Multiplicity and Irony: Hawthorne's Poetics of Historical Critique[1]

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Abstract Nathaniel Hawthorne's historical writing addresses cultural conflicts and social contradictions in America, and the mechanism of his historical writing also expresses his skepticism about the development of national history. Revolving around Hawthorne's significant literary images such as the "House of the Seven Gables," the "Scarlet Letter," and "Grandfather's Chair," this paper examines how the novelist clarifies the historical origin of national culture and showcases his historical concepts and historical writing mechanisms through six coupled aesthetic elements: the "new" and the "old," the "real" and the "unreal," and the "individual" and the "collective." It argues that Hawthorne not only investigates and represents important events in national history but also explores strategies for historical writing, challenging contemporary mainstream discourse from various perspectives. On this basis, Hawthorne's historical poetics, by including multiple perspectives and satirizing authoritative ideas, exhibits his careful contemplation of national issues and sharp criticism of nineteenth-century American official history.

Keywords Nathaniel Hawthorne; historical poetics; colonial history; multiplicity; irony

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Introduction

Although Hawthorne was not regarded as a historical novelist by his contemporaries in the same way as James Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, or Catharine Maria Sedgwick, his consistent historical consciousness and discourse construction

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that evoke a sense of history and trace historical processes have, to a considerable extent, imbued his works with a historicity similar to that of traditional historical novels. Curiously, one of the earliest critics to identify the historical nature of Hawthorne's novels was the conservative bishop Arthur Cleveland Coxe, who accused the novelist of disregarding social morality. Despite his strong disapproval of the transgressive themes in *The Scarlet Letter*, Coxe did not deny certain artistic qualities of the novel, recognizing its attempt to elevate itself from "petty" tale to "historical novel." He opined:

> It [*The Scarlet Letter*] may properly be called a novel, because it has all the ground-work, and might have been very easily elaborated into the details, usually included in the term; and we call it *historical*, because its scene-painting is in a great degree true to a period of our Colonial history, which ought to be more fully delineated. (Crowley 181-182)

In contrast to Coxe's highly restrained comments, the positive evaluations from Henry T. Tuckerman and E. P. Whipple further reveal the correspondence between Hawthorne's historical writing and traditional historical novels. For this reason, we should return to Whipple and through the lens of his thoughts, reconsider the historical dimensions of Hawthorne's fiction:

> For many of these stories are at once a representation of early New England life and a criticism on it. They have much of the deepest truth of history in them. "The Legends of the Province House," "The Gray Champion," "The Gentle Boy," "The Minister's Black Veil," "Endicott and the Red Cross," not to mention others, contain important matter which cannot be found in Bancroft or Grahame. They exhibit the inward struggles of New-England men and women with some of the darkest problems of existence, and have more vital import to thoughtful minds than the records of Indian or Revolutionary warfare. (Crowley 342)

By comparing Hawthorne with other established historians of his time, Whipple perceptively recognize the exceptional qualities of Hawthorne's historical fiction, which were absent in official history. For a long time afterward, however, many critics failed to sustain attention to the historicity of Hawthorne's fiction. As Henry James put it, Hawthorne's novels "had few perceptible points of contact with what is called the world, with public events, with the manners of his time, even with the life of his neighbours." (James, *Essays* 319) In the eyes of critics like James, Hawthorne escaped into a realm of artistic imagination, detached from historical reality. In this regard, Michael Davitt Bell points out that there was the cognitive oversight because those scholars still adhered to the "rigid distinction between 'art' and 'history'" — they believed that Hawthorne's timeless literary artistry couldn't be compatible with his unique historical awareness, thus necessitating the dismissal of the latter. Therefore, Bell advocates for thinking in the "middle ground," viewing the relationship between history and art with a more inclusive mind, or more precisely, considering history as a part of art (Bell, *Hawthorne* vii). At the same time, to address the shortcomings of historical methods in Hawthorne studies, Bell suggests shifting focus from a comparative study at the level of story (contrasting Hawthorne's historical romances with historical records) to a narratological analysis at the level of discourse (exploring how the past is interpreted and reproduced in Hawthorne's works) (Bell, *Hawthorne* viii). Following Bell's paradigm, this paper attempts to conduct a systematic study of Hawthorne's historical poetics by examining his historical concepts and aesthetic principles in both fictional and non-fictional texts.

In effect, Hawthorne has discussed his ideas of history and historical writing mechanisms on different occasions, and these concepts find expression in the following literary images. First, the historical heritages that connect old and new cultures, such as the Pyncheon house and the May-Pole recall the forgotten history, which has still haunted Hawthorne's time, albeit imperceptibly. Second, the historical reconstruction of the Scarlet Letter, the Red Cross, and the show box embodies the aesthetic realm where the real and the unreal blend harmoniously, and thus serves as an alternative to official history which unjustly prioritizes fact over fiction and deliberately disregards historical contradictions. Third, the old oaken chair, the autograph letters from historical figures, and the old women's tales present a historical panorama from both individual and collective perspectives and a revision to the grand but highly problematic national history. Although these aesthetic elements and cultural images deal with different historical issues, they complement and resonate with each other, collectively forming the poetic foundation of Hawthorne's historical narrative. More importantly, this poetic construction which includes multiple and ironic discourses engages in dialogue with contemporary official history, challenging its authority by exposing social conflicts and historical contradictions that have often been omitted or deliberately embellished, thus creating a complex and multifaceted historical field for readers. In this sense, Hawthorne is concerned about not only national history but also writing about it. And his poetics of historical critique, characterized by multiplicity and irony, well exemplifies this.

The Interplay of the Old and the New: The "House of the Seven Gables" and Remembrance of the Forgotten History

The dialectical relationship between the old and the new is a core theme in Hawthorne's historical writing. According to the writer, his works are termed "romances" because they attempt to depict the contrast and resonance between distant ages and the fleeting present, or "to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us" (*Novels* 351). From this perspective, historical writing not only enables Hawthorne to honor the past but also provides him with an important perspective to trace and clarify the historical roots of contemporary social phenomena. Therefore, while most of his contemporaries (represented by Transcendentalists like Emerson) eagerly shed the burdens of the past, embraced the present, and looked forward to the future, Hawthorne instead took a different approach by pointing out that the forgotten history might come back to haunt the present and reminding people to reflect on the past. In comparison, Hawthorne's concept of connecting the past with the present displays a conservative and nostalgic sentiment, leaving the impression of being unrelated to current affairs, especially in the face of the progressive discourse predominant in his time. However, it constitutes the fundamental principle of Hawthorne's historical writing, which further evolves into his cognitive basis for observing and intervening in social life, and reflects his responses to contemporary issues.

In this respect, *The House of the Seven Gables* holds significant symbolic importance. Revolving around the enmity between the Pyncheons and the Maules, the novel tells a lesser-known truth, that is, "the act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit, in a far distant time" (*Novels* 356). Following Hawthorne's carefully crafted theme, readers can easily discern that from the Puritan era to the eve of the American Civil War, history seemed not to have ruptured but astonishingly displayed a cyclical pattern. In the colonial period, Colonel Pyncheon capitalized on the witchcraft hysteria to falsely accuse Matthew Maule, and finally took possession of Maule's land. Centuries later, Colonel Pyncheon's descendant, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, similarly fabricated evidence to frame his cousin for personal gain. Therefore, despite the passage of time, Judge Pyncheon, by perfectly inheriting the ruthlessness, hypocrisy, and greed of his ancestor, could be seen as the latter's reincarnation, which meant past tragedies were destined to be reenacted in contemporary times. Corresponding to the novel's moral, the Pyncheons' "hereditary" violent tendencies and the family feuds indicate that if historical sins were not absolved in time, they would eventually merge into the family's bloodline and profoundly affect the destinies of future generations. To one's relief, the Pyncheons' evil does not constitute the main theme of the novel. Although history's curse has cast a heavy shadow over the House of the Seven Gables through Judge Pyncheon, this vicious cycle was ultimately broken by the younger generation, Phoebe and Holgrave, which hinted at a reconciliation to some extent between the past and the present. In this regard, the novel's conclusion carries the nuanced logic of dialectics between the old and the new: after the sudden death of the Judge and the revelation of all truths, the decision was made to move from the dark ancient mansion to the Judge's rural villa, somewhat as a gesture to bid farewell to the regrettable past. However, the past was not completely forgotten because, on the one hand, Uncle Venner, the town's old man full of ancient wisdom and practical insight, was invited to reside in the new home, implying that historical memory received due respect. On the other hand, Holgrave, who had originally advocated for the abandonment of everything past, later transformed from a staunch reformer to a conservative, and willingly embraced the existing system. His shift in stance actually embodies Hawthorne's ideal historical view that the "tattered garments of the Antiquity" are "gradually renewing themselves by patchwork," instead of being directly "exchanged for a new suit" (*Novels* 507). Within this framework of gradual change, Hawthorne manages to establish an organic connection between the past and the present, thus providing readers with a unique perspective to glimpse into the origin and development of American history and culture.

It is notable that in Hawthorne's fictional world, the past and the present not only indicate the sequence of events but also refer to the transformation of local identities. In connecting the past with the present through historical writing, Hawthorne considers both dimensions of time and space—not only contemplating the rupture and continuity between ancient and contemporary times from a diachronic perspective, but also examining the similarities and differences between England and American colonies in lifestyles, values, and beliefs from a synchronic perspective. In other words, Hawthorne's historical writing not only outlines the changes in events but also portrays the clashes between different regional cultures (i.e. English and American cultures), or to put it another way, the cultural anxieties during periods of social transformation (see Pennell 18). In this regard, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" is particularly noteworthy. The tale is based on Endicott's raid on Merry Mount and uses highly allegorical methods to reenact the conflict between new and old values in early colonial periods. In the scarcely trodden and perilous American wilderness, Merry Mount stood as a utopia where residents inherited the festive customs of old England and spent their days in revelry around the May-Pole. Unfortunately, the frivolity of Merry Mounters provoked the Puritans led by Endicott, who strictly adhered to asceticism and couldn't bear the frivolous entertainments of old England spreading to the new world. When their contradictions became irreconcilable, the Puritans acted preemptively, ruthlessly toppled the May-Pole and forced the Merry Mounters to leave their joyful haven. Although the tale on the surface depicts the conflict between Revelers and Puritans as a clash of mentalities (the struggle between "joy" and "gloom"), it allegorically alludes to the confrontation between two ideological orientations and ways of life in the new and old worlds. More precisely, the tale attempts to reveal the gains and losses in the formation of New England's character. This is particularly evident in the story's end—when contemplating how to do with the newlyweds Edgar and Edith, Endicott showed mercy, merely ordering the discipline and assimilation of the young couple and even placing rose wreaths from the destroyed May-Pole on them. Thus, for Edgar and Edith, though "the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gaiety," the "purest and best of their early joys" did not perish, but forever resided in their emotional bond (*Tales* 370). From the overall plot of the tale, it appears that the Puritans have won decisively in the struggle, but the victory was mitigated by Endicott's leniency, which symbolized compromise, and foreshadowed the formation of New England's regional identity and intellectual tradition under the interaction between new and old cultures.

Compared to "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," the entanglements of the past and the present seem more complex and thought-provoking in *The Scarlet Letter*. In the novel, although the early immigrants of New England frequently deplored the Church of England as corrupt to justify their unique mission in abandoning the old culture and creating a new world, they still maintained spiritual ties with old England in many ways. In terms of thought, emotion, and cultural tradition, they were not very different from the English. For example, the "old home" in Hester's eyes was not just a reminder of the static past, but a vibrant and dynamic cultural symbol. It not only carried unique individual memories but also profoundly affected her perception of the present—whether Hester looked back on the past on the scaffold, pondered gender issues in solitude, or considered her escape with Dimmesdale in the woods, the old England always appeared before her eyes, and prompted her to reflect on the differences between old and new lives. On a larger scale, both the common people and the nobility in the colonies cherished longing for their motherland to varying degrees. The novel begins by explaining that, compared to their delicate descendants, the Boston women watching Hester's trial in the marketplace were more akin to their English counterparts because they were raised in their native land and perfectly inherited the physique and temperament of their countrywomen. Their derision of Hester and Pearl—on the one hand, jokingly referring to Hester's use of "heathenish adornment," and on the other hand, labeling Pearl as "demon offspring" (*Novels* 162, 202)—actually betrayed their own contradictions. Although the Puritans bragged that the novelty and superiority of the colony lied in its abandonment of the home country's obnoxious customs, their fetish for symbols (using the scarlet "A" to symbolize sin was itself a way of Catholic symbolism) and fine clothing (Hester's exquisite needlework was highly valued in the colony) seemed to indicate that they secretly retained many old habits, and hence they were not yet purely Puritan (see Bercovitch 57).

Therefore, in the chapter "The New England Holiday," readers are treated to not only a panorama of the customs of New England, but also a glimpse of English cultural traces. The novel mentions that at the inaugural ceremony of the new governor, although "popular merriment [...] in the England of Elizabeth's time, or that of James" was prohibited, certain recreational activities from the old world (such as wrestling matches) continued, adding much enjoyment for the common people (*Novels* 317). As for the upper classes, on the one hand, they publicly expressed dissatisfaction with extravagant customs like bonfires and banquets, but they still clung to some old ways, including procession to celebrate the Election Day. These facts indicate that the earliest European colonists were not "born to an inheritance of Puritanic gloom"—quite the contrary, they selectively inherited many folk rituals from their motherland and thus could be called "native Englishmen" (*Novels* 316). In such case, it is not difficult to understand that even Governor Bellingham himself found it hard to let go of his feelings for the motherland. Not only did he decorate his colonial mansion "after the residences of gentlemen of fair estate in his native land," but he vainly hoped to transplant the flowers and vegetables from his homeland to the new environment (see *Novels* 206-209). In a sense, this "contrapuntal" historical perspective breaks contemporary reader's expectations and sets *The Scarlet Letter* apart from contemporary historical narratives, since unlike the latter, it does not view the New England Puritans as the forebears of the American Revolution or "proto-Americans," but rather as the English people who found it difficult to sever cultural traditions of and emotional ties with their homeland. Hence the novel offers a unique view of the formation of the American nation and its dual impact (Pennell 18, 29).

Overall, whether delineating the residue of Puritanism in nineteenth-century America, or portraying the enduring attachments of American colonists (and even their descendants in the United States) to their "old home," Hawthorne excels in capturing pivotal moments in national development, thereby clarifying the causes and effects of national culture and spirit, and envisioning the destiny of the nation. From this perspective, the wise old man in *Grandfather's Chair* who tells national history can be regarded as Hawthorne's mouthpiece. His story ranges from John Winthrop to George Washington and covers the two-century journey of American colonization and nation-building. He guides young audiences inside and outside the story to revisit the national epic and inherit ancestral spirits, so his storytelling makes possible "the past speaking to the present, or rather to the future." Through the vivid historical imagination of Grandfather, the innocent children can not only "know anything of the past," but also recognize the present and "provide aught for the future" (*Grandfather* 478). Therefore, Hawthorne's advocacy of connecting the past with the fleeting present is of great significance here.

The Integration of the Real and the Unreal: The "Scarlet Letter" as an Alternative to Official History

In "The Custom House—Introductory to *The Scarlet Letter*," Hawthorne metaphorically describes the ideal creative environment as "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (*Novels* 149). To practice this aesthetics, Hawthorne claims to be the "editor" rather than the author, pretending that the manuscript of *The Scarlet Letter* was "discovered" rather than "created" by him. He further lists various "factual evidence" to create the illusion of objectivity, asserting that Hester's story is based on historical facts. Moreover, he candidly claims that his "editorship" is not a mechanical retelling of previous records but an active exercise of imagination, adding embellishments to the story at critical moments (see *Novels* 146-147). It is worth noting that this poetic strategy of "integrating reality and fiction" is not unique to *The Scarlet Letter*. Instead, it runs throughout Hawthorne's entire creative career and forms a unique feature of his historical poetics. In works such as "Endicott and the Red Cross," "Roger Malvin's Burial," and "The Gentle Boy," the narrator tends to provide a detailed historical background at the beginning of the text, or even deliberately reveal the historical sources or creative materials of the story. Take "Legends of the Province-House" as an example. The narrator creates the illusion of true events and urges readers to suspend their disbelief, while simultaneously admitting that the stories have "a tinge of romance approaching to the marvellous," not hiding the fictionality of the tales (*Tales* 641). To borrow the paradoxical rhetoric of *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne's historical writing, is essentially like a "day-dream," but it also has a sense of "reality"—it is this both-real-and-dreamlike quality that constitutes the unique poetic foundation of his work (*Novels* 634). In summary, this deliberate technique of obscuring the real and unreal has the following effects: (1) it makes clear the historical correspondences referred to in the story, thus guiding readers to the best path into the text; (2) it adds a sense of reality to fictional narrative, thus resolving the traditional opposition between reality and fiction; (3) it questions the authority of official history and gives voice to suppressed discourses.

Obviously, this narrative characteristic carries strong meta-narrative implications and displays Hawthorne's self-reflexive awareness of the mechanisms of historical writing. According to Harry E. Shaw and Wallace Martin, most Western scholars since Aristotle have often defined the novel from a negative perspective (i.e. in contradistinction to history, reality). Paradoxically, the novel, often synonymous with "fiction," often exhibits a "truth to reality" (Shaw 30; Martin 57). This contradiction is particularly pronounced in historical fiction—what literary genre embodies the artistic tension between fact and fiction more than historical fiction? Unfortunately, because history has always been held as a model and a significant measure of the value of novel, the inherent aesthetic qualities of the latter (let alone historical novels) have long been neglected. Therefore, even though the historicity of the novel is recognized and the narrative characteristics of historical fiction are explored, some critics remain confined to the mindset that prioritizes fact over fiction and fail to recognize the creativity of such genre in balancing historical truth and artistic truth. It is no wonder that renowned critics like François-René de Chateaubriand and Georg Brandes were quite dissatisfied with the "transgression" of historical novel and accused it of disregarding facts and blurring the lines between reality and fiction, thus being "a false genre," or even worse "a bastard species" (Chateaubriand 530; Brandes 125).

From this perspective, Hawthorne consciously explores the dialectical relationship between truth and fiction in historical fiction to correct the bias of realism mentioned above, and thereby justify the legitimacy of historical imagination. In guiding his close friend Horatio Bridge in writing travelogue, Hawthorne straightforwardly points out the necessity of imagination:

> I would advise you not to stick too accurately to the bare fact, either in your

> descriptions or narrations; else your hand will be cramped, and the result will be a want of freedom, that will deprive you of a higher truth than that which you strive to attain. Allow your fancy pretty free license, and omit no heightening touches merely because they did not chance to happen before your eyes. If they did not happen, they at least ought — which is all that concerns you. This is the secret of all entertaining travellers. (qtd. in Mellow 227)

Hawthorne sees imagination as the key to writing travelogue, which somewhat recalls his later confession to Bridge about his mindset while writing the campaign biography *The Life of Franklin Pierce*: "though the story is true, yet it took a romancer to do it." (qtd. in Stewart 133) It applies to non-fiction writing, even more so to fiction writing. In the historical sketch "Sir William Phips," Hawthorne openly speaks of the limitations of mere historical records and then goes on to note that a proper exercise of imagination can correct narrative deficiencies and make up for biases:

> The knowledge, communicated by the historian and biographer, is analogous to that which we acquire of a country by the map, minute, perhaps, and accurate, and available for all necessary purposes, but cold and naked, and wholly destitute of the mimic charm produced by landscape painting. These defects are partly remediable, and even without an absolute violation of literal truth, although by methods rightfully interdicted to professors of biographical exactness. A license must be assumed in brightening the materials which time has rusted, and in tracing out the half-obliterated inscriptions on the columns of antiquity; fancy must throw her reviving light on the faded incidents that indicate character, whence a ray will be reflected, more or less vividly, on the person to be described. (*Tales* 12)

To highlight fancy's "reviving light," Hawthorne consciously breaks the barriers of historical writing and instead employs literary techniques to depict historical figures: after outlining Phips's early experiences, he explicitly states that the events to be described henceforth have no historical basis, thus asserting a distinct departure from historical fidelity. Accordingly, the text intentionally deviates from the conventional biographical writing and embodies a distinct artistic character. On the one hand, the main text focuses solely on one day in Phips's life by succinctly compressing major events of his tenure (such as the Salem witch trials and Indian warfare) into a single day. On the other hand, the sketch embeds micro-details within its grand narrative to further showcase the personal traits of this grassroots governor through specific vignettes. Evidently, Hawthorne maintains a high degree of artistic autonomy by integrating imaginative elements to make the work multivalent, and convey the "truth of human experience" not yet accommodated in official records but more closely aligned with human experience (Pennell 18).

It can also be seen from the historical inaccuracies in "Endicott and the Red Cross." Hawthorne customarily opens with the pseudo-historical style ("There is evidence on record" [*Tales* 542]) to create an unquestionable sense of historical authenticity. However, as noted by some scholars, the tale exhibits several traces of tampering with historical materials: the narrator expends much effort describing the severe punishments imposed by Puritan authorities on heretics, yet certain specifics (such as being punished for toasting the English King's health) lack substantiation in colonial judicial history. Even where historical basis exists, the timing (certain penalties listed in the tale preceded their historical documentation by many years) and frequency (Salem's crime rate, as depicted by Hawthorne, was shockingly high just six years after its founding) diverge significantly from historical accounts. More prominently, Hawthorne diminishes the young Separatist Roger Williams into a feeble peacemaker in the presence of the indignant and uncompromising Endicott (see Doubleday 102-103). Through the reconstruction of history, "Endicott and the Red Cross" is less about the exploitation of colonies by England than about the discipline and oppression of the marginalized groups (including Williams) by the colonial authorities (represented by Endicott). With this reversal of power dynamics, Hawthorne shifts his focus from Endicott, who has been lauded by nationalist discourse, to the minorities forgotten and suppressed by national history, thereby satirizing the official American history and opening up historical possibilities.

However, we cannot conclude from Hawthorne's advocacy of using imagination to inspire creativity that he seeks only fiction and disregards historical fact. As Michael Colacurcio has pointed out, the enduring charm of Hawthorne's historical fiction lies in its artistic tension that is "historically, disparate without being in all senses perfectly opposed" (Colacurcio 226). In other words, while Hawthorne primarily aims to unearth figures and events obscured in history through imagination, it does not mean that he ignores the principles of truth in his works. On the contrary, he respects objective reality and accurately depicts historical events. Thus, despite its advocacy for imagination, "Sir William Phips" does not abandon historical authenticity; it even shows a desire to conform to authentic records and establish itself as credible history. For instance, when depicting the horrifying details of white people massacring Native Americans, the narrator clarifies the truthfulness of his descriptions, dispelling readers' doubts with a rigorous tone: "we would not venture to record without good evidence of the fact" (*Tales* 15). In the end, he even solemnly cites authoritative sources to substantiate the reliability of the narrative. This seemingly contradictory strategy precisely demonstrates Hawthorne's endeavor in reconstructing historical events—to achieve an organic unity of historical truth and artistic truth. As he suggests, imagination could be used to reconstruct history "without an absolute violation of literal truth" (*Tales* 12).

To better grasp Hawthorne's views on reality and fiction, one must revisit *The House of the Seven Gables*, especially its preface concerning creative flexibility. Given the prejudices of nineteenth-century American mainstream society towards fiction (see Bell, *Development* 11-13), Hawthorne positions his own work within the realm of romance, hoping to carve out a place for artistic imagination with this established literary genre:

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude … The former [Romance] while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart, has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public. (*Novels* 351)

At first glance, Hawthorne seems to defend imagination throughout, and even earnestly plead with readers who are adept at seeking factual accuracy not to "assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative." Instead, he asks them to regard the novel merely as the crystallization of artistic concepts, a "castle in the air" (*Novels* 352-353). However, upon closer examination, *The House of the Seven Gables* actually advocates a coexistence between reality and fiction. Certainly, as novelist, Hawthorne seeks to maintain artistic self-discipline, but this does not mean he neglects the real world. The limiting terms such as "a certain latitude," "rigidly subject itself to laws," and "a very moderate use of the privileges" in the preface strongly demonstrate that Hawthorne neither purely emphasizes unfettered flights of fancy nor slavishly reproduces facts. Instead, he organically blends realistic and imaginative strokes by deftly transforming social life into artistic elements.

What needs to be clarified is that Hawthorne's writing strategy of blending reality with fiction not only signifies the dialectical unity of historical facts and literary imagination, but also involves the creative process and artistic logic intrinsic to historical fiction, and thus showcases his strong sense of innovation and introspection. This meta-construct is prominently presented through juxtaposed writing, which openly reveals its "sources" while constructing a bizarre stage, thereby creating a scene where reality and fiction intermingle and mutually illuminate each other. "Fancy's Show Box: A Morality" perhaps provides an excellent commentary on this. The tale begins with the question "What is Guilt," and then explores whether guilty thoughts are equivalent to guilty deeds by introducing the story of Mr. Smith, a so-called moral exemplar, confronted directly by three uninvited guests—Fancy, Memory, and Conscience. These three intruders respectively expose Mr. Smith's lesser-known aspects: Fancy operates the show box to reveal Mr. Smith's cruel moments, though they never occur in real life. Memory flips through her volume, finds one record of Smith's sinful thought which corresponds to Fancy's picture, and reads it to the gentleman. Conscience, after the first two reveal stains on Mr. Smith's soul, always strikes a dagger to his heart. The tale aims to suggest that even if one has not committed heinous acts, harboring malevolent thoughts would also render him sinful. In such cases, the sinner (whether in action or thought) must deeply reflect, sincerely repent, and thus purify his souls.

On the surface, "Fancy's Show Box" focuses on moral discussion and seems unrelated to creative principles. However, if one considers the abrupt "aside" in the latter part of the tale, a hidden literary allegory emerges. After Fancy, Memory, and Conscience have exposed Smith's base thoughts and left him to repent in solitude, the main plot ends and the narrative then returns to moralization. Unexpectedly, the narrator at this moment equates the novelist with the criminal by focusing on their hidden similarities. That is, to enhance the realistic elements of a tale (to make it "seem, in the glow of fancy, more like truth, past, present, or to come, than purely fiction" [*Tales* 454]), the novelist's thought processes in crafting antagonists mirror those of the real-life villain who meticulously plans his crimes before acting. From this perspective, the "novel-writer" and the "villain of actual life" are only a step apart (the key lies in whether there is a constraint of moral conscience), and they often "meet each other, half-way between reality and fancy" (*Tales* 454). On the formal level, this passage is a kind of critical commentary, clearly distinct from the preceding fictional narrative. On the thematic level, it focuses on the similarities between the villain's scheme planning and the novelist's creative writing, which bears no direct relation to Smith's midnight adventure. However, given the broad definition of sin at the tale's beginning, Hawthorne's discussion on novel writing here is not digressive but rather closely connected to the theme. At the meta-linguistic level, it mirrors the symbolic identities of the three visitors in Smith's story, who echo the core elements of writing respectively: "Memory" which records actual thoughts is akin to reality; "Fancy" which constructs possible scenarios and subtly reflects reality can be considered the artistic elaboration; and "Conscience" serves as the ethical and ideological framework bridging both. Hawthorne's artistic representation of these creative elements recalls Henry James's metaphors when the latter discusses the poetics of romance:

> The balloon of experience is ... tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are, and from the moment that cable is cut we are at large and unrelated: we only swing apart from the globe – though remaining as exhilarated, naturally, as we like, especially when all goes well. The art of the romancer is, "for the fun of it," insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him. (James, *French* 1064)

Although Henry James's conception of the art of romance differs significantly from Hawthorne's, the three vivid images James uses to illustrate the fabric of romance writing resonate similarly with the three allegorical figures in Hawthorne's tale. Thus, "Fancy's Show Box" encapsulates the operational mechanism of artistic imagination. Namely, the morality play centering around Mr. Smith turns out to be an implicit allegory of (historical) novel aesthetics: past events are documented; the novelist reconstructs existing historical records in accordance with his own moral values, and creates an artistic world that appears detached from social life but is imbued with the spirit of the times.

Echoing "Fancy's Show Box," "Alice Doane's Appeal" explores the dialectical relationship between reality and fiction in historical writing with a high degree of self-awareness. It should be noted that Hawthorne not only employs first-person narrative perspective in the tale, but also introduces a frame narrative structure. This narrative construct not only represents a dialogue between Hawthorne and contemporary readers, his interaction with mainstream historical discourse, but also produces an aesthetic effect of mutual illumination between fiction and reality. As implied by the two mirthful female listeners, the narrator "I" lamented that the entire nation did not pay attention to its history. Even if someone did, he (implicitly referring to the famous historian at the time, Charles W. Upham) has treated this dark history "in the only desirable connection with the errors of our ancestry," by "converting the hill of their disgrace into an honorable monument of his own antiquarian lore" (*Tales* 206). Thus, through the narrative mechanism of the frame story, the tale utilizes the interaction between "I" and his audience to teach those blindly optimistic readers and historians a lesson about historical truth. Moreover, regarding the relationship between fiction and reality in "The Appeal of Alice Doane," Colacurcio argues that the tragic story of the Doane siblings and the wrongful cases in Salem are merely two different narrative forms of the same material, with the latter even being more "true," "literal," and "reductive" (Colacurcio 92). However, these two narratives are not superficially similar. Hawthorne arranges the coexistence of literary fiction and historical reality on the same stage to vividly reveal the generative mechanisms of artistic imagination. Contrasting the fictional and factual elements in the tale, one will perceive that the morbid imagination of Leonard Doane, the incestuous love of the Doane siblings, and the malicious instigation from outsiders in the Doane narrative all to varying degrees echo the chaos in the Salem narrative, thus artistically reproducing the causes of the historical tragedy. Therefore, the story of Doane is not as absurd as described by the two ladies; on the contrary, based on historical facts, it artistically represents the hidden logic of the Salem tragedy, thereby pointing towards a higher truth that official historical narratives fail to attain. To borrow the ironic rhetoric of the narrator "I," one could say, "fiction is more powerful than truth."

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne similarly employs a writing strategy of juxtaposing the real and the unreal to further highlight the self-referentiality and self-creativity of historical imagination. This is particularly evident in the intertextual correspondence between "The Custom-House" and the body of the novel. Notably, "The Custom-House" is not only a personal biography or a memoir of Hawthorne's political career, but also a ticket to his imaginative world since it contains the poetics of his historical writing. From this perspective, one may better understand why the sketch, in its comprehensive portrayal of lives at Salem Custom House, digresses to explain the origin of the scarlet letter and Hester's story. Considering Hawthorne's advocacy for creating a neutral territory between the real and the fictional, the narrative digression helps establish an implicit correspondence between the author and the female protagonist, thus mapping the structural relationship between social reality and artistic imagination. In this regard, a detail is worth noting. When Hawthorne found the scarlet letter among the belongings of the former Surveyor Jonathan Pue and wore it on his breast, a burning sensation struck him with a shock, and the letter fell to the ground. This extraordinary "emotional resonance" (in the novel, it seemed as if the scarlet letter, the "badge of shame," was "burning" on Hester's chest) was not entirely a physiological response. As the plot progresses, this seemingly unreasonable tremor and its underlying emotional drive turns out to be a key thread connecting "The Custom-House" and the body of the novel: Hawthorne, who was falsely accused and removed from his post due to party strife, must have felt a deep sense of desolation similar to Hester's. Therefore, he entrusted his unspoken emotions to Hester, or expressed his perceptions of social reality through the writing of her story. In other words, by means of a "structural repetition" of his own situation and that of Hester (Baym 104), Hawthorne was able to practice his poetics of historical writing–connecting the past and the present, and fusing the real and the unreal. Correspondingly, to navigate the neutral territory constructed by Hawthorne's works, readers must possess a perspective that integrates both ancient and modern knowledge, and embraces both reality and fiction.

The Juxtaposition of the Individual and the Collective: "Grandfather's Chair" and Revision of the Grand National History

In an essay titled "On Solitude," young Hawthorne pondered the relationship between individuals and society with the statement: "Man is naturally a sociable being ... It is only in society that the full energy of his mind is aroused. Perhaps life may pass more tranquilly, estranged from the pursuits and vexations of the multitude, but all the hurry and whirl of passion is preferable to the cold calmness of indifference" (qtd. in Matthiessen 238). However, judged from Hawthorne's career over the years, he seemingly did not stick to this social declaration. Instead, he often gave the impression of a hermit. While addressing public misunderstandings, Hawthorne added a preface to the revised edition of his collection *Twice-Told Tales* and hoped to reshape his image. In his view, the works in the collection are simple and clear, demonstrating his own goodwill toward the public and a desire to "open an intercourse with the world." Therefore, if readers can set aside their preconceptions and approach the works in a "proper mood," they can establish "most agreeable associations," and even "imperishable friendships" with him (*Tales* 1152-1153). No matter how sincere these words may sound, they at least help reveal Hawthorne's desire to step out of his study and integrate into the world. This even provides an important perspective to consider Hawthorne's aesthetic principles in historical writing.

In fact, Hawthorne's emphasis on the interaction between the individual and the collective not only influences his social habit, but also permeates his historical writing, resulting in narratives that integrate multiple perspectives and considerations. Overall, its influence is mainly reflected in two aspects: thematic conception and discourse construction. In Hawthorne's historical writing, the relationship between individual and society is a significant theme. Lawrence Buell believes that the Puritan society in Hawthorne's works is a "monolithic entity," within which the protagonists are more or less out of sync with their surroundings (Buell 268). Buell's viewpoint certainly warrants discussion. Indeed, works like "Young Goodman Brown," "The Man of Adamant," and "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" portray misanthropic figures who looked down upon others, but equally significant are texts like "The Gentle Boy," *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The House of the Seven Gables*, which tell stories of rebels who eventually repented and reconciled with communities. From this perspective, Hawthorne's representation of human sociability is quite complex, for it contains profound ethical concerns and moral admonitions—as seen in the semi-autobiographical tale "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man," where in his dying moments, the "solitary man" Oberon warns one "not to follow an eccentric path, nor, by stepping aside from the highway of human affairs, to relinquish his claim upon human sympathy" (*Tales* 499).

The contemplation of interpersonal relationships and social dynamics not only provides Hawthorne with cognitive foundations for developing plots, but also exerts a significant influence on his historical poetics. According to literary theorists M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, the historical novelist is tasked not only with "mak[ing] the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative," but also with "us[ing] the protagonists and actions to reveal what the author regards as the deep forces that impel the historical process" (Abrams and Harpham 230). Thus, adopting a dual perspective that considers both individual choices and societal environments is integral to the creation of historical novels. Hawthorne responds to this challenge both thematically and formally. In this regard, *Grandfather's Chair* serves as an excellent example. The work presents a superb panorama of American history before the founding of the nation through an ancient oaken chair, while simultaneously examining the chair's vicissitudes within specific historical contexts. The storyteller Grandfather vividly exemplifies the writing strategy. Aware of the expectations of his youthful audience, Grandfather chooses the chair as the vehicle for his national history to connect events across different eras and thus offer "picturesque sketches of the times" (*Grandfather* 429). Simultaneously, Grandfather knows well that excessive emphasis on individual experiences without addressing social history could render the story superficial and personalized, which damages both the authenticity and uniqueness of historical narrative, and hinders the purpose of historical education. Therefore, prior to narration, Grandfather claims that the colonial history constitutes a prerequisite for the unfolding of the chair's story. Later, he intermittently reminds the audience that to understand the fate of the chair, they must also consider social background of the times. When the attentive listener Laurence hears about the chair changing hands repeatedly during the American Revolution, he couldn't help but wish that this precious historical artifact could be protected from the incessant entanglements of human affairs. In response, Grandfather comments that throughout its varied life, the chair has been long engaged in "general intercourse with society," making society its optimal stage (*Grandfather* 625). Later, as Laurence comes to embrace this perspective, viewing the chair's link to history through the correct lens, he changes from a mere listener to narrator. In a tone reminiscent of Grandfather's, he concludes the chair's story: "After its long intercourse with mankind, —after looking upon the world for ages, — what lessons of golden wisdom it might utter! It might teach a private person how to lead a good and happy life, or a stateman how to make his country prosperous" (*Grandfather* 631). Through the "ideal reader" Laurence, Hawthorne not only summarizes one basic tenet of historical writing, but also highlights the ethical significance and social value of his historical writing in particular, and literature in general—giving "instruction with life examples and experiences," and "counseling against fault in the physical and spiritual realm" (Nie 14).

Clearly, just as Hawthorne seeks to find an optimal balance between the new and the old, the real and the imaginary, he also aims to bridge the gap between the individual and the collective, and invest his works with both the analysis of human nature and the observation of society (see Matthiessen 239). To achieve this, Hawthorne often employs several poetic strategies in his writing: (1) embedding micro-narratives within a macro-background; (2) fusing official records with folk rumors; (3) combining a global perspective with a personal viewpoint; (4) addressing both mainstream and marginalized groups.

First, the narrative focus shifts from the environment to the people within the environment, and conversely reflects the macro environment through the specific facts of human life. As previously mentioned, Hawthorne typically begins his work by carefully detailing the historical background of the story's events. This not only enhances the authenticity of the work and gives the reader an immersive experience, but also establishes an organic connection between characters' experiences and the societal environment in the work. In "Roger Malvin's Burial," the interplay between personal experience and collective narrative is portrayed with utmost subtlety. The tale boldly introduces Lovewell's Fight of 1725, and repeatedly emphasizes the heroic aspects of the white soldiers. Yet, just as readers are about to applaud the heroic deeds, the narrator abruptly shifts the narrative focus to the post-war aftermath by focusing on the ethical dilemma of the retreating soldiers and highlights the tragic life of the survivor, Reuben Bourne.[1] At first glance, the story seems far removed from the "heroic" theme, as it not only fails to celebrate Lovewell's Fight but also portrays the antihero Reuben and uses his disgraceful deeds to further undermine the epic color of the war. In fact, given Reuben's remorseful abandonment of his comrade Roger Malvin, his subsequent lies to preserve his reputation, and the tragic killing of his own son, the tale never deviates from the theme of war but rather reflects on the aftermath of this unjust fight. As Colacurcio analyzes, Hawthorne not only uses Reuben's concealment of truth to allude to the glorification of the Lovewell expedition's deplorable conduct (the bloody massacre of Indians for selfish gain), but also reveals the vicious cycle of interracial conflicts (the ongoing wars between white settlers and Indians), implying that the peace proclaimed at the beginning of the tale was merely a pipe dream. Through this short story, therefore, Hawthorne calls on the American people to learn from history and tell "the unlovely truth about their national experience" (Colacurcio 121).

Second, there is an organic integration of official records with popular discourse in Hawthorne's historical writing. In "Edward Randolph's Portrait," the colonial politician and historian Thomas Hutchinson expressed his unequivocal disdain for popular rumors: "These traditions are folly, to one who has proved, as I have, how little of historic truth lies at the bottom" (*Tales* 645). In this regard, Hutchinson criticizes his predecessor Cotton Mather: "too implicit credence has been given to Dr. Cotton Mather... [he] filled our early history with old women's tales, as fanciful and extravagant as those of Greece or Rome" (*Tales* 645). For Hutchinson's style of asserting official authority and disregarding folk traditions (in line with his contempt for the people and extreme loyalty to the Crown), his niece Alice Vane's questioning is quite telling: "may not such fables have a moral?" (*Tales* 645) If Hawthorne, in "Edward Randolph's Portrait," reveals tensions between official and unofficial histories through the disagreements of his main characters,

1 As Professor Nie Zhenzhao aptly suggests, "The ethical choice made out of ethical dilemmas, more often than not, leads to tragedy," (Nie 192) Reuben's tragic ending primarily results from his ethical choice of abandoning Malvin and not telling the truth.

he also attempts to reach a compromise elsewhere by blending these two types of sources to broaden his historical perspective. He not only extracts necessary materials from official records but also probes valuable marginal information found in unofficial histories. Throughout Hawthorne's historical romance, it is evident that he not only utilizes the "old women's tales" scorned by Hutchinson as creative materials but also explains the use of those sources in such works as "The Wedding-Knell," "The Feathertop," "An Old Woman's Tale." Certainly, the "old woman's tale" is not often, as its literal meaning suggests, confined to women's talk. In a broader sense, it refers to folk discourses that are not officially recognized but contain vast narrative potential. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne not only actively incorporates public rumors and family legends to enrich the plot, but also critically reflects on such creative process. This is particularly evident in the characterization of Colonel Pyncheon and Judge Pyncheon. Highlighting their shared duplicity, the novel often steers towards the rumor and hearsay to reinforce its satirical undertones. Furthermore, unlike contemporary official history, the novel not only alludes to the Salem witch hunt through Colonel Pyncheon but also evokes the traumatic memories of historical victims like Thomas Maule to challenge the grand national history which has invariably excluded those marginalized figures. Significantly, the novel reveals a strong self-referential awareness of the profound efficacy of such unofficial and personalized narratives in semantic enrichment. That is, appropriately invoking folklores not only "preserves traits of character with marvellous fidelity" but at times also "brings down truth that history has let slip" (*Novels* 365, 458).

Third, Hawthorne switches between a global perspective and a personal perspective to fully depict the interaction between historical figures and their social milieu. This narrative technique is evident not only in "Sir William Phips," but also in Hawthorne's other works. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the portrayal of Dimmesdale is achieved not only through his public speeches and confessions but also through his inner monologues and private conversations (with Hester and Chillingworth) which subtly reveal his internal conflicts and complex emotions towards Hester and the Puritan regime. Thus, Hawthorne not only places his characters under the spotlight of the social stage and portrays their outward characteristics, but also delves into their inner worlds to uncover their lesser-known aspects. However, this does not mean that Hawthorne glosses over the historical contexts in which his characters lived. On the contrary, the portrayal of multiple facets of characters often manifests Hawthorne's attempt to explore the social causes of characters' fate from a broader perspective and examine the dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective. In this regard, "A Book of Autographs" makes a brilliant example. In the sketch, Hawthorne creatively employs a unique narrative medium—the personal letters of historical figures. From his perspective, unlike printed works, perusing the handwritten letters of historical figures not only allows readers to immerse themselves in the historical milieu and feel the spirit of the times between the lines, but also facilitates a friendly conversation of readers with the writer himself and offers a glimpse into his inner thoughts through every stroke of the manuscript. More importantly, it is precisely because of the informal and personal nature of autograph letters that readers can see the true face of the letter-writer and discover significant differences between his handwritten signature and printed name, as well as between "the actual man" and "his historical aspect" (*Tales* 966). Take John Hancock's signature as an example: his hasty and blurry signature on a document pales in comparison to the grandeur of his name inscribed on the Declaration of Independence, thus suggesting that Hancock himself may not be as majestic as most history books proclaim. Perhaps his elevation to the status of a great man is primarily due to "an ornamental outside" rather than "intrinsic force or virtue" (*Tales* 966). Here, through the interchange between public and private perspectives, Hawthorne not only reveals the complexity and multiplicity of historical figure but also articulates the constructiveness of historical narrative. The writing strategy endows Hawthorne's historical writing with both social examination and exploration of human nature, and reinforces its self-referentiality and critical acumen.

Finally, Hawthorne gives voice to the marginalized groups and engages them in pointed and even conflicting dialogue with the mainstream. In the preface of *Peter Parley's Universal History, on the Basis of Geography*, Hawthorne clearly points out to readers the harsh truth of the past and the necessity of studying history:

> As you lift the curtain of the past, mankind seem from age to age engaged in constant strife, battle, and bloodshed. The master-spirits generally stand forth as guided only by ambition, and superior to other men in wickedness as in power […] It is necessary that history should be known, that we may learn the character and capacity of man; but in telling of the vices and crimes that soil the pages of the past, I have taken advantage of every convenient occasion, to excite hatred of injustice, violence, and falsehood, and promote a love of truth, equity, and benevolence. (*Peter* viii)

Hawthorne is keenly aware that history is a memory field built upon countless disasters and tragedies. To re-create the past means touching upon the power structures of the time, revealing the ideological clashes of interests therein. Thus, we often see social elites and lower-class figures taking turns on Hawthorne's historical stage, where different ideologies and political discourses intersect and collide. For instance, in foregrounding the ruthless colonial regime, Hawthorne leaves, albeit subtly, traces of marginalized groups in the background. Through passive observers (such as the powerless Native Americans witnessing colonial intimidation in "Endicott and the Red Cross") or sufferers (like black slaves in "Old News"), he can highlight the authority of the Puritan (Federal) government. On the other hand, Hawthorne also writes directly about those marginalized groups subjected to disciplinary power. For instance, "The Gentle Boy" focuses on Puritan persecution by depicting the tragic experiences of Quaker Ilbrahim and his family's ruin. And "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" in essence criticizes the authoritarian mindset of Puritans, who victimized Merry Mounters through "forced acculturation" on both physical and psychological levels (Mielke 54).

Certainly, the marginalized groups in Hawthorne's historical writing do not always appear as the silenced other. They often accumulate significant disruptive power, break through the shackles of power structure, and address their accusation. Whether they are the criminals who dared to question and criticize Puritan regime in "Endicott and the Red Cross," the artists single-handedly refuting public prejudice in "The Prophetic Portrait" and "Drowne's Wooden Image," or the descendant of the victimized family who practiced hypnosis for revenge in *The House of the Seven Gables*, these persecuted heretics are empowered to challenge or even break the rigid hierarchical systems. In this regard, Hawthorne's depiction of Tories within American society stands out prominently. His Revolutionary narratives like "Old News," "Legends of the Province-House," and *Grandfather's Chair* all end with the "dilemma of the loyalist," infused with a sympathetic touch (McWilliams 556). Evidently, this narrative structure embodies a strong humanitarian spirit, indicating Hawthorne's critical view of historical gains and losses. While constructing national history and eulogizing Revolutionary heroes, he does not leave unheeded the "victims" and "losers" in social development and instead reflects on the negative impacts and heavy costs brought about by national rise (Brown 123).

Conclusion

In Hawthorne's historical narrative system, diverse couplings merge into one and unfold a tapestry that intertwines and complements each other. As one navigates these historical scenes and embrace the aesthetic elements, Hawthorne's poetics of historical critique is to be seen: through interplay of the old and the new, integration of the real and the unreal, juxtaposition of the individual and the collective, Hawthorne innovates his own historical writing, explores the origin and development of the American nation, and satirizes mainstream historical concepts. Reading in this light, one could explore the multifaceted poetic logic of Hawthorne's historical critique, identify the links between his aesthetic principle, historical ideas, and ethical concerns, and thereby fully grasp the internal coherence of Hawthorne's historical writing.

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