas, Jaffrey's corpse takes on a new significance: the conservative Judge's decaying body gives physical form to Holgrave's idea of the corpse of the past, lingering and hindering the present.

The politicisation of ruin in Holgrave's rhetoric also links with Hawthorne's interest in the significance of ruin in the construction of national identity. Holgrave's hatred of time-worn decay can be understood as a symptom of the American democratic spirit of Paine and Jefferson but it also links him to poets such as Franeau and Brackenbridge, who, as I discussed in my introduction, celebrated a perpetually youthful America in which decay and ruin, antithetically associated with the Old World, have no place. However, an important distinction to be made between Holgrave and the poets of the early American Republic is that while the revolutionary poets celebrate an America which was to be free of the ruin which corrupts the Old World, Holgrave sees America as a nation already encumbered by the influences of a decaying past. So while The Scarlet Letter examines myths of American

newness by depicting the decaying origins of American society, The House of the Seven Gables scrutinises such myths from the opposite end of history, representing a contemporary American society which has succumbed to various forms of decay. As the mid-nineteenth century proponent of the kind of ruin-averse idealism which characterised the revolutionary writers, Holgrave's desire to see the myth of America realised in contemporary society links him with the prevalent Antebellum urge to reform society: 'Few Americans committed themselves to radical movements like Mormonism, but a substantial number of men and women across the North became active in a web of single-issue reform societies. Reformers organized to address a long list of problems, including alcohol, slavery, women's rights, prisons, and Indian removal'.[81] Such desire to reform had at its core a perception of American decay and in particular the kind of moral decline which was seen to be threatening American society. As 'the wild reformer' Holgrave's ideas of reform are typically extreme; he does not pursue reform in the name of one specific issue but instead promotes the idea of total and continual societal reform in order that the present may remain free of the decay which has been allowed to infect society through conservatism:

> I doubt whether even our public edifices - our capitols, state-houses, court-
> houses, city-hall, and churches, - ought to be built of such permanent
> materials as stone or brick. It were better that they should crumble to ruin
> once in twenty years, or thereabouts, as a hint to the people to examine into
> and reform the institutions which they symbolize (II:184).

Once more Holgrave's radical proclamations have their basis in the Jefferson's ideas. Using tables of mortality to calculate the age of a single generation, Jefferson argued that 'Every constitution then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced

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[81] David Voelker, "Religious Sects and Social Reform" in Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives, ed. Mark Renfred Cheathem, Peter C. Mancall (Santa Barbra: ABC-CLIO, 2008) 108

longer, it is an act of force, and not of right'.[82] In his vision of the ruin of public buildings in

the name of reform, Holgrave takes Jefferson's ideas to a new extreme. Yet Holgrave's vision

of public buildings which are never to stand for more than twenty years is striking for the fact

that this radical American democrat, apparently so opposed to material decay, now appears to

be celebrating it. There is, of course, a difference between the time worn-decay which

Holgrave rejects and the instant ruin of the public edifices he promotes. The idea of

encouraging short-term cycles of ruin in order to aid reform and prevent the lingering decay

which Holgrave sees as the symptom of persisting generational influence, is a suggestive

example of how Hawthorne's writing continually examines the notion of ruin, not as one

single concept but as an idea so multifarious that two separate forms may be understood as

complete opposites.

Holgrave's hatred of temporal ruin is directed with most ferocity towards the decaying house

of the seven gables:

> Now, this old Pyncheon House! Is it a wholesome place to live in, with its
>
> black shingles, and the green moss that shows how damp they are? - its dark,
>
> low-studded rooms - its grime and sordidness, which are the crystallization
>
> on its walls of the human breath, that has been drawn and exhaled here in

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[82] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, September 6, 1789, in The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Volume 15 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958). In his reply Madison outlines clearly the impossibilities of his friend's radical new theory of governmental reform: 'However applicable in Theory the doctrine may be to a Constitution, it seems liable in practice to some very powerful objections. Would not a Government so often revised become too mutable to retain those prejudices in its favor which antiquity inspires, and which are perhaps a salutary aid to the most rational Government in the most enlightened age? Would not such a periodical revision engender pernicious factions that might not otherwise come into existence? Would not, in fine, a Government depending for its existence beyond a fixed date, on some positive and authentic intervention of the Society itself, be too subject to the casualty and consequences of an actual interregnum?' James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, February 4, 1790, in Letters and Other Writings of James Madison: 1769-1793, (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1865) 503-504

discontent and anguish? The house ought to be purified with fire, - purified

till only its ashes remain! (II:184).

To Holgrave, the decay of the house is a material embodiment of the corruptions of the past

and its systems of inherited custom and wealth which, to his mind, continue to plague the

American present. Charles Swann describes Holgrave's radicalism, his desire to see the

complete and perpetual ruin of societal institutions and customs, in terms of the European

revolutionaries of the age, suggesting that 'Holgrave's appeal to "the people" is more in the

spirit of 1848 than a Jeffersonian 1776'.[83] However, it is possible to see this politicisation of

ruin in terms of other, earlier, European revolutionaries. Holgrave's rejection of the typically

Gothic form of the house, with its merging of human experience and architecture, its

atmosphere of deterioration, might be compared with Mary Wollstonecraft's attack on

Edmund Burke's use of Gothic forms to venerate the past in his Reflections on the

Revolution in France. In arguing that 'the people of England well know, that the idea of

inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation and a sure principle of transmission;

without at all excluding a principle of improvement,' Burke conveys his own belief in the

sovereignty of previous generations through distinctly Gothic terminology.[84] As well as

conceiving the 'state' through the Gothic images of 'our hearths, our sepulchres, and our

alters,' Burke describes the system of British inheritance as 'grasped as in a kind of mortmain

for ever'. [85] The use of the term 'mortmain,' a legal term literally translated as 'dead hand,'

colours Burke's argument with a sense of the Gothic paranormal. Tom Dugget states that

Burke's use of this term 'sounds a reservoir of supernatural menace beneath the notion of the

immortal state that works upon the imagination more effectively than if the state presented

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[83] Swann, Tradition and Revolution, 108.
[84] Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1790])
33.
[85] Burke, Reflections, 33-4.

only its daylight face'.[86] Wollstonecraft, in her response to Burke, seizes on his Gothic

imagery and turns it back upon him in order to attack his conservative stance. Contrasting

Burke's belief in the present generation's debt to the past against the revolutionary

dislocation of the new constitutional Assembly of France, Wollstonecraft's language

prefigures the language that Hawthorne would give to Holgrave some sixty years later on the

other side of the Atlantic:

> Why was it a duty to repair an ancient castle, built in barbarous ages, of
>
> Gothic materials? Why were the legislators obliged to rake amongst
>
> heterogeneous ruins; to rebuild old walls, whose foundations could scarcely
>
> be explored when a simple structure might be raised on the foundation of
>
> experience, the only valuable inheritance our forefathers could bequeath?[87]

Like Holgrave, Wollstonecraft's desire to build new, democratic societal forms, finds its

outlet through the rejection of the material forms of the past which persist into the present.

Ruins and ancient buildings should not be maintained or venerated; instead, new

constructions, both material and ideological, should be celebrated, lest 'we are to reverence

the rust of antiquity'.[88] Placing Holgrave's hatred of the past and the forms of time-worn

decay within a wider tradition of European revolutionary sentiment emphasises the extent of

his radicalism, while also complicating the notion that his idealism characterises him as a

specifically American type.

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[86] Tom Duggett, Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 47-8.
[87] Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Men, (New York: Cosimo, 2008 [1790]) 66.
[88] Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Men, 18.

Holgrave is undoubtedly the hero of <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>. Eventually revealed to be the descendent of the Matthew Maule, his return to the house, allied with the death of the Judge allows the possibility of the original wrong of colonial dispossession to be finally rectified. The dénouement of <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> involves Holgrave's union with the novel's other adversary of decay and ruin, Phoebe, niece of Hepzibah and Clifford from the country, whose innocence is such that her bedroom becomes 'purified of all former evil and sorrow by her sweet breath and happy thoughts' (II:72). Viewing Holgrave as hero means that his politicisation of decay might suggest that the novel itself subscribes to the myth of Transcendental American newness in which decay and ruin are foreign, unwelcome concepts. However, as might be expected from Hawthorne's complex depictions of American ruin in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, Hawthorne's second novel also resists such binary readings of American decay. The dénouement of <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> sees the inheritance of the Judge's estate by Clifford, Pheobe and Hepzibah, and, through them, by 'that sworn foe of wealth and all manner of conservatism,—the wild reformer,—Holgrave!' (II:313). The group leave the decaying house of the seven gables for the Judge's grand country estate, prompting Holgrave to speculate about this new home:

> But I wonder that the late Judge—being so opulent, and with a reasonable
> prospect of transmitting his wealth to descendants of his own—should not
> have felt the propriety of embodying so excellent a piece of domestic
> architecture in stone, rather than in wood. Then, every generation of the
> family might have altered the interior, to suit its own taste and convenience;
> while the exterior, through the lapse of years, might have been adding
> venerableness to its original beauty, and thus giving that impression of

permanence which I consider essential to the happiness of any one moment

(II:314-5).

Holgave's total abandonment of this radical values has been interpreted as the great failure of

The House of the Seven Gables.[89] In the context of my discussion of decay and ruin,

however, Holgrave's abandonment of his radicalism is less of a surprise than a complication

of the romance's overall depiction of decay and ruin in nineteenth century America, since

Hawthorne's American writings practically never resolve the problem of ruin in America

with the kind of absolute idealism and clarity that Holgrave espouses. Holgrave's new-found

conservatism and his desire to build in stone, to secure the future for posterity seems to be

equally at odds with Hawthorne's tendency to represent decay as the ultimate result of the

desire for permanence. The basis for Holgrave's repudiation of his radical viewpoint comes

earlier in the novel, at the moment he realises his love for Phoebe. Almost instantly, his

perception of the world, as a place encumbered by the decaying remnants of the past, is

fundamentally altered:

> what a good world we live in! How good, and beautiful! How young it is,
>
> too, with nothing really rotten or age-worn in it! This old house, for
>
> example, which sometimes has positively oppressed my breath with its smell
>
> of decaying timber! And this garden, where the black mould always clings to
>
> my spade, as if I were a sexton delving in a graveyard! Could I keep the
>
> feeling that now possesses me, the garden would every day be virgin soil,
>
> with the earth's first freshness in the flavor of its beans and squashes; and the
>
> house!—it would be like a bower in Eden, blossoming with the earliest roses
>
> that God ever made (II:214)

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[89] See Nina Baym, "Nathaniel Hawthorne's Holgrave: The Failure of the Artist Hero," The Journal of English and German Philology, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Oct., 1970) 584-598.

It is Holgrave's reinterpretation of the presence of decay and ruin which underpins his conservative transformation. His perception of universal youthfulness, even in the 'old' house and its ancient garden, allays previous concerns he has about the negative consequences of building for posterity. However, we know at this moment that Holgrave's newfound perception of the world is false; in spite of what he may now believe, everything that has come before has demonstrated that America has inherited the ruinous forms and processes of the Old World. The house itself remains a decaying vestige of the Puritan past, just as the ruined Pyncheons who populate it are symbols of moral and social decay in the American present often entwined with this lingering past. Some critics have argued that Holgrave's initial attitudes towards the past are meant as an ironic critique of the kind of transcendental idealism which saw ruin as the antithesis of American youthfulness. Richard Millington, for example, describes Holgrave's earlier fear of the influences of dead generations as 'a fantasy of determinism' and an illustration of his 'cultural immaturity'.[90] Conversely, Bellis argues for recognition of the degree to which 'Hawthorne participates in the feelings' expressed by Holgrave as he rails against the past.[91] Bellis highlights a passage from The American Notebooks, dated July 27th 1844, where Hawthorne, speculating on possible ideas for new artistic ventures writes:

> To represent the influence which Dead Men have among living affairs...Dead Men's opinions in all things control the living truth; we believe in Dead Men's religion; we laugh at Dead Men's jokes; we cry at Dead Men's pathos; everywhere and in all matters, Dead Men tyrannize inexorably over us (VIII:252).

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[90] Millington, Practising Romance, 133.
[91] Bellis, Writing Revolution, n. p185

Certainly these words could easily be attributed to Holgrave; indeed, some of this passage is transferred, verbatim, to Holgrave's speech against the past. Yet, while this could be argued to be evidence for Hawthorne's identification with Holgrave on the matter of the influence of previous generations, if we subscribe to this argument completely then we must understand The House of the Seven Gables as a novel which argues for incompatibility of decay and ruin in America. It is the narrator who points to the error in Hoglrave's attitude and, in so doing, outlines the novel's true position on decay in America. Holgrave's attitudes towards decay, before and after realising his love for Pheobe, are erroneous because they are both based upon his own incorrect perception that the world in which he lives is still young. After his epiphany, Holgrave believes that the world is entirely youthful and free from anything 'rotten or age-worn.' Prior to his realisation, his desire to pull down the past, the narrator tells us, comes from the fact that 'Man's own youth is the world's youth; at least, he feels as if it were, and imagines that the earth's granite substance is something not yet hardened, and which he can mould into whatever shape he likes. So it was with Holgrave' (II:179). Holgrave's belief in the world's youthfulness leads to the error of 'supposing that this age, more than any past or future one, is destined to see the tattered garments of Antiquity exchanged for a new suit, instead of gradually renewing themselves by patchwork' (II:180). In such a formulation of gradual change, the presence of ruin and decay in America does not necessarily represent the inevitability of absolute decline. Rather, ruin and decay exist as inevitable but necessary aspects of society's development and growth, similar to the outlook of growth from decay which characterises the historical model of The Scarlet Letter. Indeed, while Holgrave's concerns appear to be founded upon his idealistic American democratic notions, the narrator suggests that the inevitability of decay, the presence of 'the tattered garments of Antiquity,' is a universal fact which transcends any specifically American situation. This, in turn, counters the ideals of American exceptionalism by placing the vision of America described in The

House of the Seven Gables firmly within the context of a world history where the presence of ruin is a transnational fact.

The notion of gradual change over time and the persistence of antique forms in the present suggests an attitude towards reform similar to that of Edmund Burke who, in response to the iconoclasm of the French Revolution, argued for gradual, as opposed to revolutionary, change. In a letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, dated January 3rd, 1792, Burke writes of the value of 'the gradual course,' which 'may proceed by degrees'; such a mode of reform is essential since 'We must all obey the great law of change. It is perhaps the most powerful law of Nature, and the means perhaps of its conservation'.[92] Some critics have pointed out the similarities between Burke's and Hawthorne's conservatism. Newberry suggests that 'were we to align him with any political thinker, Edmund Burke would likely come closer than anyone else to representing Hawthorne's moral and cultural politics'.[93] I would argue, however, that while the representation of decay in The House of the Seven Gables suggests a much slower and organic process of change than the revolutionary iconoclasm Holgrave strives towards, Hawthorne's novel stops short of honouring the forms of the past in the same manner that Burke does. Ruin may be inevitable as society develops and history moves onwards, but this does not mean that the forms of the past must be preserved and venerated. After all, while pointing out the faults in Holgrave's youthful perceptions of the world, the narrator states that his desire for total reform is fundamentally correct: 'As to the main point,-- may we never live to doubt it!'; that main point is that 'the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be trust out of the way' (II:128). The decaying house

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[92] Edmund Burke to Sir Hercules Langrishe, January 3, 1792, in The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo, 2008) 301.
[93] Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, 207. See also Lee Trepanier, "The Need for Renewal: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Conservatism," Modern Age, Vol. 45, No. 4, (Sep. 2003) 315-23.

of the seven gables and its ruined occupants may suggest the inevitability of decay and thus

the gradual nature of social change, but these images of ruin nonetheless highlight societal

problems and difficulties. Bellis talks of <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> as a novel which

'resists a fully conservative, repetitive closure. But this does not mean that his romance offers

a commitment to, or even a basis for, any thoroughgoing or radical change. It gives

expression to numerous conflicts within American political culture...but it can do no more,

finally, than bring them out into the open'.[94] As both markers of social protest and

conservative reform, decay and ruin thus mark the political ambivalence of a novel which

highlights societal issues without offering the possibility of immediate and total reform.

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[94] Bellis, <u>Writing Revolution</u>, 50.

Chapter 4: The Enervating Pleasure of Aesthetics: Hawthorne and the Ruins of Britain

The Enervating Pleasure of Aesthetics: Hawthorne and the Ruins of Britain

In 1853 Hawthorne crossed the Atlantic in order to take up his post as American Consul in Liverpool. This transatlantic journey led to significant developments in Hawthorne's writing in both his notebooks and fiction and transformed his transatlantic perspective. The present chapter will focus on the extensive journals, or notebooks as he termed them, composed during his time spent living and working in Britain. While I have in previous chapters made some reference to The American Notebooks, I will analyse The English Notebooks in much greater detail because these extensive journals constitute much a large proportion of his writing in Europe and also because these texts are replete with descriptions of British ruins. Therefore, while my previous chapters looked at fictional depictions of ruin and decay, this chapter necessarily involves an analysis of Hawthorne's own written reactions to real landscape ruins. The switch in my focus from fiction to non-fiction reflects the fact that in Europe, decay and ruin were much more evident and tangible than in America. Certainly, as my previous chapters have demonstrated, Hawthorne was more than capable of perceiving ruin in an American context. However, in Europe, material ruin, and in particular the material decay of old buildings, was seemingly everywhere, and Hawthorne sought it out at almost every opportunity. My aim in the current chapter is to analyse how Hawthorne reacted to the extensiveness and materiality of European decay.

Hawthorne in Britain

The English Notebooks were composed between 1853 and 1857 during the four years in which Hawthorne resided in England (he later spent a year in England between June 1859 and July 1860, but did not keep any journals during this period apart from a small pocket diary). Much of this time was spent working as American Consul in Liverpool, though

Hawthorne found time to travel around England and the rest of Britain, noting his many experiences in his extensive journals (a more appropriate name for which would be 'The British Notebooks'). Hawthorne also spent more than a year travelling through France and Italy between 1858 and 1859, during which time he composed extensive journals on his experiences on the continent, later published initially under the title <u>Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne</u> (1883). When Hawthorne returned to America in 1860 he began to draw up large portions of his English notebooks into a series of essays which were published in 1863 under the title <u>Our Old Home</u>. The primary difference between the way Hawthorne's experiences are described in the notebooks and in <u>Our Old Home</u> is the contrast between the rhetorical public performance style of the latter and the much more reserved and personal tone of the former. In fact, Hawthorne never intended for any of his notebooks to be published. He felt that his descriptions of England, and of the English in particular, were too honest and that to publish them would, as he wrote in a letter to his friend and publisher William Ticknor, 'bring a terrible hornet's nest about my ears'.[1] They were, in Hawthorne's mind, for private consumption only, as he wrote to his sister-in-law Elizabeth Peabody: 'it [the journal] is written with so free flowing and truth-telling a pen that I never shall dare to publish it. Perhaps parts of it shall be read to you, some winter evening after we get home'.[2] <u>The English Notebooks</u> were, however, published posthumously in 1870 in a work entitled <u>Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne</u> (1870). This version of Hawthorne's 'English' notebooks was heavily revised by his widow, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, who made, what Randall Stewart describes as, various kinds of:

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne to William Ticknor, May 23rd 1856, in <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. XVII: The Letters 1853-1856</u>, ed. Thomas Woodson et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1985) 493.

[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne to Elizabeth P. Peabody, August 13th 1857, in <u>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. XVIII: The Letters 1857-1864</u>, ed. Thomas Woodson et al. (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1985) 89.

'stylistic revisions; and the omission or revision of passages which dealt with trivial, unpleasant, or indelicate subjects; or which described certain contemporaries with uncircumspect freedom; or which expressed uncomplimentary opinions of England; or which had to do, in too personal a way, with Hawthorne and the members of his family'.[3] It was Stewart who in 1941 edited and published the first complete edition of the original manuscripts of The English Notebooks. The edition used in this chapter was published in 1997 and presented in two volumes edited by Thomas Woodson and Bill Ellis.[4] This edition also reverts back to Hawthorne's original manuscripts and thus serves as a much more reliable guide to Hawthorne's private writings about his experiences in Britain.

The journey of the American writer to Europe was something of a rite of passage in the nineteenth century. In spite of calls for a distinctly American literature, many writers and artists felt compelled to experience the varied culture and history of the Old World for themselves at some point in their lives. As William W. Stowe points out, of 'the canonical figures in nineteenth-century American literature…all but Whitman, Thoreau and Dickinson went to Europe, and most wrote about it'.[5] Hawthorne's journals, along with Our Old Home, The Marble Faun and, to some degree, his abandoned English romances, exist within this wide tradition of nineteenth century American travel writing. This chapter will examine Hawthorne's British travel writing within a transatlantic context. In the introduction to this thesis, I quoted Manning and Taylor's assertion that for the traveller, 'all knowledge, subsequently' becomes 'comparative and everything is perceived from (at least) two

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[3] Randall Stewart, "Introduction" in The English Notebooks, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962) xi.
[4] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol XXI: The English Notebooks, 1853-1856, ed. Thomas Woodson and Bill Ellis (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1997); Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol XXII: The English Notebooks, 1856-1860, ed. Thomas Woodson and Bill Ellis (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1997).
[5] William W. Stowe, Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 4.

perspectives'.[6] <u>The English Notebooks</u> and <u>Our Old Home</u>, reflect this suggestion that travel shifts viewpoints and induces comparison. Hawthorne continually compares Britain and America, Old World and New World in a variety of ways: 'English villages are compared to New England villages, English girls to American girls, the English lower classes to the American lower classes, and English officials to American officials'.[7] Hawthorne's comparative study of British and American habits and cultures is so extensive that these texts in effect constitute what one Hawthorne biographer calls 'a comparative presentation and interpretation perhaps not equalled elsewhere in the literature of either country'.[8] It is within the context of this shifting viewpoint associated with the literature of transatlantic travel writing that I will examine Hawthorne's descriptions of British ruin.

For many American travellers, 'The European tour was – in theory, at least – an occasion for education, a chance to submit oneself to the influence of older civilisation'.[9] Often, the desire to become immersed in antiquity necessarily involved visiting the prominent sites of European ruins. Thus, the nineteenth century tradition of American travel writing is also, at times, a tradition of American ruin writing, wherein Americans document their responses to the major sites of European antiquity: from English castles and abbeys to the expansive ancient ruins of Rome which will be discussed in Chapter 5. In his own account of his European travels, James Fenimore Cooper wrote of Americans in England who

> had done little else than admire ruins, for the past week. The European who
>
> comes to America plunges into the virgin forest with wonder and delight,

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[6] Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, "Travel: Introduction" in <u>Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader</u>, ed. Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 281.
[7] Milder, <u>Hawthorne's Habitations</u>, 171.
[8] Turner, <u>Nathaniel Hawthorne</u>, 267.
[9] Stowe, <u>Going Abroad</u>, 34.

while the American who goes to Europe finds his greatest pleasure, at first,

in hunting up the memorials of the past. Each is in quest of novelty, and is

burning with the desire to gaze at objects of which he has often read.[10]

Many transatlantic travellers were inspired to visit these ruins by American guidebooks to

Europe which would 'provide an order of worship at the shrines of the beautiful, the historic,

and the foreign'.[11] Furthermore, this kind of novelty and excitement was often enhanced by

the fact that while American tourists would have had little, if any, first-hand experience of

ruins most, if not all, would have experienced such ruins vicariously, through the long

tradition of British ruin writing described in my introduction. Walter Scott's descriptions of

Melrose Abbey in his Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805), along with the many antique ruins of

Scott's novels and poetry, and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and "At Furness Abbey,"

could have been just a few of the texts already in American tourists' minds when they visited

these and other ruins for the first time. For instance, Scott's novel Kenilworth (1821)

attracted many visitors to the ruined castle of the story's title: 'For many decades the

Americans continued to prowl the precincts of Kenilworth, clutching their guidebooks,

dreaming their fantasies out of Scott's novel, some of them even purchasing copies to read

right on the premises'.[12] Some of the more famous American tourists were even able to meet

with the literary figures who inspired their visits to British ruins. When Irving visited Melrose

Abbey in 1817 he paid a visit to Scott's Abbotsford home on the way and was received

warmly by Scott and his family. Scott was writing Rob Roy (1817) at the time so was unable

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[10] James Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe: France, Vol. 1 (Albany: State University of New York Press 1983[1837]) 43.
[11] Stowe, Going Abroad, 29.
[12] Allison Lockwood, Passionate Pilgrims: The American Traveler in Great Britain, 1800-1914 (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1982) 84.

to accompany Irving but he sent his son Charles along as a guide.[13] In <u>The Lay of the Last Minstrel</u>, Scott advises the reader that:

> If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
>
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight:
>
> For the gay beams of lightsome day,
>
> Gild but to flout the ruins gray (1-4).[14]

Such was the popularity of the poem and the renown of this description that many visitors to Melrose would arrive at night in order to experience the ruins according to Scott's description. As Irving notes, the importance of such lines for visitors is indicated by the fact that on nights where there was no moonlight, the custodian of the ruins had to devise another means 'to accommodate…poetry-struck visitors with this indispensable moonshine,' namely 'a great double tallow candle stuck upon the end of a pole, with which he could conduct his visitors about the ruins on dark nights, so much to their satisfaction that, at length, he began to think it even preferable to the moon itself'.[15] Hawthorne too had Scott's poetry in mind when he visited Melrose, though he had his own ideas about how properly to view these, or other, ruins: 'I do not myself think that daylight and sunshine make a ruin less effective than twilight or moonshine' (XXII:19). That Hawthorne is willing to disagree with the directions of his literary hero demonstrates the degree to which his fascination with ruin saw him forge his own preferences when it came to viewing such sites. Indeed, while Antebellum American tourists were greatly influenced by British ruin writing, many likewise brought a distinctly

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[13] Scott did, however, accompany Irving to the ruins of nearby Dryburgh Abbey the following day.

[14] Sir Walter Scott, <u>The Lay of the Last Minstrel</u>, Canto II, 1-4, in <u>The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. 1</u> (Edinburgh: James Ballantine and Co., 1857 [1805]) 18.

[15] Washington Irving, "Abbotsford" in <u>The Complete Works of Washington Irving: Crayon Miscellany</u>, ed. Dahlia Kirby Terrell (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979[1835]) 130.

American perspective. If the British tradition of ruin writing is characterised by 'temporal awareness generally, inducing nostalgic and other reflections on time's changes,' American tourists, many of whom would never have seen a ruin over a century old, demonstrate an even greater awareness of a ruin's temporality.[16] For some transatlantic visitors, the sight of a ruin could send such them 'into a reverie of knights, damsels in distress and all the trappings of a bygone chivalric era'.[17] In Washington Irving's The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon (1820), the titular narrator, like Irving himself, is an archetypal American traveller in the Old World, for whom

> Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle. I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement – to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity – to loiter about the ruined castle – to mediate on the falling tower – to escape, in short, from the common-place realities of the present, and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past.[18]

Crayon's narrator demonstrates how the temporality of European ruins was one of their primary attractions. Contemplating historical associations and the great spans of time indicated by such ruins allowed the viewer to connect with a distant and exotic past. Crayon's contrast between the 'realities of the present' and the 'grandeurs of the past' prefigures the manner in which Hawthorne links ruin to the unrealities of romance in his American novels. The contemplation of temporality and the vicissitudes of history might also act to reinforce an

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[16] David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 175.
[17] Clark, The American Idea of England, 152.
[18] Irving, The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent, 9.

American tourist's belief in American exceptionalism, reminding 'the American traveller in political terms of republican philosophies'.[19] Ruined castles and abbeys were monuments to the kind of institutions from which Americans had fought to free themselves. Therefore, the ruins of such buildings could, to some, symbolise the decline which inevitably befell the decadent and corrupt societies of the Old World. Contemplating the intense temporality suggested by ruins could also provoke some level of anxiety in American travellers; those not as assured about American exceptionalism might see British ruins as warnings about the eventual destiny of the American Republic. One American traveller, overcome by so many scenes depicting 'the inevitable effects of time,' worried that everything 'would finally be lost amidst the general wreck of all sublunary things'.[20]

Transatlantic Historical Ambivalence

Due to the fluctuating nature of Hawthorne's accounts of British history in The English Notebooks, it is difficult to produce any unified assessment of his attitude towards the British past.[21] Hawthorne's sense of British history as an oppressive, stagnating force is often complicated by the deep ancestral connection he feels with it. His fluctuating attitude towards British history is often made most explicit in his descriptions of historic British buildings, such as those surrounding Salisbury Cathedral:

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[19] Clark, The American Idea of England, 155

[20] Joshua E. White, Letters on England (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1816) 308-9.

[21] Critics vary in their assessments of Hawthorne's attitude towards the British past. For an assessment which focuses on Hawthorne's sense of connection and home feeling with Britain, and particularly England, in The English Notebooks see Newberry, Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties, pp194-216. For an argument which centres on Hawthorne's general aversion towards British society and the sense of British history, see Randall Stewart, "Hawthorne in England: The Patriotic Motive in the Note-Books," The New England Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Mar. 1935) 3-13.

These are the dwelling-houses of the dean, and the canons, and whatever

high officers compose the bishop's staff; and there was one large brick

mansion, old, but not so ancient as the rest; which we took to be the bishop's

palace. I never beheld anything – I must say again – so cozy, so indicative of

domestic comfort for whole centuries together – houses so fit to live in, or

die in, and where it would be so pleasant to lead a young maiden wife

beneath the antique portal, and dwell with her, till husband and wife were

patriarchal – as those delectable old houses. They belong naturally to the

Cathedral, and have a necessary relation to it; and its sanctity is somehow

thrown over them all, so that they do not quite belong to this world, though

they look full to overflowing of whatever earthly things are good for man

(XXI:51).

His reverence for this scene initially seems clear. These buildings appear, through their

relation to the cathedral, to have a natural purpose. His admiration seems to come directly

from the buildings' permanence. Buildings such as these disclose Hawthorne's attraction not

only to the robustness of English architecture, but also to the sense of durability conveyed by

such buildings. The American visitor imagines living within one of these houses in the same

manner as people have done for centuries, thus identifying with the past inhabitants and the

history of the buildings and their surroundings. Crucially, Hawthorne feels able to imagine

himself at home within this history because 'the past of England is also his,' meaning that

'Hawthorne's years in England thus extended his sense of home into an idea of

homecoming'.[22] This comforting home feeling offered by the reassuring English past is

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[22] Terence Martin, "Hawthorne's Public Decade and the Values of Home," <u>American Literature</u>, Vol. 46, No. 2, (May 1974) 143.

communicated by the pleasant domestic scene described; such scenes appealed to Hawthorne because he was, Brodhead argues, 'the most perfectly domestic of all American writers, the one most devoted to the family as the scene of fulfilling relation'.[23] However, while Hawthorne identifies with these buildings and imagines himself living in them, enveloped by the centuries old stability of the English past, he immediately retreats from this position, characterising this same historical permanence as something inherently unhealthy:

> These are places, however, in which mankind makes no progress; the rushing tumult of human life here subsides into a deep, quiet pool, with perhaps a gentle circular eddy, but no onward movement. The same identical thought, I suppose, goes round, in a slow whirl, from one generation to another, as I have seen a withered leaf do, in the pool of a brook (XXII:51).

The idea of a place with 'no onward movement,' where he could live and die in comfort and security, which only a moment ago seemed so appealing to Hawthorne, has suddenly become oppressive. Significantly, he conveys this notion through depictions of a stagnant nature. In his description of the cathedral, the spires 'ascend towards Heaven with a kind of natural beauty, not as if man had contrived them; they might be fancied to have grown up, just as the spires of a tuft of grass do' (XXII:46-7). However, where nature is previously used to communicate the idea of fluidity and growth in the outward appearance of the cathedral, it has now become inert. At such moments in <u>The English Notebooks</u>, Hawthorne appears to be at his most typically American; he is perhaps displaying the democratic idealism of Holgrave who proclaims 'that, once in every half century at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors' (II:185). Equally, and

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[23] Richard Broadhead, <u>The School of Hawthorne</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 48.

with a similar use of organic imagery to represent human stagnation, the above passage of The English Notebooks restates the words of the Hawthorne-narrator of "The Custom-House," who complains that 'Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted for too long a series of generations in the same worn-out soil' (I:11-12). We can therefore see how Hawthorne's view of life in the buildings surrounding Salisbury Cathedral provokes an overwhelming ambivalence in which an attraction to English conservatism, the domestic pleasure of the knowable and stable past, is countered by an American democratic idealism which is evident, although at times with a degree of ironic distance, in his American romances and which emphasises the implicit dangers of associating with one 'home' for too long.

In 1863, around four years after his return to America, Hawthorne published Our Old Home. The distance and time between himself and his experiences of English history only seems to have amplified Hawthorne's ambivalence. The essay "Leamington Spa" offers perhaps the best distillation of these fluctuating attitudes in Our Old Home.[24] At one point in this essay Hawthorne describes how, in viewing the Norman church in the village of Whitnash, the American newly arrived in Britain will be thrilled 'with strange emotion' to think of how this ancient little church has 'stood for ages under the Catholic faith, and has not materially changed since Wickliffe's days, and that it looked as gray now as in Bloody Mary's time, and that Cromwell's troopers broke off the stone noses of those same gargoyles that are now grinning in your face' (V:59). It seems that the American visitor to Whitnash church can sense an accumulation of religious history, from the church's Norman and Catholic origins, to the religious and political upheavals of the late fourteenth century stimulated by Wycliffe's

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[24] For a detailed account of Hawthorne's time spent in Leaminton Spa, see: Bryan Homer, An American Liaison: Leamington Spa and the Hawthornes, 1855-1864 (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1998)

writings, the English Reformation of the sixteenth century, the violent return to Catholicism under Mary I, and the Civil Wars and Puritan iconoclasm of the seventeenth century. The attraction of the church lies in the layers of history its appearance suggests. The structure of Hawthorne's sentence seems to act out this notion of stratal history. The use of anaphora means that the syntax becomes increasingly complex with each added historical reference. Through drawing attention to the build up of clauses within the sentence, Hawthorne can be seen to be reinforcing the idea that, for the American tourist, the weight of successive historical revolutions can be felt at this spot. We see how the contemplation of such history evokes national distinctions, although in this case, the American democratic consciousness has not yet rejected such accumulated history; rather, Hawthorne states that 'it is only the American,' free from the burdens of the past, who senses the accumulation of history in this way, while the Englishman, like the American who has resided in England for an extended period of time, 'begins to feel himself growing insensible to its effect' (V:59).

Hawthorne's description in <u>Our Old Home</u> of Whitnash church is followed by a description of the 'immemorial yew-tree' which stands in the church yard and has

> lived among men, and been a familiar object to them, and seen them brought
> to be christened and married and buried in the neighboring church and
> churchyard, through so many centuries, that it knows all about our race, so
> far as fifty generations of the Whitnash people can supply such knowledge
> (V:59).

While the church building evokes in the American a sense of the history, in particular the religious history, of England, the ancient tree in the grounds of the church conveys a sense of

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the successive generations of local people who serve as representatives of 'our race' – a term that collapses the distinction between Americans and the English (or British). Hawthorne's identification of the ancient yew tree as a symbol of genealogical continuity and historical permanence is reminiscent of the kind of anglophilic-conservatism discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the older members of the Pyncheon family.[25] Hawthorne's veneration of the yew tree, which watches over successive generations of the people of Whitnash, might be compared to Burke's famous symbol of British Conservatism where the contented and benign British people are portrayed as 'thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak' who 'chew the cud and are silent'.[26] In both cases, the tree represents a particularly reassuring British permanence, the antithesis of the revolutionary spirit in America and France.

Hawthorne's descriptions of Whitnash church and the yew tree initially indicate a kind of reverence for the ideas of history and permanence which these objects convey. However, his ambivalence soon becomes evident. In the next paragraph of the essay the tone changes completely when Hawthorne extends further his anthropomorphises of the tree's experience of local history: 'what a weary life it must have been for the old tree! Tedious beyond imagination!' (V:59). Hawthorne's lamentation of the repetitive history which the yew tree has witnessed, although not overtly political, is imbued with the same spirit of democratic idealism, the aversion towards modes of permanence and the veneration of the past, which provoked Emerson to reject the image of the oak tree in his own political writing. In his lecture "Politics" (1844), Emerson argues that to the 'young man,' it may seem as though society

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[25] For a comprehensive summary of this correlation between Angliophia and Conservatism in Antebellum America, see: Clark, The American Idea of England, pp 21-53.

[26] Burke, Reflections, 85.

lies before him in rigid repose, with certain names, men, and institutions,

rooted like oak-trees to the centre, round which all arrange themselves the

best they can. But the old statesman knows that society is fluid; there are no

such roots and centres; but any particle may suddenly become the centre of

the movement, and compel the system to gyrate around it….politics rest on

necessary foundations, and cannot be treated with levity'.[27]

While the initial impression of Whitnash Church and its surroundings, representative as they

are of deep personal and social history, 'thrills' the American tourist, the 'final impression on

the mind' is entirely different, and more in line with Emerson's warning to avoid the

veneration of the old ways and forms simply because they seem to sit at the 'centre,' insisting

upon obedience. Hawthorne's viewer 'becomes sensible of the heavy air of a spot where the

forefathers and fore-mothers have grown up together, intermarried and died, through a long

succession of lives without any intermixture of new elements, till family features and

characters are all run in the same inevitable mould' (V:59). Again, this aversion to stagnation

and inbreeding, to generations living and dying upon the same spot, recalls both Holgrave

and the Hawthorne-narrator of "The Custom-House"; Swann calls this Hawthorne's

perception of 'the sheer boringness of history as redundant repetition'.[28] Instead of being

exciting or interesting, history has become an oppressive force which weighs down upon the

American viewer. The American tourist's initial 'delight at finding something permanent' has

been displaced by 'his Western love of change' (V:59), what McFarland calls 'the

progressive quality' which 'most notably distinguished these exuberant United States, the

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[27] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Politics," The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson Vol. II ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, Jean Ferguson Carr (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983 [1844]) 117
[28] Charles Swann, Tradition and Revolution, 154.

world's best hope, from hidebound England'.[29] In a manner which reminds us again of Holgrave, Hawthorne reaffirms his rejection of the English past:

> Rather than such a monotony of sluggish ages, loitering on a village-green, toiling in hereditary fields, listening to the parson's drone lengthened through centuries in the gray Norman church, let us welcome whatever change may come – change of place, social customs, political institutions, modes of worship – trusting that, if all present things shall vanish, they will but make room for better systems, and for a higher type of man to clothe his life in them, and to fling them off in turn. (V:60)

At this point, Hawthorne's opinion of the 'old home' appears to have come into line with Emerson's notion of 'England, an old and exhausted island'.[30] The account of the Church at Whitnash in <u>Our Old Home</u> begins with a description of how exciting it is for the American tourist to find something so ancient as this building but leads into an entirely contradictory ending with a passionate assertion of the need for change and progress inspired by this same scene. It might be possible to claim that, rather than demonstrating how Hawthorne's writing fluctuates between two separate attitudes, this passage from <u>Our Old Home</u> instead illustrates only Hawthorne's devotion to the American ideals of change and progress. After all, the 'final impression upon the mind' is of the need for progress and change, so perhaps the tourist's American principals always overrule any initial admiration of history. This would be a valid argument, but for the fact that Hawthorne's fluctuations do not end here. In the following paragraph there is yet another shift in viewpoint and attitude:

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[29] Philip McFarland, <u>Hawthorne in Concord</u> (New York: Grove Press, 2004) 281.
[30] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Stonehenge," <u>The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson Vol. V</u> ed. Douglas Emory Wilson (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994) 155

Nevertheless, while the American willingly accepts growth and change as

the law of his own national and private existence, he has a single tenderness

for the stone-encrusted institutions of the mother-country. The reason may be

(though I should prefer a more generous explanation) that he recognizes the

tendency of these hardened forms to stiffen her joints and fetter her ancles

[sic], in the race and rivalry of improvement. (V:60)

After asserting the need for change in the sentence preceding this passage, Hawthorne now

claims that the American necessarily has different attitudes toward his old home and his new

home. His final and overwhelming ambivalence is characterised by the fact that even the

'tenderness' that the American feels for the 'stone-encrusted institutions of the mother

country' is given two contrary explanations: the selfish desire that the mother country may be

fettered by the past and so less of a competitive threat to America, and a 'more generous'

explanation that is never clarified. The fact that he feels such a connection to these 'stone-

encrusted institutions' seems to remain somewhat of a mystery even to Hawthorne himself. In

this way it is possible to see how Hawthorne's encounter with the church at Whitnash

demonstrates his continually fluctuating attitudes towards history.[31]

Our Old Home amplifies the deep ambivalence towards British history first recorded in The

English Notebooks; it is a transatlantic ambivalence, oscillating between a conservative

desire to connect with a stable and permanent British past and an American revolutionary

preference for change and the new. Since British ruins are, for many American travellers,

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[31] For a discussing of other passages which also demonstrate these fluctuating attitudes to England in Our Old Home, see John P McWilliams Jr., Hawthorne, Melville and the American Character, 127-8.

some of the most emotive historical objects, communicating both Old World decline and the admirable depth of British history, it might be expected that ruins would provoke the strongest displays of Hawthorne's transatlantic historical ambivalence. However, Hawthorne's accounts of ruined buildings in The English Notebooks are markedly different to the above description of the buildings surrounding Salisbury Cathedral and Whitnash Church. In contrast to his responses to many intact British buildings, and British history more generally, when Hawthorne considers British ruins, questions of history and nationhood are largely absent. This is not to say that Hawthorne does not know or, indeed, care about the history of British ruins. His notebooks suggest that in many instances he either possessed prior knowledge of, or found guides who knew about, the history of such ruins. Yet in spite of his knowledge of the history of such ruins, Hawthorne's notebook entries about them do not contain much of the intense historical contemplation evident in his responses to intact ancient buildings, and in the ruin literature of other writers. There is, in The English Notebooks, little sense of the moral and political questioning which is often stimulated by viewing ruins as symbols of nationhood or the decline of civilisations. Instead, the emotive and imaginative responses to ruins in The English Notebooks are generated by the aesthetic qualities of the ruins being described.

Hawthorne and British Ruins

In a journal entry dated September 13th 1854, Hawthorne describes a visit he made with his family to the ruins of Conway Castle in North Wales. Hawthorne writes that Conway Castle 'must be the most perfect specimen of a ruinous old castle in the world' (XXI:119). For other ruin enthusiasts, this castle may have provoked some form of deep historical reflection. Edward Parry's nineteenth century guidebook The Cambrian Mirror (1843), for example,

states that 'to a thoughtful mind, the contemplation of this mouldering fabric will give a rich treat, and teach lessons of morality upon the instability of human greatness'.[32] Hawthorne's account of this thirteenth century ruin does contain some considerations of its history, such as in the description of a tower which was said to have once been occupied by Eleanor of Castile:

> There was another pleasant little windowed nook, close beside the oratory, where the Queen might have sat sewing, or looking down the Conway at the picturesque headlands towards the sea. We imagined her stately figure, in antique robes, standing beneath the groined arches of the oratory (XXI:122).

Here, and at other points in the notebook entry, Hawthorne's knowledge of the ruin's history prompts an imaginative reconstruction of something which might once, centuries before, have transpired upon the spot. However, he stops short of reflecting upon any meanings which might be communicated by the structure's great age and decline. While the sense of Conway Castle's history is acknowledged, a much larger part of this journal entry is given to describing what Hawthorne sees as its perfect outward appearance. Such entries in The English Notebooks reflect the sense of unbridled pleasure which Hawthorne often feels in the presence of a ruin which he feels achieves certain aesthetic criteria. In The English Notebooks, indeed, Hawthorne is continually searching for the most aesthetically perfect British ruins. The criteria by which he judges the merits of such ruins demonstrate the degree to which his perceptions are influenced by his familiarity with European literature and

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[32] Edward Parry, The Cambrian Mirror: Or the Tourist's Companion Through North Wales (London: Simpkin & Co. 1843) 124. As a young girl, the poet Felicia Hemans would spend hours lingering and reading among the ruins of Conway Castle, something which may have influenced her own historical imagination. Francesco Crocco, Literature and the Growth of British Nationalism: The Influence of Romantic Poetry and Bardic Criticism (North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 2014) 163.

aesthetic theory. British ruins are described in <u>The English Notebooks</u> largely in terms of their visual qualities, rather than what they might *mean* as symbols of history. Thus, the deep-seated, transatlantic ambivalence which characterises Hawthorne's descriptions of other historical objects and scenes in Britain is generally absent from his descriptions of ruins. Instead, Hawthorne's attraction to British ruins is governed by principles of beauty, the sublime and, most of all, the picturesque. There is 'nothing in the world,' Hawthorne writes, 'so beautiful and picturesque as Conway Castle' (XXI:123). We have seen in previous chapters that Hawthorne deploys the notion of the picturesque in his American-period fiction in a variety of abstract ways. Hawthorne's European notebooks are concerned with the picturesque in much more conventional terms, as governing principles of landscape appreciation. By the time that Hawthorne came to Britain, the picturesque tour and its associated aesthetic values were no longer the height of fashion.[33] However, for many American writers, including Hawthorne, the principles of the picturesque remained essential to their comprehension of rural scenes.[34]

The picturesque tour became popular in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century as the early phase of the Romantic appreciation of landscape coincided with improvements in British roads and transport technology.[35] As travelling became easier and more comfortable, an increasing amount of upper and middle-class tourists travelled the countryside in search of picturesque landscapes. Put simply, such landscapes were those that would be suitable in a picture. According to William Gilpin, one of the pioneers of the notion of the picturesque, travellers should look for 'landscapes featuring contrasts in light and shadow; rough textures or ruggedness (as opposed to smoothness, which was associated with the beautiful);

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[33] Kenneth Clarke, <u>The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste</u> (London: Butler and Tanner, 1962) 68.
[34] See Beth L. Lueck, <u>American Writers and the Picturesque Tour: The Search for National Identity, 1790-1860</u> (New York: Garland, 1997).
[35] Piggot, <u>Ruins in a Landscape</u>, 122.

compositional unity within the varied elements of a scene, sometimes achieved through the

unifying light of the sun or moon on a landscape; and historical, legendary, literary, or other

associations'.[36] Such picturesque scenes, according to Gilpin, had the power to affect the

observer emotionally: when a scene suddenly comes into view it 'strikes us beyond the power

of thought' and when 'impressed upon the mind, give it a disposition to happiness'.[37]

It is 'roughness' and 'ruggedness' which differentiate a picturesque scene from a beautiful

one :

> roughness forms the most essential point of difference between the beautiful,
>
> and the picturesque; as it seems to be that particular quality, which makes
>
> objects chiefly pleasing in painting. – I use the general term roughness; but
>
> properly speaking roughness relates only to the surfaces of bodies: when we
>
> speak of their delineation, we use the word ruggedness. Both ideas however
>
> equally enter into the picturesque; and both are observable in the smaller, as
>
> well as in the larger parts of nature.[38]

The broken lines and tints offered by a ruin is one possible source of the roughness and

ruggedness sought by the lover of the picturesque. For this reason a picturesque tourist would

always favour ruins in a landscape over modern day complete structures. In his description of

Tintern Abbey in Observations on the River Wye (1782), for example, Gilpin notes that

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[36] Lueck, American Writers and the Picturesque Tour, 6.
[37] William Gilpin, Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, (London: T. Cadwell & W. Davies, [1798] 1808) 320.
[38] William Gilpin, Three Essays : On Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque Travel and On Sketching Landscape : to which is added a poem, on landscape painting (London: R. Blamire, 1792) 6-7.

No ruins of the tower are left, which might give form and contrast to the buttresses and walls. Instead of this a number of gable ends hurt the eye with their regularity, and disgust it by the vulgarity of their shape. A mallet judiciously used (but who durst use it?) might be of service in fracturing some of them; particularly those of the cross-aisles, which are both disagreeable in themselves, and confound the perspective.[39]

In this notorious passage Gilpin is actually suggesting that the ancient structure of the abbey could be further improved from the perspective of the picturesque tourist if it were subjected to further destruction. Hawthorne's notebook entries on British ruins share close similarities with Gilpin's picturesque appraisals. Echoing the picturesque notion that ruins can be more aesthetically pleasing to view than complete buildings, Hawthorne writes of Linlithgow Palace in Scotland that 'on the whole, I think it more valuable as a ruin than if it were still perfect' (XXII:319). He justifies this statement by contrasting Linlithgow with the complete Holyrood Palace, still the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland: 'Scotland, and the world, needs only one Holyrood; and Linlithgow, were it still a palace, must have been second in interest to that, from its lack of association with historic events so grand and striking' (XXII:319). Hawthorne is able to disregard the historical shortcomings of Linlithgow compared with other historical sites, such as the complete Holyrood, because of the pleasing picturesque aesthetics of its ruined state. Such distinctions between the historical and the aesthetic contemplation of the ruin further suggest the influence of Gilpin's picturesque theory on Hawthorne, since 'Gilpin frequently mentions significant historical events connected to the places he describes. However, history does not become a part of his aesthetic; rather it remains with few exceptions a separate category of interest to the

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[39] William Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye (London: Pallas Athene, 2002 [1782]) 42.

traveller'.[40] Malcolm Andrews places Gilpin's aestheticism within the context of the shifting

concerns of ruin enthusiasts in the eighteenth century:

> Familiar with Sublime aesthetics, tinged with fashionable 'sensibility' and
>
> equipped with the connoisseur's vocabulary in landscape analysis, these later
>
> ruin enthusiasts are primarily interested in mood, colour and composition.
>
> Their Augustan predecessors, by and large, were excited by allegorical
>
> interpretation of garden architecture and sculpture and by the moral and
>
> political connotations of ruined castles and abbeys.[41]

The absence of allegorical meaning and historical reflections, and the moral, social and

political questions such reflections might induce, identifies Hawthorne's British ruin writing

with Gilpin's amoral and non-political aesthetics. However, while the historical ambivalence

provoked by considerations of the British past is largely absent from the ruin descriptions of

The English Notebooks, the aesthetic condition of the ruin can never be separated from wider

considerations of temporality, of natural time which exists outwith the boundaries of human

history. In terms of the picturesque, Stephen Copley and Peter Garside argue that although

'the Picturesque has been presented as resolutely ahistorical in its deflection of social

consequential interpretations of favoured aesthetic objects such as ruins,' the reality is that

'time and mutability are essential to, and indices of, Picturesque decorative effects'.[42] Indeed,

'in spite of Gilpin's recommendations to separate the moral and aesthetic responses' to ruins,

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[40] Mark Saber Phillips, Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) 344.

[41] Malcom Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1987) 50.

[42] Stephen Copley and Peter Gardside, "Introduction" in The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, landscape and aesthetics since 1770, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 6.

the temporality of ruins remains relevant to his theory.[43] Considerations of temporality are important not for what they communicate about the relationship between mankind and history but because the progress of time is essential to a ruin's aesthetic appeal. In particular, time governs the relationship between the ruin and nature which is fundamental to picturesque composition. Gilpin states that 'A ruin is a sacred thing. Rooted for ages in the soil; assimilated to it; and become, as it were, a part of it; we consider it as a work of nature, rather than of art. Art cannot reach it'.[44] The idea that a ruin must be physically assimilated into its natural surroundings in order for it to be considered properly picturesque has its basis in the picturesque preference for roughness, irregularity and broken lines, which are enhanced as nature reclaims the ruin. Time is the essential ingredient in this process of natural assimilation, as Gilpin states in a warning to those who attempt to construct artificial ruins:

> Besides, after all that art can bestow, you must put your ruin at last into the
> hands of nature to finish. If the mosses and lychens [sic] grown unkindly on
> your walls – if the streaming weather-stains have produced no variety of tints
> – if the ivy refuses to mantle over your buttress or to creep among the
> ornaments of your Gothic window – if the ash cannot be brought to hang
> from the cleft; or long spiry grass to wave over the shattered battlement –
> you ruin will still be incomplete – you may as well write over the gate, Built

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[43] Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque, 49.
[44] Gilpin, Observations on the Western Parts of England, 183. Andrews argues that the importance of the ruin's assimilation into nature naturally leads viewers to consider questions about the relationship between man and nature, thus going against Gilpin's idea of an aestheticism devoid of moral considerations. For instance in Child Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron calls Ivy: 'The Garland of eternity, where wave/ The green leaves over all by time overthrown' (888-9). Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Fourth (Echo Library: Middlesex, 2006 [1818]) 121-2.

in the year 1772. Deception there can be none. The characters of age are

wanting.[45]

This passage demonstrates how Gilpin's picturesque theory emphasises the temporal qualities

of a ruin without moralising upon their historical dimensions. As I have demonstrated in the

previous chapters of this thesis, Hawthorne had long been interested in the role of organic

materials in depictions of decay, particularly the image of moss grown ruin which is evident

in Mosses from an Old Manse, "The Custom House," The Scarlet Letter and The House of

the Seven Gables. Moss-grown decay in these texts can be associated with an idealised

conception of European decay, but it can also be a 'native material,' a way of endowing

American ruin with that air of venerability which it so often lacked. In Britain, Hawthorne's

enthusiasm for the organic signifiers of natural decay is further enhanced. Hawthorne

understands the British climate itself to be perfectly suited to producing the conditions

needed for such organic decay. In his notebook entry from July 13[th,] 1855, Hawthorne writes

about Furness Abbey as follows: 'conceive it all, with such verdure, and embroidery of

flowers as the gentle, kindly moisture of the English climate procreates on all old things,

making them more beautiful than new' (XXI:236). In this eradication of the historical

dimensions of a ruin through the elevation of organic aestheticism, the ruin is no longer

associated with old age but instead becomes something new altogether. George Simmel's

essay on the ruin some sixty years later is helpful in elucidating the effects of the assimilation

of the ruin into nature: 'There arises a new form which, from the standpoint of nature, is

entirely meaningful, comprehensible, differentiated. Nature has transformed the work of art

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[45] William Gilpin, Observations, on Several Parts of England, Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, Volume 1, (London, Cadell & Davies, 1808 [1786]) 74.

into material for her own expression, as she had previously served as material for art'.[46] That Hawthorne occasionally describes British ruins in terms similar to Gilpin and Simmel, is, I would suggest, evidence of the impression of stable and permanent history which Hawthorne feels while in Britain. Such a sense of permanence may attract and repulse Hawthorne at different moments but its underlying and constant presence in relation to ruins means that considerations of decline and historical deterioration often associated with the writing of other ruin enthusiasts remain, in The English Notebooks, largely absent. Instead, the ruin's status as new, semi-natural object comes to the fore. We can see further evidence of this in Hawthorne's description of Kenilworth Castle, dated 13th September 1857:

> The ivy is even more wonderfully luxuriant; its trunks being, in some places, two or three feet in diameter, and forming real buttresses against the walls, which are actually supported and vastly strengthened by this parasite, that clung to them at first only for its own convenience, and now holds them up, lest it should be ruined by their fall (XXII:378).

In this description, nature's reclamation of the site involves replacing the physical characteristics of the building with natural ones. The thick trunks of ivy are described in architectural terms as 'buttresses.' The human design of the building is being slowly overwritten by nature's own enterprise. In British ruins such as these, nature does not obliterate the works of mankind so much as gradually supersede them. The seeming benevolence of British decay is evident in the manner which the ivy supports the walls, preventing, their total ruin.[47]

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[46] George Simmel, "The Ruin," trans. David Kettler, The Hudson Review, Vol 11, No 3 (1958[1911]) 381.
[47] For a further example of nature gradually and gently replacing the architecture of British ruins, see Hawthorne's notebook entry concerning Bolton Abbey, dated, 11th April 1857: 'Neglect, wildness, crumbling

While Hawthorne's responses to British ruins lack the kind of fraught transatlantic historical questioning present elsewhere in The English Notebooks, his enthusiasm for the aesthetics of British ruins does lead to some considerations of American ruin. Hawthorne states that 'Nature is certainly a more genial playfellow in England than in my own country. She is always ready to lend her aid to any beautifying purpose' (XXII:55). He also laments the absence of ivy in America: 'Oh that we could have ivy in America! What is there to beautify us when our time of ruin comes?' (XXI:123).[48] At such moments, Hawthorne appears to be less concerned with the moral and political ramifications of American historical decline than he is with the aesthetic consequences. Indeed, the fact that Hawthorne can contemplate American ruin in purely aesthetic terms demonstrates his disinclination towards myths of American exceptionalism even in the face of British historical ruin. His anticipation of America's 'time of ruin' suggests its inevitability as part of the process of *traslatio imperii*. Hawthorne, at this moment, is primarily concerned with how aesthetically lacking the ruins of America will be without the benefits of the English climate and its beautifying ivy.

Hawthorne's concern with the future ruin of America might be contrasted with the theory of Ruin Value, promoted by the Nazi architect Albert Speer. Speer suggested to Hitler that 'By using special materials and by applying certain principles of statics, we should be able to build structures which even in a state of decay, after hundreds or (such were our reckonings) thousands of years would more or less resemble Roman models'.[49] Speer illustrated his theory to Hitler through a prepared 'romantic drawing' of 'what the reviewing stand on the Zepplin Field would look like after generations of neglect, overgrown with ivy, its columns

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walls, the climbing and conquering ivy; masses of stone lying where they fell; trees of old date, growing where pillars of the aisles used to stand, - these are the best points of ruined abbeys' (XXII:188).

[48] English Ivy was introduced to America in the early eighteenth century so it would have been present in America during Hawthorne's time, although not to the extent that it was in Britain.

[49] Albert Speer, Inside the Third Reich, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) 56.

fallen, the walls crumbling here and there, but the outlines still clearly recognizable'.[50]

Speer's goal in imagining his constructions as ruins was to ensure that Nazi works of architecture 'should also speak to the conscience of a future Germany centuries from now'.[51] While Speer sees a link between the aesthetics of decaying Nazi buildings and the memory of the Third Reich, Hawthorne is, it seems, always primarily concerned with aesthetics. His worry is neither about the fact that America may fall to ruin, nor, like Speer, whether such ruins will adequately remind future generations of the perceived glories of the past. Rather, Hawthorne's primary concern is whether American ruins will be beautiful in the manner that English ruins are. Yet, while his central concern may be the aestheticism of American ruins, implicit within the act of imagining America in ruins is the historical context of the growing threat of the American Civil War. While British ruins appear to provoke more untroubled aesthetic responses in Hawthorne, in my next chapter I will argue that the developing events in America, twinned with his experiences of decidedly more historically unstable Roman decay, provoked him to react more forcefully and worriedly to the prospect of America's potential ruin.

The Admiration of Decay

Hawthorne's passion for the combination of natural growth and architectural decay brings his own ruin writing in The English Notebooks into contact with the wide debates of the eighteenth and nineteenth century concerning the maintenance of ruins. The popularity of

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[50] Speer, Inside the Third Reich, 56.
For a comparison of Speer's ruin theory with that of Walter Benjamin, see Naomi Stead, "The Value of Ruins: Allegories of Destruction in Benjamin and Speer," Form/Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Built Environment, Vol. 6 (Oct. 2003) 51-64. For imagined American ruin see John Ames Mitchell, The Last American, (New York: Hard Press 2006 [1889]). Mitchell's novel is the beginning of science fiction trend of imagining America in ruins – recent blockbusters such as Independence Day, The Day After Tomorrow and 2012 have continued this tradition.
[51] Speer, Inside the Third Reich, 56.

picturesque travel during this period and the passion for ruin hunting meant that landlords often worked to preserve historical ruins, not only by clearing obstructive vegetation but also at times by repairing or retouching the ruins themselves. Such forms of maintenance were often met with fierce criticism. John Ruskin's attitude in <u>The Seven Lights of Architecture</u> (1844) towards such restoration is particularly hostile:

> Neither by the public, nor by those who have the care of public monuments is the true meaning of the word restoration understood. It means the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered: a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed. Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter; it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture. That which I have above insisted upon as the life of the whole, that spirit which is given only by the hand and eye of the workman, never can be recalled. Another spirit may be given by another time, and it is then a new building; but the spirit of the dead workman cannot be summoned up, and commanded to direct other hands, and other thoughts.[52]

For Ruskin, unconcerned as he is with the amorality of the aesthetic picturesque, such restoration is offensive because it destroys the spirit of the original workman. Attempting such restoration is, for Ruskin, an affront to the workman who originally created the building. In Ruskins's protest, restoration becomes, paradoxically, more destructive than the natural processes of ruin which such restoration seeks to counter. Gilpin was equally outraged by

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[52] John Ruskin, <u>The Seven Lamps of Architecture</u>, (New York: John Wiley, 1849) 161.

such forms of restoration: 'It is a difficult matter, at the sight of such monstrous absurdities, to keep resentment within decent bounds'.[53] However, he is, predictably, more concerned with the adverse effects of such restoration upon the surface appearance of such ruins, with the 'unnatural' sight of 'the recent marks of human industry' upon ruins that are 'evidently forlorn and deserted by man'.[54] Hawthorne's own assessments of ruins reflect such aversions to overly maintained ruins. In his account of Bolton Abbey he complains that 'everything here is kept with such trimness that it gives you the idea of petrification. Decay is no longer triumphant' (XXII:188). Hawthorne's enthusiasm for nature's reclamation of British ruins is underpinned by a desire to witness genuine forms of decay. He remains relatively uninterested in false ruins and prefers the kind of historical sites where organic material has taken hold of ruins over an extended period of time. However, the desire to witness such forms of authentic decay necessarily invokes a contradiction. As Gavin Lucas writes: 'the paradox of preserving a ruin is only apparent when one realizes that what defines a ruin is, fundamentally, the very *process of decay* or ruination. Preservation arrests or even reverses this process, and thus the notion of preserving ruins is surely an oxymoron'.[55] In this sense by stressing process over stasis, Hawthorne encourages factors which may speed up 'complete ruin' or see picturesque viewpoints obscured by overgrown vegetation.

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[53] William Gilpin, Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, On Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland, Volume 2, (London: R. Blamire, 1792) 183.
[54] Gilpin, Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Volume 2, 182. For a discussion of the Picturesque debate on the maintenance of ruins see: Ian Ousby, The Englishman's England: Taste Travel and the Rise of Tourism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp113-29.
[55] Gavin Lucas, "Ruins," in The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World, ed. Paul Graves-Brown et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 195.

British Nature and the Sublime

While Hawthorne shares with Gilpin and Ruskin a dislike for ruins which have been 'petrified' by restorative touches, his perception of British nature outwith the context of the ruin reflects a more distinctly American mindset. It seems that the same conditions of historical stability and permanence which create the platform for purely aesthetic experiences of British ruins, also result in an impression of humbled nature: 'Man has…got entire possession of Nature here' (XXI:233) he complains at one point in The English Notebooks. 'American scenery is,' Hawthorne writes, apt to 'shock the sensibilities of cultivated people,' while British nature, though 'in excellent taste...keeps itself within the very proper bounds' (XXI:233). Indeed, the picturesque principles which make the viewing of British ruins so pleasurable can make British nature seem overly familiar and unexciting: 'every point of beauty is so well known, and has been described so much, that one must need look through other people's eyes, and feels as if he were looking at a picture rather than a reality' (XXI:233). Hawthorne's observation that Britain lacks the 'naked Nature' (XXI:233) of America implies that while the natural landscapes of the 'old home' may be beautiful and picturesque, they can never be sublime in the manner of American nature.

In his influential account of the sublime in A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757/1759), Edmund Burke writes that

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment;
> and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are

suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely

filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other. [56]

To the American tourist such as Hawthorne, who had been witness to untamed American

nature, there was little in British nature which could induce such astonishment.[57] America

had the Great Plains, for example, described by Francis Parkman Jr. in 1847 as 'a plain as

level as a frozen lake' which went on 'league after league,' with no other feature than 'its vast

extent, its solitude, and its wilderness'.[58] Claudia Bell and John Lyall argue that such

descriptions of the Great Plains invoke 'horizontality' and thus conjure up one of the

'Burkian characteristics of terror: dreadful distance'.[59] While Hawthorne had not himself

travelled far enough west to witness the sublime expanses of the prairies, he had visited and

written about another site of sublime American nature, Niagara Falls: where 'The golden

sunshine tinged the sheet of the American cascade, and painted on its heaving spray the

broken semicircle of a rainbow, Heaven's own beauty crowning earth's sublimity'.[60] The

sublime spectacle of the Niagara Falls is rooted in the divinity of the scene: as the falls are

haloed by the rainbow, making it seem in that moment as though the vast falls have bridged

the chasm between heaven and earth.[61]

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[56] Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (London: Cartwright, 1824 [1757]) 53.

[57] For a discussion of the American sublime see: Rob Wilson, American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre, (Wisconsin: University Of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Mary Arensberg ed. The American Sublime, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).

[58] Frances Parkman Jr., The Oregon Trail (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1996 [1847]) 61.

[59] Claudia Bell and John Lyall, The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape, Tourism, and Identity, (Connecticut: Praeger, 2002) 83. For another description of the sublimity of the Great Plains see, William Cullen Bryant, "The Prairies": I behold them for the first/ And my heart swells, while the dilated sight/Takes in the encircling vastness. Lo! they stretch,/ In airy undulations, far away,/ As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,/ Stood still, with an his rounded billows fixed, /And motionless forever (4-10). William Cullen Bryant "The Prairies" in The Poems of William Cullen Bryant, ed. by Humphry Milford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914 [1832]) 118-121.

[60] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Visit to Niagara," The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol XI: The Snow Image (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1962) 89.

[61] For a further discussion of sublime Niagara see, Elizabeth R. McKinsey, Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

But although Hawthorne tended to represent American nature as sublime and British nature through the more restrained terms of the picturesque and the beautiful, his contemplation of British ruins occasionally overturns this tendency. In his description of Furness Abbey, dated July 13th 1855, Hawthorne's notebook entry reflects the impressions of sublimity generated by these ruins. But this sublimity comes not, as it does in a text such as Volney's The Ruins, from the contemplation of the vast expanse of time and history and the terror of man's relative insignificance in light of the fragility of his achievements. Rather, it is the ruin's interaction with the natural world which creates this impression of sublimity:

> Conceive all these shattered walls, with here and there an arched door, or the great arched vacancy of a window; these broken stones and monuments scattered about; these rows of pillars up and down the nave - these arches, through which a giant might have stept, and not needed to bow his head, unless in reverence to the sanctity of the place - conceive it with the grass for sole pavement of the long and spacious aisle, and the sky above for the only roof. The sky, to be sure, is more majestic than the tallest of those arches; and yet these latter, perhaps, make the stronger impression of sublimity, because they translate the sweep of the sky to our finite comprehension (XXI:236).

The relationship between ruin and nature in this scene is markedly different from picturesque British ruins, in which decaying buildings' connect with nature through a literal assimilation into the landscape as nature begins to reclaim and replace the site. The incomplete condition of the huge arches allows a connection to be formed between the ruin and nature through the imagination of the observer which, as it reconstructs the arches, is led in one seemingly

organic progression from contemplation of architectural form to contemplation of the infinite sweep of the sky. Other than further illustrating the fact, already well documented in this chapter, that British ruins had a profound effect upon Hawthorne, this description of Furness Abbey underlines the aesthetic appeal of ruins since, even in this moment of sublime contemplation, Hawthorne's focus is entirely upon the aesthetic qualities rather than its historical dimensions.

Taken in light of the previous chapters of this thesis, Hawthorne's purely aesthetic responses to British ruins in The English Notebooks may be considered somewhat surprising. His American romances demonstrate a keen interest in and awareness of ruin aesthetics, particularly the recurring image of new organic growth upon old decay. In addition, Hawthorne's American writing displays a fundamental concern with ruin as an indicator of some form of decline or deterioration – the ruined wharves of Salem, Hester as a ruined woman, the decaying house of the seven gables, and so on. In The English Notebooks, contemplation of ruins is characterised by aesthetic considerations which are themselves notable for the way in which they preclude contemplation of historical decay and the moral and political connotations it might represent. As I have previously suggested, the fact that the historical ambivalence present in Hawthorne's considerations of complete buildings is absent from his considerations of British ruins indicates that the sense of a familiar and stable British history, which attracts and repels Hawthorne variously, itself precludes any contemplation of ruins as symbols of historical decay. British ruins are, in spite of their decay, also symbols of permanence and historical stability. Consider, finally, the following passage describing the church in Bebbington, south of Liverpool:

The steeple has ivy on it, and looks old, old, old; so does the whole church,

though portions of it have been renewed, but not so as to impair the aspect of

heavy, substantial endurance, and long, long decay, which may go on

hundreds of years longer before the church is a ruin. There it sits, among the

surrounding graves, looking just the same as it did in Bloody Mary's days;

just as it did in Cromwell's time (XXI:28-29).

This building is not a ruin but it nonetheless exhibits signs of decay. Hawthorne reflects upon

the building's history, and in so doing, makes reference to two figures, Oliver Cromwell and

Mary I, from some of the most tumultuous and violent periods in British history. Yet, in spite

of his knowledge of such periods of history, this decaying building does not prompt

considerations of the vicissitudes and upheaval of history. Rather, even in its state of decay,

the building suggests permanence not decline through its 'substantial endurance.' The

description of this church, I would argue, is therefore illustrative of the way in which the

sense of historical permanence Hawthorne felt in Britain silently underpins the predominance

of his aesthetic responses. If history was felt to be stable and enduring then political and

moral responses to ruins are not what is raised within the mind when viewing a ruin. Instead,

it is the visual composition of the ruin which takes primacy. Hawthorne's sense of Britain as

stable and permanent was, of course, illusionary. Indeed, he was well aware that many of the

abbeys and castles he visited would have been initially ruined by the violence of the

reformation and the English Civil War. However, his sense of home feeling with the British

past appears to have coloured his perceptions of it. And, as we shall see in the next chapter

concerning the troubling decay of Rome, Hawthorne's own awareness of the growing Civil

War in America affected his own perceptions of European history and decay. In this sense his

ability to view British history as static, permanent and knowable, in spite of his knowledge to

the contrary, may have been informed by his anxieties about the history which was unfolding in his own country.

During his time in England, Hawthorne tried, and failed, to produce a romance set in England. His three aborted romances were titled The Ancestral Footstep, Dr Grimshaw's Secret and Etherege. These works were intended to tell the story of an American claimant who had returned to England under various guises, and most involved the rediscovery of the claimant's original roots. The romances had their basis in Hawthorne's own desire to 'discover the exact origins of his family and the precise spot from which his forefathers had emigrated to the New World'.[62] In the various attempts to produce this romance,

> the original emigrant to America may have carried away with him a family -
> secret, whereby it was in his power (had he so chosen) to have brought about
> the ruin of the family. The secret he transmits to his American progeny, by
> whom it is inherited throughout all the intervening generations. At last, the
> hero of the Romance comes to England and finds that, by means of this
> secret, he still has it in his power to procure the downfall of the family
> (XXI:162).

Hawthorne was never able to complete any of these romances and eventually all attempts were abandoned once he began to write The Marble Faun. Some critics, such as Edward Hutchins Davidson, have argued that the failure to complete these romances marks the beginning of the intellectual decline which Hawthorne had feared in "The Custom-House." Charles Swann sees Hawthorne's failure in terms of the shift in how America could be

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[62] Edward Hutchins Davidson, Hawthorne's Last Phase, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949) 15.

perceived in relation to England: 'With the America Hawthorne had known all his life in such dire straits, it is no wonder that he could not continue with the American claimant material – for that was…..crucially dependent on stable if complex ideas of America and England and on their interrelationships'.[63] While both of these are valid explanations, in light of the previous chapters of my thesis, and to anticipate one of the central concerns of the subsequent chapter, I would argue that Hawthorne's perception of English history as stable and stifling may not have offered the appropriate conditions for romance. As we have seen, all of his previous romances, even The Scarlet Letter, set in the 'virgin soil' of seventeenth century New England, are characterised by a pervading atmosphere of decay. British decay is underpinned by a sense of stability which precludes the kind of imaginative interplay fictionalised in the upper floor of "The Custom-House." While ruin is an almost ever-present concern in The English Notebooks, it does not have the suggestive potential it possesses in America, where notions of decay continually engage with myths of national beginnings and futures. Nor does British decay compare with the ancient and inescapable decay of Rome, which communicates the continual flux and change of Roman history and, therefore, prompts the kind of consideration of moral, political and social upheaval which supplies the themes for romance.

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[63] Swann, Tradition and Revolution, 184.

Chapter 5: Italian Ruins and American Anxieties: Hawthorne in Rome

Italian Ruins and American Anxieties: Hawthorne in Rome

In this chapter I will examine Hawthorne's The French and Italian Notebooks and The Marble Faun. One reason for examining the novel in light of the notebooks is that Hawthorne's encounters with Rome, recorded in these journals, form the basis for many of the depictions of Rome in The Marble Faun. Thus, examining Hawthorne's own experiences of, and attitudes towards, Rome in his Italian notebooks can in turn enhance any subsequent readings of The Marble Faun. This is particularly true in relation to the notion of ruin, since many of Hawthorne's accounts of Italian ruins are simply transferred directly from notebook to novel. In examining these two texts in succession, I will look at how Hawthorne's experiences and representations of the vast array of material ruins of Italy, and in particular Rome, differ from his responses to British ruins. I will show that the aestheticism which is so prevalent in The English Notebooks is largely absent in his accounts of Roman ruins. Instead, Roman ruins become symbols of the city's deeply unsettling history, a history which often overwhelms Hawthorne, and at times repulses him, but which he, nonetheless, occasionally feels deep connection to. I will examine the way in which Hawthorne in his notebooks, blurs the lines between ruin and atmosphere, and how this atmosphere of Roman decay became the source of deep personal trauma for him. I will then argue that this overlap between atmosphere and decay is essential to the composition of his final novel The Marble Faun. Returning to the preface to The Marble Faun, with which I began my introduction, I will examine the qualities of romance in Hawthorne's final completed fictional work. I will argue that there is a division between the ruined European characters, whose stories endow this text with its dissociative power of romance, and the two Americans of The Marble Faun, who remain immune to ruin and therefore only observers of, rather than participants within, romance. I will then argue that while the innocence of these two American characters is at

odds with Hawthorne's knowledge of the approaching American Civil War, we can, nonetheless, understand their imperviousness to decay in terms which suggest that Hawthorne has recalibrated his attitude towards American ruin.

In January 1858, after spending around a month travelling from England through France and then to Italy, Hawthorne and his family arrived in Rome. Hawthorne had been living and working in England for five years and the opportunity for the family to undertake a continental trip was afforded to them in no small part by the savings he had accumulated during his time as American Consul in Liverpool. The Hawthornes would spend the next year and a half living in Italy, with two spells in Rome in the winter and spring of 1858 and the winter and spring of 1859, either side of a stay in Florence and some of the intervening towns and cities. During his time on the continent, Hawthorne continued the habit of keeping journals which had occupied him during his time living and working in England. Indeed his continental notebooks, which were published posthumously in 1871 under the title The French and Italian Notebooks, comprise 'the most sustained and detailed journalizing of Hawthorne's life'.[1]

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[1] Thomas Woodson, "Historical Commentary" in The Centenary Edition of The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne Volume XIV: The French and Italian Notebooks, ed. Thomas Woodson, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1980) 903. Compared to The English Notebooks, written over four and a half years and which consist of 1,508 manuscript pages, or around three hundred and forty thousand words, The French and Italian Notebooks, written over a year and a half, consist of 863 manuscript pages, or just under two hundred thousand words (903). While The English Notebooks had been fully published previously, most notably Randall Stewart's 1941 edition, volume sixteen of the Ohio State Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne is the first publication of Hawthorne's entire continental notebooks.

Roman Holidays

The trip to continental Europe and to Italy in particular fulfilled a long-standing desire for Hawthorne. In a letter to his friend Grace Greenwood in April 1852, Hawthorne spoke of 'that long cherished idea' of travelling to Italy (XVI:328). Hawthorne's dreams of visiting Rome can be traced back to the British tradition of the European Grand tour. Italy, and Rome in particular, was perhaps the most desirable destination on the entire tour due to 'its perennial associations not only with devotion, but with power and with artistic and cultural influence'.[2] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Grand Tour offered the opportunity 'to round out the education of young men of the ruling classes by exposing them to the treasured artefacts and ennobling society of the continent'.[3] James Boswell quotes Samuel Johnson as saying that all of 'our religion, almost all our law, almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above the savages, has come to us from the shores of the Mediterranean'; Johnson therefore opined that '[a] man who has not been to Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see'.[4] For artists of the period, Rome held a special significance. The city's historical and cultural associations, especially its republican past, resonated strongly with the Romantic revolutionary consciousness and Rome arguably played an important role in the 'formation of the Romantic aesthetic and theories of the imagination'.[5] Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Keats and Shelley all visited Rome at some point in their lives and Keats and Shelley are buried in the Protestant Cemetery there. Romantic artists were particularly drawn to the ruins of Rome. Roman ruins offered them the opportunity to revel in the melancholy which

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[2] Judith Camp, <u>The English Pilgrimage to Rome: A Dwelling Place for the Soul</u>, (Bodmin, MPG Books 2000) 1.

[3] James Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)" in <u>The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing</u>, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 38.

[4] James Boswell, <u>Life of Johnson</u> (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1970) 742, quoted in James Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)" 39.

[5] Jonathan Sachs, <u>Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination 1789-1832</u>, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 3. For a further discussion of the Romantic significance of Rome, see Jerome J. McGann, <u>The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in the Historical Method</u>, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) pp313-333.

characterised much of their work and provided material for inward reflection as well as contemplation of wider historical forces. As Jonathan Sachs argues, 'symbols and markers of history' ruins 'provide material for the expression and explication of the self. They enable a profound solipsism and provide an aid with which the self can see the self'.[6]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Rome had become a destination for many American artists in Europe. The narrator of The Marble Faun facetiously remarks that all his readers will know the Roman location being described 'for everybody, now-a-days, has been in Rome' (IV:70). Hawthorne was among a number of American writers-travellers, including Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and then latterly William Dean Howells, Mark Twain and Henry James, who visited Rome at some point in their lives. Paul R. Baker describes how

> Many Americans came to Italy intent upon broadening themselves and gaining instruction from the sights of the ancient world. Some hoped to satisfy childhood dreams and longings; they were eager to see the places associated with those ancient poets, statesmen, and historians whom they had come to know as young students and whose writings many of them still remembered well and quoted freely.[7]

While the Roman-centric writings of the European Romantics, most notably Canto IV of Byron's Child Harold's Pilgrimage (1818), would probably have helped to shape the New

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[6] Sachs, Romantic Antiquity, 140.
[7] Paul R. Baker, The Fortunate Pilgrims: Americans in Italy 1800-1860, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964) 22. See also, Susan Rather, "Rome and the American Academy: Art Mecca or Artistic Backwater," in The Italian Presence in American Art, 1860-1920, ed. Irma B. Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992) 214-228.

World travellers' preconceived ideas about Rome, the Roman experience for Americans was something distinct from that of European visitors. According to Joshua Parker, 'Rome was simultaneously a physical locus for the production of American arts and letters, an iconic symbol of America's Republican heritage, and a setting onto which Americans projected their hopes and fears for the contemporary United States'.[8] Equally though, if Britain was the 'old home' for many Americans, Rome, and Italy more generally, were the epitome of Old World otherness, a place which offered the most direct contrast to perceived American modes of thought and social norms. Such contrast could destabilise a previously assured sense of identity:

> Rome offered a new and more complex sense of history, one that was deeply layered and palimpsestic, not subject to easy rational analysis. For the American who had considered himself or herself as exempt from the childishness of Italy – that is, the lack of intellectual and moral maturity – the journey to Rome forced a reexamination of oneself and one's identity. Rome allowed for freedom and was indeed in the mid-nineteenth century a site of political contestation...but that freedom could be terrifying in its challenge of assumptions of secure identity. Religious, political, and sexual assumptions were challenged for those writers who explored the Italy of another reality. The Italy they saw (for they rarely read Italian) was finally a part of their own moral landscape.[9]

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[8] Joshua Parker, "War and Union in Little America: The Space of Hawthorne's Rome," Nathaniel Hawthorne Review, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Autumn, 2014) 60. Parker goes on to quote Emerson in a letter to his brother Charles Chauncy Emerson, dated April 16th, 1833: 'Here is the town of the centuries, the capital of the ancient & of the modern world'.

[9] Robert K Martin and Leland S. Person, introduction to Roman Holidays: American Writers and Artists in Nineteenth-Century Italy, eds. Robert K Martin and Leland S. Person (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2002) 2. For the most comprehensive discussion of American artists and tourists in Rome from the end of the eighteenth century to the present, see William Vance, America's Rome: 2 Volumes. (New Haven and London: Yale

In Hawthorne's case, re-examinations of identity prompted by his time in Rome can be detected in the ways in which his responses to Roman decay differ significantly from his responses to British decay and in the way that his perceptions of Roman ruin in <u>The French and Italian Notebooks</u> help to shape the complex formulations of national identity and destiny in <u>The Marble Faun</u>.

<u>Roman Ruins: Expectation and Reality</u>

The relative abundance of Roman ruins and the fact that Hawthorne spent more time in Rome than anywhere else during his time in Italy means that it is pertinent to concentrate on his responses to Roman ruins rather than those he saw in Italy as a whole or elsewhere on the continent. As with <u>The English Notebooks</u>, a significant proportion of Hawthorne's continental journals are dedicated to recounting his responses to the ruins he visited or came across during his travels. Hawthorne's reactions to British ruins were primarily aesthetic; the sense of a stable British history, which equally attracted and repulsed Hawthorne at different times, formed a backdrop against which ruins would be understood primarily in terms of their aesthetic qualities. Hawthorne's lack of historical contemplation when faced with British ruins can be, I have argued, linked to his failure to adapt the materials of the British experience into romance writing. By contrast, Hawthorne's responses to Roman ruins are markedly different. For the most part, Hawthorne is considerably less enamoured with the ruins he encounters in Rome than those he visited in Britain. Central to this divergence in response is the perceived aesthetic deficiency of Roman ruins:

University Press, 1989). See also, Natalia Wright, <u>American Novelists in Italy: The Discoverers: Allston to James</u> (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965).

I saw massive ruins, not particularly picturesque or beautiful, but huge,

mountainous piles, chiefly of brickwork, somewhat weed-grown, here and

there, but oftener bare and dreary. . . All the successive ages, since Rome

began to decay, have done their best to ruin the very ruins by taking away the

marble and the hewn stone for their own structures, and leaving only the

inner filling-up of brick-work, which the ancient architects never designed to

be seen (XIV:107).

For a man who constantly judges the appearance of the ruins he encounters, the ruins of

classical Rome very often lack the aesthetic appeal of those he had viewed in Britain. Roman

ruins have very often been degraded by the cycles of Roman history in which the best

materials have been successively stripped away in order to build other structures, as in the

case of the 'bare' Coliseum, whose 'stone and marble…[has been] stolen away, by popes

and cardinals, to build their palaces' (XIV:137). In addition, Hawthorne observes that the

Coliseum 'does not compare favourably with an English ruin...on account of the lack of ivy'

(XIV:137). The degree to which Hawthorne's opinions of such ruins are, despite his devotion

to the overarching principles of the picturesque, often entirely subjective, can be seen by

comparing this account of the Coliseum to that of his wife Sophia in her own journals

detailing the family's time in Europe. In at entry dated June 26th 1858 in her Notes on

England and Italy (1869), Sophia writes that

the Coliseum, softened by the ages in tint, and genial in the first place, being

of buff travertine, looks hoary with the years that have passed; and flowers

and moss and ivy, and even trees, grow upon and out of its stones. It is the

Ruin of Ruins.[10]

What is striking about this description of the Coliseum is that as well as being enamoured by the appearance of the limestone skeleton of the structure rather than lamenting the absence of marble or more attractive stone, Sophia also describes the pleasing appearance of the organic material which has taken root, including ivy. Hawthorne's account of the Coliseum is typical of the disappointment he felt when viewing the vast majority of Rome's ruins. It is a disappointment which is nearly always underpinned by such comparisons, either explicit or implicit, with the type of ruins he visited during his time in Britain.

Hawthorne was not alone in these complaints concerning the poor aesthetics of Roman ruins. In 1853, his friend George Stillman Hillard called the Forum 'a desolation which is not beautiful; a ruin which is not picturesque'.[11] Disappointment with the harm done to Roman ruins by the recycling of their materials is evident in the work of another American writer in Rome, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, who wrote, almost twenty years previous to Hawthorne, of her 'disappointment in the ruins; not in their effect, but in their condition'; many, she writes 'are such mere ruins, so changed in form, and stripped of their original embellishments, that they only serve to kindle the enthusiast or puzzle the antiquary'.[12] Such responses to Roman ruins are by no means typical of the thousands of American writer and artists who visited and lived in Rome during the Antebellum years, but what they demonstrate is that for some American travellers the reality of Italian ruins did not match up to their an idealised notion of

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[10] Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, Notes in England and Italy (Denver: Bibliolife, 2010 [1869]) 408.
[11] George Stillman Hillard, Six Months in Italy, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867 [1853]) 189.
[12] Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Letters From Abroad to Kindred at Home, Vol. 1, (London: Edward Moxon, 1841) 229. Sedgewick does, however, exempt 'the Colosseum, the Pantheon, the temple of Vesta, and a few others' from this criticism (229).

them, developed by reading Romantic accounts of Rome or by viewing paintings of its great historical sites. In Six Months in Italy (1853), Hillard writes that

> The traveller who visits Rome with a mind at all inhabited by images from books, especially if he comes from a country like ours, where all is new, enters it with certain vague and magnificent expectations on the subject of ruins, which are pretty sure to end in disappointment. The very name of a ruin paints a picture upon the fancy. We construct at once an airy fabric which shall satisfy all the claims of the imaginative eye. We build it of such material that every fragment shall have a beauty of its own. We shatter it with such graceful desolation that all the lines shall be picturesque, and every broken outline traced upon the sky shall at once charm and sadden the eye. We wreathe it with a becoming drapery of ivy, and crown its battlements with long grass, which gives a voice to the wind that waves it to and fro. We set it in a becoming position, relieve it with some appropriate background, and touch it with soft, melancholy light, - with the mellow hues of a deepening twilight, or, better still, with the moon's idealizing rays…In Rome, such visions, if they exist in the mind, are rudely dispelled by the touch of reality. [13]

The expectations of Hillard's well-read American traveller in many ways reflect Hawthorne's own concerns when viewing ruins: the picturesque, the relation between sky and ruin, the assimilation of ruin into nature. If Hawthorne, like Hillard's traveller, initially fostered his idealised notion of ruins from literature and paintings, his experience of British ruins saw

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[13] Hillard, Six Months in Italy, 184.

these expectations largely justified, or even exceeded, by reality. In Rome, however, such visions were rudely dispelled by the reality.

For Hawthorne, Roman ruins are incomplete not only because they are the remains of decayed buildings but also because they are incomplete realisations of the ideal conception of what a ruin should be. Such unfulfilled aesthetic expectations contribute to Hawthorne's telling statement that the ages have done their best to 'ruin the very ruins' of Rome. Ruins are necessarily defined by their incompleteness; in Hawthorne's accounts of British ruins, this incompleteness provides the basis for the ruins' assimilation into nature, leading to an aesthetic unity and the creation of something altogether new, but the incompleteness of Roman ruins is merely a lack: 'Whatever beauty there may be in a Roman ruin is the remnant of what was beautiful originally, whereas an English ruin is more beautiful, often, in its decay than ever it was in its primal strength' (XIV:58). The contrast between the new form of the ideal British ruin and the remnant of the Roman ruin is discussed in further detail in Simmel's essay some sixty years later:

> a new meaning seizes on this incident [the decaying form of a ruin],
> comprehending it and its spiritual form in a unity which is no longer
> grounded in human purposiveness but in that depth where human
> purposiveness and the working of non-conscious natural forces grow from
> their common root. For this reason a good many Roman ruins, however
> interesting they may be otherwise, lack the specific fascination of the ruin –
> to the extent, that is, to which one notices in them the destruction by man; for

this contradicts the contrast between human work and the effect of nature on which rests the significance of the ruin as such.[14]

Simmel's interest in scenes of decay, and his subsequent dismissal of Roman ruins, is underpinned by the idea that in architectural ruins, as opposed to ruined paintings or sculptures (the former will be discussed later in this chapter), artistic conception, or the 'spirit' achieves a balance with natural forces. Simmel writes that: 'Architecture is the only art in which the great struggle between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature issues into real peace: that in which the soul in its upward striving and nature in its gravity are held in balance'.[15] For both Hawthorne and Simmel, the process of decay, when allowed to occur without human intervention, allows the ruin to become something new. However, the history of Rome has precluded the kind of aesthetic unity of decay which is present in the British ruin. While British ruins seem to Hawthorne to be relics of a stable and familiar history, Roman ruins are material signifiers of a more volatile and fractious past. Unlike British ruins, which Hawthorne often contemplates outwith the scope of history, Roman ruins are reminders of historical mutability, of change and deterioration over time which is indicative of a past which spans vast periods and dramatic historical shifts.[16] Describing a visit to the Forum, Hawthorne writes that

> these remains do not make that impression of antiquity upon me, which
>
> Gothic ruins do. Perhaps it is so because they belong to quite another system
>
> of society and epoch of time; and in view of them, we forget all that has

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[14] Simmel, "The Ruin," 380.

[15] Simmel, "The Ruin," 379.

[16] The locations of British and Roman ruins may also play a part in this contrast. Whereas the ruined abbeys and castles Hawthorne visited in Britain are often in less populated, rural locations, Roman ruins are found throughout the city, meaning that over the successive ages, the buildings have come into continual contact with the destructive forces of mankind.

intervened betwixt them and us, being morally unlike and disconnected with

them, and not belonging to the same train of thought; so that we look across

a gulf to the Roman times, and do not realize how wide the gulf is. Yet in

that intervening valley lie Christianity, the Dark Ages, the feudal system,

chivalry and Romance, and a deeper life of the human race than Rome

brought to the verge of the gulf. (XIV:167)

To Hawthorne, the ruins of classical Rome can, at times, seem so ancient that any sense of

historical perspective is lost. Viewing such ruins, he claims, results in the vast span of history

which exists between the present moment and the classical period being erased from his

perceptions. Yet, such disorientation is, this passage suggests, only temporary, for Hawthorne

is in turn reminded of, and inspired to describe, the accumulated history which exists within

this gulf. At this moment, it is the dense history within the gulf which Hawthorne feels some

affinity with, as opposed to the distant classical period. As well as containing Christian

rather than pagan history, within this gulf is also the medieval Gothic period and 'chivalry

and romance,' the ancestors of Hawthorne's own chose art form. While the classical past

seems inaccessible and distant, Hawthorne is drawn to the harmony of the Gothic. Dennis

Bertold claims that the Gothic is admired by Hawthorne because it has the potential to bridge

the 'gulf between earth and spirit, man and God, and to provide a tangible link between the

finite and the infinite even as it made us aware of our distance from the Absolute'.[17]

However, while the history contained within this gulf may be more familiar and more

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[17] Dennis Berthold, "Hawthorne, Ruskin and the Gothic Revival: Transcendent Gothic in The Marble Faun," ESQ, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1974), 21. While this article provides an insightful account of Hawthorne's admiration of the Gothic, Berthold does not make the distinction I previously have made between Hawthorne's responses to ruined buildings compared to his responses to complete buildings. Therefore, his assessment that the Gothic's 'principal considerations were always moral and religious, not aesthetic' appears to omit an essential facet of what I would argue is Hawthorne's distinctly aesthetic responses to British ruins.

valuable, a 'deeper life of the human race,' its sheer scale can be unsettling. In <u>The Marble Faun</u>, Hawthorne's narrator describes the experience of attempting to comprehend the vast history within the gulf that exists between the present moment and the distant past:

> You look through a vista of century beyond century - through much shadow, and a little sunshine - through barbarism and civilisation, alternating with one another like actors that have prearranged their parts: through a broad pathway of progressive generations bordered by palaces and temples, and bestridden by old, triumphal arches, until, in the distance, you behold the obelisks, with their unintelligible inscriptions, hinting at a past infinitely more remote than history can define. Your own life is as nothing, when compared with that immeasurable distance (IV:410).

Here the narrator strains to look beyond Rome's classical past and to glimpse civilization before the Roman Empire, as signified by the obelisks. The task is, however, impossible and contemplation of such vast periods of time only has the effect of amplifying the individual's sense of insignificance within the scope of such expansive history. While contemplation of classical ruins can, as described above, result in the temporary loss of all historical perspective, the fact that such ruins have been stripped of their valuable materials over time means that they are indelibly marked by, and become symbols of, the vicissitudes of history contained within this gulf; Roman ruins become symbols of what the narrator of <u>The Marble Faun</u> calls 'the decay and change' (IV:6) of Rome.

Robert Milder describes how 'ancient Rome confounded Hawthorne's sense of time and history….Rome did for him something of what the nineteenth-century unearthing of the fossil record did for believers in the literal truth of Genesis; it vastly expanded human time in ways

that challenged assumptions about the nature of reality'.[18] This vast 'gulf' and the anxiety it

stimulates in Hawthorne can be understood in terms of the temporal sublime, which Emily

Brady describes as 'a mode of the mathematical sublime that is related to quantity not

through infinite number or infinite space (height or depth), but rather through points in time,

in this case, stretching successively backwards. The temporal sublime challenges imagination

by expanding it backwards'.[19] Hawthorne, in an illustration of the unrelenting materiality of

Roman history, and his propensity to conflate history with place, expresses this notion of

temporal sublimity though the spatial image of the 'gulf.' In so doing, Hawthorne's depiction

of sublime history might be compared to Whitman's conception of history in Leaves of

Grass: 'The Past! The Past! The Past!/ The Past – the dark unfathom'd retrospect!/ The

teeming gulf-the sleepers and the shadows!' (9-11).[20] For Whitman, as for Hawthorne in his

American romances, the past forms the organic foundations of the present: 'For what is the

present after all but a growth out of/the past?'; however, when Hawthorne, encounters the

classical past, first-hand, in a manner which Whitman never would, the vastness of this

history is disorientating and alien. Unlike the pleasing aestheticism of British ruins,

encounters with Roman ruins are defined by overwhelmingly historicity, constantly

reminding Hawthorne of the almost dizzying extent of historical change and cycles of

societal decline which have occurred within this gulf.

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[18] Milder, Hawthorne's Habitations, 225-6.
[19] Emily Brady, The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetic, Ethics, and Nature (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 37. See also, Karl Kroeber, "Romantic Historicism: The Temporal Sublime" in Images of Romanticism: Verbal and Visual Affinities, ed. Karl Kroeber and William Walling (London: Yale University Press, 1978) 149-165.
[20] Walt Whitman, "Passage to India," Leaves of Grass, 356.

Roman History and the Atmosphere of Decay

As we have seen, the apparent stability of the British past, which underpins Hawthorne's aesthetic responses to its ruins, nonetheless breeds a historical ambivalence where his sense of feeling at home in the English past is countered by a fear of stagnation. Rome's past, conveyed most clearly by its ruins, is less stable and comprehensible than British history; and yet, Hawthorne's attitude to Roman history is not entirely consistent. Rather, his response to Rome is defined by 'a profound ambivalence and insecurity' towards this foreign environment.[21] The aversion Hawthorne feels towards the unsettling vastness of the Roman past is countered by a puzzling affinity which at times appears to exceed his connection to the stable and knowable English past. In the notebook entry describing his final departure from Rome, Hawthorne writes:

> I saw Soracte on the horizon, and I looked at everything as if for the last
> time; nor do I wish ever to see any of these objects again, though no place
> ever took so strong a hold of my being as Rome, nor ever seemed so close to
> me, and so strangely familiar. I seem to know it better than my birthplace,
> and to have known it longer; and though I have been very miserable there,
> and languid with the effects of the atmosphere, and disgusted with a
> thousand things in daily life, still I cannot say I hate it - perhaps might fairly
> own a love for it. But (life being too short for such questionable and
> troublesome enjoyments) I desire never to set eyes on it again (XIV:524).

I have already discussed Hawthorne's sense of home in relation to Salem in "The Custom-House" and in relation to England in The English Notebooks. His experience of Rome adds a further degree of complexity to an idea which runs throughout much of his writing up until

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[21] Udo Nattermann, "Dread and desire: 'Europe' in Hawthorne's The Marble Faun," Essays in Literature, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1994) 54.

this point since, in spite of all Rome's objectionable qualities, Hawthorne states here that he feels more of a connection to the city than to Salem; such a complex attitude towards Rome has been described by Robert K. Martin as 'a love/hate relationship in which the degree of hatred depends on a concomitant degree of love'.[22] Leonardo Buonomo argues that 'It is the artist in Hawthorne who is most forcefully attracted to Rome. It is his sense of belonging there that counterbalances the perception of evil and decay'.[23] As the numerous visits to art galleries, monuments, collections and ruins documented in the notebooks demonstrate, 'Hawthorne's Italy…is not social but aesthetic, the sum of the art works and art history assembled there'.[24] As we shall see, the importance of Rome's artistic heritage and Hawthorne's unique, often naïve understanding of some of its artworks, play an essential role in his depiction of Rome in The Marble Faun.

Among the aspects of Rome that repulse Hawthorne in the above journal entry is the effect of its 'atmosphere.' As discussed in previous chapters, 'atmosphere' is a multifaceted term in Hawthorne's writing which is often entwined with his depictions of decay and ruin and with his definition of the Romance genre more generally. In his writing about Rome, Hawthorne's notion of 'atmosphere' is given further significance by the continual suggestion, evident from the very beginning of Hawthorne's Roman journal entries, that the air of Rome has a harmful quality to it. The Hawthorne family arrived in Rome in January 1858 and were confronted with a city in the grip of a particularly dismal winter. On February 3rd 1858, a fortnight after the family's arrival, Hawthorne notes in his journal: 'I did not think cold weather could have

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[22] Robert K. Martin, ""An Awful Freedom": Hawthorne and the Anxieties of the Carnival" in Roman Holidays: American Writers and Artists in Nineteenth-Century Italy, ed. Robert K Martin & Leland S. Person (Iowa: University of Iowa Press 2002) 27.

[23] Leonardo Buonomo, Backward Glances: Exploring Italy, Reinterpreting America (1831-1866), (London: Associated University Press, 1996) 52.

[24] Richard Brodhead, Introduction to The Mable Faun, by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Penguin, 1990) iii.

made me so very miserable; upon my word, having caught a feverish cold, I was glad of being muffled up comfortably in the fever-heat. The atmosphere certainly has a peculiar quality of malignancy' (XIV:53). In the early days of the Hawthornes' Roman sojourn, it is the cold temperature of the winter months which appears to account for the sense that the Roman atmosphere is injurious. However, in the above quotation taken from Hawthorne's final notebook entry before departing Rome in 1859, the portrayal of the 'languid' effects of Roman atmosphere is motivated by a concept associated with the summer months of Rome: namely malaria, which Cooper called Rome's 'greatest enemy'.[25]

Even before arriving in Rome, Hawthorne was concerned about the quality of air in Europe. His wife Sophia had been in questionable health since infancy and her condition was further aggravated by the damp English climate, particularly during winter. To combat this, Hawthorne had deemed it necessary for her to go to Lisbon for the winter months of 1856 so that her lungs were not subjected to another damp English winter. During the family's travels on the continent in 1858 it was hoped that the atmosphere of southern Europe would prove to be more agreeable to Sophia's lungs than that of Britain. In addition to Sophia's illness, however, Hawthorne was also concerned about the possibility of his family contracting malaria in Rome. The Campagna, the low lying, marshy land surrounding Rome, provides the perfect conditions for mosquitos to breed, which in the mid-nineteenth meant that a summer spent in the city or the surrounding area could be deadly.[26] So closely associated had Rome become with malaria that the particularly deadly strain of the disease found in this area had

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[25] James Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe: Italy, Vol. 2, (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1838) 158.
[26] Writing in 1896, Emile Zola describes the Campagna as being 'like a desert of death, with the glaucous green of a stagnant sea.' Emile Zola, The Three Cities Trilogy: Rome, (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2010 [1896])

become known as Roman Fever.[27] The summer months in Rome often saw a huge exodus of people, especially foreign visitors, from the city to other, less affected parts of the country. For this reason, the Hawthorne family spent the summer of 1858 in Florence, returning to Rome again in October where they would remain until May of the following year. During this second period in Rome, Hawthorne's concerns about the threat of malaria proved to be well founded. His daughter Una fell ill in November 1858. As her condition worsened over the coming months Hawthorne wrote nothing in his journals, although he did continue to write in his pocket diary. One entry in the pocket diary for April 8th shows how serious the illness had become: 'A dim morning. Gen[eral] Pierce came early; so did the Doctor. He seems to have very little hope. God help us!' (XIV:657). Hawthorne was deeply affected by his daughter's illness and 'Unable to endure the alternations of hope and dread concerning Una's prognosis….had settled his mind on the prospect that his daughter would not survive'.[28] Eventually, though, Una's condition did begin to improve and by May she was well enough to begin the journey back to England, although it would be years before she achieved anything close to complete recovery. T Walter Herbert Jr. suggests that Hawthorne himself never recovered from the trauma of this his daughter's illness in Rome.[29]

The Smell of Decay

And yet, in spite of the personal trauma Hawthorne experienced during this period, his time in Italy proved ultimately to be more artistically productive than his time in England. Hawthorne wrote his fourth and final romance, The Marble Faun, during the time he spent in

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[27] The eponymous character of Henry James's novella Daisy Miller (1879) dies of Roman Fever contracted on a visit to the Coliseum.
[28] T. Walter Herbert, Jr., "Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and The Scarlet Letter: Interactive Selfhoods and the Cultural Construction of Gender," PLMA, Vol. 103, No. 3 (May 1988) 293.
[29] Herbert, "Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne," 293

Florence and Rome in the summer and autumn of 1858, completing the novel upon his return to England in 1859. In writing this romance, Hawthorne borrowed extensively from his Italian notebooks; as Susan Manning notes that 'Hawthorne absorbed into The Marble Faun, often without much change, large quantities of information and reflection from his Notebooks. In fact, forty-five out of fifty chapters of the book include material translated from one context to the other'.[30]

In the development from the notebooks to the fiction of The Marble Faun, the uncertainty and concern regarding the malarial air of Rome becomes the vehicle for Hawthorne's representation of the corrupting and oppressive force of the decaying Roman past. Such generalised fear of the Roman air or atmosphere existed at this time due to the fact that mosquitos had yet to be identified as the carriers of malaria.[31] Describing 'The ancient dust, the mouldiness of Rome, the dead atmosphere….the hard pavements, the smell of ruin and decaying generations' (IV:74), the narrator of The Marble Faun associates Rome's material decay with its 'bad air,' suggesting that the potentially harmful atmosphere is literally polluted by Roman history. In The Marble Faun, ruin has a smell: decay in the city can be inhaled. Later, the narrator describes the relationship between the history-rich soil of Rome and its poisonous atmosphere: 'where the crimes and calamities of ages, the many battles, blood recklessly poured out, and deaths of myriads, have corrupted all the soil, creating an influence that makes the air deadly to human lungs' (IV:90); as a consequence, Rome is 'the native soil of Ruin' (IV:73). This confluence of disease with soil and atmosphere reflects the notion of miasmatism, still understood as scientific fact in Hawthorne's time, which

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[30] Manning, introduction to The Marble Faun, ed. Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) xvii.
[31] The discovery that malaria is transmitted by infected mosquitos was made by the British doctor Sir Ronald Ross. He was awarded the Noble Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1902 for his findings.

explained that malaria was caused by air poisoned by vapours rising from wet earth. Miasmatism could itself be understood as a process stemming from decay, as this passage from a popular English guidebook to Italy from the period demonstrates in its explanation of malaria in Sardinia:

> the malaria...in Sardinia appears to be produced by the overflowing of the torrents in the spring, which, carrying down great masses of vegetable matter, give rise, by fermentation or decomposition, to these deleterious exhalations, and which are particularly noxious in the deltas near the mouths of the rivers, the districts bordering on which are thereby rendered uninhabitable from June until October.[32]

Here, the poisonous atmosphere of malaria is presumed to rise from the decay of organic materials in marshy ground. In The Marble Faun, Hawthorne uses the idea of miasmatism, with its overlap between disease and decay, as a means to communicate an atmosphere of Roman history which has similarly malignant qualities. In The Marble Faun, it is the blood of a violent human history which has dampened and polluted the soil of Rome, making the air 'deadly to human lungs.' The narrator of the novel suggests that

> If we consider the present city as at all connected with the famous one of old, it is only because we find it built over its grave. A depth of thirty feet of soil has covered up the Rome of ancient days, so that it lies like the dead corpse of a giant, decaying for centuries, with no survivor mighty enough even to

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[32] Octavian Blewitt, Hand-book for Travellers in Central Italy, Seventh Edition (London: John Murray, 1867) 434.

bury it, until the dust of all those years has gathered slowly over its recumbent form and made a casual sepulchre (IV:110).[33]

The metaphor of the dead corpse covered by thirty feet of soil highlights the gulf, alluded to in the notebooks, between classical Rome and the succeeding historical epochs; these successive ages, and their subsequent decay have become the barrier between the present and the most distant past. Such an image of the corpse of the past also appears to associate the narrator with the iconoclastic rhetoric of Holgrave at his most fervently radical.[34] However, just as in The French and Italian Notebooks, the attitude towards Rome and its decay is not consistent; Bell claims that the voice of the narrator in The Marble Faun is 'undoubtedly Hawthorne speaking.'[35] This claim is supported by the fact that immediately after he compares Rome's classical past to a decaying corpse, the narrator goes on to ask:

Yet how is it possible to say an unkind or irreverential word of Rome? - the City of all time, and of all the world! - the spot for which man's great life and deeds have done so much, and for which Decay has done whatever glory and dominion could not do! - At this moment, the evening sunshine is flinging its golden mantle over it, making all that we thought mean, magnificent; the bells of all the churches suddenly ring out, as if it were a peal of triumph, because Rome is still imperial (IV:111).

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[33] The atmosphere surrounding Poe's decaying House of Usher conveys similar ideas of miasmatism. It is 'an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn - a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.' Edgar Allen Poe, The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings (London: Penguin, 2003 [1839]) 90.
[34] Similarly, at an earlier point in the novel the narrator describes the weight of Roman history in terms which call to mind Holgrave's tirades again the past: 'It is a vague sense of ponderous remembrances; a perception of such weight and density in a bygone life, of which this spot was the centre, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out' (6).
[35] Millicent Bell, "The Marble Faun and the Waste of History," The Southern Review, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring 1999) 359.

The magnitude of human history which has occurred upon the site of Rome has, in this instance, become essential to the ambivalent attitude Hawthorne displays towards the city. Rome's all-pervading decay, which has been an oppressive force in the city up until this point, is now credited as giving Rome an aesthetic appeal which has previously been absent in Hawthorne's descriptions of Rome. Roman history can offer this paradoxical attraction because contained within its vastness, mutability and decline is a succession of artistic achievements unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

Hawthorne's diverse concept of Roman atmosphere, already a carrier of disease and historical decay, is also a conduit for artistic influence. A recent study sheds some light upon this complex idea of Roman atmosphere. Focusing upon the concept of influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Richard Wrigley describes 'the crossover between influence as both a cultural and medical term'.[36] The Roman atmosphere and 'bad air,' so often associated with disease and death, was also seen to be connected to the notion of artistic creation:

> travellers also bear witness to a belief that Rome's atmosphere must have contained some special ambient factor which had stimulated the remarkable artistic achievements which were everywhere to be seen. Based on prevailing medical ideas of the central importance of air as an expression of the particular combination of local conditions, which in turn shaped physical

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[36] Richard Wrigley, Roman Fever: Influence, Infection and the Image of Rome 1700-1870, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013) 3.

constitution and character, Roman air was presumed to contain some magical

artistically inspirational ingredients.[37]

As we shall see, the inspirational power of Roman air is evident in <u>The Marble Faun</u> in

relation to the American character of Hilda. This notion of atmosphere as a source of artistic

inspiration is also relevant to Hawthorne's own artistic relationship with Rome. Rome's

atmosphere of decay was a source of deep personal trauma for Hawthorne, as well as an

indicator of an unsettling sense of history which pervades every aspect of the Roman

experience, and yet it can be argued that Hawthorne was able to produce his final complete

romance from his experiences in Rome precisely because of, rather than in spite of, this

atmosphere. In Britain, he found ruins which pleased him deeply but did not provoke

unsettling or conflicted contemplation. Rome's ruins and the overpowering atmosphere of

decay they represent by contrast provoked the profound contemplation of sublime history and

of the frailty of the human condition which underpin his final romance.

<u>Miriam: Ruin and Romance</u>

In the passage from the preface quoted in the introduction to my thesis, Hawthorne makes the

claim that 'Italy, as the site of his romance, was chiefly valuable to him [Hawthorne] as

affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted

upon as they are, and must needs be, in America' (IV:3). The grounds for this new,

transatlantic distinction between romance and reality is based on the qualities apparently

lacking in America compared to Italy; his New World home has, he claims, 'no shadow, no

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[37] Wrigley, <u>Roman Fever</u>, 18. Indeed one definition of "inspire" is literally "to breathe in"; this correlation between inspiration and breathing is one Keats takes advantage of in his poem "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" (1816): 'Oft of one wide expanse had I been told/ That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;/ Yet did I never breathe its pure serene/ Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold" (5-8). John Keats, "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" in <u>The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Volume 2A: The Romantics and their Contemporaries</u>, ed. Susan Wolfson and Peter Manning (New York: Longman, 2003) 854.

antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight.' The pervading atmosphere of decay in Italy now provides the ground for romance since, 'Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers, need ruin to make them grow (IV:3). In the postscript to The Marble Faun, just as in the prefaces to his previous romances, Hawthorne describes romance in terms of atmosphere: he writes that his aim was to create in 'this Romance the kind of atmosphere essential to the effect at which he had aimed,' that is, to design a story and characters which bore 'a certain relation to human nature and human life' but which nonetheless remained 'artfully and airily removed from our mundane sphere' (IV:463).[38] Neil Matheson argues that 'The aim of romance is to create the impression of an unbroken narrative past and present, by surrounding this fictive history with a protective "atmosphere" that both animates and mystifies it'.[39] We have seen in my discussion of The French and Italian Notebooks how Hawthorne also observed an atmosphere of decay in Rome. Building upon this, my examination of The Marble Faun will demonstrate the way in which romance and decay are united by the concept of atmosphere.

Hawthorne's final romance tells the story of four friends visiting Rome, two American artists: Kenyon and Hilda; and two Europeans: Miriam, an artist with a mysterious background and heritage, and the Italian Donatello, a figure of child-like innocence. During the course of the story, Miriam is stalked throughout the city by a shadowy figure from her past named only as the Model. Eventually, Donatello, driven by his love for Miriam and her apparently encouraging glance, throws the Model to his death. The crime destroys Donatello's innocence

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[38] Hawthorne added a postscript to the second edition of The Marble Faun after learning from reviews that many readers were unhappy with the amount of questions left unanswered by the conclusion. The postscript describes a meeting between Hilda, Kenyon and the narrator of the romance at St Peter's Basilica, where the two characters offer explanations for some (although not all) of the these unanswered questions.

[39] Matheson, "Depression and Materiality," 238.

and sees him exposed to the world of sinful experience for the first time. Although Hilda witnesses the murder and, as will be discussed later, is affected by the sight of this crime, the story of Donatello's fall only directly involves the three European characters – Donatello, Miriam and the Model. The American characters remain peripheral to the crime, either as a bystander, as in Hilda's case, or for the most part ignorant of its occurrence, as in Kenyon's case.

In terms of achieving an 'atmosphere' where events and characters are 'artfully and airily removed from our mundane sphere,' the lives and actions of the two European characters and the mysterious Model are the most obviously romantic aspects of the story. The tale of Donatello's fall is evidently allegorical; indeed Waggoner notes that The Marble Faun is 'more allegorical than any of the three preceding romances'.[40] This allegorical quality endows The Marble Faun with a transcendent meaning which partly underpins the text's suggestive potential, strengthening claims that the romance is somehow one step removed from reality. In addition to these allegorical dimensions, Miriam and the Model display decidedly Gothic qualities which further endow The Marble Faun with an 'atmosphere' of romance. Both the allegorical and Gothic aspects of the romance are inexorably tied to the novel's ruinous Roman setting.

Miriam is the novel's most enigmatic central character. An artist like Hilda and Kenyon, her history remains murky and the source of much speculation. Early in the novel we are told that 'It was said…that Miriam was the daughter and heiress of a great Jewish banker…Another story hinted that she was a German princess…According to a third statement, she was the off-

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[40] Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study, 224.

spring of a Southern American planter…By still another account she was the lady of an English nobleman' (IV:22-3). Each of these speculative biographies is underpinned by some dark mystery as to why Miriam departed her place of birth: an arranged marriage, a disputed inheritance, rejection of hereditary rank, and even the notion that the 'one burning drop of African blood in her veins so affected her with a sense of ignominy, that she relinquished all and fled her country' (IV:23). Towards the end of the novel, Miriam seemingly illuminates some of aspects of her heritage, telling Kenyon that she comes from 'English parentage, on the mother's side, but with a vein, likewise of Jewish blood; yet connected, through her father, with one of those few princely families of Southern Italy, which still retain great wealth and influence' (IV:429-30). The dark mystery at the heart of Miriam's past is intentionally left incomplete, meaning, as Michael Dunne argues, 'Readers may at this point fill in the scandalous blanks with any real or imaginary villainy of their choice'.[41] Miriam's story therefore reminds us of the relationship between the imaginative and the incomplete, that link between the ruin and romance which informs so much of Hawthorne's writing. The narrative voice, more than Miriam's words, has a direct and heavy hand in the sustained obfuscation of the true mystery. The narrator tells us that, as Miriam describes her heritage to Kenyon, 'she revealed a name at which her auditor stared and grew pale; for it was one that, only a few years before, had been familiar to the world in connection with a mysterious and terrible event' (IV:430). This 'terrible event' is, according to the narrator, one 'the frightful and mysterious circumstances of which will recur to many mind, but of which few or none can have found for themselves a satisfactory explanation. It only concerns the present narrative, inasmuch as the suspicion of being at least an accomplice in the crime fell darkly and directly upon Miriam herself'(IV:431). That Miriam's incomplete and mysterious background is an essential component of her character is clear from the great lengths to

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[41] Michael Dunne, Hawthorne's Narrative Strategies (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1995) 190.

which the narrator goes to sustain these ambiguities. Indeed, the true nature of Miriam's

crime is one of the mysteries which Hawthorne patently refuses to clarify in the postscript; to

the narrator's questions concerning Miriam's background, Hawthorne has Kenyon answer,

> "Is it possible that you need an answer to these questions?...Have you not
>
> even surmised Miriam's name? Think awhile, and you will assuredly
>
> remember it. If not, I congratulate you most sincerely; for it indicates that
>
> your feelings have never been harrowed by one of the most dreadful and
>
> mysterious events that have occurred within the present century" (IV:466-7).

Miriam's shadowy past and the unnamed crime which hangs over her are given physical form

in The Marble Faun by the figure of the Model, who stalks her steps in Rome, tormenting her

with his relentless presence. Miriam remembers the Model as the 'evil spirit which blasted

her sweet youth' and 'compelled her…to stain her womanhood with crime' (IV:190). In The

French and Italian Notebooks, Hawthorne compares Rome's long distant past to the 'dead

corpse of a giant, decaying for centuries' which has been buried by the successive ages of the

city. In a figuration of such observations, the first glimpse of the Model occurs in the

Catacombs deep below Rome, 'that vast tomb' where 'reminiscences of church aisles and

grimy cellars…seemed to be broken into fragments, and hopelessly intermingled' (IV:24).

The Model, more of a Gothic trope than a fully formed character, rises from the depth of the

explicitly Gothic setting of the Catacombs, a place of 'graves and skulls' and all of the

'ghastliness which the Gothic mind loves to associate with the idea of death' (IV:24). In this

way, Hawthorne uses Roman ruin to endow his narrative with qualities of romance which

contribute towards a detachment from a recognizable reality. Introducing the Model in the

depths of the Roman catacombs, and describing Miriam as being 'plucked out of a mystery'

with 'its roots still clinging to her' (IV:23) corresponds to Hawthorne's experiences of Rome as a city where the ruin and decay of the past literally come from ground, and a place where the deeper you dig, the further back into this past you are likely to go. At one point in his notebooks, Hawthorne writes that 'You cannot dig six feet downward anywhere into the soil, deep enough to hollow out a grave, without finding some precious relic of the past' (XIV:201).[42] This correlation between depth and the ruins of the past is reflected not only in the Model rising from the depths of the Catacombs but also in the notion that Miriam 'fair as she looked, was plucked out of a mystery, and had its roots still clinging to her' (IV:23).

Fernie has observed that the The Marble Faun is a romance which revisits Hawthorne's 'great themes of moral and spiritual struggle, but [that] the novel is also overtly concerned with how such struggles are represented in works of art.[43] We see evidence of this in Hawthorne's use of Rome's Catholic art, which serves to enhance the Gothic mystery of Miriam's unexplained connection to the Model. Miriam is associated with a painting ascribed to Guido Reni and presumed to be of Beatrice Cenci, which Hawthorne viewed during his time in Rome and described in his notebooks as 'the very saddest picture that ever was painted or conceived'(XIV:92).[44] Beatrice Cenci was a young woman sentenced to death for assisting in the murder of her father Francesco Cenci who it was alleged had raped and abused her. Viewing Hilda's copy of Guido's painting, Miriam comments: '"I would give my life to know whether she thought herself innocent, or the one great criminal since time began"'

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[42] This description of the Roman soil might be compared with a passage from "The Old Manse" where Hawthorne describes how the ground surrounding the manse 'is identified by the spear and arrow-heads, the chisels, and other implements of war, labor, and the chase, which the plough turns up from the soil. You see a splinter of stone, half hidden beneath a sod; it looks like nothing worthy of note; but, if you have faith enough to pick it up - behold a relic! (X:10-11). Hawthorne's antiquarianism was evident long before he ever left America. However, his idea of what constituted a 'relic' would have been vastly altered by his experiences of the Roman past compared to the Native American past which was evident in the soil around the Old Manse.
[43] Fernie, Hawthorne, Sculpture and the Question of American Art, 207-8.
[44] See Appendix C for an image of the portrait of Beatrice Ceni.

(IV:67). At this moment, 'Hilda looked from the picture into her [Miriam's] face, and was startled to observe that her friend's expression had become almost exactly that of the portrait; as if her passionate wish and struggle to penetrate poor Beatrice's mystery had been successful' (IV:67).[45] Miriam's similarities with Beatrice highlight her status as human ruin and as a fallen woman whose mysterious past is stained by elements of violence and sexual transgression. Indeed, as Todd Onderdonk has pointed out, her ruinous past, occurring offstage as it does means that it is possible to view 'Miriam is an incarnation of Hester Prynne'.[46]

Miriam's ruined condition is reflected in the content and form of her own paintings. In previous chapters we have seen how Hawthorne associated the ruined or the incomplete with artistic creation. This idea is further evidenced in The Marble Faun by the contents of Miriam's studio, which contains many artworks retelling the same story repeatedly: 'Over and over again, there was the idea of woman, acting the part of a revengeful mischief towards man' (IV:44). These revengeful acts suggest that Miriam is acting out some hidden and violent desire in her artwork, highlighting the importance of her own mysterious and ruinous past to her artistic creativity. In addition, Miriam's studio also contains a number of sketches, described as 'the outward type of a poet's haunted imagination, where there are glimpses, sketches, and half-developed hints of beings and objects, grander and more beautiful than we can anywhere find in reality' (IV:41). By associating Miriam with pictorial sketches, which Mukai argues 'are part and parcel of her mysteriousness and imperfection,' Hawthorne

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[45] Percy Bysshe Shelley was also fascinated by this painting and the legend associated with it. The story of Beatrice Cenci forms the basis for his drama The Cenci (1819). Hawthorne was probably familiar with Shelley's retelling of the legend when he viewed the painting himself.
[46] Todd Onderdonk, "The Marble Mother: Hawthorne's Iconographies of the Feminine," Studies in American Fiction, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Spring 2003) 28.

further highlights the suggestive and creative power of the incomplete.[47] The rough form of the sketch can, Hawthorne claims give an insight into the an artistic 'ideal' which holds more truth than any material reality. For instance, some of Miriam's sketches are 'productions of a beautiful imagination, dealing with the warm and pure suggestions of a woman's heart, and thus idealizing a truer and lovelier picture of the life that belongs to woman, than an actual acquaintance with some of its hard and dusty facts could have inspired' (IV:46). It seems that Miriam's sketches of womanhood transcend common experience and instead reflect some deeper truth about the female condition. The notion of the higher truth offered by the sketch is an important one throughout Hawthorne's descriptions of the visual arts, and indeed all art. He saw the potential of the sketch to provide a glimpse of the ideal conceptions of the artist, conceptions which were present only in a reduced form in the finished work of art. Hawthorne's fascination with the sketch is evident in The French and Italian Notebooks, in which he writes:

> They certainly possess a charm that is lost in the finished picture; and I was
> more sensible of forecasting thought, skill, and prophetic design, in these
> sketches than in the most consummate works that have been elaborated from
> them. There is something more divine in these; for I suppose the first idea of
> a picture is real inspiration, and all the subsequent elaboration of the master
> serves but to cover up the celestial germ with something that belongs to
> himself. At any rate, the first sketch is the more suggestive, and sets the
> spectator's imagination at work; whereas the picture, if a good one, leaves
> him nothing to do; if bad, it confuses, stupefies, disenchants, and disheartens

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[47] Mukai, Hawthorne's Visual Artists, 118.

him. First thoughts have an aroma and fragrance in them that they do not

lose in three hundred years; for so old, and a good deal more, are some of

these sketches (XIV: 402).

In Hawthorne's eyes, the power of the sketch comes from its orientation towards future

possibility. The sketch demonstrates the true potential of the artist's work because it is a

closer reflection of the initial inspiration of the artist; it is valuable, Millicent Bell argues

'because its lack of definition represented ideas still unencased in conscious form'.[48]

Hawthorne's notions of inspiration clearly have their roots in European Romanticism. In the

opening lines of The Prelude, Wordsworth talks of how 'while the sweet breath of heaven/

Was blowing on my body' he 'felt within/ A correspondent breeze'(41-43).[49] Here,

inspiration comes to the artist from a divine external source. In the same way, Hawthorne's

conception of a 'celestial germ' points to an external source of inspiration which is

responsible for the initial conceptions of the artist. The proximity of the sketch to the first

idea, or ideal artwork, comes from the fact that this 'celestial germ' has not been covered up

and eradicated by the artist's own touches. The implication of this is that all artworks become

necessarily flawed as they are developed by the artist. The initial idea becomes obscured and

the artwork is consequently further distanced from its original conception. We can see

Hawthorne's debt to European Romanticism if we look to Shelley's Defence of Poetry (1820)

and his own ideas about artistic influence, of which Shelley says:

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[48] Millicent Bell, Hawthorne's View of the Artist (New York: State University of New York, 1962) 46.
[49] William Wordsworth, "The Prelude," in The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Volume 2A: The Romantics and their Contemporaries, ed. Susan Wolfson and Peter Manning (New York: Longman, 2003 [1820]) 390.

Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is

impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition

begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry

that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of

the original conceptions of the poet.[50]

The spectator viewing the sketch, even hundreds of years later, experiences the same sense of

future, prophetic possibility, through the stimulation of his or her imagination, as the artist

did when he or she first began to conceive of the artwork.

Ruskin also believed in the necessary imperfection of all artwork, as outlined in "On the

Nature of Gothic," an essay republished from volume two of his The Stones of Venice

(1853). Ruskin here argues that 'accurately speaking, no good work whatever can be perfect,

and the demand for perfection is always a sign of misunderstanding the ends of art....Accept

this then for a universal law, that neither architecture nor any other noble work of man can be

good unless it be imperfect'.[51] For Ruskin, the irregularities of Gothic architecture, as

opposed to the symmetries of classical architecture, therefore became more appropriate form

and one which came closer to the original conceptions of the artworks specifically because

perfection was not being sought. Hawthorne too applies these principles to architecture,

although for him it is the ruin which can give insight into the original conceptions of the

architect. For instance, in The English Notebooks, Hawthorne writes of Furness Abbey that

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[50] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Volume 2A: The Romantics and their Contemporaries, ed. Susan Wolfson and Peter Manning (New York: Longman, 2003 [1820]) 806.
[51] John Ruskin, "On the Nature of Gothic Architecture" (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1854) 13-14.

The arches of the nave and transept were noble and immense; there were four of them together, supporting a tower which has long since disappeared, - arches loftier than I ever conceived to have been made by man. Very possibly, in some cathedral that I have seen, or am yet to see, there may be arches as stately as these; but I doubt whether they can ever show to such advantage in a perfect edifice as they do in this ruin, most of them broken, only one, as far as I recollect, still completing its sweep. In this state they suggest a greater majesty and beauty than any finished human work can show; the crumbling traces of the half-obliterated design producing somewhat of the effect of the first idea of anything admirable, when it dawns upon the mind of an artist or a poet, - an idea, which, do what he may, he is sure to fall short of in his attempt to embody it (XXII:235).

As Abel suggests 'Because it is the imperfectness of the art-thing that enlists the aid of the imagination to perfect its idea, things in ruins and fading things have the same suggestive capability as rude unfinished things'.[52] Accordingly, we can understand ruins and sketches to exist on opposite ends of the same spectrum. In the middle of such a scale would be the fully completed artwork: a painting with all of its paint and varnish applied or a recently completed building untouched by the destructive effects of time. If we accept that in completing this artwork, the painter or architect has necessarily compromised his initial, ideal conceptions by committing these fully to the imperfect material world, then the sketch and ruin, associated respectively with the time before completion and the period after, allow the viewer, through the suggestive potential of their incompleteness, a greater insight into the initial idea which

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[52] Abel, The Moral Picturesque, 57.

inspired the creation of these artworks. Miriam's ruin, underlined by her association with the sketch, similarly works in terms of the suggestive potential of the incomplete. As well as being inspired by her own ruin to create art which Mukai describes as being characterised by 'terms related to imperfection, suggestiveness, sympathy and morality – terms central to romantic aesthetic,' Miriam's ruined past also prompts imaginative engagement from the reader who is inspired to fill in the gaps of her past as it were. [53] As we shall see, the connection between romance and ruin suggested by Miriam is in contrast to Hilda, whose faultless innocence underlies her skill as copyist rather than original artist.

Donatello: Rome and the Fall

Natterman argues that 'The most prominent feature of the romance is, of course, that Hawthorne chooses a protagonist who reincarnates a mythic figure'.[54] This character is Donatello: it is he who, through his mythic associations, epitomises the novel's detachment from a 'commonplace' reality more than any other character. Where Miriam, Kenyon and Hilda are, to varying extents, more recognisably realistic characters, Donatello is both otherworldly and idealised. This distinction between Donatello and the others is evident at the beginning of the novel when, during a visit to 'the sculpture-gallery, in the Capitol, at Rome' (IV:5) the three friends notice the close resemblance between Donatello and the Faun of Praxiteles, a sculpture of a young satyr leaning against a tree trunk (IV:5).[55] Miriam leaves the reader in little doubt as to the significance of the association between Donatello and the faun: '"If it were a picture, the resemblance might be half illusive and imaginary; but here, in

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[53] Mukai, Hawthorne's Visual Artists, 116.
[54] Nattermann, "Dread and Desire," 56.
[55] See Appendix D for an image of Praxiteles' Capitoline Faun

this Pentelic marble, it is a substantial fact, and may be tested by absolute touch and measurement. Our friend Donatello is the very Faun of Praxiteles"' (IV:7). The resemblance between Donatello and the statue of the faun illuminates the qualities of Donatello's character which appear to make him, like the faun of classical mythology, a being from an entirely separate time and place than the other characters. Similar to the faun, described by the narrator as 'Neither man nor animal, and yet no monster, but a being in whom both races meet on friendly ground,' Donatello is 'a being not precisely man, nor yet a child, but, in a high and beautiful sense, an animal, a creature in a state of development less than what mankind has attained, yet the more perfect within itself for that very deficiency' (IV:10). Just as romance is a version of reality, detached from literal representation by imaginative flourishes, so Donatello mirrors this compositional balance – he is man but in a romanticised and abstracted form. This link between Donatello and romance can also be seen in the effect that his qualities have on the character of Miriam. Donatello's qualities spur Miriam into something approaching romantic contemplation, filling 'her mobile imagination with agreeable fantasies' (IV:78). Donatello is ostensibly of noble Italian birth, with an ancestral home in the Tuscan countryside. However, as suggested by his association with the statue of the Faun, he is fundamentally from a time long before the beginning of human history, so that it seems that '"he has nothing to do with time"' (IV:15). Henry James contends that Donatello 'is of a very different substance from them [his three companions]; it is as if a painter, in composing a picture, should try to give you an impression of one of his figures by a strain of music'.[56] The qualities which make Donatello like 'a child or some other lawless thing, exacting no strict obedience to conventional rules' also make him seem entirely out of place in modern civilisation (IV:14). In contrast to Donatello's timelessness, Rome is the city of all time where

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[56] James, Hawthorne, 169.

You look through a vista of century beyond century,—through much

shadow, and a little sunshine,—through barbarism and civilization,

alternating with one another like actors that have prearranged their parts:

through a broad pathway of progressive generations bordered by palaces and

temples, and bestridden by old, triumphal arches, until, in the distance, you

behold the obelisks, with their unintelligible inscriptions, hinting at a past

infinitely more remote than history can define (IV:410).

The encounter which occurs between Donatello and sinful mankind is fundamentally an

encounter between Donatello, the foreigner to civilization, and Rome, the city of endless

human history.

Hawthorne's writing is replete with stories of human ruin, many of which tell the story of a

fall into sinfulness or corruption. Yet it is Hawthorne's experiences of the vast and oppressive

decay of Rome which leads him to retell, in the most explicit terms, the most fundamental

story of human ruin, as Miriam remarks '"The story of the Fall of Man! Is it not repeated in

our Romance of Monte Beni?"' (IV:434). That the decay of Rome underpins such explicitly

allegorical associations contrasts with Hawthorne's overwhelmingly aesthetic responses to

British ruins, where the 'moral and political connotations of ruined castles and abbeys' which

underpin allegory were absent.[57] As Samuel Chase Cole writes, in The Marble Faun, 'Rome

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[57] Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque, 50.

becomes a distinctly allegorical presence and emblem of death and decay'.[58] Although Hawthorne was well aware that the British past contained its own periods of violence and upheaval, his overwhelming impression of British history was one of stability and stagnation. It is this benign history which underpins his aesthetic responses, devoid of moral and political reflections upon the deteriorative effects of time. In contrast, Rome is defined by 'all this decay and change' (IV:6). Here, ruin and decay are inexorably linked with considerations of historical mutability and of the place of human beings within such cycles.

Thus, just as the endless decay and growth of the forest in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> lends meaning to the romance's stories of human ruin and societal decay, so the backdrop of Rome, with its own endless cycles of decay becomes an essential component in the story of Donatello's fall. Rome too is characterized by decay and growth, but here, the density of history and repetitiveness human experience make the growth of new civilizations from the old materials of Rome seem moribund and futile. There is no sense of a genuinely new life in what grows from this decay. In particular, Catholic Rome compares inadequately to the classical past from which it grew:

> Rome as it now exists has grown up under the Popes, and seems like nothing
> but a heap of broken rubbish, thrown into the great chasm between our own
> days and the Empire, merely to fill it up; and, for the better part of two
> thousand years, its annals of obscure policies, and wars, and continually

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[58] Samuel Chase Coale, "Mapping the Manse and Resuscitating Rome: Hawthorne's Themed Spaces and Staging Places," <u>Nathaniel Hawthorne Review</u>, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 2013) 66

recurring misfortunes, seem also but broken rubbish, as compared with

classic history (IV:110).

This passage reflects a different perspective on Roman history than was evident in the

passage from The French and Italian Notebooks which describes 'the gulf' between the

present and the classical past. In the notebooks, Hawthorne describes how viewing classical

ruins caused him to lose, momentarily at least, all sense of historical perspective and to forget

'the deeper life of the human race' that existed within the gulf between the classical past and

the present. However, when he peers into the gulf in The Marble Faun, this 'deeper life'

seems fragmented and imperfect, a heap of 'broken rubbish.' Thousands of years of politics

and violence connotes an exhausting and repetitive history; in such descriptions of Rome,

Bell argues, Hawthorne sees Roman culture as 'a composite of meaningless vestiges'.[59] The

classical past now stands in a positive contrast to the history contained within this gulf; if the

latter is 'broken rubbish' the former, although remote, seems complete in comparison.

The scene in which the corpse of the Model, revealed in death to be a monk, is interred in

Capuchin cemetery in Rome, illuminates the forms of decay in this 'gulf' which seems to

menace the action of The Marble Faun. In this cemetery

The arched and vaulted walls of the burial recesses are supported by massive

pillars and pilasters made of thigh-bones and skulls; the whole material of

the structure appears to be of a similar kind; and the knobs and embossed

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[59] Bell, "The Marble Faun and the Waste of History," 360.

ornaments of this strange architecture are represented by the joints of the

spine, and the more delicate tracery by the smaller bones of the human

frame. The summits of the arches are adorned with entire skeletons, looking

as if they were wrought most skillfully in bas-relief (IV:193).

One wonders what Holgrave, in his revolutionary fervor, might have made of such a scene,

where a building so ancient as this is literally constructed of the remains of the 'dead

generations' he reacted so strongly against. Such a scene shines a light into 'broken rubbish'

which fills 'the gulf' of Roman history. Here, remains of Catholic monks have become so

numerous that 'the brotherhood are immemorially accustomed, when one of their number

dies, to take the longest buried skeleton out of the oldest grave, and lay the new slumberer

there instead' (IV:194). Bell describes how Rome as the city in which 'grandeur and meaning

had crumbled and out of which new forms were always rising up again only to crumble once

more became a metaphor for his [Hawthorne's] view of human time'.[60] In this cemetery and

in Rome more generally, Catholic history is associated with a decaying and oppressive past;

in the cemetery 'the soul sinks forlorn and wretched under all this burden of dusty death'

(IV:194). The cycles of Roman decay characterized by such scenes as the Capuchin cemetery

are wholly devoid of the forms of newness which Hawthorne had at times associated with

decay in his American romances. The floor of the cemetery 'is kept quite free from grass or

weeds, such as would grow even in these gloomy recesses, if pains were not bestowed to root

them up' (IV:192). The 'broken rubbish' of 'the gulf' may be recycled but the pointed

absence of new organic growth, such an important metaphor in Hawthorne's previous images

of growth from decay, illustrates that Hawthorne's experiences of Roman decay were entirely

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[60] Bell, "The Marble Faun and the Waste of History," 360.

different from anything he had previously encountered or imagined. In America, Hawthorne imagined that the present must grow from the ruins of the past and that such processes allowed for the growth of new life and new art forms, while in England he was fascinated with the aesthetic pleasures to be gleaned from the assimilation of a ruin into nature. And yet, the decay and death of Catholic Rome did, of course, provide the materials for this allegory of the fall. As McWilliams writes, 'The energy, blackness, and intelligence that once constituted the American Puritan character are now associated with Rome, Catholicism, and Europeans'.[61] British history, it seems did not offer the same substitute for American Puritanism, the stability and stagnation he garnered form the English scene being devoid of the imaginative potential presented by the death and decay of Rome.

This discord between the wholeness of distant antiquity and the ruinous history of Rome in the intervening ages underpins Donatello's incompatibility with the city. Donatello is an idealized and timeless figure associated with classical mythology: 'So full of animal life as he was, so joyous in his deportment, so handsome, so physically well-developed, he made no impression of incompleteness, of maimed or stinted nature' (IV:14). Like the classical past with which he is connected, Donatello is endowed with a sense of wholeness. This condition is brought into rude contrast with the moribund decay of Rome. In the grounds of Villa Borghese, Donatello is able temporarily to escape into nature and the Acadian past:

> The ancient dust, the mouldiness of Rome, the dead atmosphere in which he
> had wasted so many months, the hard pavements, the smell of ruin and
> decaying generations, the chill palaces, the convent bells, the heavy incense

[61] McWilliams Jr., <u>Hawthorne, Melville and the American Character</u>, 124.

of altars, the life that he had led in those dark, narrow streets, among priests,

soldiers, nobles, artists, and women,—all the sense of these things rose from

the young man's consciousness like a cloud which had darkened over him

without his knowing how densely (IV:74).

History is here understood through the idea of 'decaying generations' similar to Holgrave's

Jeffersonian lament of the influence of 'dead generations.' This atmosphere is at odds with

Donatello's innocence and suggests the impending threat of his corruption. Yet, I would

argue that the decay of Rome does not merely provide an appropriate backdrop upon which

we can read the ensuing story of the fall. Roman decay is more than this: its all-pervading

'dead atmosphere' has a malignant quality which is given agency within this story. Just as it

could harm visitors to Rome through the transmission of malaria, so the history of death and

decay which saturates Rome threatens to corrupt Donatello's antithetical innocence. When he

eventually and inevitably succumbs to the atmosphere of Rome, throwing the model to his

death from Rome's Tarpeian Rock, Donatello is absorbed into the history of humanity's

sinfulness experience. Donatello's innocence is instantly compromised; he is no longer the

idealized conception of man from a pre-lapsarian Acadia; as Miriam observes, 'that simple

and joyous creature was gone forever' (IV:172). The 'melancholy' which characterizes

Donatello's disposition after his crime, even when he returns to Tuscany with Kenyon, is

itself evidence of an incompleteness previously alien to him. In his examination of the

Romantic incomplete, Thomas McFarlane describes melancholy 'Like longing' as a

'diasparactive form…a sense that things as they are provide no fulfilment, that they partake

of incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin'.[62] Such melancholic sentiments are often associated with the Romantic contemplation of ruins, where a viewer might reflect on the former life and glory of a ruin. Donatello's melancholy is directed inwards. Where he was previously an idealized figure, characterized by a sense of completeness, he is now aware of the ruin which underpins sinful humanity, the lack which now exists within himself.

The Reality of American Ruin

A consequence of Hawthorne's declaration in the preface that Italian ruin provides the perfect conditions for romance is that America is reconceived as having 'no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong.' In short, Hawthorne proclaims that there is no ruin in America, only 'commonplace prosperity' and 'broad and simple daylight.' As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, this claim concerning the absence of American ruin is at odds with Hawthorne's previous American romances. The ambiguous nature of the preface to The Marble Faun has therefore been the subject of much critical scrutiny over the years. Discussing these problematic claims, Bell points out that: 'These supposed absences should have (but had not) prevented him from writing those three earlier books…How had Hawthorne managed to write them without those essentials'?[63] Similarly, Evan Carton asserts that, by declaring that America is now the land of 'actualities,' 'Hawthorne literally exiles it [romance] from America…and ignores or forgets the fact that he himself has previously published three romances that take their themes from American history and the events of American life'.[64] The seeming incompatibility of this claim with Hawthorne's previous

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[62] McFarland, Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, 17. McFarland takes the term 'diasparactive,' meaning 'torn to pieces….to render in sunder or in pieces' from 'An intermediate Greek-English Lexicon' (4). For a further discussion of melancholy and the incomplete, see Goldstein, Ruins and Empire, 73-94.

[63] Millicent Bell, introduction to Hawthorne and the Real, 8.

[64] Evan Carton, The Marble Faun: Hawthorne's Transformations (New York: Twyane Publishers, 1992) 67.

literary output has led some critics simply to dismiss the preface as wilfully insincere. Monika E. Ebert, for instance, argues that 'Hawthorne's lament that America lacked a past is disingenuous'.[65] Assuming that Hawthorne cannot be taken at face value in this preface often leads to the assumption that Hawthorne is being ironic in describing a ruin-free America, and that, in light of the approaching Civil War in America, his insincerity concerning American ruin is laced with irony. This is the assumption made by William L. Vance who proposes, like Ebert, that 'The preface, written in December 1859 on the eve of the Civil War, is deliberately disingenuous and constitutes a satire on America's self-conception'.[66] Such a reading of the preface can be supported by the fact that in 1858 and 1859, as he wrote The Marble Faun, Hawthorne was well aware of the threat posed to the American Republic by the increasingly bitter, and at times violent, dispute between Northern states and Southern states concerning the government's power to prohibit slavery in new territories. During his time spent in Europe, Hawthorne read all he could about the growing crisis in his home country. His concern about the approach of conflict is evident in his correspondence some three years before he began writing The Marble Faun. In a letter to his friend Horatio Bridge dated December 14, 1854, Hawthorne, worried that that the United States had become 'so convulsed with party-spirit as it is, so crotchety, so restless, so ill-tempered. From this distance, it looks to me as if there were an actual fissure between the North and the South, which may widen and deepen into a gulf, anon' (XVII:294). Such an image of the widening gulf is significant since, as we have seen, it became an image which would, on more than one occasion in his notebooks and fiction, be used to represent the ruinous and fragmented history of Rome which existed between the present day and the classical past. The gulf described in his letter to Bridge is no less threatening and is characterized by the sense of an instantaneous

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[65] Monika E. Elbert, "Is Rome's Moonlight Different from Salem's?: Hawthorne and the Reconceptualization of the Gothic," Nathaniel Hawthorne Review, Vol. 38 No. 2 (Fall, 2012) 143.
[66] William L. Vance, America's Rome, Volume One: Classic Rome (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989) 114.

fracture which would break the Republic in two. In a letter which reflects an envy for the comforting inactivity of English history Hawthorne, after his return to America, would write to his English friend Harry Bright: 'How queer, that the rotten old patchwork of your Constitution should be so likely to outlast all our bran-new contrivances' (XXIII:354). The letter, dated December 17th 1860, was written only four months before the Confederate army fired upon the federal garrison at Fort Sumter in South Carolina and ignited a Civil War which would last four years and cost over 600,000 lives.

A consequence of Hawthorne apparently exiling romance from America in the preface is that he also effectively claims that The Marble Faun will not be concerned with American 'actualities.' Yet, as his correspondence suggests, Hawthorne was, Reynolds argues 'keenly aware that his "dear native land" was suffering from "gloomy wrong" that threatened to tear it apart'.[67] The wrong to which Reynolds refers is, of course, slavery and there are hints within The Mable Faun that the notion of race caused Hawthorne a degree of discomfort. In an act of transference which will become more significant to my argument later in this chapter, Hawthorne's most racialized characters in The Marble Faun are the two European characters, Miriam and Donatello. In a nod to slavery's 'gloomy wrong' we are told that one theory of Miriam's possible heritage is that

> she was the off-spring of a Southern American planter, who had given her an
>
> elaborate education and endowed her with his wealth; but the one burning
>
> drop of African blood in her veins so affected her with a sense of ignominy,
>
> that she relinquished all and fled her country (IV:23).

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[67] Reynolds, Devils and Rebels, 204.

That Miriam's past is most probably European, as she eventually confirms (although this claim itself cannot be verified), makes her possible connections to slavery and, presumably racist attitudes, somewhat problematic. Within the context of the raging dispute over slavery in the United States, Donatello's definition as primitive man is troublingly radicalized. Donatello is described continually in animal terms; for instance, Kenyon comments of Donatello that '"there is a great deal of animal nature in him, as if he had been born in the woods, and had run wild all his childhood'" (IV:104). Nancy Bentley has observed that in combination with such animalistic descriptions, the blurring of the lines of Donatello's 'pedigree' into the mythical past serves to 'obviate the problem of racial determinism by making race something richly indeterminate'.[68] The effect of racializing the European characters of the novel, who stand in direct contrast to the American characters, particularly Hilda, with her 'white doves and white thoughts' (IV:112), is that Hawthorne appears to undertake the wishful transference of his own country's troubled racial problems onto the European 'others' of the novel. For it should be noted, that while Hawthorne was aware that the building tension in America was a result of slavery and that he believed slavery to be inherently wrong, he was not keen, as we have seen in his previous romances, on the idea of radical change within America. Indeed, in a famous passage of his campaign biography of his friend and future president Franklin Pierce, titled The Life of Franklin Pierce (1852), Hawthorne called slavery 'one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream' (XXIII:352). The idea of the slavery issue being solved 'in its own good time' is akin to the conservative images of gradual decay and

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[68] Nancy Bentley, The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Warton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 38.

new growth which eventually trump the more revolutionary ideology of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> and <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>. However, whatever Hawthorne's thoughts on the dangers posed by radical action in America, <u>The Marble Faun</u> demonstrates that he was nonetheless willing to highlight the immorality of slavery. For instance Kenyon, while standing at the Trevi Fountain, is asked by another artist what would be done in America with such water-power. Kenyon's reply is that '"The good people would pull down those rampant marble deities…and possibly they would give me a commission to carve the one-and-thirty (is that the number?) sister States, each pouring a silver stream from a separate can into one vast basin, which should represent the grand reservoir of national prosperity"' (IV:146). Kenyon's response is one of unblinking confidence in the vision of America, especially in comparison to the corruptions and idolatry of the Old World. However, what is striking about his response is the comment concerning the exact number of States. His uncertainty as to how many make up the Republic reflects more than a lack of knowledge of his homeland. Rather, this question reflects what Tellefsen calls 'America's national self-doubt,' meaning that at this moment 'the turbulent historical conflict amid which <u>The Marble Faun</u> was written…emerges in a narrative that, ostensibly, is fundamentally distanced from America by both its setting and its subject matter'.[69] The idea of America's 'turbulent' present is made more explicit by the reply to Kenyon's comment from an unnamed English artist, who suggests that Americans could instead '"set those same one-and-thirty States to cleansing the national flag of any stains that it may have incurred. The Roman washerwomen at the lavatory yonder, plying their labour in the open air, would serve admirably as models"' (IV:146). The 'stained' flag suggests that

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[69] Blythe Ann Tellefsen, ""The Case with My Dear Native Land": Nathaniel Hawthorne's Vision of America in <u>The Marble Faun</u>," <u>Nineteenth-Century Literature</u>, Vol. 54, No. 4 (March, 2000) 456.

At this moment American prosperity and national sin are juxtaposed…in a barely repressed reference to the sin of slavery (among others) in the United States – the national sin upon which national prosperity was based and over which the nation was about to be split asunder.[70]

It seems then that, contrary to the claims of the preface, ruin does exist in America and that this romance is as concerned with the 'actualities' of looming American ruin as it is with Italian romance. Certainly a recent critical trend has pointed towards an ironic reading of the preface and a reading of The Marble Faun which focuses not on an Italian 'fairy land' but instead anxieties about the unfolding situation in America. Robert S. Levine characterizes this approach in his analysis of The Marble Faun where he terms the setting of the romance 'Antebellum Rome' and claims that in it, Hawthorne 'addresses the more immediate American situation…through a historicism that explores more generalized cultural tensions in a foreign setting that, during the antebellum period, would have invariably prompted Americans to think about America'.[71] Yet I would argue that although there are certainly concerns about American ruin suggested by the allusions to race and slavery in The Marble Faun. Once we include the two American characters within our discussion, the claims of the preface become problematic once more. This is because these two characters appear to represent a vision of America which is at odds with an America stained by the crime of slavery and primed to descend into Civil War.

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[70] Tellefsen, ""The Case with My Dear Native Land," 456.

[71] Robert S. Levine, ""Antebellum Rome" in The Marble Faun," American Literary History, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring, 1990) 19. For further discussions of American 'actualities and anxieties in The Marble Faun see Nancy Bentley, The Ethnography of Manners, 24-67; Emily Budick, "Perplexity, Sympathy and the Question of the Human: A Reading of The Marble Faun" in The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Richard H. Millington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 230-250; Mark A. R. Kemp, "The Marble Faun and American Postcolonial Ambivalence," Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 43, No. 1, (Spring, 1997) 209-236.

Spotless Innocence and the New Question of American Ruin

I demonstrated earlier in this chapter how the stories of Miriam and Donatello, through Miriam's mysterious Gothic past and Donatello's fall to sinful experience, evidence the relationship between ruin and romance in The Marble Faun. While the romance is ostensibly about four friends in Rome, a more accurate way to view the central characters of the text is as two sets of pairs: the Europeans, Miriam and Donatello, and the Americans, Kenyon and Hilda. As Nattermann says, the 'Americans and Europeans…do not even begin to bridge the gap between themselves. Hilda and Kenyon only enjoy a superficial relationship with Miriam and Donatello'.[72] The division between these two sets of characters extends to the notion of ruin in The Marble Faun. As McWilliams comments, 'The two Americans in The Marble Faun are creations of a mind resolutely determined to associate American virtue with moral innocence and a commonplace prosperity'.[73] The decaying atmosphere of Rome at turns threatens and depresses Hilda and Kenyon, but ultimately these two New World figures prove immune to the ruin which haunts Miriam and befalls Donatello, to Rome's debilitating and oppressive atmosphere of decay. The imperviousness of Kenyon and Hilda to the decay of Rome in turn situates them as observers of romance rather than participants within those aspects of the story which could be understood to be 'artfully and airily removed' from 'our mundane sphere,' thus offering support to the claim that America is the land of the actual and Italy the realm of romance.

In particular, Hawthorne emphasises Hilda's opposition to Roman decay and corruption. She dwells high above Rome 'in her tower, as free to descend into the corrupted atmosphere of the city beneath, as one of her companion doves to fly downward into the street' (IV:54). Her

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[72] Nattermann, "Dread and Desire in Europe," 56
[73] McWilliams Jr., Hawthorne, Melville and the American Character, 124.

spotless innocence does not just set her in opposition to the decay of Rome, she is literally above it; she is a gendered realisation of the American democratic rejection of decay. Such is her seeming immunity to the deteriorative atmosphere of Rome that 'setting at defiance the malarial-fever' (IV:67), Hilda remains in the city during the summer months, while the vast majority of tourists, including the three other main characters, travel to safer locations. There are characters in Hawthorne's other novels, usually women, who exist in direct opposition to the kind of ruin which infects and debilitates many of his other characters. Pheobe in The House of the Seven Gables is the clearest example of Hawthorne's virtuous females. McPherson calls these 'benign and sunny' female characters Hawthorne's 'ideal native-born American' women.[74] Like Pheobe, Hilda is another female whose virtue and purity opposes notions of decay and ruin. However, while in the American romances these figures of innocence and purity are contrasted with and confronted by various forms of American moral and societal decay, Hilda's opposition to decay in The Marble Faun exists within a transatlantic context. The opposition between the innocence and purity of Hilda, and the decay and degradation of Rome sets up the kind of clear binary opposition between Old World ruin and New World innocence which has heretofore been absent from Hawthorne's writing.

One of the most striking aspects of Hilda's 'white-souled' (IV:202) American innocence is that it is delineated by her Puritan ancestry. Emily Schiller calls Puritan innocence 'the paradox central to Hilda's identity' since, as demonstrated by the previous chapters of this thesis,

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[74] Hugo McPherson, Hawthorne as Myth-maker: A Study in Imagination (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 227.

central to the beliefs and practices of all real Puritans is the concept of

depravity: All men, women, and children, without exception, are fallen, and

only a few are destined for salvation….Whatever Hawthorne's original

sympathies toward Calvinism might have been, the idea of the Fall and

inescapable human guilt runs through many of his works.[75]

Just as in the preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u> Hawthorne appears to have forgotten or ignored

those forms of American ruin which informed his previous romances, so Hilda, this 'daughter

of the Puritans' (IV:54), represents a version of the Puritan heritage which is at odds with the

deep ambivalence displayed towards the Puritan past in his previous romances. Contrasting

Hilda's whitewashed Puritanism with the corruptions of Catholic Rome, works to create a

transatlantic opposition, Old World decay contrasted with spotless New World innocence. It

is a contrast which, while supported by the claims of the preface, is contradicted by the

historical 'actualities' of the American situation.

After secretly witnessing Donatello's murder of the Model and Miriam's assenting glace

seconds before the act, Hilda finds herself in deep turmoil. We are told that: 'To this innocent

girl, holding the knowledge of Miriam's crime within her tender and delicate soul, the effect

was almost the same as if she herself had participated in the guilt. Indeed, partaking the

human nature of those who could perpetrate such deeds, she felt her own spotlessness

impugned' (IV:329). The suggestion here is that simply by witnessing the act of sin, Hilda's

innocence is compromised, causing Marcus Bewley to assert that it seems that Hilda 'loses

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[75] Emily Schiller, "The Choice of Innocence: Hilda in "<u>The Marble Faun</u>," Studies in the Novel, Vol. 26. No. 4 (Winter, 1994) 377.

her innocence by proxy'.[76] Yet, according to Hilda's own thoughts, her innocence has not been corrupted; instead it has been challenged, threatened by this new awareness of sin in the world. A more apt explanation is Conrad Shumaker's remark that her 'saintlike innocence is vulnerable, not to sin itself, as is Donatello's innocence, but to the discovery that sin is in the world'.[77] Hilda's newfound awareness of sin manifests itself in the ruinous Roman atmosphere to which she had previously seemed impervious.

With her awareness of her friends' crime, Hilda simultaneously becomes conscious of and threatened by the ruinous atmosphere to which she had previously been immune. This change is most clearly signaled by the shift in Hilda's relationship with Roman art. Although a painter in her own right in America, once she had arrived in Rome 'Hilda had ceased to consider herself as an original artist. No wonder that this change should have befallen her. She was endowed with a deep and sensitive faculty of appreciation' (IV:56). Where Miriam's ruinous past inspires her to create artworks which come close to the elusive artistic ideal, Hilda's sympathy, a characteristic of her purity and innocence, allows her to see to the heart of the artworks of the great Italian masters. She is, we are told, a copyist of such skill that her reproductions 'had that evanescent and ethereal life – that flitting fragrance, as it were, of the originals – which it is as difficult to catch and retain as it would be for a sculptor to get the very movement and varying colour of a living man into his marble bust' (IV:58). Indeed, Hilda's talent as a copyist is such that

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[76] Bewley, The Eccentric Design, 182.
[77] Conrad Schumaker, ""A Daughter of the Puritans": History in Hawthorne's The Marble Faun," The New England Quarterly, Vol. 57, No 1(March 1984) 77-8.

If a picture had darkened into an indistinct shadow through time and neglect,

or had been injured by cleaning, or retouched by some profane hand, she

seemed to possess the faculty of seeing it in its pristine glory. The copy

would come from her hands with what the beholder felt must be the light

which the old master had left upon the original in bestowing his final and

most ethereal touch. In some instances even (at least, so those believed who

best appreciated Hilda's power and sensibility) she had been enabled to

execute what the great master had conceived in his imagination, but had not

so perfectly succeeded in putting upon canvas (IV:58-9).

The extent of Hilda's sympathetic insight allows her to literally see through the ruinous

Roman atmosphere which has caused the painting to fade or to see past the damage caused to

it by attempts of restoration. Not only can she see through this veil of decay which has

obscured the appearance of the painting, she is also able to see past the necessarily failure of

the material art object, and to instead identify the ideal conception of the artist.[78] After

witnessing Donatello and Miriam's crime, Hilda's relationship to the artwork and artists with

whom she feels such sympathy is irrevocably altered. For the first time, Hilda becomes aware

of and threatened by the corruptions of Rome's art:

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[78] During Hawthorne's many visits to Italian picture galleries, the physical condition of the paintings he viewed was often the focus of his attention. An entry dated July 4, 1858, in The French and Italian Notebooks describes a visit to the Church of Santa Maria Novella, where Hawthorne notes that 'Any other sort of ruin acquires a beauty, proper to its decay, and often superior to that of its pristine state, but the ruin of a picture, especially a frescoe, is wholly unredeemed; and, moreover it dies out so slowly that many generations are likely to be saddened by it' (359). Hawthorne's notion of the reductive rather than enhancing decay of a ruined artwork is something which Simmel would similarly identify in his essay "The Ruin": 'A painting from which particles of paint have fallen off, a statue with mutilated limbs, an ancient text of poetry from which words or lines are lost – all of these have the effect only according to what is still left in them of artistic formation or what the imagination can construe of it from these remnants. Their immediate appearance is no artistic unity; it offers us nothing but a work of art imperfect through the reductions it has undergone.' Simmel, "The Ruin," 380.

she saw beauty less vividly, but felt truth, or the lack of it more profoundly.
She began to suspect that some, at least of her venerated painters, had left an
inevitable hollowness in their works, because, in the most renowned of them,
they essayed to express to the world what they had not in their own souls.
They deified their light and wandering affections, and were continually
playing off the tremendous jest...of offering the features of some venal
beauty to be enshrined in the holiest places (IV:338).

The ideal conceptions of these artists have now, in light of Hilda's newfound knowledge of
sin in the world, revealed to her Puritan sensibilities a truthlessness and decadence inherent in
Roman, and specifically Catholic art. Despondent at her loss of faith in the Italian Masters
she had held in such high esteem, Hilda is told by another visitor that the time has come for
her to return to America since

> "The air has been breathed too often, in so many thousand years, and is not
> wholesome for a little foreign flower like you, my child, a delicate wood-
> anemone from the western forest-land…Remember that Raphael's genius
> wore out that divinest painter before half his life was lived. Since you feel
> his influence powerfully enough to reproduce his miracles so well, it will
> assuredly consume you like a flame" (IV:333-4).

In the ruinous atmosphere which now threatens Hilda, disease and artistic influence become merged, so that the malaria air is simultaneously poisoned with the corruptions of decedent Italian art. This warning reflects the fear of the Roman atmosphere recounted in Hawthorne's notebooks; it could almost be read as a plea that Hawthorne wished he had made to his own daughter Una, that she might have left Rome and returned to America before she fell ill.

Unlike Una, Hilda, although endangered by the corruptions of Rome, escapes to America unharmed. Before the two Americans depart, Kenyon tentatively suggests that they might understand Donatello's fall as a *felix culpa*:

> Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him. Is sin, then,—which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the universe,—is it, like sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his? (IV:460).

To understand Donatello's fall as fortunate would be to introduce the possibility of seeing ruin, both moral transgression and historical decline, as part of a process of human and societal improvement. The narrator of The House of the Seven Gables maintained that it was erroneous to suppose 'that this age, more than any past or future one, is destined to see the tattered garments of Antiquity exchanged for a new suit, instead of gradually renewing themselves by patchwork' (II:180). Kenyon's questioning opens the door to seeing the central allegory of Donatello's fall not as European decay, but as a universal experience of mankind,

and a fundamental component of the 'tattered garments of Antiquity.' However, Hilda is predictably quick to reject such a notion:

> This is terrible; and I could weep for you, if you indeed believe it. Do not you perceive what a mockery your creed makes, not only of all religious sentiments, but of moral law? And how it annuls and obliterates whatever precepts of Heaven are written deepest within us? You have shocked me beyond words! (IV:460).

The novel therefore ends with Hilda reasserting the ideas of the preface and maintaining her own, and thus America's purity, understood through the 'moral law' which she has so stringently upheld in the face of Rome's decay. Kenyon meekly acquiesces to her words and we are left with a final image (before the hastily added postscript) of Hilda who has 'a hopeful soul, and saw sunlight on the mountaintops' (IV:462). Having Hilda looking hopefully away from Rome and, presumably, back towards America, highlights that her status as archetypal American innocent is never compromised. The ending therefore appears to affirm the denunciation of Donatello and Miriam and to ensure that their ruined conditions remain associated only with Europe. Indeed, paradoxically, at the end of The Marble Faun even associations with slavery have been transferred away from the innocence of America. The story of Kenyon and Hilda and their escape from ruinous Rome to the bosom of innocent America therefore runs counter to the American 'actualities' which are also present within The Marble Faun.

The possibility exists, of course, that Hilda is an ironic character, meant to further underline the implausibility of such American innocence, both in terms of her Puritan innocence and in light of America's contemporary 'gloomy wrong.' Schiller argues that 'the impossibility of renouncing the human condition – a condition Hawthorne wrote about over and over again…demonstrates Hawthorne's ironic use of Hilda'.[79] Yet, because there is no explicit evidence in The Marble Faun that we should read Hilda ironically (indeed, it seems to me that the opposite is true) such an ironic reading of Hilda must always be based, as Schiller bases her own, upon what we know of Hawthorne's previous writing. Such a reading does not address the possibility that Hawthorne may in fact have changed his perceptions of American innocence and American ruin. The fact remains that, as Stern argues, 'Hilda does emerge unscathed, unchanged – and right in all things. To see Hilda as an instrument of conscious irony saves face for Hawthorne as an artist, and therefore it is a tempting critical gambit, but it is a simplistic reduction of the problem'.[80] If there is one element of irony in the depiction of Hilda, or at least a suggestion as to the failings of her innocence, it is the implications for American art. Since her inability or unwillingness to create original art can be traced to her purity, and contrasted with the ruined Miriam's creativity, it would appear that Hawthorne is suggesting that the absence of such decay in America makes the creation of original and insightful artwork difficult. And yet this is hardly a subtext of the romance, since this is precisely what Hawthorne states in the preface to The Marble Faun:

> No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a
>
> Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no
>
> mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a

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[79] Schiller, "The Choice of Innocence," 382.
[80] Stern, Contexts for Hawthorne, 137.

commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case

with my dear and native land.

If the ruinous atmosphere of Rome underpins the Gothic and allegorical elements which give

the romance its dissociative and suggestive powers, then Kenyon and Hilda, distinct and

immune to such ruin as they are, remain observers of romance rather than participants within

it. Kenyon and Hilda thus seem to reinforce the claim that innocent and youthful America is

the realm of the actual while ruinous Europe has become the land of romance. The way in

which these two characters remain distinct and aloof from the decaying atmosphere of Rome

suggests that, while we may not be able to take Hawthorne at his word in the preface in the

claim that ruin is absent from America, he is not, as some critics have claimed, being

willfully disingenuous. To quote Stern again, with whom my thesis agrees on the matter of

these two American characters:

> Of course, one can say that the preface's celebration of America is
>
> ambiguous, but it is not easy to maintain that view when one considers that
>
> throughout the book Hilda and Kenyon, constantly identified as morally true
>
> and as American, echo the same sentiment. After their years of exile they
>
> both decide finally to go home only when "Ruin" has spoiled Europe for
>
> them and they long for the "broad and simple daylight" of the native scenes
>
> they recall with increasing nostalgia.[81]

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[81] Stern, <u>Contexts for Hawthorne</u>, 109.

However, rather than either taking Hawthorne at his word, or presuming that the preface is laced with irony, I would argue that we might understand a third perspective on American ruin in The Marble Faun. We cannot, I have argued, deny Hilda's innocence and the implications this appears to have for the claims of a ruin free America. Nor though, can we argue against the presence in The Marble Faun of the approaching Civil War and its ruinous implications. A third perspective on American ruin in The Marble Faun is to understand that Hilda's American innocence, rather than contradicting American 'actualities' can instead be understood *in relation to* the threat of Civil War. The Marble Faun, I would argue portrays two opposite but interrelated images of America, ideal and actual, innocent and ruined. Hawthorne's depiction of Kenyon and Hilda is a hopeful representation of American innocence which is evoked precisely because of the impending Civil War. It can be argued that Hawthorne's experiences of Roman ruin could also have heightened his anxieties about American decay, thus underpinning the evocation, previously absent from his writing, of the exceptionalist opposition between Old World decay and New World innocence. Witnessing the endless cycles of Roman decay was a shock to him, as it demonstrated that decay did not necessarily result in the kind of new growth, aesthetic or societal, which he had encountered in Britain and had imagined or witnessed in America. Roman decay was instead a marker only of unrelenting decline; new societies did grow from the ruins of previous ones but they were defined by their deficiencies and corruptions in comparison to what had come before, specifically the distant classical past. Experiences of such decay in tandem with his knowledge and fear of the approaching American catastrophe mean that, as Parker writes, Rome's ruins could be seen 'not only as those of a foreign past but as America's own possible future'.[82] By the time Hawthorne wrote The Marble Faun it seems that he was no longer willing to imagine American ruin in the manner he had done before. Instead, he looks

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[82] Parker, "The Space of Hawthorne's Rome," 80.

in <u>The Marble Faun</u> to the myths of American innocence which he had been undermining his

whole literary career, for solace and comfort rather than with any degree of conviction or

belief.

Conclusion

Conclusion

When Hawthorne returned to the United States in 1860 he settled with his family in a house in Concord, Connecticut called The Wayside which the family had previously occupied in the years before their departure for Europe. Although Hawthorne attempted to write another full length romance upon his return to America, he was once more wracked by indecision and frustration over how to approach his subject. It seems that by this point Hawthorne's ability or willingness to write romance had finally deserted him. Hawthorne did return to his English notebooks and from these published the series of essays, <u>Our Old Home.</u> However, <u>The Marble Faun</u> marked the end of his career not only as a writer of full length romances but as a writer of fiction altogether. In the introduction to <u>Our Old Home</u>, Hawthorne discusses his failure to write a final romance:

> Of course, I should not mention this abortive project, only that it has been
> utterly thrown aside and will never now be accomplished. The Present, the
> Immediate, the Actual, has proved too potent for me. It takes away not only
> my scanty faculty, but even my desire for imaginative composition, and
> leaves me sadly content to scatter a thousand peaceful fantasies upon the
> hurricane that is sweeping us all along with it, possibly, into a Limbo where
> our nation and its polity may be as literally the fragments of a shattered
> dream as my unwritten Romance (X:4).

That the Civil War began a year after his return to America served to make it impossible for Hawthorne ever to find the 'neutral territory' of romance again. The realities of the American

situation, 'The Present, the Immediate, the Actual,' had become the dominant concern, making an escape into the border realms of romance seem both futile and imprudent. The preface to <u>The Marble Faun</u> lends a certain irony to these words from <u>Our Old Home</u>; his previous claim that America was the land of actualities had come to pass. However, the actualities were not those of a 'commonplace prosperity' but of violence and destruction which threatened to destroy the nation entirely. The ruin brought on by the Civil War was not the ruin from which romance might grow. Instead, the Civil War triggered for Hawthorne one final recalibration of this relationship, where ruin now became the death of romance.

The Civil War featured in Hawthorne's only other piece of work published after his return to America, an essay in <u>The Atlantic Monthly</u> titled "Chiefly About War Matters" (1862). In this essay Hawthorne recounts with sadness his experiences of travelling through the American towns and countryside which had been devastated by the war. Hawthorne describes such scenes as the Potomac River, where he saw

> dismal ruins of the United States arsenal and armory, consisting of piles of broken bricks and a waste of shapeless demolition, amid which we saw gun-barrels in heaps of hundreds together. They were the relics of conflagration, bent with the heat of fire, and rusted with the wintry rain to which they had since been exposed. The brightest sunshine could not have made the scene cheerful, nor have taken away from the gloom from the dilapidated town (XIII:426).

The ruin of total war leaves nothing of aesthetic value. We might understand such scenes caused by almost instantaneous destruction in terms of a distinction between decay and ruin: the deteriorative effects of time has little or no hand in scenes such as these. Decay, if it is

present at all, is found only in the rust forming on the metal of gun-barrels. Hawthorne's reflections upon such scenes were primarily tinged with a sadness concerning the violence which threatened to destroy this fledgling republic, and which had already claimed so many lives. For a writer who had been so fascinated with ruin and decay throughout his life, and who had placed it at the centre of his writing both as an aesthetic and as a theme, there must also have been a sadness that the final scenes of ruin he wrote about were so devoid of beauty or complex meaning. Because, as we have seen, Hawthorne rarely if ever understood ruin in binary terms – positive or negative, Old World or New World. The ruins encountered in the American battlefields and surrounding landscapes offered little to the imagination and less to aesthetic contemplation. The sadness might also be felt by the reader who has charted Hawthorne's ruin writing from his first American romances to The Marble Faun and who can observe that these new and depressing forms of American ruin correlate with Hawthorne's final failure as a writer, a failure which left the wreckage of numerous abandoned romances in its wake.

That such scenes of ruin mark the end point of Hawthorne's career and life contrasts with the notions of American ruin with which I began this thesis. Before his European travels, Hawthorne actively sought out scenes and ideas of decay and ruin. These images and abstract notions formed the basis for his American romances, supplying them with their suggestive potential and aesthetic qualities. "The Custom-House" forms an interesting counterpoint to the final stages of Hawthorne's career, as this preface has at its core the notion that Hawthorne, or at least the fictionalised version of himself who narrates "The Custom-House," is threatened by creative decline. That such intellectual ruin ever took hold is of course dispelled by the complexity of "The Custom-House" itself, and the fact that this preface

marks the beginning of a period of almost unparalleled artistic creativity, characterised by the publication of three full length romances in the space of just three years. It is ruin, and particularly the decaying Puritan past, to which Hawthorne attributes his ability break free from his creative stupor and begin writing The Scarlet Letter. At this stage in Hawthorne's romances, the insubstantial decay of the American present offers little, if any, imaginative potential. The balance between the actual and the imaginary, which his own brand of romance, demands cannot be found in the scenes of Salem's decay, although this is a problem which would be addressed in The House of the Seven Gables. In the meantime, it is in the past that Hawthorne locates the forms of decay which offer the imaginative potential for romance.

"The Custom-House" also demonstrates the manner in which Hawthorne continually located the decay and ruin of his romances within a system of transatlantic influence and awareness. His American romances reject any notion of a ruin free America and instead look to ways in which the suggestive potential of European decay can be linked with and adapted to his own work. In his most celebrated romance, The Scarlet Letter, such ideas of transatlantic ruin come to the fore. In this romance, Hawthorne rejects American myths of a New World free from ruin by depicting Puritan Boston as a society invested with forms of ruin from its inception and seemingly already in decline only ten years after it was founded. However, while New England's settlers appear to have brought with them the forms of ruin which undermine myths of Puritan new beginnings, the decaying Old World from which they came is not understood to be exhausted and obsolete. Instead, through the important image of new growth upon old decay, Hawthorne signals the creative potential of decay; this creative potential relates as much to societal growth as it does to the generation of new art forms. In

this respect, the image of the American forest is equally significant in <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>. These scenes of organic decay demonstrate that America has, in its primeval and limitless nature, forms of ruin which are comparable to those of the Old World. Between these two extremities of ruin, the forest to the west and the Old World to the east, Puritan Boston clings to its existence at the eastern edge of the continent. While the images of the prison and the graveyard in the opening scene of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> appear to signal the inevitable decline of the Puritan venture in Boston, the recurrent image of new growth from old decay in the romance infers that while the experiment of Puritan theocracy is doomed to failure, the Republican present will grow from these ruins. With this image, Hawthorne responds to Rufus Choate's call for a New England romance, while circumventing the idea that such romance should venerate the Puritan past. The vision of progress suggested by new growth, particularly moss upon old decay, also serves as a warning to those desirous of rejecting the past completely, or of mythologizing an America free from decay.

By transferring into the nineteenth century American present the decaying remnants of the Puritan past, and its connections to a more distant Old World past, Hawthorne's <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> solves the problems outlined in "The Custom-House" in respect to the insubstantial forms of nineteenth century American decay. The relationship between romance and ruin is evident in the way that Hawthorne utilises these forms of past decay to suffuse <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> with a certain Gothicism. This Gothic quality gives the text, set in an ostensibly everyday nineteenth century setting, its dissociative power of romance. That is not to say that forms of present day ruin of the kind encountered on the lower floor of "The Custom-House" do not exist in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u>; in fact Hawthorne is keen to show that decay exists in many forms in a prosperous and expanding American

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present, and that ruin is a necessary product of such rapid progress. However, such ruin is never a lamentation for a declining America. Indeed, the inevitability of decay and ruin as a product of America's progress, from past to present and on into the future, evidences a similar conservative-gradualist impulse in The House of the Seven Gables as was seen in The Scarlet Letter. Just as the present grows from the decay of the past, so the future will gradually grow from the ruins of the present. Again, Hawthorne warns against attempting to reject the notion of American ruin entirely. Holgrave's desire to dispel the past from America is ultimately undermined and, like Hester, he is absorbed into a cycle of decay and growth which characterises Hawthorne's vision of America in his first two romances.

These two American romances, The Scarlet Letter and House of the Seven Gables also demonstrate Hawthorne's fascination with the manner in which decay and ruin can become manifested within individuals as well as in the outward world of architecture or nature. Indeed, human ruins form the bulk of Hawthorne's images of decay in the American romances. While the Puritan notion of total depravity forms the starting point for Hawthorne's examination of Dimmesdale's complex ruined body and soul, Hawthorne's human ruins move far beyond a Calvinist fascination with original sin. His ruined humans are fallen women, Gothic villains, antique military men, ruined American aristocrats and morally corrupted politicians. Invariably, the meanings generated by the incomplete conditions of such human ruins go beyond the confines of the self. Hawthorne always makes us aware of the way in which notions of ruin interact with myths of American nationhood, and of the way in which such depictions of decay elucidate the continuities and connections between the Old World and the New.

I began this thesis with a passage from The Marble Faun to which I returned on numerous occasions throughout my argument. This passage was significant not only because, like "The Custom-House" it makes a statement regarding the relationship between ruin and romance, but because this preface claims that Hawthorne's homeland is a place free of ruin and decay. As my first three chapters demonstrated, images and notions of ruin form an essential part of Hawthorne's American romance writing. Therefore, it seems that we must either assume that the preface to The Marble Faun signals a change in Hawthorne's view of decay and ruin in America, or that he is being disingenuous and instead aimed to highlight, through irony, the continuing presence of American decay. Understanding the manner in which Hawthorne's American romance writing imagines ruin in his homeland provides the basis for understanding how his transatlantic travels altered the ways in which ruin figures within his writing. Ultimately, comprehending ruin in Hawthorne's American romances allows us a better insight into whether he had, by the time he wrote his final romance, really changed his perspective on American ruin.

The most obvious distinction between Hawthorne's American and European writing about ruin is the movement from the imagined ruin of romance writing to his experiences of material decay described in the notebooks. The English Notebooks in particular are replete with descriptions of the kind of ruined castles and abbeys which Hawthorne had previously never encountered. Hawthorne is fascinated by these historical sites, the decay of which dwarfs any American ruined buildings, in terms of both size and age. Hawthorne's overwhelming response to such ruins is an aesthetic one. His knowledge of the picturesque governs his experiences of these ruins as he looks for the manifestation of specific visual qualities. We saw that in The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables Hawthorne

was drawn to the suggestive possibilities of the image of new growth upon old decay. In <u>The English Notebooks</u>, this image is perhaps the principal quality by which he judges a ruin's aesthetic value. Yet this focus upon the aesthetic value of new growth upon decay marks a significant change in the way Hawthorne approaches this image. The emphasis on the visual qualities of decay in <u>The English Notebooks</u> supersedes considerations of the moral and political meanings which might be associated with decay. That British ruins should lack such suggestive potential is itself evidence of Hawthorne's view of British history as static and inert. Despite his knowledge of the violence and upheavals of the British past, Hawthorne viewed his distant ancestral home as a place where history was characterised simultaneously by a comforting familiarity and the threat of stagnation. This understanding of British history is perhaps a reflection that Hawthorne was becoming increasingly aware of the growing divisions and instability in his own country. His perception of British historical stability underlies the primarily aesthetic responses to ruins in Britain, since the ruins of an inert and permanent history meant that decay was not necessarily a reminder of historical change. The divergence from considerations of the suggestive power of decay which characterised his previous romances offers an insight into Hawthorne's repeated failure to compose an English romance.

The ruins of Rome, in contrast to those of Britain, were for Hawthorne characterised by both an absence of aesthetic quality and a deep and troubling sense of history. The history Rome communicates is often described in <u>The French and Italian Notebooks</u> in terms of atmosphere. This atmosphere carries with it all of the ruinous history of Rome, blurring the lines between disease and artistic influence and underpinning an ambivalence which was very different to the one expressed in <u>The English Notebooks</u>. In Rome, Hawthorne feels an

uneasy attraction to the city's artistic past but he is simultaneously repulsed by its moral corruptions and the 'malaria air' which caused him serious personal trauma through the near death of his daughter Una. Rome's classical past seems almost inconceivably distant to Hawthorne and he is disconcerted by the contemplation of all that fills the great 'gulf' between the present moment and this classic past. The history of the 'gulf,' unlike the history of Britain, is characterised by a sense of endless decay and change. However, unlike the fecund decay he had imagined in both Old and New Worlds in his American romances, and in the pleasing aesthetics of Britain, the cycles of decay in Rome are characterised by death and hopeless deterioration. Nevertheless, Hawthorne finds in the unsettling decay of Rome inspiration for his final romance, The Marble Faun. It is, like "The Custom-House," a bifurcated text. The decay and degradation of Rome provides Hawthorne with the materials for his allegory of the fall of man and for his ruined and mysterious Gothic female, Miriam. However, Hawthorne refuses to allow his American characters to fully descend into the romance and ruin of Rome in The Marble Faun. They remain detached observers, at times threatened by the decay of the city but ultimately never corrupted by it. These characters seem at odds with much of what Hawthorne had written in his previous romances. It seems that he is now willing to tell us that America is the land imagined by American exceptionalist myth, a country free from ruin and where virtue and innocence reign. Yet hints of another America also exist in The Marble Faun, since Hawthorne was, by this stage of his career, well aware of the impeding Civil War. The troubles of American sectionalism, American 'actualities' which he claimed had no place in his romance, have been the focus of much critical attention. However, the innocence of his two American characters endures in spite, or indeed because, of the developing troubles in America.

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Hawthorne's experiences of European decay had, by the time of his final romance, left him unwilling to associate America with notions of decay and ruin as explicitly as he once had. For Hawthorne, the combination of the impending and potentially devastating Civil War in America, and his experiences of permanent British history and the hopeless cycles of Roman decay, meant that his romantic ideas of gradual new growth upon old decay no longer seemed relevant or realistic. Instead, he uncharacteristically retreats in <u>The Marble Faun</u> into the kind of exceptionalist myth of a ruin free America which he had, in his American romances, continually undermined. While Hawthorne was aware that, according to his previous theories of romance, dissociating ruin from America was also to exile romance from his homeland, he nonetheless sensed that the violence of the Civil War, coupled with his own artistic failings, would inevitably preclude the composition of American romance anyway, an assumption which was proved correct in his final American writing.

Decay and ruin, I have argued, are ideas which very often exist in Hawthorne's work within a transatlantic context. Hawthorne's American romances depict ruin and decay in a system of influence and awareness which draws upon Old World forms in order to endow his New World writing with the imaginative suggestiveness borne of the incomplete. His transatlantic travels proved to have a huge bearing upon the manner in which ruin and decay figured in his writing. Inevitably, the movement from fiction to non-fiction, from romance to notebooks, was marked by a movement from imagined decay to factual responses to ruined buildings. His final completed romance demonstrates that his experiences of Old World ruin, coupled with his awareness of the threat of Civil War, left Hawthorne less willing to associate his country with the forms of ruin with which he had endowed America in his earlier romances. That my thesis has focused specifically upon Hawthorne's career from "The Custom-House"

onwards was intentional, as this preface marked a highly significant moment in Hawthorne's life – the beginning of his career as a writer of romance novels, a moment which is described in terms of the importance of ruin in the creation of romance. However, this is not to say that Hawthorne's earlier short stories did not consist of many images and ideas of decay and ruin. Thus, the opportunity to study decay and ruin in his short stories and to examine whether these tales, in turn, evidence a similar system of transatlantic influence and awareness, would be one possible area for further research in this area. While Hawthorne's writing is, of all the American writers of the period, perhaps the most explicitly concerned with ideas of decay and ruin, further study might also look to situate Hawthorne more clearly within the wider context of other authors of the period. Authors such as Melville, Irving and Emerson all visited the Old World during their lifetimes. Hawthorne's ruin writing could, in this sense, form one chapter of a wider study of authors of the period, looking to compare the way in which the transatlantic travels of these authors might be seen to have affected their own ruin writing.

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<u>Appendixes</u>

Appendix A

Thomas Cole, <u>The Course of the Empire</u> (1833-6) (five painting series)

<u>The Savage State</u> (1834)

<u>The Arcadian or Pastoral State</u> (1834)

Appendix A cont.

The Consummation of the Empire (1836)

Destruction (1836)

Appendix A cont.

<u>Desolation</u> (1836)

Appendix B

Thomas Cole, <u>Lake with Dead Trees</u> (1825)

Appendix C

Portrait presumed to be Beatrice Cenci, attributed to Guido Reni.

Appendix D

Praixletes, <u>Capitoline Faun</u> (c. 130 AD)