

GUY-MCALPIN, CHARLES T., M.A. *The Tattooed Treatise: Breaking Down Mind/Body Binaries in Moby-Dick* (2009)
Directed by Dr. Karen Kilcup. 28 pp.

Both physically and narratively, Moby Dick's body dwarfs all others in the eponymous novel by Melville, as the author devotes inordinate space to dissecting and explicating a whale's physical presence. Yet he explores other bodies too. In "The Tattooed Treatise: Breaking Down Mind/Body Binaries in *Moby-Dick*" I focus on human bodies, arguing that Melville used Queequeg, Ishmael and Ahab to contest contemporary bodily theories. From Calvinism and Transcendentalism to phrenology and Abolitionism, Melville was surrounded by discourses that competed in asserting the body's relationship to the mind.

By describing Queequeg's tattoos as a "complete theory," a "mystical treatise," and a "wondrous work in one volume," Ishmael explicitly textualizes the harpooner's body and dissolves the traditional opposition between body and mind; the body retains the mind's knowledge and the mind requires the body to convey its wisdom. This cohesive mind/body relationship directly opposes a separatist discourse like Melville's childhood Calvinism. Ahab's body is also unified with his mind, yet with starkly unharmonious implications: his severed leg scarred not only his body, but also his mind, leading the captain ultimately to calculated murder-suicide.

Using modern race and gender theory to interpret Melville's mind/body binaries, I argue that Ishmael struggles to choose between his allegiance to Ahab's corruption or Queequeg's harmony by developing awareness of his own body's performative nature. By textualizing his body with tattooed whale measurements (and leaving room for a

poem), Ishmael makes the body's fluid relationship with the mind explicit, asserting his allegiance not only to Queequeg's mind/body harmony but also to his body's performative possibilities. Melville thus dramatizes a model of mind/body unity that was decidedly radical for his contemporary sphere of ideas, and which remains so today.

GUY-MCALPIN, CHARLES T., M.A. Poetic Minds in Cloddish Soil: Hawthorne's Bodies in Contemporary Discourse (2009)
Directed by Dr. Karen Kilcup. 30 pp.

“Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom”:

Nathaniel Hawthorne thus establishes the Transcendentalist dream in *The Blithedale Romance* through his protagonist and narrator, Miles Coverdale. Coverdale's personal journey begins with youthful idealism but ends with wounded skepticism. In “Poetic Minds in Cloddish Soil: Hawthorne's Bodies in Contemporary Discourse,” I analyze Hawthorne's rejection of Transcendentalism in *Blithedale* through the lens of the mind/body binary, arguing that his romance undermines the tenability of this philosophical model.

Most modern scholars analyze bodies with reference to race, gender, and sexuality. In Hawthorne studies these readings usually focus on *The Scarlet Letter*, particularly on Hester's desexualized body, implicit slave narratives of subjugation, and Chillingworth's “raping” of Dimmesdale. Rather than contesting these theoretical perspectives, I suggest that their prominence causes us to systematically overlook other textualized bodily discourses. In *Blithedale*, Hawthorne critiques Emersonian Transcendentalism by interrogating the body's relationship to the mind.

When Coverdale says that his labor will unearth truth, he connects his body's toil to the mind's capacity for knowledge, clearly channeling Emerson; Transcendentalism depends on the possibility of poetic unity between body and mind. Coverdale aspires to this unity, but soon realizes its philosophical flaw: as he works harder and harder, his ability and desire to write and contemplate decreases, foreclosing a utopian access to

poetics and Nature. Hawthorne's interrogation of Transcendentalism is not limited to Coverdale. By exploring certain synecdochal images in other characters, particularly Westervelt's teeth and Zenobia's flowers, I show how Hawthorne repeatedly establishes mind/body binaries throughout the text while undermining their idyllic, transcendental possibilities.

THE TATTOOED TREATISE: BREAKING
DOWN MIND/BODY BINARIES
IN *MOBY-DICK*
AND
POETIC MINDS IN CLODDISH SOIL: HAWTHORNE'S
BODIES IN CONTEMPORARY
DISCOURSE

by

Charles T. Guy-McAlpin

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
2009

Approved by

Karen L. Kilcup
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair: Karen L. Kilcup

Committee Members: Alexandra Schultheis

Nancy Myers

May 6, 2009
Date of Acceptance by Committee

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INTRODUCTION

The following two papers explore the relationship between body and mind as they are constructed in nineteenth-century American literature. The first paper examines this mind/body binary through the lens of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, while the second focuses on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* and *Scarlet Letter*.

THE TATTOOED TREATISE:
BREAKING DOWN MIND/BODY BINARIES IN *MOBY-DICK*

Thanks to Tommo's primal fear of tattoos in *Typee*, the practice of body-modification has enjoyed a sustained conversation in Melville scholarship. The discussion is necessarily tinged, though, with an emphasis on tattoos as a site of violence to both the body and identity, thanks to Tommo's reactionary anxieties. But this antagonistic emphasis belies the alternative image that Melville offers through Queequeg in *Moby-Dick*. In this novel, the white protagonist overcomes his repulsion and becomes Queequeg's fast friend. Far less recognized, though, is the fact that Ishmael appropriates Queequeg's practice by tattooing whale measurements onto his arm. Melville shifts his emphasis, and tattoos transform from agent of violence to transmitter of knowledge. This alternate discourse allows a reading that focuses explicitly on the mind's interconnectedness with the body.

Melville famously describes Queequeg's tattoos as a "complete theory of the heavens and the earth," although no one can understand the language (366). The interplay between tattoos and language taps into an argument over the binary opposition between body and mind that is prevalent in both Melville's culture and our own. I contend that Queequeg's tattoos function as a response to the dominant bodily discourses of Melville's time, including Calvinism, Transcendentalism, and phrenology and race; and that modern gender and race theorists like Judith Butler and Hortense Spillers offer unique insights

into these contemporary ideas because of their emphases on bodily performance.

Queequeg's tattoos explicitly perform the mind's relationship with the body.

The significance of Queequeg and Ishmael's tattoos requires some framing. Thus, I will begin with scholarly and historical context to justify this discussion of the body, followed by a look at Ahab, whose maimed body figures most prominently in the novel (at least among the humans). The discussion then moves to Queequeg and Ishmael, utilizing modern gender and race theory's attention to bodily discourses to explore the implications of these performances.

Scholars tend to focus their interests in the body on *Typee*; for example, Geoffrey Sanborn's Riverside edition offers a critical section on the practice of tattooing, wherein Nicholas Thomas describes tattooing as "violence to the body" (356). His description is literal as well as metaphorical, for the implementation required hammer and sharp bone dipped in ink. Tommo is "Horrified at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life," and his overwhelming fear colors the readings of modern scholarship (206).¹ Ishmael's friendship with Queequeg and subsequent willingness to tattoo himself freely is all the more remarkable in light of *Typee*. The most extensive research on the body in Melville scholarship appears in Samuel Otter's *Melville's Anatomies*. Otter deftly weaves together multiple cultural moments, from cannibalism to craniology to landscape paintings, in order to contextualize Melville's mission to represent the bodies of both humans and whales. While Otter's study reads the meanings of bodies, I am pivoting to a study that explicitly addresses the body's binary relationship with the mind.

¹ See also Otter, Wardrop, and Orr.

Melville establishes linked mind/body constructions throughout *Moby-Dick*. Queequeg's tomahawk pipe had "both brained his foes and soothed his soul" (92); Ahab's "soul" is "shut up in the caved trunk of his body" (131); and Ishmael believes that a "fasting body makes the body cave in; hence the spirit caves in; and all thoughts born of a fast must necessarily be half-starved" (82). The different word choices of "mind," "soul" and "spirit" should not distract from the fact that all function as counterpoints to the body. The categories all break down to a distinction between internal and external—abstract essence versus worldly matter.

By repeatedly emphasizing this binary opposition, Melville confronts competing philosophical and religious discourses that attempt to define the binary in mutually exclusive ways. The Calvinism of Melville's childhood emphasized death, damnation and original sin, treating the worldly life of the body as entrenched in carnal fallibility. Salvation was only possible by divorcing the redeemable inner self from the carnal outer self.² Transcendentalists (evolving from the Unitarian tradition) argued the opposing view that people were rational beings who could choose to better themselves and that evil was an overstated force in the world. Transcendentalists like Emerson were relatively uninterested in the body, while Whitman reveled in the oneness between mind and body. The differential emphasis from Calvinism, however, makes clear that for Transcendentalists the body and mind were idealistically unified, not tragically divided.³

² For a recent discussion on Melville and Calvinism, see Emory Elliott's "Wandering To-and-Fro": Melville and Religion"; T. Walter Herbert, Jr.'s *Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled*, while older, offers more extensive analysis.

³ See McLoughlin and Williams.

Melville's interest in and dissatisfaction with both sides of this debate appears explicitly in *Moby-Dick*: though technically a Quaker, Ahab clearly succumbs to the bleakest overtones of Calvinist fire and brimstone as he drives his crew toward destruction; and the novel's pervasive themes of death, terror and insanity resist Transcendentalist notions that life could ever be serene. Indeed, Emory Elliot argues that Melville critiques most religions and philosophies for empowering men like Ahab who believe they have special access to knowledge of good and evil and thus special privilege to act as they please (191). In contrast, Melville's experiences among non-white populations in his travels informs his distaste for transcendental idealism. His years in the diverse whaling populations inspired his harsh criticism of racist agendas throughout his body of work, which led him to anticipate McLoughlin's assessment of Emerson's Transcendentalism: "Although [Emerson's] Over-Soul theory is based on the natural divinity of *all* people, [...] in actuality it becomes apparent that he is really only applying his theories to a small, elect group" (31). Here McLoughlin's critique focuses on the marginalized lower classes of American society, yet for a man like Melville who is concerned with translating the humanity of other peoples to an American readership that still recognizes the legality of human property, cynicism toward Emerson's infinite progress would have seemed doubly naïve.

In the face of what one might call Emersonian elitism, Melville crafted Queequeg. The harpooner is neither white nor American, and ironically was interested in profiting from Western knowledge but gave it up when he realized "that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked" (60). Queequeg stands on the fulcrum between Ahab and

Ishmael. An impressionable young fellow, Ishmael is drawn to Ahab's monomaniacal power. Ahab's fury, though, is rooted in a highly divided mind and body, which threatens self-destruction. On the other hand, Queequeg harmoniously resolves the mind and body, disrupting the binary that commonly separates them.⁴ We will begin by considering Ahab in order to establish the dangers of a highly polarized mind/body schema, thus further emphasizing what Queequeg's synthetic perspective offers.

“The Tormented Spirit that Glared Out of Bodily Eyes”: Ahab

In his analysis of Melville's connection to Emerson, John Williams observes, “In no other character has Melville dramatized so completely what Emerson called the ‘divided state’ of man when out of harmony with the forces that created him” (21).

McLoughlin reads Melville as more critical of Emerson; at one point McLoughlin argues that Emerson believed “evil does not exist,” and later highlighting the evil ramifications of Ahab's “defective human will” (32; 73). Both critics note the frantic discontinuity inherent in Ahab's character—a discontinuity that we can fruitfully analyze along the mind/body binary.

The key word for Ahab is *monomania*, Melville's favorite descriptor for the captain. Although one might casually unpack this phrase to mean *singularly crazy*, it more accurately signifies “an exaggerated or fanatical enthusiasm for or devotion to one subject” (OED). It would be superficial to say that Ahab directs his monomaniac

⁴ This “harmony” is not to be confused with the pastoral idealism of Whitman's poetry, for Melville carefully tests Queequeg's mind/body against the harsh realities of a brutal whaling world. Indeed, Ishmael does not reveal the full import of Queequeg's tattoos until the harpooner prepares his coffin.

obsession at the one Moby Dick, for a closer look reveals the true object of obsession to be himself. Ahab's neurotic obsession with the whale thinly veils his "extreme doubt concerning the nature of [his] own identity" (Williams 63). Ahab, in other words, externalizes the rage rooted in his maimed body, which then becomes his maimed identity, onto the external whale. Perhaps here we should introduce Butler, for she argues in *Gender Trouble* that "'[i]nner' and 'outer' make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability" (170).⁵ By redirecting the object of his rage from his maimed body to his maiming assailant, Ahab stabilizes his identity, reinventing himself as a man capable of agency and power. In light of this disabled identity, Ahab's will to power offers a dramatic representation of Butler's assertion that bodies only hold meaning "in the context of power relations" (117). Ahab's power stems from the apparent inferiority of his body and yet proceeds from his rejection of that body.

What is this body's relation to power? Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that disability is characterized as "lack, loss, or exclusionary difference for which compensation is needed to achieve the equality justice promises" (106). Ahab's claim to power represents his need for normalcy—to recuperate the ever-evasive source of his former wholeness. Ahab must compensate for the castration of his body (an obvious enough image when Ahab's broken whale leg nearly pierces his groin in "Ahab's Leg") by redistributing emphasis away from his body and onto his vengeance-seeking intellect. But in favoring the mind at the expense of the body, Ahab negates the idealistic

⁵ One must of course be careful when reinscribing theories of gender to a more generalized reading of "identity." However, my attention to the body maintains the relative intent of Butler's argument by emphasizing the body as the site of identity's cultural performance.

possibilities of Emerson's reason-based philosophy, as Melville clearly shows: "He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down, and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it" (156). The unquenchable violence in Ahab's soul works against Emerson's claim in "The Transcendentalist" that "there is no crime but has sometimes been a virtue" (Myerson 370). When inequality, injustice, and violence are figured into accounts of the body, Transcendental concepts of the mind suddenly seem inadequate.

Ahab, then, epitomizes egocentrism. He pursues the whale to satiate his suicidal blood-lust, uninterested in the safety and profits of everyone else on the ship—"coercively regarding them as projections of his own will," as Louise Barnett puts it (114). This egocentric "will" equates to a total preference for the mind in the mind/body binary, and fittingly, Ahab's monomania manifests itself in overtly mind/body terms. Ahab's first encounter with Moby Dick ends with the whale biting off his leg. Ishmael conjectures that Ahab's madness developed during his sedentary months of recovery: "then it was, that his *torn body* and *gashed soul* bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad" (156, emphasis added). In one decisive motion Melville interrogates both Calvinism and Transcendentalism: Calvinism, because the corrupt mind becomes synonymous with the corrupt body, and Transcendentalism, because this supposed harmony between mind and body offers no hope for a brighter future. Instead, Ahab's violated body bleeds into his tortured mind, positing a horrifying and disabling unity. While Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* lines may seem similar—"if the body were not the

Soul, what is the soul?”—their tones differ dramatically: “The full-spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul” (19.1.8; 19.6.79).

In negotiating these contemporary ideologies, Melville stakes out his own ground by positing a union between body and soul, while simultaneously disrupting the optimism of that relationship by melding the two in common anguish. Instead of dissolving the binary harmoniously, as Queequeg does, Ahab broods on his physical and mental pain, returning to public life with his “natural intellect” possessing “a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one reasonable object” (157). Considering his emphasis on the mind’s intellect, Ahab rejects the body, locus of maimed defeat, and bends his entire being to his mind’s cunning so that he may find Moby Dick and inflict his revenge.

Ahab’s singular craziness suggests that a division between mind and body is unhealthy. Indeed, Melville revisits this split later when Ahab bursts out of his cabin in a sleepwalking state. Ishmael hypothesizes that Ahab’s suppressed, “eternal, living principle or soul [...] spontaneously sought escape” while Ahab’s monomania slumbered (169). Although it is tempting to digress into an id/ego reading here, we should note instead how the body is only a tool—the internally divided forces of good and evil duel, but the body remains an object of possession and thus victimization. Hortense Spillers’ discussion of slave persecution becomes oddly relevant for a white ship captain: “[slaves’] New-World, diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body*—a willful and violent [...] severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire” (457). Ahab’s

monomaniac mind besieged his body so that he could satisfy his suicidal lust for revenge, which ends in the body's desecration.

Ahab's ironic victimization is made possible by the dual forces of disability and Calvinism. "Representation tends to objectify disabled characters by denying them any opportunity for subjectivity or agency," Garland-Thomson argues (11). Although Ahab certainly enacts a powerful force of agency, that agency clearly registers as an overcompensation against the emasculating and disabling effects of his injury. Ahab effects this shift from mind to body by redeploying his identity as a Calvinist one. Marianne Noble calls attention to this dichotomy when describing the Calvinist distrust of "the body and the feelings as sites of corruption and confusion" (62). Ahab's disability made his body's corruption readily apparent, thus initiating his rejection of that body.

Melville makes clear that Ahab's insanity stems from the schism between his mind and body, and that his mind's total domination results, necessarily, in his body's subjugation and victimization. But in the mind/body context, Melville establishes Ishmael as Ahab's antithesis, providing one more answer to the oft-asked question, Why does Ishmael survive? Otter's praise of Melville's cetology chapters makes the answer evident: "It is about the epic poetics of the body. It is not about the gap between expendable surface and philosophical depth but about how bodies became saturated with meaning" (133). In the course of the novel Ishmael learns from Queequeg just how meaningful the body can be.

Thus far, this argument has focused on Ahab to call attention to the mind/body binary; Melville takes an even greater step, though, by constructing scenes where key

characters explicitly perform the meaning-saturated body that Otter describes. Even while Ahab splits mind from body, he undermines the move with a textual gesture: every day Ahab marks his navigational measurements onto his ivory leg (127). This image signals the interconnectedness between mind and body even as Ahab refuses such a concept; Queequeg and Ishmael posit the opposite model, and all three characterizations fall within the paradigm of bodily inscription.

“We cannibals must help these Christians”: Queequeg and Ishmael

Ishmael begins the novel in gloom: “With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship” (18). Much like Ahab, Ishmael looks to the ocean for death and glory. Before setting sail, he again voices his death-drive while sitting in a chapel and pondering over the empty tombs of sailors killed at sea: “Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me” (45). He argues that his body is irrelevant to his identity, and specifically that his body only represents a sedimentation of his true, internal self.⁶ Resonating with Ishmael’s phrasing of the sediment, Butler’s own argument resonates with Ishmael’s phrasing, with the same word choice, although divested of Ishmael’s faith in an autonomous identity: “But the more mundane reproduction of gendered identity takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence” (*Performative Acts* 524). Butler argues the body reflects the sedimentation of identity, which is itself a sediment of

⁶ “Sediment” is the OED’s explanation of the word “lees.” The word refers to the non-liquid material that settles in beer or wine, and thus carries the unsavory connotation of “dregs.”

social norms. Ishmael believes at this early stage in the novel that his identity has an essentialist coherence, but still concludes that his body merely reflects that identity, without being invested with any inherent meaning. This framework of the body partially anticipates Butler's argument that bodily significance derives more from identitarian politics than inherent bodily meaning.

Unfortunately, Ishmael's Calvinist bent leads him to the conclusion that death would be inconsequential, perhaps preferable, in light of this distinction. But the connection to Butler makes clear that Ishmael's fatalism should be fundamentally understood as an anxiety over the relationship between mind and body, particularly when the binary is understood through the discourse of Calvinism, which, when one is suicidal, seems to encourage a view of the body, and by extension the corporeal world, as expendable. Textually speaking, Ishmael parallels Ahab by shunning the mind's dependence on the body and seeking death; there are ruinous implications for both characters when the mind subjugates the body.

But thanks to Queequeg, Ishmael does not die; he even clings to life while his entire crew perishes around him. Much scholarship has been devoted to the significance of this union. "Ishmael makes himself over in Queequeg's image," while the latter propels Ishmael into "a different order of experience" (Elmore 87; Sanborn 248). Queequeg's sense of calm stimulates "healing and rescue and [...] Ishmael's survival" (Flory 97). Suffice it to say that while Ahab's decline begins when his leg is divorced from its body, Ishmael's recovery begins when he marries Queequeg.

While we can bracket off the fact of Queequeg's influence on Ishmael, as it is well established in current scholarship, we do need to examine what it is about the harpooner that transforms him. Ishmael first warms up to Queequeg upon observing that the islander was "thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself" (50). Most dramatically in the last phrase, Ishmael's language emphasizes an attraction to harmony. In the reflexive "equal to himself," Melville conveys that Queequeg's mind is in harmony with his body. We need only look at Ishmael's next revelation to underscore this claim: "I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (51). Melville's parallel between Ahab and Ishmael waxes and wanes here, for while Ahab allows his torn body and gashed soul to corrupt one another, Ishmael dissolves the splintered internal and maddened external into the soothing example of Queequeg. Body and mind melt together, establishing harmony.

I want to take a moment to defend against the notion that this harmony mirrors the idealism of Whitman. It is true that Queequeg represents a sort of ideal figure: princely native from a mythic isle, fully unified in marked contrast to the puritan American states. Yet the fact remains that Queequeg dies, along with the entire crew (Ishmael excepted). Queequeg's body represents harmony, but that harmony that works against an often-evil universe. The intent of Whitman's verse, particularly "I Sing the Body Electric," is to "strip significance strategically from the human body and restore an innocent wonder to its contemplation" (Otter 112). While my use of "harmony" may be tinged with a bit of a

soft filter, Queequeg's character is emphatically *not* stripping significance away from the body, but is in fact performing the opposite move by calling attention to the body in a mode of contemplation that is bereft of innocence. Ishmael explains Queequeg's body while the man is emaciated and dying and the entire crew careens toward doom; thus, the entire framework of this discussion is necessarily foregrounded by the character of the text as tragic.

Queequeg's influence on Ishmael may directly relate to harmony between mind and body, but what good is a harmony based on racial subjugation? After all, Melville's emphasis on Queequeg's body, simplicity, total good will towards white men, and even noble lineage all raise concerns over racial stereotyping and subjugation. Based on the changes Geoffrey Sanborn discovered between Melville's source text for Queequeg and Melville's own version, Sanborn argues convincingly that Melville actively rejected an imperialist view of native people.⁷ We see this anticolonial move most clearly when Queequeg explains his presence in the West:

he was actuated by a profound desire to learn among the Christians, the arts whereby to make his people still happier than they were; and more than that, still better than they were. But, alas! the practices of whalers soon convinced him that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father's heathens [...] Thought he, it's a wicked world in all meridians; I'll die a pagan. (59-60)

⁷ "The three most important changes are that Queequeg comes from an imaginary island, Kokovoko, rather than from New Zealand; that he changes his mind about "civilizing" his island; and that he saves a stranger, rather than his bosom friend, from drowning" (Sanborn 230).

Queequeg travels the world in search of spiritual improvements for his people, but ultimately concludes that his people are better off without Western influence. Although one need not feel totally comfortable with Melville's portrayal of Queequeg as an exotic, disposable benefactor of Ishmael's coherent identity, the corpus of Melville's work indicates that he sought to offer as much humanity to non-whites as to whites in his characterizations.⁸

Strictly speaking, the mind/body harmony that Ishmael learns from Queequeg is entirely reflective; my evidence has focused completely on Ishmael's interpretation of Queequeg's behavior, not on any explicit gesture Queequeg makes to assert this harmony in his own philosophy. But in the post-structuralist landscape, what could Queequeg possibly utter through the narration of Ishmael's speech that would hold any more validity than Ishmael's own narrated thoughts? His power over the narrative objectifies Queequeg's agency in a way that their friendship cannot unmake. Deconstruction thus plagues us with "undecidability" (Spillers 455). For Butler the problem is to represent women politically without essentializing them—to speak about women while refusing the sedimented category of *woman*. Melville's problem is to provide Queequeg with agency unmediated by Ishmael's narrative voice. Spillers articulates a similar need, to represent "ethnic" people in a way that steps outside of the colonial patriarchal discourse, by focusing on the body. In discussing the body's non-linguistic utterances—as opposed to Butler's contention in *Bodies that Matter* that bodily significance is always

⁸ *Typee* and *Benito Cerino* are good examples. Although laced with somewhat disturbingly racist language, the texts overtly call imperialism and slavery into question. See Marr.

predetermined by discourse—Spillers offers a more fruitful paradigm by which to read Queequeg’s bodily inscriptions.

Spillers argues that slave injustice is mapped onto the flesh of the body, which bears evidence of slaves’ incessant torture and serves as a “primary narrative” (457): “These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh” (458). Her premise—that a slave’s bodily mutilation functions as a non-linguistic narrative on race—can inform a reading of Queequeg, for he bears his own set of undecipherable hieroglyphics of the flesh. Queequeg’s tattoos serve the same purpose as Spillers’ mutilations, bearing “the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside” (458). But in her world that text is one of ripped flesh—mental pain mapped onto the body. On Queequeg, prince of a fictitious island that is safe from colonization, Melville reappropriates the bodily text to represent a peaceful harmony with the mind.⁹

⁹ There is of course a tension here between Butler and Spillers. Butler refuses to acknowledge that the body contains any signifying power that is not mediated by language: “Is there a physical body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide” (*Gender Trouble* 146). But Spillers pushes back, arguing that “The flesh is the concentration of ‘ethnicity’ that contemporary critical discourses neither acknowledge nor discourse away” (458). Spillers bolsters her contention against post-structuralist feminism by channeling Elaine Scarry who, in *The Body in Pain*, argues that “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). For Scarry and Spillers, flesh embodies an access to experience that operates outside the unifying construct of language. I choose to negotiate these conflicting perspectives by focusing on Spillers’ framing of her discourse as a search for “figurative possibility” to gain the “*potential* for gender differentiation” (455). This is not back-peddling on Spillers’ part, but rather an appeal to read what the bodily text offers without dismissing it as a construct of language, even if we can only understand that text through language. Spillers does not really contradict Butler, but rather resists Butler’s agenda to pull the discourse of gender away from the identitarian body, where it has remained historically entrenched. Taken together the two theorists offer, fittingly enough, a reading that balances the power of the mind with that of the body.

Melville links Queequeg's tattoos to his identity, as is evident when Queequeg copies down a mark from his arm as signature for the whaling expedition (85). But that is weak material compared to what Melville has in store. As Queequeg prepares for death he inscribes his tattoos onto the wood of his coffin, at which point Ishmael reveals their full import:

And this tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them. (366-7)

Knowledge has literally been inscribed onto Queequeg's body, which Melville explicitly describes as a text. Melville underscores the internal/external dichotomy when he describes the heart beating against the flesh. Mind and body are thus fused into a cohesive whole where the body retains the knowledge of the mind's domain, and the mind requires the body to transmit its knowledge.

Yet Queequeg's bodily signs are unreadable—both to him and everyone else. They contain knowledge, but they do not transmit knowledge. This very unreadability permits a Derridian reading, for the tattoos represent signified knowledge but cannot be mistaken for an essential signifier—they contain knowledge but that knowledge cannot be reinscribed. The tattoos make deconstruction explicit, forcing us to acknowledge that any significance we glean from the tattoos can only be a significance of our own devising. In turn, the body balances the mind's significance by appropriating its signs as tattooed knowledge. But the body holds those signs on its own terms; it does not

retransmit them through language. I indulge in this splash of structuralist theory because it shows how Melville has diffused the mind/body binary. His depiction demands a reading of the body and mind as interconnected, and yet tattoos do not make this reading inevitable. If the treatise were readable, translatable, identity would simply shift *from* the mind *to* the body. But by making the tattoos meaningful yet unreadable, he bleeds the binary in upon itself while maintaining an uncomfortable and irresolvable fluidity between the two spheres of agency, thus ensuring that neither holds power over the other. The resulting lack of boundaries unsettles what Toni Morrison characterizes as early America's obsession with order and hierarchy (37-38).

As with all objects of deconstructed meaning, Queequeg's body causes anxiety for those who want the body's identity to remain stable, and freedom for those who seek new modes of knowledge. To Otter the overall thesis of Melville's "corporeal chapters" is that "the body is a book of secrets, waiting to be read by the observer"; he adds, "[t]he inscrutable things are what Ahab hates, the things that resist searching examination" (135-36). Although he refers to cetology here, the analysis clearly carries over to Queequeg's body.¹⁰ This flesh epitomizes an inscrutable book of secrets, so it should come as no surprise that Ahab reacts to Queequeg's hieroglyphic body with such rage,

¹⁰ Otter draws upon extensive research into physiognomy and craniology to argue that Melville's contemporaries, epitomized by "The American School" of scientists, were keenly interested in discovering how one could read the body.

shouting, “Oh, devilish tantalization of the Gods!” (367). In his extreme mind/body split, Ahab despises this elusive knowledge that is mapped out on Queequeg’s flesh.¹¹

Ahab’s verbal lash at Queequeg brings us back to Spillers. This ego-driven fiend despises his bodily markings for the inaccessible truths they contain. For in the history of selfish, violent males of the mid-nineteenth century, bodily markings are “specifically externalized acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of *male* brutality” (Spillers 458). Bodily markings that do not reflect torture, that in fact posit superiority over this dominant white male, necessarily incite rage. Queequeg thus offers modern readers an idealized response to Spillers. Although his triumph is only fictitiously possible, it is triumph nonetheless. For Spillers, bodily hieroglyphics represent rape and torture, “an interiorized violation of body and mind” (458), and the desecrated bodies reflect a desecrated mind. But Queequeg’s character posits the opposite; his bodily hieroglyphics assert strength and soothing harmony with the mind. As a final flourish, they enrage the dominant class.

“[I] wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing”: Ishmael

As a barely-capable white sailor with neither grand lineage nor noble bravado, Ishmael cannot hope to make a gesture such as Queequeg’s. He cannot map a non-linguistic treatise upon his body (who would write it?); he cannot defy colonialism by his very existence (who would care?). He can only hope to embody some gesture that bears

¹¹ Otter discusses Ahab’s outburst by focusing more on the body’s significance, whereas I wish to connect that body to its polarized other (164)

the trace of Queequeg's harmonious presence. Ishmael accomplishes that feat by tattooing knowledge, specifically the measurements of a whale, onto his own body: "The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed" (346). Ishmael thus completes the triumvirate of inscriptions: Ahab marking latitudes on his whale-bone leg, Queequeg's tattooed treatise, and now Ishmael's whale-measurement tattoos. Ishmael's tattoos are not hieroglyphic; they do not challenge Derridian linguistics, but they do bear the trace of Queequeg's more profound mind/body performance—they explicitly perform the mind's connection to the body by imprinting knowledge on the flesh. To borrow from Margaret Homans' work in another context, he "is defending not the body alone, but the inseparability of body and mind, against a philosophical tradition that depends on a mind-body split" (80).¹²

When discussing Queequeg's body, it seemed logical to focus on Spillers' argument—the primary narratives of race and body required it. But Ishmael's tattooing gesture, his *performance* as I have cast it, offers the opportunity to reintegrate Butler into the argument. It would be disingenuous to claim that Ishmael's feeble numerical tattoos contain the same level of importance as Queequeg's richly textual body. Yet this feebleness also offers realism, allowing us to step off the mythically pristine island of Queequeg's birth (and thus the mythic origin of his tattoos) and onto the dry ground (or dry planks) of nineteenth-century America. And it is in this more realistic context that we

¹² Homans is speaking about Joyce A. Joyce's objection to black critics' willingness to adopt post-structuralist theory, which amounts to an "elitist 'rejection of race'" (79). The argument thus mirrors the tension between Butler and Spillers.

can read Ishmael's tattoos as performing the same function as Butler's conception of drag performance.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler agrees with feminists who critique drag as creating a "unified picture of 'woman,'" but argues that drag goes further by simultaneously exposing the falsely naturalized unity of heterosexual coherence: "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*" (175 author's emphasis). In essence, drag questions the coherence of the gender binary by convincingly performing its opposite. If a man can perform *woman* better than woman can, then what claims to validity does gender contain? Melville's homoerotic construction of the "marriage" between Ishmael and Queequeg establishes a similarly fluid conception of heteronormativity. But more abstractly, Ishmael's tattoos perform the same function. By mapping out knowledge onto the body, Ishmael subverts the notion that the internal and external are irrefutably distinct. By imprinting knowledge onto the body, Ishmael performs the body's opposite, thus parodying the very notion of its binary opposition.

Of course drag theory seems out of place, not least because it is shamelessly anachronistic. But what is drag's function? Drag subverts cultural norms that necessarily exclude and persecute those who cannot or will not comply. Melville's career was founded on this desire to push back against Western hegemony: "he began to see his 'civilization' as highly limited in its range of ideas and possibilities regarding every aspect of life and culture" (Elliot 176). Melville's project, as I have argued throughout, has been to complicate the binary discourses of contemporary America, particularly

discourses on the nature of the body and its relationship to the mind. Since Ishmael figures his radical act as an act of the body, it makes perfect sense to read that as a drag performance. Butler herself says, with no reference to gender, what drag works against: “What constitutes through division the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control” (170). This control of inner/outer is precisely what Ishmael opposes, which we see clearly when he famously, and somewhat ridiculously, revels in the glory of squeezing spermaceti: “Come: let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness” (323). Ishmael’s foray into this ecstatic transcendental moment of worldly unity, comical though it may be, proves that he has lost interest in binary thinking.

This notion of drag is not as ahistorical as it may seem. Phrenologists were essentially trying to make the reverse assertion; as Otter argues throughout *Melville’s Anatomies*, the pseudo-scientists of “the American school” were centrally concerned with proving that the outside represented the inside: “Melville’s uneasiness about tattooing [in *Typee*] reflects with a vengeance American obsessions with making the surface of the body speak eloquently of inherent human existence” (10). The ethnological conceit of the day, then, was to read the internal mind/body/soul through the lens of the external body. This central anxiety prefaces Tommo’s fear of tattooing as a fear of having one’s white civilized identity tarnished by the indelible mark of the Other. But Ishmael overcomes this fear that engulfs Tommo, making friends with the “savage,” even “marrying” him,

and even tattooing himself voluntarily. Ishmael's tattoos represent a profound rejection of the ethnological conceit that so overwhelms Tommo. But one can reject this ethnology in numerous ways: by demanding the two spheres of mind and body are distinct, as a Calvinist might prefer, or that the rational mind supersedes the corporeal body, as an Emersonian might protest. Instead, Ishmael goes radical by reversing the claim—by imprinting a piece of his mind onto his body. He thus posits a body whose identity is in flux—a body that can represent the mind, as phrenologists desire, but only because the mind contingently imprinted itself onto the body. This cyclical exercise calls the entire phrenological conceit into question.

Butler prefaces her section on gender performativity with a question: “How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?” (171). Of course she argues that the figured body is gender identity—suggesting an essentialized internal identity with a rhetorical wink—and that the function of drag is to continuously rehearse the fictitious cultural norm by performing its opposite. But in the mind/body binary, Ishmael's tattoos perform the same function. Ishmael literally figures the internal onto the surface of the body. The effect, as I have argued, is to lock the mind and body into a cyclically referential continuum that calls the entire binary into doubt, just as drag undermines gender even as it seems to be reinscribing it. The permanency of Ishmael's tattoos gestures not to the fixity of the body's meaning, but to its perpetual threat to become something different.

The very permanency of Ishmael's tattooed performance suggests that he performs drag better than modern drag does. Drag works within the framework of gender

as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (179). But the repetitive performance of gender identity also opens the space for that identity to fail, and change:

The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts [of gender continuity], in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. (179)

Ishmael’s tattoos call attention to this arbitrariness of identity as it is delineated between internal and external, and the permanency of his act—that very permanency that Tommo feared—ensures that his bodily parody will repeat perpetually and without interruption. By indelibly refiguring the mundane surface of his body, Ishmael ironically undermines the “illusion of an abiding [...] self” (Butler 179).

Ishmael began the novel as a man who was so entrenched in Western conceptions of the self that he literally did not care if his body were destroyed because he had so much faith in the unilateral primacy of his internal essence. But, as Stubb argues within our paradigm, “I’ve part changed my flesh since that time, why not my mind?” (384). Ishmael literally changes his flesh, and this alteration reflects a revitalized desire to live, which his squeezing-spermacetti scene clearly shows. Since Ishmael learned that desire from Queequeg, a desire he explicitly understands as predicated on mind/body harmony, he adopts the tattooing practice to stylistically repeat that harmony.

But why does it matter that we understand this harmony in terms of drag? Ishmael’s early state of mind was not only significant because of how it reflected an essentialist conception of identity, but because of how it aligned him with the suicidal

vengeance of Ahab's Calvinism. Although Ishmael opens himself up to a new subjective position by the end of the novel, Ahab cannot break free from his monomania. Some of Ahab's final words staunchly reassert the primacy of his will, and they register to the reader as a fatal error that foreshadows the tragedy to come: "Nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own *proper* and *inaccessible* being" (417, emphasis added). And within a few lines, Ahab maintains his position that this untouchable essence of self not only bears no relation to his body, but is diametrically opposed to its feebleness: "Accursed fate! That the unconquerable captain in the soul should have such a craven mate! [Starbuck expresses confusion] My body, man, not thee" (417-18). This division is what Ishmael's character works against. Through Ishmael, Melville offers a conception of the mind as interconnected with the body, which opens up a new space for concepts of identity that are not confined by the polarizing norms of contemporary America.

While Queequeg represents the ideal, Melville positions Ishmael more in reality. A lonely, depressed man, Ishmael began his journey sharing Ahab's bifurcated mind and body. And just as with Ahab, the implications were disastrous. But in the idyllically unified character of Queequeg, Ishmael finds a different model to pursue, one that emphasizes harmony between the mind and body in direct contrast to contemporary thought. And while Ishmael's whale-measurement tattoos may not be the most hieroglyphic, he seems to have the right idea in mind, for he has saved room on the rest of his body for "a poem [he] was then composing" (451). In constructing the body as an ever-changing text, Melville seeks to unify body and mind, which speaks directly to his

contemporary sphere of ideas and anticipates modern gender and race theorists. In Melville's fiction, to insist that the body and mind remain distinct means reinforcing Ahab's claim to power. But by granting signifying power to the body as a site of knowledge, Melville offers a way out of the normalizing systems that allow Ahab to lead his crew to destruction.

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POETIC MINDS IN CLODDISH SOIL:
HAWTHORNE'S BODIES IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

Contemporary criticism has made it seem irresponsible to theorize the body without regard for race, gender or sexuality. Discussions of Queequeg's bodily inscriptions in *Moby-Dick* must consider the racialized body on which they are imprinted, and Ishamel's relationship to Queequeg requires some attention to the homoerotics, if not homosexuality, of their explicitly marital relationship. The issue is even more pronounced in Hawthorne studies, with the classic *Scarlet Letter* earning a steady flow of criticism on such subjects as Hester's desexualized body and Chillingworth's "raping" of Dimmesdale. Of course "the body" enjoys critical capital today because of race and gender theory's interest in it as a doorway into suppressed or ignored narratives. Race, gender, and sexuality should not be abandoned as objects of inquiry, but the dominance of these theoretical lenses causes us to systemically overlook other neglected representations of the body.

This essay will show how Hawthorne's bodies critique transcendental idealism and cultural essentialism. My reading is very much grounded in performativity, but foregrounded by an explicit interest in exploring the ramifications of these performances in non-gendered terms. While *The Scarlet Letter* is usually the principal text for these debates over the body in Hawthorne studies, I will focus primarily on *The Blithedale*

Romance. Although issues of the body are more pronounced in the former, in the latter Hawthorne more explicitly connects the mind/body binary to contemporary discourses—in this case Transcendentalism. Hawthorne and his contemporaries understood the mind and body as complementary parts of the Self. Although his framework is amenable to race and gender theory, I will instead discuss Hawthorne’s depictions of the mind and body in light of his socio-cultural context. In *Blithedale*, Hawthorne appropriates Transcendentalist notions of mind/body unity and uses those terms to disrupt the philosophy’s idealistic potential. In *The Scarlet Letter*, which usefully bookends this discussion of *Blithedale*, he dramatizes competing cultural gazes to reveal the impermanent, performative nature of bodies.

The Scarlet Letter

Given *The Scarlet Letter*’s abundant bodily emphases, the most enticing scene for critics is usually Chillingworth’s “rape” of Dimmesdale. Readers will recall how Chillingworth exposes Dimmesdale’s sleeping body to discover the ambiguously defined “A” upon his breast: “The physician advanced directly in front of his patient, laid his hand upon his bosom, and thrust aside the vestment, that, hitherto, had always covered it even from the professional eye” (121). Readings of this scene tend to capitalize on erotically charged words like “thrust,” “shuddered,” “rapture” and “ecstasy” to elaborate on the homoerotic or homosexual dimensions of their relationship, culminating in this moment of symbolic rape. Scott Derrick, for example, uses the rape to discuss homophobia in nineteenth-century America, figuring the two men’s relationship in explicitly homosexual terms. Karen Kilcup more persuasively analyzes the scene in

homoerotic terms, complexly interweaving relationships between body and text, author and reader, and interiority versus exteriority.

Kilcup's argument helps clarify my position. She argues that the narrative "apparently attempts to read the text *via* the body, and ends up reading the body *itself* as text" (6, author's emphasis). She then comments on the homoerotic dimensions of the inward and outward manifestations of Dimmesdale's guilt, describing them as "the story's hidden substantive sexual excess, 'inside' and 'outside' the text" (7). Kilcup's analytical strategy clarifies the opening that this paper will exploit. She claims that Dimmesdale's body acts as a text, and then reads that text through a homoerotic lens. Although this is precisely her intention, the maneuver deemphasizes the overt dialogue within the text between the body's relationship with the mind and the ramifications of Dimmesdale's exposure. The pages leading up to Dimmesdale's violation by Chillingworth are filled with references to this binary, as when Chillingworth asserts that "a sickness, a sore place, if we may so call it, in your spirit, hath immediately its appropriate manifestation in your bodily frame" (119). By paying closer attention to the intratextual discussion of body and mind that Chillingworth asserts here, I will show how Hawthorne deploys bodies to critique contradictory societal gazes. But first I will establish the theoretical context for this reading practice.

The Blithedale Romance

Bodily theories of gender, sexuality and race almost inevitably work within the mind/body paradigm because we read bodies through their relations to cognition.¹³ Judith Butler's performativity theory exploits how the interiorized demands of society (mind) manifest themselves in how we perceive and enact our physical bodies, and crossdressing makes this binary explicit, with minds choosing (in the gendered societal sense) their bodies. When Margaret Homans discusses "belief in the embodiedness of race and gender (a belief that race and gender are experienced in the body)," she calls attention to the mind that is doing the experiencing—an internal perspective that counterpoints the external body (79). By reducing these complex theories down to this simple binary, I simply mean to underscore a historically entrenched conception of human identity as split between body and mind, which emerges throughout nineteenth-century American writing. Thus, when Coverdale is disturbed by Zenobia's riddles during his illness, the disturbance afflicts his "sensitive condition of mind and body" (35). One sees this "mind and body" throughout Hawthorne's tales and novels. The phrase carries an interesting double significance, for it simultaneously suggests the mind and body are separate, each requiring its own annunciation, and yet conflated, since they are so frequently called forth in tandem as a single unit.

Oftentimes these "mind and body" constructions convey contemporary clichés, a regurgitated phrase that simply means "every aspect of myself." But in *Moby-Dick*

¹³ The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays offer many excellent race/gender/sexuality readings, particularly essays by Alison Easton and Nina Baym. See also Monika Elbert's "The Surveillance of Woman's Body in Hawthorne's Short Stories."

Melville drastically opened up this binary, using it to express the tensions and unities in characters like Ahab (his injured leg corrupts his psyche), Queequeg (his angelically tattooed body represents his spirituality), and of course the numerous cetological chapters for the whale himself. Although Hawthorne never invested his prose with such dramatic presence as Melville's, he shared his friend's interest in breaking apart cultural givens to test the foundations on which they rested. As with Melville, these treatments of the mind and body are most illuminating when we consider them in light of contemporaneous philosophies. For Hawthorne, particularly in *Blithedale*, that preoccupation was with Transcendentalism.

By "contemporary philosophies," I have a few discourses in mind: of course Transcendentalism, but also Calvinism, spiritualism and Unitarianism, as well as discourses on slavery and women's rights. Each sphere depended on the mind and body to articulate its position. Calvinists understood the body as an inherently corrupt vessel for the soul. The internal self may be capable of salvation, but the body, with its carnal desires and material impermanence, can only be a hindrance. Thus the Calvinists emphasized bodily rejection and inward contemplation. Spiritualists were even more overtly concerned with the body, but contradictorily; they believed less in heaven and hell and more in purgatory-like ascending spheres of afterlife.¹⁴ Influenced by Native American theology, spiritualists believed that ghosts could remain on Earth, and that mediums could make their bodies porous to spiritual inhabitation and guidance.

¹⁴ See Bret Carroll's [Spiritualism in Antebellum America](#).

Spiritualism was a budding sensation while Hawthorne wrote *Blithedale*, and the Veiled Lady's mesmerism is a clear reference to spiritualist faith.

My intention here is not to fully summarize each philosophy, but rather to highlight how each paradigm articulated itself in terms of the relationship between body and mind. Thus, Unitarians valued reason and contemplation (read mind-centric) while Calvinists tended to be evangelical and damnation focused, harping on the threat of everlasting pain (read body-centric). Transcendentalists grew out of Unitarianism, but posited a system that idyllically integrated the reasoning mind with the feeling body. For Transcendentalists, Nature provides humanity with the path to God, and Nature is best experienced both cognitively and viscerally.

American Renaissance authors could not invest meaning into bodies without being mindful of these discourses. What Hawthorne (and Melville) so effectively exploits is not the contradictions between these bodily discourses but the commonalities. While each philosophy represented radically different ways of perceiving life and spirituality, they all depended on discourses that pitted mind against body, or body against mind. Transcendentalists worked against this duality by positing a more unified self. Yet we see in an essay like Emerson's "The Poet" that the Unitarian underpinnings of Transcendentalism remain salient, for Emerson attempts to articulate the poet as one who idyllically unifies Nature with the mind by describing him as "the sayer, the namer, and [one who] represents beauty" (5). Although Emerson wants to cast Nature as spontaneously poetic, such words indicate that it is a poetics imposed on Nature by the poetic mind. Hawthorne's contribution to these competing discourses would be to explore

the body's relationship with the mind. By suggesting their union while denying that union's utopian implications, he directly critiques Transcendentalism while indirectly critiquing his whole contemporary culture's attitudes toward the binary.

Hawthorne frequently denied his tales' applicability to the real world, qualifying his prose as "Romance" to detach and universalize his themes (and to distance himself from those damned "scribbling women" who massively outsold him).¹⁵ Not surprisingly, modern scholars tend to read these disavowals with skepticism. Although Hawthorne set *The Scarlet Letter* in an earlier era, the text's societal and psychological themes clearly represent critiques of his present, and *Blithedale* is certainly a commentary on Transcendentalist idealism through the lens of his experiences at Brook Farm, a utopian Transcendentalist commune that Hawthorne joined for the better part of a year: "Hawthorne's constant claim was that he aimed to escape that American insistence upon actuality, but we may have taken him too readily at his word" (Bell 17). Since *Blithedale* represents one of Hawthorne's clearest attachments to contemporary issues, particularly transcendentalist philosophy, the text provides a useful source to explore the mind/body binary in ways that do not focus primarily on race, gender or sexuality.

Of course, race and gender are not only modern theoretical paradigms that we impose on the past. The abundant scholarship on Margaret Fuller, a friend of Concordians and a model for Zenobia in *Blithedale*, makes it clear that feminist issues

¹⁵ Nina Baym effectively problematizes Hawthorne's infamous outburst, or rather scholars' appropriation of it, in "Again and Again, The Scribbling Women."

were circulating in the period.¹⁶ Zenobia is an explicitly feminist character: “If I live another year, I will lift up my own voice in behalf of woman’s wider liberty!” (94). Race, of course, was also a significant concern in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Samuel Otter’s *Melville Anatomies* prolifically investigates racial discourses in antebellum America; Otter shows how a popular pseudoscience like phrenology attempted to rationalize racial subjugation by mapping out inferior structures of African skulls. It is not my intention to suggest that Hawthorne ignored these discourses (indeed, his denunciations of abolitionism were notorious, and his relationship with Fuller’s feminism was complex), but rather to suggest that they comprised only some of the many discourses on bodies that were prevalent in the era. Given that race and gender already receive such prolific critical attention today, we should remember that these are not the only bodily discourses circulating in Hawthorne’s time. By focusing on the Transcendentalist dimensions of bodies in *Blithedale*, I do not intend to negate racial or feminist readings, but rather to shift emphasis and allow for other bodily discourses to emerge.

Although scholars may often give Emerson too much credit as the sole voice of Transcendentalism, the emphasis is valid in Hawthorne’s case. Emerson was the arbiter of his move to Concord, and Hawthorne harbored complex feelings toward Emerson, both admiring and antagonistic. Most scholars agree that the egomaniacally visionary Hollingsworth was a subtle critique of Emerson. According to Larry Reynolds, Hawthorne’s portrayal of Hollingsworth mirrors his impression of Emerson “as an

¹⁶ For Hawthorne’s relationship with Fuller, see David Kesterson’s “Margaret Fuller on Hawthorne.”

angelic friend and a manipulative idealist, whose influence appeared chilling and often Satanic in its effects” (12). We might also consider that Emerson refused to join the transcendental community of Brook Farm because of its artificial framework; although Hollingsworth does join the Blithedale commune, he was just as skeptical about its viability. These abundant connections between the novel and Hawthorne’s own experience make it clear that *Blithedale* offered a direct critique of transcendental idealism, particularly Emerson’s Transcendentalism, and that Hawthorne’s insistence on the tale as a disconnected Romance is dubious.

Hawthorne’s reliance on “Romance” was not only a realist evasion; we must also consider the more subtle benefit of the romantic strategy. By writing in this less “realistic” form, Hawthorne found the freedom to develop “unrealistic” scenarios that benefited his critique. Priscilla’s scene as the Veiled Lady would be preposterous in a realistic novel, but the romantic genre gives Hawthorne license, making it possible to dramatize Hollingsworth’s greed, subjugation of women, and ethically bereft egotism. Zenobia’s evolving flower ornaments transcend mere cosmetics and become “a subtle expression of Zenobia’s character” (33). As I will argue, Hawthorne manages time and again to use the tropes of romanticism to imbue bodies with potent meaning, which allows him to redouble his critique of Transcendentalism.

Emerson’s “The American Scholar” remains the most iconic expression of Transcendentalist idealism and most clearly establishes the philosophical framework in which *Blithedale* operates:

The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. [...] We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. [...] A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men. (69-70)

In this short passage we see the major themes of Transcendentalism at play, including self reliance, infinite progress, naturalism, and nationalism. And although Emerson's words are metaphorical, he clearly emphasizes corporeal knowledge: the feet and hands are transcendently glorified for their purely generative labor. He also directly connects these hands and feet to the mind in parallel constructions (with "we will" statements for all three, both divided and connected by semicolons). Emerson's rhetorical move assumes a connection between body and mind that, as I have indicated, was common parlance. But here Emerson breaks crucially from other contemporary philosophies. Calvinists, for example, believed that the mind/body dichotomy sharply divided the internal self that is redeemable before God, from the body, which is the seat of carnal sin and the catalyst for all filthy desires. For Calvinists, then, "mind and body" connotes the self's two halves while underscoring their division. But Emerson rhetorically connects the body to the mind, positing them as two elements of a whole that must integrate to achieve divine unity. In "The Poet" Emerson says, "Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words" (6). When we speak of transcendental unity we are implicitly speaking of a unified self, and this passage reveals how Emerson conceives of that self as a harmony between body and mind.

Emerson's address resonates throughout *The Blithedale Romance*. Hawthorne structures the plot around a socialist commune where high and low-class citizens all work together in perfect harmony to provide nourishment for both their bodies and souls. When Zenobia, the fiercely independent benefactor and organizer of the commune, expresses her fear that Coverdale (the protagonist and narrator) will cast off his poetry (mind) for his new life of toil (body), he attempts to assuage her fears by romanticizing the forthcoming labors:

I hope, on the contrary, now to produce something that shall really deserve to be called poetry,— true, strong, natural, and sweet, as is the life which we are going to lead,— something that shall have the notes of wild birds twittering through it, or a strain like the wind anthems in the woods, as the case may be. (8)

Emerson's philosophy resonates through Coverdale's speech. The exertions of his coming exercise are tempered only by its natural harmony with Nature. Life becomes art when one grasps it firmly and confidently. The transcendental unity between body and mind also emerges here, with the body's toil spontaneously and simultaneously enacting the purest of art forms. Coverdale makes this connection even more explicit later: "Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom" (49). Hawthorne astutely links the minds and bodies of his characters to the philosophies and toils of their socialist enterprise (bodily strokes unearthing mental wisdom), thus developing transcendental utopianism not only as a philosophy but simultaneously as a visceral experience.

Earlier I noted Coverdale's description of his "sensitive condition of mind and body." Indeed, the binary assumes primary significance during this illness, which afflicts

him on the first night of his arrival at Blithedale. Coverdale claims that he intuitively understands Zenobia more clearly while sick than he had before, and describes this knowledge along the mind/body spectrum: “The soul gets the better of the body, after wasting illness, or when a vegetable diet may have mingled too much ether in the blood. Vapors then rise up to the brain, and take shapes that often image falsehood, but sometimes truth” (34). The emphasis of this scene is on the truths, not the falsehoods. But regardless, Coverdale perceives mind and body as aligned on a thinly divided continuum; the body’s transformation directly modifies the possibilities of his internal mind, or soul.¹⁷ Coverdale believes that the opposite can work as well, for earlier he claims to be “impressed” that his body didn’t die when he had “tolerably made up [his] mind to do it” (30). Not only can bodily changes determine the mind’s abilities, but Coverdale also believes (exactly like Queequeg, in fact) that his mind is capable of shutting the body down—not by refusal to eat or any such gross means, but through sheer force of will.

Coverdale’s illness cleanses him, both in body and mind. He comes out on the other side having cast off “a thousand follies, fripperies, prejudices, habits, and other such worldly dust” (45). Coverdale explicitly connects this mental junk to his distilled body: “The very substance on my bones had not been fit to live with [...] In literal and physical sense, I was quite another man” (45). This rebirth allows Coverdale’s internal “spirit” to transcend his bodily “mortality” (45). My point here is not simply to hammer

¹⁷ Although mind and soul have alternate meanings, I often conflate them in this reading because Hawthorne clearly juxtaposes them against the body. I am not interested in the rationalistic versus spiritual implications of each word, but rather in how Hawthorne uses both words to dichotomously counterpoint the sensory body.

on Coverdale's persistent connections between body and mind, but to highlight the optimistic way he does it, and to tie it to his transcendental belief in the unifying potential of the community's socialist project. He soon describes the commune as "an enlightened culture of the soil" that offers "delectable visions of the spiritualization of labor" (46; 49); here we should read "enlightened" as mind and "soil" as body, and "spiritualization of labor" as mindfulness of the body. The unifying themes between mind and body thus link directly to the utopian themes of Transcendentalism. Just to solidify the point, Coverdale spends his time in the sick bed reading, among others, Emerson.

Of course the utopian project fails, at least in Coverdale's eyes. Hawthorne arranges the novel's structure quite simply as *first half good, second half bad*, with the straightforward chapter title "A Crisis" marking the literal and thematic center, and Coverdale's claim that the community won't seem real until someone dies representing clear foreshadowing and the thematic turning point. From here to the end, the novel deconstructs the transcendental idealism it established in the first half: relationships become distractions, egotism subverts socialism, and the dramas of urban society invade the pastoral. But when we consider the mind/body binary as a lens into Hawthorne's critique of Transcendentalism, evidence of the project's downfall begins to appear quite sooner—a quarter of the way in. It doesn't take Coverdale long to crash down from his post-illness self-unity and begin to realize that a life of the mind and a life of the body are mutually exclusive.

Immediately following his ecstatic vision of poetic labor, Coverdale admits that the experience was failing to actualize the ideal. But he does not belabor the point,

turning his attention instead to the social dynamics between Zenobia, Priscilla, Hollingsworth and himself; a sustained criticism of the Blithedale commune doesn't emerge until the latter half of the novel. But our attention to Hawthorne's development of the mind and body lends this brief scene after Coverdale's recovery an exaggerated significance:

The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish. Our labor symbolized nothing, and left us mentally sluggish in the dusk of the evening. *Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise.* The yeoman and the scholar [...] are two distinct individuals, and can never be melted or welded into one substance. (49, emphasis added)

These thoughts quickly recede beneath anxiety about Hollingsworth's power over Zenobia and Priscilla, and their thematic impact is smothered by a shift in attention to Blithedale's interpersonal dimensions. But seen through the mind/body lens the passage doubles in significance. Coverdale's transcendental dream of a physical lifestyle imbuing power to the poetic mind is dashed. Not only does labor fail to enhance art, but it actively inhibits it. Not only does the daily toil exhaust the brain's imaginative capacity, but Coverdale fails to find any symbolic significance to labor—it is merely hard work. He explicitly connects “clods” of earth to “cloddish” thoughts, suggesting a third strike against Transcendentalist notions of unity: earth is firm, stubborn and unyielding, and an earthly life mimics these qualities, which are antithetical to the pliable imaginativeness that a poet requires.

Significantly, Hawthorne does not discredit the idea of a union between body and mind, but rather the idealistic potential of that union. In essence, Emerson's notion of mind/body unity still gives precedence to the mind: the poetic mind bends the body to its will, causing the body to experience nature poetically (although Emerson would not see it that way). As Emerson says in *Nature*, "To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone" (13). Our discussion of *Blithedale* exposes the privileged position of Emerson's statement, which views corporeal experience predominantly as an antidote to mental toil. But Hawthorne critiques Emerson's bias, showing how corporeal toil prohibits the mind's ability to perceive nature as restorative. By appropriating the very unity between mind and body that Emerson asserts, Hawthorne effectively subverts Emerson's idealism by complicating the nature of that unity. In light of this tactic, Emerson's words become laughable: "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other" (9). Hawthorne shows how truly adjusted senses can actively prohibit a love of nature, for as Coverdale attunes himself to a soiled life his ability to poeticize Nature suffers.

Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* addresses a similar problem. Scarry claims that "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Again we see the mind/body binary at play, with language representing the mind and pain the body. Scarry's groundbreaking text pushes back against the mind-centrist lexicon, arguing for the body's own forms of perception

that take precedence over those of the mind—in this case, pain.¹⁸ Hawthorne attempts the same maneuver, resisting Emerson’s poeticized vision of mind/body and asserting a corporealized counterdiscourse. Coverdale’s daily toil certainly relates to the body’s pain; it is interesting to note that while Scarry maintains the mind/body binary (bodily pain independent of mental language), Hawthorne integrates the two, arguing not that bodily pain is “anterior” to the mind, but is in fact connected and capable of dominating the mind’s perceptive capacities. Although Thoreau spends the chapter “Reading” in *Walden* talking about the importance of literature (mind), we shouldn’t dismiss the following passage as quickly as Thoreau does: “Incessant labors with my hands [...] made more study impossible. Yet I sustained myself by the prospect of such reading in the future” (71). Like Scarry, Thoreau wants to separate the mind and body. He talks about the importance of literature after admitting he couldn’t deal with literature as a farmer. Through Coverdale, Hawthorne exposes this blind spot in Transcendentalist theory.

Returning to *Blithedale*, I want to underscore the significance of Hawthorne’s strategy. He clearly establishes a Transcendentalist ideal of mind/body unity in Coverdale, and then undermines it not by discrediting the notion of a unified self, but by complicating the utopianism of that unity. By accomplishing this critique substantially prior to his thematic deconstruction of Transcendentalism, Hawthorne lends extra power to his Transcendentalist critique. Hawthorne’s insistence on calling *Blithedale* a *Romance* allows him to slip this commentary in without too much attention, enshrouding it in a psychodrama between Coverdale and Hollingsworth (“Miles Coverdale is not in earnest,

¹⁸ See also Hortense Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” which reads the physical damage inflicted on slave bodies as a racial narrative independent of language.

either as a poet or a laborer,” jibes Hollingsworth) and enmeshing it in a rhetoric of mind and body that could be overlooked either as a standard “mind and body” trope or a romanticization of Coverdale’s selfhood reminiscent of Emerson’s “The Poet” (51). But under closer examination, Coverdale’s post-illness musings offer Hawthorne’s first disruption of the Transcendentalist ideal, thus establishing a paradigm for reading unified bodies and minds as disruptions, not reinforcements, of this Transcendentalist utopia.

The mind/body paradigm is not confined to Coverdale; one of Hawthorne’s most potent realizations of his strategy appears in the characterization of Westervelt, the arbiter of Priscilla’s veiling and probably Zenobia’s horrid ex-husband. Also in the first half of the novel, Coverdale is immediately antagonistic to Westervelt, who essentially ambushes him during the farmer’s attempted vacation in the forest (marking another failure to experience nature idealistically). Coverdale offers several explanations for his aversion to this “disagreeable person”: he ruined his peaceful walk; his “foppish dress” made Coverdale self-conscious of his “homely garb”; his manner of speech was condescending; and more generally, Coverdale simply felt an “intuitive repugnance” (70-72). But Coverdale cannot articulate his distrust until he makes a bodily discovery; he sees a gold band around the top of Westervelt’s teeth and realizes that “every one of his brilliant grinders and incisors was a sham”:

I felt as if the whole man were a moral and physical humbug; his wonderful beauty of face, for aught I knew, might be removable like a mask; and, tall and comely as his figure looked, he was perhaps but a wizened little elf, gray and decrepit, with nothing genuine about him save the wicked expression of his grin. (73-74)

Once again we see a bizarre unity of self here, but one that Hawthorne strips from its transcendently idealistic implications, suggesting instead the darker possibilities of such unity. The false teeth betray a false identity. Hawthorne calls upon the trope of the mask (which emerges repeatedly in his works) to dramatize the body's ability to hide the contents of the mind. But the teeth are the key, unlocking for Coverdale the holistic meaning of Westervelt's selfhood.

Admittedly, the mind/body analysis gets more slippery as we shift from Coverdale to Westervelt. With Coverdale we had a clear, conscious investigation into the mind and body as transcendently charged categories, but with Westervelt we emerge into the realm of subjective judgments as cosmetic tastes. And the site of this revelation on the face makes the issue even more complicated—if Coverdale doesn't like the way a man cocks his eyebrow, is that a window into his evil soul and a denunciation of Transcendentalism as well? Not at all. We must remember Hawthorne's crucial reliance on the term *Romance*, which gave him license to dramatize synecdoche: "for Hawthorne, the term *romance*, which figures so prominently in the prefaces, alerts us not simply to unrealistic events but also to that particular absence of realism that makes meanings show, often aesthetically, on its characters' bodies" (Cameron 83).¹⁹ Hawthorne thus uses the (bodily) teeth to encapsulate Westervelt's internal self. Considered alongside Coverdale, Westervelt's false teeth undermine the utopian implications of unified selves. In Westervelt we clearly see such unity representing evil.

¹⁹ For a more recent approach to Hawthorne's treatment of inner and outer selves, see Joel Pfister's "Hawthorne as Cultural Theorist."

When we consider Coverdale and Westervelt together, it begins to seem that Hawthorne denounced Transcendentalism by exposing the pain and evil that bridges all mind/body binaries. But this conclusion is a far more gothic reading than Hawthorne demands. Zenobia's symbolic identity comes, not from false teeth, but from the various rare flowers she wears in her hair each day. Coverdale considers their effect, concluding (expanding on a previously-cited passage), "The reason must have been that, whether intentionally on her part or not, this favorite ornament was actually a subtle expression of Zenobia's character" (33). These flowers express an undoubtedly *good* character. Clearly based on Margaret Fuller, Zenobia holds Blithedale together through her indomitable will, intense intellect and passion for the community's egalitarian cause.²⁰ To illuminate Cameron's claim in the previous paragraph, we should note that Hawthorne downplays the importance of Zenobia's intention in wearing these flowers, suggesting instead that they are a spontaneous physical embodiment of her interior self. Once again, *Romance* gives Hawthorne the freedom to establish this unity while allowing him to diminish the significance of a character's intent, which would dilute his investigation into the mind/body relationship.

Zenobia's flowers do represent transcendental unity, and neither Coverdale nor Zenobia nor anyone else questions this fact. Do we then finally find in Zenobia the

²⁰ Neither Zenobia nor Fuller go uncriticized by Hawthorne. Yet it seems clear that Hawthorne intended his criticisms of Zenobia more to develop her character than to undermine her. He certainly was not interested in idealizing any of the major actors, including the narrator, and I read his criticisms more as a sign of respect (for here is a woman worth arguing with) than as a denunciation. See Lindsey Traub's "Woman Thinking: Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the American Scholar" and Nina Baym's "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism."

perfect, transcendental figurehead? Certainly not, for Zenobia is the tragic figure in the novel, resolving the foreshadowing inherent in Coverdale's claim that Blithedale won't be real until someone dies. In life, Zenobia is the ideal Transcendentalist, but in death she becomes its sharpest critic without requiring a word. The power of her criticism stems from the relationship between her mind and body.

Zenobia's downfall erupts out of Hollingsworth's betrayal. Coverdale returns to Blithedale toward the end of the novel to find Hollingsworth, Zenobia and Priscilla concluding an informal trial. Hollingsworth is the accused and his reprehensible actions toward Priscilla make up the case, but Zenobia is the true victim. He essentially sold Priscilla into slavery as the new Veiled Lady, but then repented and claimed to love her. Zenobia feels her own love for Hollingsworth unforgivingly betrayed, and it ruins her.²¹ We cannot fail to notice that the Emerson-like Hollingsworth causes Zenobia's downfall by caring only for himself and his impractical ideals; Hollingsworth denies any wrongdoing, and Zenobia exasperatedly retorts, "'It is all self!' answered Zenobia with still intenser bitterness. 'Nothing else; nothing but self, self, self!'" (172). Hawthorne is likely interrogating the contradictions between Emerson's desire for a transcendental community of brotherhood and his egotistical commitment to self-centered idealism.²² But stated more simply, this scene marks the undeniable downfall of Blithedale as an ideologically viable Transcendentalist community. Hollingsworth's egotism finally

²¹ The tension between Zenobia's Fuller-like empowerment of women's rights and her passivity in the presence of Hollingsworth's overbearing masculinity has garnered much-deserved feminist attention. In addition to Traub, see also Roberta Weldon's *Hawthorne, Gender, and Death* and Robert Levine's "Sympathy and Reform in *The Blithedale Romance*."

²² See Reynolds, especially pages 11-19.

shatters the very possibility of communalism, causing irreconcilable rifts among the community's key players. Unlike Louisa May Alcott's critique of transcendental utopianism in "Transcendental Wild Oats," which mocks a group of intellectuals' ability to manage and work a farm, Hawthorne ultimately rejects Transcendentalism from an interpersonal perspective by disavowing the possibility of harmonious and platonic social networks. This alternative social assault makes sense, though, when we consider Hawthorne's frustrations with Emerson and other Concord Transcendentalists (including Fuller).

Zenobia's synecdochal flowers marked the one safe refuge for Transcendentalist self-unity in Blithedale—the one bodily image that idyllically connected to a Transcendentally minded character. It would seem, then, to be a strain on this thesis to claim that Zenobia epitomizes transcendental failure. But we should consider Zenobia's final action before she descends into ruin:

‘Tell [Hollingsworth] he has murdered me! Tell him that I’ll haunt him! [...] And give him—no, give Priscilla—this!’ Thus saying, she took the jeweled flower out of her hair; and it struck me as the act of a queen, when worsted in a combat, discrowning herself, as if she found a sort of relief in abasing all her pride. (178)

Considered merely in terms of plot, Zenobia's gesture is romantic. By casting off her flower she casts off her identity, resigned to obscurity and death. But through our lens Zenobia casts off so much more, for this simple flower represented the one bodily image in idyllic transcendental harmony with the mind of its wearer. But Hollingsworth destroyed her spirit, and in casting off the flower she shows more potently than all her words that he has destroyed the transcendental dream along with it.

To solidify the death of Transcendentalism, Hawthorne kills Zenobia. Even in death, Hawthorne continues to connect her body and mind. Dredged from the bottom of the river, the men discover Zenobia's hands "clenched in immitigable defiance" (186). They cannot smooth her arms down against her sides, and her clenched fists take on a permanence akin to Westervelt's teeth. But this dramatic death-act merely introduces Hawthorne's grand, melodramatic finale. While dragging up Zenobia's body, Hollingsworth unintentionally stabs her breast: "'You have wounded the poor thing's breast,' said [Foster] to Hollingsworth, 'close by her heart, too!' [...] And so he had, indeed, both before and after death!" (186). In place of an idealized union between beautiful flower and beautiful soul, Hawthorne leaves us with the gothic union of a wounded heart, functioning simultaneously as the bodily heart and the spiritual one. How far we have come from the poetic ecstasy of bodily labor!

Blithedale, as Hawthorne presents it to us, is a psychodrama. The novel's dramatic thrust focuses more on unraveling social dynamics than any other theme. But a sharp critique of Transcendentalism bubbles under the surface, present in every page but never explicitly uttered. By reading bodies (and their minds) in relation to this utopian framework, a complex theme emerges that critiques Transcendentalism through the very fiber of the body, its connection to the mind, and their parallel associations with labor and art; both binaries are thus inextricably linked. But Hawthorne asserts through this union that the outcomes do not necessarily lead to enlightenment and spontaneous joy as Emersonian Transcendentalism would have us believe. Instead, they often cause frustration, doubt and pain.

***The Scarlet Letter* (continued)**

Having established this alternative interpretive lens, I would now like to return to *The Scarlet Letter*. As I suggested in the beginning of the essay, we often minimize or ignore intratextual theorizations of bodies in favor of our more modern approaches through racial, gendered or sexualized lenses.²³ What I offer here is a brief epilogue, a modest treatment of Coverdale's "rape" of Dimmesdale, which has understandably received far more bodily analysis than *Blithedale*. But I hope to show how this reading of *Blithedale* opens up the possibilities of interpreting *The Scarlet Letter* in underappreciated ways.

Hawthorne's first commercially successful novel is quite explicitly concerned with physical representations of one's internal self. Just as Westervelt had his gold-banded teeth and Zenobia her flowers, Hester Prynne's existence becomes synonymous with the "A" upon her breast. But Hawthorne's strategy here is to express the mutability of the binary. Hester does not defiantly overcome the letter, nor cast it away for a new identity, nor verbally demand that society reconsider its significance (she chooses rather to enact change through action). Rather, the letter's meaning evolves in tandem with Hester's internal, subjective evolution. Remarkably, her bodily representation of identity remains objectively static, while subjectively transforming, in the eyes of the entire community, from a mark of gross sin to one of saintly self-sacrifice. Bodies are linked to minds, but that connection is precariously determined by society.

²³ For a lucid overview of feminist readings of *The Scarlet Letter* and other Hawthorne works, see Nina Baym's "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism." See also *Hawthorne and Women*, edited by John Idol and Melinda Ponder.

We can read Chillingworth's rape of Dimmesdale through the same lens.

Chillingworth's profession as physician is ostensibly of the body, but he desires to unlock the adulterous secret in Dimmesdale's mind. His strategy, then, is to try and convince Dimmesdale that the two are inextricably linked: "A bodily disease, which we look upon as whole and entire within itself, may, after all, be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part" (119). Dimmesdale does not deny this connection, but simply refuses Chillingworth the privilege of examining his internal self, citing that as God's domain. But Chillingworth cannot shake his fascination with this "strange sympathy betwixt soul and body," which is when he uncovers the mark upon Dimmesdale's breast (120).

It is interesting that modern readings have been so engaged with the act of Chillingworth's transgression, and less with the substance of what he discovers. Derrick examines in detail how Dimmesdale's "passion" problematizes "identity by rupturing the borders of the body," but he largely neglects the disruptive potential of the actual mark on Dimmesdale's breast (312).²⁴ Yet this scene of passion is largely isolated, while the mark remains central throughout. This episode clearly links Dimmesdale's body to his mind, but the full significance of that connection doesn't manifest until he stands on the podium with Hester.

When Chillingworth exposes Dimmesdale's breast, Hawthorne defers explanation of the revelation. More boldly, he dares to defer again when Dimmesdale climactically

²⁴ Derrick dismisses the mark's significance because Chillingworth's discovery "in no way clarifies the mystery of its appearance on the minister's breast" (311). I would suggest that the mark's origin story is far less interesting than its representative power as a link to Dimmesdale's soul.

reveals his chest to the whole town. Hawthorne does offer explanations in his conclusions, but they are intentionally ambiguous. We get three possible answers: (1) Dimmesdale carved the “A” on his chest as a masochistic penance, (2) Chillingworth’s poisons caused it to appear, and (3) the bodily mark was a physical manifestation of Dimmesdale’s spiritual guilt. It would be fitting to favor the latter option; after all, such a fluid connection between body and mind plays perfectly into the context of this discussion. But Hawthorne explicitly refuses to give precedence to any one of the three options; instead, he positions the body as a text that is vulnerable to societal readings.²⁵

Through the ambiguity of Dimmesdale’s “A,” Hawthorne takes the mutability of Hester’s mark to more profound heights. Essentially, each version of his mark represents distinct cultural biases. The first option is psychological. Dimmesdale indulges in archaic flagellation as penance for his adulterous guilt, so it should not test the reader’s imagination that Dimmesdale could have carved the “A” upon his breast in gothic solidarity with Hester. The second option channels sorcery and witchcraft, important subjects throughout Hawthorne’s works. The final option represents religion, spirituality and faith. In this context God punishes Dimmesdale for keeping his bodily sin a secret, manifesting his punishment not only through guilt in the mind but also visibly on the flesh; the mark thus physically manifests God’s call for confession.

Hester’s scarlet letter is mutable because its meaning as a physical representation of her internal self changes as Hester grows and the town observes her, showing how a

²⁵ This authorial ambiguity is a particular trademark for Hawthorne. He loved unreliable narrators. Indeed, in *Blithedale* he tells the reader on several occasions that his inferences (or rather Coverdale’s, as narrator) may be exaggerated or completely incorrect. Of course Hawthorne makes a similar apology in the Custom House introduction.

body's meanings are not merely inherent, but fully determined by society's gaze. We are moving decidedly toward Butler and performativity here, despite our inattention to gender: "Is there a 'physical' body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide" (Butler 146). Yet Butler leans toward a negative answer, and Hawthorne suggests the same. The representative mark on Hester's body remains static in actual fact, but changes dramatically by societal perception. But in Dimmesdale Hawthorne makes the statement even more profoundly. By offering three different explanations for Dimmesdale's bodily mark, each representing different contemporary discourses, Hawthorne states even more radically than with Hester how the body's meaning derives from discourse, not inherent fact. Such a reading reinforces Bell's claim that Hawthorne "foresaw a 'postmodern' way of thinking that 'reality' is a word always to be set in quotation marks as part of the mind's figuration" (19). Bodies are performative, not intrinsic. Thus, the act of Chillingworth's "rape" of Dimmesdale is not as important as his reasons for doing it. He demands that Dimmesdale's body is unified with his mind, and assaults the body to discover the secrets in his heart. But not until the final pages do we see Hawthorne opening up that connection, asserting that the body is not only defined by its inhabiting mind, but by all the members of society who view it, judge it, and determine its worth.

I began this essay by suggesting that we do a disservice to nineteenth-century American literature by predominantly confining our readings of bodies to the paradigms of gender, sexuality and race. It has certainly not been my intention to suggest that these perspectives lack merit, but rather that Hawthorne and his contemporaries were thinking

and writing about bodies in ways that are not always best understood primarily through these lenses. Kilcup concludes her discussion of homoerotics by suggesting that *The Scarlet Letter* shows “how a text is a body and a body is a text” (21). What we often fail to notice is that these bodies are textual not only via modern theoretical readings, but also within the texts themselves as they refer to their own contemporary theories. When Miles Coverdale concedes that cloddish work forms cloddish thoughts, he isn’t saying anything about race, gender, or sexuality. However, his words imbue the body with a philosophical depth that interrogates Transcendentalism and societal preconceptions about the mind/body binary as a whole. These intentional representations of the body offer compelling windows into Hawthorne’s culture, and they continue to merit our attention.

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