WATSON, JAMIE, M.A. Man-Made Menopause and Architectural Embodiment in Herman Melville's "I and My Chimney." (2017)
Directed by Dr. María C. Sánchez. 24 pp.

Herman Melville's 1856 short story "I and My Chimney" illustrates a dispute between an old man and his wife about the domestic inconveniences caused by the chimney centrally located in their home. The old man desires to preserve his chimney at all costs. Meanwhile, the wife seeks to reduce the size of the chimney for mobility within the home and the comfort of her family. R. Bruce Bickley, Jr. and Clark Davis, among others, view the old man's wife as emasculating. However, the narrator is responsible for many of the physical and mental conditions that limit his wife's agency. Furthermore, these conditions cause her to resemble the stereotypical nineteenth-century menopausal woman. I argue that, through this narrative, Melville suggests that menopausal symptoms are male-constructed rather than biological. In order to further support my argument that Melville does not characterize the wife as a tyrant, I compare Melville's story with Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "Revolt of 'Mother'"—a critically-accepted feminist text. Freeman's female protagonist experiences a similar plight to the wife in "I and My Chimney," though scholars have interpreted both women in significantly different ways. This intertextual approach shows similarities between the short stories and encourages a new reading of Melville's story that shows the depth of Melville's understanding of gender, sexuality, and aging.

WATSON, JAMIE, M.A. “A Disembodied Listener”: Hawthorne’s Mesmeric Narrator in *The House of the Seven Gables*. (2017)
Directed by Dr. María C. Sánchez. 24 pp.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* thrives on its engagement with mesmerism, a pseudoscience Hawthorne feared but often explored throughout his fiction. Much like a mesmerist, the novel’s narrator controls the Puncheons and his readers using spellbinding language. Alongside this commanding language, the narrator suggests he is both embodied and disembodied, singular and ubiquitous. While scholars have examined Hawthorne’s recurrent use of mesmerism, this essay is the first to examine how Hawthorne’s narrator influences *Seven Gables’* plot as a mesmeric *character*. In this essay, I discuss Hawthorne’s narrative style, how his narrators are embodied, and how mesmerism influences how we interpret these narrators. Then, I examine how the narrator of *Seven Gables* controls his readers, actively threatens the Puncheon family, and characterizes himself as a threat to the safety of both characters and readers. Through this analysis, I hope to further the ongoing critical conversation regarding Hawthorne’s use of narrative mesmerism and its interconnectedness with the structure, style, and theme of the novel. Moreover, this essay urges scholars to further question Hawthorne’s narrators in his mesmeric stories and the evolving role of the narrator in nineteenth-century American fiction.

MAN-MADE MENOPAUSE AND ARCHITECTURAL EMBODIMENT IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S "I AND MY CHIMNEY"

AND

"A DISEMBODIED LISTENER": HAWTHORNE'S MESMERIC NARRATOR IN *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

by

Jamie Watson

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MAN-MADE MENOPAUSE AND ARCHITECTURAL EMBODIMENT IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S "I AND MY CHIMNEY"

During the nineteenth century, American women of a certain class were expected to construct and maintain a Christian home that promoted the overall virtue, happiness, and health of their families. Furthermore, it was believed that the home was a site that both encouraged and reflected the values of its inhabitants.[1] For domestic manual author Catharine Esther Beecher, "There is no point of domestic economy, which more seriously involves the health and daily comfort of American women, than the proper construction of houses" (*Treatise on Domestic Economy* 258). But what happens when a woman's husband prevents her from securing this ideal home? Herman Melville's 1856 short story "I and My Chimney" explores the clash between a woman's domestic responsibility and her husband's need to maintain patriarchal authority.

Scholars typically perceive the narrator of Melville's story as a victim confronting the threat of metaphorical castration—the destruction of his chimney. And yet, these scholars do so without considering the experience of the narrator's wife, an aging woman

[1] In *The American Woman's Home*, Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe write: "In the Divine Word it is written, 'The wise woman buildeth her house.' To be 'wise,' is 'to choose the best means for accomplishing the best end.' It has been shown that the best end for a woman to seek is the training of God's children for their eternal home, by guiding them to intelligence, virtue, and true happiness. When, therefore, the wise woman seeks a home in which to exercise this ministry, she will aim to secure a house so planned that it will provide in the best manner for health, industry, and economy, those cardinal requisites of domestic enjoyment and success" (20-1).

largely inconvenienced by her husband's refusal to reduce the size of his chimney. R. Bruce Bickley, Jr. and Clark Davis, among others, view the old man's wife as a sort of emasculating force attempting to reclaim control over her domestic space by removing the chimney. However, after readers question the husband's reliability and decision-making, it becomes clear that he is responsible for many of the physical and mental conditions that limit his wife's agency. Furthermore, these conditions cause her to resemble the stereotypical nineteenth-century menopausal woman—irritable, confused, and depressed. Nineteenth-century male physicians defined menopause as a debilitating, defeminizing disease plaguing women. This largely constructed definition of menopause greatly limited women's opportunities and mobility.[2]

Using current knowledge regarding nineteenth-century medicine, I first argue that the way the old man characterizes his wife and constructs his home encourages his wife to resemble the stereotypical menopausal woman —"tired," "frequently depressed," "irritable," "confused," "asexual," and "overwhelmed by hot flashes" (MacPherson 97). I then underscore how the narrator's unreliability only further suggests ulterior motives. Finally, I examine why scholars should acknowledge the experience of the wife in Melville's short story by comparing "I and My Chimney" to Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's 1891 short story "Revolt of 'Mother.'" Freeman's female protagonist experiences a

[2] See Carroll Smith Rosenberg's "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America," Nancy Theriot's "Women's Voices in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse: a Step Toward Deconstructing Science," and Carolyn Skinner's *Women Physicians and Professional Ethos in Nineteenth-Century America*.

similar plight to the wife in "I and My Chimney," though scholars have interpreted these women in significantly different ways.

Since the 1970s, critics have perceived the narrator's wife as the story's antagonist—a view undermining both the wife's circumstances and the narrator's consistent unreliability. Bickley, Jr. calls her an "aggressive, indeed almost voracious" wife whose efforts to exchange the "grotesquely phallic chimney" for a "yonic entrance hall" threaten the foundation of both the house and the narrator's "fundamental self" (52). Likewise, Davis argues that "the schemes of the wife directly attack" the narrator's "potency and independence" (73). Davis derives his evidence from the narrator's own evaluation of his wife's behavior; granted, it is difficult to avoid this tendency while reading "I and My Chimney," but Davis questions neither the reliability of the narrator's perspective nor the perspective of the narrator's wife.

Although "I and My Chimney" has been critically examined in myriad ways, scholars have neglected a feminist reading of the work. What seems to most deter this work is the tendency to examine the story alongside Melville's own biography. Merton Sealts argues that the story is an allegory for the psychological examination Melville underwent in his later years and that the wife represents Melville's controlling mother. Likewise, Newton Arvin writes:

> How deep his resentment was against both mother and wife we can make out…in the sketch called "I and My Chimney," in which the wife is…a gorgon of domestic energy and tyranny who is determined to abolish the great chimney….Lizzie Melville herself once noted...that "all this about his wife applied to his mother—who was very vigorous and energetic about the farm, etc." It is natural and touching that Lizzie should have been able to believe this, but the

> truth is that wife and mother have been fused in Melville's mind into a single image of intrusive and oppressive hostility. (204)

Whether or not the wife represents any one of Melville's relations, scholars perceive this story as inextricable from Melville's biography. A feminist reading of such a work is further complicated by Elizabeth Renker's "Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page." With evidence of the Shaw family's concern for Elizabeth's safety, Renker argues that Melville "emotionally and physically abused Elizabeth Shaw Melville" and that this revelation helps us to understand both Melville's biography and his written works (139). Hershel Parker and Laurie Robertson-Lorant admit the possibility and even likelihood of Melville's psychological abusiveness; yet they rightfully acknowledge that we simply cannot know for sure if the rumors of Melville's physical abuse were true.[3]

"I and My Chimney" presents a challenge for scholars disheartened by Melville's potential for abuse. The story could be Melville's fantasy of fighting back against the seemingly oppressive women of his life. Further, Melville could be channeling his own abusive nature through the voice of the narrator. But I hope to add to recent scholarship challenging the typical biographical reading of the story. In "Melville's Chimney: Queer

[3] Parker writes that it is "impossible to draw the line between what the Shaws concluded from Lizzie's reports and what they had concluded over the previous eighteen years from the public prints and what they led Lizzie to believe" (632). Robertson-Lorant also points out that "[s]pousal abuse is notoriously difficult to detect, especially in cultures that grant men full authority over wives and children. Although rumors that Herman threw Lizzie down the back stairs on at least one occasion surfaced decades later, no conclusive evidence of martial abuse exists…" (505). I intend neither to agree nor disagree with Renker, Parker, Robertson-Lorant, and other scholars interested in Melville's biography. Rather, my point is that the debates over Melville's biography have influenced how certain pieces of his work, such as "I and my Chimney," have been received by scholars.

Syntax and the Rhetoric of Architecture," Rasmus R. Simonsen makes a strong claim for the furthered study of "I and My Chimney" as a rhetorically complex text. Simonsen writes, "Whereas previous critics have tended to read 'Chimney' biographically…I argue that a concern with rhetorical patterns and syntax becomes a way for Melville to experiment with ways to articulate 'inexpressible' connections among language, space, and homoeroticism" (29). While my reading emphasizes the narrator's wife's experience, like Simonsen, I read "I and My Chimney" as a text that illuminates Melville's desire to connect language with architecture and sexual embodiment. Moreover, unlike previous critics, I argue that the story demonstrates Melville's sympathy for both his narrator mourning for lost patriarchal dominance and the wife who yearns for domestic freedom.

Through the characterization of the narrator, Melville consistently urges us to read the narrator's wife in a way scholars have long avoided. Therefore, I read "I and My Chimney" alongside another story of domestic dispute: Freeman's "Revolt of 'Mother.'" Doing so raises new questions of Melville's beliefs regarding women's marginalization, especially in his later works. "Revolt of 'Mother'" resembles Melville's story in several ways and has been critically accepted as a feminist work. Exploring a new reading of "I and My Chimney" that is centered on the experience of an aging woman furthers the trend of reading Melville's work through a feminist lens. Through his portrayal of the narrator's manipulative behavior, Melville illuminates the social construction of menopause. Furthermore, Melville criticizes the dominant perception of menopausal women as biologically inhibited through architectural metaphors.

The Construction of Nineteenth-Century Menopause

Melville's contemporaries within the medical community perceived menopause as a "physiological crisis" that "marked the beginning of a period of depression, of heightened disease incidence, and of early death" (Caroll Smith-Rosenberg 65). Although some medical professionals acknowledged that menopause could be lead to "increased vigor, optimism, and even of physical beauty," nineteenth-century physicians and Americans as a whole largely believed menopause reduced the quality of a woman's life. Menopause was thought to cause "tumors, depression, hysteria, and insanity" (Cockerham 564). Moreover, this view of menopause as a medical emergency was used to justify contemporary social constructions of gender. Women's traditional roles were often viewed as "rooted inevitably and irreversibly in the prescriptions of anatomy and physiology" (MacPherson 100). Melville was immersed in a culture that rationalized the marginalization of women partly due to the medical and resulting social perception of menopause. Today, we know that the "only scientifically documented menopausal experiences are hot flashes and night sweating" (97). But nineteenth-century physicians told women to limit activities, stay at home, and tend to their bodily crises—effectively limiting the space they could occupy (100).

Melville directly contradicts this limiting perception of menopause in *Pierre,* published four years prior to "I and My Chimney." In the novel, Mrs. Glendinning contradicts the dominant view of menopausal women in the nineteenth century. According to *Pierre*'s narrator, "That nameless and infinitely delicate aroma of inexpressible tenderness and attentiveness…was for Mary Glendinning, now not very far

from her grand climacteric, miraculously revived in the courteous lover-like adoration of Pierre" (Melville 16). This "grand climacteric" signifies the later years of menopause. Yet, Ms. Glendinning is portrayed as a fruitful, healthy, and strangely romantic character despite being described as a menopausal woman.[4] Melville's Gothic romance challenges the notion of the menopausal woman as masculine or asexual, and this sentiment is only furthered in "I and My Chimney."

The narrator of Melville's story is keenly aware that his wife—who matches him in age—is significantly healthier than he is and does not display the medically-accepted feebleness or exhaustion of menopausal women. The man says, "Though in years nearly old as myself, in spirit she is young as my little sorrel mare, Trigger, that threw me last fall" (Melville 384). Contemporary medical professionals expected menopausal women to be exhausted and encouraged them to "retire from worldly life into the bosom of the family" (MacPherson 100). By telling women to conserve their energy during these supposed crises, physicians could "sanction attacks on any behavior they considered unfeminine" and reinforce traditional gender roles (100). Viewing this medical context adjacent to the narrator's discussions of his wife in "I and My Chimney" suggests that the narrator believes his wife should resemble what was accepted as the norm for menopausal women; they should match the perceived standard for their age: exhaustion and physical weakness

[4] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "grand climacteric" as "a year of life, often reckoned as the 63rd, supposed to be especially critical" ("climacteric, adj. and n.").

The old man further reinforces desire for his wife to demonstrate the effects of her age by discussing her surprisingly healthy body. The old man criticizes his wife for her youth, saying that "she, out of the infatuate juvenility of hers, takes to nothing but newness…." Rather than praising his wife's health, he criticizes her for being immature: "Advanced in years, as she knows she must be, my wife seems to think that she is to teem on, and be inexhaustible forever" ("I and My Chimney" 385). From the old man's descriptions, the reader learns that in old age and menopause, the wife has vitality and strength. Further, the dominating view of menopausal weakness and exhaustion is manifested in the husband's desire for his wife to act her age.

The husband also compares her health to his own: "What is extraordinary, though she comes of a rheumatic family, she is straight as a pine, never has any aches; while for me with the sciatica, I am sometimes as crippled up as any old apple tree. But she has not so much as a toothache" (384). Rheumatic symptoms—although also generally common of old age—were also attributed to menopause during the mid-nineteenth century, so it puzzles the narrator that his wife does not also experience these symptoms (Price and Shildrick 171). Because the husband suffers from sciatica, it seems that his frequent discussions of his wife's superior health stem from his jealousy; she has agency he does not possess because her body does not ache. The narrator's feelings of jealousy and resentment manifest in his characterization of her as both irritable and depressed.

Both the narrator and literary scholars often note the wife's irritability as evidence of her tyrannical nature. Throughout their dispute, the husband depicts his wife as domineering in her persistence to tear down the chimney. Offhand, the narrator calls his

wife “the poor old lady who was accusing me of tyrannizing over her” (“I and My Chimney” 388). Such a comment urges readers to view the wife as a character who is, by contrast, tyrannizing over the old man. The narrator also emphasizes the wife’s irritability when he describes her supposed impatience. He says she is “spicily impatient of present and past,” and unlike her husband, who lives in the past, the wife lives “in a continual future.” She is “restless for newspapers, and ravenous for letters” (386). The husband reiterates her youthfulness as a fault, and, as he describes her as “restless” and “ravenous,” he characterizes her as an irritable woman who starts to fit more into the image of the menopausal woman despite her physical health. However, the old woman seems justified in her irritability once her husband describes his reluctance to improve the conditions of the home.

The narrator portrays his wife as depressed when the husband describes the conditions he himself has created due to his reluctance to alter the chimney. He calls his wife and daughters “a sort of bells, always chiming together” and notes that the “most silvery of bells may, sometimes, dismally toll, as well as merrily play” (393-4). The narrator refuses to give his wife and daughters a clear answer as to if and when the chimney will be removed. Then, the women begin a “dirge-like, melancholy tolling”—the “key-clapper” of these bells being the wife. Of course, sadness is not only a symptom of menopause, but it is clear that the husband creates the conditions that, cumulatively, characterize his wife in such a manner. The man explains, “My chimney, were it not so mighty in its magnitude, my chambers had been larger.” He also notes, “How often has my wife ruefully told me, that my chimney…casts a contracting shade all round it” (383).

Rather than from menopausal hormones, these emotions derive from her husband's refusal to give her enough space (both physically and architecturally). The husband attempts to destroy her surprising health and attitude toward life as she attempts to destroy his chimney.

While the old man acknowledges his wife's discomfort as a result of his own decision-making, he refuses to yield to her needs. He notes that his wife complains of the "endless domestic inconveniences" that derive from the "chimney's stubborn central locality" and that her "grand objection" is that the chimney "stands midway in the place where a fine entrance-hall ought to be" (383). While he says that the wife is concerned about the "inconveniences" the chimney causes, the husband portrays her as greedy in her desire for a "fine entrance-hall." But because the chimney occupies so much space, the house is tortuous to navigate: "Going through the house, you seem to be forever going somewhere, and getting nowhere. It is like losing one's self in the wood; round and round the chimney you go, and if you arrive at all, it is just where you started, and so you begin again, and again get nowhere. Indeed—though I say it not in the way of faultfinding at all—never was there so labyrinthine an abode" (389). By comparing the man-made home to a forest, the narrator shows how he accepts this condition as natural; and when discussing the construction of physical ailments considered to be natural, this only reinforces the narrator's blame in the circumstances of his home and its inhabitants. Again, the narrator recognizes the inconvenience of the chimney and the difficulties it causes, yet he refuses to remove it for the benefit of everyone in the household. The man says that attempting to navigate around the chimney and the labyrinthine home causes a

loss of "one's self," which alludes to the way in which the wife's lived experience is compromised as a result of the chimney and of her husband's refusal to compromise.

The husband and critics of the story condemn the wife's desire to function more efficiently in her home. But reducing or removing the chimney grants her more space to entertain guests, which allows her to cater to the needs of others. Also, changing the structure of the chimney would give her more agency and access than she currently has with a giant chimney impeding her home. The chimney makes the home difficult to navigate for everyone, so this moment is seemingly less about selfishness and more about practicality and consideration for herself and others.

Yet the narrator fails to consider his wife as logical and instead portrays her as a jealous, threatening antagonist. This portrayal is unsurprising given that—in addition to being characterized as exhausted, irritable, and depressed—the nineteenth-century menopausal woman was viewed as illogical. As much as the husband attempts to convey that his wife is scheming and vindictive, she regards her situation with practicality, and although her husband and Melville scholars vilify her, the wife merely wants to reside in a livable home. The husband portrays her as confused again when he says, "The truth is, women know next to nothing about the realities of architecture. However, my wife still talked of running her entries and partitions" (384). Here, he insinuates that his wife forgets her own incompetence regarding architecture, yet she still attempts to dismantle the chimney.

In addition to portraying his wife as irritable, depressed, and illogical, the old man also characterizes her as lacking sexual desire. This is especially striking because

nineteenth-century physicians believed that having sexual intercourse during or after menopause caused women to experience "hemorrhaging, ovarian tumor, or insanity…" (Smith-Rosenberg 192). In Melville's story, the wife appears as an antagonist to the chimney and thus works against the phallic metaphor at play. Moreover, her sexuality comes into question when the husband says, "Often I think how grapes might ripen against my chimney." Here, the chimney becomes a male appropriation of a womb-like structure. He continues, "How my wife's geraniums bud there. Bud in December. Her eggs, too—can't keep them near the chimney, on account of hatching" (384). Here, the narrator first mentions flowers budding in December—fertility in a later stage of life—which suggests that the wife should not be fertile, yet she challenges nature.

In his analysis of this passage, Davis articulates a damaging view of aging womanhood by saying that the wife's views toward the chimney and her husband's sexuality "suggest that her potency has shifted from simple sexual production to a postsexual, antiphysical desire to rule the household" (73). The chimney used to satisfy her "eggs," yet they do so no longer. Davis portrays the wife as non-sexual and disembodied—a problematic view that is often attributed to menopausal and postmenopausal women (73). Moreover, this reading suggests that to not worship a man's sexual organs—even in a metaphorical sense—means she is nonsexual. Because the narrator of the story says that he keeps the wife away from the chimney for fear of her eggs hatching, he characterizes her as unnatural, suggesting that she should better fit the standard for aging women while also taking the opportunity to cast her as the villain of the story.

The narrator is unwilling to compromise with his wife, regardless of the inconvenience his resistance causes, but she is still viewed by critics as an antagonist. Describing his wife's concerns, the narrator says, "In vain my wife—with what probable ulterior intent will, ere long, appear—solemnly warned me, that unless something were done, and speedily, we should be burnt to the ground, owing to the holes crumbling through the aforesaid blotchy parts, where the chimney joined the roof." The husband responds to her anxieties by saying "far better that my house should burn down, than that my chimney should be pulled down, though but a few feet" ("I and My Chimney" 379). The threat of the house burning down as a result of the chimney is understandably frightening for the wife and presents a unique metaphor for hot flashes. The recklessness of the husband in regards to the house catching fire or overheating resonates as a metaphor for the overheating of the wife's body.

To accept that the burning of the house is indeed a reference to hot flashes, one must accept that the house is, in part, a metaphor for the wife's body. One of the first ways that the husband describes his house and chimney is by their mutual wideness: "Most houses, here, are but one and half stories high, few exceed two. That in which I and my chimney dwell, is in width nearly twice his height, from sill to eaves—which accounts for the magnitude for its main content—besides showing that in this house, as in this country at large, there is abundance of space, and to spare, for both of us" (377). When the husband discusses having space to spare, he does not mention his wife and daughters—who complain of having limited space. Instead, the narrator chooses to prioritize himself and his chimney. The wife must accommodate her husband's desires

and the space he has delegated to his family. Therefore, she is not unlike the house having to accommodate the "obese" chimney; her body must accommodate the chimney as she is pressured to accommodate her husband (374).

The home is best explained as a metaphor for the wife's body through her determination to liberate the home and, as a result, to liberate her own body. The husband says, "However, my wife still talked of running her entries and partitions. She spent many long nights elaborating her plans; in imagination building her boasted hall through the chimney, as though its high mightiness were a mere spear of sorrel-top." The narrator refers to "her entries and partitions," "her plans," and "her boasted hall." Calling the entryways and partitions hers necessarily likens the wife to the house, and the "plans" suggest the wife's scheming and well as the house plan (384).

Because the narrator says that "tak[ing] out the back-bone of anything is a "hazardous affair…I can't abolish my back-bone," it seems as if the home represents the husband's body (391). However, it is necessary to consider that the narrator rhetorically threatens his wife with heat, heat that will literally influence her body and will burn down the house as an extension of herself. This is at once a reference to menopause and a ploy to force his wife to forsake her efforts to destroy the chimney.

To reinforce an accusation that the narrator does possess nefarious intentions regarding his domestic circumstances, his family, and his wife's body, it is especially helpful to recognize just how unreliable he is. Keeping the narrator's unreliability at the forefront allows readers to be more cognizant of the wife's living conditions and to keep in mind the way her body—an aging woman's body—interacts with a domestic narrative

and architectural metaphors. The narrator's unreliability is suggested in the way that he keeps his name (and his wife's name) secret, and he bribes Mr. Scribe fifty dollars to write a letter saying there is not a secret closet in the chimney. The narrator then uses the letter to trick the wife into believing that Mr. Scribe fully inspected the chimney (404). Clearly, the narrator lies to his wife, so we must also question how honestly he *portrays* his wife.

The narrator is also unreliable because he is ostentatiously self-serving. Throughout the story, the man tries to persuade readers that he is not egotistical by positioning himself as subservient to his chimney: "Though I always say, *I and my chimney*… this egotistic way of speaking, wherein I take precedence of my chimney, is hardly borne out by the facts; in everything, except the above phrase, my chimney taking precedence of me" (373). The narrator seemingly personifies the chimney as an entity more important than himself. This approach attempts to absolve the narrator from being responsible for the problems the chimney causes his wife and daughters in the domestic narrative. However, the narrator fails in his endeavor to not seem egotistical or responsible since he is so fixated on *his* chimney. The narrator's tactic of establishing himself as a selfless man is frustrated by his own representation of the chimney as a phallic metaphor.

The shape of the chimney and the way that it precedes him—in the sense of the erect penis preceding the body—makes evident the phallic nature of the chimney. But one instance particularly characterizes the chimney as impotent or too small. Noticing the old man digging at the base of the chimney, a neighbor says, "Ah, loosening the soil, to

make it grow. Your chimney, sir, you regard as too small, I suppose; needing further development, especially at the top?" (381). The neighbor makes a key observation—that the narrator is not so confident in his chimney, his body, and his sexuality. If the reader accepts that the chimney is perceived by the narrator as a phallic extension of himself, one must also accept that the narrator is self-absorbed; to preserve the chimney is to preserve himself—no matter whose happiness or agency is at stake.

The narrator is also delusional and rejects modernity, leading the reader to question his motives and the accuracy of his narrative. By privileging the chimney over himself, through the sheer worship of the architectural construct, the narrator also loses sight of the present and maintains antiquated practices. He says, "From this habitual precedence of my chimney over me, some even think that I have got into a sad rearward way altogether; in short, from standing behind my old-fashioned chimney so much, I have got to be quite behind the age, too, as well as running behind-band in everything else" (374). The old man sacrifices both his relationship to the present and his consideration for others' needs for the sake of his chimney. The man's preoccupation with maintaining his chimney causes him to remain firmly rooted in the past—yet another reason to question the narrator's reliability.

Reexamining "I and My Chimney" using Freeman's "Revolt of 'Mother'"

Given that the narrator frequently causes his family's discomfort, it remains surprising that scholars have continued to sympathize with him. And it is even more surprising because Freeman's "Revolt of 'Mother'" resembles "I and My Chimney" in

several key ways. “Revolt of ‘Mother’” chronicles an architectural dispute between Adoniram and Sarah Penn—an old couple unable to communicate their differences effectively. Adoniram’s decision to build a second barn—much like Melville’s narrator’s decision to maintain his chimney—preserves a series of domestic difficulties. Even Sarah’s daughter recognizes the oppressive nature of her father’s stubbornness: “‘Mother,’ said she, ‘don't you think it's too bad father's goin' to build that new barn, much as we need a decent house to live in?’” (120). As the story’s narrator points out, Sarah’s house is “infinitesimal” in comparison to the “great barn and a long reach of sheds and out-buildings” on her farm (118). Simply, Adoniram’s home is too small for its inhabitants, just as Melville’s narrator lives in a labyrinthine domestic space.

“Revolt of ‘Mother’” and “I and My Chimney” share—as Michael Grimwood says in his analysis of Freeman’s story— “a tangled relationship among gender, power, and architectural structure” (66). The men and women of both stories value the home in oppositional ways, which complicates their motivations. Martha Cutter observes this difference in “Revolt of ‘Mother’”: “Father's main symbol of success is his barn, and it is in opposition to the symbolic realm of the barn that Mother counterpoises the actual and symbolic realm of the home. Mother values the home not as a symbol of wealth or social status but rather as a place in which the generation and regeneration of human life can occur” (281). This relationship to the home is mirrored in “I and My Chimney” in that the wives in both stories want hospitable domestic spaces for their families.

One of the most powerful ways that gender conflict is furthered in these stories is through language. Specifically, in “Revolt of ‘Mother,’” Adoniram does not engage in

discourse with his wife when she airs her complaints regarding the condition of her home as well as the construction of a new barn. Sarah begins her discussion by saying to Adoniram: “I’m goin’ to talk real plain to you; I never have sence I married you, but I'm goin’ to now. I ain’t never complained, an’ I ain’t goin’ to complain now, but I’m goin’ to talk plain” (124). She continues by describing the lack of carpet, the dirty wallpaper, and the lack of space and concludes her discussion by a very pointed urging for Adoniram to answer her questions:

> Sarah Penn went back and stood before her husband. “Now, father,” said she, “I want to know if you think you’re doin’ right an’ accordin’ to what you profess. Here, when we was married, forty year ago, you promised me faithful that we should have a new house built in that lot over in the field before the year was out. You said you had money enough, an’ you wouldn’t ask me to live in no such place as this. It is forty year now, an’ you've been makin’ more money, an’ I've been savin’ of it for you ever since, an’ you ain’t built no house yet. You've built sheds an’ cow-houses an’ one new barn, an’ now you’re goin’ to build another. Father, I want to know if you think it’s right. You’re lodgin’ your dumb beasts better than you are your own flesh an’ blood.” (125-6)

Even after all this urging, Adoniram merely responds with “I ain’t got nothin’ to say” (126). Adoniram does not grant Sarah the power to engage him in conversation and realizes that, to preserve his own power, he must remain dominant and ignorant of her perspective in the matter of the domestic decisions he is making. As Cutter explains, “Sarah Penn also lacks a language; she cannot become a speaking subject. The story shows language to be patriarchal, and it illustrates that women, marginalized by frontier values, are also marginalized in this other sense: they cannot speak; they are excluded from a discourse that is patriarchal in intent and meaning” (279-80). In “I and My Chimney,” Melville employs a different kind of language deprivation; the story’s narrator

governs the narration, and the narrator conveys everything we know about the women in the story.

By depriving women of language and therefore an opportunity to be viewed as sympathetic, men can claim power over them. It is possible to consider Sarah a sympathetic character because Freeman writes "Revolt of 'Mother'" in the third-person. Therefore, Sarah's motivations, as well as the husband's, are clearer to the audience. But the husband of "I and My Chimney" is the only source of information we have about the wife. And while critics consider "I and My Chimney" and "Revolt of 'Mother'" comic short stories, both concern serious issues of gender and power. As Cutter says, "Sarah Penn is forced repeatedly to understand her powerlessness, a status that stems from her position in a patriarchal…society that through its focus on conquest and colonization often excludes feminine values" (279-80). But Sarah is not complacent in her powerless status. Instead, she seizes the opportunity to move the family into Adoniram's new barn—a superior home—when her husband leaves town.

Of course, Sarah is not just celebrated within the story for her decision to rebel against her husband. As the narrator of "Revolt of 'Mother'" describes when the townspeople see what Sarah has done to Adoniram's new barn, "Everybody paused to look at the staid, independent figure on the side track. There was a difference of opinion with regard to her. Some held her to be insane; some, of a lawless and rebellious spirit" (134). Sarah even has to qualify that she is not insane to Adoniram when he discovers what she has done:

> [Sarah] led the way into the harness-room and shut the door. “Now, father,” said she, “you needn't be scared. I ain’t crazy. There ain’t nothin’ to be upset over. But we've come here to live, an’ we’re goin’ to live here. We've got jest as good a right here as new horses an’ cows. The house wa’n’t fit for us to live in any longer, an’ I made up my mind I wa’n’t goin’ to stay there. I've done my duty by you forty year, an’ I'm goin’ to do it now; but I'm goin’ to live here.” (136)

This instance demonstrates Sarah’s resilience when even language is embedded in a patriarchal structure. Further, she is aware of the implications of her rebellion—that people will assume she is crazy. Unfortunately, the wife of “I and My Chimney” is accepted by her husband and literary scholars alike as militant in her actions, though I argue that her actions are as justified as Sarah’s.

In reclaiming her agency, Sarah illustrates a woman’s claim to power in a patriarchal system working against her in myriad ways. However, this reclamation is not an uncomplicated celebration of female empowerment. As Grimwood says, “While Sarah's story celebrates an oppressed woman's assertion of a claim to space within her marriage and her culture, Adoniram’s story expresses regret that, despite an appearance of imperious manhood, he is weak enough to be challenged successfully” (67). “I and My Chimney” and “Revolt of ‘Mother’” share both demonstrations of feminist protest and nostalgia for patriarchal power. “I and My Chimney” concludes with the narrator’s desperate, isolating attempt to defend the chimney. Seven years after the course of the story’s events, the narrator says he does not visit his city friends anymore. The narrator says, “I am simply standing guard over my mossy old chimney; for it is resolved between me and my chimney, that I and my chimney will never surrender” (“I and My Chimney” 407-8). The wife’s triumph over the patriarchal constructs her husband encourages is

undercut by the sympathetic realization that he has lost the battle; even if he is able to maintain the chimney, it is still falling apart just as he is.

The similarities between "I and My Chimney" and "Revolt of 'Mother'"—especially given that they have been read in vastly different ways—are striking. Sarah is considered, at worst, a quasi-feminist rebel against her husband's patriarchal behavior. But the wife of "I and My Chimney" is not granted that reception due to her husband's command over the narration. Moreover, in addition to evoking sympathy via metaphors of erectile dysfunction and castration, Melville's narrator replicates the symptoms of menopause supported by nineteenth-century male-physicians (exhaustion, depression, anger, confusion, abstinence from sex, and episodes of hot flashes) by manipulating his wife's environment and living situation. He makes the house more exhausting to navigate, more likely to cause confusion, less habitable—all leading to a view of the wife as an irrational, irritable women suffering from menopause. However, the wife contradicts the nineteenth-century view of menopausal women by being physically active. Moreover, she is logical, sexual, and only seems to suffer from hot flashes because her husband allows the home to overheat.

In "I and my Chimney," Melville unsettles the predominant views of aging women's bodies by portraying these views as male-constructed rather than founded in reality. Recognizing the pressures working against the aging wife illuminates Melville's perception of menopausal women's agency and how men can marginalize them. Further, Melville uses spatial language and architectural metaphors to illustrate the social construction of gender, sexuality, and menopause.

Melville scholars are continually working toward innovative, feminist readings of the author. And "I and My Chimney" should not be neglected—even if nineteenth-century readers and modern scholars alike have conceived of Melville's story as—in the words of Melville's contemporary J.A.E Smith—a "quaintly humorous essay" (7). Likewise, when recommending "I and My Chimney" for publication in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, G.W. Curtis called the story a "capital, genial, humorous sketch by Melville, thoroughly magazinish" (qtd. Leyda 507). By calling the story a "sketch"—and a "magazinish" one at that—Curtis dismisses the story as a one-off for Melville. I agree with Katja Kanzler that the story's "'lightness' in tone and plot…indicates for some that Melville actively ignored his literary skills in composing texts like this, writing them either as potboilers or as artless autobiography" (2). And like Kanzler, I perceive "I and My Chimney" as a valuable and complex work.

Rather than conveying Melville's own ailments or fondness for Arrowhead, "I and My Chimney" illustrates an evocative domestic dispute. The narrator, a man whose drive to maintain the masculine dominance long afforded to him, self-destructs. He sacrifices himself for his hearth and for his strong belief in patriarchal governance. On the other side of this dispute, a mother—representing the needs of herself, her daughters, and those who visit the home—rebels against her husband's, at best, illogically-designed home. At worst, the home oppresses the minds and bodies of its inhabitants.

Unlike many Melville scholars, I have argued that this story resists assigning a clear antagonist. Both the husband and wife inconvenience one another. This point is made more obvious when this story is read alongside Freeman's "Revolt of 'Mother.'"

As an example of feminist writing, "Revolt of 'Mother'" is a thoughtful and woman-empowering text that also sympathizes with the disempowered patriarch. "I and My Chimney" and "Revolt of 'Mother'" are similar enough to encourage further examinations of Melville's story from a feminist lens.

Furthermore, this examination of "I and My Chimney" should encourage scholars who are wary of highlighting Melville's more problematic politics in his later works. Indeed, if one reads Melville's story of a domestic dispute as autobiographical, the work can be disheartening. But I remain adamant that further study of this work will help enrich our understanding of Melville as an author. In the words of Robertson-Lorant, "[t]ragedy and comedy flowed with equal force through Melville's veins." Melville was a "living, breathing human being involved in a web of relationships, a complex and contradictory man who could be as insensitive to those around him as he was sensitive to the issues of his times" (xvi-ii). Melville's personal politics are almost inextricable from his writing. But, if we accept Melville not as a heroic, socially-irreproachable figure, but as an author who often struggled to align his personal beliefs with his actions, we can begin to explore more thoroughly the works that emerged from less glamorous times in Melville's life. Those committed to the study of Melville and his writings can only benefit from revisiting these understudied, undervalued works.

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"A DISEMBODIED LISTENER": HAWTHORNE'S MESMERIC NARRATOR IN *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* thrives on its engagement with mesmerism, a pseudoscience Hawthorne viewed with "invincible repugnance" but often explored throughout his fiction (*Letters* 590).[5] By the time mesmerism (or animal magnetism) was popularized in mid-nineteenth-century America, its scientific principles were sensationalized. Discussions of bodily magnetism were replaced with demonstrations of stage hypnotism where participants were required to relinquish control to the mesmerist (Fuller 30, 31). Watching a willing patient abandon themselves to a mesmerist's willpower provoked fear and disgust in many, including Hawthorne. Mesmerism became a "medical and commercial breakthrough" in 1850s Boston, and young women flocked to these "mesmeric healers" (Rodgers 129). In a letter to his then fiancée Sophia Peabody, Hawthorne pleads with her to avoid such practices—lest she allow herself to be "bruited abroad in connection with these magnetic phenomena" (*Letters* 590). Perhaps because Hawthorne was repulsed by mesmerism and its consequences, he continually interrogated writing's mesmeric qualities within his fiction. In *Seven Gables,* Hawthorne explores how a narrator is able to violate and entrance the

[5] See Samuel Chase Coale's *Mesmerism and Hawthorne*. Coale convincingly argues that mesmerism can be located in—among others—*The Blithesdale Romance*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Marble Faun*, "Young Goodman Brown," "The Minister's Black Veil," "Rappaccini's Daughter, and "The Birth-mark."

soul. Much like the mesmerist, the story's narrator controls the Pyncheons and his readers using spellbinding language. He distracts and entrances us, his long diatribes shaping our perceptions of the story's events and characters. Alongside this commanding language, the narrator suggests he is both embodied and disembodied, singular and ubiquitous. By occupying a liminal space between character and storyteller, he can enact his will without being ostentatious. While scholars have examined Hawthorne's recurrent use of mesmerism, this essay is the first to examine how Hawthorne's narrator—with his transient embodiment—influences *Seven Gables'* plot through mesmeric language.

I will first discuss Hawthorne's narrative style, how his narrators are embodied, and how mesmerism influences how we interpret these narrators. Then, I will briefly discuss how Hawthorne's tone in the preface—which greatly resembles the tone of the narrator in *Seven Gables*—should not dissuade us from examining the narrator's rhetoric or cause us to assume that the narrator is Hawthorne. Comprising the majority of my analysis, I will examine how the narrator controls his readers, actively threatens the Pyncheon family members, and characterizes himself as a threat to all participants in the story—whether they are readers or characters. Through this analysis, I hope to further the ongoing critical conversation regarding Hawthorne's use of narrative mesmerism and its interconnectedness with the structure, style, and theme of *Seven Gables*.

Throughout Hawthorne's body of work, his narrators do not simply exist outside of the story. Instead, they influence the course of events in the text as characters. For instance, the narrator of "Wakefield" is an active participant in the plot of the short story and invests himself in the actions of the story's protagonist. However, the narrator

"cautiously avoids directly disclosing his private intention for developing Wakefield's character in the manner that he does" (Piacentino 72). Hawthorne employs a similar technique in "The Custom House" since the narrator is both Hawthorne and someone else entirely. While Hawthorne did indeed work in a custom house, he did not actually discover a document that becomes *The Scarlet Letter*. This narrative framing allows the narrator to function as the author of the text and an outside observer—a character invested in Hester Prynne, Puritanism, and legends of witchcraft.

I do not mean to suggest that the way Hawthorne experiments with omniscient narration is unique to his writing. Hawthorne's style of narration greatly resembles free indirect speech—a style characteristic of Goethe and Austen—where characters' feelings emerge through third-person narration (Pascal 34). Likewise, Harriet Beecher Stowe's narrator in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sometimes shifts into second-person omniscient narrations in order to—much like *Seven Gables*' narrator—coerce readers. However, Hawthorne's contemporaries within the Gothic genre, such as Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and Edgar Allan Poe, composed their works to be either exclusively first-person or third-person rather than combining the two. In contrast, Hawthorne's narrators often switch between first-person and third-person—allowing them to occupy a liminal space between character and all-knowing storyteller.

Hawthorne's approach to narration is especially noteworthy because these transiently-embodied narrators engage with mesmerism. Taylor Stoehr and Samuel Chase Coale, among others, have noted that Hawthorne integrates mesmerism in his works to explore the act of writing. Stoehr argues that Hawthorne explores the link between

writing and mesmerism in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. As Stoehr writes, mesmerism "expressed [Hawthorne's] own ambivalent positions on questions of will, imagination, and reality" (63). Moreover, Hawthorne considered the ambiguities of writing and mesmerism as inherently similar as exercises in language and imagination. Whereas Stoehr attributes Hawthorne's use of mesmerism to only two texts, Coale underscores mesmerism's presence in a wide range of Hawthorne's stories, a presence that enriched the "structure and texture" of these works:

> Despite Hawthorne's fervent objections to mesmerism and spiritualism, the processes and aims of pseudosciences attracted him to such an extent that they significantly influenced his practice of writing romances, as evidenced in several of his tales, the four major romances, and, to a lesser extent, in the unfinished manuscripts. He constructed texts that not only participate in the very processes he found appalling but also constitute a form of mesmeric expression in and of themselves. (*Mesmerism and Hawthorne* 7)

Coale underscores how Hawthorne's use of "long clauses and a hypnotic litany of language" in the first paragraph of *Seven Gables* "establishes his own concentrated gaze upon his material" and crafts his "linguistic spell" (29). Likewise, Yu-wei Bu and Rui Li argue that Hawthorne uses language as a "medium through which the mesmerist exercises his will" (491). Mesmerism undoubtedly pervades the plot, style, and thematic underpinnings of Hawthorne's works. However, it has yet to be acknowledged that Hawthorne's narrator in *Seven Gables* functions as a mesmeric *character*.

Critics concerned with mesmerism in *Seven Gables* overlook how the narrator is intermittently embodied and thus operates as a character. This reading suggests that mesmerism is used in the novel, not only as a tool to explore the writing process, but also

as a plot device enacted by the narrator. In *Seven Gables*, the narrator is able to "penetrate interiors but nevertheless moves uncomfortably about the house, loitering at doorways, sometimes uneasy about his access, sometimes bemoaning his lack of access, and sometimes relying on his imagination to fill in the gaps" (Kohler 79-80). The narrator occupies liminal spaces and strives to influence the narrative rather than to just gaze over it, removed and merely conveying the accounts of others.

As early as *Seven Gables*' opening paragraph, Hawthorne's narrator suggests he can choose to shift between a corporeal and non-corporeal existence based on his language choices. As the narrator recounts, "On my occasional visits to the town aforesaid, I seldom fail to turn down Pyncheon-street, for the sake of passing through the shadow of these two antiquities,—the great elm-tree, and the weather-beaten edifice" (*Seven Gables* 5). By saying that he can navigate Pyncheon-street, the narrator asserts that he has the body and means to do so; thus he claims that he is an active and physically manifested participant in the novel. Throughout the text, the narrator is sometimes more or less embodied through his own will; he determines the space he occupies within the text. And in some respects, he determines how the characters and even the objects of the story are embodied.

Just after the reader learns of the feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules and is introduced to Hepzibah Pyncheon, the narrator explicitly references himself and his reader as disembodied entities. Through the early repetition of the word "our" in the narrative—" [o]ur story" and "our good fortune…" —the narrator hints at a communal relationship between himself, the reader, the Pyncheons, and the Maules (24, 25).

However, the narrator then makes it clear that the word "our" deceptively references only himself with the phrase "inasmuch as they could be audible to nobody, save a disembodied listener like ourself" (24). The narrator's use of "ourself"—combining the plural and seemingly inclusive "our" with the singular "self"—gestures toward the narrator's role as "our." Also, throughout the text, the narrator uses the words "our" and "we" instead of "my" and "I." The narrator views himself as both a singular and plural narrator that cannot be contained in a singular "I." Rather, he is one voice that seems to represent many. Also, the narrator reinforces a sense of fleeting embodiment and singularity by only using "my" once—the first time being in the first paragraph: "my occasional visits to the town aforesaid" (5). The only other time a narrator uses "my" in the novel is when Holgrave briefly adopts the role as narrator of the story.

While scholars acknowledge the narrator's embodiment, his authoritative instruction, and how mesmerism appears in the novel, these aspects of the text have not been viewed as working together to influence the plot. The narrator's "long character delineations," "flights into the past," and "musings over matters that are irrelevant to the action of the story" enhance the relationship between structure and theme in the novel (Dillingham 60). These peculiar narrational decisions often include and underscore bodily trauma, power, and control. Readers should be attentive to this language and question the identity of the narrator, his mesmeric powers, and his relationship to both the Pyncheons and the Maules.

Once it becomes clear that the narrator is more a character than a device used to convey the story, his motives come under question—especially when readers consider

how the narrator's mesmeric language functions in relation to the feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules. The novel's central conflict begins with Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew Maule's dispute over the control of land. Matthew Maule, during his execution for witchcraft during the Salem witch trials, addressed Pyncheon and—as Hawthorne's narrator describes—"uttered a prophecy, of which history, as well as fireside tradition, had preserved the very words.—'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!'" (*Seven Gables* 7). Maule's prophecy is realized with the mysterious death of Colonel Pyncheon, leading readers to wonder if Maule's prophecy was actually an act of witchcraft. Language is power in this narrative, and we see a similar violence and anger toward the Pyncheon family displayed by Hawthorne's narrator.

While it is difficult—if not impossible—to prove whether the narrator is a Maule, the narrator urges readers to speculate about the effect that language has on us and how the Maules mesmerize using speech. This concept of language as possession is particularly emphasized when the narrator says that "ancient superstitions, after being steeped in human hearts, and embodied in human breath, and passing from lip to ear, in manifold repetition, through a series of generations, become imbued with an effect of homely truth" (135). Like magic, language also shapes reality. Ideas become tangible and are then shaped by rearticulation. And eventually, a superstition becomes truth. Whether or not the narrator is a member of the Maule family is, in some ways, up to reader interpretation, but it is indeed an interpretive possibility. The narrator's choice to continually deny the autonomy of the Pyncheons leads us to speculate whether the

narrator is a member of the Maule family or simply understands that language is, in itself, a mesmeric tool he can use for his insidious plans.

In exploring the manipulative tone and entrancing, possessive language used by the narrator, it is tempting to simply view Hawthorne as the narrator. Even Herman Melville says that reading Hawthorne's fiction is an entrancing, mystical, yet imprisoning experience. Of Hawthorne's "wild, witch voice," Melville says, "The soft ravishments of the man spun me round in a web of dreams, and when the book was closed, when the spell was over, this wizard 'dismissed me with but misty reminiscences, as if I had been dreaming of him'" (2571-2). True, the narrator's forceful attitude and spell-like charm in *Seven Gables* come as little surprise given Hawthorne's tendencies as a writer. These characteristics are even less surprising given Hawthorne's instructive preface to the novel. Hawthorne writes:

> The reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of the narrative…Not to speak of other objects, it 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….The personages of the tale…are really of the author's own making….He would be glad therefore, if…the book may be read strictly as a romance…. (4)

Here, Hawthorne directs his readers to interpret *Seven Gables* as merely a series of imaginary events in a romance narrative. Part of this forceful instructiveness is for self-preservation as an author. But Hawthorne's authority over his readers strongly resembles the authority of *Seven Gables*' narrator. Even though Hawthorne's preface resembles the narrator's own forcefulness, the narrator's influence has consequences for both interpretation and trajectory of the novel's plot.

Because Hawthorne attempts to evoke a certain reaction from readers, we should wonder at similar language in his narrative. Although the preface does not mix autobiographical and fictional narrative elements as does *The Scarlet Letter*'s "The Custom House," the preface to *Seven Gables* does influence the interpretation of the novel. Reading Hawthorne's manipulative tone in the preface could convince readers that Hawthorne is simply domineering toward his readers and that this tendency bleeds over into the novel. This reading encourages readers to overlook the narrator's intentions. In my reading of *Seven Gables*, I am less concerned with Hawthorne's tone in the preface and instead investigate how the tone of the narrator influences the novel's mesmerism-driven plot.

Attributing the narrator's tone to Hawthorne's own habits unnecessarily characterizes the narrator as Hawthorne, limiting the interpretive possibilities available to readers. Instead, I favor a reading focused on the narrator of *Seven Gables* as one who is uniquely positioned in a story about mesmeric possession; he is a character who functions all too independently to be Hawthorne or an outside observer to the story's events. Therefore, in *Seven Gables* Hawthorne extends readers' expectations of narration. He imbues his Gothic romance with mesmeric language, and he plays with the idea of controlling his reading; if we can't trust the text, what keeps us reading? Why do we believe the things our narrators tell us?

Even as early as *Seven Gables*' first chapter, Hawthorne's unidentified narrator repeatedly directs his reader. In doing so, the reader creates an ideal reader who opposes the Pyncheons and submits to the logic of the narrator. The narrator explains that "since

the reader must needs be let into the secret, he will please to understand, that, about a century ago, the head of the Pyncheons found himself involved in serious financial difficulties" (23). The narrator mentions that the reader needs to know the secrets of the Pyncheons. In pointing out his narrative choices, the narrator shows that he carefully chooses his rhetorical moves in order to most effectively communicate with his ideal audience. After establishing the reader's presence, the narrator repeatedly addresses his own expectations about how the reader will perceive the story. To this end, the narrator seemingly undermines the reader by either directing the reader's interpretation or correcting it.

To govern the reader's interpretation of the text, the narrator also uses the phrase "The reader may" in the first chapter, which demonstrates the narrator's desire for control over his reader. The narrator states, "The reader may deem it singular that the head carpenter of the new edifice was no other than the son of the very man from whose dead grip the property of the soil had been wrested" (9). Here, the narrator showcases the seemingly correct reader reaction to the carpenter. Also, while "the reader may" initially resonates as a gesture of possible interpretation for the reader, the phrase also can mean that the narrator is giving readers permission to evaluate the carpenter's identity as remarkable. Readers are *allowed* to view the situation this way. Thus, the reader appears subordinate to the narrator. Furthermore, the narrator treats the reader as a vessel into which he can impress his own thoughts and opinions.

In order to further diminish reader agency, the narrator condescends to the reader in other circumstances. The narrator states, "These words, however, had not the

inhospitable bluntness with which they may strike the reader; for the two relatives, in a talk before bedtime, had arrived at a certain degree of mutual understanding" (54). Rather than taking responsibility for perhaps misrepresenting the communication, the narrator blames the reader for failing to interpret the narrative accurately.

When not influencing the reader's interpretation or undermining it, the narrator acknowledges the great lengths he goes to in order to communicate the story effectively. He claims that "[t]his character—which showed itself so strikingly in everything about him, and the effect of which we seek to convey to the reader—went no deeper than his station, habits of life, and external circumstances" (42-3). In this passage, the narrator attempts to persuade us that he is catering to the reader and that he is a figure we should trust—even if he does not convey the story objectively. Moreover, the narrator makes himself present in the story again by articulating his role in the storytelling process. The narrator suggests that we should trust him through the use of strategically-placed humility. He says that "if we fail to impress it suitably upon the reader, it is our own fault, not that of the theme—here is one of the truest points of melancholy interest that occur in ordinary life" (29). The narrator seems to take responsibility here for his shortcomings, but how genuine is this confession? Further, he attempts to persuade us that he has neither malice nor an ulterior motive. The narrator purposely expresses insecurity to his reader in a manner that does not aid the interpretation of plot. Rather, the narrator carves out a space for himself to act and to be acknowledged within the text.

The narrator repeatedly conveys self-conscious, reader-critical asides. As a result, Hawthorne communicates that the narrator is conscious of his influence over his readers.

The narrator explains that the "author needs great faith in his reader's sympathy; else he must hesitate to give details so minute, and incidents apparently so trifling, as are essential to make up the idea of this garden-life" (107). Here, it appears that the narrator is complimenting the reader; it seems he views his audience as critical thinkers. But he also communicates a profound awareness of his word choices. He is acutely aware of language's influence. Therefore, this sentiment reinforces the idea that the narrator is self-aware and therefore responsible for his often directive, diminishing, and—in some instances—violent language. We can assume that the moments he belittles the reader were intentional. Moreover, his self-deprecation is purposeful.

The narrator also suggests his affinity for manipulation by insinuating that his words can affect the reader. He writes that a "certain remarkable drowsiness (wholly unlike that with which the reader possibly feels himself affected) had been flung over the senses of his auditress" (150). Here, the narrator suggests that he has the power to control the drowsiness of the reader through the style of his own narration. The narrator understands (and takes advantage of) the mental and physical effects his work has over his audience.

Throughout *Seven Gables*, the narrator portrays the bodies of the Pyncheon family as flawed and counterintuitive. Hepzibah, Clifford, Judge Pyncheon, Alice, and even Phoebe suffer due to their self-betraying bodies. While the character may indeed exhibit bodily disfunction, the narrator characterizes their flaws in a way that emphasizes their vulnerability and illustrates the violent acts that could potentially be done to them. The narrator revels in imagining their suffering. For example, Hepzibah's body is one of the

central issues of her characterization—her eyesight and facial expressions often betraying her. Hepzibah's scowl, according to the narrator, "had done [her] a very ill office, in establishing her character as an ill-tempered old maid" and the scowl itself is a result of her near-sightedness (26). While I agree with Gillian Brown that "Hepzibah's shopkeeping demonstrates the bodily risks in labor, the ways labor continually exposes and emphasizes the body," the unwieldiness of Hepzibah's body is emphasized by the narrator in insidious ways (Brown 81).

The narrator exercises power through language when he says, "Never before had she had such a sense of the intolerable length of time that creeps between dawn and sunset, and of the miserable irksomeness of having aught to do, and of the better wisdom that it would be, to lie down at once, in sullen resignation, and let life, and its toils and vexations, trample over one's prostrate body, as they may!" (50). As the narrator speaks for the reader in certain instances, the narrator speaks for Hepzibah here. Rather than saying that Hepzibah was merely tired and miserable, he portrays Hepzibah as vulnerable, mocks her, and emphasizes that it would be better for her to submit than to continue trying. We cannot be sure that these thoughts attributed to Hepzibah are accurate portrayals of her feelings. Also, because the narrator oscillates between portraying himself as a real, embodied person and a disembodied entity, we must question how he knows Hepzibah's feelings so well.

The narrator also portrays Clifford in a way that problematizes his weakened body. The narrator infantilizes Clifford, saying, "He himself, as was perceptible by many symptoms, lay darkly behind his pleasure, and knew it to be a baby-play, which he was to

toy and trifle with, instead of thoroughly believing" (107). By describing Clifford this way, the narrator manipulates how readers view him. Furthermore, like in the instance of portraying Hepzibah as being trampled, the narrator depicts Clifford as submissive and vulnerable. The narrator also characterizes Clifford as frail when he says that Clifford has a "weak, tremulous, wailing voice, indicating helpless alarm, with no more energy for self-defense than belongs to a frightened infant" (93). By diminishing Clifford's power in this infantilizing description, the narrator gains power by using a rhetoric of domination.

The narrator further insults Clifford by discussing his own superiority to this child-like character. More specifically, the narrator describes Clifford watching the procession as a sad reflection of his ineptitude, saying that nothing is more deficient in picturesque features than a procession, seen in its passage through narrow streets." He continues that the "spectator feels it to be fool's play" and that "in order to be majestic, it should be viewed from some vantage point, as it rolls its slow and long array through the center of a wide plain" (118). This "remoteness," for the narrator, "melts all the petty personalities, of which it is made up…into one broad mass of existence…with a vast homogenous spirit animating it. (118) In this passage, the narrator self-aggrandizes by alluding to the superiority of entities who can encompass multiple identities. Like the procession, the narrator—in some instances—is not just one person. As acknowledged earlier, the narrator most often refers to himself as "we"—not "I." As the narrator romanticizes this form of existence, he proceeds to mock Clifford for gazing at something with such vast multiplicity:

> But, on the other hand, if an impressible person, standing alone over the brink of one of the processions, should behold it…as a mighty river of life…he would hardly be restrained from plunging into the surging stream of human sympathies. So it proved with Clifford…At last, with tremulous limbs, he started up, set his foot on the window-sill, and, in an instant more, would have been in the unguarded balcony…But his companions, affrighted by his gesture…seized Clifford's garment and held him back. (118)

The narrator describes Clifford as "impressible" and "alone" as he attempts to "plung[e] into the surging stream of human sympathies" (118). Although the narrator tries to characterize this moment as evidence of Clifford's mental weakness, it is through this plunge that Clifford attempts to reclaim power over his body by trying to fling himself out of a window. Clifford "fantasizes about re-entering society" by destroying his body (Castiglia 202). Jumping out of the window, for Clifford, means eluding the body-controlling curse over the Pyncheon family members. But instead of characterizing it that way, the narrator makes it seem as if Clifford is so overwhelmed by vastness—vastness that the narrator sometimes possesses—that he submits himself. Based on the way he describes Hepzibah, this submission is the goal of his narrational style.

The narrator once again mocks Clifford and uses threatening language after Clifford declares that he could become a better man by breaking his own body. "Possibly, in some sense," the narrator explains, "Clifford may have been right. He needed a shock; or perhaps he required to take a deep, deep plunge into the ocean of human life and to sink down and be covered by its profoundness, and then to emerge, sobered, invigorated, restored to the world and to himself. Perhaps, again, he required nothing less than the great final remedy—death!" (119). The problem is not that the narrator agrees with Clifford; Clifford does not desire death if he cannot be reinvented as a new man after

hurling himself out of a window. Rather, the narrator's choice to vividly describe the pain Clifford could experience is troubling. The narrator need not illustrate the consequences as a "deep, deep plunge" or to glorify death as a "great final remedy" for Clifford. The narrator seems to take joy in the idea of Clifford's death.

Like Hepzibah and Clifford, Judge Pyncheon is also a victim of his own body. Though he is powerful and intimidating, he is unable to control his facial expressions. His face often fluctuates between his intimidating glare and his benevolent face. The narrator says, "On raising her eyes, Phoebe was startled by the change in Judge Pyncheon's face. It was quite as striking, allowing for the different for scale, as that betwixt a landscape under a broad sunshine and just before a thunderstorm…" (85). Judge Pyncheon's face often betrays his motives. According to Alan Trachtenberg, Holgrave, a "descendant of the wronged Maules and privy to the ancestral gift of witchcraft…knows the 'secret' written on the 'merest surface' of Judge Pyncheon's self-betraying face" and can make this secret emerge with the use of the daguerreotype (54).

Judge Pyncheon is also a victim to his body because he resembles Colonel Pyncheon. The narrator describes Judge Pyncheon "staring with what seemed to be angry alarm; for the very frown of the old Puritan darkened through the room as he spoke" (160). The narrator furthers the idea that Judge Pyncheon's face is not his own, though at the expense of Hepzibah, who is characterized as insane for thinking so, when he says that "Hepzibah almost adopted the insane belief, that it was her old Puritan ancestor, and not the modern Judge, on whom she had just been wearing the bitterness of her heart. Never did a man show stronger proof of the lineage attributed to him, than Judge

Pyncheon, at this crisis, by his unmistakable resemblance to the picture in the inner room" (164-5). The narrator explains this again when Judge Pyncheon enters Hepzibah's shop: The fantasy would not quit her, that the original Puritan, of whom she had heard so many somber traditions…had now stepped into the shop" (86). Judge Pyncheon is continually compared with the enemy of the Maule family, which foreshadows his demise. Judge Pyncheon's body is not characterized as his own; therefore, his fate is seemingly dictated by having a body that looks like the accursed Colonel Pyncheon.

The narrator is more ostensibly antagonistic when he insults the dead Judge Pyncheon. And in his verbal attacks, the narrator suggests his antagonism toward the Pyncheon family as a whole. The narrator mocks Judge Pyncheon's dead body, saying:

> Rise up, Judge Pyncheon! The morning sunshine glimmers through the foliage, and, beautiful and holy as it is, shuns not to kindle up your face. Rise up, thou subtile, worldly, selfish, iron-hearted hypocrite, and make thy choice whether still to be subtile, worldly, selfish, iron-hearted, and hypocritical, or to tear these sins out of thy nature, though they bring the life-blood with them! The Avenger is upon thee! Rise up, before it be too late! (199)

Although the narrator urges Judge Pyncheon to rise, he follows this comment with violent language and insults—saying that the sunshine "shuns not to kindle up your face." Through this phrase, the narrator still create the image of the sun burning the judge's face. The narrator then calls him "subtile," selfish" and an "iron-hearted hypocrite." He then asks the Judge to rise and "tear these sins out of thy nature," knowing full well that the Judge is dead—killed in the same mysterious way as the cursed Colonel Pyncheon. The narrator continues this mocking, saying: "What! Thou art not stirred by this last appeal? No, not a jot! And there we see a fly…Canst thou not brush the fly away? Art

thou too sluggish? Thou man, that hadst so many busy projects, yesterday! Art thou too weak, that wast so powerful? Not brush away a fly! Nay, then, we give thee up!" (200). By deciding to "give thee up" and calling the judge too weak, the narrator once again exerts power over the Pyncheons and demonstrates his dislike for them.

Even Phoebe cannot escape the problem of bodies within the Pyncheon family. Hepzibah insinuates that Phoebe is exempt from the curse of the family (and also the class benefits of being a Pyncheon) when she says "What I nice little body she is! If she could only be a lady, too!—but that's impossible! Phoebe is no Pyncheon. She takes everything from her mother" (59). Phoebe even calls herself a "cheerful little body" (55). While these two sentiments positively describe Phoebe's body, according to the narrator, "Her activity of body, intellect, and heart impelled her continually to perform the ordinary little toils that offered themselves around her" (98). Phoebe—according to the narrator—is a victim of her own determination to care for Hepzibah and Clifford.

Phoebe is also vulnerable to Holgrave's "spell." The narrator says, "Let us allow [Holgrave] integrity, also, forever after to be confided in; since he forbade himself to twine that one link more which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble…He made a slight gesture upward with his hand" (151). Through the narrator's descriptions of Phoebe as a subservient, vulnerable, "body," he suggests that she, too, lacks control over her body—even if this lack of control is interrelated with a dearth of agency and the expectation for her to be a caregiver.

As he does with Hepzibah, Clifford, and Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne's narrator uses threatening language—although subtle and disguised as concern in this instance when talking about Phoebe's body. He writes:

> A flower, for instance, as Phoebe herself observed, always began to droop sooner in Clifford's hand, or Hepzibah's, than in her own….Unless she had now and then indulged her brisk impulses, and breathed rural air in a suburban walk…had occasionally obeyed the impulse of nature…unless for such moral medicines as the above, we should soon have beheld our poor Phoebe grow thin, and put on a bleached, unwholesome aspect, and assume strange, shy ways, prophetic of old-maidenhood and a cheerless future. (124)

Yet again, the narrator uses language to illustrate control. He says that imagines a flower wilting in the hands of Clifford and Hepzibah; and because Phoebe, too, is understood as a wilting flower this description characterizes Phoebe as delicate, vulnerable, and easily manipulated. To add insult to injury, the narrator says that unless Phoebe were moral, she would "grow thin," have a "bleached" appearance, assume the qualities of an old maid, and have an unhappy life altogether. Consequently, the narrator emphasizes, in detail, the violence that could be done to Phoebe—and particularly Phoebe's body—exerting, in some respect, his own desire for harm to come to the Pyncheons.

Before taking control over the narration to explain to Phoebe the horrors done unto Alice Pyncheon by Matthew Maule, Holgrave alludes to the power that language and storytelling has in manipulating others. Holgrave states, "'Yes, Miss Phoebe Pyncheon, among the multitude of my marvelous gifts, I have that of writing stories….In my humourous line, I am thought to have a very pretty way with me; and as for pathos, I am as provocative of tears as an onion! But shall I read you my story?'" (133). The

primary narrator's references to the power he can exert over the Pyncheons and his readers through language are reinforced by Holgrave articulating similar desires. Holgrave is a Maule possessing mesmeric powers, so why not the narrator? Or, if the narrator has no powers, which is a possibility, what does this tell us about narration? It is a complicated question, yet we know that Holgrave believes and invests in storytelling's ability to influence one's body—even if it is just to make one cry.

Holgrave continues by illustrating to Phoebe Matthew Maule's mesmeric trance controlling Alice. Holgrave says that Alice was "Maule's slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand fold, than that which binds its chain around the body of Matthew Maule" (149). This scene of bondage and control governed by language recalls the sexual undercurrent embedded in the mesmerizing process Hawthorne would have witnessed. As Fuller observes, mesmerism as it was defined in the mid-nineteenth century "required a passive female to willingly yield all mental resistance and to comply with the physical gestures of an active, dominating male" (33). But what dictates a willing participant when her mental fabric can be manipulated? As Holgrave explains, Matthew Maule "inherited some of his ancestor's questionable traits" and was "fabled, for example to have a strange power of getting into people's dreams, and regulating matters there according to his own fancy, pretty much like the stage-manager of a theatre" (135). Holgrave compares mysticism to managing a stage and thus to the creation of narrative. Subsequently, Holgrave suggests that narrational style and characterizing others through language is its own form of magic. Additionally, Holgrave introduces the most explicit example of mesmeric dominance and submission in the text.

While not all of Maule's control over Alice is spoken, language can be used to control her. Holgrave says that Matthew would command "Alice, laugh!" and that "the carpenter, beside his hearth, would say; or perhaps intensely will it, without a spoken word" (149). But after Holgrave finishes telling the story to Phoebe, we find her entranced. The primary narrator returns, replacing Holgrave as narrator, and says, "It was the effect, unquestionably of the mystic gesticulations, by which he had sought to bring bodily before Phoebe's perception the future of the mesmerizing carpenter" (150). Holgrave continues to reinforce the mystical power of language that the narrator himself enacts throughout the novel.

Shortly after explaining the darker consequences of language, Holgrave utters his own sort of curse to Phoebe. He proclaims, "Whatever health, comfort, and natural life, exists in the house, is embodied in your person. This blessing came along with you, and will vanish when you leave the threshold" (153). This forewarning eventually comes true as the seven-gabled home becomes miserable once Phoebe leaves. Holgrave seemingly hopes for the household's misery and casts a successful spell to manifest his desire. As Phoebe says, "And let me tell you frankly, Mr. Holgrave, I am sometimes puzzled to know whether you wish them well or ill" (154). Like Holgrave, the narrator wishes ill upon the Pyncheons—often characterizing their bodies in demeaning ways, mocking them, and using language in ways that mimic the magical powers of the Maules.

Despite how often Phoebe questions Holgrave's intentions, she is entranced by him. And by the novel's conclusion, they marry. On the surface, this marriage appears as a strangely simple resolution to the conflict between the Pyncheons and the Maules.

Indeed, as Shawn Michelle Smith observes, it seems that their union "transforms class conflicts into new gender relations," Holgrave restrains himself from violating Phoebe's soul, and Phoebe allows Holgrave to "look into her heart and claim it as his own" (Smith 28). When Holgrave asks if Phoebe loves him, she responds, "You look into my heart….You know I love you!" (216). But given the mesmeric underpinnings of the novel, we must further question Holgrave's intentions.

Like the novel's narrator, Holgrave can control and enchant his audience. And in this case, his audience is Phoebe, his supposed object of affection. It is interesting that Hawthorne specifically feared losing his love to the mesmerist's charms. In a letter to his then fiancée Sophia Peabody dated October 18th, 1841, Hawthorne warns of the dangers of mesmerism as it relates to love and violation:

> But, belovedest, my spirit is moved to talk with thee to-day about these magnetic miracles, and to beseech thee to take no part in them. I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on thee, of which we know neither the origin nor consequence, and the phenomena of which seems rather calculated to bewilder us….If I possessed such a power over thee, I should not dare to exercise it; nor can I consent to its being exercised by another. Supposing that this power arises from the transfusion of one spirit into another, it seems to me that the sacredness of an individual is violated by it. (*The Letters* 588)

Smith's reading of Holgrave's resistance certainly makes sense given Hawthorne's own stance on mesmerism as the violation of the soul. If Holgrave indeed loves Phoebe, then he should hesitate to control her as Alice was controlled. But the following day, Hawthorne writes to Sophia, "Most beloved, what a preachment have I made to thee! I love thee, I love thee, I love thee, most infinitely. Love is the true magnetism" (590). Hawthorne separates mesmeric control from the magnetism of affection, which is

interwoven in the circumstances of Holgrave and Phoebe's marriage. What is true magnetism but the hypnotic, consuming nature of love, at least for Hawthorne?

In *Seven Gables*, Hawthorne gives us no answers and leaves us searching through ambiguities. Just as Hawthorne professes to know little of mesmerism or how to navigate the difficulties of writing, his readers know little of the novel's truths. But it is clear that Hawthorne's novel explores how narration, in many ways, allows the storyteller to control his audience. Hawthorne also illustrates the ways we can be controlled, whether through insidious methods such as hypnosis or through love. However, these distinctions are muddled. We can never know the true intentions of any of the novel's characters because *Seven Gables* is filled with threats of mind-control, violence enacted on the body, and magic executed both verbally and nonverbally.

Additionally, Hawthorne's exploration of narration leads us to ponder the identity of the narrator as a character. Like the Maules, the narrator dislikes the Pyncheons and manipulates them. Viewing the narrator as a member of the Maule family influences the interpretation of the narrative in that we have to be wary of his biases. Also, we must question our own relationship to the narrator as readers. Does the narrator entrance us as Matthew Maule entrances Alice Pyncheon by having readers experience long diatribes, flashbacks, and sentiments aiming to capture our sympathy? Furthermore, from a plot standpoint, does Holgrave really love Phoebe, or will his supposed love for her inevitably destroy her? We simply cannot answer these questions.

In considering the novel's broader implications, Hawthorne makes us wary of our narrators by comparing narration with the mesmeric powers he feared. We cannot dismiss

the third-person omniscient narrator of *Seven Gables* as a passive participant in the story; rather, he is always lurking on the outskirts of the narrative, reminding us of the power he exerts over us and over the plot. This analysis of *Seven Gables*—demonstrating Hawthorne's ability to liken transiently-embodied narration to mesmerism—should prompt scholars to question the mesmeric narrators in Hawthorne's works.

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