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Dialectical Sentences and Discursive Conflicts in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*

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This paper highlights formal and thematic expressions of discursive conflicts in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. It focuses on Hawthorne's use of the "dialectical sentence," a type of sentence attributed to German dialectical thinkers, principally Theodor Adorno. Voicing two contradictory views in the same breath, the dialectical sentence provides formal expression of irresolvable discursive conflicts. Hawthorne's dialectical sentence serves as a suitable medium for expressing the conflict of interests between the Pyncheon and Maule families. The discursive conflicts are expressed through a set of binary terms, including Pyncheon/Maule, novel/romance, present/past, reason/rumor and science/superstition. The first term in each binary usually serves for the Pyncheons and the second, the Maules. Thus, expressed in dialectical sentences, the narrative voice oscillates between an irony which reflects the values of the former family and an enthusiasm which reflects those of the latter. Coming down firmly on neither side of the conflict, and through avoiding reconciliation, the novel takes on a dialectical structure which keeps the resolution of the discursive conflicts, as a utopian element, for a time outside the novel's timeframe.

Keywords: American Fiction; Romanticism; Nathaniel Hawthorne; Theodor Adorno; Dialectical Sentence

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Oraciones dialécticas y conflictos discursivos en *The House of the Seven Gables* de Nathaniel Hawthorne

Este artículo destaca las expresiones formales y temáticas de los conflictos discursivos en *The House of the Seven Gables* de Nathaniel Hawthorne. Se centra en el uso que hace Hawthorne

de la “oración dialéctica”, un tipo de oración atribuida a pensadores dialécticos alemanes, principalmente Theodor Adorno. Al expresar dos puntos de vista contradictorios al mismo tiempo, la oración dialéctica proporciona una expresión formal de conflictos discursivos irresolubles. La oración dialéctica de Hawthorne sirve como un medio adecuado para expresar el conflicto de intereses entre las familias Pyncheon y Maule. Los conflictos discursivos se expresan a través de un conjunto de términos binarios, que incluyen Pyncheon/Maule, novela/romance, presente/pasado, razón/rumor y ciencia/superstición. El primer término de cada par suele servir para referirse a los Pyncheon y el segundo para los Maule. Así, expresada en oraciones dialécticas, la voz narrativa oscila entre una ironía que refleja los valores de la primera familia y un entusiasmo que refleja los de la segunda. Al no situarse de manera clara en ninguno de los lados del conflicto, y al evitar la resolución y la reconciliación, la novela se convierte en una estructura dialéctica que mantiene la resolución de los conflictos discursivos, como un elemento utópico, durante un tiempo fuera del marco temporal de la novela.

Palabras clave: ficción americana; Romanticismo; Nathaniel Hawthorne; Theodor Adorno; oración dialéctica

I. INTRODUCTION

Formal and thematic duality in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*¹ has received significant attention. Critics have drawn attention to different kinds of duality, both within the novel² and on a larger scale, as a structure that governs his whole *oeuvre*.³ A number of studies which, like the present one, address Hawthorne’s artistic integrity in *HSG* have focused on one particular form of duality, that between the novel as a whole and its incongruous ending. To many readers, Hawthorne’s promise of social revolution throughout the novel, his giving voice to the radical thoughts and aspirations of the unprivileged, displays a stark contrast with its hardly convincing ending, which Anthony Trollope described as “the hurrying up of the marriage, and all the dollars which they

¹ The novel will subsequently be referred to as *HSG*.

² Waggoner identifies a tension within the novel between Hawthorne the artist and Hawthorne the man (1962, 20). Bell (1980) and Trachtenberg (2000) identify a similar tension within the narrative between “romance” and “novel.” Millington (1992) identifies a number of dual voices in *HSG*. The “Historian” of the first chapter, for example, is divided as voiced/lettered and the narrator of the second chapter as boor/sympathizer. Ullén (2006) sees the novel as a chiasmic structure, whereby the second half of the narrative repeats the first part in inverted order.

³ For Waggoner (1962), Hawthorne’s work displays a duality between his dark short fiction, more characteristic of Hawthorne the artist, and his happier long fiction, more characteristic of Hawthorne the man. Millington identifies in Hawthorne’s career a pattern of “reparation” governing his changing direction from one published work to the next: “This notion of reparation is characteristic of Hawthorne’s response to his own novels and—also characteristically—cuts in two directions: the friendliness of *The House* produces the desire to write something with ‘an extra touch of the devil’ in it and the bitterness of *The Blithedale Romance* in turn produces the intention to be more ‘genial’ the next time out” (1990, 86).

{Holgrave, Phoebe, Clifford and Hephzibah} inherit from the wicked Judge” (1879, 216). For Hyatt Howe Waggoner, this irresponsible ending is the result of the destructive intervention of Hawthorne the man, who wanted to be a “well-adjusted man of society,” in the work of Hawthorne the artist, who did not care about what he “should believe” (1962, 20). To Michael T. Gilmore (1988), the novel’s “fairy-tale ending” is far from the artistic and critical ending that Hawthorne would have created if he had not had to yield to the demands of the marketplace. To Walter Benn Michaels, Hawthorne “imagines the past and present as utterly continuous, even identical, and in so doing, attempts to repress the possibility of any change at all” (1987, 88).

Millington’s subtler reading (1990) places Hawthorne “inside” the ideology of his novel’s characters. To him, the “Author”⁴ of the Preface is not “heroically above or outside ideology” but rather is one of the several characters who represent different “cultural positions” and express their anxieties about how to establish their position at the center of their culture, that is, how to regain or maintain their relevance in the current sociopolitical and cultural milieu. The Author’s anxiety about entering the literary marketplace with a product (a Romance) is on a par with Hephzibah’s anxieties about opening a cent shop and Holgrave’s “adolescent absolutism” regarding houses and inheritance. Both the Author and Holgrave have to overcome their anxiety by giving up some of the ideals (artistic and/or revolutionary) that prevent them from participating in the economy. The Author has to succumb, at least partly, to the demands of the literary marketplace, and Holgrave has to agree to live in Judge Pyncheon’s house. The outcome, in both cases, is the transformation of the center *from the center*. Holgrave embraces Phoebe’s “sentimentalism” to protect him against his excessively analytical mind (and the wickedness which might follow inherited wealth), while the Author manages to reach a wider audience at the center of the middle-class culture with a narrative which presents and exemplifies one important lesson: how to transform a culture by participating in it rather than standing aside from it. “A rigorously thought-out art,” Millington concludes, “must give up the *éclat* of its marginality or the prestige of its ethereality and understand the culture that it addresses as contested ground, where different representations of value and meaning compete for the authority that only an audience can confer” (1990, 86).

Inspired by the critics (mentioned above) who have traced duality at a macro level as a structure governing Hawthorne’s whole oeuvre, the present study will start by analyzing the text at a micro level, tracing duality at the level of individual sentences. Imagining this structural continuity from the whole to its parts (the representation of the whole by the individual parts and vice versa) allows us to consider Adorno’s model of Hegelian totality as the basis for the novel’s form. This model would allow us to read formal contradictions at the heart of Hawthorne’s text as expressions of the discursive

⁴ Millington capitalizes the word “Author” to emphasize his positionality as a persona speaking in the Preface.

conflicts which the novel stages. The main discursive conflict, which governs many other conflicts in the novel, is that between the written discourse of the “novel” and the oral discourse of the “romance.” While the former insists on reducing past history to extant official documents (here the legal document which supports the Pyncheons’ claim to the house), the latter aims at reviving a suppressed past through oral tradition. Hawthorne’s dialectical sentences give voice to these conflicting discourses as they also voice the values of the two feuding families. Different generations of the Pyncheons emphasize their right to the house on the basis of legal documents (they also continue searching for a long-missing document that would establish their title to another piece of land in Maine), while the Maules depend on oral tradition and to mesmerism to prove the Pyncheons wrong. Hawthorne’s dialectical sentences map the dynamics of this conflict through a set of dialectical relationships, including Pyncheon/Maule, novel/romance, present/past, reason/rumor and irony/enthusiasm. Accordingly, the ending will not be read as Hawthorne’s failed attempt to *resolve* the discursive conflicts which he has staged, but as his successful formal emphasis on their irresolvability, a laying bare of art’s anxious pursuit of formal unity amid irresolvable discursive conflicts. By doing so, the novel meets Adorno’s criterion for the best and politically most effective work of art, one that lays bare its own internal contradictions so that *hidden* social contradictions can no longer go unnoticed.

2. HAWTHORNE AND THE DIALECTICAL SENTENCE

In his *Marxism and Form* (1971), Fredric Jameson explains Adorno’s characteristically difficult language as his “obscure, and cumbersome, indigestible, abstract” style which characterizes him as a true heir to German dialectical tradition (xiii). Jameson here uses the negative terminology of some Anglo-American critics of Adorno’s so-called “Germanic” style. For Jameson himself, the structure of Adorno’s sentences is the result of his thinking process: dialectical thinking finds its proper medium only in the “dialectical sentence” since dialectical thinking “remains aware of its own intellectual operations in the very act of thinking, such self-consciousness must be inscribed in the very sentence itself” (53). “Dialectical thinking,” Jameson continues, “characteristically involves a conjunction of opposites or at least conceptually disparate phenomena” (53). As dialectical thinking is the constant thinking and rethinking of the limitations of one’s own thought, it requires the involvement and articulation of opposite views in the process of thinking and writing. Something similar to this specific kind of self-consciousness and reflexivity, which Jameson (2007) terms “dialectical stereoscopy” and dialectical “double standard” (35), can be traced in Hawthorne’s work.

This comparison of Adorno’s philosophy and Hawthorne’s fiction may seem far-fetched, but evidence shows that it is not. For one thing, as Jameson reminds us, German dialectical philosophy is known for its poetic quality. Adorno, for instance, is famous for his highly poetic style. Jameson goes so far as to attribute to Adorno’s

work the kind of organic unity which is familiar to us from the Romantic poets who influenced Hawthorne: "It is a kind of stylistic obedience analogous to that which governs the work of art itself, where it is the shape of the sentences themselves, above and beyond all conscious reflection, that determines the choice of the raw material" (1971, 53). Jameson goes even further to speak of "the purely formal pleasure" of Adorno's sentences (xiii). A lifelong student of German dialectical philosophy, Jameson himself is famous, or as Douglas Kellner puts it, "infamous" for his difficult writing (1989, 7). Terry Eagleton finds in Jameson's own work a high degree of literariness. He praises Jameson's "magisterial, busily metaphorical sentences" which can be read "as often in place of poetry or fiction as of literary theory" (1982, 14-15).

The second basis for our comparison is Hawthorne's and Adorno's well-known Romantic German similarities. In the former, this quality is indicated by what has been described as "Hawthorne's pseudo-Germanic style" (Palma 2008, 163). Hawthorne's contemporaries were quick, if not calculated and clear, in pointing out similarities between Hawthorne and the German Romantic authors. The most famous such critic was Edgar Allan Poe, whose review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* and *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1847) verges on accusations of plagiarism.⁵ A year later, and perhaps under Poe's influence, James Russell Lowell described Hawthorne in his *A Fable for Critics* (1848) as the "Puritan Tieck" (47). Fred Lewis Pattee denies Poe's charges against Hawthorne, but he too outlines a number of formal and thematic similarities between Hawthorne's works and those of Tieck (1923, 105). Adorno, too, is known for his Romantic German influences. For Margarete Kohlenbach, Adorno's work displays "strong affinities with Romanticism" (2009, 257) and represents a "twentieth-century adoption of the postulate of the unity of philosophy and *Poesie* that Friedrich Schlegel and Schelling had first formulated at the time of historical Romanticism" (273). For Elizabeth Millán Brusslan, "the theme of the relation between freedom, nature and the aesthetic that was central to the work of the early German Romantics" is central to Adorno's thinking (2019, 107).

What is interesting, and particularly fitting for our comparison here, is that discussions of Hawthorne's German influences mostly revolve around the same stylistic feature which Jameson traces in German dialectical philosophy: the use of multiple perspectives and the juxtaposition of opposites, which makes summarization and paraphrasing particularly difficult. For Waggoner (1964), Hawthorne's characteristically difficult style is the style of "a man whose insights are too qualified to be succinctly summarized" (quoted in Coale 2011, 106). Waggoner's formalist distrust of summarization, as an approach to Hawthorne's work, is comparable to Jameson's formalist approach to Adorno's work. In the opening paragraph of his chapter on Adorno in *Marxism and Form*, Jameson acknowledges the incompatibility of Adorno

⁵ Poe's accusation has received many critical responses. See William Crisman (2002) for a critical review of related scholarship. For the purpose of this paper, we adhere to Pattee's advice that "one may indeed 'liken' Hawthorne's work to Tieck's and even to Töpffer's, but it is doubtful if one may go much farther" (105).

with summarization, warning the reader that it is indefensible “to summarize, simplify, make more widely accessible” the work of a theorist who “insists relentlessly on the need for modern art and thought to be difficult” (1971, 3). Emphasizing Hoffman’s influence on Hawthorne, Allienne R. Becker highlights both authors’ use of multiple perspectives, itself indicative of the influence of the German tradition of the arabesque (1986, 3). Becker founds her argument on Schlegel’s definition of the arabesque as “artfully organized confusions,” “charming symmetry of contradictions” and a “wonderful perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony” (Schlegel 1968, 86). This symmetry of contradictions and the alternation of enthusiasm and irony are among the main characteristic features of Hawthorne’s language and narrative style. The following section of this paper provides a close analysis of Hawthorne’s use of the dialectical sentence in his major novel *HSG*. It will discuss how his alternation of enthusiasm and irony in artfully structured dialectical sentences serves to lay bare various levels of discursive conflict throughout the text.

3. DIALECTICAL SENTENCES AND THE DIALECTICAL NARRATIVE

Hawthorne’s preface to *HSG* mirrors the narrative itself in both form and content. The main stylistic feature of both texts is the dialectical sentence, a sentence in which two opposing views or arguments are played against each other without resulting in a univocal resolution. The author usually begins by expressing an opinion, but then he suddenly points out the limitation of that opinion by expressing an opposite but equally justifiable one, thereby generating an unending dialectic between the two views. The dialectical sentence can also be defined as a sentence which contains the seeds of its own destruction. For example, it may rely on evidence which has already been discredited or problematized. The dialectic carried out at the level of each individual sentence or paragraph constitutes part of an extended dialectic played out in the novel as a whole, whereby the author’s voice oscillates between two opposing views toward his subject: an *enthusiasm* which interprets the narrated events (the story) as a continuous and meaningful process directed towards a *telos*, and an *irony* which regards them as fragmented, accidental and unrelated. This dialectic of enthusiasm and irony, which is embodied in Hawthorne’s dialectical sentences, runs through both the preface and the novel itself. While Hawthorne’s enthusiasm usually voices the “romantic” (oral) discourse of the Maules, his ironic streak supports the “novelistic” (written) discourse of the Pyncheons.

Hawthorne defines his novel as “romantic” (1851, IV), a definition which explains the extended dialectic that he develops throughout the text. The alternation of enthusiasm and irony is, in fact, the narrative voice’s alternation between the romantic and the novelistic. The romantic voice interprets the tragic fall of the house of Pyncheon as the retribution of Providence for the vices committed by the family’s ancestor. From this perspective, many of the events are couched in a mystic air and are explained by recourse to supernatural agents. The novelistic voice, on the other hand, interprets the

events as episodic and seeks to demystify seemingly mysterious elements. The elements which support the romantic/enthusiastic view are mostly fantastic and marvelous, as opposed to the actual and realistic elements which support the novelistic/ironic.

Hawthorne's dialectic of enthusiasm and irony is set in motion from the very start through a sequence of artfully structured dialectical sentences. The preface opens with Hawthorne's assertion of the large degree of freedom enjoyed by the writer of the romance, or romantic novel, as a genre. The writer of a romance can claim "a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he [*sic*] would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel" (Hawthorne 1851, iii). This assertion, however, is challenged immediately in the following sentence, when Hawthorne claims that a romance, "as a work of art, [...] must rigidly subject itself to laws" (iii). The paragraph continues with Hawthorne's suggestion that the writer of the romance should "mingle the Marvelous rather as a slight, delicate and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public," the idea only then to be undercut by his view in the next sentence that "he [*sic*] can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime even if he [*sic*] disregards this caution" (iii). In the next paragraph, Hawthorne expresses the moral of his story: "that the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief" (iv). He goes on to say that he "would feel it a singular gratification if this romance might effectually convince mankind [*sic*]—or, indeed, any one man [*sic*]—of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity" (iv). These enthusiastic views, however, are challenged by Hawthorne's next and more ironic sentences, when he starts to speak "in good faith" (iv). He tells us that "he is not sufficiently imaginative to flatter himself with the slightest hope of this kind," i.e., the hope to "convince mankind [*sic*]" of what his tale is supposed to teach (iv), and he goes so far in this ironic direction as to relinquish his alleged moral and to reject the conventional notion of "moral" which he seemed to confirm in the previous sentences: "When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one" (iv-v). This style of writing is characteristically Hawthorne's. Frequent use of disjunctives such as "but," "while," "however," etc., is the earmark of his writing style and reveals what Leland S. Person describes as Hawthorne's "frustrating tendency to give evidence with one hand and take it back with the other—to create ambiguity of human perception and conclusion" (2007, 42). This style is maintained throughout the narrative itself and serves as a structural device, governing and regulating the relationship between the romantic (enthusiastic) and the novelistic (ironic) in Hawthorne's romantic novel.

As in most of Hawthorne's other works, public opinion, gossip and hearsay form a huge portion of the narrative. This narrative style, which according to John Bayer is the main feature of Hawthorne's fiction (1980, 251), serves to couch the narrated events in what Hawthorne describes as a "legendary mist" (1851, iv). The narrator reports public

legends and superstitious beliefs, but he also proposes more realistic interpretations of the events, voicing the reader's skepticism in the same breath with which he expresses those superstitious opinions. He uses many interchangeable terms to refer to public opinion, including "popular imagination" (26), "traditionary lore" (10), "fireside tradition" (13), "traditionary gossips" (24), "diurnal gossip" (133), "local gossip" (273), "received opinion" (26), "fable" (21; 134) and "fireside talk" (211). He frequently reminds the reader of the fact that his narrative is based on public hearsay and gossip, which serves to foreground the act of narrating and problematize the narrated events. However, despite the fact that a large portion of the narrative is based on hearsay, the narrator considers it as "the wild babble of the time" (Hawthorne 1851, 22).

Among the events that the narrator reports in accordance with local gossip is Colonel Pyncheon's mysterious death: "There is a tradition, only worth alluding to as lending a tinge of superstitious awe to a scene perhaps gloomy enough without it, that a voice spoke loudly among the guests, the tones of which were like those of old Matthew Maule, the executed wizard—'God hath given him blood to drink!'" (20). The narrator's equivocal narration of this scene has the effect of both affirming and denying public opinion at the same time. Gossip provides a "tinge of superstitious awe" which, despite the narrator's partial denial, becomes an indelible part of the event:

there were the marks of fingers on his throat, and the print of a bloody hand on his plaited ruff; and that his peaked beard was disheveled, as if it had been fiercely clutched and pulled. It was averred, likewise, that the lattice window, near the Colonel's chair, was open; and that, only a few minutes before the fatal occurrence, the figure of a man had been seen clambering over the garden fence, in the rear of the house. But it were folly to lay any stress on stories of this kind [...]. For our own part, we allow them just as little credence as to that other fable of the skeleton hand which the lieutenant-governor was said to have seen at the Colonel's throat, but which vanished away, as he advanced farther into the room. [...] Doctors [...], each for himself, adopted various hypotheses, more or less plausible, but all dressed out in a perplexing mystery of phrase, which, if it do not show a bewilderment of mind in these erudite physicians, certainly causes it in the unlearned peruser of their opinions (20-21).

Later, the narrator provides an account of the sermon at Colonel Pyncheon's funeral, "which was printed, and is still extant" (22). He interprets the pious clergyman's speech as the expression of his disbelief in the possibility of murder (22). Although presented as a written historical document, the clergyman's opinion is only one among many others that participate in the discursive conflict and to which the narrator attaches a certain degree of credence. Moreover, this account of the clergyman's speech comes not long after the narrator's own comment on falsification in written history where he remarks that oral tradition "sometimes brings down truth that history has let slip" (22).

What is interesting here is the oscillation of the narrative between the natural (novelistic) and the supernatural (romantic). As a result, the event becomes the main site of the discursive conflicts carried out in the novel. The account of the rumors surrounding Colonel Pyncheon's death puts the blame on Matthew Maule's vengeful ghost. However, the image of somebody clambering over the garden fence directs the reader's suspicion, for a short instant, toward someone among the living. Then the narrator provides the account of the skeleton hand and the sound of Maule's curse which, once more, sets the narrative back in the kingdom of the dead. The narrator, though, doubts all of these accounts. The funeral sermon provides no evidence that Colonel Pyncheon's death was the result of a murder. However, the reader cannot take this written document as the ultimate truth of the event, especially as the narrator has spoken of "truth that history has let slip" only a few lines above his account of the sermon (22). Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon's death closely resembles that of Colonel Pyncheon, although the court identifies the former's death as murder and his niece Clifford Pyncheon is announced as the perpetrator. This fact supports the argument of those who regard Colonel Pyncheon's death as murder. When Judge Pyncheon dies in a very similar way as both the Colonel and Uncle Jaffrey, Clifford, who has just completed his thirty-year sentence for his uncle's alleged murder, runs away with his sister Hepzibah for fear of being accused of this murder too. Like most other narrated events, the novel's descriptions of the scenes of Uncle Jaffrey's and Judge Pyncheon's deaths are perplexing. Holgrave believes that the scene of Jaffrey's death was falsified. Judge Pyncheon's death, too, is couched in mystery. Following angry Judge Pyncheon's insistent orders, Hepzibah goes to fetch Clifford, who is hiding in his chamber, but he is not there. He might have left the house—but Hepzibah cannot tell how. Upon her return, she finds the Judge motionless in his chair. An instant later, Clifford appears as if from nowhere and announces Judge Pyncheon's death. Brother and sister escape the town for fear of being found guilty. However, it is decided later that the Judge died of natural causes. After reading this part of the novel, the reader will likely reexamine the narrative of Colonel Pyncheon's death, finding it even more enigmatic.

This oscillation of the narrative voice between natural and supernatural is also visible when the reader is introduced to the spring on Matthew Maule's property, making it one of the main sites of the discursive conflict between the Maules and the Pyncheons. It is said that the negative change in the quality of the water is the result of Maule's curse on Colonel Pyncheon. People remember the "deliciousness" and high quality of the water before Colonel Pyncheon started to build his mansion on the Maules' confiscated property (14). Here again, we find two opposing narratives. It is highly probable that building the house on the spot disturbed the spring at its origin. There is, however, an equally probable explanation that points to darker and "subtler" causes. After all, two hundred years have not been enough to diminish the awe with which Maule's Well is viewed and it "seems" that the water is indeed pestiferous. Toward the end of the novel, whenever Maule's Well is concerned, this dual narrative—of the natural and the supernatural—is

evoked and the author does not seem to embrace either side to the exclusion of the other. Later in the novel, Holgrave suddenly warns Phoebe against the spring: He “called to Phoebe, with a tone which certainly had laughter in it, yet which seemed to be more than half in earnest. ‘Be careful not to drink at Maule’s Well!’ said he. ‘Neither drink nor bathe your face in it!’” (105). Holgrave’s ideas are characteristically a mixture of enthusiasm and irony. By presenting Holgrave’s comment on Maule’s Well, Hawthorne further problematizes Holgrave’s already dubious view on the existing rumors about the spring. Clifford is bewitched by the spring: he sits next to it looking into its depths and entertaining himself with the “beautiful faces, arrayed in bewitching smiles” that he sees in the water (167). These moments of joy are often spoiled by the appearance of a horrible face and Clifford desperately cries out for help. This face reminds Clifford, and the reader, of the faces of Matthew Maule Jr., the mesmerizing carpenter, and of Matthew Maule, the infamous wizard. Clifford—who has spent thirty years in prison—is a weak hazy-minded man and the reader is not supposed to consider his visions as the “actual substance,” i.e., the realistic or the novelistic line of the narrative, especially as the author presents Phoebe’s refutation of Clifford’s claim. Nevertheless, this tinge of the supernatural is indelibly attached to the spring. It is believed that the water of Maule’s Well is especially nutritive to Alice’s Posies (225), as if those flowers, like Alice herself, are permanently under a spell cast by the Maules. The flowers are said to have been planted by Alice Pyncheon, a past inhabitant of the house of the seven gables who had fallen victim to the feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules and her death at a young age has cast a shadow of guilt over the house.

Artfully built on the borderline of the natural and supernatural, the house itself—the house of the seven gables—serves as a major site of discursive conflict. The meeting place of the living and the dead, the Pyncheons and the Maules, as well as the past and the present, the eponymous house mirrors the dialectical form of the novel. Even the clear-minded Phoebe cannot resist the haunting atmosphere of the house. The narrator, who expresses his skepticism regarding most supernatural events, reports the appearance of the dead Maules and Pyncheons in the room where Judge Pyncheon’s corpse lies. Here again, however, the narrator adds a tongue in cheek disclaimer and questions the reality of the scene before us, excluding it from the novel’s “actual substance”:

The fantastic scene just hinted at must by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story. We were betrayed into this brief extravagance by the quiver of the moonbeams; they dance hand-in-hand with shadows, and are reflected in the looking-glass, which, you are aware, is always a kind of window or doorway into the spiritual world. We needed relief, moreover, from our too long and exclusive contemplation of that figure in the chair (301).

Earlier in the novel, the narrator has foreshadowed this scene. Describing the interior of the house, that is to say, its “interior life,” the narrator puts much emphasis on the large old mirror in the parlor. He tells us that it “was fabled to contain within its depths

all the shapes that had ever been reflected there, the old Colonel himself and his many descendants” (25). There are also rumors that the descendants of Matthew Maule could conjure the ghosts of the dead Pyncheons in the mirror (25). Given these stories, it is difficult to reduce the scene of the ghosts in the house to simply being the result of the narrator’s hallucinatory vision.

Strange and mysterious voices are heard from the corners of the house. The characters attribute these sounds to the ghosts. It is, however, more reasonable to consider them as the rattling of the doors and windows in the wind—a view supported by the narrator. Yet, the reader finds it difficult not to think of some other “subtler” causes. It might not be mere accident that subsequent denizens of the house are afflicted with misery while those who leave it recover from their pain and misery. Also, it might not be pure chance that Judge Pyncheon, who has lived a long happy life away from the house, loses his constant smile together with his life and good name after only a momentary visit to the house. Clifford is noticeably rejuvenated shortly after his departure from the house and Phoebe is gradually overcome by gloom during her short residence there. Here again, however, the novelist has not eliminated the possibility of a different, more realistic explanation, and the reader can explain these occurrences by recourse to natural causes—although, as a structural rule, complete demystification is impossible.

Hawthorne’s dialectical sentences address three different groups of readers, each representing one position in the discursive conflict between the Maules and the Pyncheons. As he suggests, sober-minded readers may choose to disregard those events and interpretations which they deem unreal. Such readers limit themselves to what Hawthorne calls the “actual substance.” Those more imaginative or romantic-minded readers may choose to resist disbelief and adapt themselves to the rules of a fantastic or supernatural world. This second group are those to whom Hawthorne addresses the moral of the story. Their supernatural reading of the events, which mostly depends on public opinion and gossip, bestows meaning on an otherwise meaningless world. These readers allow the legendary mist to “float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events” not merely “for the sake of a picturesque effect” (iv). Their enthusiasm allows them to read a moral teaching and a divine design into Hawthorne’s fictional history of the house of Pyncheon.

For Gary Fine (1985), public opinion is a signifying practice which bestows meaning on the world: “Rumor and Gossip serve as the cornerstone of epistemology. These forms of discourse speak to how people make sense of their world” (223). This view sheds light on how Hawthorne founds the moral of his story on public opinion. The readers who take Hawthorne’s “moral” seriously—despite the author’s own recantation—are those who accept the rules of the supernatural and are enthusiastically obsessed with the thoughts of sin, retribution, curse, the revenge of the rambling ghosts, etc. They can imagine a meaningful relationship between the events of the past and those of the present; between the curse of the dying Matthew Maule and the tragic lives of subsequent generations of the Pyncheons. This second group, however, miss the “actual

substance” of the narrative, the realistic and natural explanations of the events, and confine themselves to the “evanescent flavor.” The first group of readers are no less unfortunate. They refuse to take into account those parts of the narrative which they cannot naturalize by recourse to the laws of the real or their own lived experience. They disregard Hawthorne’s explicit moral and take pains to remove all traces of the supernatural from their kingdom of the natural. Limiting themselves to the world of the realistic novel, they have no interest in higher flights of the imagination. They live the kind of life which Hawthorne describes as a “naked life” (1941, 239).

Hawthorne’s ideal reader, his soul mate, belongs to a third group. Unlike the second group of readers, they display no desperate enthusiasm for certainty. Through momentary suspensions of disbelief in dealing with the narrator’s reports of fanciful rumors, they allow a measured flight of imagination. Yet, their profundity allows no room for haste and hustle. As Allport and Postman remind us, a penchant for rumor indicates “a tendency to put ‘closure’ upon a story which is felt to be otherwise incomplete” (1945, 74). It indicates an “effort [toward] meaning which customarily haunts the subject who finds himself [*sic*] in an unstructured situation” (74). Hawthorne’s ideal readers do not, however, display any such enthusiasm for closure and meaning. They are, in John Keats’ words, “capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (1899, 277).⁶ Unlike the first group of readers, ideal readers are not satisfied with a one-sided view and do not dismiss hearsay and public opinion as complete nonsense. Indeed, Hawthorne’s dialectical style requires a dialectical reading process, one which entails the ability to think through both sides of the argument. Another term used by Jameson for this ability is “stereoscopic thinking” (2007, 28) which he considers an essential element of dialectical writing.

Scott Harshbarger reads Hawthorne’s use of multiple points of view as an attempt to establish a lively two-way communication with his audience. To do so, Hawthorne tries to translate “the dynamics of interpersonal communication into print” (1994, 30). He plays the roles of the author and the reader at the same time, expressing the former’s opinions and voicing the latter’s questions and doubts in the same breath. Hawthorne has been described as “one of the most regularly intrusive of intrusive authors” (Waggoner 1962, 18). Yet, the author-narrator is not there to have the final word. For Harshbarger, Hawthorne’s narrator functions “less as editor than as rumormonger,” who “tells his story by telling stories” (1994, 35).⁷

Hawthorne’s metaphor of the butterfly in the preface is key to understanding his aesthetics. His determination not to “impale the story with its moral,” not to stick

⁶ For George Dekker, “Hawthorne’s ideal reader is an adult in whom the child’s capacity for imaginative engagement with fact-defying fiction has not been lost” (2005, 62), and for Mary Gosselink de Jong, this ideal reader is one who “willing to bear with the narrator’s qualifications, equivocations and ambiguity is also prepared to accept uncertainty and to respect his [*sic*] judgment in keeping certain matters dark” (1984, 361).

⁷ In their psychological study of gossip and rumor, Levin and Arluke argue that gossip flourishes “wherever facts are undetermined or in conflict,” whilst the attempt to acquire knowledge of the truth through collecting more rumors often increases uncertainty (1987, 51).

“a pin through a butterfly” explains his decision to assign to the narrator this role of rumormonger, who, instead of pinning down meaning, enjoys its fluttering around. In Hawthorne’s aesthetics, artistic beauty is the result of the artist’s attempt to retain indeterminacy. For Adorno, too, this artistic representation of the indeterminable is the standard of true art. Martin Seel calls attention to Adorno’s frequent quoting of Paul Valéry’s famous dictum in his *Autres Rhumbs*: “beauty demands, perhaps, the slavish imitation of what is indeterminable in things,” and argues that “consideration of this indeterminable is not only of great theoretical importance but also of great ethical significance to Adorno” (2005, 15).

Although rumor serves as the main device for problematizing the narrative in *HSG*, another favorite device employed by Hawthorne is psychologizing. He uncovers this device too, referring to it in several different ways, often using different variations of verbs such as “fancy,” “think,” “imagine,” “seem,” etc. Joseph Campbell ([1949] 2008) has famously observed that “dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream” (14). Campbell’s observation is key to understanding Hawthorne’s hand-in-hand use of local legends and subjective narratives. A subjectively narrated event, like local gossip, is *sous rapture*; it is subject to constant oscillation between presence and absence. Hawthorne’s subjective narrative allows the reader to try to psychologize, or naturalize, the fantastic events. As Tzvetan Todorov observes, psychologization is a way of explaining fantastic events as being the result of natural causes (1975, 25). Among the fabulous events which are filtered by a character’s perspective is Holgrave’s hypnosis of Phoebe. The narrator, as usual, intervenes with equivocal remarks and expresses his doubt concerning the possibility of hypnosis. Although by the mid-nineteenth century hypnosis was recognized as a valid practice (Williamson 2011, 34), foreseeing future and conjuring the souls of the dead were, and still are, improbable and fabulous.⁸ Here again, Hawthorne’s ideal reader puts the subjectively-narrated events *sous rature*, letting them alternate between the romantic and the novelistic.

The ideal reader takes shape in the character of Holgrave, whose practice of daguerreotype is a metaphor for Hawthorne’s own dialectic of the romantic and the novelistic. Hawthorne provides several clues as to Holgrave’s fitness to serve as the reader’s role model. In his narration of the tragic story of Alice Pyncheon to Phoebe, it seems that his profound reading of the story teaches him not to repeat history by misusing his own power over her. Colonel Pyncheon’s appropriation of Matthew Maule’s property had been responded to by Matthew Maule the younger enslaving Alice Pyncheon through mesmerism (appropriation of the self for appropriation of the property). In his greed-driven quest for a missing document that would prove his right to a land in Maine, Gervayse Pyncheon, the Colonel’s grandson, had allowed Matthew Maule the younger to hypnotize his daughter Alice and use her as a medium

⁸ Hawthorne’s own fiancée, Sophia Peabody, who suffered from headaches, had been treated by a mesmerist (Kermode 1975, 98).

to communicate with the dead, a decision that cost him his daughter's life. Alice's story thus puts *greed for truth* and *greed for wealth* on a par: a warning to the reader about their anxious search after truth. Curious as Holgrave himself is about the "interior" of people, he decides to remain in relative doubt regarding the content of Phoebe's psyche rather than violating her right to self. He decides that "man's [*sic*] bewilderment is the measure of his [*sic*] wisdom" (Hawthorne 1851, 193), which can serve as practical advice for the reader to remain in doubt regarding the nature of the mysterious events.

Matthew Maule's mesmerism involves conjuring the ghosts of the two families' ancestors, symbolic of his own enslavement by the dead. Seeking the advice of the dead is central to subsequent generations of both the Pyncheons and the Maules. For the former, this conjuring is embodied in their anxious search for the lost deed (a written document) and for the latter it is their anxious attempt, through rumor-mongering (or recourse to oral tradition), to prove their right over a property which has been taken from them by the authority of an extant legal document. Holgrave, on the other hand, calls for a revolt against the rule of the dead: "Shall we never, never get rid of this Past" (197). He warns his generation against capitulation to the authority of the dead: "[W]e must be dead ourselves, before we can begin to have our proper influence on our own world" (197). This is a warning to the reader too. They need to exert influence over the text that they are reading. They too have to learn not to rely solely on one line of the narrative, the romantic or the novelistic. They have to stay in "bewilderment," turning their mind into a dialectical house of wonder, a site for the discursive conflict propagated by the novel.

Holgrave has in him the Maules' ability to mesmerize and his skill as a writer links him with the written discourse of the Pyncheons, a duality that is indicated by his skill at daguerreotype. As a hybrid genre, daguerreotype combines the actual and the imaginary, the objective and the subjective (Dinius 2012, 67). Commenting on *HSG*, Alan Trachtenberg also observes that "sharing features of both 'Novel' and 'Romance', of science and magic, of modernity and tradition, the daguerreotype plays a strategic role in the narrative" (2000, 31). As Holgrave's portraits indicate, his art pictures the smooth surface of the things he photographs as well as their hidden fissures and contradictions. This art is an emblem of Hawthorne's own art. As mentioned earlier, Holgrave's vow to marry Phoebe and his decision to move to Jaffrey Pyncheon's lavish country house has been read as his—and Hawthorne's—abandonment of his revolutionary ideals by the end of the novel. This ending, however, as Matthiessen observes, is "somewhat too lightly made" to serve as an ending (1941, 332). Hawthorne, it appears, problematizes the ending in order to keep the dialectic open, at least in the mind of the ideal reader. This problematic ending fits with Hawthorne's problematic and ironic narrative. As Ullén observes, Hawthorne's account of present events opens up "a vista to a future of indefinite extension" (2006, 7-8). For Thomas Brook too, Hawthorne's hardly convincing ending "seems to have retained a hope for the future" (1982, 209). The eventual coming together through marriage of the Maules and the Pyncheons has the

same effect as the daguerreotype: it gives the story a superficially convincing ending which reveals its cracks to the discerning reader.⁹ As John Limon observes, aware of the incompatibility¹⁰ of romance and his own scientific age, Hawthorne modified the form in *HSG*, using “the daguerreotype to fit an artistic-cum-scientific epistemology to the America of trains and telegraphs” (1990, 20). By closing his dialectical narrative with this problematic ending, Hawthorne satisfies Adorno’s criterion of successful art. “A successful work of art,” for Adorno, “is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure” (Adorno 1983, 32).

4. CONCLUSION

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *HSG* depicts the lives of subsequent generations of the houses of Pyncheon and of Maule over a period of more than 150 years, from the late seventeenth to the mid nineteenth century. This conflict is expressed in various terms, such as the conflict between present and past, reason and rumor, science and superstition and novel and romance. Throughout the novel, the narrator voices two opposing discourses: the realistic discourse of the novel and the romantic discourse of the romance. The novel’s “realism” is articulated by the narrator’s rhetoric of reason, its “romanticism,” through rumor. While the reasoning part of the narrator interprets the suffering and the eventual fall of the house of Pyncheon as the natural effects of natural causes, his rumormongering part reads them as retributions for ancestral crimes. In other words, the reasoning realistic part of the narrator reads the present events in isolation, while his romantic rumormongering part reads them as shadows of past events. The narrative voice oscillates between irony and enthusiasm. While the ironic voice reads no divine design into the events, the enthusiastic voice finds many connections between the past and the present and between many events in the novel. The enthusiastic voice seeks certainty and determinacy through recourse to supernatural explanations, while the ironic voice accepts only natural and scientific explanations. Readers are, accordingly, divided. While one group of readers may follow the voice of reason and disregard the rumors and superstitions as being added for effect, another group may resist the voice of reason and read the text as a didactic romance which shows how the sins of one generation affect the lives of later generations, and how elements in nature—here the water of Maule’s Well—punish sinners in mysterious and yet intelligible ways. Accordingly, the narrative functions as a dialectical form: a romantic novel which achieves formal unity out of different types of tensions and contradictions. The novel leaves the conflict between the Maule and Pyncheon families unresolved and closes

⁹ For Frank Kermode, “Hawthorne has, in extraordinary degree, the modernists’ sense of a future whose relation to the past is far more than ever before ambiguous” (1975, 91).

¹⁰ The inability of the romance to capture the flux of the present is also highlighted by Millington (1992).

with a promise of utopian resolution only in a distant unimaginable future. The final marriage between the two houses is too superficial and fragile and the sense of “ending” and “closure” is only the result of the novel’s formal unity.

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