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Make-believe: uncertainty, alterity, and faith in nineteenth-century supernatural short stories

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Make-Believe: Uncertainty, Alterity, and Faith
in Nineteenth-Century Supernatural Short Stories

by

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of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy Degree in English
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, “Make-Believe: Uncertainty, Alterity, and Faith in Nineteenth-Century Supernatural Short Stories,” illustrates the confluence in nineteenth century America of a philosophical investment in uncertainty and the emergence of a genre suited to its expression. I argue that supernatural short story collections, characterized by stories *with explicit* fantastical elements or *which leave open* that possibility, helped voice and explore uncertainty as a critique of prevailing master narratives of both Enlightenment rationalism and religious orthodoxy. My study examines Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), Herman Melville’s *The Piazza Tales* (1856), Charles Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales* (1899), and Mary Wilkins Freeman’s *The Wind in the Rose-Bush* (1903), whose fantastic elements question the confident subjectivity shored up by rationalism and the sense of totality it projects. The genre’s insistent uncertainty conditions a reader into an alternative posture of openness to possibilities—an openness which, at its most ethically effective, describes a means to approach alterity without the totalizing certainty which so often reduces the other. The terms of faith are crucial here, as a means to lend numinous or transcendent meaning to the world beyond the reach of, and therefore setting limits on, rational materialism. But faith also functions on an ethical and interpersonal level, in the act of believing the testimony of an other despite the assumptions of the self. As the century progresses, this genre was taken up by authors with identities more vulnerable to society’s master narratives and the power structures they uphold. My final two chapters demonstrate how the supernatural uncertainty in these collections provided not just a theoretical model for approaching otherness but a specific articulation of the oppressions which certainty enables and the openness which the supernatural helps to found.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This thesis illustrates the confluence in nineteenth century America of a philosophical investment in uncertainty and the emergence of a genre suited to its expression. I argue that supernatural short story collections helped voice and explore uncertainty as a critique of prevailing master narratives of both Enlightenment rationalism and religious orthodoxy. My study examines *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), *The Piazza Tales* (1856), *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales* (1899), and *The Wind in the Rose-Bush* (1903), whose fantastic elements question the confident subjectivity shored up by rationalism and the sense of totality it projects. The genre's uncertainty conditions a an alternative posture of openness to possibilities—an openness which, at its most ethically effective, describes a means to approach alterity without the totalizing certainty which so often reduces the other. The terms of faith are crucial here, as a means to lend numinous or transcendent meaning to the world beyond the reach of, and setting limits on, rational materialism. But faith also functions on an ethical, in the act of believing the testimony of an other despite the assumptions of the self. As the century progresses, this genre was taken up by authors with identities more vulnerable to society's master narratives and the power structures they uphold. My final two chapters demonstrate how the supernatural uncertainty in these collections provided not just a theoretical model for approaching otherness but a specific articulation of the oppressions which certainty enables and the openness which the supernatural helps to found.

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Introduction

With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States doubled in size, helping mark the beginning of a period of expansion and self-definition for the country which might be said to end with the publication of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, in 1893, persuasively arguing that this defining age of the American frontier was over. This explosion westward began in an era of proliferations of Enlightenment thinking which sought to account for the world in terms of a growing body of scientific knowledge and a sense that a comparable rationalistic approach could also illuminate mysteries of morality, truth, and ethics. Alfred Bendixen situates the early nineteenth century in terms of the "legacy of the Puritan condemnation of the fanciful and frivolous combined with a post-Enlightenment valorization of 'fact' and empirical truth" (23). Protestantism also helped pull Western religious practices toward a *moral* universe grounded in the same logic of rational subjectivity. In the words of Gilman Ostrander, American intellectual circles gravitated toward a more "modern, moral, republican, Protestant society functioning within the framework of a divinely planned, orderly, and essentially changeless universe" (22). The collusion of Enlightenment rationalism and Protestantism helped produce a subjectivity of mastery and a literature which catered to it. Yet, there also arose counter-narratives which sought to disrupt and contest these views. In the earliest examples of American literature, there appear cracks in this confident rationalist subjectivity, cracks particularly visible in the supernatural short story, whose embrace of the "fanciful and frivolous" this study will examine as a consistent renunciation of those totalizing master narratives out of which it emerged.

To understand the supernatural short story, how its form and genre helped describe alternatives to the dominant discourses of the nineteenth century, we might set the stage at the

beginning of the century with one of the first American novels, Charles Brockden-Brown's *Wieland*, (1798) written in the notably *irrational* style of the gothic. The novel narrates the collapse of a respected family as its patriarch murders his kin, in accordance with what he believes to be divine direction. The novel's gothic style flirts with the possibility of the supernatural, portraying a world in which irrationality disrupts the stable social order. And *Wieland*'s themes are the dangerous, even murderous, eventualities of a figure seeking precisely the mastery and certainty embedded in both Enlightenment and American Protestant ideologies. The titular Wieland, whose temple features a bust of the rhetorician Cicero, a figure of rationalism, "thirsted for the knowledge of [God's] will," but laments that his "knowledge has always stopped short of certainty" (151). It is in pursuit of this certainty, and in confidence when he feels it is attained, that Wieland destroys his own family, later rationally defending his actions in the court of law. Wieland's collapse of Enlightenment and religious forms of certainty help describe constitutive elements prevailing in the nascent US culture more broadly, elements which the destabilizing forces of gothic, and specifically supernatural writing (which I will come to), so effectively disrupt.

Situating the historical moment of this collapse of rationalist discourses with religious ones, Gordon Wood argues that after "the successes of natural science" the same models "generated eighteenth-century moral philosophy—the search for the uniformities and regularities of man's behavior" (414). But even the novel form in which Brown writes participates, in some fashion, within the totalizing narratives of early America. Wood suggests how these discourses produced "a new genre of literature—the novel with its authorial control and design" (415). He cites the formal aims of the carefully plotted and causal novel that emerge from the very ideological frameworks which Brown critiques. In this fashion, even as Brown's genre and

themes work to destabilize Enlightenment ideologies, the formal expression of the novel subtly reasserts them. Brown even participates in a tradition of late eighteenth century novels and novelists justifying the art-form in utilitarian terms, hoping in the preface that the text will join those past works “whose usefulness secures to them a lasting reputation” (3). Fittingly, in a letter accompanying a copy of *Wieland* sent to Thomas Jefferson, Brown suggests it promotes the “public good” (qtd. in Tompkins 46), defending the work against charges of frivolousness.

Other critics than Wood, including Anthony Galluzzo and Fredric Jameson, have noted the connection between Enlightenment ideologies and the emergence of the novel. Less explored than that connection has been the reverse, that is, the ways that short stories, as either discreet units of literature themselves or fractured asynchronous collections, challenge and disrupt precisely such broad and sweeping narratives. Short story collections are apt for such resistance as their form can disrupt cohesive totalities, encourage openness to plural perspectives, and imply alternatives to more monolithic narratives. Different than Woods’s view of “the novel with its authorial control and design” (415), short story collections continually emphasize, and could not even escape if they wished, a sense of fracturedness in their ultimate expressions. This phenomenon is demonstrated in the publication of the first collection of American short stories in Washington Irving’s *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1819-1820). The collection features diverse topics, tones, and styles, loosely held together by little more than their being the supposed papers of the fictional Geoffrey Crayon.

What is more, short stories of the nineteenth century evince a surprisingly consistent recourse to supernatural qualities which further help to disrupt the rationalist discourses of their cultural moment. Mary Rohrberger suggests that “there is something quite different about the short stories that began to appear in the early nineteenth century,” because “unlike the novel

which arose from the movement toward realism in English literature, the short story has its beginnings in romanticism, in myths and legends, in the supernatural” (10). These antecedents position the short story as part of a tradition orthogonal to the underpinnings of much rationalist discourse and also mark the stories as aimed toward a different purpose. Whereas Brockden-Brown felt compelled, even as a resistor of utilitarianism, to defend the utility and value of novels, Poe’s theorization of the short story is geared toward producing what he calls “a single effect” as its highest aim, valuing this feeling, “the exultation of the soul” (571, 572), over the aims of producing informed readers. Stories themselves reflect a different view of utility so that a mark of the short story in this period, as opposed to the novel, might be described in terms of inutility and idleness. Tellingly, Irving’s protagonists nearly all stand out as inefficient, lackadaisical, and wandering—such as Rip Van Winkle whose notable act is sleeping for twenty years, Ichabod Crane whose primary aim is to marry into wealth and leisure, and Irving’s rambling story-telling proxy in Geoffrey Crayon.

Beyond this active idleness which resists utility, there are still other considerations that help to differentiate the short story and collection, one of the most important being a reversal of the tradition of characterization over concept. Whereas in traditional novels the slow and careful rendering of character is valued over and above poor archetypal casting, short stories frequently eschew characters or even deploy types as a means of more easily and emphatically bringing out the conceptual concerns of the story. Additionally, instead of concerns for how events causally follow each other in the sequence of plot, short stories are able to focus on brief and uncontextualized moments, not judged for the likeliness of their having come about but on the terms of their novelty. Short stories, then, become an apt medium to explore complex and ambiguous ideas. The ambiguous qualities of nineteenth century short stories are theorized by

Ross Chambers, who describes short stories “becoming specialized as ‘artistic’ communication [...] the conditions of ‘interpretability,’ now become the necessary conditions of meaningfulness for literature,” so that the short story “literature no longer has a use value” (11-13). This idea of artisticness and interpretability at odds with “use value” reinforces the short story’s historical position in opposition to the rather more utilitarian values which sometimes surround the novel.

In addition to the short story collection’s fracturedness as opposed to a totality, an idleness opposed to utility, and an emphasis on ambiguity as opposed to comprehensibility, my project focuses on texts I term “supernatural” because of their persistent recourse to elements outside the established expectations of realism and for the extra-realist possibilities which accompany these elements. I argue that these story collections help to assert an openness to things not just unverified but unverifiable as a necessary supplement to reason in accounting for the world and our meaning making in it. My definitions of the supernatural and my conceptual connections between uncertainty and ethics draw on genre theorist Tzvetan Todorov and various philosophers of language and ethics, including Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. In drawing these connections, I demonstrate how the generic product of uncertainty helps model the uncertain nature of confronting otherness.

I begin with Todorov’s characterization of the fantastic as a genre which suspends the reader, usually along with a character, between two poles of accounting the events in the text: “the marvelous” and “the uncanny.” Between these two poles, the fantastic exists as a “median line” (51). These poles are distinguished by the different ways in which miraculous happenings are accounted in the text. The uncanny includes those texts in which events “may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, for one reason or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, [etc]” (46). The marvelous, alternatively, includes “that class of

narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural” (52). Todorov characterizes the fantastic as those texts which refuse, or at least hesitate, to resolve into a wholly reasonable or supernatural account. Most often this hesitation lies not just in the reader's response but is reflected in the narrator or characters of the work, who also struggle to distinguish the root causes. “The fantastic,” Todorov famously writes, “occupies the duration of this uncertainty” (25).

Taking up this generic device of two competing accounts, one which seeks a rational explanation and another which posits the possibility of the miraculous, I turn to Jacques Derrida’s work on “Faith and Knowledge,” which suggests how a similar epistemological quandary helps to shape the way the self encounters and interacts with the other. I suggest that the suspension of certainty in supernatural texts encourages a type of faith in their potentiality for meaningfulness, akin to Derrida’s formulation of a faith in the immanence of meaning despite the infinite limitations of language and human knowledge—a space of openness and the indefinite that he calls the “desert in the desert” (55, 59). In this openness Derrida explores how our interactions with otherness, because of the uncertainty in language and translatable understanding, is based in a “credit that is irreducible to knowledge and a trust that ‘founds’ all relation to the other” (56). I suggest that the possibility which exists in the limitation of knowledge which Derrida presents coincides with Todorov’s duration of uncertainty, creating a space of openness, alternative to the mastery and totality promised in rationalism. Beyond formal linkage between supernatural uncertainty and an epistemological openness in faith, lie specific and pressing opportunities for rethinking questions of identity, racial and gender otherness, and ethical postures of the self to the world.

My primary texts explicitly connect the desire for mastery of a text's supernatural

ambiguities with assumptions of mastery and knowledge of social classifications and individuals who inhabit them. Emmanuel Levinas's work is central here, specifically his configuration of the self-other meeting, and the insistence on approaching alterity without the assumption of knowledge or mastery. Levinas acknowledges a human impulse toward totalizations: how we “recognize a whole when a multiplicity of objects – or, in a homogeneous continuum, a multiplicity of points or elements – form a unity, or come without remainder, under a sole act of thought [...] an intellectual operation by which that multiplicity of objects or points is encompassed” (*Alterity and Transcendence* 39). But he recognizes also the historical situatedness of totality with the onset of rationalism, so that “the role played by totality in hermeneutics would then indicate that reason and totality are indeed inseparable” (42) and that “the true function of totalizing thought does not consist in looking at being, but in determining it by organizing it” (47). In this fashion, “nothing remains other for reason” (48), according to Levinas, who clarifies how this perspective “would justify a religious or personalist conception of man at the heart of creation, of which he would be both part and end” (50). Levinas distinguishes this *totalizing* process against an accommodation of otherness as *infinity*, “to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity” (51). The sense of infinite otherness stands in opposition to our impulse to totalization and mastery. Like Derrida’s formulation of faith and knowledge, this distinction describes my considerations of supernatural openness to the incomprehensible as a passionate openness to the infinite unknowability of the other.

Part of my claim is that this supernatural literature rose in popularity in the nineteenth century as a response to and as a means of recovering from what Max Weber famously called a disenchanting of the world that began in the Enlightenment and continued through the nineteenth

century. I look toward the genealogical work of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, as a means to understand how rationalism's promises of a knowable universe "disenchanted" the world for many, leaving a desire for the numinous and a meaning beyond that bestowed by the modern rational self. Taylor distinguishes two helpful alternative postures available in the nineteenth century in the form of the secularized "buffered self" versus the "porous self":

For the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them ... This is not to say that the buffered understanding necessitates your taking this stance. It is just that it allows it as a possibility, whereas the porous one does not. By definition for the porous self, the source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside the "mind"; or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area, grounding in which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense. (38)

Illustrating how these postures define alternative subjectivities and how these subjectivities bestow meaning, Taylor describes how the buffered self "can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it" while the "porous self is vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces" (38). The dangerous allure of the position of rational subject from whom extends definitions of meaning and value is especially visible in supernatural short stories, which feature and invite just such figures of dismissal and insularity. Taylor even recognizes the importance of the fantastic genre to this understanding, briefly calling "the clearest sign of the transformation in our world" from porous to buffered, the nostalgia for porosity, so that "the creation of a thick emotional boundary between us and the cosmos were now lived as a loss. The aim is to try to recover some measure of this lost feeling. So people go to movies about the uncanny in order to

experience a frisson” (38).

The suitability and use of fantastical fiction toward this particular recovery is not a new proposal. From describing the gothic affect as a return of repressed belief in the numinous, to reading fantastical literature as a rejection of reductive Enlightenment values, critics and theorists such as Eric Savoy and Andrew Weinstock have convincingly established the linkage between the supernatural and its antipathy in unchecked rationalism. In addition to fleshing out these connections and demonstrating their expression in short story collections in particular, the primary contribution of this project to the critical conversation is demonstrating how the language and narratological effects of uncertainty, which help facilitate the alternatives to rationalist certainty, model an ethical posture toward otherness. Of course, I would not insist that all supernatural short stories express resistance to totalizing narratives but that the rise of the short story as a form was significantly connected to these stories' consistent recourse to subjects and styles which emphasized the limitations of the knowable and the persistence of the ineffable. Moreover, the texts I examine specifically encourage openness to possibility as an appeal to faith or belief against more stifling and strict rationalism, an openness that asserts not just the importance of proceeding with uncertainty in the face of the limits of language and knowledge, but maintains that a recognition of such limits does not foreclose the possibility of meaningfulness.

This posture of uncertainty and the condition of openness to the transcendent connect to, but do not dissipate into, an ethical framework of self-reflectiveness and a passion for the unknown and the unknowability of others. Notably, the destabilizing power of the gothic, the unsteady correspondence of fantastical allegories, and the haunting insubstantialities of ghostliness, also call into question traditional religious institutions and their dogmatic structures

of certainty, beginning with Winthrop's articulation of the City on a Hill and those Puritan errands which follow in the culture and writing of early America. My claim is that via the supernatural, authors managed to carve out a space of hopeful uncertainty from which they could undermine both secularizing trends of rationalism and fixed religious dogmas— keeping faith in the possibility of transcendent meaning in the world but resisting the impulse to surety or inflexibility. Put in more practical terms, these authors of supernatural stories use the suspension within uncertainty and a corresponding faith in and of their narratives as a means to disrupt and reconfigure materialism's restrictive and problematic methods of accounting for others and otherness.

It is from this epistemological and ethical crossroads which I take my title, “Make Believe,” finding a doubly meaningful way of reading in that common colloquialism. First, of course, is the reclamation of the phrase, often reserved for the “fanciful and frivolous,” as a substantive practice for literary exploration. The imagining of alternative worlds and alternative forms of existence, enabled by supernatural literature, opens possibilities to question those ideological and social structures which so often feel like inevitable eventualities in culture. The second valence of this wording is a more literal reading of the phrase, examining the element of acknowledged creation, whether spiritual or imaginative, which faith entails in the absence of epistemological certainty. Rather than relying on firm or fixed structures of inherited belief, funneling experiences through inherited or established channels, these authors acknowledge the limitations of totalizing master narratives, and create instead discrete and uncertain alternative possibilities.

Chapter one examines at Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), the supernatural allegories of which break down and go awry of any simple, one-to-one

correspondence between a material and transcendent structure. “I am not quite sure,” Hawthorne wrote, “that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories” (Bell, 23). Close to my starting point in engaging them is Beverly Haviland's criticism that Hawthorne's allegorical work is “[s]training against its historical origins as a philosophical and a theological mode of affirming the existence and superiority of the ideal world, [so that it] first affirms the traditional distinction between the ideal and the real, but then refuses to reconcile them” (279). I see Hawthorne's strongest stories “refusing to reconcile” as part of a broader critique of language and signification, suggesting an always insufficient relationship between actual expression and implied meanings. What is more, the subjects of several of these allegories take on precisely this concern for imperfect representation. And like Hawthorne's unreconciled ideal and real, the stories critique the representational pursuits of both the strident purveyor of idealism and the monomaniacal scientist.

While I touch on many of the supernatural stories in the collection, the bulk of the chapter examines three allegorical tales: “The Birth-Mark,” “Rappaccini's Daughter,” and “The Artist of the Beautiful.” Each of these stories are emblematic of Hawthorne's notoriously unreconciled real/ideal, material/spiritual binaries. But rather than focusing solely on these ostensible binaries, entwined to such an inextricable degree that neither side might be imagined in its own right, I suggest it is the characters' representational endeavors which differentiate the ethical concerns of the stories. The men of singular vision violently doom those around them in forwarding the primacy of their vision. Alternative to these, and avoiding the dangerous ramifications of their surety, Hawthorne positions “imaginative faith” which I read, like the slipping allegorical form itself, as accommodating both material and spiritual concerns without hierarchy or collapse. The term, imaginative faith, comes from the story, “A Select Party,”

describing the quality which allows viewers to see “unrealities become a thousand times more real than earth whereon they stamp their feet, saying, 'This is solid and substantial; this maybe called fact’” (45). It is this sensibility which I suggest structures these slipping, open allegories. Hawthorne depicts “imaginative faith” as a multifaceted quality of openness which resists totalizing accounts of both materialism and religion, eludes the crisis of signification with a language of fancy which gestures towards meaning without pinning it down, and which resists oppressive practices of representation operant in either stridently idealist or rationalist extremes.

Chapter two introduces Herman Melville's stories from *The Piazza Tales* (1856) and follows closely on the themes of my first chapter—after all, Melville held an outspoken admiration for Hawthorne's “elusive truths” in *Mosses* (“Hawthorne and His Mosses” 6), and Hawthorne described Melville as persisting between “belief and unbelief” (J. Hawthorne 135). I explore the intertextual relationship between Hawthorne's definition of fantasy and the titular story of Melville's collection, “The Piazza,” in terms of the tension between seeing the world fantastically like Hawthorne or with more materialist emphasis (*Selected Writings of Herman Melville: Complete Short Stories*). In “The Piazza” Melville's narrator is building his home and must choose on which side to build his porch piazza, as he cannot afford a wrap-around deck which could offer him full circumspection. After settling on a single side, he perceives the far-off glint of another home and traverses the *fairy-land* between, only to be forced to contend with the *actual* life of a poor woman whose house he finds in shambles at his adventure's end. Melville's tale, a quasi-allegory like many of Hawthorne's, meditates on the space between “the actual” and the “imaginary,” even using some of Hawthorne's language of “fairy land.” But whereas most of Hawthorne's work seems to err on the side of the “imaginary,” placing emphasis on the interior mind of the perceiver, Melville's narrators are haunted by the very physicality around them,

unable to accept ideas as more real than physical suffering.

I demonstrate how Melville's interest in faith as a co-creator of meaning with knowledge was haunted by a perceived diminution of the world and its most unfortunate inhabitants. Allegorical works like “The Lightning-Rod Man” and “The Bell-Tower” explore faith's relation to physical existence, deploying proto-science fictional tropes of man's technological aspirations toward the divine. In both stories, especially the emphatically supernatural “The Bell-Tower” with its automata and retributive spirit, the entangled conflict between rationalism and faith play out explicitly in the texts, which measure out a nuanced and complex middle ground which may accommodate both. I demonstrate how less supernatural stories like “Benito Cereno” and “Bartleby” still exhibit a continuous use of supernatural language and imagery to preserve an openness to others despite the allures of totalizing knowledge. “Benito Cereno” obsessively turns to gothic tropes to critique exhaustive rationalist perspectives. Alternatively, “Bartleby” uses a sustained metaphor of Bartleby as a haunting ghostly presence to measure out ethical obligations to an inscrutable other. Michael Colecurcio has written about Melville's allegories as religious dilemmas and suggests they depict “the problem of universal defect com[ing] face to face with the question of human obligation” (2). I would agree with this but build on it to show how, in *The Piazza Tales*, the inscrutability of right action gave rise to an ethical prescription to negotiate otherness in cautious, sustained uncertainty—as a spiritual concern but a physical reality. Melville suggests that the acknowledgment of unknowability must be qualified by an element of faith in the possibility to reach the other—lest we turn away and accept suffering as the way of the world. Different than Hawthorne's “imaginative faith,” which prioritizes infusing the empirical world with fantastic possibilities, Melville deploys the supernatural as a means to resist normalizing the despairing other into an inherent quality of the “real world” while also keeping

faith in the possibility of attendance to them.

Beginning with Hawthorne and Melville, in this era of increasing religious elasticity of the mid-nineteenth century, we discover roots of the genre's investment in the epistemological questions of how meaning is sustained in the face of uncertainty. Their earliness in the genre's history, their self-conscious reflections on the form itself, their paralleled dissatisfaction with and interest in questions of transcendent belief, and their responses to each other's work, all help to provide a bedrock for examining the way the genre would shape the discourse as it evolved throughout the century. Ultimately, their expressions would admit for a hopeful possibility that the uncertainty embedded in the supernatural wouldn't just slow the inevitable encroachment of a totalizing reduction of otherness, but that it could gesture toward an expression of the numinous or transcendent which lay beyond both the reach of rationalist discourses *and* which transcends the obstructive barriers of alterity. In this fashion, their uses of the supernatural did not just help to provide a critique of rationalist mastery and the subject position it establishes, but to sketch in the faintest of terms an affirmation of meaningfulness, the access to which may prove the ultimate in connecting with and meeting the other.

The third chapter examines Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899), written almost exactly a century after *Wieland*, and its evocative mixture of social advocacy and fantastic elements particular to African American folklore traditions (*Conjure Tales and Stories of the Color Line*). Chesnutt's work toys explicitly with a question of belief and a reader's willingness to suspend disbelief in a series of folk tales. The stories feature a good deal more continuity than other collections I consider, their core being the relationship between the ex-slave, Julius, and the narrators, a married couple new to the South. Each story is framed by Julius telling a tale of some relevance to the couple's troubles or ambitions, though the stories seem to

vacillate between genuine attempts to help the couple and a trickster's use of language to protect his own interests. But like the collections previous, much in the stories is structured around the question of what readers, like the couple, are willing to credit in them. Where in the next chapter, I show the supernatural mobilized in service of expanding literary recognition to women, Chesnutt's tales stretch the form into new and racially active spaces. Especially given the historic necessity of black writers to “prove” the authenticity of their authorship, Julius's asking for the couple to not dismiss his stories too quickly has a socially evocative element. And like all of the stories in my investigation, Chesnutt's work uses openness to ideas outside of the listener's accepted view of the “real” to challenge established assumptions.

Existing criticism of these conjure tales often focuses on the blurring of persons and nature. For instance, Robert Hemenway argues that Chesnutt's “Gothic directs the reader back to a primal psychic state where nature is animistic, reality poses great peril, and fears of darkness and night are unmediated by ritual or rationality” (101). Instead of reading the psychological qualities of the supernatural, I see the social experience of blackness being figured as supernaturally unimaginable to the white characters, and as that which must be credited with a certain degree of faith. In “Mars Jeem's Nightmare,” the frame consists of the narrator deciding whether to fire an unproductive young black worker. In response to the narrator's plans, Julius tells of a conjure woman and a slaver plagued by nightmares because of his strictness. At the end Julius, uncharacteristically, explicates his meaning: “dat w'ite folks w'at is so ha'd en stric', en doan make no 'lowance fer po' ign'ant niggers w'at ain' had no chanst ter l'am, is li'ble ter hab bad dreams ... en dat dem w'at is kin' en good ter po' people is sho' ter prosper” (38). The narrator dismissively thanks Julius for explaining the story, commenting “it might have escaped us otherwise,” only to add accusatively, “did you make that up all by yourself?” (38). But the

narrator's wife decides to give the worker in question another chance, despite the narrator's desire to fire him. The narrator's rationalist dismissal is connected to his rigid economics so that the same impulse to fire the unproductive man blinds the narrator to the meaning of the supernatural story. The wife's openness to the supernatural possibilities in Julius's stories, consistent throughout the collection, allows her to be open also to the difference of racial experience. Exploring racially concerned qualities of alterity, Chesnutt's collection uses the supernatural uncertainty to challenge economic and social disparities. The tales cast the unimaginable plight of racial others in terms (even dialect and language) which disrupt established narratives and ideologies of the primarily white listeners and readers. But far from resting on just this critique and caution, Chesnutt's works provide this study's best example of how crediting the spirit of the others' words enchants the world with spiritual possibility—a possibility shown to produce actual and meaningful change despite the power structures in place.

The fourth chapter takes up Mary Wilkins Freeman's ghost story collection, *The Wind in the Rose-Bush* (1903). The collection's ghost stories depict a reluctance to either endorse the possibility of the supernatural or to denounce it as impossible, inviting skepticism even as their power rests on a suspension of disbelief. This fits with Todorov's definition of the fantastic as comprising the duration of uncertainty and coincides with my interests in the genre resisting mastery over understanding with all its ethical ramifications. These stories each connect the emotional meaning of a spirit's presence with a corresponding concern for insubstantiality and with crediting things that have no possibility of substantiation—paradoxically exploring the weightiness of the immaterial. Moreover, these stories pose questions of gender and the literary sphere, challenging what sort of writing itself was considered substantial. I expand on critics such as Rosemary Jackson, who argues that nineteenth century “women writers of the

supernatural have overturned many of these assumptions and definitions [concerning rigid boundaries between life and death] ... in order to extend our sense of the human, the real, beyond the blinkered limits of male science, language and rationalism” (12). In addition to reading faith in these stories as a means of challenging these “blinkered limits,” my reading follows up on the historic ways “the spiritual” gets marginalized as a feminine concern (opposed to more “weighty matters”) and the ways ghost stories use the metaphor of a lingering immaterial presence to critique prevailing views of women's perspectives.

Even the image of the title, the ephemeral “wind” in the rosebush, helps to suggest the crucial nature of the insubstantial in the collection—and indeed, in that story, this wind is one of the signs of a ghostly presence a woman hears but is told she just imagines. As in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s, “The Yellow Wall Paper” (1892), the structure of the ghost-story is used to show how women are forced to question their own experience of events in favor of rationalistic interpretations; this includes a pathologization of the women who insist on their own experience, often to their imprisonment or dehumanization. Freeman continually shows women confronting this sort of opposition, forced to deny their experiences or face social censure. But the stories also present a consistent depiction of women’s circles of friendship and community as a space of faith in one-another’s experience of these “insubstantial” matters. Recasting familiar ghost stories, Freeman uses the archetypes of haunted rooms and other domestic spaces in “The Southwest Chamber” and “The Vacant Lot,” to show not just the role of rationalist discourses in preserving patriarchal power structures but also the occasional complicity of religious figures whose power is likewise deployed. Developing these concerns, “Luella Miller” and “The Lost Ghost” each use a frame-tale of a woman sharing her impossible story. Like Chesnutt’s Uncle Julius, this set-up demonstrates the need for openness and faithful attentiveness to each other’s

stories. Freeman consistently uses the elements of supernatural ghostliness to describe how women's struggles are marked as "insubstantial" and their experiences are dismissed as irrational. But the stories also use the metafictional device of storytelling, specifically women listening to other women, to suggest the spiritual community of women's circles (a historical phenomenon of which Freeman was aware and in which she dabbled) which might resist the dismissive and totalizing perspectives which sought to silence them. And like Chesnutt's works, Freeman's collection moves past critique to demonstrate the success of women "entering into the fantasy" of each other, situating such relationships in the narratives as refuges against the dangerous and totalizing powers which would separate and silence them.

Considered together, these authors showcase the suitability of the genre to counter some of the postures of certainty promised by more totalizing narratives. The brevity of the short story resists exhaustive accounts, favoring more modest aims of exploration. The fracturedness of collections illustrates a palimpsest view of meaning, suggesting that certain considerations may better be expressed in the complex interrelations of fractured pieces rather than in a broad and sweeping narrative. And the sustained uncertainty of the fantastic itself disrupts these totalizing narratives by demonstrating a counter to rationalistic perspectives of the world, insisting that for the story to have meaning we must give over some of our assumed posture of knowledge. This uncertainty models an alternative subject position as a means to approach alterity, both in the other and in the possibility of the numinous, without the ethical missteps inherent to the buffered and sovereign self.

This is not to say that the genre always functioned in this fashion. Indeed, a figure such as Edgar Allan Poe, despite his writings also destabilizing ideological frameworks with supernatural uncertainty, is absent from my study because his work often fails to reach the

satisfying ethical sensibilities which drive the collections collected here. A fuller examination of the genre would necessarily consider other of the many supernatural short stories which I am unable to examine because of the scope of this project. In the epilogue, I touch on some of the major figures not treated in this project: Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Louisa May Alcott, and Elizabeth Stewart Phelps. Each of these authors provides key contributions to the supernatural short story in the nineteenth century and help showcase the disruptive power of uncertainty as a means to challenge and critique oppressive ideologies. One primary consideration in selecting the texts which came to anchor this project was the consistency of their ethical expression as it emerged from uncertainty. Each of the authors I consider layers into his or her collections a concern for how the supernatural as a mode helps model the ways we approach fundamental otherness in the world. A second consideration was to demonstrate the breadth of this supernatural form—reaching from Hawthorne’s allegorical tendencies and Melville’s subdued gothic to Chesnutt’s folk-tale stylings and Freeman’s local color fiction. In the end, these four authors showcase both the diversity of the supernatural short story and also the insistent challenge it poses to totalizing ideologies and the postures of mastery they enable.

Perhaps most interesting to track in this project is how, as the century wore on, the supernatural short story genre was taken up by authors of marginalized identities as a means to stretch the borders of the form and to address specific social ills. Supernatural short stories allowed these figures to expand on the oppressive natures of certainty, specifically as it is deployed by the privileged as a means to solidify existing power structures and insulate them from criticism. Most importantly, the genre’s emphasis on uncertainty helps to structure a means of approaching alterity, including those who exist outside the dominant and privileged groups, without oppressive practices and assumptions. This cautious attentiveness to values beyond those

prioritized by the dominant culture proved a compelling means to encourage alternative subjective positions and counter-narratives.

Chapter 1

“Imaginative Faith”: Uncertainty as Alternative in *Mosses from an Old Manse*

I. “Glimmering Shadows”: Fantastic Hesitation and Ethical Uncertainty

As the reader rolls up to the Old Manse which served as Nathaniel Hawthorne's residence, inspiration, and opening sketch for a collection of stories, we are introduced to some of the text's most persistent concerns. “The glimmering shadows that lay half asleep between the door of the house and the public highway,” Hawthorne writes, “were a kind of spiritual medium, seen through which the edifice had not quite the aspect of belonging to the material world” (3). Liminal spaces and doorways like that between sleep and waking, the shadowy evanescence of the spiritual world against which stand the edifices of the material, and the private places and interiors which lay just off the public highways, are each evoked in the passage. The collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), offers a diverse mixture of fantastical satire, supernatural allegories of human nature, and brief sketches which, like that quoted above, attempt to draw connections between everyday experiences and broader philosophical ideas. Deploying the sketch and the short story after their emergence around the beginning of the nineteenth-century, I demonstrate how *Mosses* establishes a critique of the prevailing rationalism of the period. Moreover, I undertake to show how the ambiguous and specifically supernatural qualities of Hawthorne's work, in a period so concerned with empiricism and utility, were deployed tactically to call into question broad, totalizing ideologies which sought an exhaustive view of “Truth.” I demonstrate how the short story form in general and the fantastic subtype in particular undermined ossified postures of certainty among both rationalists *and* religious communities and negotiated a possibility for theorizing a world capacious enough for both—with an ethics which

resists oppressive postures of knowledge and mastery.

After contextualizing the historical moment of Hawthorne's writing, his avowed and subtextual artistic concerns, and the theoretical underpinnings of his chosen genres, this chapter will illuminate Hawthorne's consistent recourse to uncertainty as an alternative to rigid or totalizing postures. The stories of the collection will be divided into two sections—sketches and allegories—from which I'll choose representative examples to demonstrate their contributions to the supernatural's uncertain alternative to totality. The first section, on sketches, will illustrate the fantastic short story collection's deployment of fractions and incompleteness toward disrupting the aims of exhaustive understanding. The section will also explore the continual recourse to processions in these sketches and illustrate the qualities of plurality which further undermine any ideology which aspires toward totality. The final section on supernatural allegory will examine the form as an exploration of the failures of language and signification themselves—modeling a means to check assumptions of knowledge and the power structures which abuse them. Ultimately, I propose that in Hawthorne's hands the conditions of supernatural enchantment—the acknowledged limitations of signification, and an embracing of uncertainty—help to provoke an ethical challenge which might allow for a more accommodating vision of alterity. Pulled from one of Hawthorne's story, I use the term “imaginative faith” to describe a posture of uncertainty which supplements rationalism with a spiritual sympathy that is more open to others and otherness, as it calls upon a world of transcendent meaning whose ineffability challenges any totalizing ideological practices. Ultimately, Hawthorne's most ethically focused tales use the term sympathy, which follows from this imaginative faith and generously allows for meaningfulness beyond the self's perspective without the certainty of mastery which always reduces the other as conceivable by and thus subject to the self.

As I demonstrate in the Introduction, several studies connect the rise of the novel to rationalist ideologies and associated utilitarian values. One such illustration connects the novel's mechanics of plot to the growing acknowledgement of causality as the reigning order of the universe. Writing on one of Hawthorne's influences in Charles Brockden Brown, Gordon Wood argues that causal views “produced not only a new genre of literature—the novel with its authorial control and design—but also a new kind of man-centered causal history” (415). Short story collections, alternatively, are particularly effective at resisting this perspective in forgoing the focus on careful plotting for more fanciful explorations of ideas and possibilities. And in keeping with the associations of the short story with more fanciful idleness, in the tradition of Washington Irving and his foundational *Sketch-Book*, Hawthorne's collection embraces a relative inutility and idleness. In the journals written during the period of *Mosses* Hawthorne calls light gardening “the only present labor of my life” (*The Business of Reflection* 74) and later claims that he will “look back upon a day spent in what the world would call idleness, and for which I can myself suggest no more appropriate epithet; and which, nonetheless, I cannot feel to have been spent amiss” (75). He mentions in later entries his “idle impulse” and even calls himself, “idle altogether” (93) and “perfectly idle” (95) during this period of writing. This idleness is not merely an avoidance of labor but helps illustrate the alternative values driving and imbuing the short story collection. At one point in the journals Hawthorne muses that “clouds of any one day, are material enough, alone, for the observation either of an idle man or philosopher” (101). Here, he toys with the term material, ironically transforming the immaterial cloud into the material of artistic speculation, and relates his idleness to the “serious” work of philosophy.

Hawthorne connects his concern for the relation of the material and spiritual worlds to the discourses surrounding the utility and fanciful in imaginative work—a connection that is continually in evidence in his collection. Regarding this interest in idleness, Richard Hamilton has suggested that Hawthorne embodies “antebellum discourses of bachelor reverie and masturbation, made both thrilling and threatening for readers in anti-onanism advice manuals of the day. The danger of daydreaming and self-pleasuring for single men [...] was that energy and passion could be all used up when spent un(re)productively” (Hamilton 115). And it is true that there is something of a guilty pleasure in Hawthorne’s depiction of unproductive time—but there is also evidence to suggest this daydreaming, which serves as the central conceit of a few stories, is an active political resistance to dovetailing philosophies of labor and utility. The most prominent figure of this resistance in Hawthorne’s texts is Owen Warland, the artist in the story which closes this chapter, who “cared no more for the measurement of time than if it had been merged into eternity” (357). Freed from the concern of wasting time, Owen, like Hawthorne himself, is able to explore the ambiguous and unanswerable (and thus “unproductive”) spiritual concerns which drive his artwork.

In terms of the idleness and leisure associated with exploring the fantastic, the nineteenth-century short story made something of a name for itself as a place of ambiguous exploration. Hawthorne continually pursued this mode in terms of moral and epistemological uncertainty—an insistence of the world as elusively and only partially or plurally articulable. The ambiguous qualities of nineteenth-century short stories are theorized by Ross Chambers who describes them in terms of the market:

... the literary text itself, as a form of communication, undergoes the process of reification, becoming *specialized* as “artistic” communication [...] the conditions of

“interpretability,” now become the necessary conditions of meaningfulness for literature [...] Yet, it means that, if literature no longer has a use value (by which I understand the sort of value an act of direct communication might have), it has entered into the system of exchange value, in which its significance, or worth, is a function of its interpretability as a complex sign for which other discursive signs can be substituted [...] such a text succeeds in acquiring a readership and inserting itself into the new interpretive contexts that will actualize its meaningfulness. (Chambers 12-13)

Chambers' argument that the ambiguous and plurally interpretable short story attained value as a response to evolving markets for literary art is compelling but seems a bit vicious as well, reducing the qualities of ambiguity to the level of a fashionable and profitable trend rather than an earnest philosophical quandary. Instead of this, I find a more generous approach to these ambiguities. I account for them not just as a commodification of intellectual exercise but as a recognition of complexity which stages a reflection on the self confronting a world or other which challenges the self's sense of wholeness and understanding.

This would suggest that Hawthorne's ambiguous short story collections were earnest, though hardly naïve, attempts to accept a degree of uncertainty with regard to the world and unknowability with regard to others. This acceptance is particularly compelling in a cultural moment of such profound and exhaustive rationalism. A more generous view than Chambers' is forwarded by Nancy Bunge who examines Hawthorne's interest in additive meaning, wherein multiple differing viewpoints accumulate toward a more perfect vision:

Hawthorne identifies 'adding wisdom to wisdom, throughout Eternity' as the activity distinguishing human beings ... suggests that admitting ignorance and ameliorating it by multiplying perspectives brings joy as well as insight for 'every ... view from a different

position, creates a surprise in the mind.' Not only does the process of learning delight, Hawthorne believes the most rewarding human activity, love, rests on and grows from this ability to acknowledge different points of view. (Bunge 5)

My take is closer to Bunge's both in method and in tenor, suggesting that across Hawthorne's wide-ranging and diverse texts can be observed an insistent theorization of an ethics of representation characterized in supernatural uncertainty. Hawthorne's supernatural short stories help to express limitations of language and ideologies due to their own inherent formal qualities. Less constrained by concerns for character development and the causal mechanics of plot, short stories offer opportunities for brief, speculative flights of fancy or quandaries of faith—even more so when unbridled from a realist aesthetic. Expressions of open-ended ambiguity which might become tedious over the course of, and given the exceptions around, a novel, are right at home in the supernatural story. These stories find a consistent recourse to subjects and styles which emphasize the limitations of the knowable and the persistence of an ineffable which checks the materialist or rationalist ideologies.

II. A Haul of Fantasy: Sketches & Processions

The sketch in particular has specific ways to confront the totalizations of the period more closely associated with the novel. Immediately, the term “sketch” indicates its alternative posture to the realist portraiture or causal plot mechanics of other popular writing forms and Hawthorne's sketches are compelling as both experimental and nebulous examples. Critics have noted that Hawthorne deployed the term liberally and would “use 'sketches' as a covering term for short pieces, often with disparaging intent” (Doubleday 3) though he often saw the sketch as “a genre that was inherently useful and responsive to the needs of American writers and readers” because

he “thought that it was in the ephemeral—in the evanescence that would characterize the ‘new reality’ of the mid nineteenth-century” (Hamilton 100). Hawthorne's own writing *about* the sketch suggests just such a sense of importance to evanescence and incompleteness:

The charm lay partly in their very imperfection; for this is suggestive, and sets the imagination to work; whereas the finished picture, if a good one, leaves the spectator nothing to do and if bad, confuses, stupefies, disenchant, and disheartens him.

(*The Business of Reflection* 183)

The “finished” artwork's proclivity to “disenchant” is particularly compelling, as it is the sketch's connections to the supernatural story which I am most interested in drawing. Despite current literary taste, it is also important to recognize the contributions the sketch made to Hawthorne's artistic conceptualizations. His inclusion of them in his collections, often to the exclusion of popular stories indicate this import. “We must assume his advocacy of the sketches was conscious and that there was a market or cultural value seen in their inclusion,” (48) Michael Dunne argues. He continues: “the sketches can be seen to represent not feeble concessions to the taste of his times, nor, conversely, heartfelt expressions of Hawthorne's deepest convictions, but innovative approaches to basic literary problems” (51). And indeed, the sketch's resistance to broader and totalizing narratives could hardly be more fitting to the purpose of a collection, described by Hawthorne's preface to merely “tinctured with its modicum of truth” (*Mosses* 23).

Speaking to the concern of disenchantment, it is compelling to see Hawthorne's work in terms of Charles Taylor's theorization of “the nova effect” which was ongoing at this time. The nova effect describes much of the nineteenth-century shifts in religious thinking as Taylor traces secularism as it becomes a “fractured culture” of unbelief (the nova), available to more than just the “elites” of previous eras. This period more or less begins with the Romantics and the “culture

of 'authenticity,' or expressed individualism, in which people are 'encouraged to find their own way'" (299) and coincides with "the malaise of modernity," a sense of a "disenchanted world, a sense of it as flat, empty," which followed the Deism and humanism of the 18th century (302). The intellectual shifts in the social imaginary from the "Cosmos" to the "Universe" helped disenchant the western world of its "spirits and forces" (323); it changed "the way the universe is spontaneously imagined and therefore experienced" (325) and people's sense of placement within the world. Scientific developments which clarified humanity's existence in the huge universe, in the vast expanse of time, and as a link in Darwin's chain, all challenged the privileged place of human existence and helped "fragilize faith" (329). This shift helps to describe the changes which facilitated Hawthorne's exploration of the sketch to resist the disenchantment of the world in terms of secular rationalist explanations. The sketch helped describe a world increasingly experienced in secular terms as still mysterious and perhaps partially determined by qualities unaccounted for by rationalism.

Looking back to the opening sketch, "The Old Manse," Hawthorne describes the wandering stream which runs nearby as a sort of proxy for his artistic process. Like his journals of the time, he notes how it "idles its sluggish life away" as opposed to most other things "compelled to subserve some useful purpose" (*The Business of Reflection* 6). The description of the river goes on to suggest how it reflects "so adequate a picture of the heaven that broods above it" but also in "the muddiness of its bed, let it be a symbol that the earthliest human soul has an infinite spiritual capacity" (6). The stream's notable idleness belies its double duty as both reflecting the airy sky above it and also providing a window to the muddy earth where still the spiritual is made manifest. The sketch works to recast the world so that both the brooding heaven and muddy bed are visible in one space. This moment helps introduce the text's investments in

the interrelations of materialist and transcendent discourses, articulates the concept of idleness as a resistance to utilitarian values, and demonstrates imaginative fantasy as being not just a diversion but a means to see otherwise.

Additionally, and later in “The Old Manse,” Hawthorne describes discovering the library, feeling “as if I had found bits of magic looking glass among the books” (16). It is compelling that the books are not just called magic mirrors, a term used often and symbolically to suggest their reflection of reality, but also as “bits,” that is, pieces, incomplete fractions. Here, the supernatural elements are explicitly connected to the celebration of fractured pieces which these sketches embody, suggesting how the supernatural texts and the sketches both function towards the aims of the collection as a whole. This trend of bits and pieces in the collection appears not only in the sketch and short story genre itself, but in other various forms in these fantastic tales. Hawthorne’s sketches continually explore forms comprised of multiple smaller parts, including the alternate history in “P’s Correspondence,” the tales in “Sketches from Memory,” and the fragments in “Passages from a Relinquished Work.” Each story title even evokes the sense of parts bound together without necessarily comprising a whole.

Embodying this fractured form and its connection to alternative viewpoints, the story, “P’s Correspondence,” is a series of letters from a mysterious P, describing the moral views of famous figures in an alternative reality. It is framed by an editor introducing us to P, whose curious writing is being published more out of sympathy than any artistic deserving. This editor informs us that “P has lost the thread of his life” due to a “disordered reason,” meaning that for him the “past and present are jumbled together” (287). Emphasizing the limitations of the narrative with a second-hand text, an abbreviated author, and a “disordered reason,” the story undermines the coherent and plotted model on which most narrative is based. Instead, it makes

its own legitimacy suspect, even conjuring an editor who questions the text's worthiness of publication. This destabilization extends to the concept of time and reality, as the text's primary conceit is that P updates the reader on the lives of famous authors in an alternative reality and timeline. This device calls into question the sovereignty of rationalism as well as the additive and progressive view of causal time, the result of which, in concert with the letters themselves, is to challenge the totalizing views of monolithic truth.

Our introduction to P details many of Hawthorne's aims in supernatural short stories. P failed to find literary success in the "light of reason," but as the story itself is proof, discovered some degree "in his misty excursions beyond the limits of sanity" (287-288). Hawthorne suggests that reason can be a blinder to broader and important qualities and, once again, invokes the ambiguous qualities—here "misty"-ness—as a means to access a deeper understanding in the story. Furthermore, this ambiguity is located beyond the limits of sanity, suggesting that whatever is important in the story involves something beyond the rationalist perspective on reality. In addition to reiterating the resistance to the formalized and prevailing cultural apparatuses of rationalism and utilitarian views, the story complicates the allegorical dualism so prevalent in Hawthorne's work. Despite musing on the relation of the "earthly frame" to a "spiritual immortality" (288) the narrator admits that it would be "caustic" to "consider this mass of earthly matter as the symbol, in a material shape, of those evil habits and carnal vices which unspiritualize man's nature and clog up his avenues of communication with the better life" (289). This moment troubles the proclivity of structuring clear and fixed correspondence between material and spiritual concerns. It also anticipates the deconstruction of transcendent qualities forced into an empirical model. This effect is in evidence when P criticizes a reformed and religious Percy B. Shelley for seeking "poeticphilosophical *proofs* of Christianity" (295, my

emphasis). This sardonic moment introduces the story's broader critique of turning religious, spiritual, or otherwise transcendent qualities into a totalizing and materialist paradigms.

Against this tendency to structure the spiritual in terms of the rational, "P's Correspondence" deploys its thematic content in concert with its formal qualities toward several of the destabilizing aims which Hawthorne found so available with the supernatural short story. The story resists the contemporary social apparatuses by which authority and legitimacy is bestowed, opting for misty-incompleteness, a-temporality, and irrationality as a means to explore its ideas. And the premise of the sketch too reinforces such qualities in exploring art's ability to render truths precisely in relation to its willingness to deploy uncertainty. Hawthorne's taking aim at art and artistry calls attention to his own choice of the fantastic genre towards these purposes. Most particularly, the story cautions against the proclivity to adopt an extreme position for the the sense of totality and understanding it bestows, promoting instead, a more uncertain and unfixed positioning.

The story goes to great length to provide a suspension between alternative extremes. Discussing a reformed Lord Byron, P tells how the "uncompromising conservative" has become fixed in "rigid" religious views and "ultra doctrines" of a particular sect (290). This change has had an adverse effect on Byron's writing. His rigid soul, lacking the "vivid and riotous flame," has tarnished his artwork and, indeed, "he no longer understands his own poetry" (290). Coming just after Hawthorne's criticism of Byron's original worldly perspective, the suggestion here is that either extreme reduces art away from its proper mode. P criticizes Byron for expunging from his work "whatever assails settled constitutions of government or systems of society," suggesting that it is not necessarily religion nor worldliness that is to be promoted but rather destabilization itself. This sentiment echoes a momentary aside at the story's beginning where P demonstrates

distrust for how “[o]ld associations cling to the mind” and how “custom grows up about us like a stone wall, and consolidates itself into almost as material an entity as mankind’s strongest architecture” (288). The uncertainty inherent to the fantastic, not lacking in this possibly insane character’s tale of a deceased writer’s alternative future, works to challenge precisely these customs.

Not only does Hawthorne’s subject matter help to illustrate this suspension between fixed positions, the fantastic form itself functions in just such a capacity. In the most famous definition of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov defines it as a “median line” between the two poles of “the marvelous” and “the uncanny” (51). For Todorov, the uncanny includes those texts in which events “may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, for one reason or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, [etc]” (46). The marvelous, alternatively, includes “that class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural” (52). The fantastic describes texts that refuse, or hesitate, to resolve into a wholly reasonable or supernatural account. “The fantastic,” Todorov famously writes, “occupies the duration of this uncertainty” (25). P’s letter’s exist somewhere between these poles, being possibly the result of madness and possibly an insight to an alternative world. But this fantastic hesitation is even more fundamental to the structure of the story’s exploration of uncertainty itself, cultivating not just a narratological hesitation, but using this narratological hesitation to help reinforce the importance of ideological hesitation, resisting the allure of rigid and totalizing positions.

In dealing with a fantastical sketch about the aims of artists and the danger of too ossified a religious or materialist posture, Hawthorne’s inclusion of consolatory fantasies within the same scope of critique is compelling. Unlike Shelley and Byron who both swing from one end of the

political spectrum to the other in this sketch, showcasing the dangers of extremes more than of a particular view itself, Sir Walter Scott is criticized for retreating further into his fantasy worlds. He is symbolically afflicted into a “hopeless paralytic” body just as his mind “vegetates from day to day and year to year at that splendid fantasy of Abbotsford, which grew out of his brain” (293). The criticism of a paralysis-inducing fantasy is particularly apt in a story which demonstrates fantasy as an alternative posture toward the world and as a check to fixed viewpoints. It helps to differentiate fantasy, what I have been demonstrating here as a destabilizing force of uncertainty, from fantasy which becomes its own comfortable totality. Hawthorne massages this point into further nuance in suggesting that the tastes for Scott’s consolatory and disconcertingly nostalgic fantasies are unfit for contemporary pursuits of “a deeper moral, and a closer and homelier truth” (293). In this fashion, even as he uses the fantastic in these sketches as a means to break up fixed religious and materialist postures, Hawthorne cautions against retreating too deeply into fantasy as a means of escape from the “close and homlier” truths of the world. Fantasy, then, becomes not an alternative to the “real” but a supplement which helps resist totalizing perspectives and break up the accumulated customs of society.

Another trend across these sketches which helps to measure the scope of Hawthorne's fantastic vision is the strangely consistent use of processions, collections, and odd gatherings. Many of the sketches side-step plot, with its causal mechanics, for a loose knitting together of related concerns. I have already suggested that these processional texts function self-referentially, as a model for how to approach short story collections themselves, but their affect offers additional qualities of mystification. “The Hall of Fantasy,” “A Select Party,” “The Procession of Life,” “The Intelligence Office,” “Earth's Holocaust,” and “A Virtuoso's

Collection” each make use of a parade of images, ideas, and people to effect a disorienting alternative to the novelistic master narrative as coherent and exhaustive. Rather than a causal or rationalistic attempt at establishing continuity and rigid frameworks, the effect of these stories is a fracturing and pluralizing vision.

Much like the allegories which I read last, these stories negotiate their resistance to materialist accounts with a firm suspicion of the overly ideal. “The Hall of Fantasy” introduces the reader to a series of people and viewpoints, all suggesting that our perspectives make use of an inescapable medium of unworldliness. The story captures the sense of seeing things in tinted lights of art and religion, opening in a hall glowing with “the light of heaven only through stained and pictured glass, this filling the hall with many-colored radiance and painting its marble floor with beautiful or grotesque designs; so that its inmates breathe, as it were, a visionary atmosphere, and tread upon the fantasies of poetic minds” (133). Through a parade of personages, professions, and dreamscapes, the narrator moves onward, at once confounded by the idleness and charmed at the prospect of “discovering a purer truth than the world can impart among the lights and shadows of these pictured windows” (138). When the skeptical narrator protests having no time for such fantasies which the “sunshine of actual life is necessary to test,” a companion suggests that the narrator’s faith is stronger than he admits: “You are at least a democrat; and methinks no scanty share of such faith is essential to the adoption of that creed” (139). Here, Hawthorne, a democrat himself, seems to recognize the contingencies of faith and insubstantialities which serve to inspire human visions of politics and meaning-making. And, of course, it is not just the hall itself which is filled with the colored and tinged lights of fantasy but “the whole external world was tinged with the dimly glorious aspect that is peculiar to the Hall of Fantasy” (140), indicating again the ways a fantastic imagination is not just a place of escape

from the world but a means to rethink the world. Hearing the fantastic talk, the narrator sighs with relief at avoiding some of the speakers only to be chided by a companion for “an old prejudice” against the poetic dreamers.

Of “The Hall of Fantasy,” Jeremy Kessler writes that “Hawthorne hints that every form of human activity verges on the unworldliness of fantasy, negating the present in favor of the future or imagined past.” He also suggests that such imagination can be destructive: “Political reformers and revolutionaries, Hawthorne argues, are uniquely unworldly, even anti-worldly, as they claim to care deeply for the same world that they work to destroy” (113). This seems correct and, to my mind, rightly places the emphasis in terms of imagination—an important term in Hawthorne's fiction. Part of the negotiations between the material and ideal which Kessler suggests that “Hall” purports, seems to critique the same one-sidedness which defined certain of Hawthorne's tragic characters. The term imagination, rather than being an unworldly or anti-worldly stance is rather the means of accommodating a capacious view of the world both material and ideal. In fact, one of the characters in “P’s Correspondence” is afflicted with the medical condition which leaves half his face lax, the result being a “disagreeable onesidedness” (299) of this figure. This symbolically significant onesidedness is not lost on the reader in the story’s overarching critique of the grotesqueness of extreme ideological positions.

Another processional story, “Earth's Holocaust,” effects a similar critique of certainty by cataloging reform groups and their accumulated ideas as a means of illustrating the limitations of fixed political positions. “Earth's Holocaust” challenges ineffective reformation politics with the allegorical image of a great bonfire used to rid the world of its “accumulation of wornout trumpery” hoping that the fire itself “might reveal some profundity of moral truth heretofore hidden in mist or darkness” (302). What follows is a procession of tracts, books, icons, and like

things, thrown into the fire as if their destruction would lift off the weight of the past. But the story suggests that a deeper quality of humanity is responsible for our transgressions. Here, the story takes on a most fascinating self-reflective maneuver, suggesting that “if we go no deeper than the intellect,” in our pursuit of human failings, “it matters little whether the bonfire [...] were what we choose to call a real event and the flame that would scorch a finger, or only a phosphoric radiance and a parable of my own brain” (320). This ending not only indicates Hawthorne's dissatisfaction with superficial and topical political reformations but likewise questions the superficial nature of allegorical representations. The suggestion being that society needs more than a “parable” of reform. The idea that this reform must go deeper coincides with my sense of Hawthorne's concern for a spiritual component whose quality is defined insofar as it ineffable.

Such a quality is explored more fully in the story, “A Select Party,” on which I'll end this section, forgoing other processional sketches which add little to the better examples here. Once again, the story provides something of a catalogue, in this case of “distinguished personages” attending the party in one of the “castles in the air” belonging to a Man of Fancy (44). I end on this section primarily for its ideas on the fantastic, illustrated in how the castle is seen. The narrator describes those on the ground who “probably mistook the castle in the air for a heap of sunset clouds, to which the magic of light and shade had imparted the aspect of a fantastically constructed mansion. To such beholders it was unreal, because they lacked the imaginative faith” (44). The narrator goes on to suggest that “the dominions which the spirit conquers for itself among unrealities become a thousand times more real than the earth whereon they stamp their feet, saying 'This is solid and substantial; this may be called a fact'” (44-45). This moment helps to illustrate a broader, overarching vision of fantasy as a means of seeing differently in the text.

Hawthorne suggests that “imaginative faith” is a practice of seeing the castles in the air where others are limited to the solid and substantial. It is from this phrase that I expand on what I take to be one of Hawthorne’s primary concerns in fantastic short stories: the supplementing of the empirical and rational views with the possibility of spiritual meaning whose ineffability continually works to contextualize knowledge and undermine the sense of mastery or totality toward which rationalism aspires.

In keeping with this project, the Man of Fancy defends his castle against the more utilitarian views of others. When asked whether he is “sure it is built of solid materials and that the structure will be permanent” he concedes “it is true, my castle may well be called a temporary edifice. But it will endure long enough to answer all the purposes for which it was erected” (46). The Man of Fancy’s response continues the critique of materialist and utilitarian views of value, which insist on stability and longevity. This moment also preempts the introduction of the next character, the “performer of acknowledged impossibilities” (47). Though the story has a humorous tone towards its fantastic impossibilities, there persists a sense that the fantastic is a necessary supplement to the everyday. Likewise, with its ironic introductions to: “an incorruptable Patriot; a scholar without pedantry, a Priest without worldly ambition [...] a reformer untrammelled by his theory,” (50) the story critiques those myopic or polar positions as too fixed and extreme. Imaginative faith, then, becomes a necessary supplement to the empirical world, providing a glimpse of the spiritual possibilities the mere acknowledgement of which limit the capacity for totalizing understanding and the positions of surety they bestow.

The consistent themes of fractured and limited narratives, parades and pluralities, and the need for a capacious “imaginative faith” to see otherwise is consistently laid out in these sketches. However, without fleshed out characters and relations between them, it is hard to see

the very real and pressing ethical considerations of this uncertainty which the imaginative faith empowers. For this I look toward Hawthorne's longer allegorical tales, which deploy similar themes and concerns but which also showcase the oppressive dangers inherent to postures of certainty and totality which these sketches caution against. In the allegories we see demonstrated the interpersonal stakes of failing to accept a degree of uncertainty and in reducing the world within the materialist and rationalist scopes which promise mastery. It is in the allegorical short stories that Hawthorne places the brief axioms and sardonic gestures into more sustained consideration and interrelation—opening the way for a more complex picture of the ethical ramifications of self-assuredness unchecked by the uncertainty, sympathy, and imaginative faith which are shown as alternative. More specifically, the allegories explore the way the dichotomies of the real and ideal, the material and spiritual, the empiric and transcendent, correspond and interrelate so that any fixed position must come at the expense of one side and in the subsequent relation to others and otherness.

III. “Blasted Allegories”: Imperfect Representation

Before we take up Hawthorne's particularly compelling allegorical practices, it is worth outlining the evolving ways theorists have thought of allegory's function. From its history in philosophical discourse (Plato's allegory of the cave) to its more common position in religious disquisition, allegory fell out of favor for the strictness of its paradigm, the success of which is measured by the resemblance between the mundane example and the ideal expressed, or, the empirical and transcendent frames. The shift in allegory's role and reception reflects shifts in the religious framework within which allegories of the nineteenth-century were usually read. Victoria Nelson compellingly describes allegorical fiction in the West as expressing a “dual

reality, filtered through a Christian matrix, [which] dominated Western philosophy up to the 17th Century” (173). Crucially, Nelson notes that, in a traditional allegorical framework “of visible/material and invisible/transcendental, an allegory was no fanciful conceit or even an abstraction from the material world. The exact reverse of our present-day humancentric formulations, allegory was a way of giving substance and form, for the benefit of our mortal senses, to the world we cannot see or hear or touch or taste—the realm of Ideal Forms” (173). But even in the nineteenth-century, when Hawthorne was writing, the form had fallen out of intellectual and popular favor. This was due in part to a complicating of the ways much of the predominantly Protestant religion in the country was itself depicted, understood, and its practice transformed. Not only did many of the religious communities undergo their own introspective analysis and diversification but religion also experienced a downturn in popularity from the nova effect, a sign of which is the emergence of Emersonian influenced spiritual and intellectual communities as alternatives to religious sects.

Hawthorne's allegorical stories of this tumultuous period reflect both these shifting religious concerns and the way theorists have begun to think of allegory's role. Rather than being seen as an overly reductive form, simplifying the relation of signification, modern theorists have undertaken to show allegory *emphasizing failures* in the ability to bridge the gap between said and meant. “Allegory presupposes a fracture within a once-Edenic referentiality,” Deborah Jones contends, “[a]llegorical narrative sets itself the task of working through this Babel-like plurality, in a quest for the privileged cognitive mode that will translate multiplicity into a pristine singularity” (154). But beyond just indicating this impossibility of perfect referentiality, other theorists, Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin in particular, have suggested that allegory specifically performs the exact opposite of what it initially indicates—not revealing the clarity of

meaning but its deconstruction. For “de Man, allegory gradually became the key rhetorical figure in a particularly relentless strain of deconstruction [...] allegory marks out the space of the failure of referential meaning, the space in which, as he explains, representation 'does not stand in the service of something that can be represented'” (Hansen 665). Likewise, Benjamin describes allegory as a space of ruins, wherein the empirical and transcendent frames of allegory, which identify the example and the metaphoric correspondence which it purports to describe, do not coalesce but imperfectly fuse and rupture (Buck-Morss 168). In these ways, allegory does not provide the perfect image to express the inexpressible but the figuration which marks its absence: inexpressibility itself. Jim Hansen suggests that authors “sufficiently attuned to the nuances of language's historicity appear capable of realizing allegory not as truth but, rather, as an indication of the truth's ineluctable failure to be anything other than rhetorical and situated” (672). And indeed, Hawthorne's interest in the fissures of signification, the limits of language, serve to reinforce his allegorical tendencies toward fracture and collapse even as they point to a lingering promise of transcendence.

If allegory helps call attention to the fissures of language and signification, then Hawthorne's allegories have attracted specific attention for the way they increase fracturedness by strange and persistent ambiguities. Critics have variously accounted for this broadly observable trend. David Reynolds suggests that Hawthorne “modifies a sacrosanct Puritan form by mixing it with contemporary themes and styles” in order to “suit modern needs” (xxx). Cindy Weinstein alternatively notes that Hawthorne “adopts the allegorical mode in order to turn it against allegorical intentions” (Weinstein 44). The reason for this critical contention lies partially in Hawthorne's complex and elusive use of allegory, specifically the way his work unravels the traditional binary oppositions and structured hierarchies. Indeed, the journals of Hawthorne as

well as the stories themselves, help to suggest that allegory for him was not a tool to structure a perfect parallel between the material and spiritual world but to intertwine and complicate the relation between the two as correspondent but unresolvable.

It is perhaps too tempting to conflate Hawthorne's employment of allegory with his notorious distaste for the gross physicality of life. Randall Fuller and Robert Milder point to Hawthorne's travels in Europe where he "felt himself more 'surrounded by materialisms, and hemmed in with the grossness of this earthly life, than anywhere else'" (3). And it is suggestive that this sensibility produced something of an escape into allegory and abstraction. But the earlier journals, specifically those written simultaneous with the stories of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, suggest a more elaborate and intentional exploration of the real and the ideal. There are several times that Hawthorne mentions his allegorical process wherein what is striking, is how allegory both seems to emerge from the material world but also to follow the peculiarities of that material world. It is as if Hawthorne were constructing allegories not just to understand the ideal world but to better understand the physical one. For instance, in one scenario Hawthorne muses on a possible story framework which would "symbolize moral or spiritual disease by disease of the body;—thus, when a person committed any sin, it might cause a sore to appear on the body;—this to be wrought out" (*The Business of Reflection* 59). Here, Hawthorne describes finding a fitting material analog with which to further explore the ideal. Elsewhere, his allegorical process seems to work backwards. Such is the case with Hawthorne's persistent preoccupations with mirrors, a story about which, "Monsieur du Miroir," finds its inception as the author pondered over the physical aspect of reflections in his journal. "To make one's own reflection in a mirror the subject of a story" (*The Business of Reflection* 29), he dictates while compiling material for the collection. Even more compellingly, Hawthorne also writes of the

“picturesqueness and *reality* of back-yards ... as compared with the front, which is fitted up for the public eye. There is much to be learnt” (63 my emphasis). Here is another material quality which Hawthorne looks into for allegorical possibilities, and one particularly striking for its *reality*. F. O. Matthiessen suggests that Hawthorne “seems sometimes to have started from a physical object.... and to have worried it for implications” (244). The fact that Hawthorne's method did not privilege either side of the allegory as “original” or “superior” helps to establish his method as emerging differently than allegory's traditional didactic and religious purpose.

Hawthorne's allegorical uncertainty, I'd protest, has more in common with Todorov's fantastic, hesitating between accounts. Todorov actually describes allegory as separated only by degree from his definition of the fantastic as a duration of uncertainty. He clarifies that allegory *usually* delivers a “fatal blow” to any fantastic uncertainty even if it offers other types of hesitations in a reader's account of the actual and the allegorical (73). As I've already suggested however, Hawthorne's particular and peculiar allegorical tendencies, elusive and unresolvable as they are, abide by Todorov's description of the fantastic uncertainty. By complicating the material/ideal binary, Hawthorne's allegory doesn't deliver that “fatal blow” that Todorov describes but rather appears much like the enduring uncertainty which defines the form. Indeed, Hawthorne seems to embody and even revel in this precise sort of inbetweenness. “I am not quite sure,” Hawthorne wrote in a letter to an editor, “that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories” (Bell, 23). The incomprehensibility here is significant precisely because of the social expectations surrounding allegory, an almost contractual expectation that meaning will emerge clearly and preeminently. Hawthorne's phrase “blasted allegories” also calls attention to Hawthorne's frustration with the form, expressed thematically in fiction but also in the various paratextual materials which accompanied his stories. I'd suggest that Hawthorne's

dissatisfaction with traditional allegory registers the limits of any project which seeks to align meaning too strictly with language, even figuratively or partially.

Touching back on the nova effect to better contextualize Hawthorne's speculative allegory—what is striking about Taylor's periodization in discussing Hawthorne is that it describes not two departing paths of accounting for the world as spiritually or materially accountable. Instead it raises a new possibility of thinking which “enabled people to recover a spiritual outlook beyond materialism... [it] opened a space in which people can wander between and around all these options without having to land clearly and definitively on any one” (351). This paradox that arose from an increasing desire for spiritual transcendence even in the face of an increasing empirical prevalence helps to frame the way Hawthorne explored uncertainty in his allegorical tales. Hawthorne, like many others in his time, the transcendentalists famously so, longed for a religious conceptualization which could more fully meet the spiritual desires of an increasingly secular society. In a telling journal moment Hawthorne claims to have no “faith” in the utility of clerical types, saying we need a “new revelation—a new system—for there seems to be no life in the old one” (*The Business of Reflection* 82). In light of this declaration, his fiction reflects an appeal to an enchanted world without any surety that such an appeal will be met—just as his stories’ imaginative faith gestures toward a spiritual possibility whose existence challenges the supremacy of rationalist or materialist accounts.

Most often this consideration of a spiritual possibility within a materialist framework emerges in the form of Hawthorne's allegorical stylings, specifically the entwined but unresolved ones for which he is famous. It is not difficult to see the unresolved material and ideal worlds of Hawthorne's allegories connecting to his broader vision of religion and its relation to the physical world. Rather than just promoting the ideal world over the physical, or equating them as perfect

parallels, Hawthorne seems interested in examining the ways they connect but sustain difference. In a telling passage from his journal, Hawthorne indicates precisely his interest in this type of complex connection, exploring the relation of the mind and heart—a formative way he characterizes the binaries with which he is concerned:

The Unpardonable Sin might consist in a want of love and reverence for the Human Soul; which in consequence of which, the investigator pried into its dark depths, not with a hope or purpose of making it better, but from a cold philosophical curiosity;—content that it should be wicked in whatever kind of degree; and only desiring to study it out. Would not this, in other words, be the separation of the intellect from the heart?

(*The Business of Reflection* 102)

In this passage the “cold” philosophical approach of separating out the self from the soul, the intellect from the heart, indicates Hawthorne's thinking on binaries and hierarchical categorization. This interest continually led him in fiction to question whether too rigid a separation of these binaries might itself be the true Unpardonable Sin. I'd suggest that this concern with keeping “separate” the spheres of mind/intellect and heart/spirit is where the ethics of alterity emerge in Hawthorne's fiction. Hawthorne continuously raises and worries these Manichean binaries for their implications, the intellect and the heart, the spirit and the body, male and female, knowledge and faith. Specifically, we see characters of one side of the paradigm oppressing those whom they don't understand on the other side. The general effect across his fiction is a destabilization of such constructions so that the continual recourse to and reliance on uncertainty helps avoid the oppressive hierarchization which occurs across such binary constructions.

In working through the various and persistent binaries which Hawthorne troubles there is

an ethical valence to the Todorovian hesitation which lingers between two alternative protocols of interpretation. The qualities of fantasy and limitations which accompany this hesitation ultimately anticipate the ethical considerations which arise from totalizing and fixed ideological structures. Emmanuel Levinas describes the fundamental ethical interaction occurring when the self must confront otherness. In this moment, the ethical response is to accept infinite mysteriousness of the other and avoid that encounter with others that is in the self's understanding and which strives to totalize them within the self's perspective. "Levinas's philosophy is constructed on the basis of a non-constructed intuition: that of the upsurge of transcendence as a '*question* to the Other and about the other'" (xii), Pierre Hayat argues in a preface to Levinas's work titled "Philosophy Between Totality and Transcendence." He goes on to explain how "the other must concern the *I*, while at the same time remaining eternal to it" (Hayat xiii). Against this transcendent otherness in the realm of infinity, Levinas sets the inclination to totality which would subsume the other within the self's mastery insofar as "the totality is at the heart of philosophical reflection on the truth defined as totality, on history understood as totalization, and yet again on the hermeneutic method that intertwines the whole and the part" (xvii). In the following attention to *Mosses*, I show how Hawthorne's artistic attentions undermine the tendencies to mastery of the central characters toward an alternative, *uncertain* ethics. At the core of these issue is the structure of allegory itself, and the question of whether meaning emerges as a direct and certain product or as an indirect and approximated process of sympathetic understanding. The stakes of these two protocols are mirrored in the stories, in those who assume direct control as opposed to those who operate with a degree of uncertainty. Specifically, the stories measure oppressive practices by the degree to which a scientific or rationalist posture assumes a view of value which is exhaustive in its calculation or

when the religious or idealist presses their view of the transcendent as certain knowledge.

The subjects of several of Hawthorne's allegories take on the concern for imperfect representation. And like the unreconciled empirical and transcendent frames of allegory, the stories critique pursuits of both the strict materialist and the strident purveyor of idealism. I read three allegories: "The Birth-Mark," "Rappaccini's Daughter," and "The Artist of the Beautiful," each emblematic of the notoriously unreconciled real and ideal which helps disrupt the monolithic narratives of the nineteenth-century and the problematic totalizations which they engender. But rather than focusing solely on the binaries themselves, I suggest that it is the characters' practice of reinforcing binaries which clarifies the ethical concerns of certainty and totality which the supernatural challenges. The men of singular perspective in these stories doom those around them in forwarding the surety of their vision and insisting on control over representing the ideal. Hawthorne's allegorical structure runs contrary to these absolute visions, entwined but unreconciled, an alternative to extremes, recognizing fragments and limitations instead of stagnant correspondence. They invite the aspirations of a connection between the transcendent and the material worlds but leave the expectation conspicuously unmet. It is this configuration which I propose helps to structure their ethical valence: a hope for meaningful correspondence which recognizes that such correspondence is always limited, uncertain, and imperfect. Just as the allegorical structures depict the necessity of uncertainty and ambiguity, the corresponding figures of certainty are shown as dangerous, failing to acknowledge limitations with regard to others. Against this practice, it is the terms of Hawthorne's "imaginative faith" which most aptly characterize a hopeful alternative posture.

"The Birth-Mark" relates what seems at first a rote, cautionary tale of an overreaching scientist, Aylmer, who destroys his beloved in a scientific effort to erase her imperfections. His

wife, Georgianna, bears the titular birthmark and dies quaffing the husband's intended cure. One of the primary effects of "The Birth-Mark" is the crossing of the spheres which an allegorical structure would seem to set out for distinction. This supposedly *scientific* Aylmer feels "he could draw a *magic* circle around [Georgianna] within which no evil could intrude" (33-34, my emphasis) and his tomes are called sorcerer's books (38). It is not just the transcendent and the empirical which appear collapsed but the spiritual and the physical as well. The story establishes Aylmer's pursuits as unrestricted to the material and scientific world. His mastery of "every branch of natural philosophy" stands side-by-side, in the first sentence no less, a sense of "a spiritual affinity more attractive than any chemical one." And Aylmer's confluence of interests is mirrored also in a "love of science to rival the love of woman" (28). The confusion of ostensibly separate spheres enables the initial complication which Hawthorne's allegories produce, mixing rather than distinguishing binary oppositions. More than just suggesting that these terms and ideologies exist on a continuum, the text indicates fusions and hybridity as a means of creating a force stronger than the sum of its parts. Aylmer's "love for his young wife might prove the stronger of [his two passions]" the text suggests, "but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science and uniting the strength of the latter to his own" (28). In this way Hawthorne establishes a structure not of hierarchies among the dichotomies in question, but of interconnection and uncertainty.

Closest to my take on Hawthorne's allegorical structures in these stories is Beverly Haviland's. Haviland writes on this topic that Hawthorne uses:

allegory to deconstruct hierarchical relation of the ideal and the real that was essential to romanticism and that had been in the past essential to allegory as well. He valorizes the real world as the necessary antidote to any imagined ideal world, and yet he does not

choose realistic representational narrative as his weapon to attack idealism [...] Straining against its historical origins as a philosophical and theological mode of affirming the existence and superiority of an ideal world, Hawthorne's allegory first affirms the traditional distinction between the ideal and the real, but then refuses to reconcile. (279)

This counter-intuitive claim that the material world is validated rather than diminished in the work of allegory is a crucial element to my understanding—as is her articulation of the unreconciled form. But while her claim contends that the allegorical structure emerges from the author's feeling that it was “[b]etter that difference be preserved than that nature be violated by uniting dissimilar things” (279), I suggest that this disgust with dissimilarity united is precisely the posture which Hawthorne is illuminating *and critiquing* with his story. These stories critique the posture of disgust, suggesting that it emerges from a dangerous subjectivity which presumes to understand things down to pure and essential qualities and in this presumption reduces them.

This intermixing which Haviland suggests as Hawthorne's concern, actually describes Aylmer's response to this phenomenon and further indicates his motivations. Aylmer's pursuit of certainty and control manifest as anxieties of things mixing and uniting so that they defy his mastery over pure elements. His obsession with the mark arose “only after *marriage*,” when it was “more intolerable with every moment of their *united* lives” (30 my emphasis). More telling than that his disdain occurred after their own intertwinement, is that the birthmark was so heinous because of a sense of mixing it suggested to Aylmer's view of perfection and purity. Aylmer views it as nature's reminder of mortality, that the living flesh will experience dissolution into the earth, “degrading them into kindred” (30). Thus even as the allegorical structure of the story dissolves oppositional distinctions, Aylmer balks at ideas such as marriage of difference, of uniting, and of spiritual bodies merging with earth. His aspirations for distinguishing ideal

essences are frustrated by the dissolution of boundaries.

In a sense, Aylmer's failure to accept complex interrelations across difference appears in his attempt to construct in the world something like a traditional allegorical apparatus, wherein the physical is separate and subservient to an ideal. The failures in this pursuit and the ethical issues which haunt it are grounded in the problems of surety, rigidity, and a primarily masculine idealism. Even as the story itself is a slipping and imperfect allegory, Aylmer attempts to structure a perfect one. Georgianna notes that Aymer “spiritualized [physical details] and redeemed himself from materialism by his strong and eager aspirations toward the infinite” so that “in his grasp the veriest clod of earth assumed a soul” (38). He is likewise described as “spirit burdened with clay and working in matter... thwarted by the earthly part” (38). Both of these moments indicate the tension between Aylmer's material components and idealistic aspirations. Aylmer's desire to see the world in terms distinguishing the physical from the spiritual are also clear in his references to his servant, Aminadab, alternatively called a “human machine ... man of clay... clod... earthly mass” (42). Georgianna's description of Aylmer spiritualizing physical details and “assuming a soul” in the mound of dirt does not indicate his having a composite views but rather his attempt at forcing the real into the ideal to his purpose. And this is just what he does to Georgianna in trying to purify her body. What is more, Georgianna's references mask Aylmer's *disdain* for the physical, most notably, in bodies constantly associated with dirt and the earth—the exact association with which the birthmark instills disgust in him. Herein lies the ethical concern with those so focused on distinguishing binaries: that it invariably leads to hierarchy and oppression across the distinction.

Specifics of Aylmer's anxiety of intermixing are also made clearer with a picture of what the birthmark represents. The birthmark awakens Aylmer's idealism and likewise concerns

“[m]asculine observers” who “wish[ed] it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness without semblance of flaw” (30). Here, the text links the pursuit of the ideal at the expense of the physical as a “masculine” concern. We see this in action as Aylmer assures Georgianna that there “is no taint of imperfection on thy spirit. [But t]hy sensible frame, too, shall soon be all perfect” (30). The term “sensible frame” suggests that the concern is her senses, notable since the mark appears when Georgianna pales or blushes (29), “glimmering to and fro with every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart” (30). While Aylmer's pursuits encompass diverse spheres, so-called feminine associations of feeling and emotion seem beyond him, even fueling his desire to control and change the female body. This point will become of greater importance later in this study, as the terms of “senses” connect to a broader paradigm of sympathy and understanding which contrast to the practices of knowledge and certainty in the story.

The sexism of Aylmer's work is not just announced in the implications of his project to control and change a female body but likewise in his overbearing language. Aylmer continuously aligns Georgiana with superficiality as compared to his depth. Time and again the story reinforces the quality of depth as an indicator of scientific and masculine prowess. Georgianna exclaims at Aylmer's “deep science” while Aylmer rapturously announces having given her problem his “deepest thought” and even thanks Georgiana for supplying him reason to penetrate “deeper than ever into the heart of science” (32). This depth is contrasted to Georgianna's constant associations with surface. Her association with surfaces appear in her primary characterization as beauty but also in mistaking a lotion Aylmer has mixed as the possible cure for the birthmark. In response to this mistake, Aylmer chides “this is merely superficial. Your case demands a remedy that shall go deeper” (37). This difference in gendered responses is also

reflected in the tone of Aylmer, who demands of Georgiana, “has it *never* occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?” (29). She responds submissively suggesting that she was “simple enough” to not think it a blemish. Reiterating her associations with simplicity and surface, he accosts her as “prying woman” (40) when she does press him for details, establishing the asymmetry of their positions wherein prying into secret depths is his prerogative and her sin. Just as Aylmer enforces the understanding of various binary distinctions, so does his understanding inevitably lead to oppressiveness which emerges out of the sure sense of distinct roles and responsibilities.

Aylmer's idealistic pursuits align with a masculine concern for control and a “deep” understanding but, most importantly, it sets the stage for the story's exploration of idealism and perfect representation. In opposition to Georgianna's associations with emotions and senses, Aylmer's nature is called “pure and lofty ... [and wouldn't] make itself contented with an earthlier nature than he had dreamed of.” Aylmer would not be “guilty of treason to holy love by degrading its perfect idea to the level of the actual” (40, 32). It is against Aylmer's pursuit of idealized representation which Hawthorne's allegory stands, relinquishing perfect control over meaning and acknowledging a degree of play in signification so that control is limited and surety impossible. The implications of this suggest the ethical valence of desire for perfect representation as an oppressive process. This aspiration for the ideal is shown keenly when Aylmer uses his power to “soothe” Georgianna and “release her mind from the burden of actual things” (34). It is significant that he is disconcerted by her burden of actuality, just as he is concerned with her physical body, but significant too is his method of distracting her. He creates “airy figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of insubstantial beauty” which gave the impression that he “possessed sway over the spiritual world” (34-35). The insubstantial and ideal

images he creates in his illusion are thought by him to be “much more attractive than” the “figures of actual life”. This sequence comes just before Georgiana explores his library herself to find that the authors he keeps believed themselves “to have acquired for the investigation of Nature a power above Nature and from physics a sway over the spiritual world;” (37-38) echoing Aylmer's own desires for the ideal to hold supremacy over the actual.

The story's end explicates the failure of Aylmer who “with so high and *pure* a feeling [had] rejected the best the earth could offer” (43 my emphasis). The term purity rings ironically, given Aylmer's aspirations toward it. With his experiment he erases “the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame” though he too could have “woven his mortal life ... with the celestial.” We see here Aylmer's obliviousness to the very project of Hawthorne's slipping allegories. Aylmer destroys the very element which enables fusion, mixing, and paradox—first, in a union between spirit and frame and, then, in failing to “[weave] his mortal life ... with the celestial.” This determined fight against combination and collapse at work in Hawthorne's allegories is reiterated in the story's final line, stating Aylmer's failure “to find the perfect future in the present” (43). Here, it is not just the irreconcilable physical and spiritual, real and ideal, which Aylmer attempts to distinguish, but the paradoxical present in the future.

These allegorical factors produce a tension in the story with the aspirations toward transcendent meaning which is always bogged down and limited by the means of its expression. Likewise, the story indicates that such aspirations themselves can be problematic and oppressive. In exploring these peculiarities, Jones suggests:

The transcendental signified, when expressed in language, ceases to be pure transcendence and becomes a signified dependent upon a mundane signifier; yet it is language, the scene of a primal fracture, that alone offers a potential access to

transcendence. This is the paradox that complicates and motivates allegory. Absolutes cannot be held apart and yet they cannot be collapsed together: Truth and Falsehood, Good and Evil, ideal and real, sacred and profane, subjective and objective, private and public, self and Other—absolute contraries are not the same nor are they radically different. (154)

The concern for meaningfully representing a transcendental possibility in the physical, like the possibility of capturing ideas in language, is always in full display in Hawthorne's uncertain supernatural stories. Ultimately, this uncertainty overlaps onto the very considerations of spiritual possibility brought about by the allegorical structures of a material world. But the ethical considerations I have suggested, the concerns for oppressive views and methods of representation, are only partially fleshed out (pardon the pun) by this first story. It is in the collection more broadly viewed that the further ramifications of this uncertainty, and particularly its ethical valence, are brought to light.

In terms of Hawthorne's dissatisfaction with traditional allegory, “Rappicini's Daughter” is particularly notable, as some printings include the preface which calls into question allegorical narratives themselves. After writing the preface, Hawthorne vacillated between whether to publish it or not, and withheld it from the 1848 and 1851 versions. The preface describes its writer who “seems to occupy an unfortunate position between Transcendentalists [and those ...] who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude” (71). This positions the writing in the sort of liminal betweenness which I argue as central to the allegorical project. Furthermore, the preface calls into question the writer's “inveterate love of allegory,” as an outdated mode—though he defends this particular allegory whose metaphorical correspondences “so far as can be discovered, have little or no reference either to time or space” (71). Not content to suggest that

there is no firm allegorical meaning, the preface describes how the proper reading will not uncover a perfect interpretation, but will rather “amuse a leisure hour” (72). In this fashion, the preface acknowledges the waning popularity of allegory but insists on its own complicating contributions. Haviland remarks that the preface's narrator is “intent on illustrating a variety of ways in which two levels of meaning can coexist and differ” with such features as false frames and foreign languages, so that “the text cannot be read as a closed system of meaning” (282-283). This lack of a clear interpretive aim, the positioning of the author between ideologies, and the added complexity of language and references which undermine the text's sense of wholeness, are all in keeping with the hesitating uncertainty of the collection. And they describe an impulse to establish meaningful connections without absolute confidence as to whether any such meaning can be fully understood.

The story introduces Giovanni, a young man pursuing studies at an Italian university, who falls in love with a woman he sees in the garden next door. This is Beatrice, the titular daughter of the gifted but unethical chemist, Rappaccini. Rappaccini is “a wonderful man indeed” Giovanni is told by his mentor, Baglioni, a rival to Rappaccini, “a vile empiric, however, in his practice, and therefore not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession” (93). Indeed, Rappaccini has experimented on his daughter in a perverse inversion of the Garden of Eden, filled with poisonous plants which imbue Beatrice with their noxious nature. Giovanni eventually brings to her an antidote mixed by Baglioni, hoping to purify her nature. Like the solution in “The Birth-Mark,” the potion kills Beatrice and, also like “The Birth-Mark,” the reader is encouraged toward several practices of reading only to find them swept out from beneath them.

In keeping with Hawthorne's comments about not knowing what is meant by his own

“blasted allegories,” many elusive elements pervade “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” Along with the chagrined admission of an “inveterate love of allegory” in the preface, Hawthorne confirmed an ambivalence regarding the primary characters’ position in relation to the major themes of good and evil. Abramson notes that Hawthorne “himself was not entirely sure of Beatrice’s nature,” referring to an account when Hawthorne was pressed by his wife: “‘But how is it to end? [. . .] is Beatrice to be a demon or an angel?’ ‘I have no idea!’ was Hawthorne’s reply, spoken with some emotion” (31 Abramson). Whereas such coyness is not out of keeping with many authors, reluctant to pin down or reduce their work, it is consistent with the complexities, even paradoxes, of this particular short story. This ambiguity is made more notable given the expectations surrounding allegorical fiction—that a clear and meaningful interpretation will emerge. It is with this complexity in sight that I look to connect the text with other stories in this collection, demonstrating how the acceptance of uncertainty and the commitment to following the absurd windings of signification call into question more rigid practices of accounting for the world. Likewise, the tragic climax of this story, following the actions of figures trying to forward their own sense of mastery and knowledge, presents an ethical indictment of practices of certainty and the ideologies around which they cohere.

Part of the way Hawthorne demonstrates this uncertainty in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” is in a constant and symbolic intertwining of difference, often on a deconstructive level of language. The intertwining of various (at least linguistically) separate categories is cleverly represented at the story’s beginning, as Giovanni first gazes into the garden which serves as the domain of Beatrice. There he sees that a “plant had wreathed itself round a stature of Vertumnus, which was thus quite veiled and shrouded in a drapery of hanging foliage” (74). Not only does this imagery evoke Hawthorne’s almost obsessive turn to themes of veils and masks, it likewise depicts nature

entwining with the realms of art. But these realms are not always intertwined and often stand opposed, as in this scene where Giovanni gazes from behind a “window” to see Beatrice emerge from behind a “screen of leaves” (74). Just after this, Giovanni thinks to himself that the beauty of the garden is “not to be approached without a mask” even while he looks on to see Beatrice hug a plant so that “her features were hidden in its leafy bosom” (76) and her hair intermingled with its flowers. By showing the limitations of perspectives and the blurring of boundaries, Hawthorne complicates the binary thinking which Giovanni represents in his attempts to separate difference—the alternative to which is the character of Beatrice who is associated with both art and nature and their continual entanglement.

Even more to the purpose of such entanglement is the description of Rappaccini's as a chemist “capable of so spiritual a love of science” (78). Like Aylmer's, Rappaccini's intellectual pursuits combine with his spiritual nature, mixing scientific with fantastic language—his work called at one point the “arcana of medical science” (84). It comes as no surprise then that in his studies the “medicinal *virtues* are comprised within those substances we term vegetable *poisons*” (78 my emphasis), culling a thing from its opposite. And, like in “The Birth-Mark,” we see an anxiety of difference merging in the mind of the protagonist. A notable instance of this merging occurs when Giovanni anxiously frets over the visual “analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub” (79). His concern is made explicit when Giovanni calls Rappaccini's work in “commixture:” “an adultery” that is not God's work but man's “depraved fancy” (85). The disgust at collapsing differences and commixture pervades Giovanni, who becomes unsure of his own love of Beatrice, asking, “[b]eautiful shall I call her, or *inexpressibly* terrible?” (80). The terror of how she blurs these lines between human and plant, poison and balm, art and nature, is central here. But so too is it important that she is “inexpressible,” defying Giovanni's impulses

toward expression and categorization. Giovanni characterizes Rappaccini's experiment which suspends her between human and plant, as a "fearful sympathy" (97). This terminology indicates the anxiety of dissolving barriers, like that fear of similitude across too distinct a divide of difference in "The Birth-Mark".

The allegorical structure which bridges these binaries is complicated in the same fashion as "The Birthmark" but actually explicates its own structure even further. Like de Man's definition of the auto-deconstructive allegory which continually showcases its own failures at representation, "Rappaccini's Daughter" seems intent on both evoking and undermining the story's structure of meaning-making. The text "simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode" (de Man 17). For instance, "Rappaccini's Daughter" toys with the synecdochic qualities of allegory in which there exists a tension between the container and that contained. Notably the antidote given to Giovanni is held in a silver vase made by a famous artist, itself "well worthy to be a love gift," though it holds the "invaluable ... precious liquid" which can heal any toxin. This tension between container and contained, of course, recalls us back to a crisis of signification and representation, but also, narratively, depicts the dilemma of whether Giovanni will give the vase as a "love gift" or as a "cure." Put another way, it is a question of whether his gesture extends from a care for her or care to control her. This concern recalls us back to Hawthorne's own crisis of language, itself an issue of the sign and signified. This too the story toys with, most notably in the allegories final moments. Ultimately, Beatrice drinks the *antidote* which is a *poison* to her and then flips the literal into the figurative in the end of the story, asking if there is not "more poison" in Giovanni's nature than hers (99).

Whereas "The Birthmark" pursued its concerns primarily by calling into question the aims of ideal representation and representing the ideal, "Rappaccini's Daughter" does so more on

the level of language: showing the slippage in communication, the fractures in correspondence, and the imperfections of literal and figurative meanings. At one point, Giovanni's mentor describes an "old fable ... become a truth" in warning Giovannia about Beatrice's condition—even as readers watch the story's 'truth become a fable' in the course of the character's interaction (92). In her exegesis of "Rappaccini's Daughter" as emblematic of Hawthorne's view of language and signification, Patricia Roger contextualizes language theories contemporary to Hawthorne. Typifying the two primary views, she calls one the "'spiritual' view [which] accepted God's word as the Truth, which He could communicate to us; [alternative to] the empirical view [which] considered language an imperfect medium for expressing truth because of the arbitrary connection between words and their referents" (437). Roger indicates that some, including Hawthorne, did not see these as mutually exclusive and explored overlap and hybridity. She argues that Hawthorne's "experiments with the idea that language connects nature and spirit seem to have led him to conclusions [...] that language does connect the natural and the spiritual but that the connection is not necessarily direct and clear" (Roger 440). This view establishes Hawthorne's anxieties of meaning in historical terminology but doesn't fully indicate the purpose to which he turned these complex, strange relations in his stories. It is my contention that these stories didn't just include these fissures and contradictions on the level of language and in the framework of allegory, but asserted them in the stories' ethical representations of the characters' interactions.

The effect of this upending of perfect signification, the impossibly irresolvable allegory, is a more explicit critique of rigid rationalist views. Against the language of scientists and chemists in the stories are contrasting terms of fantasy, imagination, and faith. Through the tale, Giovanni denies his "wonder-working fancy" for the "most rational view of the matter" (77).

And it is notable that he likewise “had not a deep heart” (82) and is incapable of “high faith” (95). Meanwhile, Rappaccini is similarly reductive and utilitarian in his approaches, so that “patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment” (77). This problem in seeing without “wonder,” “a deep heart,” or “faith” is parsed most fully in Giovanni's final meeting with Beatrice—who significantly confesses she “would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge” (86) if it would mean a more equable correspondence. Beatrice's thoughts include “fantasies of a gemlike brilliance” (86), contrasting to Giovanni. Beatrice declares outright that a thing “true to the outward senses, still [...] may be false in its essence; but the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the depths of the heart outward. Those you may believe” (87). It is this rather under-defined quality which I suggest is the uncertain and imaginative faith which Hawthorne's collection continually makes recourse to. This fantastic mode provides a means of seeing the world without the need for totalizing rationalism but with the aspirations for a spiritual possibility which surrounds and places limits on human understanding.

What this deep and imaginative faith might look like, opposed to the cold rationalism, emerges only obliquely. Like “The Birthmark,” the story establishes a critique of masculine and oppressive visions of ideality and purity, first in Rappaccini's experimentation on his daughter and then in Baglioni and Giovanni's attempt to purify her. The reader is privy to asides from Baglioni who also uses individuals to his purpose. After warning Giovanni of this precise danger in Rappaccini, Baglioni admits he is led by “too insufferable an impertinence in Rappaccini to snatch the lad out of my own hands” (84). Nearly all of these ethical breaches occur in terms of oppression that extends from a desire for knowledge and control of others. For Rappaccini the “garden is his world” (86) and later “the whole space in which he might be said to live” (89) so

that his experiment is an attempt to control all (86). Similar to “The Birth-Mark,” Beatrice is a threat to the masculine aims of control because her “sensual and spiritual” aspects are seen as dangerous and “apt to deceive” (91). Her associations with the sensual and spiritual, as with fantasies and faith, counter-pose to the rationalist and utilitarian approaches of the story’s men who are seeking both exhaustive and inflexible answers.

It is important to note that these figures’ oppressive practices emerge from a prior assumption of knowledge grounded in a rationalist posture which bolsters the desire for control. This rationale which seeks to know and exhaust is directly opposed to the relinquishment of final understandings which Beatrice embodies as she keeps things in the realm of fantasy and faith. Like Hawthorne’s own project of allegory, which suspends the reader in uncertainty, the figure of Beatrice operates outside of the totalizing and oppressive narratives of the other figures. An uncertain ethics of this type is found in Levinas, whose vision of meeting alterity without the assumption of knowledge structures an alternative to such reductive totalities. Levinas describes “a relationship with the other that does not result in a divine or human totality, that is not a totalization [...] but the idea of infinity” (*Alterity and Transcendence* 52). This infinity stands against the impulse to totalization and mastery and instead sees the other as “beyond the capacity of the I” (51). Coming back to the ethical valences of the term sympathy, we have something of a play on words when Giovanni is baffled by the “sympathy” between girl and shrub. The dangerous fusions which Beatrice represents and which Giovanni desires to cure are “sympathies.” Put another way, the very quality which Beatrice embodies and which is anathema to the male figures is her ability to be sympathetic and to find sympathy across the gulf of difference.

The concept of sensitivity and sympathy connects to a curious and uncomfortable quality

in both “The Birthmark” and “Rappaccini's Daughter,” wherein the texts seem to suggest the women's complicity with their own demise. Georgiana commands: “Give me the goblet. I joyfully stake all upon your word” (41). Likewise, Beatrice demands: “Give it me [...] I will drink; but do thou await the result” (98). These vocalizations may seem like justifications of the men's oppressive practices insofar as the women look complicit. But I would suggest that they are actually an expression of one of Hawthorne's concerns regarding social contexts and the expectations of women. Less than a year after writing “Rappaccini's Daughter,” Hawthorne was part of a search party for a young woman who committed suicide due, in Hawthorne's journaled writing, to her having a sensitive nature and struggling with her family's “want of sympathy” (*The Business of Reflection* 102). Hawthorne's sense that she “died for want of sympathy” (102) seems in some ways to echo precisely the self-destructive acceptance of Beatrice and Georgiana, both described as sensitive and living without sympathetic allies. While this actual death occurred after the stories' writing, it is likely that such a stance was not new in Hawthorne's thinking and that it guided his portrayal of these women. I suggest that the characterization of both Georgiana's and Beatrice's as “sensitive,” aligned with feeling but uncorrespondent with sympathy from others, coupled with the masculine firmness in these stories, was a critique of unsympathetic and hardened perspectives which were particularly destructive toward women. It is not difficult to see in the male characters' desire for totalizing control the exact ethical failure which Levinas describes, nor in the uncertain infinity the possibility for sympathy which these figures need.

The final story which I will examine at length in this chapter is “The Artist of the Beautiful,” which showcases a more refined sense of idealistic representation in Hawthorne's supernatural stories and the ethics which follow. The tale concerns an artist, Owen, who pines for

affection and acceptance of his more work-a-day community. He is a watchmaker by trade, whose mentor, Peter, looks disdainfully at Owen's wistful personality and aesthetic pursuits. The mentor's daughter, Annie, passes over Owen's affections for those of Robert, the physically imposing local blacksmith. As a belated wedding gift, Owen gives the couple a delicate mechanical butterfly which draws awe from the couple, shrinks from the critical sneers of the father-in-law, and is ultimately crushed in the hand of Annie's and Robert's infant child. But unlike the previous two stories of idealistic pursuits, we have a protagonist depicted differently and a different perspective on the "failed" pursuit. Most important, is that this story further explores allegory as a means of examining the relation of a material and ideal world and the ethical considerations which it helps to model.

Like "Rappaccini's Daughter," "The Artist of the Beautiful" reiterates the theme of struggling in liminality, the contestation hinted by the artist's surname, *Warland*—connoting a figure conflicted between sides. Frederick Newberry has described the story as a "crossing of the narrative boundary between mimetic representation and the imaginary, between a referentiality that points to an extratextual reality and a fantasy" (42). Most notably, Owen is a figure who combines the "masculine" pursuits of ideality and purity from the previous stories with a "feminine" sensitivity and feeling of the women in those stories. In the tale's beginning, the calculating Peter mocks Owen for precisely the latter of these qualities. Annie's admonitions toward her father only serve to reiterate them: "[Owen's] ears are as delicate as his feelings," (355) she cautions. Like the figures of Georgiana and Beatrice, Owen is associated with both sides of "sensitivity," first in the sense of *physically* experiencing the world via the senses, and second as *emotionally* experiencing the world via relationships to others. Consequently, Owen resists much of the abstract idealism which characterizes the masculine scientists of the previous

stories, even as he pursues a vision of the ideal in beauty.

Negotiating this interest in the intersections of the material and ideal, Owen works in a watchmaker's shop but reveals a complete disregard for abstract time, either how he spends his own or for its obsessive measurement with clocks. The narrator writes that Owen "cared no more for the measurement of time than if it had been merged into eternity" (357). Likewise, the concept of monetary value, itself inextricably tied to the measurement of time and labor, is unimportant to Owen, who muses as to whether he should tell the group the value of the butterfly he created. He is bemused that they cared not for its ideal beauty even if they should be stunned by its monetary value (374). David Urban has argued that this story resists the abstract tendencies which so many of Hawthorne's allegories depict on the part of their idealist's pursuits. "A number of Hawthorne's tales reveal a distrust in the sort of leaps into the infinite" Urban writes, "and the characters who attempt this road to enlightenment are ultimately left thwarted and unfulfilled" (333-334). Through Owen, Hawthorne seems to be articulating an idealistic pursuit that intersects with the infinite but doesn't sacrifice the finite at its altar.

With money and structured time being the primary social means of organizing labor, it comes as no surprise that Owen eventually steps outside the framework of employment altogether. With a fortune left him, he was "freed from the necessity of toil," so that the regularity of work, like regulatory time, which provides that "delicacy of his organization" was no longer restrictive (364). Owen's pursuit of "the beautiful" without restraint is also consistently depicted as outside of the standard practices of his utilitarian neighbors. He wants to "imitate the beautiful movements of Nature... refined from all utilitarian coarseness" (356) and fears society would put his work "to utilitarian purposes" (357). For this reason, he doesn't get on with the "matter-of-fact class of people" (357) and insists that he is "irrevocably doomed to inutility as

regarded the world” (364). The most notable figure of utility is, of course, his rival for Annie's affections. Robert Danforth is a man of materiality, of “main strength” and physical nature, of “iron,” who “spends his labor upon a reality” (355). Danforth's distinctions from Owen are primarily physical strength, which Owen calls “an earthly monster. I make no pretensions to it. My force, whatever there may be of it, is altogether spiritual” (358). But Danforth is also a man of extremes, another difference from Owen's more liminal betweenness. The narrator introduces Danforth in his workshop “viewed in so picturesque an aspect of light and shade, where the bright blaze struggled with the black night” (355), the exact sort of contrasts and absolutes with which Danforth thinks compared to Owen's ambiguity. When first discovering that the butterfly is a creation of Owen's he says “that does beat all nature” even though he goes on to say that there “is more real use in one downright blow of my sledge hammer than in the whole five years' labor that our friend Owen has wasted on this butterfly” (373). Danforth's impulse is to rate the artisan's creation in competitive contrast to physical nature, just as he does with the value of Owen's labor versus his own. Danforth's professions of absolutes showcase the utilitarian thinking which immediately assumes a natural hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, seen in Danforth's claim that the mechanical butterfly is superior to its natural model and then in the suggestion that its creation is less valuable than the “real use” of his blacksmith's hammer.

Compared to Danforth's associations with the distinctness of bright lights and dark shadows, Owen is a creature of dusks and twilights, times between times. Peter suggests at one point that if Owen resists his inclinations, “success [will be] as sure as daylight” (361). Owen continues his twilight toils, though he is “weighed down by his old master's presence ... this man's cold unimaginative sagacity” (361). His best work is done “[a]lways at the approach of dusk” when he enjoys “indefinite musings” and an escape from the “sharp distinctness” (363) of

day. Here the dusk and indefinite provide an alternative to the harsh absolutes of Danforth's and Peter's world. Owen's is a world of imagination which might be "shattered and annihilated by contact with the practical" (360). Among his musings is the "chase of butterflies [which] was an apt emblem of the ideal pursuit in which he had spent so many golden hours; but would the beautiful idea ever be yielded to his hand like the butterfly which symbolized it?" (362). Here we see Owen paralyzed by the paradoxical dilemma of wanting to render the transcendent, and realizing that his project would "chase the flitting mystery beyond the verge of his ethereal domain, and crush its frail being in seizing it with a material grasp" (362). It is this desire, to access the transcendent via the empirical, which animates Owen and the allegorical structure of this story. But unlike his previous works, Hawthorne here provides something closer to a resolution.

The resolution of this dilemma comes from qualities noticeably absent in the main characters of those stories previous: imagination and faith. Owen declares of his struggle that he "must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief" (360). For a time, Owen succumbed to the utilitarian world around him and "lost his faith in the invisible ... and trusted confidently in nothing but what his hand could touch" (368). In one of the story's the most fascinating maneuvers, Owen transitions from his lost faith to his posture at the end, "redeemed from his hard skepticism into childish faith" (375). Regarding the change from lost faith to childish faith, the story anticipates our question but refuses the answer: "How it awoke again is not recorded" (369). What "it" is exists as yet another uncertainty to be pieced together. Given the ambivalence of declarative and certain answers, it is unsurprising that Owen later refuses to answer Annie's constant questions regarding the symbol of his transformation: is the butterfly real? Did you create it? Owen answers with his own questions, "wherefore ask who

created it, so it be beautiful?" (372). The absent moment of Owen's revelation, and Owen's reluctance to answer Annie's questions absolutely, help to anticipate the epiphonic ending. There, to the tune of another "cold and scornful laugh" from Peter, the butterfly is pulverized in the child's hand to "a small heap of glittering fragments" (375). It is in this image of crushed fragments, not in creation of the butterfly, that Owen apprehends his apotheosis. "He had caught a far other butterfly than this" Hawthorne writes, "the artist rose high enough the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of reality" (375). The story's ending provides not the culmination of various pieces into a totalizing whole which gratifies a completed understanding but rather finds meaning in the uncertainty of dashed fractions.

Unlike "The Birth-Mark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," where the attempts at perfect representation incur oppressive results, Owen's ending is neither tragic nor traditionally successful. Some have read this differently, of course, Kathryn McKee has argued that the butterfly's vulnerability is a flaw which Hawthorne associates with his own concerns about the limited short story form. McKee looks at Hawthorne's protagonists' various mediums of artistic productions to suggest that their fragility echoes his own anxieties regarding a lasting legacy. "In 'The Artist of the Beautiful,'" McKee argues, "forces the creator cannot control destroy the progressively transient medium of artistic creation [... and] mirror the limitations Hawthorne had come to see as inherent in the short story genre" (137-138). However, I see this vulnerability as the precise *value* in "The Artist of the Beautiful," which resists fossilizing the transcendent into the empirical. In the final line of "The Artist of the Beautiful," Owen's "spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of reality," which doesn't suggest the triumph of the transcendent over the material but rather an erasure of the apparatus of their distinction. Just as Aylmer's *failure* was in

trying to separate the two into purified distinction, Owen's *success* is ultimately an accommodation of both. Unlike those figures compelled by anxiety at the blurring of binary opposites, Owen finds peace in the very symbol of Hawthorne's allegorical aim: not the material butterfly that perfectly represents ideal beauty, but the “heap of glittering fragments” which reveals the fragmentation *of* the perfect representation.

Owen struggles with the same concern of sign and signified which has thus far troubled Hawthorne's stories, and it is this question which is at the heart of the allegorical experimentation and which leads to its ethical realization. Initially, Owen makes a similar mistake to Aylmer and Rappaccini in “connecting all his dreams of artistical success with Annie [who was] the visible shape in which the spiritual power that he worshipped, and on whose altar he hoped to lay a not unworthy offering, was made manifest to him” (367). In allegorical terms, they seek to press the material into the transcendent. But in ethical terms he turns the person of “Annie” into what is significantly just a “shape” in this process, describing how the allegorical process models the ethical failures of these figures in the stories. However, Owen recognizes this very concept and “he became convinced of his mistake through the medium of successful love, —had he won Annie to his bosom, and there beheld her fade from angel into ordinary woman” (367). This moment registers in advance what is only discovered in retrospect in the previous stories: that the idealization of the material is bound to limit both. “The Artist of the Beautiful” suggests that neither collapse nor separation are a sufficient model for the relation between the allegory's empirical and transcendent frames. Instead Hawthorne once again turns to the term “sympathy” which embodies a relationship of entanglement, strengthened by both the faith and imagination announced as central to the story.

Like the theorization of Levinas's empathy which I have been using, Hawthorne's

sympathy seems to manage opposite imperatives, in this case to recognize kinship and to allow for difference without hierarchy. Owen recognizes his own need of this, maintaining that he would have the strength “if he could gain the sympathy” of Annie (363). He later concedes that the lack of this has marginalized him, that “[p]erhaps he was mad. The lack of sympathy—the contrast between himself and his neighbors which took away the restraint of example—was enough to make him so” (366). And like him, the butterfly he creates needs sympathy, in “an atmosphere of doubt and mockery its exquisite susceptibility suffers torture” as does the soul of its creator with which it is imbued (374). This element of sympathy, of susceptibility, distinguishes Owen's pursuits from those in the other stories and is further articulated in the story's self-conscious line, that the butterfly represents “the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful” (372-373). The butterfly, then, doesn't merely prove one's mastery like a Rappaccini, nor satisfy the representational idealism of an Aylmer; rather Owen's butterfly lays bare and makes vulnerable to sympathy or scorn its creator. Just as Hawthorne's terms of imaginative faith ask that the reader not reduce the world with rationalist protocols into their totalized understanding, to be open to a transcendent possibility which is irreducible, sympathy helps describe how we keep the openness to others without reducing them with those same paradigms. Like Levinas's understanding of empathy, which insists on keeping others in the open possibility of “the infinite” rather than totalizing them within the self's mastery of the finite, this sympathy must not reduce the other within those paradigms which the assumption of knowledge enables.

Each of these three stories presents women figures failing an ideal—Georgiana's imperfection, Beatrice's impurity, Annie's materiality—and forcibly distorted into one, Georgiana being perfected, Beatrice given an antidote, Annie's worshipped as angelic. While

rationalism and utilitarianism are each taken to task in turn among the stories, it is rather the egotistical posture which imagines the other in one's own terms, which is shown to be most dangerous. That is to say, it is the impulse towards totalization, specifically the incorporation of the other on the terms of the self's knowledge which run through the stories as a unifying critique. Likewise, these allegorical structures themselves call into question and ultimately destabilize the genre's proclivity for just such a strict totality. But far from a quietistic or hopeless resignation, the texts do not give up on the attempts to structure a meaningful correspondence between the material and ideal in allegory. In fact, the insistent use of allegory despite such deprecation suggests nothing less than the hope for a possibility to gesture towards meaning *without* explicating it. But it is a meaning which must issue from a place not of certainty and confidence, but of uncertainty and hesitation—a position which the supernatural so adequately enabled. Correspondingly, the ethical structures of these story fail in so far as the interactions are determined on the ground of knowledge and totality even as they flourish most in the acknowledgment of imperfect knowledge and fractured representation.

Chapter 2

Uncertain Faith: Doubt, Alterity, and the Supernatural in *The Piazza Tales*

I. “Cunning Glimpses”: Hawthorne’s Mosses and Melville’s Piazzas

Herman Melville's *The Piazza Tales* (1856) uses the destabilizing elements of the supernatural short story as a means to disrupt broader narratives of truth, but also finds in the genre a means to indicate an attentiveness to the possibility of meaningfulness. Melville's famously elusive religious explorations found in the supernatural a sustained openness, a key expression of uncertain faith as a means to preserve qualities of meaningfulness even as objective truth is deconstructed. I use the phrase “uncertain faith” to describe this position, as something of an alternative to Hawthorne's more positivist and subjective “imaginative faith.” While both suggest that faith helps bridge an incessantly troubling gap between language and meaning, Hawthorne ultimately suggests that literary devices could build toward a spiritual understanding through the power of symbolic meaning and imagination. Melville's tales suggest that such devices always fall short but that they allude to the gap between language and meaning, caution a degree of trepidation with regard to understanding, but don't foreclose on the possibilities for meaningfulness. While at its core realism always assumes a degree of transparency to the world, or at least its translatability into language, the encroachment of Melville's supernatural into the real constantly reminds the readers of the limitation of language. Ultimately, Melville suggests that the furthest we can strive is to stop short of assuming knowledge and to proceed with a constant sense of the contingency of our own perspectives. I use the term “uncertain faith” to describe the dual function of supernatural in Melville's collection, to disrupt the totalizing force of rationalism's claim to exhaustive knowledge and

expressability, even as this faith leaves open the possibility of meeting the needs of the other despite these precise limitations.

In a fashion different than Hawthorne's "imaginative faith," Herman Melville's short story collection turns to the supernatural to explore a sacred obligation to others in a world of inexpressability and alterity. Melville adopts many of the trappings, iconic caches, and destabilizing effects of the supernatural genre but leans less on the sense of literary enchantment and less on the model of imagination as a resistance to materialism. Instead he challenges traditional story-telling structures, exploring how fantastic stories might touch on otherwise transcendent or trans-materialist concerns. Rather than establishing a reliance on enchantment and the imagination, Melville's supernatural employs the genre's alternative to rationalism, and a specific suspicion of expressibility and knowability, showing the limitations of fixed means of accounting the world. To this end, the stories rely on elusive and discrete methods of gesturing to alternative possibilities, most notably, a relation to fundamental otherness despite the fractious language, which come about in unconventional ways. The chapter will showcase each of the six stories in turn and illustrate how supernatural protocols help to explicate these most persistent and elusive of Melville's ethical and spiritual concerns. Likewise, I show how the supernatural helps structure its own sense of an uncertain faith in the immanence of meaning, which might be accessed and transmitted across the gap of otherness despite the almost obsessively catalogued limitations.

The Piazza Tales has been treated more often than *Mosses*, in so far as it is addressed as a collection at all, as being conceived with some sense of artistic unity. Marvin Fischer and Steven Frye each address the organizing principles of the small collection, citing a coherency of theme. Ironically, this organization is usually seen in terms of a commitment to fracture,

incompleteness, and disunity itself. Whereas *Mosses* requires some analysis to see its coherency, *The Piazza Tales*'s continual recourse to the themes of uncertainty and alterity are almost painfully in evidence—themes which I will continue to explore and connect for the bulk of this chapter. The qualities which requires some initial establishment at the outset, are akin to the generic, supernatural elements which were more pronounced in Hawthorne and might appear less explicit in Melville. For this reason, I will begin by establishing the critical legacy of fantastical treatments of Melville as well as the essential qualities this treatment provides in understanding the short story collection, though each story will also receive more particular treatment in due course.

Discussions of Melville's familiarity with the gothic novel with its thematic trappings, noir associations, and supernatural incarnations, have been long accepted though not central to studies of his fictional works. Melville's stories appear in supernatural anthologies dating from H. Bruce Franklyn's early *Future Perfect* (1966) collection to Peter Straub's recent *American Fantastic Tales* (2009) published by Library of America. Likewise, critical and theoretical examinations of several genres which make up the supernatural umbrella have focused on individual pieces by Melville as expressive of those formal traits. Whether it is gothic readings of *Billy Budd*, situating *Moby-Dick* in the monster epic tradition alongside Verne, or a reclamation of "The Bell-Tower" as "Ambiguous Steampunk Horror" (Fast 229), the history of reading Melville is one riddled with recognitions of his debts to and interests in the fringes beyond realism.

The problem is not so much proving Melville's dabblings, as just about every major author of the nineteenth-century tried their hand at the ever-popular supernatural tale, as it is exposing the supernatural sources, aims, and affects. While Arvin in "Melville and the Gothic

Novel” says flatly that “[t]here can be no doubt of his familiarity with the writers of the Tale of Terror school” (33), he says little about which parts and possibilities Melville responded to. The three poles of Melville's engagement which critical consensus seem to suggest are: the cache of images and tropes which gave symbolic richness to his work, the romantic theorization and praxis of his much admired friend Hawthorne, and finally, the fantastical allegorical frameworks which helped to structure the relation between the physical and spiritual concerns which so transfixed him. I will briefly sketch the relevance of this first quality before launching into the second. This rich engagement with Hawthorne's romantic vision of writing caught between “the Real and the Imaginary,” another casting of Todorov's vision of the fantastic hesitating between empirical and fantastical accounts, will give way to my study of *The Piazza Tales* as something of a response. Melville's allegorical process and its relation to the fantastic will be addressed more fully throughout the individual readings.

A helpful means of exploring why Melville chose to use the supernatural as a framework, is to look at a similar reading of an author who was likewise only recently revisited in full light of their gothic interests and explorations. Daneen Wardrop's exemplary *Emily Dickinson's Gothic: Goblin with a Gauge* models an approach toward the poet's body of work, in light of its consistent investment in the protocols of the supernatural genres. Wardrop uses “the word ‘gothicism’ to apply in a versatile way to the literary threshold in the setting, plot character, image, or language that causes hesitation in the reader” (xi). This invokes Todorov's definition of fantastic hesitation as a duration of uncertainty and goes on to suggest that “Gothicism resists closure, protracting the uncertainty before discovery; sometimes it precludes discovery to frustrate resolution altogether. Gothicism thrives in the hesitation before dark revelation” (xii) so that in “that prolongation the reader becomes destabilized, a victim of hesitation just as the

heroine is victimized by the text's figuration of the secret" (xii). Melville's supernatural, like Dickinson's, entails a process of drawing attention to the always already strangeness of the world, highlighting the instabilities and embedded possibilities. The supernatural elements tendencies help expose some qualities hidden behind the obfuscations of the world but also suggest that others could never be fully revealed. Wardrop traces the epistemological aims of Dickinson's:

interest in the 'spectral power in thought'—from an obsession with a kind of epistemological writing that pushes the limits of knowing, that explores disjunctive consciousness ... that seizes upon dissociation as its format. It discovers culturally unnegotiable modes of awareness. A border epistemology, or 'slant' truth, if you will, gothicism introduces a way of knowing that critiques rationalism. (xiii)

I quote Wardrop at length not just because the *formal* structure of her inquiry reflects my own but also because many of the specific aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual concerns of Dickinson reflect some of Melville's own aims with the supernatural.

But there are also pronounced differences, of course. Wardrop explains for example that, "Dickinson uses enchantment as an aesthetic condition. Indeed, Dickinson states her preference for literature that bewitches rather than instructs or uplifts" (5). Melville's own work—with its persistent though deeply ambiguous ethical quandaries—questions affect and enchantment as a literary goal, worrying it for its efficacy in an unjust world. Instead of reading Melville in perfect confluence with Wardrop's view of Dickinson, I show how Melville drew from a similar generic tradition for related but alternative purposes. Less concerned for this aesthetic enchantment, *The Piazza Tales* provokes an almost alienating sense of obfuscation at times, with every immediate avenue of moral meaning uncertain. If enchantment is a redemptive quality which balances

gothic obscurity in Dickinson's and Hawthorne's case, the effect of Melville's gothic supernatural is an almost agonizing alienation which provokes a conscious commitment to meeting and respecting otherness.

Having established a critical tradition acknowledging Melville's gothic credentials and a model for revisiting such work as deeply and genuinely informed by these interests, I'll briefly sketch some of the Hawthorne-Melville relationship which contributed to Melville's artistic and spiritual development in this vein. Most notably, I see the instantiations of uncertainty and supernatural affinities developed in Hawthorne's writing which Melville will take up and riff on in his own short story work. Like Hawthorne, Melville shows an interest in discrete short stories as an alternative and often superior means of approaching such transcendent issues. Even with his large and famous *Moby-Dick* rivaling ancient epics in their search for "Truth," Melville's short work too seriously approaches this concern. This chapter investigates Melville's use of supernatural and fantastical elements in his short fiction as a means of breaking up the inherited protocols of rationalism, and to explore an ethics founded outside of assumption of knowledge, one of the basis of which is an accumulation of facts. Short stories, by refusing to fill out the grid of cartesian space and avoiding the causal chain of plot-lines, leave much of the weight of its world in a state of open flux. Melville's specific use of fantastic language, ambiguous supernatural events, and allegorical frameworks, further call into question the social structures in the stories and those interior structures of meaning which the narrators use to view and impose their view on the world. While his story collection might not seem supernatural outside of some overtly fantastical pieces, it is clear that much of the work done to break up the comfortable and inherited ideological structures of realism which are called into question is done so via the means of supernatural generic qualities.

Hawthorne's piece which I'll work from as a way into Melville's own stories, was fittingly enough transitional itself, as a preface for what would be his most famous work, *The Scarlet Letter*—a text exploring the interrelations of the fantastic with a search for spiritual truth. This preface, culled from ideas in the sketches of *Mosses* and from one of Hawthorne's more fully formed journal entries, is titled “The Custom-House” and is a useful document in investigating Hawthorne's interests in fantastical qualities of writing. Indeed, it is something of a manifesto, and has since been seen as an early theorization of the fantastical genre:

Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showcasing all its figures so distinctly... all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of the intellect... whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. (*The Scarlet Letter* 34)

We see themes familiar in *Mosses* such as the fragile imagination which shrinks from the hard light of day, the liminality between “fairy-land” and the “real world.”

This preface also exemplifies precisely the qualities Melville would find in Hawthorne's fantastical short fiction, sometimes even in the same images and language. Melville responded dynamically to Hawthorne's stories and wrote something of his own manifesto in the form of a review of Hawthorne's *Mosses*, the same year “The Custom-House” appeared as the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*. Melville's anonymous review, “Hawthorne and his Mosses,” illuminates in

Hawthorne's elusive and ambiguous stories, a crucial mode of expressing something otherwise inexpressible. Like Hawthorne's own description of his work as measuring out that "neutral territory somewhere between the real world and fairy-land," Melville responds to the supernatural qualities: the "wonder" and "magic" that the "fairy stories" suggest ("Mosses" 915-917). It is Hawthorne's elusive supernatural protocols, which allow for the artistic exultation which Melville applauds as Hawthorne's highest achievement. Hawthorne's notorious impulse toward supernatural ambiguity, framed in the above quote, describes the conditions of uncertainty which Melville would find so conducive to his view of approaching a "truth" that only receded in becoming fixed, which shrinks from the bright lights which Hawthorne found counter to his process. Specifically, Melville spoke richly of Hawthorne's partial and ambiguous approaches:

it is those deep far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality ... speaks the sane madness of vital truth [...] For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,—even though it be covertly, and by snatches. (*Herman Melville: Moby Dick, Billy Budd, and Other Writings* 916-917)

Just as his friendship with Hawthorne kindled Melville's artistic productivity and sharpened his creative desires, so too did Hawthorne's collection of fantastical and allegorized tales provide a model for speaking the "Truths" Melville sought to bring into words.

This relationship would be the most important of Melville's artistic career and perhaps suggests why an author who found initial fame in the furthest genre from the supernatural,

memoir-based realism, turned increasingly in later works to the supernatural and allegory. A year after Melville's review, the pair again found much in common as they spent visits speaking of "time and eternity, things of this world and the next, and books, and publishers, and all possible and impossible matters" (*The Business of Reflection* 121). It is easy to recognize the concerns which dominate Melville's writing for the rest of his life, but the difference in their approaches would be even more striking. While Hawthorne's spiritual ambiguities manifested in a supernatural liminality, suggestive of spiritual consolation, Hawthorne describes Melville's own uncertainty as a kind of agony.

It is strange how he persists--and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wondering to-and-fro over these deserts... He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential. (qtd. in Julian Hawthorne 135)

My argument suggests that for Hawthorne, such liminality between the real world and fairy-land was a means to discover a personally gratifying spiritual relation between the material and immaterial worlds, but for Melville, this same liminality became something like that "desert," without referent or landmark. Where Hawthorne used his "imaginative faith" to create a space neither wholly empirical nor fully transcendent, Melville is more concerned in asking how the spiritual could answer the sufferings in the physical world, and if they could not, what good were they?

Rather than reading Melville as a fantasist in the same fashion as his friend, I propose reading his short fiction for the way it is informed by and consequently speaks to the protocols of supernatural writings, finding a new means of broaching the spiritual and transcendent concerns

which dominate his work. The pay-off of uncovering Melville's engagement with alternatives to realism and naturalism is a further understanding of Melville's strategies for radical departures from his political and social contexts in the form of thinking otherwise, and the development of a system whereby meaning can be theorized to persist despite, and not because, of the structures of language. A place we see Melville's interests in the supernatural depart from Hawthorne's usage is in the structure of allegories. Melville's allegories zero in on what the reader does with “actual” material concerns, at the exact point where the reader is usually supposed to toss them away for the all-important “meaning” of allegory. I suggest that Melville's interest in faith was troubled by his sense that it diminished the world and its most unfortunate inhabitants in focusing on the eternal and infinite. Allegories like “The Lightning-Rod Man” and “The Bell-Tower” emphatically explore faith's relation to physical existence, while less supernatural stories like “Bartleby” *flesh out* the persistence of human lives which suffer even while the narrator tries to understand their abstract meaning. Michael Colecurcio has written about Melville's allegories as religious dilemmas and suggests they depict “the problem of universal defect com[ing] face to face with the question of human obligation” (2). I would agree with this but build on it to show, in *The Piazza Tales*, that the impossible complexity of right action gave rise to an ethical prescription to negotiate otherness in cautious, sustained uncertainty—as a spiritual concern but a physical reality.

As such, Melville's short stories seem to suggest that the acknowledgment of unknowability must be qualified by an element of faith in the possibility to reach the other—lest we turn away and accept suffering as the way of the world. In accounting the lonely and poverty-stricken physical world in his allegorical tales, Melville evokes the trappings of, if not always the plots of, the supernatural, modeling an ethical posture of uncertainty to accommodate the

haunting otherness in the stories, which is otherwise denied entirely or subsumed as normal in the narrator's perspective. Different than Hawthorne's "imaginative faith," Melville deploys the supernatural as a means to resist normalizing the despairing other into an inherent quality of the "real world" while also keeping faith in the possibility of attendance to the other to steel our obligation.

II. "Fairy-Lands" and "Faces as Real": "The Piazza" and "The Encantadas"

In discovering the point of departure between Melville's and Hawthorne's view of supernatural uncertainty modeling a world-view capacious enough to accommodate both material and spiritual concerns, there exists a fascinating intertextual relationship. This intersection exists in Hawthorne's definition of fantasy and the titular story of Melville's collection, "The Piazza." Hawthorne wrote "The Custom-House" as a preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, waxing on the process of the fantastic, describing it 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" (149). And while Hawthorne's custom house helped provide a fecund space to hesitate between actuality and fairy-land in negotiating otherness, the narrator of "The Piazza" creates his own *custom house* with a titular piazza, facing the difficulty of squaring an impulse towards fairy-land with the actuality of another's existence. After settling on a side of the house on which to build his piazza, the narrator perceives the far-off glint of another home and traverses the *fairy-land* between, only to be forced to contend with the *actual* life of a poor woman whose house he finds in shambles at his adventure's end. Melville's tale, a quasi-allegory like many of Hawthorne's which only partially correspond between their empirical and transcendent frames, meditates on the space between "the Actual" and the "Imaginary," even

using some of Hawthorne's language of "fairy land." But whereas most of Hawthorne's work seems to err on the side of the "imaginary," placing emphasis on the fantastical imagination of the perceiver, Melville's narrator is left haunted by the very physicality around him, unable to accept transcendent ideas as more important than physical suffering.

The story itself, outside of the fantastic tendencies of allegory to gesture toward the transcendent, is not strictly supernatural but rather probes the effects of supernatural frames on thinking. "The Piazza" explores the ethical valence of Melville's commitment to uncertainty by creating an allegory in which the metaphorical questions prove incapable of answering the actual diegetic problems in the text. In it, the fundamental unknowability of the other is demonstrated through the construction of the subject, the limitations of perspective, and the arbitrariness of language. But such unknowability proves problematic as the character attempts to attend to the downtrodden other. "The Piazza" relates the story of a retired seaman who builds his house at the base of a mountain to enjoy the morning sun's painting of the slopes. Being first puzzled and then obsessed for months with a beautiful glint of some "fairy palace" (*Selected Writings of Herman Melville: Complete Short Stories* 440) high in the peaks, the man finally decides to pursue his vision to its source on a long afternoon trek. Upon reaching the focus of so many of his thoughts and dreams, he finds only a ruined hut and inside a lonely, miserable woman, Marianna. The story reveals that she too looked across the mountain slopes but instead dreamt of the enchanted home that sunset gilds with light—the narrator's home. The man is upset and desires to help her; like Plato's cave or Tennyson's bower, Marianna never looks up from her work, but merely watches shadows. The narrator suggests she leave for a walk if not move entirely, but she is content enough with her dreams of the mysterious inhabitant of the far off home (him) and will not leave. Ultimately, the man returns to his piazza to leave no more.

Like Melville's other allegorical works, this tale demands interpretation, layered as it is with multiple literary allusions as well as symbolic gestures and themes. But unlike some allegories, it is not just the metaphorical paradigm which carries the weight; in light of the very real suffering of Marianna, the allegory seems interesting but not paramount. Similar to Bartleby's famous ending line "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (47), the ending of "The Piazza" speaks of the narrator "haunted by Marianna's face and many as real a story" (453). This is in opposition to the ending of "The Bell-Tower," which ends with an explication of the allegory's metaphoric thrust; the final line, "pride went before the fall" (372). It is Marianna's *actual* face and the *real* stories of loneliness with which the reader is left, rather than the abstract meaning. The story establishes the collection's insistence on an allegorical yearning for meaning but recognizes an ethical dilemma that nonetheless demands "real" and immediate attention. It is Melville's deployment of an uncertain faith, structured in the sense of the supernatural, which I will demonstrate that gives vitality to the hope that flawed words and perspectives might nonetheless be able to meet the needs of the other in the world.

The issue of dealing with and living in a world that is fundamentally unknowable but also deeply flawed and incomplete is first presented in the story by the titular piazza. The narrator desires the piazza, the open patio connected to his home, precisely because it allows him to straddle the space between the external world and his home, "the coziness of in-doors with the freedom of the out-doors" (437). More importantly it allows him to enjoy the sublimity of the mountains as spaces of transcendence and religion but also to cater to his bodily needs. The narrator imagines that in the past "devotees of Nature, doubtless, used to stand and adore—just as, in cathedrals... the worshipers of a higher Power—yet in these times of failing faith and feeble knees, we have the piazza and the pew" (437). Whether or not this edenic relation ever

actually existed is moot, what is important is that we must make do and be constantly aware of the mediated relations between the empirical and transcendent, especially those mediations conspicuously constructed by our own hands. Marianna too, when he meets her, is said to live “in a pass between two worlds, participant in neither” (447). Herein lies the problem of liminality, the neutral territory so prized by Hawthorne: that one doesn't always get both worlds but sometimes finds oneself barred from both. This is due in part to Melville's fuller appreciation of global conditions, having spent time aboard ships, so that he was familiar with the contact zones of colonialism. These contact zones often left native peoples alienated from their own land even as they were kept from fully entering their colonizer's culture. It is worth noting that the retired seaman narrator likens himself to Captain Cook and Marianna to a Tahitian girl.

Being explained as the work of human hands, the limitations of the narrator's piazza are clear, and made clearer in economic terms as well. One limitation is that the narrator's limited “fortune” could not afford him a wrap-around landing from which to view the “monastery of mountains,” instead he must choose “but one of the four sides” (439) upon which to build his stoop and from which to enjoy perspective of the world. This notion of not being able to see from all directions and being limited to one is crucial, evoking immediately the impossibility of a totalizing or panoramic view of the world, insisting that the subject is instead confined to the limitations of choices. But so too does the economic valence of this passage persist—our perspectives and world are not just limited by the truism of subjectivity but also according to material factors, the narrator literally cannot afford to see from all sides. The limitations of wealth, as the story makes clear, is *not* just a metaphor or allegory for spiritual or subjective destitution, though it is also that. The story's interest lies in precisely how material questions persist *despite* the overwhelming tendencies of the transcendent in allegory.

As the story goes on the narrator first notices and then becomes more and more preoccupied with the far-off house. The exact location of the glint was impossible to nail down, and “only visible... under certain witching conditions” (441). This moment further demonstrates the qualifications that limit and mediate human perception but also introduces the fantasized element in the terms of witching. This dimension emerges more strongly in the language of “fairies” and “fairy-land” (440-441) with which the narrator comfortably begins to describe the neighboring home. Just as the piazza is a place to view the out-doors from the home, to gaze upon sublime nature and the divine while rooted in the creature-comforts of the flesh, fairy-land becomes the fantastic other place and more crucially the fantasized other’s space. This projection requires an unconscious maneuvering predicated on the assumption that to the self, the other is somehow unreal or magically other. More importantly, the issue of making things into fantasies or fancies sets the stage for the primary ethical dilemmas in the narrator's meeting with Marianna.

When the narrator finally decides he must find this special place, he journeys from his significantly named “sole piazza” (439). Unsurprisingly, during the journey the narrator again makes the path fantastic with “radiance... sparkle... magic”. He describes a “haunted ring where fairies danced” and looks forward to the “rainbows end” (442, 444). In illustrating this point, and in reiterating this seemingly realist story's relevance to the discussion of fantastic stories, it is interesting to note that in the 10 or so pages the story takes up in the original collection, the word “fairy” occurs in some variation 29 times, unrelentingly situating the story, if not as, at least in conversation with the supernatural. But, of course, at this rainbow's end he finds only a “lonely girl sewing at a lonely window” (447). The fact that this story goes to such obsessive pains to bring in the language of fantasy, placing the narrator on something of a fairy-tale or mythic

quest, only to find the reality so far removed, begins the story's meticulous deconstruction of consolatory fantastic impulses. The sense of wonder and magic is challenged by the sense of loneliness, the actual of the other's circumstance. This loneliness is foreshadowed before in the narrator's uncharacteristic moment of self-awareness. While walking the narrator describes the wilderness between their homes, whose "vastness and [...] lonesomeness are so oceanic" and he adds to these "the silence and the sameness, too" (440). This chasm is not just the swath of trees which separate the two houses but the gulf between the self and the other, a gulf whose obstacles of silence and symmetrical misunderstanding are exemplified in the final meeting of the two.

Because the narrator is so accustomed to constructing the world around him, he is unprepared for what he finds at his destination. When he reaches Marianna's home he is struck dumb. "Silent [he stood] by the fairy window" (448), while Marianna tearfully relates her sad life story. At this crucial moment the other's unknowability is revealed but so too is the crucial relation between the two characters. She tells him she gazes down on "King Charming's palace" as her only solace, "it looks so happy, I can't tell how; and it is so far away" (449). When the narrator looks, he is troubled: "I caught sight of a far-off, soft, azure world. I hardly knew it, though I came from it" (448). The reader finds this concept of mistaking one's own place in the wider context, recalling the earlier moments of the text when the narrator himself described the sky above his little valley, "the circle of the stars cut by the circle of the mountains. At least, so looks it from the house; though, once upon the mountains, no circle of them can you see" (437). The geometric perfection of the circle, the closure of its shape are rather just mistakes of the perspective which present a coherent view of the one in the valley but don't reflect the more complex topographical conditions of the place.

The narrator seems to recognize, for a moment, that they are both locked in practices of

fantasy and imaginings and suggests that the sun may gild her roof just as it does that of King Charming's palace. "Sir, the sun gilds not this roof," she replies, later saying "it leaks so" (449). Here, if not the narrator, at least the reader understands the contingencies of constructing others, namely that they are constructed how we imagine and not how they are. The narrator's romantic and fantasized notions are best encapsulated in his journey to the house when he says, "[t]he enchanted never eat. At least, so says Don Quixote, that sagest sage that ever lived" (444). This almost comical application of fairy-tale logic to the reality of existence is poignant, showing the danger of romanticizing poverty and hunger. Moreover, the narrator's misrepresentation of Don Quixote as the wisest, rather than as a product himself of fantastical notions, further demonstrates the limitations of such fantasies.

The narrator, still stuck in his original constructions, tries to tell Marianna, "Yours are strange fancies." She admonishes him and he apologizes, "I should have said, 'These are strange things' rather than 'Yours are strange fancies'" (449). Like the narrator's imagining that a crumbling ruin with a leaky roof was a fairy land, the narrator now realizes how easily, how naturally, one assumes knowledge of the other and the injustice that such assumptions may enact. The pivotal change in the wording that the narrator realizes are twofold: first is the difference between the judgmental "yours" and the more generous "these," shifting his words from an accusation to an observation. The second difference is a change from "fancies" to "things," a change more internally recognized in that the narrator himself is also guilty of misreading things as fancies, imagining Marianna's hovel as a fairy palace. This line also functions metafictionally, demonstrating the problem with reading the story's allegorical "fancies" and in doing so forgetting the "things" of the narrative, namely the reality of poverty. It is at this point that the narrator begins to see the true horror of Marianna's life, when he finally releases his assumption

of understanding. According to Emmanuel Levinas, this assumption of knowledge when approaching otherness is a primary aspect of the fundamental ethical interaction. Levinas suggests that the self may either conceive of the other in the terms of totality and knowledge, limiting the other to our preconceptions as the narrator of “The Piazza” does initially, or that we may keep others in the realm of the infinite, a transcendent, even divine, alterity. The latter describes for Levinas the ethical relation wherein the other is taken on the radical terms of complete but not alienated otherness—and allowed fully to be without limitation by the self.

In a manner which helps unpack “The Piazza” and its use of this confrontation, Levinas acknowledges a human impulse toward totalizations in *Alterity and Transcendence* and recognizes also the historical situatedness of totality with the onset of rationalism, so that “the role played by totality in hermeneutics would then indicate that reason and totality are indeed inseparable” (42). Levinas goes on to describe that “the true function of totalizing thought does not consist in looking at being, but in determining it by organizing it. Whence the idea of the temporal or historical dimensions of totality” (47) wherein “Totalization is the history of humanity qua realization of rational universality in mores and institutions, in which thought (the subject) is no longer out of step with that which is thought (substance), in which nothing remains other for reason” (48). In this manner totalization and rationalism are both systems which are means and ends of themselves. “Totality validates the part, which would justify a religious or personalist conception of man at the heart of creation,” Levinas suggests, “of which he would be both part and end” (50). It is in opposition to these forces that Levinas positions the infinite—a counter to totality wherein complete otherness is allowed and unthreatened by and unthreatening to the self.

That the alterity of the Infinite can consist in not being reduced, but in becoming:

proximity and responsibility, that proximity and responsibility, that proximity is not a failed coincidence but an incessant – and infinite – and, so to speak, glorious growth of alterity in its call to responsibilities, which, paradoxically, increase as they taken; that the finite is, thus, as if for the greater glory of the Infinite – that is the formal design of the notion of infinity that, when taken as knowledge, is lowered. (*Alterity and Transcendence* 75)

The infinite is linked to the divine and transcendent, according to Levinas and helps to position an alternative to the exhaustive forces of rationalism and other totalizing narratives. But in his own crucial maneuver, Melville describes how fantasy itself can also be a consolatory narrative for the self, suggesting further nuance to the process by which supernatural fiction becomes a means to structure an acceptance of the alterity in otherness.

The narrator learns from Marianna that no man comes near the place, nor dog, nor even bird. She has lived her years sustaining her need for coexistence with shadows for companions until the clouds pass over and diminish those shadows' distinctness. The narrator is shocked, asking, “to you, these lifeless shadows are as living friends, who though out of sight, are not out of mind, even in their faces—is it so?” (451). In a sense, Marianna's limited and flawed perception reflects the narrator's own—he too mistakes the shadows on the fringes for things of his fancy. The dangers of creating a “fairy-land,” this story seems to suggest, are that such a construction allows for a totalization of the other within a conception of the self, even as some degree of fantastical construction is necessary to resist the totalizing force of rationalism which likewise reduces the other. Unlike Hawthorne's more pointed criticism of rationalism as the totality which fantasy may supplement and contest, Melville demonstrates that fantasy too can form a totality which reduces the other in service to the self's sense of centralized understanding.

Though he is naïve, fantasizing, and ignorant, the narrator of “The Piazza” is not cruel. When faced with Marianna's despair, the narrator grasps for advice, telling her to walk in the wide woods but is stopped by her answer, that they are “lonesome; lonesome because so wide” (452), the same recognition he has had before. In desperation he impotently suggests prayer and sound sleep. She stops him again and silently gestures out the window to two vines climbing “two poles [that] gaining their tip-ends, would have joined over in an upward clasp, but the baffled shoots, groping awhile in empty air, trailed back whence they sprung” (452). He doesn't seem to understand asking, “You have tried the pillow, then? ... And prayer?” (452) Her answer is that she but wishes to dream of that “yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there” (452). Finally, the narrator decides that she is right, that such connections as theirs, like the climbing vines which never clasp, can never truly come to pass. And so, like the climbing hop-vine, the narrator “trailed back” to his own home, to no more strive for that connection, deciding to “stick to the piazza,” the “box-royal” (453) where the self is sovereign.

In “The Piazza” Melville challenges positions of viewing, of believing, of knowing but also the delight and escape of fantasy. The distinction here is between imposing a worldview which is concretized and thus justifies judgements but also avoiding slipping into the space of fantastic escapism within which one has no duty to one's (literal or figurative) neighbor. The narrator of “The Piazza” is forced to contend with the illusion of his construction of Marianna and is forced likewise to contend with her misery, but rather than continuing outreach he returns home. Venturing “no more for fairy-land,” the story ends as he enjoys “the illusion so complete” (453) from his piazza. Reading the text metafictionally, as an allegory about allegorizing, one sees the dangers inherent to losing the reality of the world for the transcendent or fantastical

image we would make of it. It is not the denial of the transcendent for the sake of the empirical in allegory which may allow us to bridge the gap of the unknowable any more than it is an acceptance of fairy-land instead of its rebuke which allows for otherness. “The Piazza” instead uses a commitment to uncertainty itself, to suggest a more ethical approach to otherness. But given the catalogue of obstacles hindering such ethical interactions, Melville combines this uncertainty which refuses to reduce the other in the knowledge of the self, with a degree of faith in the ability to meet the other, so that the self still finds reason to attend to the other, despite the insuperable barriers. It is this “uncertain faith” which vitalizes the ethics of these stories, which prompts figures to reach out across the gulfs of unknowability, and which the language and protocols of the supernatural are deployed to describe

While “The Piazza” falls short of offering a clear prescription to this conundrum, wherein we must neither rationalize away nor fantasize away the other, the final epiphanies offer clues, of which Levinas again helps make sense. The narrator’s end, “haunted by Marianna’s face and many as real a story,” (453) works wonderfully to reference both the necessity of fantasy with the evocation of “haunted” but also to reference the reality of the other’s face. The face is of particular important because it insists on the infinity of otherness even as it is also insistently real. Levinas asks: “Is not the face of one’s fellow man the original locus in which transcendence calls an authority with a silent voice in which God comes to the mind? Original locus of the Infinite” (*Alterity and Transcendence* 5). In this fashion despite being the “real” of the story, it is in fact the portal through which the transcendent is accessed. Moreover, it is in the act of facing that face, which Levinas calls the condition of meeting and attending to other. Levinas expands that, “that face facing me, in its expression—in its mortality—summons me, demands me, requires me: as if the invisible death faced by the face of the other—pure alterity, separate, somehow, from

any whole—were 'my business'" (24). In this fashion, Levinas doesn't just help illustrate how supernatural fiction may position the other as infinite and outside the self's rational totality, as Hawthorne's work showcases, but also to suggest how the actuality of the other, whose locus exists in the face to face, also pushes our experience of the world into the realm of the transcendent. By invoking this, "The Piazza" complicates the sense of fantasy as a supplement to rationalist views of reality in accepting the alterity of others by showing the dangers of a totalizing fantasy as well.

Ultimately, using devices of the fantastic itself, in "haunting," to suggest the lingering and transcendent meaning beyond the physical, coupled with the essential physicality of a human "face," Melville suggests the complex interdependency of epistemological modes. In a fashion that will be fleshed out in further sections, as this story merely raises the issues without satisfactory resolutions, being but a fraction itself of the collection as a whole, Melville begins the work of demonstrating the insufficiency of either protocol. This insufficiency is reflected also, in the narrator's question of whether Marianna has found solace in "the pillow" or in "prayer," respectively physical or spiritual remedies. While "The Piazza" inventories the oppressive results of totalizing narratives and calls them into question by cataloguing the limitations of epistemological certainty, it never fully expresses alternatives. Instead, the short story collection as a whole is deployed to more fully address these concerns in discrete and incomplete parts, with "The Piazza" functioning as the purest distillation of the ethical stakes.

This inventory of the oppression of totalizing narratives are central to another of the collection's works, the series of sketches that make up "The Encantadas or The Enchanted Isles," which helps provide an alternative to such totalizations with themes of plurality and radical openness. While they are not as thematically rich or coherent as some of the collection's stories,

these fragmented glimpses of the Polynesian islands and slight narratives which accompany them can be seen as a sort of map (or allegory itself) for negotiating the collection as a whole—always casting light but never exhausting mystery. The sketches constantly hint at the impossibility of complete knowledge despite the impulse to chart and empirically account for the geographical definitions of the islands. The sketches thus argue for a reliance on allegorical understanding, allusive and elusive associations, and a sense of spiritual yearning in this process. Their fantastic qualities consist of tapping the rich language of the supernatural as a means to express uncertainties and as a means to curtail postures of mastery but also to express values beyond the rational or empirical, which the sketches gesture toward without explication. Toward this end the series emerges in a mythic form, wherein the sailors' tales and the native legends destabilize the familiarity that a sketch might suppose to establish between its reader and its subject matter, for a surreal and dreamlike narrative.

This initial sense of substance beyond the empirical is, of course, suggested in the title, which refers to the isles as enchanted. The sense of enchantment in literature, the feeling of affect in being swept up, is also remarkably strong here considering the sketch as a mode—which is something of a personal essay infused into a description. The impulse toward supernatural or spiritual sensibility is established in “Sketch First,” not just in the supernatural language describing the islands as “enchanted... magic... curse[d]” (49), but in Melville's positioning the reader as a fellow “pilgrim” (50), treated to a Virgilian tour of the Isles, complete with a story of an island as a hell for evil sea captains (53). But readers are again constantly reminded of the limitations of perspective, of even the narrator's limited ability to convey. Performing the complexity and elusiveness of telling “Truth” for which he commends Hawthorne, Melville refuses to reveal truths except “covertly, and by snatches” (*Herman*

Melville: Moby Dick, Billy Budd, and Other Writings 916-917). And like Hawthorne's romances, Melville continually turns to the supernatural as a means of expressing these limitations. He writes of the island chains as being “spell-bound” and “enchanted” (53) even at the risk of “meriting the charge of believing in enchantments” (54). Ending this first sketch with a haunting image, he claimed “to see, slowly emerging from those imagined solitudes, and heavily crawling along the floor, the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with ‘Memento *****’ burning in live letters upon his back” (54). As I’ll argue further, the tortoise becomes a crucial lacuna for Melville in this sketch series but here it begins the work of establishing a haunting presence which combines the “ghost”ly supernatural with the “live letters,” conjuring the collision of the spiritual and the physical so crucial to the collection’s interrogations.

One might say that the overarching theme of the series of sketches is limits—of language and of sense beyond both of which the supernatural flourishes. The visual limits and glimpses verily define “Sketch Third” which begins by conjuring what a view from atop Rock Rodondo would reveal of the surrounding area only to resign its language to ambiguity, recalling the “gray of the morning” when the narrator first saw the rock in “moon shadow” and “double twilight” when the atmosphere was “just enough to reveal every striking point without tearing away the dim investiture of wonder” (61). Here, Melville explicitly toys with the limits of perspective but, going further, claims that it is in the very limits that something more *wonderful* might be perceived.

If the limits of vision dominate the third, “Sketch Eighth” explores the limits of expression. The sketch relates the sad fate of a rescued castaway widow but the entire story revolves around the unspeakableness of the widow's past. The off-page events of the past are described as too horrible for the narrator to retell and which even the widow, at first, “passed

almost entirely over” (91) when relating her story to the crew. Like the narrator's wishing but being unable to “draw in crayons” (88) this woman—it is what we are *not* told, what *cannot* be drawn, that is central to the story. The pathos of the sketch relies on the consciously unvoiced. This possibility of silence or the unspoken as the vehicle for a truer sense of things is a constant in Melville's works, it is even directly vocalized in *Pierre*, significantly subtitled *The Ambiguities*, written near the same period, whose main character repeats the mantra: “silence is the only Voice of our God” (*Pierre* 204). I will explore divinity and/as silence more later but what is central here is the insistence on unsettling ossified understanding and the acknowledgment that meaning persists through unsettling.

These sketches, whose generic term itself evokes the limits of their capacity, constantly admit their own withholding of information, even give reasons for such limitations in that some of the most worthwhile things are worthless when related (69). Not satisfied with just incomplete sketches, Melville emphasizes in the series the plurality of these “unnumbered *Polynesian*” (67 my emphasis) islands. It is unsurprising, given this ambiguousness and multiplicity, that as the narrator navigates us through the difficult waters, a “circuitous [path] proved far more expeditious than the normally direct one” (69). A multifaceted, multi-consituted world requires careful and nuanced negotiations, especially when there are not just physical ambiguities. This nuanced triangulation of meaning is ultimately expressed in the form of allegory, not written dominantly in the sketches, but brimming beneath the surface. Among these giant swaths of open seawater and island-dotted horizons, the narrator makes room for a moment of pregnant smallness and microcosmic possibility, to pause and meditate upon the doubled nature of the islands' famous tortoise. “Enjoy the light, keep it turned up perpetually if you can”, Melville writes of the tortoise's shells, “but don't deny the black” (56). Allegorizing the shell comprised of

light and dark sides, the narrator complicates wholeness, not just as before with notions of inscrutability or incalculability, now with the insistence of simultaneity. Significantly, the “crowning curse” of these symbolically over-determined tortoises is *not* their dual nature but their shell's rigid structure, dooming them to a “drudging impulse to straightforwardness in a belittered world” (58). In light of the complexity, plurality, and simultaneity the danger here is calcification, straightforwardness, and totality.

I end this section on the allegorically overdetermined tortoise, because it is allegory, even more than the sketch, which will characterize Melville's resistance to reduction and totalizing comprehension in the collection. Melville's allegorical writings constantly allude to possibilities, even demand the consideration of them, but because of the stories' investment in openness, they also resist the finality of meaning which allegory promises. These promises are illuminated by one of the primary theorists on allegory, Walter Benjamin, who contends that the power of allegory is not just a one-to-one understanding of a physical thing and its metaphorical parallel but rather it is the suspension of desperate aspects within a common space: “it deals in ruins, takes as its focus the fragmented images of a past life and sets them in a modern environment” (qtd. in Plate 12). In this manner Melville's tortoises doubly fulfill an allegorical role by metaphorically sustaining a symbolic meaning but also by suspending two mutually exclusive aspects—in this case “light and black”—within the same ruinous, fractured space. Susan Buck-Morss explores Benjamin's theorization and develops helpful language for discussing Benjamin's ruins as the place where “the empirical and the transcendent appear momentarily fused within a fleeting, natural form” (Buck-Morss 168), creating a state of unrest with regard to knowledge. Such uncertainty with regards to allegory is the clearest articulation of the particular uncertain faith in Melville's collection, whose faith in the persistence and ultimate transmission

of meaning through the obstacles of expression.

What is most important about the framework of allegory as it occurs in Melville's stories is the experiential demands it places on the reader to discern the "truth." Bainard Cowan also follows Benjamin's theory, showing how "affirmation of the existence of truth... is the first precondition of allegory; the second is the recognition of its absence. Allegory could not exist if truth were accessible" (Cowan 114). Allegory first must insist that something, something more, deeper, truer, is at work in the story, but also that the reason the truer is not the originating focus is because of its elusiveness, because a direct approach would distort or destroy the very truth that allegory may glimpse. This coincides with Melville's own writing on truth as revealing itself "only covertly" and also in his claim that "one must have plenty of sea-room to tell the truth" (*Herman Melville: Moby Dick, Billy Budd, and Other Writings* 916-917), as if truth must be surrounded and contextualized with all its qualifying events to have any value. Truth, in this case, the possibility for transcendent meaning in an allegory, must be grounded by the things that it is not.

In this tortoise scene, beautifully foretelling Benjamin's allegorical "ruins" as a space of uncertainty and faith, the narrator of "The Encantadas" gestures at the three tortoises and imagines them, "transfigured" into "three Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay." Into this ruined space he presses his imagination: "pray, give me the freedom," he cries, and "dateless, indefinite endurance" (57). It is in parsing this prayer for datelessness and the indefinite that we see the importance of uncertainty. Jacques Derrida's figuration of the "desert in the desert" offers traction as well; the "desert in the desert" being the abstraction of the abstraction that arises from pure undecidability, that stands in opposition to the world of law and provides instead the hope for a world of faith. Lori Branch articulates how "the uncertainty and destitution of the desert

within the desert allow for the possibility for faith, for the flowering of freedom” (814) from Derrida’s claims that uncertainty “renders possible precisely what it appears to threaten” (qtd. in Branch 814), namely, faith at the limits of doubt. This abstracted desert, like the desert with which Hawthorne describes Melville’s own faith and doubt, is borne out in the constant questioning of perspectives in “The Encantadas.” The limitations of language and explication draw attention to the unsaid and unsayable, performing precisely this type of abstract generation. Moreover, “The Encantadas” invalidates human constructs and geographical references toward this sense of abstraction, sarcastically describing the “real genuine Equator” (69), replacing it instead with markers such as “No-Man’s Land,” with its “ocular deceptions and mirages” (72-73). Melville’s defamiliarizations and disorientations in the use of the supernatural, like the unsteady shifting allegories, not only allow for faith, they assert the need for it by exploring the limits of its opposite in knowledge.

III. “Supernatural Agency”: Allegories of “The Lightning-Rod Man” and “The Bell-Tower”

Several of Melville’s allegories in the collection self-reflexively excavate these very interrelations of knowledge and faith via the empirical and the transcendent of allegory. “The Lightning-Rod Man,” specifically, can be read as a text at once about the natural world, the supernatural world, and the disjointed relation that describes their intra-bondage. Importantly, it is supernatural forms and language which Melville turns to to structure these realizations. The story entails the interaction between a lightning-rod salesman and the narrator, his potential client, on a stormy evening. The narrator resists the frightening setting of the thunderstorm which the mysterious salesman who appears at his door has calculated as “peculiarly favorable for producing the impressions favorable to [his] trade” (217). Already, the story taps into the “sturm

und drang” of gothic fiction, using dark strangers, mysterious technologies, and a pathetic fallacy in the storm, toward its affective purposes. But instead of responding to these stimulæ, the narrator denounces the salesman as a “pretended envoy” (220) who “drives a brave trade with the fears of man” (221) and throws the salesman out along with his rods. In a way, unlike “The Piazza,” the narrator responds in a self-aware fashion to his realization of finding himself caught up in a supernatural tale.

The most immediate allegorical reading entails a dichotomous relationship between narrator and salesman as enlightened intellectual versus religious fanatic almost as explicit as the foundational, literal reading itself. The narrator uses mythic allusion, likens the dripping salesman to a “Greek statue” (214) and creates a mock-epic figure of the salesman as the “Thunderer himself” (215). The salesman eventually tires of the jabs and demands not to be called “that pagan name” by the narrator, who is unwisely “profane in the time of terror” (215). These binary positions are reinforced in the narrator's continued classical allusions and the salesman's constant utterances of “Good Heavens” and “For Heaven's sake” (215). This allegorical outplaying of reason and religion comes to a head when the salesman demands that the narrator give in to warnings and move from the hearth. The dialogue repeats:

“Come hither to me!”

“The reasons first.”

... “Come hither to me!”

“The reasons, if you please.” (218)

Here the reader finds the literal figures of the story enacting the essential relation of reason in its dichotomy with faith. It would seem that the only mystery left the reader is to continue to the end to discover whether the story is about the hubris of Enlightenment education or the hypocrisy of

religious fundamentalism.

Yet, the story is most interesting in the ending, which completely subverts this previous rigid casting of religion and reason. Just before the narrator dashes the salesman's lightning-rod "scepter" and tosses him out, a peculiar reversal takes place in the positioning of the two. "You pretended envoy [...], you mere man," accuses the narrator, "who come here to put you and your pipestem between clay and sky, do you think that because you can strike a bit of green light from the Leyden jar that you can thoroughly avert the supernatural bolt?" Here, the narrator accuses the salesman of thinking that technology and knowledge can "avert the supernatural." What is more, the narrator claims to "stand at ease in the hands of my God" (221). After this accusation, the lightning-rod man curses the narrator as an "Impious wretch," and threatens to "publish [the narrator's] infidel notions" (221). It is at this point that the true delineations between the two are made manifest, not as a faulty binary of reason against faith, where one relies on the worldly sense and the other on the extra-worldly, but in the narrator's vision that accommodates a world both natural and supernatural and in the salesman's vision which presents the supernatural as dissolving into and becoming the natural.

In this way the narrator enables the full power of allegory by sustaining a cognitive discordance and also by fusing the empirical and the transcendent frames of allegory. The salesman, meanwhile, has sacrificed both the empirical and the transcendent by collapsing any sense of their difference, by *equating* the capacities of "striking a bit of green light" with averting "the supernatural bolt." I'd suggest that it is actually the existence of the empirical mode that persists *despite* the overwhelming transcendent mode that sets Melville's allegory apart, in that, both formally and with its subject, the story resists the easy transcendence of meaning collapsing uncertainty. Melville's allegory gives weight to both aspects of the story,

allowing the empirical and transcendent, but also troubles both by the sudden and late shift in the story. The story manages to destroy the clean separation of transcendent and empirical realms by refusing to pay homage to a causal relation, leaving them inextricably intertwined.

I am not the first to note this tension in Melville's works, nor the first to show Melville's suspicion of both in exploring Melville's departure from what I term Hawthorne's vision of a imaginative faith. Zachary Lamm claims that "while [Melville] seems to want desperately to cleave to fantasy-as-resolution, he cannot help but transmute his romances into critiques of romanticism" (3). Lamm goes on to suggest that "Melville's characters never wander too far into the realm of the fantastic before being drawn back by material concerns or anxieties" (6) only going so far as to "queer" heteronormativity, scientism, and the status-quo (7-8). Alternatively, some have seen the fantastical supporting a more spiritually robust world-view. Steven Frye claims that *The Piazza Tales* "is in its own right an imaginary flight of religious fancy" (49) and points to "The Lighting-Rod Man" in particular as a place of Melville's frustrations with scientific positivism. This take leans heavily on the sentiments from an 1851 letter to Hawthorne, where Herman Melville writes, that the "reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch" (115). Melville's anatomical construction certainly recalls Hawthorne's allegories such as "The Bosom Serpent" which explore mediating the heart and the brain, but also points to the concern over balance rather than a distaste for rationalism itself. I'd agree with Frye's claim that "men of faith [] lament, like Melville in his journal, the disenchantment of the world in the wake of the scientific enterprise, as well as the harnessing of science for material and mercenary purposes" (Frye 116). But I'd clarify that such lamentation does not emerge as religious certainty in Melville, but rather as this uncertain faith which keeps open a space for both the empirical and

the transcendent which supernatural allegory is so apt to explore.

What I'm suggesting is distinct from a fully ambivalent or completely morally ambiguous view which Melville's texts sometimes enable. For instance, Linda Gallagher seeks to “contrast with earlier efforts to identify the lightning-rod man's character, which seems to be a symbolic composite and not a single allegorical representation” and instead to “focus on the lightning-rod man as a foil to the narrator's own distinctive characteristics and thereby seek to understand more fully the narrator's perspective” (148). But this symmetrical reading fails to recognize that the narrator, unlike the salesman, already represents a composite perspective which accommodates complexity. While the salesman has elements of both religion and rationalism, there is a seamlessness between them, so that the power of the divine is circumscribed within man's power to alter the natural world. I don't see the text deconstructing any attempt to suggest a satisfactory combination of faith and reason, though their differences are shown to be blurred. The narrator's view seems substantially less prone to dangerous totalities and oppressions, such as the proselytizing and aggressively capitalistic forms the salesman's views take. Instead of these, the narrator's bemused but invested engagement with the concerns reflects the pervasive attenuation to spiritual concerns without doctrinal certainty in Melville's work at large.

This elusive nature of Melville's faith has long been pursued by critics and readers—it is my suggestion here that the supernatural form both allows for the expression of his uncertainty but also helps us to understand the ethical and epistemological shape of that uncertainty. My argument maintains that the supernatural form allowed Melville to project a sense of faith in an immanent but always unattainable transcendent meaning, be it numinous or otherwise, by structuring stories around an unempirical possibility which is always unspoken. Brian Yother's recent study on Melville's tries to investigate similar concerns, taking for its title the phrase

“sacred uncertainty” from one of Melville's letters. Yothers unpacks the phrase, illustrating that: the term “sacred” points broadly toward moral earnestness and numinous sense of awe. [While the other term], “uncertainty” undermines the prospect that earnestness and awe can lead to either arrogance or a conclusive faith. The state Melville describes at once defers certainty and confidence and reaches after it strenuously. It is distinguished from relativism by its moral fervor, but it is likewise distinguished from orthodoxy by its deferral of settled belief (5).

Yothers uses the term religious difference specifically with Derrida in mind and “suggests that differences are both generative of meaning and never absolute, thus leading to an endless deferral of definite meaning” (6). It is this deferral of definitive faith which I argue that Melville's supernatural impulses, including his ambiguous allegories, empower—structuring a gap between the said and the meant and leaving unresolved the final correspondence between the frames.

“The Bell-Tower” also deploys allegory as a means to destabilize, rather than resolve, the relation between faith and knowledge. The story concerns a Renaissance architect, Bannadonna a “great mechanician” (355) commissioned to erect a bell-tower. Bannadonna labored upon the bell but fatefully “concealed the blemish” (359) of his work, sure that none would know his mistake—like with “The Piazza,” there is an embedded racial concern, the flaw being the blood of enslaved workers having diluted the bell's caste. But on top of arrogance and oppression, he is also self-sufficient and “would not let another do what he could” (360), so he fashions an automaton servant to help along his progress and to strike the bell's hours when it was finished. Bannadonna dents the bell with artwork of mythological images including twelve embodied hours who, when struck by the automaton's hammer, would each produce their own toll. While

working, he reluctantly shows his work to the magistrates of the town whom he despises for their superstitions. They are frightened of the draped shape of the automata under a cloak and claim that, Una, one of the carved figures on the bell resembles the Biblical judge-prophet Deborah and that her gaze seems to follow Bannadonna. Ultimately, Bannadonna is killed on the day of unveiling by the automaton which strikes for the bell but hits the architect, who is gazing into Una's prophetic eyes. The story's most immediate allegorical correspondence alludes to the Biblical axiom, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (*King James Bible*, Prov. 16.18). The last words of "The Bell-Tower," "pride went before the fall" (372), catalogue the fatal hubris which could not admit its mistake nor its exceeding ambition. In this manner the story seems straight forward, even trite. But the marginalia, the extraneous material of the story begins the work of undermining any simplistic reduction.

The problems of interpretation and its determining perspective are raised explicitly in the text through differing protocols of viewing and the eyes which do the viewing, as catalogued in the story in almost obsessive succession. In addition to the architect's "eye... turned below" (356) to the street and his fear of the crowd's "critical eyes" (358) *from* below, the reader notes the "uneasy eyes" (359) of the magistrates, and the at once "foreboding eyes" (361) and "fore-looking eyes" (363) of the Una figure on the bell. Most central to the story is this first pairing between Bannadonna above and the crowd below; Bannadonna in the tower can see "sights invisible from the plain" (356) and to those people on the ground, figures above undergo "such a reduction in [their] size, as to obliterate intelligent features" (368). Not only is this constant disproportion crucial to the collection's continued interest in questioning protocols of perspective and truth, but it begins a delineation of empirical and transcendent readings similar to those in "The Lightning-Rod Man."

Throughout the story, Bannadonna is described as a “practical materialist” who sought to recreate the human form not through “conjunction, not by altars; but by plain vice-bench and hammer” (369). Importantly, he neglected to consider in humanity, “that between the finer mechanic forces and the ruder animal vitality some germ of correspondence might prove discoverable” (369). Because of his insistence on the mere mechanics of man, Bannadonna neither notices Una's likeness to the judge-prophet Deborah nor how her gaze follows him. The magistrates, in their fear of the roaming gaze of Una/Deborah, represent a superstitious or spiritual viewpoint opposed to the mechanical; they refuse to account for the likeness of Una as mere physical happenstance. Likewise, they express anxiety at the figure of the draped automaton and the footfalls still emanating from the tower on their way down when they have left no “soul above” (363) in their departure. The speculation of the circumstances of Bannadonna's death eventually brings to a climax the issue of materialist and spiritualist readings. The “popular solution” of those below is that “supernatural agency” (367) was to blame for Bannadonna's demise. Alternately, the suspicious discover that it was in fact the mechanical forces of the architect's automaton that killed him. Yet, despite the correct materialist accounting of Bannadonna's death to machinery, it is ultimately Bannadonna's inspection of the prophetic gaze of Una, his admission of extra-mechanical forces, that places his doubly “intervening brain” (371) between the hammer and the bell.

Like “The Lightning-Rod Man,” “The Bell-Tower” both enacts Benjamin's allegorical structure of fused transcendent and empirical frames and complicates it by confounding the frames. Rather than merely leaving open the possibility of both or of either, Melville's text relies on a paradoxical contingency that links them in their very denouncement of each other. Bannadonna pronounces “the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God” (370) and refuses to

acknowledge the prophecy of Deborah and is thus murdered by the mechanical thing he has created. The wide public attributes the event to “supernatural agency” and thus overlook the mechanical events of Bannadonna's downfall. Again, there is no sense that either the transcendent or empirical frames are solely correct and neither are they both jointly affirmed; they are possibilities that seemingly demand each other's cancellation within the story's operation but are also reliant on each other. These two readings, as Derrida describes faith and knowledge, are “bound by the bands of their opposition” (“Faith and Knowledge” 43). Allegory as a form and Melville's subject matter in particular makes these bands themselves explicit. Rather than allegorizing a spiritual world above or beyond the physical, these tales suggest an inextricable nature of the two. The capacity of missing one or the other, laying in the certainty of either, represented by the superstitious who fail to understand the mechanism, and the mechanist who fails to recognize the supernatural.

The next and final section of this chapter will connect these supernatural protocols specifically to the concern for otherness and alterity in light of the imprecision of knowledge and language. But these previous two stories, using supernatural and allegorical structures, help to clarify the author's use of uncertain faith, a faith not in development toward certainty but always already unsure and untotaled. The entanglements of epistemological footing in both “The Lightning-Rod Man” and “The Bell-Tower” provide the condition of fused empirical and transcendent frames which Benjamin describes in allegory but also point to one of allegory's prerequisites: “affirmation of the existence of truth... is the first precondition of allegory; the second is the recognition of its absence. Allegory could not exist if truth were accessible” (Cowan 114). Thus the project of Melville's supernatural allegories to show limitation and fracture are nevertheless predicated on an affirmation of the possibilities for meaning, even if it

is slant, partial, or flawed. This sort of faith, structured around an uncertainty, has been part of the legacy of Derrida whose own work increasingly circled around uncertainty and faith in relation to meaning. John Caputo, who follows Derrida, writes that, “undecidability is the reason faith is faith and not knowledge” and that faith is the “*passion* of non-knowing” (*On Religion* 128). This passion, I argue, would explain what Hawthorne calls Melville's “strange persistence” in the liminal space between belief and unbelief—that he has not settled as most are wont, suggests his is a space of faith, a space of passionate non-knowing.

These stories use supernatural and allegorical methodologies, both systems which point to an exterior and usually imperfectly-translatable possibility, to describe a means to access meaning outside of the religiously doctrinal and the empirically committed. “The Lightning-Rod Man” deploys gothic setting, mythological allusions and an almost science fictional narrative of technological intercession between man's and God's will to describe the gulf between faith and knowledge, ultimately showing that their combination must be dynamic and gestalt as opposed to overlapped and equated. “The Bell-Tower” uses its allegorical structure and fantastical qualities to critique the totalizing vision of its protagonist in suggesting that man and meaning are singularly composed. This, however, is not the final step in the collection's excavation of the religious insistence of allegory. The strongest of Melville's allegories are not content to rest on the abstract questions of faith's entanglement with its Other in knowledge but instead tirelessly interrogate the individual's responsibilities to their own Others in a world so fundamentally complex.

IV. “His Soul I Could Not Reach”: Absurd Ghosts and Alternative Realities in “Bartleby” and “Benito Cereno”

It is unsurprising that the two longer, more traditional, and more popularly anthologized stories should be the ones to most fully account for Melville's interest in uncertainty: the obligation to those figures of otherness which populate a world itself thoroughly unknowable. Likewise, whether coincidentally or necessarily, these stories have less clear overtures to the supernatural and use absurdity, surreality, and alternative history, in addition to the generic protocols of gothic, to call into question otherwise realist setting and plot. These two stories, “Bartleby, the Scrivener” and “Benito Cereno” serve to show the elasticity of Melville's interests in uncertain alternatives to realism, even as they strive to investigate the most fundamental relationships of existence: the self/other.

From its title onward, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street” addresses the issue of knowability and obligation. Even as the word “scrivener” in the title points to the possibilities of translation and explication, the barrier embedded in the subtitle “a story of wall-street” calls attention to the obstacles and opacity in that very project. The story describes an absurdist workplace where people are seemingly reduced to types, and where a strange, aloof figure in Bartleby appears and disrupts the accepted protocols of “real life” by his refusals to participate in a professional capacity. Bartleby's increasingly atypical and undefined resistance, beginning with the simple phrase “I'd prefer not to” and ending with a refusal to leave the premises, signals a new kind of uncertainty, an absurd one, a defiance of a reality deemed so natural that his insistence becomes almost supernatural. In the end, the story begins to dovetail into, even threatens to collapse into a full Christ allegory, causing further suspicion that Bartleby's actions are not motivated or even functioning along empirical axes but are rather

spiritually or divinely significant. Ultimately, the story comes to focus back on the narrator himself, the boss of the office, who visits Bartleby behind bars for vagrancy, dying there in his refusal of sustenance. The absurdity of Bartleby's choices stun and anger the boss in a manner akin to previous figures' encountering the fantastical, like Banadonna's disbelieving encounter with Una, even as he struggles to understand Bartleby and the obligation one owes one's fellow man.

To explore the question of obligation we must first address the initial questions of understanding. In the opening paragraph the narrator admits that he “believe[s] that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man... nothing is ascertainable except from original sources” (3). This claim asserts the limits of perception, of the unknowableness of the other, but, what is more, the narrator shrewdly goes on here to place this story within “[his] own astonished eyes” (3). These eyes through which the story is related belong to one whose characteristic philosophy is made manifest up front as well. Predicated on the notion that “the easiest way of life is the best,” the narrator insists that he has “suffered [nothing] to invade [his] peace” (4). When Bartleby appears wanting a job, looking “neat, pitiaibly respectable, incurably forlorn” (11), the boss hires him but immediately the narrator deepens the implications of a mediated relationality when he “procures a high green folding screen which might isolate Bartleby from [his] sight” (12). The green of this screen, perhaps coincidentally, though not the less effectively, recalls the breadth of lonely trees which separates the narrator from Marianna in “The Piazza.” The screen reinforces another detail mentioned just previously when the boss describes the portal to his office, which “according to [his] humor [he] threw open... or closed” (11). Like the narrator in “The Piazza,” Bartleby's boss mediates his relation to the outside world and its inhabitants through controlling devices like the the screen and doors but also, as we shall

see, with the non-physical apparatuses of social regulations and reason.

Reason as a mediator through which the self communicates with the other arises conspicuously when Bartleby utters his famous “I would prefer not to” (13) for the second time—the first time being so shocking, so out of the order of reason, that the narrator doesn't respond at all. “I began to reason with him” (14) the narrator claims after this second blasphemy against workplace protocol, in a scene conspicuously overseen by a bust of Cicero (13), the great rhetorician. When this doesn't work the narrator advances the legal method of calling a witness in one of his staff. With a witness to the reasonableness of the request, the boss demands that his subordinate in Bartleby “come forth and do [his] duty” (16). This moment recalls the back-and-forth between the lightning-rod salesman and his client, the one trafficking in fear and superstition, the other demanding to speak with reason. But in “Bartleby,” the narrator's reason begins to signal a failure to fully meet the other. Up to this point the boss was never pressed outside of the comfort he so enjoys, the peace he keeps according to the regulations of economic and business propriety. Bartleby's unreasonable reluctance to perform this small but unquestionable role of employee forces the boss to reflect upon his own philosophical grounds.

Directly after this last episode the boss, in the clarity of hindsight and perhaps a measure of shame, explores the impulses jockeying for governance of him. Part of him charitably thought, “Poor fellow!” and recognized that Bartleby “means no mischief... his eccentricities are involuntary” (17). But this is qualified by a recognition that his fear for Bartleby's safety, should the fellow be cast into the street, is tied up with “delicious self-approval... what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for [his] conscience” (17) and also with an economic view of Bartleby as not costing much and being a “valuable acquisition” (20). What is more, the boss must contend with an “angry spark... the evil impulse” (17) that balks at Bartleby's bucking of convention and

longs to draw the young man into confrontation. This rather miraculous show of self-awareness provides a mapping of the boss's vacillating positions in relation to Bartleby for the rest of the story. This nimble dance of the conscience is not so much emblematic of any conviction of the narrator but is a moment displaying the many plausible interpretations of circumstances and the subsequent arbitrariness inherent to choosing any one over the other. The moment is not one in which we see a devil and angel hovering at the ear of a conflicted hero but in which the reader sees all the myriad ways in which the world is taken in and interpreted by the self.

The boss is given the greatest challenge to his particular viewpoint (his piazza, if you will) when he stops at the office on his way to church and finds Bartleby has been living at the office, “in miserable friendlessness and loneliness” (22). This moment of “overpowering stinging melancholy” (23) forces the boss to recognize his obligation to Bartleby in the “bond of common humanity” but quickly yields to “fear... revulsion” (24). Like the narrator in “The Piazza” the boss is horrified by the abjectness of the other but more so by an image of impossible connections. “It was his soul that suffered,” the boss laments (or justifies), “and his soul I could not reach” (25). Like in the previous texts, the vast chasm separating people causes the narrator to recoil because it signals the unknowability of the world and challenges both fantasy constructions and reasoning methods. From this point forward the boss entertains the possibility, even the desire, of accepting the responsibility for Bartleby, going so far to say that his “mission in this world” (35) may be to take care of the young man. Eventually though, the narrator's “vanity” (30) and the fear of what others will think of his keeping an un-working vagrant in the shop overcome any sense of duty. Even more, the wounded pride of allowing Bartleby to “triumph” (32) over him leads the boss to eventually abandon his employee. When a group comes to the narrator and asks him if he knows the now vagrant Bartleby, the narrator denies his

association several times like the biblical Peter. This moment ushers in the Christ allegory which gains momentum as the story goes on, culminating in Bartleby's Christ-like death at the hands of the government between “murderers and thieves” (43) in prison.

This reading of the text as an allegory of Christ—that Bartleby was betrayed and died so that the narrator may earn his salvation—is tempting, considering the narrator's belated, though not disingenuous, concern for his soul. But so too are the materialist and Marxist readings which point to the economic mediation of relationships and the utilitarian valuation of humans as accounting for the text's questions about evil and insurmountable otherness—the tale is, after all, “A Story of Wall-Street.” But not only do both of these readings fail to comprehend what I would suggest is a wider discussion of human separation, the two are, in fact, in direct opposition. If the story is a Christ allegory, then Bartleby *had* to die so that others would be forgiven, but if the story is Marxist, then the idea of a worker having to suffer for the benefit of a Wall-Street businessman is worse than ironic and undoes any pro-proletariat message.

Instead, I'd suggest that both the Marxist and Christian allegorical apparatuses imbue the story with a matrix of meaning. Bartleby's Christic function as the stranger and man of sorrows establishes the sense of alterity and begs the questions of obligation. But his actions also call up the resistance to the protestant work ethic in his steady refusals and idleness, already shown to be so foundational in the fantastical genres. Like Hawthorne's and even Irving's idle protagonists, Bartleby is an alternative to the narratives of rationalism and utilitarianism. Andrew Knighton goes so far as to say that, “[n]o work in the whole of American literature is more profound in its attention to the meaning of idleness than ‘Bartleby, the Scrivener’” (185). Knighton suggests that the story engages how the “problem of unproductive activity constitutes a limit for the imperatives of the work ethic and the jurisdiction of Enlightenment certainty; here we discover

how the economic intangibility of idleness undermines both the rationality of modern time and space and the autonomy of the modern subject” (186). Thus, like Hawthorne's Owen, Bartleby's idle refusals are not passive acts but active resistance to the tendencies of certainty which rationalism encourages. Further, this certainty coincides with precisely the narrator's view of orderly vocations and explains his loathness to empathize with his employee: “[u]nmoored from the law,” in Knighton's argument, “the attorney is drawn into a vortex of uncertainty and fear” (193). It is certainty which, I suggest, the boss treasures and which is unsettled by Bartleby's alterity and need that the surreality and absurdity of the text detail.

Instead of the more direct allegorical alignments, Michael Colacurcio has called this issue in Bartleby “the problem of universal defect com[ing] face to face with the question of human obligation” (2). In the passage from which Colacurcio draws his essay's title, the boss stands in repulsed awe of the “excessive and organic ill” of the world, an ill tied up with his adjoining statement that it was Bartleby's “soul that suffered, and his soul [the boss] could not reach” (25). Like Colacurcio, I would argue that this crisis points to a religious dilemma but, deviating from Colacurcio, I'd argue it's one that is obscured in part by both reasonable economic/legal systems as well as constructs of the self. Unlike “The Piazza,” in which the narrator contends with his fantasy construction of the other as the primary mediating force, Bartleby's boss mistakenly oversteps the other way by refusing his superstitious inclinations to trust, to love, and to help Bartleby in favor of the reason which his bust of Cicero represents. The boss eventually neglects that “something superstitious knocking at [his] heart” and demands Bartleby “be a little reasonable” (26), giving way to the boss's eventual, and fatal exclamation, “What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is the property yours?” (33) Though this language of “pay”, “rent”, “taxes”, “property” should evoke materialist balking,

it is the term “earthly” which is actually standing at odds with the “superstitious knocking.” Thus the religious and materialist allegories stand irresolvable but equally viable, just as the allegorical structure of the story places both the empirical depicted and the transcendent alluded to at odds but coexistent. But to really understand Bartleby's liminal “occupation” of space between material and immaterial, is to look to the genre conventions which the story calls up: specifically, the supernatural quality of Bartleby.

The history of critical readings of “Bartleby in terms of a haunting or gothic presence are established if not exactly pervasive or conclusive. In terms of generic gothic threat, Douglas Anderson suggests “the story’s narrator engages with this ghostly intrusion upon his safe life” and claims “Edgar Allan Poe would have been the ideal reader for this quiet, domestic variant of [Poe’s] ‘William Wilson’” (483). More to my purpose, William Vaughn locates Bartleby in the *specific* tradition of the ghost story, going so far as to suggest “‘Bartleby’ could be read as one of the great ghost stories in American literature” (537). What is so significant about the story is not that Bartleby is likened to a ghost as opposed to a physical being but that his ghostliness exists alongside a frustrating and persistent embodiedness. Vaughn lists the moments of Bartleby’s ghostly descriptions as “a very ghost,” “a man, or rather ghost,” “haunting the building,” “the apparition of Bartleby” and suggests that “the scrivener reminds [the boss] that we are but phenomena to one another—that our noumenal selves remain forever unreachable” (537). Vaughn demonstrates that this persists even as Bartleby’s embodiedness is cataloged, his being “cadaverous,” “his cadaverously gentle manly nonchalance,” “his mildly cadaverous reply,” “his cadaverous triumph” (537). These observations locate two of the primary images of the gothic in the immaterial ghost and the obsessively material dead body. But my interest is in the very discrepancy between them in defining this singular figure, more than the two different versions

themselves. It is not merely significant that he is one or the other but that he is both of these things, at odds as they are, at the same time.

Melville uses these two conventions of gothic narration, the haunting immateriality of ghosts, and the physical presence of the corpse, in a fashion which reflects the allegorical structure of the story—the corresponding transcendent and empirical frames. Likewise, this entanglement between two diametrically opposed definitions troubles both comfortable reading practices as well as the narrator's desire for clarity and certainty. Melville toys with allegory's predisposition towards resolution and creates the same conditions as fantastic uncertainty, a lingering hesitation which draws attention to our faulty means of accounting the world. It is this unresolved allegorical construction which helps to model the intersections of faith and uncertainty. Unresolved allegory provides the conditions for language attaching to meaning which are conspicuously inaccessible in the same fashion that Melville cultivated a sense of faith which could never transform into knowledge. Instead faith functions conceptually as a means to aspire toward meaning without committing the totalizing acts by which meaning is reduced, or worse, becomes oppressively totalizing. This type of uncertain faith, akin to what Yothers dubs “sacred uncertainty,” emerges as supernaturalness in these short stories. The supernaturalness is explicit in “The Bell-Tower,” metafictional in “The Piazza,” and lies both in the absurdist surreality and the use of ghostly and cadaverous symbolism in “Bartleby.”

In none of these stories do we see the ultimate fulfillment of obligation to otherness, the need for which the texts revolve around. Instead they primarily show relations in terms of use and employment, a relation to the other that is not on the other's terms but on the self's, whether completing a fantasy or maintaining a reasonable status quo. Like Levinas referring to the other in terms of infinite unknowability, Martin Buber, in his own ethical treatise, writes that “it lies

with yourself how much of the immeasurable becomes reality for you” (32). Where the piazza owner retreats from poverty to his illusion of a fairy land, constructing a solipsistic fantasy that others are not real, the businessman retreats to the utilitarian system of human use-value and a labor economy justifying his own retreat. Bartleby too seems to have been a character retreating from his own inability to contend with the vast chasms separating individuals in the world.

The last moments of “Bartleby” delves “further in the history” of the titular character and speculates that he may have worked “in the Dead Letter Office” (46), compiling for their destruction letters that never made it to the addressed—broken dialogues, unspoken words, failed connections. In addition to the actual faulty mail system, these dead letters obviously go further, suggesting the impotence of the society, of even language, to bridge this chasm which the characters face with revulsion. The narrator connects Bartleby's death in “the tombs,” a term for the prison once again conjuring his dually cadaverous/ghostly nature, to his experience with these communications.

Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! (46)

The narrator's insistence that death is related to failed correspondence is twofold. First, since there is no rhyme, we can assume that dead letters and dead men “sound like,” not in terms of aural similitude but rather their likeness in the act of sounding out. And given their death, this likeness can only be a similitude of silence. Dead letters “sound” like dead men in that neither sound at all. Both writing and people fail to communicate in this equivalence. But death also follows from failed communication in the form of a ring which fails in reaching the hand, charity which falls short of the needy. Perhaps most importantly, the final example used is hope withheld from the oppressed—the very thing which the narrator imagines to have brought about Bartleby's own ruin.

Following this, the narrator in the famous last line, likens the fate of Bartleby to that of humanity, suggesting that our inability in correspondence is complete. But this sort of complete resignation is of course qualified by the very writing of the story. The whole collection, it would seem, attempts to catalogue such failures but to the purpose that their summation might help measure out the absent structure of their opposite. By refusing the sort of totalizing, reductive, and “dead letter” ways of expressing rebuked in this story, Melville seems to model—but not explicate, as that would be self-defeating—the very alternative which might prove life to letters: what I have thus far called an uncertain faith. Faith in the possibility of words to gesture, however imperfectly, to their meanings; the faith in the self to attend, however limited, to an other. This moment of “dead letters” stands alternatively to the “live letters” which are referenced in the tortoise scene in “The Encantadas,” those tortoises whose allegorical determination connects to the dual nature of light and dark represented by their shells, and as a repository of abstraction in their “dateless, indefinite” persistence.

Instead of the failures to understand or attend to one's neighbor described in these stories,

The Piazza Tales seems to imply that a relinquishing of “dead letter” ways of knowing is in fact the chance for such relation, paying tribute to the impossibility of knowledge which the abstract desert in the desert theorizes but *moving forward* with radical openness. In a study of Derrida's religious writing, John Caputo sees the philosopher's deconstructive religiosity as committed to the impossibility of knowing but “impassioned by the impossible” (*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* xx). This is precisely where the two narrators fail, theirs is a failure of *passion* for that life which cannot be fully understood. With this in mind, we may read the narrator's speech that his “mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with [] room for such a period as *you* may see fit to remain” (35, my emphasis), as perhaps the closest direct recommendation regarding the ethical and spiritual obligations facing these characters: to furnish a space, in the heart, in the mind, in the world where the other may exist on his or her terms. It is not just a question of faith in the other, but faithfulness to the other and faithfulness to them as perpetually other. Melville's depiction of infinite alterity via the startling and disruptive supernatural is softened by this uncertain faith in the possibility to reach or meet the other.

The final story of my analysis is “Benito Cereno,” whose dramatic departure from the previous stories further demonstrates the destabilizing effects which *Piazza Tales*, as a collection, can showcase in suturing together what seems disparate. Yet despite radical changes in length, setting, genre, and tone, the story nonetheless coincides fluidly with Melville's investigation of naïve point-of-view narrators, failing to comprehend the oppressive systems of which they are a part. Moreover, the story features an embedded gothic-supernatural structure as a means to break up the fixed and totalizing narratives of truth which these narrators have assumed. Like with the previous stories this process disrupts fixed approaches while still finding recourse to faith in meaning by way of their uncertainty. The text's supernaturalness features

overt appeals to gothic writing and, what is more, also features an investigation of gothic reading. Additionally, and like “P’s Correspondence” from *Mosses*, the story explores the device of alternative history, now a well-accepted sub-genre lining shelves in the science fiction and fantasy sections of what bookstores still remain. The gothic explorations and tone, as well as the self-conscious reimagining of history, function as a means to challenge rationalism and realism for more radical alternative views of the world. In so doing they challenge the very means by which meaning is made, raising questions of reading praxis and epistemological concerns for truth and actuality. Ultimately, it is the collection’s most sustained critique of totalizing knowledge, being elusive to the point of impossibility, but the story sustains a means to depict and triangulate meaning without pinning it down as truth—and in so reducing, destroying it.

“Benito Cereno” joins the legacy of classic American texts employing the dark gothic form, emphasizing hauntings and buried secrets in exploring the perverse past of slavery. It tells of sea captain Amasa Delano who discovers a drifting ship and, upon approaching to offer assistance, finds that the slaver’s crew has been decimated by tribulation. Delano tours the ship, led by the meek and inscrutable captain Cereno and his manservant Babo. Delano continually remarks at the strangeness of the ship’s environment, vacillating between blaming Cereno for tyranny and then for lackness, occasionally wondering if Cereno had plotted to entrap him. Just as Delano is paddling off to his own ship for supplies, Cereno leaps into the small boat and we discover that he has been a captive of the revolting slaves, led by the mastermind Babo. Delano helps to subdue the ship and bring them to a court, where the narration shifts to the judicial documentation of the rebellion. The story ends in narration again, with Delano encouraging Cereno to get over his trauma and move on from the incident, only to see the Spanish captain succumb to his psychological wounds and die in the wake of the trial.

In addition to connections to supernatural modes in the form of alternative history, “Benito Cereno” has an almost check-box approach to gothic conventions, beginning with its associations with Old World decadence and references to a corrupt Catholicism in the Spanish slave-ship. The narrator misreads the rebelling slaves aboard as “a ship load of monks” or “Black Friars” (257), a nod to the gothic focus on Catholicism existing also in the ship's patronage to Saint Dominick (258), and most pronouncedly in the figure of the slaver's captain Benito Cereno. Connecting the gothic tropes of the Old World, Catholicism, and conspiracy, Deleno remarks of this enigmatic figure, that even the word “Spaniard has a curious, conspirator, Guy-Fawkish twang to it” (300). Beyond these regional and religio-political conventions of the gothic, the text continually finds recourse to graveyard references with the ship described as “hearse-like” (258), its captain having a “cadaverous aspect” (272), and a general air of “ghostly dread” (285) aboard. The narrative force is sustained by the narrator's constant concerns for “goblins” and “ghosts” within the ship (276) and for the Captain, the “Spaniard himself, the central hobgoblin of all” (287).

But of course it is not just these trappings which produce the gothic mood but, crucially, at the text's climax, the unspoken act of prior violence being revealed in a “buried” skeleton (328)—in this case the corpse of another of the captains which had been tied to the prow, and whose unveiling clarifies the facts of the case to the narrator, if not exactly the truth of it. The idea of “buried truth,” is itself a primary key to the gothic tradition, always suggesting a darkness not to be illuminated. Jerrod Hogle describes this as one of primary gothic conventions, the buried secret of some old architectural enclosure which include ships and tombs, both of which the San Dominick is. Hogle suggests that these “are hidden secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) which haunt the characters” (2). It is precisely this sense which dominates the story,

producing the enchantment of supernatural mystery even as the story sets us squarely in a historical time and place. This effect begins in the opening, conjuring the “[s]hadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come” (255) even before we see the strange ship with “vapors partly mantling the hull” and a strange drift which spoke of more than just “deception of the vapors, [so that], the longer the stranger was watched the more singularly appeared her maneuvers” (256). These maneuvers are made more disconcerting and mysterious by an uncertain wind “baffling, which the more increased the apparent uncertainty of her movements” (257). It is on this approach, that Delano first notes the concealed figure-head (259), acknowledging that the ship “hoard[s] from view their interiors till the last moment... the living spectacle it contains [... giving] the effect of enchantment” (260).

Once upon the ship, this buriedness takes on the singular conceptualization of silence, mutedness, and that which cannot be spoken, which suggests to the reader the true unspoken crime taking place—not the overthrow of the ship’s crew but the institution of slavery itself. Notably this image is seen in the form of the “chained giant totally mute” (276), a former chieftain who was chained and paraded before our obtuse narrator, though even he is able to tell this lock and key are “significant symbols truly” (278). Moments like this seem to mark the furthest we can credit our narrator, not for being able to discover the clues which would unlock the mysteries around him, but simply for noticing *that there even exists* a mysterious crime beyond the superficial. He is also aware of the small indications to him of the state of the ship's mutiny (much like the ghosts warning away a visitor to a haunted house), in the gestures of a Spanish sailor warning him with “hand in the bosom of his frock, as if hiding something,” a “secret sign” (284), though Delano continuously misreads such moments. He sees “lurking significance in [these gestures], as if silent signs, of some Freemason sort,” once again recalling

conspiratorial societies of the Old World (283). As with his acknowledgment of the symbolic significance of the chained giant, here he points to the existence of a paradigm which he is unable to plumb. When asked about the ills and trials of the voyage, Cereno significantly calls it indescribable: "Past all speech" (303).

The story proceeds in this tone of "sinister muteness and gloom" even through the bureaucratic documentation of the events and into the text's bookended narration. Here the Spaniard is sunk into his own muteness (352), his spectrality mirrored in a "silver-mounted sword, apparent symbol of the despotic command, [that] was not, indeed, a sword, but the ghost of one. The Scabbard, artificially stiffened, was empty" (352). Another symbolic realization on the part of the narrator, here the indication of power is shown to be an absence, a void left in shape only by the calcification of its enclosure, just as silence is not the absence of meaning but rather the lingering specter of meaning unspoken. Even the ingenious Babo, from the time of his capture, through his trial and to his death "uttered no sound, and could not be forced to" and ultimately "met his voiceless end" (353). There is certainly more to say of the meaning of Babo's silence, the vengeful figure revenged against by the court, his gruesome disfigurement, his decapitated head with gaze fixed on the tomb of Cereno, but here at least it serves to help establish the gothic character of the story's investments in silence.

The sense of buriedness in the texts serves the primary purpose of interrogating means of accessing or interpreting for truth as it is depicted in the text. Melville uses this sense of truth-as-always-obscured to show the dangerous practices of assumption and interpretation taken on by Amasa Delano in his attempts to discover. The text stages a critique of presumptive postures and the totalizing narratives which reinforce these practices. And yet, despite this ultimate criticism, and not unlike *Bartleby's* boss, what first strikes the reader is actually the narrator's

overwhelming commitment to good samaritanism. He observes the stranded ship and brought gifts, assuming need (257), offering both sympathy and charity (261). He even makes several shrewd observations about poverty and suffering, saying, “physical suffering seems to cancel every social instinct of kindness,” which, had it run deeper, might have given Delano the capacity to truly address the wrongs on the ship (264). But it is precisely this lack of empathetic depth which dooms his good will. While Delano understands the needs to reach out, his attempts are continually undermined by his vision of order, his absorption of social norms: power relations on a ship, racial assumptions, and acceptance of slavery. The text's insistence on Delano's failures despite what seems to be so concerted an effort to do otherwise, is because of his accepting these dynamics as known and stable.

The text continuously works to show the limited vision of Delano, not just in terms of the veils and burials of the world he inhabits, but in his own perspective. His are described as “blunt-thinking American's eyes” (271), as he continually misjudges the danger around him, so that even the “return of involuntary suspicion, [in] the singular guilelessness of the American” (281) bespeaks a culpable naivety. His assumptions abound in the text, from his early mischaracterizations of the ship and its inhabitants, to the evaluative processes which guide him, such as his view that the slave figures are too open to be dangerous (286). Likewise, this superficiality is marked in his moral considerations as he suggests that the physical features bespeak moral turpitude: “intense heat and cold, though unlike, produce like sensations, so innocence and guilt” (290) and also in his mistaking the social politeness for actual morality in the case of Benito Cereno's following of social protocols (313). These moments serve to suggest that it is not just the inherent obscurity of facts which empowers gothic inaccessibility, but also the perspectival practices which skew them.

This limited perspective is tied primarily to a failure of complex, nuanced recognitions of difference and alterity, whose absence solidifies in the form of a confident certainty of moral rightness. Against this certainty, Melville positions the uncertainty which the gothic and supernatural modes enable. While one can rightly point out that, in a similar fashion to *Bartleby's* boss, Delano consistently checks his suspicions of others' motivations—an action which seems to be more ethically sound than its opposite—he is far too loath to be suspicious of his own motivations and, more broadly, of the culture of which he is a part. At one point, when Cereno is trying to tell Delano something, Delano cuts him off in an attempt at sympathetic communication suggesting he understands, but in so doing missing the point, and more importantly, channels the conversation down the path he'd already felt it should go (275). Later, he allows his hurt pride at trying to lend a hand color his judgements on the ship (322), showing his commitment to his way over actual understanding. Even his attempts at charity are not free from selfish purposes; he describes trying to outfit the battered ship as “such solid services” though he partakes in haggling over the “price of sails” (316).

More important than any economic interest in serving the stranded vessel is of course Delano's acceptance of slavery as natural, which all too often blinds him to both what has happened on the ship and the moral implications surrounding it. The court documents at the end of the text, giving the “official” version of events, serve to underscore Delano's own internalization of racist views. Much like the news clippings at the end of “*Billy Budd*” which misrepresent events in support of the state power structures, the court documents here illuminate the “evils” of the slave revolt while overlooking the true inciting evils of the tragedy: slavery itself. The court finds, for instance, that it was “impossible for the deponent [Cereno] and his men to act otherwise than they did” (348) in killing the rebelling slaves. This view of necessity

and unavoidability is extended to Delano's actions in helping to retake the revolting ship: "Don Joaquin was killed owing to another mistake of the Americans, but one impossible to avoid" (348). In the final conversation Delano even calls the events "Providence" (351), suggesting that all of these events were impossible to avoid. Delano's failure is precisely in accepting slavery as an inevitability, as providence, while being shocked at the rebellion of the victims. His acceptance itself is based on the larger social narratives which he has internalized and all of his misrecognitions follow from this unspoken, buried cause.

Locating the buried acceptance of injustice which rises in sublimated forms (the return of the oppressed, we might say) has long been a reading of American gothic at large. According to Ellen Goldner, "Gothic representations of slavery imagine a social evil that has not been laid to rest [and an] important reason that slavery continues to haunt the American literary imagination is its problematic involvement with one of the most authoritative strands of American culture, and Western culture generally: the rational discourse that comprises both abstract reason and empirical observation" (59). It is for this reason that the text makes recourse to the supernatural genre with its hauntings and specters. And it is also the reason why Delano so thoroughly misunderstands his role. The propensity of supernatural forms to problematize and break-up solidified narratives, in Goldner's words, help "gothic representations of slavery [to] grapple with the dominant discourse they disrupt... gothic elements expose the complicity between a Western scientific world view and slavery; they reveal the distortions in the lens through which the rational discourse views the world, indicating the features of life and the lives of Others for which Western empiricism fails to account" (59-60). Goldner suggests how *Benito Cereno* specifically functions in a fashion similar to what I have said more broadly about Hawthorne's and Melville's supernatural short stories: that these forms resist the totalizing ideological

structures which undergird American rationalism. In this case it was, the “Western dream of control in a discourse increasingly consistent with science helped to produce the slave trade” since “slavery was not merely an unfortunate aberration in the modern Enlightenment project, which sought human freedom through reason and control” but is instead the necessary eventuality of the logic which undergirds and propels the projects. In this way, the secrets which beg to be understood in the story are not that the Spaniard, Cereno, is plotting against the American, Delano, as he occasionally thinks, nor even that Babo is plotting against Delano, as turns out to be “true,” but rather that slavery and other injustices are the threatening evil beneath the surface of the story.

The gothic and supernatural modes are uniquely suited to this task because their emphasis on lingering mysteries mirrors the very problem that these injustices continue because of the limitations of Western modes of accounting meaning. This is an alternative to other protestations against slavery in literature, notably the sentimental form exemplified by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The embattled history of Stowe's novel, with accusations of a patronizing postures toward its subjects, is in large part due to the way sentimentalism positions the reader in relation to the figures of suffering, relying on what many see as a infantilizing view of otherness. Some portion of sentimentalism looks to translate the suffering of its subjects completely and unreservedly to the reader, suggesting a power relation wherein the oppressed's experience can be exhaustively known and understood within a correspondingly powerful and more complex reader. Peter Coviello defines Melville's text as alternatively gothic in its effects: “[t]rading on Stowe's use of a kind of offhand racial knowingness, a casually assured knowledge of black traits and black life” (156). More specifically, Coviello sees the bumbling Cereno himself as the type of problematic sentimentalist the novella is meant to upbraid, seeking “to

resist easy credulity and complacent self-assurance, which Melville fears sentimentality, as exemplified by Stowe, has been working assiduously to erode in American readers” (156). These generic properties are what help to sketch out the short story's ethical conundrums, probing into the relation of exhaustive expression versus uncertainty in accounting for alterity. The knowability in sentimentality is about “mutuality and assurance, collusion, the quiet insistence upon a knowledge that is presented as so effortlessly shared [... which trades] upon a kind of untroubled transparency, both of character to omniscient observation and judgment, and of that judgment to readers” (171). Against this archetype, I insist that the uncertainty which helps to define supernatural tales is deployed as an ethical intervention into relationships in which knowledge translates into a reductive power. It is my contention that the supernatural emphasis on things beyond the visible, meaning beyond the provable, haunting otherness, and a malleable reality all coalesce in the story to produce a check to the rationalism and reductive materialist discourses which aspire towards a totalizing surety and reduce otherness, even to the point of servitude in the story.

The gothic form of the story focusing on pronounced secrecy and the narrator's ironically poor misreadings showcase the dangers of assuming totalized understanding, even as the rewriting of the past help to emphasize the instability of truth. The effect of this story, all the more for being a radically different piece in an already diversely fractured collection, is to encourage a different approach to the task of meaning-making. I use the term meaning here, despite its potential pitfalls in our current post-modern climate, in the sense which Hannah Arendt suggests as an alternative to truth-claims, seeking to re-orient reason away from reductionist postures toward broader structures of understanding. “The need of reason,” in terms of metaphysical concerns, Arendt claims, “is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest

for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same. The basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies, is to interpret meaning on the model of truth” (Arendt 99-100). In this manner, meaning is not an attempt to prove mastery or hermeneutic discernment but to proceed from a generous and self-aware posture towards understanding. And despite the obstacles in the way of meaning, the structures of Melville's uncertain faith persist as footholds to suggest that such a process does not signify a foreclosure of the possibility for understanding or communication across the infinite gulf of otherness.

In much the same way that Hawthorne develops “imaginative faith” as a religious leap toward accommodating otherness against the impulse toward surety, Melville's exploration of what I've termed “uncertain faith” uses qualities of faith to structure aspirations toward meaning in the face of unknowability. This process of looking for and having faith in meaning without calcifying it into dogma is connected to Melville's own process and processing of religious exegetical modes. Ilana Pardes has explored Melville's exegetical practices and even claims that Melville was writing *Moby-Dick* as a “grand new, inverted Bible,” in response to Emerson's call for a bible that would be “no provincial record, but [would] open the history of the planet” (qtd. in Pardes 1). Indeed, in his famous “Dollars Damn Me” letter to Hawthorne, Melville claims he “wrote the Gospels in this century” (Coffler *Melville's Allusions* 49). Pardes argues that more than other authors who took up this call, Melville was most obsessed with “the Bible [as] a cultural text whose interpretation is carried out in highly diverse realms” and that he specifically foregrounded, “anomalies and oddities... counter-traditions” (2). This notion of taking a solidified artifact which many viewed as literal, a “provincial record,” and supplementing it with a counter-text, one which opens history and emphasizes the anomalies, is precisely the type of inquiry with which *The Piazza Tales* appears to be involved. Beyond the collection's general

sense that reading and interpretation fractures rather than unifies truth, “Benito Cereno” performs its own evisceration of “Truth” in narrating the fictionalization of an historical event.

“Benito Cereno,” as a rewriting of a historical rebellion on a slave ship, is in some manner immediately describing the process of “opening history,” as Paredes phrases it, but it is also a tale about obligation to those in need and the agonizing difficulty of generous but careful interpretation. The story's first paragraph describes the narrator, Captain Delano, watching a hapless ship drifting, considering his obligation to the “stranger, viewed through the glass” (255). This moment evokes the Bible verse describing how “we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known,” how humanity is said to gather his skewed perspective of the world—with only a divine perspective granting the true face to face understanding. The famous verse in First Corinthians directly precedes the list of “faith, hope, charity” with the stipulation that “the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 12-13)—this also connects to the Delano’s concern for obligation to an other. Both the difficulty of seeing and the duty toward common humanity pervade this allusion, and it coincides with Delano's own decision to reach out and help the fellow ship as well as his ultimately skewed perception of events. This type of misreading, along with Delano's admission that the slaves are enigmatic to him, “sphinx-like” (260), dominates the narrative, whose momentum is driven by whether or not Captain Delano realizes that he is on a ship of rebelled slaves and is killed for the realization or whether he survives by never recognizing these circumstances.

Ironically, Babo's demand for Cereno to act as if all is right aboard the ship on pain of death is precisely what causes Cereno to act in such a way as to rouse Delano's suspicion. What is essential in this situation, beyond the oblivious Delano's mis-recognition of master and servant in the situation, is that Delano is actually correct but for the wrong reason. That is, Delano is

correct to interpret that Cereno is a figure perpetrating evil but it is an evil made banal by time to Americans: slavery. Likewise, Babo *is* the brilliant, capable figure Delano *mistakes* him for, not because he is a great and loyal manservant but because he is not loyal and not a servant.

Highlighting Delano's limited discernment, Delano opines that slavery “breeds ugly passions” (312), because for him they are passions merely ugly, passions merely unpleasant to see.

Delano's vision is fatally short-sighted, which is why Delano mistakes the volatile intensity between Cereno and Babo as a “sort of love-quarrel” (313) rather than as the deeply complex relationship of oppression and retributive violence that it is.

“Benito Cereno” disrupts these social narratives just as it disrupts its own narrative form, using the devices of the gothic to destabilize our sense of truth and to continually gesture towards buried meaning. Looking at national dialogues during the period of the story's writing, Dana Luciano has shown how this structure of “Benito Cereno” coincides with discourses surrounding the building of memorials and the violence that such monuments do to the events they represent. Luciano argues, “Benito Cereno” produces a *counter-monumental* narrative which does justice to the plurality and rhizomatic nature of events. Connecting this to Pades's illumination of Melville's biblical aims re-articulates the self's relation to events, to texts, and others, the implications of which reach back to the previous stories, echoing their suspicions of wholeness but insisting on faith in the immanence of meaning. Using the last scene between Delano and Cereno, Luciano illuminates an understanding of monumentalism and anti-monumentalism, the monumentalist impulse to solidify history into digestible pieces for easy and consumption, the anti-monumentalist impulse to refuse this relationship to the past by disavowing it, by melancholically denying it. This is reflected in Delano and Cereno's conversation after the slaves have been killed or tried wherein Delano makes the event a symbolic (dead) meaning while

Cereno falls into a helpless melancholia, yields to it, and perishes himself. In their own ways, though, both do violence to the history. Luciano describes how “Delano manages to do so by purging the troublesome parts of history from his own memory; Cereno, in contrast, abandons himself to the past and so removes himself from history” (45). This is remarkably similar to the failed relationship of the narrators to their others in “The Piazza” and “Bartleby”: the one symbolizes the suffering of Marianna as fairy land, the other melancholically gives in to the overwhelming weight of Bartleby's tragedy. Luciano's “counter” position may help describe the non-imposing relation between the self and other which these other stories beg. Thus Luciano's view of “reparative possibilities of an understanding of history that sees time as discontinuous and fragmented... distinct from the teleology of redemption, [it] is not a utopic attempt to “cure” the injuries of the past... [it] understands the past as suspended within the present but not reconciled to it” (35) might also be applied to the interruptive and disruptive supernatural.

This language, which Luciano uses to describe an open relation to history, is almost perfectly paralleled to Benjamin's description of allegory itself as taking “the fragmented images of a past life and set[ing] them in a modern environment” (Plate 12). It is my contention that the type of supernaturally-infused allegorical structures which dominate Melville's collection—gesturing at the transcendent, showing its interrelation with the empirical, insisting on the possibility for a relation between selves, and now conflating the past and present—is an affirmation of hope in “Benito Cereno”. The counter-monumentalist impulse is ideologically related to the allegorical sense of approaching an understanding without asserting dominance over it. As the boss in “Bartleby” has imagined his duty to the young scrivener, instead of commanding otherness it is a way of “making room” for it. The allegorical grasping for meaning seeded throughout the collection implies that readers are not doomed to the two opinions voiced

at the end of “Benito Cereno,” instead it suggests that meaning is always imminent though it requires faithful attendance to an irreducible other.

These stories, one might say are not dead letters, those signifiers of failed connection from “Bartleby,” but the living ones from the tortoises back, which encourage circumspection and introspection and kindle hope for transcendence. They depict not the letters of law nor the law of letters but the “spirit” of both. What is most clearly at stake in reading Melville's religiously engaged yet vexed fiction, is the choice between totalization or disavowal raised at the end of “Benito Cereno.” As in allegory itself, this story reveals the traps of imagining either side of the material/transcendent dichotomy as nullifying the other. In “Benito Cereno” we realize the abject failure of such a choice—so too in allegory. It is worth noting that Benjamin saw allegory as combating the “propensity to forget the past” and resisting our “hubristic dream of self-sufficiency” (Cowan 112). Even as it insists on the importance of searching for the truth, allegory exposes the self-satisfied delusion that full Truth can be attained. Like the narrators who fit others and events into their own narratives, the reader is tempted to reduce and codify. In opposition to this, Derrida characterizes deconstructive interpretation as “reducible to neither a method nor an analysis... it always carries an affirmative exigency, I would even say that it never proceeds without love” (*Points* 83). This “affirmative exigency” proceeds with the insistence on the possibility for meaning, and, as Benjamin suggests, this process is one of humbleness. Both of these thinkers describe a type of reading which must issue forth with self-awareness in the face of the past and love in the face of the unknowable. It is this type of reading which *The Piazza Tales* demands for a nuanced understanding of both the intangible possibilities of transcendence and the tangible obligations of our shared, physical world.

Chapter 3

“Of My Own Imagination”: Credibility and the Racial Other in Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales*

I. Dialect and Dialogism

This chapter focuses on the emergence of a new front in the ethical explorations of American fantastical short stories, in Charles Waddell Chesnutt's collection, *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales* (1899), published as linked folk-tales. The distinct supernatural qualities in this text function in several ways, including as a means to describe the fundamental absurdities of the logic of slavery, to articulate metaphors strong enough to describe its horrors, but also to structure the ease with which black voices can be dismissed as unreal from the perspectives of the white listeners. Chesnutt's position as story-teller parallels that of his protagonist, the ex-slave Uncle Julius, whose stories are framed as being told to a Yankee couple living in the South. But so too does Chesnutt reflect the conjurer whose magic is always at work in these stories. And given the historic necessity of black authors to “prove” the authenticity of their authorship, Uncle Julius's continual request that the Yankee not dismiss his stories too quickly has a socially evocative element, raising the question of what and who are credited. Chesnutt's use of the supernatural brings each of these qualities and concerns into focus, building on the legacy of the supernatural genre and its short story manifestations with regards to uncertainty and belief.

Like all of the texts in my investigation, Chesnutt's work uses openness to ideas outside of the reader's accepted view of the “real” to challenge established assumptions and narratives. In his stories it is the figures most frequently marginalized by society who have the most recourse

to and investment in the supernatural. The rationalism of the white male narrator, John, is connected to his rigid disbelief in the supernatural stories of Julius. Annie, John's wife, displays an increasing openness to the supernatural possibilities in Julius's stories as the collection goes on and this allows her to be open also to the difference of racial experience. Exploring racially concerned qualities of alterity, Chesnutt's collection uses the supernatural uncertainty to challenge economic and social disparities and to cast the unimaginable plight of racial others in terms (even dialect and language) which disrupt established narratives and ideologies of the primarily white listeners and readers. Ultimately, the collection uses the protocols of the supernatural, and the disjointed but linked format of short story collections, to help structure a means of ethically approaching otherness without that dangerous impulse toward mastery.

Some of these efforts emerge most clearly in contrast to the stories contemporary to Chesnutt. Coming from a context of post-reconstruction color-fiction and dialect stories, Chesnutt saw himself working very self-consciously against a tide of nostalgia, which bordered on the romanticization and justifications of the pre-civil war South and white supremacy. "After the civil war," writes Gretchen Martin, "the plantation tradition resurfaced by writers such as Joel Chandler Harris, F. Hopkinson Smith, and Thomas Nelson Page," a tradition which "exploits the trappings of the plantation's physical and social design" and functioned in "active defense of the plantation regime" (67). This sort of writing added to the cultural conversation of the so-called "Negro question" which asked what the roles, aims, and possibilities were for freed blacks in America. Speaking to this, Chesnutt wrote to Booker T. Washington: "it has been the writings of Harris and Page and others of that ilk which have furnished my chief incentive to write something on the other side of this very vital question" (qtd. in Shaffer, 326). Such incentives are clear in Chesnutt's supernatural fiction, which uses the disruptive qualities of the

genre, the built in questions of crediting alterity, to disrupt these nostalgic edifices and provide an alternative.

His choice of resistance to this defensive posture toward slavery in plantation fiction took shape in what might be termed psuedo-folk-tales. It has been noted, even by Chesnutt, that his form doesn't perfectly correlate to the traditional folk-tale: "while they employ much of the universal machinery of wonder stories, especially the metamorphosis, ... for which the norm was a folktale, the stories are the fruit of my own imagination, in which respect they differ from the *Uncle Remus* stories which are avowedly folk tales" (*Stories, Novels, and Essays* 907).

Trying to account for this, theorists have offered various generic terms: Richard Brodhead locates "Chesnutt among other Southern regionalist writers," Ishmael Reed as "Neo-Hoodoo," and Kameelah Samuel as "neo-conjure tales" (Samuel 16,15). My project here is slightly different than that of those who seek to find what sets Chesnutt's work apart, as I am trying to locate the stories within the broader fantastical trend in short stories—that is, the trend which seeks to disguise and disrupt the process of distinguishing reality from fantasy and in so doing question the supremacy of rationalism. These folk-tales employ both classic and new methods of disrupting this process, which I will investigate for the bulk of the chapter. But prior to that inquiry an addition quality bears consideration concerning the folk-tale's relation to, and Chesnutt's artistic interpretation of, the oral tradition.

The importance of dialect and of the oral style has been investigated by various critics and theorists. One of the ironies which helps to sustain the collection's complexity is the convergence of the ephemeral with the lasting, in the form of capturing voice in prose. Chesnutt's use of the ex-slave dialect continually pushes the text into the place and moment of speaking, forgoing a sense of legibility for, instead, a sense of temporal immediacy. This sense is reiterated

in the fact that each of these stories defies temporality by the frame structure which bounces back and forth between the slavery era and post-reconstruction. As William Andrews suggests in his forward, the collection “featured Southern local color of both present and past” (ix). But for my purposes here, the primary effect of this dialect is actually similar in effect to the process of uncertainty and ambiguity whereby the fantastic causes its readers to question their own assumptions and to suspend disbelief. The oral praxis of the stories' framed narrator, Uncle Julius, is itself difficult to parse, at times almost impenetrable. This fact, arising from the dialect and phonetic writing, causes the reader to slow down almost to a halt, to reread, to parse with unsureness. But the reader is confident that meaning and illumination is there just beyond their normal means of access. It is this metaphoric concept which corresponds to the fantastic as Todorov describes it, as a suspension in uncertainty. While the parsing of dialect isn't the same moment of possibility between the two options of uncanny and marvelous causes, it does produce the same phenomenological effect of calling into question our own position of knowledge, which fantastic short stories likewise produce. Just as Melville's continual recourse to ambiguity and paradox so dense as not to be untangled was a means to layer the uncertainty in the reader's mind, to continually reinforce the importance of approaching the other without the assumption of knowledge, Chesnutt's ironically “ig'nant” mouthpiece in Uncle Julius, continually forces the reader from their comfortable positions which assume the transparency of language. We are forced to see language, experience, and context, as just some of the many barriers to understanding.

Beyond the text's supernatural connections to those previous collections which use uncertainty in this fashion, another parallel exists to the collections previously investigated, notable for its metaphoric significance and its artistic antecedents. This connection is in the

salience of architectural metaphor, made more significant by the collection's preoccupation with discrete parts completing a whole, like rooms making up a single residence. Both Hawthorne and Melville took up the architectural metaphor of homes to frame their supernatural explorations, Hawthorne's manse as a secluded refuge between nature and society, Melville's piazza as a space negotiating interiors and exteriors. Though it doesn't figure in his title, Chesnutt uses the plantation home in post-reconstruction South as both a setting and a deeply symbolic framework for his own exploration of the supernatural form, deploying the organization of the plantation to discuss power structures. With it Chesnutt highlights the enfranchisement of those slaves in the fields versus those in the house, the whites in the town versus those owning land. But most significant in my transition from Melville to Chesnutt is the evolution of the piazza as a fecund space of liminality. Like Melville's conception of the piazza as a means to keep vital both interior and exterior, bodily and spiritual concerns, Chesnutt's adaptation is alive to dualities. More specifically, Chesnutt uses his own piazza to navigate the racially oppressive whites, associated with certain buildings and building practices, as compared with the slaves and freed blacks, associated with the open-outside and the natural world. The space of the piazza, the porch which is open to the air, suggest a means to rethink the relation of both worlds, to become open to both worlds. This concern for openness is the primary question of the supernatural itself in the text: the degree to which the whites are open to an understanding of the reality of black experience, couched in a supernatural trapping.

I am not the first to note Chesnutt's interest in architecture. Chesnutt's confrontation with his contemporaries' nostalgia for the Southern past in romanticized plantation fiction of the fin de siècle took aim at architectural trends. The "neocolonial enthusiasm expressed itself not just in architectural forms but in broader social and cultural movements as well" according to

William Gleason, and “Chesnutt wrote in part in reaction to these movements” (35). Gleason contends that, “it is the southern piazza that becomes the central imaginative location in the conjure stories. Much as nearly every conjure tale is framed in precisely the same way—with an outer story set in the present introducing an inner story, told by Julius, from the plantation past—so too is nearly every tale staged in some significant way on the deck of a piazza” (35). This interpretation is given a profound historical edge in “that the cherished southern piazza, which in its grandest form becomes a conspicuous architectural marker of white power and prestige, may actually have its roots in the vernacular building traditions of West Africa” (36). In his writing, “Chesnutt tried instead to cure white amnesia by writing those very memories back into American cultural history” (37). In this manner, Chesnutt does a bit of conjuring himself, specifically by transfiguring the space of white oppression, the platform of observation and the surveillance, into a place of African tradition, story-telling, and conjure.

Gleason's study of Chesnutt actually takes its title from Melville's short story collection, suggesting that both authors use architecture in a similar metaphoric fashion, though neither Gleason nor myself are focused on extolling these similarities. But insofar as my Chapter Two shows how Melville's piazza functioned as a metaphor for the space of fantasy, defined as lying between the domestic home and exterior world, it is worth illustrating some connections between the two collections' use of this imagery. The particular topography which Melville's piazza helped chart out is the space of confrontation between modes of accounting the world, particularly between the rationalist and the fantasist, symbolized in the confrontation between the narrator and Marriana in “The Piazza.” Along this line, Gleason has observed that “the architectural grammar of the Classical Revival was intended to allude to the ancient ideals of liberty and democracy [... but] it just as frequently—and perhaps more effectively—invoked the

rule of law” (51) against which “Chesnutt's story stages the revivalists' ideals of balance and order only repeatedly to disrupt them” (58). My chapter will propose that the fantastical protocols and effects of Uncle Julius's stories appeal for an account of the world more capacious than the contemporary Enlightenment modes in a fashion similar to Melville's attempt to depict a subjectivity open to multiple perspectives.

For it is this, truly, which most fully describes the continual struggle in Chesnutt's collection: the white establishment's reliance on Enlightenment rationalist values versus the freed blacks' deployment of extra-rational values. These stories play out in such a fashion that we see these rationalist values as the underpinnings of the logic of slavery itself and how the supernatural provides an alternative power-source to the marginalized figures. Likewise, in the stories' frames we are continually given the opportunity to side with the white John in his dismissive totalizing views, or to maintain an openness to the others' experience in accepting the “truth” of Uncle Julius's stories. In this way, the collection poses an ethical concern similar in structure to Emmanuel Levinas's writing on totality and infinity. The reader can either side with John in dismissing the story and reduce the other in a totalizing vision which assumes knowledge, complying with the white establishment, or make allowance for the other to exist beyond totalizing knowledge in the realm of unknowable infinity.

For the purposes of this chapter, this position of knowledge will be contextualized primarily in terms of Charles Taylor's study, *A Secular Age*. Taylor's book theorizes nineteenth-century shifts in the social imaginary through cultural developments and intellectual movements which shape modern understandings of secularity and the modern self. Taylor traces rationalism's relation to secularism in the period as it becomes a “fractured culture” of unbelief, a “culture of 'authenticity,' or expressed individualism” which gave way to “the malaise of

modernity,” an idea of a “disenchanted world, a sense of it as flat, empty,” which followed the Deism and rationalism of the late eighteenth century (302). Of particular importance for this chapter is the terminology of a “buffered” versus “porous” self, terms which Taylor uses to describe the individual's understanding of their self in relation to the cosmos or universe.

For the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them ... This is not to say that the buffered understanding necessitates your taking this stance. It is just that it allows it as a possibility, whereas the porous one does not. By definition for the porous self, the source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside the “mind”; or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area, grounding in which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense. (38)

Taylor describes how the buffered self “can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it” (38) in a manner that dovetails with Levinas's ideas of totality at odds with an ethical relation to others. We might understand the buffered self as disposed to totality which authorizes the subject as master of meaning. This is in opposition to the self which is porous to an infinite otherness insofar as the “porous self is vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces. And along with this go certain fears which can grip it in certain circumstances. The buffered self has been taken out of the world of this kind of fear” (38). The refusal of certain figures to accept the supernatural in these stories, out of fear of vulnerability, is reflected precisely in Taylor’s construction.

In this chapter I demonstrate how Chesnutt’s supernatural openness coincides with the openness to otherness which is so crucial in the confrontations with alterity. Taylor also helps to

locate the popularity of fantastical literature as a response to the disenchantment of the world which the buffered self experiences. Taylor calls one “the clearest sign of the transformation in our world” from porous to buffered “that many people look back to the world of the porous self with nostalgia ... The aim is to try to recover some measure of this lost feeling. So people go to movies about the uncanny in order to experience a frisson” (38). I work through many of Chesnutt's concerns in *The Conjure Woman*, from the racial, to the ethical, to the ecological, to the ontological. And at each step of the way Taylor's differentiation of the buffered versus porous identity helps to situate divergent paths between the closed and rational self depicted by the Yankee John next to the open and porous nature of Uncle Julius, with John's wife Annie being a figure who vacillates between the two. The porous self helps to describe alternative models of humanity's relation to nature, an openness to supernatural and spiritual concerns, and finally an openness which allows for racial equality.

II. “Implicit Confidence”: Whiteness and Rationalism in the South

The opening story of Chesnutt's collection, “The Goophered Grapevine,” accomplishes an almost herculean labor in laying the groundwork for the themes of the whole collection. We begin in the expected literary English, introduced to our narrator, John, and his wife, Annie, as John describes their move from the North to post-reconstruction South. What stands out in the opening is John's rationalist motivation for the move, bolstered by his “implicit confidence” (*Conjure Tales and Stories of the Color Line* 1) in the medical doctor who says it will be better for his wife's health. The “doctor's advice was that we seek, not a temporary place of sojourn, but a permanent residence, in a warmer and more equable climate” (1). This line serves several purposes, not the least of which is to align John with so many dismissive masculine characters in

gothic and supernatural stories, from the antagonists of Hawthorne's "Artist of the Beautiful," through Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper," published a few years before "The Conjure Woman." This clarifies John's "implicit confidence" in the scientific world, and the (usually) men who form its hierarchy. John's view pronouncedly overlooks more contextual and experiential realities of figures with marginal identities, resulting in John often missing Annie's mental, emotional, and spiritual needs as he focuses on the physical. Also, in the quote above, we see John's view of the South as a "more equable climate," based on his observations of the temperature, revealing his obliviousness to the profound *in*-equability that will soon become clear as the racial politics come into focus.

While John's misunderstanding of the South presage his blind-spots on race and gender, his geo-political views themselves are worthy of note. His initial emotion on arrival is lukewarm, noting that he finds the "somewhat settled" nature of the South agreeable enough (1). This phrase, "somewhat settled," seems to be used in a political sense, as reconstructive efforts were presumed to have finished in the South. But one cannot help but here a pejorative tone, comparing the somewhat settled South to the *more* settled North. This association is saturated in the story, in keeping with the narrator's view of himself as the refined, productive, and civilized Northerner compared to the lazy, uncivilized, and irrational folk of the South. As such, the narrator's unconscious reiteration of racist views and misunderstandings falls painfully on modern ears. For instance, he hopes to clear high profits because, among the recently freed generations of slaves, "labor was cheap" (1)—an observation that seems callous at best. Likewise, his decision to dub his new home "Patesville, because, for one reason, that is not its name" (2), recreates the practice of mis- and renaming that has long been associated with both European colonialism and slave-owning. John's characterization of the South is in accordance

with a view of civilization on a spectrum with wildness in which he figures himself as a force of former. According to Stephen Mexal the “nineteenth-century view of wilderness is of a tangible, material space in negative opposition to civilized space ... By this logic, the wilderness and civilization have a linear relationship driven by a particular cultural and racial hierarchy: white persons live in civilized spaces, which are market capitalist, monotheistic, and urban. Nonwhite persons live in wild spaces, which are nonmarket capitalist, pantheistic, rural, and thus axiomatically savage” (Mexal 110). John's characterizations of the land, even as he imagines himself benign, reproduces the rationalist foundations of racism and capitalism, as well as their progeny in slavery.

What is more, John's attempts at what might be termed a nineteenth-century color-blindness are deeply problematic, as we see in his first meetings with the Southerners. He recognizes the Southern inhabitants “of all shades and complexion” (2) but is made oblivious to their alternative lifestyles by his own views of productivity. Like many of the rationalistic figures who resist the sway of fantasy in supernatural short fiction, John is critical of what he takes to be idleness and leisure. He suggests the Southerners must only “engage in invisible industry” (2) since their actions do not fit his view of productivity. He sees the place as leisurely and “idle,” and characterizes his being “hospitably entertained” at “pleasure [and] ease” (2) as a sort of disease, saying that he “caught some of the native *infection* of restfulness” (3 my emphasis).

Some of these assumptions are checked as he “learned later on that underneath its somnolent exterior the deeper currents of life—love and hatred, joy and despair, ambition and avarice, faith and friendship—flowed not less steadily than in livelier latitudes” (2), but John continues to characterize the South as unproductive. He describes the populace as “fighting over land [...] between disputing heirs,” saying that the “shiftless cultivation had well-nigh exhausted

the soil” (2). Against this stereotypical view, he positions himself as a source of order and efficiency. He “felt sure that [he] could introduce and cultivate successfully a number of other varieties” (3) of grapes to the vineyard he sought to purchase, though only if he could be “sure of making something out of it” (4). Beyond his presumptions of success and order, the key assumption by John here is that he can make something of the land because *it is not something already*.

Each of these initial characterizations of John help to position him squarely within the buffered identity. His “implicit confidence” in a scientific account of his wife's ills—which in time the collection will demonstrate to include those specifically not physical—mark out the historic figure of the Enlightenment rationalist. John embodies what Taylor calls the “classic expression of [the buffered self] in the great era in which this anthropocentric consciousness comes into its own, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment” (301). And this figure is a mainstay in gothic or supernatural texts as the voice of reason and doubt, with his “sense of invulnerability and distance from the unreason of the past [which] finds expression in the cool self-possession” (301). This confidence extends from John’s identification with civilization which bespeaks a teleology from the ignorant past toward a mastering and self-possessed contemporary subjectivity. This also explains John's sense of the South, with its superstitions, as less civilized and justifies his presumption to rename places and re-cultivate the land. John's bufferedness likewise appears in his positioning himself as an industrious figure against a wild and/or empty natural world. In this fashion, his “buffered distance becomes part of the complex modern-European concept of 'civilization” (Taylor 301) which projects the sense of mastery over the self to imagine civilization’s mastery over the environmental. My investigation of the buffered/porous self in terms of civilization and nature will be more fully explored in the

chapter's final section but bears noticing here at the outset.

Like his assumption that nature is nothing until he makes something of it, John imagines the vineyard empty of people until he first meets Uncle Julius, happily eating grapes on a log in the old plantation. John's entrance through the "decayed gateposts" and past "ruined chimneys" of a building signifies the still recent slave-owning past (3) where the "blight of war" is still evident (2). This entrance foreshadows both the trauma and the gothic hauntings of the past that John will continually pass by but never understand. He already sees the land as his own and Julius as therefore trespassing, though he concedes upon meeting the ex-slave that "there is plenty of room for us all" (4). Uncle Julius's first introduction through John's eyes is a perfect example of the colonialist gaze, which reveals more of the viewer's assumptions than it does about the viewed. John suspects, for instance, "a slight strain of other than negro blood" (3) in Julius because his shrewdness "was not altogether African" (4). This logic clearly displays John's association of the efficient mind with "other than negro." The moment is of particular importance because it highlights the rationalist protocols of characterizing race, usually based on a pseudo-scientific methodology, bolstered more by beliefs in purity than any real empirical data. This issue was one critical to Chesnutt, as Andrews has argued, given how Chesnutt chafed under the politics of percentages. "Charles had to contend early on with the equation Southern whites made between mixed blood and morally tainted blood," Andrews writes: "Resentment of this prejudice smoldered in Chesnutt throughout his life and made him permanently suspicious of any claim to privilege based on race, color, or blood" (viii) so that even in publication he held a "belief that his book should be read and reviewed on its own without regard to the racial antecedents of its author" (xiii). Even without this biographical information, we can see that John's first observation of Julius is in terms of this problematic equation. What is more, this

equating comes in terms of whiteness-as-intelligence and clearly positions John's rationalist protocols as suspect.

But this view of race and value based on purity of blood shifts with the text as Uncle Julius introduces himself and John's stranglehold on perspective breaks. This break is marked most particularly by Julius's speech, rendered in dialect, which becomes the center of attention. The actual intellectual act of reading undergoes a dramatic change as the reader leaves John's narration, with its assumptions of realism and transparency of language, into Julius's which calls attention to the contingencies of communication and realism itself. This contest between John's hegemonic perspective which prioritizes rationality and has “implicit confidence” in the empirical, as he seeks to buy the grape vineyard to “make something out of it,” comes into direct conflict with Uncle Julius's caution to leave it alone as it has been “goophered, conju'd, bewitch” (5). Julius, recognizing more than John that there are different ways of accounting for meaning, admits that he is unsure whether the narrator, “b'lieves in conj'in' er not,—some er de w'ite folks don't, er says dey don't” (5). But in the fashion of his porous openness, Julius asks that the narrator listen to his tale before dismissing it out of hand, saying, “I would n' spec' fer you ter b'lieve me 'less you know all 'bout de fac's. But ef you en young miss dere doan' min' lis'nin...” (5). From here, Julius will take over the narrative until the closing frame brings us back to the present. In the words of John, whose self-correction signals his doubt of the story, “the current of [Julius's] memory—or imaginations” start slow but gathers strength, eventually ignoring his listeners and giving life to the story (6). The story itself tells of a plantation owner who could not stop his slaves from eating up the profits of his grape vines, until he eventually hires a conjure woman to curse whomever tried to eat the grapes. And as important as the magical and gothic qualities in disrupting John's views are, the use of dialect and colloquialism also emerge as a

means to suggest the limitations of realism in rendering truth.

One notable quality of Julius's story is that it is unclear whether the slave-owner who commissions the conjure believes in conjure himself or is just using the slaves' beliefs against them. The point for the owner is moot, however, insofar as it only matters to him that the slaves stop and that his profits rise; something that does in fact happen. He makes 1,500 gallons of wine on the \$10 he paid Aunt Peggy (7). But this profit increase is not before one of the young slave children dies from having eaten from the vine. "W'ite folks say he die' er de fevuh," Julius relates "but de niggers knowed it wuz de goopher" (7). This moment serves to set up several of the ideas of the collection, particularly, the refusal of whites to accept the accounts of others, to credit the voices of blacks in particular. But another important concept is the asymmetry between action and consequence in the slaves' lives, so that they are at once valuable assets but simultaneously held cheap. This theme is further underscored when a new slave is purchased and eats of the vines before learning of the conjure, causing the overseer to take the slave to Aunt Peggy to mitigate the curse and preserve the slave-owner's financial investment. Peggy saves the slave but the curse causes him to undergo seasonal changes with the grapevine, swelling with life during the summer and spring and withering each year with the autumn and winter.

Here we see a further development of the treatment and life of slaves—beyond the imbalance between action and consequence which makes their lives so dangerous. This development in this story entails the slaves' connection to nature, a theme which Chesnutt will explore further on, in contrast to the white folks' associations with capital and law. In this case, the conjure literalizes the slave's body as an extension of the natural world, making him wither or ripen over the year along with the grapevine. But though the owner refuses to admit belief in the conjure, he does begin a scheme to *further* increase his profits based on the conjure woman's

magic. The slave is sold near the end of the summer after he has worked hard during his vital “seasons” for the master, and fetches a high price for his strong body. But as the slave immediately begins to wither and weaken like the grape vine in the Fall, the master buys him back for a decreased price from the new owner who thinks the slave will die. As such the owner clears more capital at the expense of his slave's existence. Just as the slave is transforming like a crop, the boss thinks of him like a crop, caring for him in the cold months “'caze a nigger w'at he could make a thoudan' dollars a year off'n did n' grow on eve'y huckleberry bush” (10). This valuation of slave life is deeply tied in with the differing perspective we see with John and Annie in the present. Like John, the white slave-owners have implicit faith in empirical sciences, so that the voodoo associated with the blacks is dismissed out of hand. Like the doctor in whom John has implicit confidence, the afflicted slave tells the doctor “'bout de goopher, but de doctor des laff at 'im” (10).

Yet while the slaves believe in goopher, Chesnutt shows a different kind of magic with which the whites might be affected. In Julius's story, a Yankee comes South to “'larn de w'ite folks how to raise grapes en make wine [and promised] he c'd make de grapevimes b'ar twice't ez many grapes.” These promises of extra profits caused the master to “des 'peared ter be *bewitch'* wid dat Yankee” (11 my emphasis). This moment provides the crux of belief and bewitchment as it will continue to function in the text. The slave-owning whites who scorn the belief in conjure are themselves subject to bewitchment in the form of capital and assume authority along the hierarchies of empirical stature (doctors, men of learning, owners). Of course, just as Aunt Peggy *may* have swindled the plantation owner of \$10 for fake voodoo, the Yankee provides only quackery, selling advice which poisons the vines before fleeing the outbreak of the Civil War. Significantly, the slave-owner's belief only in capital results in a morality that cannot escape it,

cannot think beyond debts and repayments. In accordance with these views, the plantation owner “was glad dat [war] come, en he des want ter kill a Yankee fer eve'y dollar he los” (12). Here, the slave-owner is only capable of thinking of the moral rightness of war with the North as a balance against dollars lost to the Yankee.

Chesnutt's emphasis on capital is noted by Goldner, who has argued that by this time the “reigning Western power has become emergent American capitalism, which brings its concerns for increased efficiency” in forms that include the “rationalization of plantation methods” (67). As I've already suggested this prioritization of efficiency and the justification of plantation economics are not only complicit with but actually emerge from the rationalist discourses of the era. In this fashion, the slave-owner's reluctance to believe in the power of the conjure woman (relying rather on the slaves' superstition) rests on the same principles of his belief in the power of miraculously multiplying capital. The problem arises, as I have suggested, not only insofar as rationalism is used as the sole basis for economic models of production but also as the foundation for morality—what we see in the equating of dollars for lives in the slave-owner's desire to kill Yankees in equal number to his lost capital. While certainly attuned to the ways racism positions racial hierarchies in this manner—slaves thought of in terms of dollar-values—Chesnutt also indicates the way such thinking poisons all human relations including with those Yankees, even without the racial othering which takes place. Importantly, this construction of a rationalist slave-owner who equates human life to dollars, who's primary view of the land orients around the question of efficient production, and who's same protocols for belief preclude the acceptance of conjure, is also replicated in the narrator, John.

Lest we miss the connection between the valuative protocols of the slave-owner and John himself, John responds to this story by doubling down on his looking for “opportunities open to

Northern capital in the development of Southern industries” (13). With this he further imagines the idle South as filled with resources to be developed by the calculating and efficient white Northerners. Furthermore, the narrator discovers what he believes is Uncle Julius's stake in keeping him from buying the land which he describes as having, “*doubtless*, accounted for [Julius’s] advice to me not to buy the vineyard, though whether it inspired the goopher story I am unable to state.” He goes on to say: “I *believe*, however, that the wages I paid him for his services as coach man, for I gave him employment in that capacity, were more than an equivalent for anything he lost by the sale of the vineyard” (13, my emphasis). These two lines indicate how John considers capital the equalizer of ethical dilemmas, suggesting that paying Julius in one capacity alleviates any wrongdoing of financial loss in another—just as the slave-owner sees wrongdoing as equalizing the loss of capital in the framed story. But John significantly uses the terminology of “doubt” and “belief” to illustrate the protocols which guide his views. In doing so, he echoes Uncle Julius's illustration that whites do not “b'lieve” in the bewitchment of conjure, though they believe and may be “bewitched” by capital. John's buffered identity is incapable of the sort of openness to the numinous or the other, which I have suggested is a primary and intentional conflation in the supernatural tale, so that his use of words like “belief” and “doubt” do not engage with the possibilities which Uncle Julius proposes but function only in terms of financial speculation.

In contrast to John's usage of belief and doubt, and the supernatural's capacity to suspend readers between the two, it is important to note that Annie's first question was, “is it true?” (12). The answer, according to Uncle Julius, is that it's “des ez true ez I'm a-settin' here, miss” (13). While we may read this claim like John does, as a means for Julius to keep the vines to himself, it could also be read to mean that Julius is suggesting something more complex about truth and

empirical reality. Uncle Julius goes on to say that only he is safe to eat from the grapes “‘caze I know de old vimes fum de noo ones” (13). This idea of his nuanced discernment helps to structure the collection’s negotiation of precisely the issues of discerning truth from falsehood, the good grapes from the cursed. As the collection goes on, Annie’s reluctance to believe will continually weaken as she takes on the more porous identity that Julius embodies. Like Julius, picking through the grapes trusting in his own ability to navigate the cursed and the clean, Annie’s new identity will depart from perfect allegiance to John and his buffered, utilitarian rationalism, to choose her own method of picking through the stories for what she finds true and valuable.

In continuing these themes, the opening words of “Mars Jeem’s Nightmare” depict John’s positioning of human beings precisely in terms of his utilitarian views. “We found Old Julius very useful” (25), begins the story in John’s words. This phrase is of keen importance as the story details John’s desire to fire a young black worker for being unproductive, against Julius’s hope for John to retain the young man. As if not to be missed for its importance, John reiterates this again in the opening passages: “We found him useful in many ways and entertaining in others, and my wife and I took quite a fancy to him.” John also recognizes that Julius’s life, like many of the figures in his stories, had “kept him close to nature” despite having “been accustomed, until long after middle life, to look upon himself as the property of another [...until] this relation was no longer possible, owing to the war, and to his master’s death and the dispersion of the family” (25). It is on this modicum of respect which Uncle Julius leans to prevent John, in the story’s frame narrative, from firing the young black worker. Uncle Julius implores of John “dat you mought make some 'lowance fuh a' ign'ant nigger, suh, en gib 'im one mo' chance.” But John replies with a biblical firmness that, “I had hardened my heart” (26).

This hardened heart is related to the differences which John is continually suggesting between his more pragmatic and efficient Northern ways compared to the idle and lazy South—John desiring to model his home on the former and finding this worker a representative of the latter. Doubling down on this distinction in this story, John complains about this difference not the least because of its contagiousness, saying it “was often necessary to wait awhile in North Carolina; and our Northern energy had not been entirely proof against the influences of climate and local custom” (26). Just as John characterizes his having “caught some of the native infection of restfulness” in “The Goophered Grapevine,” here he laments having not enough insulation against the restful Southern practices. And like Hawthorne's Owen in “Artist of the Beautiful” or Melville's *Bartleby*, the associations of the supernatural are deeply related to the concerns of productivity and leisure. This is not just because the genre itself was considered suspect for its relative inutility as an instructive text compared with the novel, but also because the antagonists to the figures of leisure are continually in denial of the supernatural which lingers in the texts.

In an attempt to sway John, Uncle Julius's story concerns a particularly firm slave-owner, Master Jeem's, who was “a ha'd man, en most'us stric' wid his han's [...] dey wa'n't 'lowed ter sing, ner dance, ner play de banjo w'en Mars Jeem's wuz roun' de place; fer Mars Jeem's say would n' hab no sech gwines-on” (27-28). Julius doesn't position this as cruelty or malice but rather as a lack of allowances for different characters or circumstances. “Mars Jeem's did n' make no 'lowance fer nachul bawn laz'ness, ner sickness, ner trouble in de min', ner nuffin,” Julius describes, “he wuz des gwine ter git so much wuk outer eve'y han', er know de reason w'y” (28). What is crucial about this description is that it focuses first on the result, “getting so much work,” without considering what the individual is capable of giving. His hardness was so

renowned that even the woman he sought to woo was worried he was too hard on his slaves, and “he mought git so useter 'busin' his niggers dat he'd 'mence ter 'buse his wife atter he got useter habbin' her roun” (29). The use of hardness to describe the master is a clear parallel to John's hardened heart and the idea that such fixed perspectives are not limited to race-relations but infect all inter-personal relationships, including those gendered ones.

As a means to receive better treatment, one slave arranges for the local “free-nigger conjuh 'oman” (29) to teach the slave-owner a lesson. The conjure woman hatches a plan “ter do 'im good, but he'll hab a monst'us bad dream fus” (30). She then turns Master Jeem's into a black man, whereupon he “wuz tuk up de yuther day for a stray nigger, en he could n' gib no 'count er hisse'f” (31). This new unknown slave is taken by the overseer in attempt to “break” him, a process which included many beatings and humiliations in an attempt to make him accept his station as a slave. After a few days Master Jeem is returned to his original color and identity and the slaves know that there “su't'nly wuz a change come ober Mars Jeem's” (35-36). The recently transformed master asks his overseer to give an account of the plantation while the master was “away,” to which the overseer responds with the story of the unknown slave who refused to come to heel. The overseer's report reflects what the master usually wants, numbers and efficiency; he tells “how much wuk be'n done, en got de books en showed 'im how much money be'n save” (36). When pressed, the overseer passes off his treatment of the unknown slave, saying he “did n' do nuffin but take de hide off'n 'im” (36). The master nods along and then fires the overseer, saying, “somehow er'nuther I doan lack yo looks sence I come back dis time” (37). From then on the master scaled back his expectations; Julius claimed the “goopher had made a noo man un 'im enti'ely,” and he only made them work from sun up to sun down. Likewise, his sweetheart saw the change and agreed to marriage. Significantly, the conjure woman cautioned

secrecy, as “she 'd 'a' got in trouble sho', ef it 'uz knowed she'd be'n conj'in' de w'ite folks” (38).

While this story works rather neatly and didactically to tie up its loose ends, it is in the story's frame that much of the interest lies. Just as with previous stories in the collection, the concern for what among the supernatural is credited overlaps onto the issues of how difference is either accepted or denied. Uncle Julius suggests that the story displays “dat w'ite folks w'at is so ha'd en stric', en doan make no 'lowance fer po' ign'ant niggers w'at ain' jad no chanst ter l'am, is li'ble ter hab bad dreams, ter say de leas', en dat dem w'at is kin' en good ter po' people is sho' ter prosper en git 'long in de worl'.” This explication is responded to sarcastically by the narrator. “Yes, Julius,” says John, “that was powerful goopher. I am glad, too, that you told us the moral of the story; it might have escaped us otherwise. By the way, did you make that up all by yourself?” (39). John's sarcasm in trying to indicate that Uncle Julius is making up the story shows that indeed he doesn't understand the sorts of “allowances” for the black experience that Uncle Julius is asking him to make. While John is away, however, Annie decides to rehire the recently fired young man, much to the frustration of John, who cannot believe his wife has listened to Uncle Julius's nonsense. At this turn, John “was seriously enough annoyed” and “did not share [his] wife's rose colored hopes” (39). Though Annie will continue to deny she actually believes the stories of Julius, her actions suggest that in some fashion, despite the ban on “conj'in' de w'ite folks,” Uncle Julius's magic is working on her. If we are to read the unique trans-segmental drift which can be conjured up in the particular situations of dialect, this emotionally impactful story of a “po' ig'nant” figure, becomes crucially affective, as a “poignant” figure.

This story especially reveals what William Andrews calls Chesnutt's distinctly unromantic sensibilities, how he “evokes a world of mean-spirited, penny-pinching masters

whose preoccupation with profit limits them to a narrowly utilitarian attitude toward their slaves and life itself” (xi). Against this, “the black protagonists of Julius's tales invoke imaginative resources that give them an empowering openness of vision and freedom of action. Through the magic of conjure, slaves are able to resist successfully the controls wielded by their white would be exploiters” (xi). And just as I have indicated, Andrews articulates how the tales “offered a quiet critique of the complacent rationalism of the Progressive era” (xii), not just with the masters but also with John, who “usually treats [Uncle Julius] with condescension and his tales with skepticism” (xii). But while Andrew suggests of Annie that she “shows she can look through the fantastic elements of Julius's tale to discover the tragic reality they highlight,” (xii) I suggest that it is not just Anne seeing past the fantasy, but an openness to otherness depicted *in* the fantastic that she develops. This is opposed to John's “literalistic view of the world [that] insulates him from the disturbing realities that Julius encodes in seeming fantasy” (xii).

With this distinction in place, it is easier to see the difference between the buffered and porous subjectivities which Taylor uses to describe the relations to the totalizing rationalism in the wake of religion's decline in the Western world. Limited by empirical and materialistic values, John continually disregards the stories' supernatural possibilities. In so doing, he not only fails to present a degree of empathy for the racial experience of his workers, but he recreates the very dynamics which existed in the era of slavery. Annie's gradual openness, beginning with her question as to whether the story is true in “The Goophered Grapevine,” is an alternative to John's closed certainty. Annie's rehiring of the young man “Mars Jeem's Nightmare,” is an action which suggests her acceptance of at least some degree of the story. What is more, Annie's decision is characterized by John himself as motivated by *irrational* motivations. He says he doesn't “share [his] wife's rose-colored hopes,” positioning her choice as oppositional to his more

empirical processes of discernment. Ultimately, and not for the last time, John is tricked into conceding *not* by belief in conjure but by his own faith in the hierarchical authority. He decides not to re-fire the servant because he does “not wish the servants to think there was any conflict of authority” (39). This moment highlights, like the “bewitchment” of the slave-owner in “The Goophered Grapevine,” that the rational insulation of the buffered self still has its own structures of belief.

Against this rationalism with its clergy of Western modes of authority (slave-owner, doctor, employer, etc) the alternative manifests in three ways: a sense of the self as connected to (not separate from) nature, a vulnerability to the conjure or belief in stories of conjure, and ultimately the openness to the difference of otherness. I will further illustrate each of these in the following sections but will show their initial appearances in these early stories of the collection. The sense of the self as connected to nature is fairly obvious in the “The Goophered Grapevine,” with the slave's literal experience of the seasonal changes—perhaps an allusion to the importance of season's to a slave's life insofar as they are out in the elements and their work is defined by those seasons. This is opposed to John's view of nature as an emptiness for him to make something of. In “Mars Jeem's Nightmare” John even notes that Julius's experience has “kept him close to nature.”

The concept of porosity in these stories is also illustrative of vulnerability to conjure, which, in this study, also means a vulnerability to the supernatural itself as a means to disrupt a purely empirical view of experience. In “The Goophered Grapevine” we see the impulse of the slave-owner and John to deny the conjure outright as well as Julius's suggestion that whites are reluctant to believe. But in “Mars Jeem's Nightmare,” this point is brought out even further as the slave-owner is goophered himself but characterizes his experience as a nightmare. The slave-

owner's perspective based on reason is his primary characterization, as we see in the description of his emphasis on efficiency: “he wuz des gwine ter git so much wuk outer eve'y han', er know de *reason* w'y” (28 my emphasis). This demand that things be reasonably accountable is confluent with Mars Jeem's inability to realize the effect of the conjure when he is picked up, he “could n' 'pear ter git it th'oo his min' dat he wuz a slabe” (32). And after the effects have worn off, he describes the ordeal thusly: “I ain' be'n sick, but I's had a monst'us bad dream,—fac', a reg'lar, nach'ul nightmare” (35). This view of the event as a nightmare perfectly positions it in terms of the buffered self which does not believe itself vulnerable to powers but rather imagines things as purely extensions of the individual mind, in this case a nightmare. Taylor writes that for “the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind.” Whereas, according to Taylor, “for the porous self, the source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside the 'mind',” the porous self is always “vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind, indeed, negate the very idea of there being a secure boundary” (300). The ironic qualifiers “reg'lar, nach'ul nightmare” further reiterate the owner's refusal to view the events as anything other than rational insofar as such a stance positions him as master of his own fate.

Finally, this sense of mastery which this buffered existence bestows, as I have already suggested, is especially crucial to the ethical encounter with otherness. The posture of certainty, a dubious position in supernatural stories which rely on a sustained uncertainty, always reduces the other in the eyes of the self. In this fashion, despite all of the differences between Chesnutt's tales and the previous collections, there is a continued sense that the uncertainty of the supernatural helps to model an ethics of alterity. This is most clearly articulated outside of the framed stories and in the frames themselves. John's continued refusal to credit Uncle Julius's

tales is an extension of his refusal to treat others in terms other than the utilitarian. We see him justify his purchase of the vineyard out from beneath Uncle Julius—refusing to believe the tale—by suggesting that hiring Julius paid off the lost value of the grapes Julius sold and consumed. Likewise, John disregards the supernatural story, “Mars Jeem’s Nightmare,” and fires the young man based on the precise rationalistic views which cannot believe in the supernatural. In both of these cases, the ability to be open to the uncertainty of the supernatural is connected to the ability to be open to the the other. As Uncle Julius says, the slave-owner's failure in the latter story is an inability to allow for the experience of the other, he “doan make no 'lowance fer po' ign'ant niggers w'at ain' jad no chanst ter l'am” (39). Similarly, Goldner argues that:

gothic features of these texts call attention to the distortions in the lens through which the Western scientized culture sees those whom it makes Other under slavery. They thus delegitimize the dominant culture's claim that the lens of the scientific discourse is transparent, and that it provides the West with a privileged, objective view. In the distortions the texts locate the horror and violence bound up in the rational society's institution of slavery; they also make room for images and voices of slaves, for claims of emotion and morality, and for African-derived strands of African American culture which value features of life excluded by Galilean science. (80-81)

The next section will focus more explicitly on this relation between self and other, further displaying the difference between an insulated mastery and a vulnerability that is open to the natural world, the supernatural, and to others.

III. “Imposin’”: Possession and Power Over Others

In the next three stories, I demonstrate the collection’s focus on the conjuration of possession, control over the body, and subsequent concerns of identity and agency. This element suggests a further exploration of vulnerability in so far as these are figures open to such power. An initial connection to be made in this conversation of openness to the supernatural and the porous self, specifically insofar as it helps to theorize the fantastic, is with regard to Julia Kristeva's related theorization of abjection. In a landmark study of horror and abjection, Kristeva defines the abject as a disruptor of distinctions, something which threatens the barriers by which we separate one thing from another, notably a subject from an object. In this process the abject is that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (2). Kristeva's most cogent articulations of the abject insist on the instability of the abject in relation to the law and order with which the ego contends and defines itself.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior [. . .]. Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (Kristeva 2)

This theorization has a strong legacy in gothic and horror stories. Taking up this framework, Barbara Creed suggests that the “ultimate in abjection is the corpse,” calling it the thing which destroys the very differentiation between life and death (47). Like those examples listed by Kristeva, Creed's also helps to suggest that the permeability of barriers is both a threat to the self

but also a threat to Western modes of drawing perfect distinctions around the self.

Nearly every one of the examples listed above are in evidence in the stories which make up Chesnutt's collection, as are their implications with regard to rupture. This saturation itself produces abjectness that works to disrupt the rigid structures on which John bases his understandings: pure rationalism, hierarchical authority, hegemonic law. But the abject qualities of the text also help to theorize the alternative processes of figures resisting these very same boundaries. The danger of slippage which abjection threatens also helps describe the possibility of porosity which is not closed off but is open, empathetic, and interconnected. This is not to say that every relation of porosity describes a vulnerability to a world of meaning which is kind or generous—just that this relation allows for meanings and powers which exist independent of one's own rational bestowal of values. Instances would include Annie believing in stories, slave figures vulnerable to transformations, slave-owners open to changes of hearts. The text also catalogues viciousness between figures who would still be vulnerable in this fashion as well. The difference is that their violence against each other is not the systemic and rationally justified oppression in the manner of the slave owners and even John's benevolent racism. And the vulnerability of these porous figures to each other, even if it is not acted upon generously, is what allows for a *possible* relationship of understanding that respects alterity without the need to contextualize difference in terms of the self's mastery.

Mirroring the betweenness that abjection always presages, "The Conjuror's Revenge" begins in the sort of liminality that we have come to find so common in the tales of the supernatural. On a Sunday, the cusp of the week, John and Annie lounge on their piazza, neither inside nor out, striving for "that ideal balance between heat and cold." Annie is "conscientiously ploughing through a missionary report, while [John] followed the impossible career of the blonde

heroine of a rudimentary novel” before throwing “the book aside in disgust” (40). Further showing his distaste for the “impossible,” John turns his attention to business and calculations in looking over his accounts. Soon he sees Uncle Julius approaching and asks his advice on the purchase of a mule. Thus begins the story's framed narrative as Uncle Julius says that he “would n' 'vise you ter buy no mule” (41). Already suspicious, John asks why not. In answer, Julius repeats himself, anticipating John's disbelief, “you may 'low hit 's all foolis'ness, but ef I wuz in yo' place, I would n' buy no mule” (41). Again, John questions why, putting the terms in those most important to him: reason. “But that isn't a reason,” John asks, “what objection have you to a mule?” Julius responds to this call for reason with a bit of irony using the *word* fact if not the *spirit* of it: “Fac' is... I doan like ter drible a mule. I 's alluz afeared I mought be imposin' on some human creetur... lackly I 's cuttin' some er my own relations, er somebody e'se w'at can't he'p deyse'ves” (41). Here Julius suggests that mules might be a transformed human, in keeping with the collection's characterization of slave life as being in deeper connection with the natural world while also being more vulnerable to the supernatural. This moment sets up a crucial distinction in the story-collection. Even as John continually strives for reason and fact, Uncle Julius clarifies that his own concerns center around the possibility of “imposin' on some human creetur” and the “relations” of people to each other.

Before proceeding with the actual story, Uncle Julius continues to show the contingency of his listener's belief, saying, “I dunno ez hit's wuf w'ile ter tell you dis... I doan ha'dly 'spec' fer you ter b'lieve it” (41). He even asks if John “en Mis' Annie would n' wanten b'lieve me, ef I wuz ter 'low dat dat man was oncet a mule?” John answers, “No' [...] I don't think it very likely that you could make us believe it” (41). Interestingly, there is a point in Julius's framed story where this question of belief is reflected in whether the slave-owner on a plantation believes the same

issue. In the story, a slave is unfairly punished by a conjure man by being turned into a mule. His fellow slaves try to explain to the master what happened but the owner “let on lack he did n' b'lieve de tale de two niggers tol” (48) “but de niggers all notice' dey marster did n' tie [the transformed slave] up” (49). What I find mostly notable in the story is the paralleling of John's belief with the slave-owner's, the question being whether John will refuse to credit the story in the same way as the slave owner—and in so doing end up treating humans as animals. This debasement suggests the sort of oppression which emerges, not just retributively like the story's conjure, but as the sort of systematic mistreatment which rationalism helped justify with racist discourse.

Julius's story concerns a slave whose existence is already flaunting the structures of rule and law by which the plantation owners (and later, John) organize labor. This slave is described as “de livelies' han' on de place, alluz a-dancin... [he] did n' min' de rules, en went w'en he felt lack it” (42). This characterization seems to be as perfect an articulation of John's antithesis as possible: inefficient, outside the rules, and leisurely. But the slave's characterization as acting outside the rules also aligns him with porousness and with a vulnerability to the supernatural. As the slave leaves the plantation one night, which “wuz 'gin' de rules,” he finds himself under the “cha'm” of a small pig resulting in his stealing it. This charming pig belongs to a conjure man, however, who transforms the slave into a mule for his theft. The story proceeds with some humorous antics including the mule getting drunk and fighting off a suitor to his now-single wife. But despite its more light-hearted air, indeed the story is criticized by Annie for being less serious, it nonetheless displays the collection's interest in the porous self as a vulnerable in terms of subjectivity. The story goes to great lengths to describe the transformed slave as defying the persistent rationalism of the white audience, the rules which guide that world, and also the very

sense of stable identity which is promised by the rational posture. The same free-wheeling nature which sees the figure step outside the plantation at night also makes him vulnerable to the powers of charms and conjure. Julius's framed tale ends with the conjurer converting to religion and undoing his magical revenge.

In response to the tale, Annie, somewhat uncharacteristically, calls out the story for being primarily comedic and without moral resolution. She objects to the slave having been punished for just being open and free-spirited. She complains, the “story does not appeal to me, Uncle Julius, and is not up to your usual mark. It is n't pathetic, it has no moral that I can discover, and I can't see why you should tell it. In fact, it seems to me like nonsense” (49). Uncle Julius says he doesn't understand her words but insists he is “tellin' nuffin but de truf.” He goes on to say that he believes the story himself, without having seen it, because “I be'n hearin' de tale fer twenty-five yeahs, en I ain' got no 'casion fer ter 'spute it. Dey 's so many things a body knows is lies, dat dey ain' no use gwine roun' findin' fault wid tales dat mought des ez well be so ez not” (49). Julius's response to being accused of spreading “nonsense” results in an attempt to reframe truth itself. His redefinition of truth as what “might just as well be as not” is a key passage in the text's investigation of the supernatural, meaning, and belief. And notably, it is the discovery of religion that precipitates the conjure man's change of heart. This is a crucial piece which is missing from Annie's understanding, not because Uncle Julius is trying to convert her to a particular religion, but because he is showing that the ability to understand the plight of the other is linked to a leap of faith distinct from a rational approach. In a fashion, it *is* “nonsense” as Annie suggests, in so far as the story's moral weight lies in terms of a spiritual transformation and not a logical one.

As noted earlier, the story's frame begins on the Sabbath (40) and the framed tale takes place during a local revival. It is this revival which causes the conjure man to desire to “wash'

[his] sins away ... ter ondo some er de harm [he] done” (47). The conjure man asks for forgiveness before dying and releasing the slave from his transformational conjuration. This passage comes in significant proximity to the next which details, specifically, that the master “did n' b'lieve de tale” and the following passage which details Annie's own criticisms in terms of its being unbelievable. One gathers from the proximity of these linked passages that the concern of belief is crucial to their interpretation. Specifically, it suggests that the openness required to believe, which Taylor characterizes as porosity, is the prerequisite for the forgiveness and transformation the conjurer performed.

Moreover, these bodily transformations themselves demonstrate the Kristevan abjectness which I have already linked to Taylor's configuration, insofar as the boundary-lines which the self uses for its definition are shown to be permeable. When faced with the corpse, Kristeva says, the physical body which disturbs our binary understanding of life and death, “[i]t is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border?” (3-4). Speaking further on the topic of abjectness, Kristeva provides that if, “it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject” (5). These are complex and multifaceted points which I do not wish to reduce in service of my own argument. However, the confluence of Kristeva's idea of subjectivity threatened by a force which dissolves boundaries between insides and out, interiors and exteriors, is too close to the porous vulnerability to overlook. The very conditions that make figures like the transformed slave vulnerable to charms and conjure are linked with the impetus to follow the revival of faith which transforms the conjure man's choice. What is more,

Julius insists that the meaning of the story is lost when it is cast off as “nonsense” and comes down to the issue of our interaction with “relations,” as he says, the possibility that we might be “imposin' on some human creetur” (41).

This concern for subjectivity and the abjecting power of conjure are of particular importance to the racial politics of the story. Hyejin Kim has suggested how the “American Gothic via Julia Kristeva’s theory of ‘the abject’ demonstrates how Gothic strategies expose the historical contradictions of race” in Chesnutt’s work, “the archaic process in which the subject attempts to constitute itself as homogeneous by casting off or ‘abjecting’ all that cannot be assimilated to the self-same” (ii). Thus John’s and even Annie’s occasional attempts to distance themselves from the abject is a process of self-preservation, the opposite of which is represented in the slave’s vulnerability to the conjure process. Just as the power of conjure is linked to the power of story-telling (Uncle Julius’s and Chesnutt’s), so do these Yankee figures need to resist their susceptibility to the supernatural story to not be vulnerable to the abject power which threatens their subjectivity. Hyejin goes on to suggest how “Gothic horror subverts and reverses the process through which the new subject-nation mythologized itself as blameless by abjecting the African presence and the nightmarish history of slavery,” and specifically how, “Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman*... deploy[s] Gothic strategies to give voice to the unspeakable experiences associated with slavery and contest the rationalist discourses that enforce and legitimate racism” (iii). In this fashion, the desperate buffered rationalism is not just a means for John and Annie to protect their sense of self, but is also linked to the history of the slave-owner whose own buffered skepticism kept him from recognizing the humanity in the beast of burden.

In the ending of the story-frame, Julius convinces John to buy a horse instead of a mule, only for John to find that the horse he’s purchased is a terrible and unhealthy investment. John

finds reason to believe that Uncle Julius pocketed part of the sale price having facilitated John's purchase with the seller. John curses, "alas for the deceitfulness of appearances!" but also claims: "Of course I would not charge him with duplicity unless I could prove it, at least to a moral certainty, but for a long time afterwards I took his advice only in small doses and with great discrimination" (50). This ending serves several functions, not the least a fulfillment of Uncle Julius's role as possible trickster figure, using cunning for personal gain, a gain contextualized as part of a larger and politically-justified disruption of oppression. But the specific language also points out John's continual failings in understanding the supernatural of the stories and his fatedness to repeat such folly. The words "unless I could prove it, at least to a moral certainty," work to show how Uncle Julius again uses John's commitment to proofs and certainty against him, confident that if John cannot be certain he will not stake a claim. But the line also rings ironically, insofar as John continually looks for "moral certainty" itself, looks to "prove" rightness, as if it were a mathematical formula. In a story which so emphatically details the spiritual nature of transformation, this search for such proofs in our point-of-view character is especially suspect.

"The Grey Wolf's H'ant" also resonates self-consciously with these precise thematic arcs of "The Conjuror's Revenge." The story describes John's desire to log his land for some extra capital. Julius speaks against this plan by hinting that some lands are haunted. He eventually tells a tale of land haunted by a man tortured by a vengeful conjurer who sees his revenge as a means of squaring debts. Julius's story begins in much the same way as the last, with John and his wife in the in-between space of "the piazza, which was broad and dry and less gloomy than the interior of the house" (63). Additionally, John's tendencies to capitalism and rationalism are reiterated by his "looking over [his] accounts" and then reading from a philosophical treatise on

the “redistribution of matter” (63). Much like John's disgust with the “impossible” narrative of his novel in the last story, his reading taste is telling here. Not only does the text ironically allude to redistribution, in a region discussing that very possibility as a means to address slavery's legacy, it comes also in a story about transformation: matter itself being redistributed. But John, as usual, sees the material only through his own specific lens. In boredom, Annie asks him to read aloud to her, only to make him “stop reading that nonsense and see who that is coming up the lane” (64). John laments that he cannot “interest [his] wife in the study of philosophy,” referring to natural philosophy or what we know as empirical science, and looks up the lane like she asks. What follows is an incisive critique of John's absurd commitment to empiricism. He looks out and notes that: “Someone was coming up the lane; at least, a huge faded cotton umbrella was making progress toward the house, and beneath it a pair of nether extremities in trousers” (64). This moment, where John checks his obvious assumption of “someone” by clarifying that he only *knows* an umbrella and a pair of trousers was coming, shows the dangerous absurdity of pure empiricism. While John strives for pure empiricism in only allowing for what his eyes can see, the umbrella and trousers, he actually overlooks the obvious truth (and the human) in the situation.

The truth here is that it is Uncle Julius, and, in direct corollary to John's obtuseness, we are treated to the opposite of John's empirical rationalism with a bit of superstition, as Julius closes his umbrella before climbing onto the covered piazza as a precaution against bad luck. “It's bad luck, suh, ter raise a' umbrella in de house,” Julius says, “en w'iles I dunno wuther it's bad luck ter kyar one inter de piazzer er no, I 'lows it's alluz bes' ter be on de safe side” (64). This distinction sets up one of the story's familiar confrontations between John's materialist perspective and Uncle Julius's supernatural one—a fitting preface to the frame story itself. Upon

reaching the piazza, Uncle Julius is asked the costs of clearing woods by John. He answers that it “mought cos' mo', en it moght cos' less, ez fuh ez money is consarned.” This important moment helps flesh out the distinction between the two men's world views, insofar as Julius is clarifying that “cost” is calculated only partially in material wealth, suggesting that there are other considerations as well. This point comes quickly upon John's pouring over his accounts and his insistence on an absurdly materialist view in accordance with his empirical studies. This proclivity connects the rational materialist perspectives with the more colloquial associations of materialism in terms of things having only material or economic value. As an alternative to this, Uncle Julius warns of “bad luck w'at follers folks w'at 'sturbs dat trac' er lan'... des boun' ter hab a ha'nt” (65). The idea of a haunt or haunting is one that has found remarkable traction in various literary studies as various metaphors for non-material concerns. But here it is, most importantly, a place whose past bears a historical trauma, a trauma which bestows importance to the place beyond its fecund possibilities.

It is also worth noting that Annie, in this moment, who just a moment ago rejected John's natural philosophy text, showed a “growing interest” in this conversation with Uncle Julius and particularly the “tales of the old slavery days [of which Julius] seemed indeed to possess an exhaustless store.” John catalogues these stories as “some weirdly grotesque, some broadly humorous; some bearing the stamp of truth, faint perhaps, but still discernible; others palpable inventions [...] But even the wildest was not without an element of pathos,—tragedy, it might be, of the story itself; the shadow, never absent, of slavery and ignorance; the sadness always of life as seen by the fading light of an old man's memory” (65). This never absent shadow of slavery might itself be the best terminology to describe the concept of haunting, that insubstantial presence which lingers beyond its physical expiration and represents a force that is distinctly

immaterial. But John's impulse toward typology also helps to illustrate his missing many of the deeper concerns of the stories for their formal qualities, particularly those defined in a departure from strict realism.

This 'haunting' thematic, the idea that land can have value or meaning beyond what John sees in its economic possibilities, is brought up distinctly in Uncle Julius's story. It concerns a slave named Dan trying to protect himself from a vengeful conjurer whose son Dan killed for attacking his wife. Dan is told by a different conjure woman to bury a part of himself deep in the ground, as a sort of reliquary, to keep himself safe from evil machinations of the conjurer working against him (67). As in other stories, the land is viewed as a sacred alternative to the social and cultural structures which bolster up racist ideology, in this case a refuge for his spirit. When Dan is tricked into revealing the location of his secret reliquary, the vengeful conjurer begins to plague him with aches and pains. The concept of waking up to these sorts of pains and attributing them to being "ridden" by a witch during the night as one slept is a common quality of African-American folklore. In some fashion, perhaps, it was used to account for the continual bodily wear caused by the work of slaves. This belief about being ridden is most closely approximated by Western ideas of possession, having one's body taken over by an alternative consciousness, which Taylor suggests is a primary facet of porousness:

the boundary between agents and forces is fuzzy in the enchanted world; and the boundary between the mind and world is porous, as we see in the way that charged objects can change us ... if the boundary emerges here in the various kinds of "possession", all the way from a full taking over of a person, as with a medium, to various kinds of domination by, or partial fusion with, a spirit or God. And this has to be seen as a fact of *experience*, not a matter of "theory", or "belief" (39).

Not only does this supernatural element help to position the enslaved figures as vulnerable to outside powers, but this moment describes such vulnerability as experience rather than belief. This characterization is crucial in the story for several reasons, not least because it undermines the authoritative pronouncements of the white figures who call such ideas mere superstition.

What is also interesting is the difference in purpose behind the conjurer's attacks. Where usually the conjure woman's power is bartered for with food rather than money, and is done to help the slaves resist oppressive systems, here the conjure is motivated by an economic sense of paying debts. Much like the slave-owner in "The Goophered Grapevine" who wishes to kill a Yankee for every dollar he lost, the conjurer in this story reveals that his revenge is a matter of getting even, of "squarin' up" (70) for wrongs done to him. Later in the story, the conjure man says, "I's eben wid you... I doan want no mo' d'n w'at 's fair" (73). This idea of squaring up, getting even, getting what's fair, all rely on a moral equation which works like a capitalistic exchange of value. The unjustness of the persecution of Dan for protecting his wife is thrown into even greater clarity in the story's end, as the conjurer turns Dan into a wolf and tricks him into murdering his own wife. This horrific ending with Dan's suicide and the subsequent haunting of the grove in question, serves to undermine the conjurer's continual assertion of moral equivalence. The reader cannot help but question the capitalistic view of "squaring" or "getting even" as a means of achieving justice. It also connects John's perspective, limited to thinking only "ez fuh ez money is consarned," to the economic morality which is so unjust and which is part of slavery itself. In this fashion, conjure, thusfar associated with openness and faith opposed to the stricter protocols of rationalism and capitalism, has become perverse in application toward the exact strictness and credit/debt ratio subscribed to by John.

Similar to the conjurer who reinforces the connection of capitalistic economics to the

logic undergirding slavery, the slave-owner only considers the loss of slave life in financial terms. He laments “losin' two er his bes' han's in one day” (74) rather than the tragic murder-suicide which has taken place. Once again in the stories, the materialist or empirical view, based on rationalist doctrines and a confidence in their translatability to morality, help reflect on John. Specifically, they position him as similar to the conjurer who only thinks in terms of debt and repayment without human compassion, and the slave-owner who calculates only in terms of financial value. In this fashion, Uncle Julius ends his tale, saying “w'at I be'n tellin' you is de reason I doan lack ter see dat neck er woods cl'ared up.” Uncle Julius clarifies that the ground has more than just material concerns to it, as it is now the haunt of the persecuted slave who howls in the form of the wolf he was turned into. But Uncle Julius concedes that, of “Co'se it b'longs ter you en a man kin do ez he choose' wid 'is own” (74). This moment coming from Uncle Julius seems to set out John's position for critique on the part of the reader. We have just seen the results in the slavery era of people controlling things which they “own” and its traumatic result. If slavery is the haunting force in Uncle Julius's narratives which gives spectral power and significance to the inanimate, then the haunting of the land which John will monetize for his own purpose is likewise a result of this trauma.

As usual, the story doesn't end there. At the frame's end, John discovers a honey reservoir on the land that he suspects Julius of trying to protect with the ghost story for his own purposes. This moment allows John to place Uncle Julius's motivations within a framework that he understands, the same one by which he, the vengeful conjurer, and the slave-owner abide. While this may in fact be the reason Julius tells the story, the structure of the narrative, which encourages the relinquishment of reductive accounts, positions John's suspicions negatively. John's desire to *not* believe the story is a means of self-preservation and self-definition which is

opposed to the sort of openness that Julius encourages and which Annie increasingly displays. The porousness that allows for “various kinds of 'possession', all the way from a full taking over of a person, as with a medium, to various kinds of domination” is also that which allows for “partial fusion with a spirit or God” (39) after all. It makes the figures vulnerable to being ridden by witches but also being moved to forgive and repent, as in “The Conjuror's Revenge.” Moreover, the bufferedness, which is at odds with this, is in part defined exactly by the “sense of invulnerability and distance from the unreason of the past finds expression in the cool self-possession,” according to Taylor. “This sense of self-possession, of a secure inner mental realm, is all the stronger, if in addition to disenchanting the world, we have also taken the anthropocentric turn” (300-301). I will say more of the anthropocentric turn and of an enchanted or disenchanted world in the third and final section but here it is most critical to see how this sense of self-possession works to undermine the openness to others and to possibilities which feel threatening to the secular subject.

Specifically, the closed and rational figure's self-possession must categorically refuse the abjection which threatens these laws and rules of society. But such refusal also entails a blindness to the protocols of belief, including the refusal to respect a burial ground, whose value exists outside of rationalistic paradigms. The ultimate in self-possession is the slave-owner, of course, the figure who views bodies as economically calculable and also deeply separate from each other. The slave owner's sense of self-possession, without possibility of slippage, projects outward as a possession over the world and most crucially, of himself. But to be in full self-possession is to believe one *can* fully possess one's self, is to believe one can possess other selves as well.

The final story of the collection, “Hot-Foot Hannibal,” helps to flesh out several of these

concerns, including the nature of porous identity as both vulnerable but also as more capable of deep human feeling. We begin *en medias res* with human feeling at the center as John hears the words: “I hate you and despise you,” while lying on a “hammock on the front piazza” (76). The significance of the line and of John's position to hear it connects to themes already considered. As noted early how the piazza, in the tradition of Melville, has a significant place in the supernatural story history, signifying the liminal betweenness so essential to the genre. A particular valence of this piazza as a place of Southern leisure, with its associations distinct from Northern efficiency, is further distinguished when John suggests that the hatred being voiced was the breaking of a betrothal between his sister-in-law and a local man. The “match thus rudely broken off,” John muses, “had promised to be another link binding me to the kindly southern people” (77). John has continually occupied a position as a Northerner in the South, an efficient and rational figure in a place more associated those qualities of the supernatural, the leisure of repose, and irrational superstition. This passage with John in the hammock helps to suggest the continual effects of John's slow conversion to the attitudes of the South, with the wistful suggestion of betrothal as a “link binding” him to this place. This signals, along with the gravitational pull of the piazza for John, a slow shift in his character toward a more open and liminal posture like his wife's.

To ease the discomfort of this broken betrothal, Uncle Julius takes John, Annie, and the sister-in-law for a drive, asking them whether to take “the short road, or the long one” toward their destination. Of course, and in keeping with the associated differences between the white Northerners and Uncle Julius, Uncle Julius disagrees with Annie's initial impulse for the short road which “will get there sooner.” Julius suggests that it's “a mighty fine drible round by de big road” (77), distinguishing the choice between efficiency and experience. Annie and John insist Uncle Julius takes them the short way, only to find that their mule refuses to continue at a certain

spot. Uncle Julius begins the story's framed tale by suggesting the mule must see a "ha'nt" with its animal sense. The concerned ladies ask about the haunt, to which Uncle Julius obliges, saying it's "all in de tale" (79).

Like "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt," this tale ends with a traumatized figure haunting the land after his antagonist attacked him in a desire "ter git eben" (83). Here, the revenger is a jilted lover ridding himself of his rival and competitor for a position as a house slave as opposed to a field hand. The ghost that is supposed to be arresting the mule's progress, is the spirit of the female slave, lamenting having been tricked into having her true love sold South. According to Uncle Julius, she was tricked by the vengeful suitor, against whom she'd used a conjurer's device to keep him out of the house and in the field to make way for the man she desired. The young woman and her lover used the conjurer's device to make the rival suitor look bad in front of the slave-owners but had the magic turned against them in the end. The rival suitor then tricked the young woman into believing her lover was unfaithful, having him sold further South.

The complicated plot's climax hinges on the question of believing the stories of others, most significantly, whether the young woman believes that her lover is unfaithful and facilitates his sale. At first she didn't believe but admits that "she seed how it *could* 'a' be'n so, en she 'termine fer ter fin' out fer herse'f wuther it *wuz* so er no" (84). This construction of the possible versus the plausible is reminiscent of Uncle Julius himself, who advocates for openness in the collection for what "might be" as a means to open possibilities beyond the scope of what John allows. Uncle Julius talks about the importance of not disregarding stories "dat mought des ez well be so ez not" (49). The crucial difference for this story is whether such openness extends as a type of generosity toward the other or as suspicion against them. When the young woman of the story discovers what she believes to be unfaithfulness in her lover and co-conspirator in the

goopher plot, she rushes to the plantation owner, in hopes that the owner will fire the the lover for having used conjure to win his position as a house servant. This significant moment of angry words occurs on the piazza, much like the opening scene of the story with the jealous sister-in-law. The slave's owner "wuz monst'us mad" according to Julius, but "did n' let on at fus' lack he b'liebed" (85). But like nearly all of Julius's stories, the owner "wuz 'feared she'd conjuh him. En w'iles [he] say he did n' b'lieve in conj'in' en sich, he 'peared ter 'low it wuz bes' ter be on de safe side" (85). We see the idea of openness, not to what we actively believe, but for the possibility of what might be. But once again, this belief does not occur here in terms of generosity to alterity but of suspicion of it.

Eventually, the young woman discovers the lie which led her to betray her lover, and she sinks into despair in which she "wa'n't much mo' use ter nobody" (87). The slave-owner's view of her feelings positions her in terms of "use," in this case making her an unfit servant in the master's home. This perception of utility, like in many of the stories, draws attention back to the efficient and rational means of accounting value. Annie's and John's desire to take the short road because it is more efficient at getting to their destination now seems particularly suspect. After Julius's tale, Annie and her sister decide to go the long way in accordance with Julius's recommendation, despite the teasing of John who mocks them for believing in ghosts. "I prefer the other route," (87) Annie answers, suggesting also another route than John's view of pure rationalism without respect to either supernatural possibility or the feelings and sensibilities with which it is associated in the text. As if to drive home the distinction from Annie's ability to place faith in the supernatural and super-empirical values of Uncle Julius's stories, John confesses that he is "skeptical of [Julius's] motives" (88). As it turns out, when they take the long road as Julius has suggested, the sister-in-law discovers her own lover traveling by the same path and rekindles

her relationship. Here the text, in about as explicit terms as ever, positions the openness which can allow for the supernatural, even as it makes one vulnerable to the conjure and possession, in alignment with the ability to create deep and meaningful human relationships. This lies in opposition to the slave-owner in the frame tale who, much like John himself, views the people in terms of their usefulness, in the same way that his self-possession (self-ownership) demands a utilitarian and skeptical view of the world.

The buffered skepticism which allows figures like John and the slave owners a sense of self-possession, and perhaps paves the way for a view of possession which justifies possessing or owning other humans as well, is demonstrably at odds with the kind of work done by Julius in the supernatural stories. These open, porous characters of the stories are continuously vulnerable to seeping powers external to them, be they passions which take them over, conjure which transforms, or empathy which breakdown the walls of a sovereign selfhood. In this fashion the supernatural uses abjection, the powers which disrupt and threaten the boundaries of law and of Western subjectivity. It shows both sides of these abjected figures, as they fall in the esteem of those who command law, but also as they are able to experience a porousness that is more interconnected with others, more open to possibilities than their buffered counterparts. The structures which bestow a sense of self-possession are the very same structures explored by Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas which produce a totalizing world view, a sense of mastery over knowledge which diminishes the other in the eyes of the self. The final section of this chapter will look at the remaining stories of this collection and how the two identities function in terms of an environmental consciousness, an experience of life that is either reigning over or interconnected with the natural world. Ultimately, this ecological perspective will turn our attention back to the ethical postures of openness to alterity and the supernatural's function in

conditioning it.

IV. “Pathetic Intonations”: Porosity and Enchanted Nature

I have saved the two remaining stories of Chesnutt's collection to explore this prominent concern of the porous relation to the natural world. They suggest, ironically perhaps, that a close interconnection with the natural also reflects the postures of openness to the *super*-natural or, at least, a relinquishment of the rational surety which forecloses its possibility. As a means to unpack this, I will once again turn to Taylor's work, specifically the way his description of enchantment intersects with the buffered and porous selves. Taylor writes:

In the enchanted world of 500 years ago, a clear line between the physical and the moral wasn't drawn ... things and agencies which are clearly extra-human could alter or shape our spiritual and emotional condition, and not just our physical state. This is not the only way in which we draw this physical/moral boundary today that wasn't recognized then. Connected to our firm placing of the non-human world outside the mind, is our perception of it as the domain of exceptionless natural law. The modern post-Newtonian outlook reigns supreme here. Now even if we are theoretically committed to treat the human world in the same “scientific” way, we don't manage ever in practice to frame our interaction with others in this mould. (40)

This lengthy quote serves several purposes in this final section. First, and foremost here, is his use of the term enchanted as a means to describe the world occupied by spirits or elements unaccountable by empirical means. Taylor suggests the way a buffered self is both empowered

and insulated from that world by imagining that our own minds are the means by which we allot and account for values. In this final section, I will show how the permeable barrier between the porous figure and the natural world parallels the same barrier which the supernatural represents in the text: the portal to alterity via a relinquishment of positions of knowledge and power. The buffered existence, alternatively, refuses such ebb and flow between itself and things beyond itself with an oppressive posture of mastery which axiomatically tends towards totalization and fails to adequately understand and accommodate otherness.

Echoing the opening of the first story, “Sis' Becky's Pickaninny” begins with a discussion of Annie's health and John's plan for her recuperation. Though up to this point he has continually tried to view her struggles in medical terms, he is finally forced to admit that she is the “victim of a settled melancholy, attended with vague forebodings of impending misfortune,” and he recognizes that she “must keep up her spirits” (51). Coming from a figure who cites an “implicit confidence” in the medical profession, the term “spirits” is an ironically supernatural description of her ailments. Lifting her spirits, however, seems to be interpreted by John to mean diverting her attention, as he “read[s] novels to her... plac[ing] an armchair in a shaded portion of the front piazza” for her to relax in. When Uncle Julius comes to check on her, John answers for her, assuming she was “without energy enough to speak for herself,” (51) in a move that treats her like an invalid. And once again it is of note that the tale takes place on the piazza, positioning the frame story as neither inside nor out, contributing to the elusive and liminal qualities of supernatural stories.

In keeping with his own associations with the supernatural, Uncle Julius suggests that Annie employ the use of a lucky rabbit's foot to fend off negativity. Having just presumed to speak for Annie, John now responds with a racist dismissal of Julius's offer, saying Julius's

“people will never rise in the world until they throw off these childish superstitions and learn to live by the light of reason and common sense ...” (52). Responding with special attention to John's implication of the economic status of Uncle Julius, the ex-slave claims that he wouldn't sell his own rabbit foot for “no 'mount er money” (52). Once again, against John's particular strain of rationalism and its associations with capital, Uncle Julius argues for alternative values. Julius goes on saying, “you doan hafter prove 'bout de rabbit foot! Eve'ybody knows dat... But ef it has ter be prove' ter folks w'at wa'n't bawn en raise' in dis naberhood, dey is a' easy way ter prove it. Is I eber tol' you de tale er Sis' Becky en her pickaninny?” This moment once again pits John's posture of rational certainty against Julius's sense of experiential knowledge. John actually accedes, saying, “let us hear it.” His hope being that “perhaps the story might interest [Annie] as much or more than the novel” (52-53).

Julius's story begins by highlighting one of the very issues that John so pronouncedly misses in the tales: the interconnections between his capitalistic impulses, the rationalism which he prizes, and the legacy of slave trading. The story's slave-owner trades away a mother slave, separating her from a child, for a race-horse, saying “I doan lack ter, but I reckon I'll haf ter” (53). This phrase “haf ter,” is not based on paying off debts but rather is because he wants the race horse and enjoys gambling. The man he trades with refuses to buy the child, seeing as the child can do no work, based on his own reasoning: “niggers is made ter wuk” (53). This moment explicates the connections between the utilitarian views of efficiency and productivity in capitalism and the slave trade, views which John continually mirrors in his own, admittedly less extreme, choices. But this point about the less extreme nature of John's utilitarian racism is important to think through in terms of the original slave-owner. This figure is described as “a kin'-hea'ted man,” who doesn't *wish* to separate a mother and child, who *tries* to sell them

together, but ultimately cedes to the rational position of the slave-trader. This scene clarifies how little such intentions matter, how little a small gesture of humanity matters, in the larger system which has already reduced people to things in service of the aims of efficiency. When separated from his mother the young child becomes sick with sadness. At this point the “kind hearted” slave-owner reveals his view of human life in economic terms, saying they should fetch the doctor since the child “wuz a lackly little nigger ne wu'th raisin” (56), positioning the child and his health in terms of future capital. The scene also reiterates the opening of this story which considers the physician the final authority on issues of physical and spiritual health, like John does himself.

Significantly, instead of taking the child to the medical doctor, the child's aunt brings the baby to the conjure woman who recognizes that what he “needs is ter see his mammy” (56). This moment draws attention to the importance of emotional and spiritual health as opposed to a strictly medical perspective. The conjure woman turns the lonely child into different types of birds so he can fly to the far away plantation and visit with his mother who also pines for him. Importantly, Julius puts this sort of interpersonal focus precisely in the terms that Annie's prescription took, so that the visit with her child gave the mother “mo' *sperrit* dan she'd showed sence she 'd be'n down dere” (57 my emphasis). Even as a bird, the boy's human spirit is recognizable to the mother, who says, “it sounded lack her little Mose croonin' on her breas”. She later says that his birdsong reminded her of “Mose crowin' en crowin', des lack he useter do w'en his mammy would come home” (57). In a very complicated way, this transformative process mirrors the same view of human/animal interchangeability which enabled the trade of the slave and horse in the first place. But unlike the slave-trade view that suggests that a horse can be exchanged for a person because they are both owned things, this correspondence finds the

common ground of humans and animals as both living creatures.

Eventually, the continual transformations wear on the network of those slaves who must continually arrange it, until they decide to try and get the child's mother brought back to the plantation. Interestingly, the conjure woman declares that the process will take “fig'ren en studyin' ez well ez conj'in” (58). The suggestion here is important because rather than just setting up a strict binary between rationalism and supernaturalism, the conjurer shows themselves adept at and needing both systems. Unlike John's vision of rationalism which must foreclose on the possibility of the supernatural, the supernatural openness in the text is open also to other systems. The conjure woman continues to use the natural world to her purpose, even as she uses magic, calling “a hawnet fum a nes” to go sting the knees of the recently traded horse till they swelled. This causes the slave-owner to demand Becky back in trade, seeing as the horse was lame. The horse's former owner refuses, however, saying the horse was well-enough on the day of sale. The conjure woman then has a sparrow bring some roots, again using the natural world, to sicken Becky with bad dreams and visions which jeopardized her health. This moment not only serves to show the conjure woman's use of the natural world but also continues the idea that emotional and spiritual health have implications as real as physical concerns.

Becky's new owner is tricked into selling her back precisely because he refuses to believe that she is being conjured, a “fool notion, ez he called it,—fer he wuz one er dese yer w'ite folks w'at purten' dey doan b'liebe in conj'in'.” Because he doesn't believe in the conjure, he believes she must be on the brink of physical death. Hoping that the horse is in better shape than Becky, he writes as if he has had a change of heart, without revealing Becky's condition, saying his “principle is wuth mo' d'n money er hosses er niggers” (60). This moment of disbelief followed hard upon by this economically motivated deception helps to flesh out the associations of

rationalist protocols and their reductive views of human life. Furthermore, the porous identity of the slaves, so that the currents of magic and of the natural world run through them, condition a relationality that is accommodating and empathetic. The story even suggests how the magic left the child marked and changed, but also how it helped him understand the struggles of others: “w'en little Mose growed up, he could sing en whistle des lack a mawkin'bird” so that people payed for him to sing “w'ich he alluz tuk home ter his mammy; fer he knowed al 'bout w'at she had gone th'oo ... bimeby he bought his mammy en sot her free” (60-61). As Taylor suggests of the experience of the enchanted world, “things and agencies which are clearly extra-human could alter or shape [a] spiritual and emotional condition, and not just [a] physical state” (40). In this way the child is changed for his time in and out of the human world, left abler to understand the difficulties of others in the world.

After the resolution, we are brought back to the frame where Annie listened with “greater interest than she had manifested in any subject for several days... [her face] had expressed in turn sympathy, indignation, pity, and at the end lively satisfaction” (61). But once again, John hopes to delegitimize the story by underscoring its supernatural elements. “That is a very ingenious fairy tale, Julius,” John says with special attention to categorizing it, “and we are much obliged to you.” But Annie chides “Why, John! ... the story bears the stamp of truth, if ever a story did.” John replies sarcastically to her, but Annie will not be dissuaded; “I don't care ... those are mere ornamental details and not at all essential. The story is true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war” (61) What is absolutely crucial here is that Annie has adopted precisely the vision of truth as Uncle Julius defined it in the last story, not as a series of facts but as what “might have happened,” particularly with regard to emotional experience. Furthermore, Annie characterizes the story as

true to “nature,” using the word nature not as John usually means it, as opposed to the supernatural, but as something interpersonal which indeed undergirds the supernatural as well.

Undeterred, John goes on with his criticism of Julius: “your story doesn't establish what you started out to prove—that a rabbit's foot brings good luck” (61). This moment is also crucial as it describes John's view of stories not as a means to affect the listeners but “to prove” their premise, as if story-telling were indistinguishable from rhetoric. In response to John's challenge, Uncle Julius suggests that his point is clear and gestures to Annie to clarify it for him. Annie obliges and suggests that “Sis' Becky had no rabbit's foot” (61). There are several interesting features here, first is that Annie knew what Julius referred to, suggesting that, like Mose in the story, her understanding went further as she allowed herself to be open to others and their struggles. But also, we see a clear differentiation here between John's desire for proofs as validating a story as compared to Annie and Julius's sense that cultivating understanding of others' experience validates stories. And finally, we may consider the rabbit's foot itself. While certainly not a symbol of environmentalism in our current culture, the symbol helps to situate its carrier as invested in the natural world, finding value and power outside of the human world—especially as it is something without exchange value to Julius. In the story's end, John admits that Annie's “condition took a turn for the better from this very day” of the storytelling, though his pleasure in her recovery is overshadowed when he discovers “Julius's rabbit's foot” in her coat pocket (62). Like in many of these stories, belief itself, whether or not it is connected to a “truth,” is an essential part of existence, symbolized in Annie's reaction to the story and her improved health—in this case insofar as the porousness of belief helps to connect one to a nonhuman world and to others.

This quality of connection to nature, according to Robert Hemenway, is a fundamental

aspect of Chesnutt's supernatural, as "the Gothic effect is the assertion of irrationality as a controlling force in the affairs of men and supernatural energy as a determining factor in the natural world" (101). Hemenway specifically identifies in Chesnutt the element of Gothic "animism," classified by modern science as a primitive thought process. In the Gothic, nature *lives*: the reader senses a reality outside the self in much the same way that primitive man recognizes an animistic world" (103). This corresponds with much of Taylor's sense of the enchanted world as having its own powers and purposes, but also its having value independent of bestowal by humanity. Even more crucial is Hemenway's observation of the difference between the conjurer and other Gothic figures insofar as the "conjurer does not work *on* nature in order to discover its secrets, but *with* nature as one who has been granted special insights into the will and consciousness that exist beyond the boundary of man's scientific understanding." Important to my argument is that this conjure is not necessarily benevolent, can be vengeful etc, but that its process is not predicated on the same hierarchical models which places humans above nature and some humans above others. Hemenway clarifies that the "conjure doctor differs from the Gothic stereotype of the mad, Faustian scientist because he does not impose a will on nature's processes" (109). Most crucial is the political valence of this power so that, even when used selfishly or vengefully, "Conjure becomes a source of redress for an oppressed people" (112). In this fashion, we see the porous posture which makes one susceptible to conjure in the same continuum as the openness to a natural world outside of human structures of value and meaning. The overlap between the animistic world which Hemenway sees in Chesnutt and the enchanted world that Taylor describes is a place of vulnerability to alterity which might flow through and leave one changed. This same accessibility is what provides the grounds for mutual understanding which Annie is finally capable of, even as John's buffered self struggles.

I end this chapter with what is perhaps the most powerful of Chesnutt's stories: "Po' Sandy," which employs themes similar to the rest of the collection but significantly increases the intensity, particularly with its consideration of supernatural openness resulting in connection to the natural world. Ultimately, the increased seriousness and violence in "Po' Sandy" help to make more clear the stakes in either dismissing or believing Uncle Julius's story. Like many of the stories, this one concerns the question of place and belonging. Just as the collection begins with the displaced Yankee couple coming into contact with a freed African American slave, the issues of home are continually brought up in this story. Here we are introduced to the site of an old schoolhouse on John's land that he intends to tear down for the materials to build a kitchen for Annie. But Julius cautions the couple against this action, alluding to a dark history of the building by calling out the name "po' Sandy." John admits that the "pathetic intonation with which [Uncle Julius] lengthened out the 'po' Sandy touched a responsive chord in [their] own hearts," referring to both he and Annie. But it is Annie, described as being "of a very sympathetic turn of mind," who asks to hear the story, as she "takes a deep interest in the stories of plantation life" (15). Her more empathetic view is contrasted to John's more calculating one, which again breaks down Julius's tales systematically for the reader, cataloguing how "some of the stories are quaintly humorous; others wildly extravagant, revealing the Oriental cast of the negro's imagination; while others poured freely into the sympathetic ear of a Northern-bred woman, disclose many a tragic incident of the darker side of slavery" (16). This distanced view which John takes is fundamental to the story in several ways, indicating John's resistance to supernatural stories, his refusal to fully respond to the experience and emotional trauma of the racial other, and a distance from the natural world which this story will connect to the previous two qualities.

Much like “The Goophered Grapevine,” this story deals with the awful unrootedness of slave life, a continually unfettered and insecure existence. Each child of Sandy’s owner wanted the father to give them “Sandy fer a weddin’ present” until the father allowed each of the children to “take Sandy fer a mont’ er so.” With this agreement “Sandy did n’ hardly knowed whar he wuz gwine ter stay fum one week’s een’ ter de yuther” (16). But this sense of instability for Sandy reaches a fever pitch when his first wife is sold while he is away. He says to his second wife, “I got ter go off en leab you [...] en I dunno whe’r I’, eber gwine ter see you ag’in er no. I wisht I wuz a tree, er a stump, er a rock, er sump’n w’at could stay on de plantation fer a w’ile” (17). His new wife admits that she was a conjure woman and that she can turn him into an animal or plant. Sandy says he doesn’t want to be an animal; “I wanten be turnt inter sump’n w’at ’ll stay in one place.” His new wife agrees to turn him into a tree and turn him back sometimes, letting him live in the gaps like he already does being bounced around from plantation to plantation. Eventually, his wife decides to turn both of them into foxes so they can live free like white folk (19). Her plan goes awry, however, because she cannot be stationary herself and is also sent to another plantation (19-20). While she is away Sandy-the-tree is being cut down for the wife of the slave-owner to have a new kitchen—the same reason Annie and John will tear down the old schoolhouse.

Just as Sandy and his wife seek refuge from oppression in a natural state (as plants or animals), so too does nature seem to work to save Sandy from being turned into lumber. Natural forces like mud’s suction and gravity work to slow the laborer’s progress: “dey got stuck in de mud.... keep a-stoppin’ and a-stoppin’ fer ter hitch de log up ag’in... de log broke loose, en run down de hill” (20). Myers notes this sort of connection to and help from the land in Chesnutt’s writing on slavery, how “the bodies of the men and women who work the land are conflated with

the land itself” (5). Myers clarifies how “African Americans and the land they have worked [...] have a symbiosis that the slave-owning plantation owners—and the Northern capitalists who replace them as land owners—lack” (6). It is this type of symbiosis which I suggest the supernatural helps to structure so that the encouragement to accept the supernatural stories becomes also an encouragement to see humanity in this permeable relation to the natural world. Different social practices reflect different relations to land, like the slave-owner’s poisoning of the grapevines in the opening story in comparison to Julius’s use of the same vines only for his own consumption. Myers suggests that Chesnutt does not merely link “the oppression of people of color with the exploitation of the environment” (6) but “envisions a way of inhabiting the south that is humanely and ecologically sustainable, an ecocentric way of viewing the self in the landscape that does not require mastery over nature or other people” (7). This similarity between mastery over people and over nature is crucial to my own understanding of the text. While the conjurer may turn a human into a mule, exchanging them in a fashion, so too does the slave owner by selling one for the other. The difference emerges insofar as the slave owner equalizes animals and racial others as both beneath him, while the conjure figure finds himself, others, and animals to be on the same level.

We see the connections between the whites’ treatment of the natural world and the treatment of racial others distinctly in the story’s horrifying climax. Despite the forces of nature and of his wife’s conjure and love, Sandy-the-tree is brought to the lumber mill. His wife discovers the tree “wid de sap runnin’ out’n it, en de limbs layin’ scattered round’... she wanted ter turn ‘im back long ernuff fer ter ‘splain ter ‘im dat she had n’ went off a-purpose, en lef’ im ter be chop’ down en sawed up. She did n’ want Sandy ter die wid no hard feelin’s to’ds her” (20). The more we follow the supernatural thread of the story the more brutal this moment appears. Not

only does this attentiveness condition an openness to the supernatural it also extends the same sorts of affect that we generally withhold for human suffering to the natural world symbolized in the tree. This affective transference is even more powerful as Sandy's wife "th'owed herse'f on de log right in front er de saw, a-hollerin' en cryin ter her Sandy ter fergib her," until the loggers move her away and continue the work, though "it wuz mighty hard wuk; fer of all de sweekin', en moanin', en groanin', dat log done it w'iled de saw wuz a-cuttin' thoo it" (20). Here, the squeaks and groans of the sawed wood are interchangeable with human cries. This moment helps to deliver both sides of the porous self's relationship to forces outside itself, both in the protection that can be found in the closeness to nature but the suffering that is shared because of that closeness.

Against the readers' emotional empathy stands, once again, the figures of the economically motivated whites. Rather than listen to the wife of Sandy plead, they think she is "out'n her min' [and] lock her up in de smoke-'ouse 'tel she got ober her spells" (21). This punning on spells, that conjure is a pathology, goes along with the story's structure which allies disbelief in the slave's tale with complicity in the racist power structures, allowing her to be ignored on the grounds that she is crazy. The buffered self which believes meaning is bestowed by the sound mind, sees such porousness itself as an unsound mind. The description of the slave-owner's skepticism is further fleshed out in his response to being told of Sandy's fate: "he 'lowed she wuz de wuss 'stracted nigger he eber hearn of" (21). While the owner thinks she is harmless in her distraction, we see his real concern is that she will spread her version of the story. This illustrates his own understanding that supernatural tales of conjure stand opposed to the rationalist logic on which his authority is based. For this reason, he "th'eaten' ter sen' her off'n de plantation ef she say anything ter any er de yuther niggers 'bout de pine-tree" (22). Not only is

the slave owner himself a figure of rational aloofness and buffered skepticism, but he sees belief itself as a threat to his position of authority. In any case, the other slaves do eventually hear rumors of Sandy's fate and these rumors also reach the ears of the slave-owner's wife, who wants the kitchen torn down and used to build a schoolhouse. This is the same schoolhouse that John wants to use to build Annie's kitchen.

Beyond the text's explicit illustrations of a porous relation to the natural world based on interconnection, the primary concern of my interest in this story is the way the supernatural is received and interpreted by the Northern couple. Annie, whose general investment in these stories increases as the collection progresses, "listened to this gruesome narrative with strained attention" saying: "What a system it was [...] under which such things were possible!" This moment shows her acceptance of the supernatural of the story in perfect confluence with her recognition of the crimes of slavery. The dense John, however, exclaims: "What things?... Are you seriously considering the possibility of a man's being turned into a tree?" (23). While he is ostensibly only questioning the plausibility of conjuration in the story, his resistance nonetheless discredits the tragedy of slavery which the supernatural is used to describe. His rationalism in the face of the folk-tale limits his capacity for empathy. In a move that is familiar by now and speaks to the crux of the subgenre, Annie reassures John that she doesn't believe in magic, but still, she says, "I don't believe I want my new kitchen built out of the lumber in that old schoolhouse." John continues to not understand her empathetic response: "You would n't for a moment allow yourself... to be influenced by that absurdly impossible yarn which Julius was spinning to-day?" he asks. "I know the story is absurd' she replied *dreamily*, 'and I am not as silly as to believe it. But I don't think I should ever be able to take any pleasure in that kitchen if it were built out of that lumber'" (23 my emphasis).

Instead of a new kitchen, Annie allows Uncle Julius to use the old schoolhouse as a meeting place for “The Sandy Run Colored Baptist Church.” While John is disgruntled, believing the “yarn” was calculated only for this eventual aim, Annie insists that she is nonetheless pleased it is used for “so good a purpose” (24). This distinction here is key because John's concern for being duped is shown to be rather frivolous in light of Annie's happiness that the building is being used for the betterment of the many rather than just for herself. Her faith in the story is associated with her ability to likewise see the good in this outcome. John's skepticism insulates him from the experience of racial others and the implications of his own action, particularly his reflecting of the slave-owner who polices belief in the supernatural, concerned that it will undermine his efforts. It is important to note how belief connects with the concept of openness to others, to the supernatural, and to the natural world. This is partially reflected in the fact that it is a church, a house of belief, which Julius seeks to secure with his story. Lest we see belief in the supernatural as opposed to the sorts of belief described in the African American southern church community, the text explicitly shuts down the idea of their opposition. Sandy's wife, like the conjurer in “The Conjurer's Revenge,” suggests that conjure itself is not opposed to religion, rather its conflict is defined in how it is used. She says, “w'en I got religion I made up my mine I would n' wuk no mo' goopher. But dey is some things I doan b'lieve it's no sin fer ter do,” (17) as she lays out her plan to save Sandy. This moment illustrates the connections between belief, like that we extend to others or to the supernatural, with the process of resistance to those rationalistic power-structures which John represents.

In this fashion, Chesnutt uses the supernatural tale to model an openness to alterity and to the unknowable of the world, an openness which is illuminated with Taylor's theorization of the porous self. This porous self finds access to an enchanted world with value, meaning, and

purpose beyond that bestowed by humanity. These qualities exist not only beyond the reach of a rationalist perspective, which sees meaning as something imparted only by the mind, they also provide the grounding for an empathy towards others and a positioning in nature that is not based on the subject's mastery. If we connect this process to the Levinasian model of empathy as preserving alterity in the realm of the infinite, as opposed to a totality which the self constructs and controls, then it is even more important to view these porous figures as they are associated with the supernatural. This is not to suggest that Chesnutt is a purveyor of pseudoscience and mysticism, but rather that he uses the process of supernatural fiction to undermine the certainty on which rationalist discourse occurs. As such, the reader is conditioned not to believe in magic as truth but to resist visions of truth which purport to be based on purely empirical data. Furthermore, these stories show the inflexible bands which bind together these narratives of rational certainty and the oppressive practices of slavery and bigotry which require fixed hierarchies for their justification and perpetuation.

Against these fixed structures, Uncle Julius deploys a variety of counterpoints to help pave a path alternative to the strictly utilitarian and rationalist protocols represented by John's buffered skepticism. Allowing for an interpretation based on what "mought be," cautioning against choices likely to be "imposin'" on others, and encouraging an openness to possibilities beyond pure materialism, Uncle Julius helps provide the conditions for a porousness to others and to the natural world. Unlike those figures whose rationalist impulses force them into a morality which cannot escape its capitalistic framework, dealing an eye for an eye, the tales imagine a more capacious and accommodating morality, based in empathy and sensitive to emotion and experience. We see the fruits of this in each story, including Annie's ability to give another chance to a struggling youth, in the sister-in-law's eventual capacity to forge a love

beyond suspicions, and in the continual sense that authentic understanding of others will only come with the breaking down of barriers of our own sense of surety as readers.

Chapter 4

“Half Believed”: Spirituality and Women’s Circles in Mary Wilkins Freeman’s *The Wind in the Rose-Bush*

I. “Lapse into the Mystical”: Supernatural Fiction and “Selling Qualities”

If the last three collections created liminal spaces between the interior and exterior to help situate their fantastical ideas—Hawthorne’s romantic old manse, Melville and Chesnutt their respective unfinished and plantation piazzas—Mary Wilkins Freeman’s collection develops an even more fundamental relationship between domestic and fantastical space. Continuing a long convention of haunted house fiction, Freeman engages with a specific tradition of women writers using the haunted house to zero in on issues facing women in society. Written at the cusp of the twentieth century, Freeman’s collection, *The Wind in the Rose-Bush and Other Stories of the Supernatural* (1903), comprises one of the first collections of a woman’s supernatural short fiction. The collection’s diverse and elegant stories provide remarkable means to broach contemporary concerns about marriage, equality, motherhood, and marginality. And just as the stories draw on the cache of metaphors and imagery associated with the supernatural genres, so too do they develop an alternative to oppressive structures in emphasizing a community and communion between women faced with the remarkable occurrences. And like each collection of this study, Freeman’s uses this sense of uncertainty inherent to the destabilizing supernatural to critique the broad social and political frameworks whose oppressions emerge from and are bolstered by the tendencies of certainty in Western rationalist and materialist discourses.

In what is perhaps a continuation of the sexist assumptions which motivated many of the portrayals in Freeman’s writing, and despite widespread popularity in her lifetime, these works

have received even less critical attention than Chesnutt's likewise under-examined fiction. "Most major critics completely ignored these works," Beth Fisker writes, outside of a very few examples and mostly then just to suggest their unworthiness. Much of this neglect stems from the view that Freeman betrayed her forte (or perhaps her place?) in straying to the farthest point from the local-color realism which made her famous. Mary Reichardt's comprehensive study of Freeman's short fiction, the only of its kind, acknowledges the dearth of critical material on Freeman which is even more pronounced in terms of her supernatural work, conceding that some critics might be "tempted to dismiss regional writing as a minor offshoot of American realism" even as she was among "the most prolific and popular writers of her time" (ix). The particularly important intervention which Reichardt seeks is to revise views of Freeman, and indeed of local color realists at large, as simplistic and gimmicky. Reichardt argues that in Freeman's fiction "truth was myriad, consisting of not only the physical but the emotional, psychological, spiritual, mystical, and imaginative realms" (11). But even with an awareness of the reflexive dismissal of Freeman's supernatural work, Reichardt too seems to overlook the singularity of Freeman's interest in supernatural fiction, seeing primarily the "psychological condition of the persons who witness them [... being] forced to confront what they cannot rationalize" (68). This psychological condition is indeed compelling but still rests on the value systems which redeem the work from its supernatural trappings by locating the concerns in terms of the interior life of the mind. This re-inscribes Charles Taylor's theory of how secularity reframes enchantment by defining the experience of the spiritual as circumscribed within the mind's experience. Furthermore, the psychological view also problematically reproduces one of the exact problems Freeman's supernatural fiction explores: the mental pathologization of spiritual ideas which continually make women's experiences subject to medically and rationally motivated doubt.

Instead of this view, my study will approach the supernatural in Freeman's work not just as another means to explore the psychological depths for which her realism is famous but as a means to explore the numinous and ineffable in their own right and as they are conjured by the fantastical elements of plot.

It is slightly ironic that Freeman's supernatural work seems to draw ire both for being too tame in its departures from the real *and* in failing to cleave closely enough to the real toward which realism aspires. Shirley Marchalonis describes how Freeman's style was criticized as a mere reportage of facts, "moved by inspiration rather than creative power," (9) so that many modern critics disdain the mundanity of her supernatural stories. On the other hand, William Dean Howells helps encapsulate Freeman's contemporaries' discomfiture with supernatural literature itself, bordering on moralization:

We have a lurking fear at moments that Miss Wilkins would like to write entirely romantic stories about these honest people of hers; but her own love of truth and her perfect knowledge of such life as theirs forbid her to do this. There is apparently a conflict of purposes in her sketches which gives her art an undecided effect, or a divided effect as in certain of them where we make the acquaintance of her characters in their village of little houses, and lose it in the No Man's Land of exaggerated action and conventional emotion. In the interest of her art, which is so perfectly satisfying in the service of reality, it could almost be wished that she might once write a thoroughly romantic story, and wreak in it all the impulses she has in that direction. Then perhaps she might return to the right exercise of a gift which is one of the most precious in fiction. (qtd. in Marchalonis 20)

The prescriptive connotations of Howells' "lurking fear" of Freeman's tendency is particularly

disconcerting in that he suspects she has a personal affinity for the genre. Indeed, and despite her own occasional disparagement of fantastical writing, some of Freeman's most moving articulations of artistic aims and inspirations come from her engagement with the supernatural form as a place of possibility and promise. In a letter to Sarah Orne Jewett, whose supernatural fiction bears striking similarities to her own, Freeman writes, "I have felt somewhat uncertain as to how [one of the supernatural stories] would be liked. It is in some respects a departure from my usual vein, and I have made a little lapse into the mystical and romantic one for which I have a strong inclination, but do not generally yield to" (qtd. in Fisker 41). "Most of my work, is not really the kind I myself like," Freeman writes in another letter, "I want more symbolism, more mysticism. I left that out, because it struck me people did not want it, and I was forced to consider selling qualities" (qtd. in Fisker 42). The sentiment in these letters, and indeed the fact of them, begins to describe the society of women's spiritual circles which arose as a means for women to communicate and validate spiritual concerns outside of systems motivated by rationalist and materialist concerns. I suggest that this supernatural fiction offered, for Freeman, a place to explore non-rationalist ideas and to resist patriarchal values.

Rather than being mere one-offs, the stories in this collection come in a period of remarkable non-realist output on Freeman's part, sandwiched between the publication of *Understudies* and *Six Trees*, two spiritualist collections which "represent Freeman's fullest expression of the symbolic and mystical elements she desired in her fiction... they are premised on the Emersonian theses that 'nature is the symbol of spirit'" (Reichardt 76). The period also coincides with a time in the late nineteenth-century of remarkable productivity in terms of both women's short story writing and supernatural fiction. According to Jessica Salmonson "as much as seventy percent of the supernatural fiction [in magazines] was the work of women" (x).

Moreover, these weren't isolated stories of feminist concerns but expressions from a “community [as] these women knew one another's writing and supported one another's careers” (xi).

Salmonson establishes the connections and intertextual relations which define this community's “profound philosophical, metaphysical, psychological and spiritual questioning” specifically in terms of the supernatural's resistance to the “a rationalistic, materialistic, scientific, and secular culture [which] has restricted its definition of the ‘real’ to what is familiar and under rational control” (xvi). It is this capacity of the supernatural, to disrupt such totalizing social structures, which Freeman taps into with her own expression of the generic elements. Furthermore, her fiction dramatizes the communities of women who are faced with scrutiny and suspicion for their allowance of beliefs which run counter to these qualities of a secularist culture.

Considering these influences, correspondences, and publications, it is worth examining the intersections of Jewett and Freeman especially since it was to Jewett that Freeman expressed a spiritual interest in the supernatural which she felt inexpressible to the literary elite and to popular reading audiences—a view validated by the above opinion of Howells. In characterizing her own work, Jewett defines what she called, “imaginative realism [comprising] those unwritable things that the story holds in its heart, if it has any, that make the true soul of it” (Reichardt 10). What is striking here, as with Freeman's expression, is the spiritual sensibility that is more explicit than similar expressions in supernatural fiction by the like of Hawthorne, Melville, or Chesnutt. And similarly, Freeman's interest in “mysticism” parallels Jewett's interest in a spirituality which found expression in the supernatural.

Jewett's exploration of supernatural fiction as a means to explore spirituality and women's circles has been examined by several others, including Terry Heller, who focuses specifically on the communities forged in terms of their shared spiritual investment. Describing

what she calls, “Jewett's religion of friendship,” Heller describes attempts “to advance ideals that could effectively oppose increasing materialism, extreme individualism, impersonal patriarchal institutions, capitalist commercialism, and an appropriating colonialism” (78-79). Heller illustrates how it can be “seen as an allegory of Jewett's resistance, not only to the ‘realism’ William Dean Howells demanded for the *Atlantic* [...] but also to appropriation and assimilation by a materialism that would eviscerate her unique identity and spiritual purpose” (84). More practically, Jewett’s “religion of friendship” helps portray women “sympathiz[ing] and enter[ing] into the ‘fantasy’” of their community (85) and according to Heller, “undoes this Protestant ideology, with its reliance upon scriptural authority more than personal experience. Her alternative belief system does without the authoritative narrative of cosmic purpose that undergirds identity and authorizes hierarchical and exclusive churches” (95). Connecting Jewett’s spiritualism and her supernatural fiction, Priscilla Leder suggests that Jewett’s ghosts serve a religious function as emblems of “a women's religion of healing, hospitality, and community” (28). A sense of spiritualism forging communities for women is not just reflected in Freeman’s writing, but is actualized in her correspondence with and participation within this community of women writing supernatural fiction.

It is also worth noting that, in distinction from many notable religions of the period, spiritual communities were a public space in which women were allowed and represented in leadership roles (Bennett 327). Unlike some of the more epistemological intersections of supernatural fiction and faith in previous chapters, where the uncertainty of faith is modeled in ambiguous stories, Jewett and Freeman seemed more interested in the way investments in spiritual concerns helped to forge supportive communities. These women produced works that are “*outside* the frame of reason, that are anti-reason, unreasonable, unrealistic [...] challenging]

the “real” as it is defined by a materialistic, masculine, patriarchal culture” (Salmonson xvii). The existence of this community was so crucial because “[s]peaking of things that man has declared non-existent has always made women vulnerable to charges of exaggeration, neurosis, madness” (xviii). Carpenter and Kolmar also suggest that “ghost stories by women challenge assumptions of men’s work in the genre... women often seem to develop stories in conscious antithesis to men’s stories” (10). Furthermore, they suggest that “women writers seem more likely to portray natural and supernatural experience along a continuum. Boundaries between the two are not absolute but fluid, so that the supernatural can be accepted, connected with, reclaimed, and can often possess a quality of familiarity” (12). This sense of *familiarity* helps to situate the supernatural in the domestic space which is subject to the critique of gendered expectations but also establishes the supernatural leap of faith as not just an epistemological event but also a communal one, conducting a “replacement of reason as the key interpretive faculty with another faculty: sympathy” (13). As I read Freeman’s texts, I continuously return to this terminology of sympathy, both as an ethical posture towards an other, but also as relation between a story teller and a sympathetic listener, as a means to demonstrate how Freeman’s stories used the uncertainty of the supernatural to both knit together women’s relationships and to do so as a form of resistance to a reductive and totalizing posture of rationalistic certainty.

Having established the contexts and discourses surrounding women’s supernatural fiction of the nineteenth-century, I’ll speak to some of the particulars which mark out Freeman’s work and the ways she contributes to my overarching examination of uncertainty. While the text carries thematic concerns across the entire collection, each of the three sections I have organized help illustrate the ways the supernatural, with its investment in preserving uncertainty, helps to describe the ways that women’s concerns were marginalized as less real and less important. The

first way this marginalization appears is in the theme of immateriality of the supernatural, immateriality suggesting the coded concerns are without meaningful weight or beside the point. This quality emerges as a continual recourse to themes and symbols of immateriality to explore the issues faced by the female characters. The second way this marginalization appears is the dismissal of women's perspective as unreliable, usually insofar as they are seen to be emotionally subjective or outbursts of petty gossip which cannot be taken at face value. The final way this marginalization of women's experience is explored in Freeman's supernatural is with the theme of sanity and the pathologization of women who give weight to views deemed outside of the spectrum of current rational discourse. In the next three sections I explore how each of these three qualities deploy the unstable and uncertain qualities of the supernatural itself as a means to disrupt the totalizing tendencies of certainty and in so doing provide a feminist counter-narrative to the more patriarchal and materialist rationalism of the period.

II. "No Accounting for Shadows": Insubstantiality, Materiality, and Belief

"Shadows on the Wall" describes a rather classic supernatural set-up with a group of siblings dealing with the immediate aftermath of their brother's death. The (super)nature of the story entails the sudden appearance of a shadow on the wall of a room in the ancestral home, just as the sisters discuss the mysterious death of their brother, Edward—which occurred shortly after an argument with the eldest brother, Henry. While the shadow on the wall, suggesting the possible sinister nature of the brother's death, occupies the place of privilege in the story's title and archetype, it is the community of sisters which fleshes out the bulk of the text and draws our attention. Their own differentiations underscore our social preoccupation with substantialness as a signifier of meaning and value, accompanying the shadow subplot as it challenges and

reimagines such distinctions and assumptions. This shadow functions as an example of the insubstantial supernatural which appears in all of the stories of the collection, as Freeman's expression of the supernatural is essentially always in terms of a power or force that is itself intangible. But "The Shadows on the Wall," like "The Vacant Lot" which I explore next, showcases this theme and explicates its connections to concerns of uncertainty and gender. The supernatural shadow demonstrates how things deemed insubstantial are valued as less and how this categorization is extended to concerns women face to undermine the reality of their struggles.

A primary source of this differentiation is in the bodily descriptions of the women themselves. In the second paragraph, we are introduced to all three sisters, including the way their figures, substantial or not, distinguish them:

[Caroline] was elderly, tall, and harshly thin, with a hard colourlessness of face. She spoke not with acrimony, but with grave severity. Rebecca Ann Glynn, younger, stouter and rosy of face between her crinkling puffs of gray hair, gasped, by way of assent. She sat in a wide flounce of black silk in the corner of the sofa, and rolled terrified eyes from her sister Caroline to [...] Emma Glynn, the one beauty of the family. She was beautiful still, with a large, splendid, full-blown beauty; she filled a great rocking-chair with her superb bulk of femininity (3).

In case such distinctions and their associations might be lost on us, we are immediately told that Emma's strength of character is reflected in her statuesque presence: "never had Emma Brigham lost sight of her own importance amidst the waters of tribulation. She was always awake to the consciousness of her own stability in the midst of vicissitudes and the splendor of her permanent bearing" (3). It is a presence that coincides with her refusal to be cowed. When Carolyn

commands Emma, at the height of the action, “[y]ou had better stay where you are,” Emma responds that she is “‘going to see,’ [...] she folded her skirts so tightly that her bulk with its swelling curves was revealed in a black silk sheath” (17). In these moments, the text illustrates substantialness as a means to measure importance. But as the text moves on it also works to undermine and reimagine substantialness. The text does not just suggest that it is an imprecise tool but re-thinks its application, suggesting, for example how the bulk of Emma’s presence stands opposed to the sharp lines of Carolyn’s. The oldest brother and possible murderer is associated with firmness and a hard presence that is differentiated from the soft and billowy sisters: “Henry Glynn looked more like [Carolyn] than the others. Both had the same hard delicacy of form and feature, both were tall and almost emaciated” (9). This description of Henry as both “hard” but “emaciated” helps to, without a better term available, *flesh out* the issue of substance and insubstantiality in the text. Henry is associated with a materiality in his hard features and in his hard character but he is otherwise lacking in the crucial weightiness of humanity in the others—being physically hard but in more meaningful ways insubstantial.

Henry’s hardness of spirit also emerges in the events that precede his brother’s death, the arguments about which help to highlight his antipathy toward the spiritual community which his sisters will comprise. Describing Henry and the fight with the now deceased brother, the women clarify:

"[Henry] had always been so prudent himself, and worked hard at his profession, and there Edward had never done anything but spend, and it must have looked to him as if Edward was living at his expense, but he wasn't."

"No, he wasn't."

"It was the way father left the property—that all the children should have a home

here" (5).

Henry works hard, expects the same of others, and cannot imagine that another's laziness does not come at his expense. In this fashion his hardness suggests the materiality of his concerns and this materiality results in a relation to the world that insists on action and reaction, payment of debts and just recompense. "Do you remember," one of the sisters asks "that time he killed the cat because she had scratched him?" (6). We see Henry's hard view of exchange which hints toward the possible explanation of his brother's death. And significantly, the work referenced here that Henry undertakes so diligently is that of a physician (19)—a key symbol in supernatural literature, evident in Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Charles Chesnutt and others. The physician's occupation of attending to the body contrasts to a concern for spiritual and emotional health which the women showcase. What is more, Henry's understanding of the human body in its solely physical sense obscures his ability to view it as anything more, a quality which will emerge in his dismissal of any supernatural possibility on the grounds of a rationalist certainty.

When Henry appears in the story it is continually with the qualities of absolute certainty, comprehension, and dismissal, as he entered the room and "cast a covertly sharp, comprehensive glance" (9). His "comprehension" is reiterated as "a confidence in him" which was capable of "stealing over" his sisters (10). He dismisses their calls for an autopsy, saying there "was no need. I am perfectly certain as to the cause of his death" (10). This confident and comprehensive certainty is first startled into anger when the women show him the shadow that has appeared on the wall. His response was to declare that it "must be something in the room!" (14). When no material explanation for the shadow appears he scoffs, like the physician who laughs at the slave's supernatural explanation of illness in Chesnutt's tales:

"What an absurdity," he said easily. "Such a to-do about a shadow" [...]

"You know my way of wanting to leap to the bottom of a mystery, and that shadow does look—queer, like—and I thought if there was any way of accounting for it I would like to without any delay" [...]

"Oh, there is no accounting for shadows," he said, and he laughed again. "A man is a fool to try to account for shadows." (15-16)

This sequence shows how quickly Henry's materialist insistence turns to sneering dismissal. Like his "certainty" of his brother's death, Henry's is a concern for accounting material concerns and dismissing what is unaccountable. This refusal is most strongly clarified in Henry's actions when the women have left the room. "Henry Glynn, evidently reasoning that the source of the strange shadow must be between the table on which the lamp stood and the wall," (17) and his rational response is to systematically attack the space with a sword. "Not an inch was left unpierced," one sister reports, "[h]e seemed to have divided the space into mathematical sections. He brandished the sword with a sort of cold fury and calculation; the blade gave out flashes of light, the shadow remained unmoved (17). Here, Henry's materialist and rationalist approach to the supernatural are brought to prominence in his attempt to interact with the spiritual with a physical tool and with the significant language of "mathematical" and "calculation."

Despite Henry's desires to "account" for the shadow, the story ends without ever clarifying exactly where the shadow has come from, fixing the text firmly within Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as "occup[ying] the duration of uncertainty" (25) between empirical and supernatural explanations. It is this suspension in uncertainty which, as I have continually suggested in previous chapters, vitalizes in the reader a corresponding resistance to

totalizing cultural narratives, such as rationalism, that seek exhaustive understanding and the control such understanding bestows. More importantly, this uncertainty conditions an uncertain openness to others and otherness as a more ethical relation in the world. Toward understanding this, Emmanuel Levinas theorizes a human impulse toward totalizations and recognizes also the historical situatedness of totality with the onset of rationalism, so that “the role played by totality in hermeneutics would then indicate that reason and totality are indeed inseparable” (42).

Levinas goes on to describe that “the true function of totalizing thought does not consist in looking at being, but in determining it by organizing it” (47) wherein “Totalization is the history of humanity qua realization of rational universality in mores and institutions” (48). In this manner, “Totality validates the part, which would justify a religious or personalist conception of man at the heart of creation” (50). Levinas distinguishes the alternative in an infinite openness to alterity, wherein the “alterity of the Infinite can consist in not being reduced” (75) within the self’s totalizing impulse toward knowledge. In this fashion, Henry’s continual recourse to reductive rationalist narratives corresponds both to his oppressive posture toward Edward and toward his sisters’ view of the supernatural events. The sisters, meanwhile, persist in their uncertainty with regard to the nature of events and likewise keep an open posture towards the possibility of meaning. In so doing, they relinquish the allures of certainty and mastery of knowledge but find instead a community of sympathy and spiritual possibility in their relations.

It is ironical that in trying to excuse Henry’s having fought with his brother just before his death, the sisters insist on Henry’s ignorance of the impending death as a means to exonerate him. “‘Of course he did not *know*,’ [...] ‘Of course he did not know it,’ said Caroline quickly. She turned on her sister with a strange sharp look of suspicion. ‘How could he have known it?’ said she. Then she shrank as if from the other’s possible answer. ‘Of course you and I both know

he could not” (3-4). The three sisters demonstrate a continual recourse to uncertainty in pronounced distinction to their brother, constantly communicating around the subject of the supernatural which cannot itself be communicated. Over the course of the ordeal, each vaguely insinuates both the presence of the supernatural and the possibility of their eldest brother’s guilt in its existence, using ambiguous language in stark contrast to their brother’s dangerous certainty. “What do you mean?” one asks another, in regards to the brothers’ conflict as a possible reason for the subsequent death. “I guess you don’t mean anything,” she repeats, then going on to say, “[n]obody means anything” (4). This conversation is repeated essentially verbatim a few passages later as another sister asks in regard to another insinuation, “[w]hat do you mean by that?” (6). Unlike Henry, and despite their desire for accounting for the terrifying appearance of the shadow, the sisters are not compelled to present a comprehensive explanation, nor to pin down their suspicions into rational knowledge. In fact, it is the communication between them, vague as it is, which solidifies their sorority and spiritual connection. As they discuss the matters of their brothers, the “three sisters’ souls seemed to meet on one common ground of terrified understanding though their eyes” (8). While Henry’s strict views cause violence and discord, the sisters’ uncertainty leads to a spiritual community which is capable of compassion, consideration, and mutual support.

It is critical to see the community of women in the text as a resistance to this dismissive certainty of the patriarchal forces. These forces include both those which explain away the ineffable and those that manifest as (often violent) enforcers of Western values of efficiency, industriousness, and rationalism. The women sharing in the uncertain discourse are not pressured to codify their own views and demonstrate a distinct alternative to their eldest brother, whose views (likely) resulted in the oppressive violence against his younger brother. The women’s

associations with uncertainty, their spiritual community coming together on common ground, demonstrate precisely the sort of feminist resistance to reductive and materialist rationalism which Jewett explores with her own supernatural fiction. Heller's description of Jewett's "religion of friendship" seems helpful in understanding the community of women here. Jewett's fictional communities provide an "alternative belief system [...] without the authoritative narrative of cosmic purpose that undergirds identity and authorizes hierarchical and exclusive churches" (95). In Freeman's texts these authoritative structures are figured most clearly in the patriarchal Henry who exerts power over his sisters—who themselves find strength in their openness to the insubstantial which Henry would dismiss.

"The Vacant Lot" presents a strikingly similar depiction of supernatural occurrence intersecting with the domestic space of the household, along with the gendered and economic functions ascribed to them. And once again, the supernatural's manifestation is insubstantial enough in nature to allow for its dismissal on materialist or rationalist grounds. In this story, it is not a recent crime which inspires the spectral disturbances but a familial one which visits upon a family whose home and financial security rest on ill-gotten gains. The story begins with a family's move to a better location "due to a sudden access of wealth from the death of a relative and the desire of Mrs. Townsend to secure better advantages for her son George, sixteen years old, in the way of education, and for her daughter Adrianna, ten years older, better matrimonial opportunities" (54). Not only does the "sudden access of wealth" anticipate the exploration of unjust economic situations, the difference in the children's prospects signals asymmetrical opportunities which will become important as the story progresses. Notably, the son would secure "advantages [...] in the way of education" while the daughter would find "better matrimonial opportunities." Like the last story, "The Vacant Lot" uses insubstantiality as a

supernatural trope to explore the intersections of materialist means of accounting the world and the gendered way that power is distributed and perspectives are marginalized.

One of the ways the story characterizes approaches to the world that either accommodate or extinguish the possibility of the supernatural, and not dissimilar to Chesnutt's Yankee narrators, is by associating the reductive *materialist* views with a capitalistic impulse which thinks almost solely in terms of *material* gains. The family's inheritance was "money gotten in evil fashion, and the matter hushed up with a high hand for inquirers by the imperious Townsends who terrorized everybody" even though the current family patriarch "had gotten his little competence from his store by honest methods—the exchanging of sterling goods and true weights for country produce and country shillings" (55). In this fashion, the story goes to pains to distinguish the inheritance as ill-gotten even as it acknowledges David's commitment to capital exchange. This hypocrisy suggests a lingering problematic view of money in the current family, even if it is not criminal. David, the father, is "sober and reliable, with intense self-respect and a decided talent for the management of money [... so that] he took great delight in his sudden wealth by legacy" (55). Of note here is that David's posture toward money is singularly mathematical, exchanging as precisely as possible, but is not opposed to taking capital without questioning its origin. More important is their having purchased with the money, in an "exercise of his native shrewdness in a bargain," a home "with the mystery of a lower price than it was worth" (57). This moment helps to reiterate the type of plausible deniability David maintains in terms of immoral procedure in both unquestioned inheritance and questionable purchases. As it turns out, the home is so inexpensive because it is haunted by the ghosts of the families wronged by the buyer's ancestors.

Like the last story, the nature of the hauntings is insistently insubstantial, a fact that

subjects it to suspicion by the figure of David, whose materialism encompasses both valences of valuing money and in dismissing the value of the immaterial. The first sign of something supernatural enlists the same symbolically immaterial shadow as the previous text and also positions the phenomenon within a notably domestic or feminine sphere:

"All I could see was the shadow of somebody, very slim, hanging out the clothes, and—"

"What?"

"I could see the shadows of the things flappin' on their line."

"You couldn't see the clothes?"

"Only the shadow on the ground." (59)

This moment serves both to position the manifestation as an insubstantiality but also to fix it within the feminine space, itself so often disregarded as insubstantial. When faced with this occurrence we see the distinction between responses in the husband's and wife's reactions:

"Nothing at all," replied David Townsend stoutly. He was remarkable for courage and staunch belief in actualities. He was now denying to himself that he had seen anything unusual.

"Oh, there was," moaned his wife.

"I saw something," said George, in a sullen, boyish bass.

The maid sobbed convulsively and so did Adrianna for sympathy.

"We won't talk any about it" [David replies]. (60)

This response is rather familiar by now. "As for David Townsend," the story describes, "he spent a good deal of his time in the lot watching the shadows, but he came to no explanation, although he strove to satisfy himself with many" (60). Much like the eldest brother in the last story, we see

a figure resisting the shadow's existence precisely because it fails to conform to the rationalist narrative of the perceiver. David goes on to say, "I don't care; you can never account for such things" speaking almost identically to the previous story's patriarch, in suggesting that unaccountable things must be ejected from our concerns and cannot be cared about (61).

The story's next several supernatural occurrences are all similarly insubstantial in their appearance, perfectly allowing for their dismissal by one who sustains such "staunch belief in actualities." After the shadows are seen hanging up clothes on the line the smell of cooking cabbages begins to suffuse the air. Once again, it is important to note both the insubstantiality here but also the domestic associations of this phenomenon. Like the dismissal of women's labor, these occurrences are seen as unworthy of discussion or consideration. When the wife attempts to insist on the remarkableness of the occurrence, she is again rebuffed:

"It isn't the cabbage alone," said Mrs. Townsend.

"And a few shadows," added David. "I am tired of such nonsense. (62)

Again we come across a moment of explicit dismissal, in rationalistic terms of sense and nonsense. And the literal event of the shadows is dismissed with the use of the same term in its figurative sense, a shadow as something not real or an immaterial figment mistaken for something "actual".

What is remarkable to note is that the husband's dismissal is not just a rational position taken in good faith but is rather irrational in itself. Much like the eldest brother of the last story, looking like a fool stabbing shadows with a sword, we see David acting irrationally in trying to rationalize away the supernatural:

"You will find out some day that that is no more to be regarded than the cabbage,"
said her husband.

"You can't account for that wet sheet hitting my face," said Mrs. Townsend, doubtfully.

"You imagined it."

"I *felt* it." (62)

Here, David is dismissing even bodily experience in an effort to preserve his world view, despite his wife's willingness to relay her belief in the form of physical senses. The absurd lengths he takes to accommodate his ostensibly rational view are in evidence with the next supernatural manifestation as well, when there appears "a great black group of people crossing [...] just in front of the vacant lot." David races in at the sound of rumbling: "'Did you fall?' he asked inconsequently, as if his wife, who was small, could have produced such a manifestation by a fall" (64). Once again his rational desire to account for all occurrences in a material fashion leads to a leap far beyond logic and reason itself.

David's reliance on reason becomes its own absurdity, almost a superstitious talisman against the supernatural. His invocations become more and more incessant as the story progresses and seem increasingly irrational.

"Now, look here, both of you," he said. "This is nonsense. You'll die sure enough of fright if you keep on this way. I was a fool myself to be startled" [...] "It is nothing but an earthquake," persisted Mr. Townsend. "It acted just like that. Things always are broken on the walls, and the middle of the room isn't affected. I've read about it." (64)

It is important to note that his rationalism is not so much a perfectly coherent way of observing the universe but a posture of certainty and of power which certainty bestows. This supernatural's existence outside of these protocols causes increasing frustration in Mr. Townsend who demands, "I'd like to know what in thunder all this means" (64). Furthermore, he polices the

women of his household based precisely on this value system, demanding of his daughter shortly after, “do have more sense!” (65). Again, later he commands “[h]old your tongue if you can't talk sense” (67). Much like the prerogative of the son as compared to the daughter in the story's opening, this sequence demonstrates the asymmetrical power structures surrounding what is deemed knowledge and the suitability of the supernatural to expressing this issue.

But it is not just the framework of gender roles which coincides with the view of a rationalism closed to the possibility of spirituality, it is also the values and logic of capitalism. “As for my selling a house I paid only five thousand for when it's worth twenty-five,” Mr. Townsend declaims, in response to the women's suggestion that they move, “for any such nonsense as this, I won't!” (65). Much like the narrator of Chesnutt's conjure tales, whose rationalism is inextricable from his faith in the logic of capitalism, Mr. Townsend's refusal to give “weight” to the immaterial reflects a faith in the very icon of materialism. Perhaps most telling of this conflation on Mr. Townsend's part is his response to the miraculous events. “What on earth's to pay in that vacant lot now?” he demands at one point, a phrasing we might overlook if he did not repeat just a bit later: “[w]hat's to pay here?” (66). This insistence on seeing the events in terms of capital emerges aptly, not because the events are materially accountable in the way Mr. Townsend desires to see them, but because the haunting is related to the ill-gotten gains with which the Townsend's purchased the house. In this fashion the logic of capitalism is not able to dispel the malicious supernatural force but rather capitalism is connected to the source of the supernatural force.

In keeping with this dissertation's primary claim, that the supernatural short story provided a key means for nineteenth century authors to provide cautions against the practices of certainty and provoke openness to possibility in an uncertain faith, this story too shows the

danger of transforming belief into knowledge. In the story's climax, Mr. Townsend mocks the women who look for the spiritual significance of the haunting, jeering at them: "Ain't you a church member? [...] what be you afraid of? You ain't done nothin' wrong, have ye?" (68). This expression relies on a view of religious belief which is purely causal in its most rudimentary sense. This view of religion, like the rational certainty, reflects the modern buffered self which Charles Taylor defines as emerging in the nineteenth century. For this "modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind," Taylor claims, "the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them." This is alternative to the the porous self for which "the source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside the 'mind.'" (38). Mr. Townsend's buffered and materialist rationalism allows him to position himself as the sole source of meaning and possessor of control over experience. The women's openness to a spiritual possibility outside of the causal effects of human action is mocked by the family patriarch. The only other man in the story, the agent who sold the house to the family, reiterates the father's response as he sees the house as "such a bargain as I never handled before" and regards their story and desire to sell such an asset as "beyond belief" (70). This parallel between these two figures connects the patriarchal assumptions of power and control—bolstered by the prerogative of gendered, presumably rationalist, education—with the materialist reduction of understanding which is closed to uncertainty. While the story, I'd argue, doesn't in fact advocate for a codified belief in supernatural spirits or their retributive malignance, it does work to undermine the positions closed off to spiritual sensitivity. What is more, the communication between women and their continual openness to the supernatural in opposition to the masculine figures, helps give weight and value to those qualities of spirit seen as immaterial to the men.

Freeman's use of ghost stories to explore valences of knowing and belief seems to strive for a degree of open ambiguity, resisting the patriarchal position of mastery even as it departs from a fixed religious faith. While the rationalists' surety is overtly criticized in the story, fixed religious structures, and how they mirror this surety, are likewise shown to have totalizing tendencies. Mr. Townsend's recourse to orthodoxy reflects some of Freeman's own religious upbringing against which she struggled in her work. Reichardt demonstrates how Freeman's ghost stories often catalogued "the failures of conventional religion" (67) seeing how "truth was myriad, consisting of not only the physical but the emotional, psychological, spiritual, mystical, and imaginative realms" (11). In this fashion, Mr. Townsend's claim that retributive spirits cannot be real because the family has done nothing wrong reflects the "orthodox Congregational theology the Wilkins family and many of their New England neighbors practiced, [wherein] 'it was always assumed that the poverty of the poor was a punishment for sin'" (Reichardt 5). But the women of the story demonstrate a more elastic understanding of the world, both natural and supernatural. They are sensitive to those subtle insubstantial qualities they experience and bolster each other in recognizing the supernatural disturbances, even as they are dismissed by the patriarchal father.

Similar to the shadows in the previous story, the supernatural occurrences here are both literally and figuratively subject to dismissal for being outside a materialist understanding of the real. Like "Jewett's religion of friendship ... visible in much post-Civil War women's regionalist writing" of which Freeman would be included, the generic and spiritual ideals "effectively oppose increasing materialism, extreme individualism, impersonal patriarchal institutions, capitalist commercialism" (Heller 78). The two stories I analyze use tropes of the supernatural that are deliberately immaterial and unverifiable by physical measurements to position them as

concerns of a spiritual natural. And in so doing they produce a circumstance in which women come together to verify, reinforce, and defend their experience of it. It is worth noting that such communion and the spiritual experience which gives rise to it “threatens to dissolve many of the structures upon which social definitions of reality depend, those rigid boundaries between life and death, waking and dreaming states, self and not-self, bodily and non-bodily existence, past and future, reason and madness, that have insisted on the substantiability of matter—which is all there is to a materialistic mind—and the insubstantiability of spirit” (Salmonson xviii). In this fashion, Mr. Townsend is absurd to guard against his wife and daughter’s insistence of the occurrences, not because they didn’t happen, but because his position is predicated on their being immaterial in every sense of the word.

I will continue to track the importance of the insubstantiality and unsubstantiated nature of Freeman’s supernatural stories as I move on, just as I will look back to these stories and how their elements also persist across the other topics of the collection. But it is important to clarify, before continuing, the historically significant place of Freeman’s work. Women writers of the supernatural at the end of the century, such as Freeman and Jewett, were both advocative of the need for spiritualist communities but also self-aware as to the supernatural’s resistance to “doctrines such as materialism” (6). They intentionally used the genre to express frustrations with “Enlightenment rationalism” (6) according to a study by Jeffrey Weinstock. “Supernatural fiction,” he argues “which developed alongside Spiritualism in the United States and England—and likely drew inspiration from it—also can be viewed as a response to or backlash against nineteenth-century materialism and the legacy of Enlightenment rationalism” (6-7). In this sense, it is crucial to see the spiritual sympathy as not merely a coping mechanism but as a front against the rise and dominance of reductive strains of Enlightenment rationalism and the men whose

positions of power it bolstered.

III. “Ain’t Nonthin’ Weak About that Woman”: Emotion, Sympathy, and Reliability

While not departing in form from the last two stories “Luella Miller” and “The Lost Ghost” reinforce a major component of many ghost stories by women of the period and of Freeman’s in particular. In essence both stories center in on the reliability of women story-tellers and use elements of the supernatural to help measure out the ways women’s discourses were dismissed out of hand. This dismissal was not just in terms of their insubstantialness or their being unsubstantiated like in the last stories, but in terms of the reliability of women and of emotionality more broadly. As with all the stories in this collection, and indeed of those comprising this study at large, “Luella Miller” and “The Lost Ghost” deploy the temptation to reduce or dismiss the supernatural as a means to highlight the tendency to reductively account for meaning based on dominant cultural narratives and power structures. In resisting the temptations to dismiss, the readers extend their capacity for empathy and openness to others, which is also required for the supernatural story to have any traction or meaning for the reader. In these two texts, the supernatural occupies a series of events which readers, along with the story’s listeners, are capable of doubting even as such doubt is tantamount to betrayal of the speaker’s trust. Instead of this, the women telling the framed tales to other women in these stories helps to model the sort of spiritualist community where women often found a voice to speak in the late nineteenth century and a means to speak of values, concerns, and urges counter to the materialist emphasis of the dominant culture.

“Luella Miller” carries the distinction of being one of the more widely anthologized of Freeman’s supernatural tales, and rightly so, as it details a rather novel and compelling take on

the vampire story. It is framed as the tale of “one friendless old soul” (39) in a small town who “had the gift of description, although her thoughts were clothed in the rude vernacular of her native village” (40). She tells of Luella Miller, a beautiful “pliant,” “yielding,” but “unbreakable” woman whose power over those around her commands absolute devotion, continually leading to her attendants’ deaths. Our narrator details the victims of Luella’s hypnotic power as they serve her one by one until their untimely deaths, the first victim being a young man who’d once been a possible suitor to the narrator herself. In the framed tale’s climax, the narrator derides Luella for sucking the life from those around her and helps to ostracize Luella from the village, which is an effective death sentence for the beautiful woman who lets others work for her and seems unable to do for herself.

In a slight nod to the theme of belief and doubt, both in supernatural storytelling terms and religious terms, the town’s pastor is described speaking from “the pulpit with covert severity against the sin of superstition; [yet] still the belief prevailed... unhallowed by nearly half a century of superstitious fear” (39). It is a good thing that, despite this ban, our narrator is a singularly strong woman, and “never in all her life had she ever held her tongue for any will save her own, and she never spared the truth when she essayed to present it” (40). With these two lines, the text proposes several intersecting concerns in how readers approach the text, including those religious and superstitious, but also describing the opportunity to accept or rebuke the “truth” of our assertive woman speaker. Despite this set-up in which the supernatural invites us to doubt even as we are told our speaker is honest to a fault, much of the criticism of the short story accedes to the view that the supernatural story of Luella as a vampire is a coding for the storyteller’s jealousy of the prettier Luella. These critical readings argue that the story’s ambiguity emerges out of an unreliability based on the natural jealousy which makes our

otherwise honest narrator speak dishonestly. But I suggest that this reading is actually a false trail, a reading which reifies the dismissal of women's perspectives as petty and suspect and which reinforces the closed-minded and moralizing tone of the "severe" minister.

Instead of interpreting our narrator's tale as inspired by her being jealous of a prettier woman who stole the affection of a suitor, I interpret this story as the earnest portrayal by our narrator of Luella embodying one of the few roles available to her: that of the pedestaled and pampered woman. To be suspicious of the narrator as jealous and petty is to see this as a story of women competing over male affection and assume the supernatural trappings are a mask—or, worse, an irrational fantasy—which codes their rivalry for men. To accept the narrator's version, on the other hand, is to see Luella's monstrous invalidity in both the pitiful and horrific terms which the narrator describes as a life-sucking social relation. This latter reading would "sympathize and enter into the 'fantasy'" which Heller describes as a function of nineteenth-century women's supernatural writing and the communities it created (85). The creature that is Luella is not a coded rival in love, then, but is rather the ultimate embodiment of the feminine "virtue" of delicacy—delicacy to the point that the woman is an object of worship but an object nonetheless. Luella's first husband "worshiped her" and likewise her sister-in-law "just set her eyes" by her until each of them simply "faded" away in service of the beautiful woman (41). "He always got the breakfast and let Luella lay abed," the narrator describes, "did all the sweepin' and the washin' and the ironin' and most of the cookin'. He couldn't bear to have Luella lift her finger, and she let him do for her" (42). Similarly, after the husband's death, the sister-in-law takes up the care of Luella, continually assuming Luella is incapable of doing it herself (42).

The narrator's suspicions of Luella's vampiric existence are just suspicions until Luella turns to the narrator's own mother for help. Our narrator "told [Luella] that she'd killed her

husband and everybody that had anythin' to do with her, and she'd thank her to leave her mother alone. Luella went into hysterics" (44). This view of the hysterical woman is telling but so too is the clarification that Luella was "laughin' and cryin' and goin' on as if she was the centre of all creation" (44). In this fashion, we get the sense that Luella's performance of grief is tied to her status as an object of worship that has led to the dangers of being near her. Notably, the text makes implicitly clear that even though she is dangerous, it is a result of her objectification at the hands of society, which provides the root causes more than any personal failings. Not only does Luella seem unconscious of her power, she feels for those around her and "did act real fond of Lily" even as she drank up her life (43). Most crucial is the language which positions Luella as an object rather than agent in the story. She is described as a "little pink-and-white thing" (46) showing that in becoming an object of worship, she is deprived of human agency. The doctor similarly insists that "Mrs. Miller is not strong, [...] and she is quite right in not agitating herself" (47). This diagnosis continually justifies Luella's behavior, becoming the self-fulfillment of her *not* being able to do for herself. Most telling of Luella being positioned as a drain on society by the role made available to her, is the narrator's description of Luella when confronted; "Luella she jest set and stared at me for all the world like a doll-baby that was so abused that it was comin' to life" (49). This description of her as doll-like perfectly encapsulates the infantilization and objectification of the pampered and dainty woman who is incapable of doing for herself. And finally, Luella is later described "like a baby with scissors in its hand cuttin' everybody without knowin' what it was doin'" (50), once again patronizingly describing her as being without full agency in her actions.

One of the complexities of the story, however, lies in how we are to understand this figure, once we realize that her monstrosity is not furnished by interior motives but exterior

impositions. Given the continual recourse to women's spiritual communities in the collection, we may be inclined to be critical of the narrator's hardness to Luella's condition, similar to so many of the men in the collection who do not sympathize. For instance, the narrator fights with the doctor regarding Luella:

'Weak heart,' says she, 'weak heart; weak fiddlesticks! There ain't nothin' weak about that woman. She's got strength enough to hang onto other folks till she kills 'em. Weak? It was my poor mother that was weak: this woman killed her as sure as if she had taken a knife to her.' (47)

In this passage we certainly see the strength of our narrator in confronting the medical doctor, a figure continually symbolic for ministering only to the physical body in supernatural fiction. But this strength is also dismissive of Luella's struggles, a failure to see the "weak heart" as the result of the social impositions under which Luella toils. Clarifying this critique of the narrator, even as the narrator's voice and perspective are crucial, is the admission of our narrator that there "was somethin' about Luella Miller seemed to draw the heart right out of you, but she didn't draw it out of ME" (48). This failure of sympathy is critical in the text, especially in so far as women's circles of communication are seen as sources of strength and spiritual reinforcement in the broader collection. The narrator does, however, seem to gain sympathy for Luella as the text comes to a close noting that it "seemed to her right that other folks that wa'n't any better able than she was herself should wait on her, and she couldn't get it through her head that anybody should think it WA'N'T right" (49), which seems a recognition of Luella's internalization of the role society created for her. More specifically, the narrator becomes increasingly sympathetic as an age-old and gendered ostracizing begins to take place against Luella: "a good deal of feelin' and pretty dark whispers. Folks said the days of witchcraft had come again, and they were pretty

shy of Luella” (50). In this fashion, the society which conditioned Luella into an object of draining worship then marginalizes her for the same—which ultimately produces in the narrator sympathy for Luella’s fate.

The story’s end only increases this sympathy, as Luella “had a dreadful hard time” according to the narrator and “was pretty sick, and as near as I could make out nobody dared go near her” (52). It is the narrator herself who plays witness, though not attendant, to Luella’s end.

"I saw what I saw, and I know I saw it, and I will swear on my death bed that I saw it. I saw Luella Miller and Erastus Miller, and Lily, and Aunt Abby, and Maria, and the Doctor, and Sarah, all goin' out of her door, and all but Luella shone white in the moonlight, and they were all helpin' her along till she seemed to fairly fly in the midst of them. Then it all disappeared. I stood a minute with my heart poundin', then I went over there. I thought of goin' for Mrs. Babbit, but I thought she'd be afraid. So I went alone, though I knew what had happened. Luella was layin' real peaceful, dead on her bed."

This was the story that the old woman, Lydia Anderson, told, but the sequel was told by the people who survived her, and this is the tale which has become folklore. (53)

This sequence accomplishes the apotheosis of several major concerns, including tying together the concerns of women’s reliability, of the supernatural spirituality community, and of sympathy as a means of interpretation alternative to suspicion. Our narrator’s insistence on what she saw at the end is particularly telling in light of the tendency of critics to see the story emerge from the narrator’s jealousy. Instead, of this pettiness, we see the narrator coming ever closer to the sort of sympathy and understanding that readers might take in accepting the story. Furthermore, a broadly established sense that supernatural fiction after the Civil War took pains to account for a humane afterlife, wherein individual relationships are preserved, is well in evidence here.

Kolmar and Carpenter describe how such supernatural fiction “encouraged mourners to see heaven as an extension of this world in the most literal terms” (8) and allowed for women to minister to and meet each other’s spiritual and emotional needs in times of trauma.

The narrator, despite her anger at Luella’s syphoning existence, bears witness to her death, an act which Levinas calls the ultimate responsibility in the I/other relationship. Levinas links this obligation to the other as “an order to answer for the life of the other.” This act is particular importance in defining the relationship to the infinite alterity of otherness, which the uncertain openness to the supernatural helps to model. Levinas argues that we “do not have the right to leave [the other] alone to his death” (104) and our narrator here carries out this fundamental ethical rite but also goes a step further. The final line, that the story has been “told by the people who survived her, and this is the tale which has become folklore,” can be read in two ways, whether readers see the narrator as honest and discerning or petty and vindictive. If it is the latter, as some critics have suggested, the story encourages readers to be suspicious of the supernatural as a woman’s emotional unreliability. It positions the story itself alongside those “dark whispers” of the neighbors which seal Luella’s doom. But if we read the end in terms of sympathy, that Luella is in essence cursed by her position in society, then this final line about passing down the tale becomes a means of spreading awareness about the tragic danger of such consuming social roles. It becomes yet another example of women speaking to and listening to each other, even when the testimony is “unbelievable,” as a means to resist the power structures which oppress them.

This next story, “The Lost Ghost,” holds particular significance for Freeman’s exploration of the possibilities of the supernatural genre, being the culmination of a theme she continually explored. Reichardt relates Freeman’s practice “writing and rewriting, time and

again, of several story lines [and her] lingering desire to explore these issues from every possible vantage point” (5), with the most famous example being the various stories of a little lost ghost girl. Freeman wrote to Jewett that she felt compelled to exorcise “that forlorn little girl” who “had been in my head a matter of a dozen years” (69) and “The Lost Ghost” is the third and most supernaturally intense of the versions. The story explores several themes which intersect with domestic concerns, including homes, childrearing, and motherhood. But the story’s framework also explores the relationships between women, using the supernatural to model a mode of hearing each other’s stories with openness.

Our story concerns a Mrs. Emerson, whose name evokes a spiritual significance, and a visiting Mrs. Meserve helping craft goods for a church sale, entwining the spiritual and the religious concerns in the story’s opening:

"That's real pretty," said Mrs. Emerson.

"Yes, I think it's pretty," replied Mrs. Meserve.

"I suppose it's for the church fair?"

"Yes. I don't suppose it'll bring enough to pay for the worsted, let alone the work, but I suppose I've got to make something."

"How much did that one you made for the fair last year bring?"

"Twenty-five cents."

"It's wicked, ain't it?"

"I rather guess it is. It takes me a week every minute I can get to make one. I wish those that bought such things for twenty-five cents had to make them. Guess they'd sing another song. Well, I suppose I oughtn't to complain as long as it is for the Lord, but sometimes it does seem as if the Lord didn't get much out of it."

"Well, it's pretty work," said Mrs. Emerson, sitting down at the opposite window and taking up her dress skirt.

"Yes, it is real pretty work. I just LOVE to crochet." (158)

This moment crucially sets up the divergence of materiality in the form of the crocheted work and divine significance in its purpose—a purpose which is obscured by the monetary process. The negative casting of the “value” of the work in terms of its costs and benefits mirrors the consideration of what significance it might hold for the Lord. And with Emerson’s name recalling the founder of the transcendentalist movement which shared so much overlap with spiritualist communities, the story begins to set up a silent alternative to what seems an empty religiosity that functions transactionally.

This spirituality comes in the form of, conveniently, a spirit, or at least the story of a spirit and how such stories forge closeness. The two women’s talk begins to edge toward the topic of houses and quickly to the possibilities of hauntings, which Mrs. Emerson responds to by referencing a man and his skepticism: “Simon said they told him about that and he just laughed. Said he wasn't afraid and neither was his wife and sister. Said he'd risk ghosts rather than little tucked-up sleeping-rooms without any sun, like they've had in the Dayton house. Said he'd rather risk SEEING ghosts, than risk being ghosts themselves” (159). This moment does a fascinating job of both preserving the feminine space of discourse between the two women here but also conjures the spirit of the traditional masculinist suspicion of the supernatural. This male perspective reduces the women’s concerns and positions them as less important than material ones—even if this masculine presence is itself spectral, merely summoned up by the conversation. Emerson’s follow-up shows that she doesn’t fully subscribe to Simon’s view, hedging that “maybe there isn't anything in those stories. It never seemed to me they came very

straight anyway. I never took much stock in them. All I thought was—if his wife was nervous" (159). This quote both shows Emerson's openness to possibility more so than Simon but also ends with a concern for the wife's feeling on the matter, not dismissing it as superstitious or needing to be gotten over but suggesting that her feelings themselves are what actually matter.

It is this topic that sends Meserve into a reminiscence of her own spiritual experience which occurred in her girlhood living with two older, childless women. Before speaking, Meserve lays out the terms of her spiritual sensibilities in the most sensitive expression of the entire collection, which is unsurprising given that this particular story was the final version of one Freeman had vocal toiled over for many years to get right.

"So many don't believe in anything they can't understand, that they might think my mind wasn't right. Simon advised me not to talk about it. He said he didn't believe it was anything supernatural, but he had to own up that he couldn't give any explanation for it to save his life. He had to own up that he didn't believe anybody could. Then he said he wouldn't talk about it. He said lots of folks would sooner tell folks my head wasn't right than to own up they couldn't see through it."

"I'm sure I wouldn't say so," returned Mrs. Emerson reproachfully. "You know better than that, I hope ..." (160)

"I ain't going to say positively that I believe or disbelieve in ghosts, but all I tell you is what I saw. I can't explain it. I don't pretend I can, for I can't." (161)

This quote beautifully summarizes the theme of the rationalist and materialist accounting, most often associated with masculinity, as well as the tendency to silence or obliterate those qualities which don't nicely fit within those larger accounts. Emerson's comfort comes not in a full endorsement of the supernatural, notably, but in an assurance that she would neither fully deny it

nor hear the story as a means to question Meserve's mind and credibility. Notable also is that Meserve doesn't account for the experience with the same sort of rational certainty with which it is dismissed by others but keeps it in the realm of uncertainty, of unsure possibility, neither saying "positively that I believe or disbelieve." As such, the story functions in accordance with Salmonson's view of the supernatural as "challeng[ing] this history of writing by producing texts that are *outside* the frame of reason, that are anti-reason, unreasonable, unrealistic, [which] is to simultaneously challenge the "reality" that frame contains and upholds—the "real" as it is defined by a materialistic, masculine, patriarchal culture" (xvi).

We see, in the telling of this story, a challenge to the hegemonic and rationalist narratives which define most Western discourse. But we also see this challenge in the acceptance of the story, in Emerson's willingness to enter in to the fantasy and renounce the tools of suspicion. Stephanie Branson has explored the issue in another fashion in exploring "weird" supernatural elements, by invoking the traditional sense of "weird" in terms of fate. She suggests authors of the turn of the century portray "a universe in which supernatural forces within and without the characters potentially guide them to fulfillment, provided the characters participate in their *weird*" (66). Once again, this articulation suggests that supernatural fiction requires a degree of participation which is seen in the women's choice to not close themselves off to the stories of other women. In Branson's words, we discover not only that "it is a privilege to see ghosts but that it requires effort to participate in the numinous aspects of existence" (68). In this fashion, figures like Simon who appear only in comments in the story are outside the close female spiritual community not because they are excluded but because they do not choose to be open to it. Catherine Lundie's observation that men in these types of tales "are generally peripheral, because they show themselves to be antipathetic to the possibility of the supernatural" (2) does

not suggest a punitive action against them but rather an unavoidable result of their buffered subjectivity.

Instead of either reducing belief to its own series of rigid facts or excluding belief for lacking them, this significant relationship structures a scene of ambiguous possibility and charitable listening. In a fashion, Mrs. Meserve's position reflects Kolmar's and Carpenter's articulation that "women writers seem more likely to portray natural and supernatural experience along a continuum. Boundaries between the two are not absolute but fluid, so that the supernatural can be accepted, connected with, reclaimed, and can often possess a quality of familiarity" (12). The crucial position here is not just Emerson's willingness to listen to the tale without judgement or dismissal but, of course, Meserve's own willingness to tell it. This willingness reflects, perhaps, Freeman's decision to turn to the supernatural for her own purposes despite what she referred to as selling concerns. The reader, like Emerson herself, is "kept delicately balanced between subscribing to genuine supernaturalism or perceiving the recital as Mrs. Meserve's personal fantasy, just as we are in reading about Coleridge's ancient mariner" (Fisher 13). Meserve's choice to share the story doesn't just unburden her of the unvoiced experience but opens the crucial and vulnerable opportunity, which ghost stories offer, of forging a spiritual communion. As Leder claims, women's supernatural writing during the period reinforced "a women's religion of healing, hospitality, and community" (28). Taken together, these elements strengthen my claim that the supernatural, with its duration of uncertainty, modeled crucial elements for ethical openness to others and for a corresponding openness to numinous possibilities beyond those validated by a strict rationalist perspective. The listener's within the story's frame help to model how to approach and read these stories with openness, demonstrating the power of women validating each other's experiences which are so often

dismissed by the prevailingly patriarchal culture.

The story itself entails Meserve's growing up with two elderly women and the sudden appearance in their house of a ghostly child who continually says, "I can't find my mother." (164) The concerns of motherliness and domesticity dominate the text in both themes and plot. The manifestation of the supernatural occurs in the smells of foods cooking, the temperature of the house, the disposal of chores. After Meserve's encounter with the ghost child, the elderly sisters both encounter the spirit, with special focus given to their response to it and to each other's experience. "I was silly to give way so," one sister says of the supernatural experience. "No, you wasn't silly, sister," Mrs. Bird replies, "I don't know what this means any more than you do, but whatever it is, no one ought to be called silly for being overcome by anything so different from other things which we have known all our lives" (166). Like in the frame-narrative, the emotional connection between the women triumphs over epistemological commitments, so that uncertainty itself is what is of value. Even still, the sharing of stories and information is how these communities form and function, so that what little is known is still used to forge relationships. "No, there isn't much we do know," Mrs. Bird says a bit later when considering telling another woman about the ghost, "but what little there is she ought to know. I felt as if she ought to when she first came here" (167). In this fashion, the story itself reflects how we see women's supernatural tales of the period functioning more broadly, as a means to share experiences, knowledges, and beliefs toward more intimate spiritual and emotional connections.

But this is not to suggest that the text takes a simple approach to questions of women and their social roles or relationships. Much like "Luella Miller," as a tale primarily populated by women, it is a woman who proves the antagonist, a facet made more complex in the story insofar

as her moral failures emerge as a refusal to undertake her role as a mother:

But the mother was a real wicked woman ... handsome as a picture, and they said she came from good sort of people enough in Boston, but she was bad clean through, though she was real pretty spoken and most everybody liked her ... and she never seemed to take much interest in the child, and folks began to say she wasn't treated right. (171)

This description seems to run counter what we would expect from a story which otherwise resists the “cult of true womanhood” and “angel in the house” stereotypes for women, insofar as the woman’s evil is in direct and selfish correspondence to her failures as a mother. But further reading suggests textures and complexities which allow the text to avoid merely reaffirming unhealthy assumptions about women and the dominating role of motherhood. The father, for instance, is described as being “away most of the time [...] to] earn money to buy things to deck her out in. And he about worshiped the child, too” (172). Like the description of a religion empty of spiritual depths in the beginning of this story, the father’s focus on materialistic expressions seems less an analogue to the mother’s failures and more of a failure to minister to his family’s spiritual needs. In this fashion, it is precisely his focus on material and not spiritual or emotional forms of affection which contributes to the tragedy.

Eventually, while the father was away, the townsfolk discover that the mother has run off with a lover while the community “found that child dead, locked in one of the rooms” (173). This, of course, demonstrates the wickedness referred to above but still there persists question of complicity and guilt. These questions are complicated by the role of the father who “went on the track of his wife, and he found her, and he shot her dead; it was in all the papers at the time; then he disappeared” (173). In a manner not dissimilar to the syphoning figure of Luella Miller, “The Lost Ghost” text explores a figure of female depravity but does so within a context of toxic

expectations and assumptions in the domestic space of the household. There are no direct steps taken to justify the mother's awful actions in the text but there is a recognition of the stifling expectations and asymmetrically mobility available to women in domestic roles in comparison with men. This moral complexity is reflected in the childish spirit too, whose appearance is not purely cathartic in bringing together the women and facilitating their spiritual communions.

"You don't wonder that I ain't disposed to speak light," Meserve clarifies, "when I hear there is anything queer about a house, do you?" (174) She goes on to describe how Emerson couldn't guess how much she "dreaded seeing [the ghost]; and worse than the seeing her was the hearing her say, 'I can't find my mother.' It was enough to make your blood run cold. I never heard a living child cry for its mother that was anything so pitiful as that dead one. It was enough to break your heart" (174). This moment deftly articulates the terror of the ghostly appearance even along with its deep pathos, mirroring the complex negotiations of a mothering instinct that is both a miracle of generosity but also a terrifying burden in the story.

This dual nature of motherhood as both wonderful and terrifying is most fully expressed by Mrs. Bird, the elder sister in the household, described as "always very easy to put in the wrong ... a good woman, and one that couldn't do things enough for other folks. It seemed as if that was what she lived on" (174-5). This description provides the foundation for how the story uses the supernatural figure of the ghost to unpack and examine the roles of women in a domestic setting with nuance and complexity. Specifically, Mrs. Bird, in direct opposition to the ghost's mother taking a life in pursuit of her own, gives up her own life in facilitating the lives of others. Explicating this, the story ends with Bird passing into death by escorting the child into the afterlife:

Mrs. Abby Bird walking off over the white snow-path with that child holding fast

to her hand, nestling close to her as if she had found her own mother.

"'She's dead,' says Mrs. Dennison, clutching hold of me hard. 'She's dead; my sister is dead!'

"She was. We hurried upstairs as fast as we could go, and she was dead in her bed, and smiling as if she was dreaming, and one arm and hand was stretched out as if something had hold of it; and it couldn't be straightened even at the last—it lay out over her casket at the funeral."

"Was the child ever seen again?" asked Mrs. Emerson in a shaking voice.

"No," replied Mrs. Meserve; "that child was never seen again after she went out of the yard with Mrs. Bird." (176)

The story's ending describes the dichotomy of motherhood, one side of which is defined by the selfish mother. Mrs. Bird characterizes the other side of this configuration, embodying the dangerous expectation of total selflessness that consume the mother in comforting the child.

Instead of the mother's selfishness, the father's material pursuits, or even Mrs. Bird's boundless selflessness, the text seems to leave unspecified the optimal relation between people. The closest articulation of proper relationality in the story, I would suggest, is actually that between Meserve and Emerson, in the form of the listening friend. In this configuration we see neither the abandonment of the mother, the reduction to materialism of the father (like Simon's materialist account of the supernatural), or the too thorough identification in the form of Mrs. Bird's sacrificial generosity. Instead we see an openness to the other, an acceptance of difference, that needs not deny, reduce, or know exhaustively. Toward this consideration, it is interesting to note that this tale which Freeman admitted to reworking over several publications "intensified in supernaturalness" (Fisken 47) with each iteration. In my reading, this intensifying

supernaturalness suggests that Freeman sought to extend, rather than diminish, the difficulty of accepting the story in an attempt to capture whatever quality she sought. The supernatural gave Freeman the opportunity to stretch empathetic bonds to their limits, using epistemological uncertainty to strain them and demonstrate the power of spiritual sharing and community.

In a letter to Jewett, Freeman writes of an early iteration of this story: “I have felt somewhat uncertain as to how [A Gentle Ghost] would be liked. It is in some respects a departure from my usual vein, and I have made a little lapse into the mystical and romantic one for which I have a strong inclination, but do not generally yield to” (qtd. in Fiskin 41). In another letter on the same work she writes: “Most of my work, is not really the kind I myself like. I want more symbolism, more mysticism. I left that out, because it struck me people did not want it, and I was forced to consider selling qualities” (Fiskin 42). These two quotes, in light of this work, help flesh out how this story contributes to explorations of spiritual or anti-materialist expressions. It is no accident, like the frame character’s crafting objects for an empty religious purpose, or the story’s father who pursues financial gain for his disintegrating family, that Freeman opposes “selling qualities” to the possibility of a meaningful spiritual communication. It is the supernatural itself, a genre predicated on its departure from purely material accounts, which provides the possibility of following these lines of inquiry and forging relationships in their shared cultivation.

In these stories, Freeman demonstrates precisely the value of spiritual communities, especially to woman whose perspectives are continually in question. The inherent uncertainty of the supernatural provides a distinct and compelling means to stretch the empathetic bonds and test the strength of women’s circles, what Leder calls in Jewett’s supernatural texts “a women’s religion of healing, hospitality, and community” (28). These two stories demonstrate the

necessity for women of having means and ability to speak of concerns considered outside the normal rationalist protocols available to them. But it is notable that these concerns exist also outside of the strict religious discourses which appear in the stories to have similarly reductive and inflexible formulations. The theme of women's unreliability, in a genre already predicated on the need for a suspension of disbelief, compounds the importance of reaching beyond the normal interpretive practices of readers and indicates the need for a more open and sympathetic subject position.

IV. "Inverted Mentally": Pathology and Medicalized Dismissal

Though it is in the very least an unspoken fear in all of these stories, in both the titular "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" and in "The Southwest Chamber," Freeman explores the anxiety of madness both internalized and imposed on woman faced with the supernatural. These stories both bear resemblance to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper," published a few years prior, which deploys the supernatural to critique the pathologization of women's experience of things unaccountable to material and medical science. Like "The Yellow Wall-Paper," Freeman's stories continue the discussion of spiritual and emotional concerns, gender roles, and the supernatural as a means to explore their intersections. More specifically, Freeman's stories demonstrate the way women are encouraged to doubt their own experiences and to fear in themselves a lurking tendency toward madness which is suggested by their sensitivity to immaterial things.

"The Wind in the Rose-Bush" could be seen, in some ways, as yet another attempt at getting to the heart of the story which Freeman also explored in "The Lost Ghost." The story features another spinster, Rebecca, this one an aunt who travels far from her home to collect the

daughter of her recently deceased brother from his second wife, who holds no biological relation to the young girl. While being continually put off from seeing the girl by excuses from the sister-in-law (an epithet which seems to stand in opposition to the collection's exploration of sister-in-spirit), the aunt experiences continual, inexplicable phenomena, suggesting the lingering presence of the young girl. Working against the lies and machinations of her increasingly suspicious sister-in-law, Rebecca begins to question her own sanity until she retreats home, only to discover the grim truth of her niece's death from neglect at the hands of the sister-in-law. I explicate this plot, specifically its similarities to "The Lost Ghost," because its formal *departures* from "The Lost Ghost" allow it to illustrate different elements of women's struggles exhibited by the supernatural. Specifically, by having an omnipotent narrator rather than being a framed tale, this story does not showcase just the necessity of a ready and willing listener, but also digs deeper into the female protagonist's sense of *self*-doubt, cultivated by social expectations surrounding both the supernatural and womanhood.

The story begins on the trip to the sister-in-law's home, as Rebecca talks to a local who knows more than she reveals about the family. Rebecca is significantly described as a:

type of a spinster, yet with rudimentary lines and expressions of matronhood. She all unconsciously held her shawl, rolled up in a canvas bag, on her left hip, as if it had been a child. She wore a settled frown of dissent at life, but it was the frown of a mother who regarded life as a forward child, rather than as an overwhelming fate. (90)

This description will become crucially important as the story goes on and Rebecca's liminal positioning as both motherly and spinsterly provides her means to uncover the truth of her niece's fate. Moreover, her relation to motherhood, as a difficult struggle with contesting wills rather than as an "overwhelming fate," also helps to describe a relation to domestic and feminine

responsibilities that is not stifling and defining. It is easy to see how quickly such gendered responsibilities *can* become stifling in her first interaction with a local woman, who immediately assumes Rebecca has left her own family. The woman says in a chastising tone that Rebecca's trip was "a long ways to come and leave a family" (91). Rebecca sidesteps the traditional boundaries of femininity by gently detailing her situation. "I had my own mother to care for, and I was school-teaching" (92), she replies, indicating an acceptably domestic and nurturing social role but one still outside of what she was expected.

It is in the woman's reaction to Rebecca that one sees the *failure* of the communities of women that so many supernatural works of the period explore. When Rebecca asks if the woman knew her sister-in-law, the "woman glanced at her husband's warning face" (92) and stayed silent. "Seems as if I'd ought to have told her," (92), she says after Rebecca's departure for the sister-in-law's home. We see here the husband standing as an obstacle to the women's heart-to-heart but we also see the power of the text's use of an omnipotent point-of-view, alternative to "The Lost Ghost." While "The Lost Ghost" is able to show the successful act of listening which is the act that facilitates the framed tale itself, the omniscient narration here allows for the story to go on while such failures of communication break down. Because of the third person perspective, we hear the husband and wife talk, which further illustrates the gendered associations of this breakdown.

"Do you s'pose she'll see anything?" asked the woman with a spasmodic shudder and a terrified roll of her eyes.

"See!" returned her husband with stolid scorn. "Better be sure there's anything to see." [...] "Wits that so easy upset ain't worth much," declared the man. "You keep out of it" (93)

The husband's command disrupts any possible communication by demanding that his wife "keep out of" the circle of disclosure. But his "scorn" of the supernatural also demonstrates the common response of those who find that the supernatural threatens the structures which shore-up their social power and privilege. His response reflects the terms which have so often dismissed the supernatural in these stories. His focus on what can be "seen" bestows value on only those things which have material and physical existence. More important to the concerns of this section is his follow-up line about "wits" which serves both to disregard the supernatural as something unfit for intelligent minds and also to threaten his wife's own viability in a system which values rationalism above all else. In this manner, his final imperative to "keep out of it" positions "it" as both the supernatural possibility but also the feminine circle of spiritual sharing.

This moment solidifies a theme which persists through the story and through the collection in general, often explicitly clarified but always beneath the surface. It is the threat of how the experience of the supernatural, or the acceptance of the supernatural, may marginalize one as insane and unfit for society. Stephanie Branson investigates the way women's ghost stories "encourage[] spiritual as well as practical evolution" and goes on to cite how they "propose a new way of seeing that will break what Ann Weick calls a 'perception monopoly' [... suggesting] that 'the dominant Western paradigm [i.e. Cartesian science] is based on an incomplete and therefor erroneous definition of the nature of reality'" (70). The husband's stumbling in disbelief over the word "seen" as he discusses the possibility of the supernatural describes his acceptance of this perception monopoly. And his commands to ignore other possibilities signal the threat that the supernatural poses to the traditional power-structures which are bolstered by this paradigm. "Speaking of things that man has declared non-existent," Salmonson reiterates, "has always made women vulnerable to charges of exaggeration, neurosis,

madness” (xxii). As such, the women of the story must continuously guard their words and the insistence they place on their own experience lest they open themselves up to accusations of madness. Given the spiritual and emotional components of women’s experience of the supernatural in this period, it is not too much to say that the policing of neurosis and sanity in terms of belief in the supernatural is a means to control women’s interpersonal discourses. Alternatively, the validation of feeling and belief they experience in communicating these instances helps forge the women’s circles these stories describe. The coding of women’s issues into supernatural phenomena suggests the ways that women’s resistance to patriarchal power was curtailed and undermined in the name of rational discourse.

When Rebecca finally arrives at her sister-in-law’s home, it is to discover the cold and dismissive demeanor of her sister-in-law coupled with the continual supernatural occurrences in the household. Ironically, her sister-in-law first raises the conditions of women’s madness in terms of herself, excusing her shock at seeing Rebecca: "I am subject to—spells. I am over it now" (95). This quote both reiterates the practice of undermining feeling as a pathology and positions such pathology in terms of the supernatural itself, in this case as “spells.” This concept of passing off women’s experience as a disturbance of the mind is more pronounced as Rebecca begins to see images and signs of her niece, only to have them dismissed as phantoms of her imagination. At one point, Rebecca insists she saw her niece running by the window:

"You must have been mistaken."

"I know I did," persisted Rebecca.

"You couldn't have."

"I did. I saw first a shadow go over the ceiling, then I saw her in the glass there"—she pointed to a mirror over the sideboard opposite—"and then the shadow

passed the window." [...]

"Like enough; but of course you didn't see her. You've been thinking so much about her that you thought you did." [...] (98)

Rebecca's instinct to follow her own experience is called into question not based on an alternative perception counter to hers but purely in terms of her own suspect mental state. Her immediate internalization of this dynamic appears in the form of self-policing, a fear over naming her concerns precisely in terms of the expectations of rationalism. "Rebecca was uneasy," Freeman writes, "but she tried to conceal it, for she knew of no good reason for uneasiness" (99). The concern for "good reason" provides the bedrock of the rationalist practice in the text reiterated by the sister-in-law who declares that she spends no "time puzzling over such nonsense" (100). In keeping with so many of the texts of this collection, "nonsense" and "good reason" become the primary means by which by which value and authority are bestowed or withheld.

The terminology of sanity and of pathology increase in frequency as the story progresses until the sister-in-law demands of Rebecca: "Be you gone crazy over that girl?" (104) As is so often the case in these stories, the woman whose mental stability is suspect begins to question her self. Barbara Patrick characterizes mental instabilities in supernatural fiction and how "the woman who, regarded as an invalid, becomes invalid" (77). Clinging to her own validity, Rebecca admits with regard to the supernatural elements, "I don't like such things happening. I ain't superstitious, but I don't like it" (104). Eventually she comes around to her sister-in-law's way of thinking, "with diminishing distrust before the reasonableness of it" (105). The reasonableness of her sister-in-law relies less on a full and sustained counter discourse and more on the terminology of rationalism which marginalizes those views outside of it. When Rebecca

notes a mysterious occurrence with the rose-bush, a consistent site of the supernatural in this tale, the sister-in-law once again dismisses it.

“Nonsense [...]”

"The rose is on the bush, and it's gone from the bed in my room! Is this house haunted, or what?"

"I don't know anything about a house being haunted. I don't believe in such things. Be you crazy?" Mrs. Dent spoke with gathering force. The colour flashed back to her cheeks.

"No," said Rebecca shortly. "I ain't crazy yet, but I shall be if this keeps on much longer. I'm going to find out where that girl is before night." (106)

Rebecca's fear for her own sanity, continually challenged as she is by the protocols of rational materialism, appears in the precise terms which her sister has used to undermine her. The compassion and sensitivity for her absent niece are marginalized as extra-rational and thus invalid. Ultimately, despite her continual commitments not to leave without her niece, Rebecca returns home to attend to her own disrupted mental state.

The end of the story seems almost to catalogue the terminology with which women's experience of the supernatural is framed. Rebecca is said to have a "disturbed mind" (107), experiencing a "nervous strain" which was "too much for her." She eventually became an invalid, "not able to move from her bed" from "anxiety and fatigue" (108). This diagnosis coincides almost perfectly with Catherine Lundie's articulation of anxious women in supernatural fiction of the time, particularly how "women, once persuaded by their culture to start thinking of themselves as 'nervous,' to interpret even the slightest signs of stress as mental illness, began to doubt themselves, to the point that their powers of self-assertion fail entirely"

(18). And it is in this state, having totally internalized the patriarchal values around her, that she writes to the postmaster to discover what has become of her niece. His reply “was short, curt, and to the purpose” as he “was a man of few words, and especially wary as to his expressions” (108). Coming hard upon Rebecca’s own perspective of her suspect mind, this curt and to the purpose figure of masculinity reiterates the dismissive “no nonsense” perspective which has thus far marginalized her.

"Dear madam," he wrote, "your favour rec'ed. No Slocums in Ford's Village. All dead. Addie ten years ago, her mother two years later, her father five. House vacant. Mrs. John Dent said to have neglected stepdaughter. Girl was sick. Medicine not given. Talk of taking action. Not enough evidence. House said to be haunted. Strange sights and sounds. Your niece, Agnes Dent, died a year ago, about this time. (108-109)

This reply recalls the ending of “Billy Budd” wherein a summary of the miraculous and spiritual events of Billy’s death are absent from the “object” and skewed language of the newspaper, stripped of all their potentially miraculous significance. Here, the no-nonsense style shows itself not just to be deprived of the nuance available to artistry but also lacking in the emotional sensitivity we’d expect in the circumstances.

Most important in this ending is that this frame of logic and sense, based most emblematically on the idea of “evidence,” is precisely what has failed in terms of accounting for what happened. The line “[n]ot enough evidence” suggests exactly the terms of authorization that the patriarchal and materialist culture entail. Instead of this evidence-based approach, the story positions the spiritual sensitivity of Rebecca herself as the closest access we have to discerning the meaning of the matter, if not the precise chronology of events. Turning back to Lundie, we might see this story in terms of the trend in supernatural fiction which exposes the apparatus by

which women's experiences, symbolized by the supernatural, are dismissed as scientifically unsound. In this genre "women are victims, silenced by the voice of patriarchal authority both medical and marital [...] clear gender lines are drawn between those who have the power to define illness and those who must accept being defined as ill" (Lundie 18). Like the woman on the boat who would have told Rebecca her fears, before being silenced by her husband, Rebecca too becomes silenced by the fear of marginalization in terms of nonsense and insanity. Notably, Rebecca's endurance to advocate for herself and her niece fails precisely because she lacks a community of sympathy or faith in her experience of the supernatural.

The last remaining story of the collection, "The Southwest Chamber," articulates a similar approach to issues of women's perspectives and rationalism. And like the previous story, featuring the sister-in-law as a primary purveyor of the patriarchal discourse, this story features several complications of the traditional structure which pits a woman's perspective against the medicalized marginalization of the supernatural. Here, two sisters have inherited a boarding house from their deceased aunt, only to discover that the room in which she died keeps manifesting mysterious instances. As each character attempts to confront the room's spiritual disturbances, the reader discovers a spectrum of responses to the supernatural. The story is perhaps the clearest articulation of Reichardt's view of Freeman's overarching project in the genre, which forgoes actual ghosts in favor of highlighting the "psychological condition of the persons who witness them" (68). As such, the story demonstrates how, when "forced to confront what they cannot rationalize ... after their encounter with the supernatural many Freeman protagonists remain blind to that potential" (68). But beyond just cataloguing responses and even measuring the openness of various responses, I suggest how the story explores the betrayal of women's circles of sympathetic communication, where a failure to enter in to the beliefs and

experiences of each other enables the patriarchal dismissal of belief as a medicalized marginality.

Not unlike “Shadows on the Wall,” this story uses the bodies of its main characters to reinforce themes of those hard figures, unimpressible by the supernatural and brittle enough to break before bending. This is in contrast to those softer, impressable, more able to give to the pressure of something exterior to them. We are introduced to their bodies in close parallel to their openness to the supernatural.

Sophia was firm where Amanda was flabby. Amanda wore a baggy old muslin (it was a hot day), and Sophia was uncompromisingly hooked up in a starched and boned cambric over her high shelving figure.

"I didn't know but she would object to sleeping in that room, as long as Aunt Harriet died there such a little time ago," faltered Amanda.

"Well!" said Sophia, "of all the silly notions! (126)

Sophia's firmness and uncompromising clothes reflect her deflection of silly notions, just as Amanda's flabbiness and capacious baggy clothing are open to understanding why some fear the bedroom. "Nobody knew how this elderly woman," Freeman writes of Amanda, "with the untrammelled imagination of a child dreaded" (127), further reiterating her openness to qualities foreclosed upon by most narratives of rationality. Also similar to "Shadows on the Wall" and along this same line, is the use of the insubstantial as a test of the characters' willingness to entertain possibilities. The manifestation of odors and sounds to indicate the supernatural presence allow for a degree of plausible deniability to the characters. It is only when Amanda is faced with the removal of physical objects from the room that she is forced to confront her own suspicions and to face down her sister's dismissals.

The text clarifies, without question, the nature of the concerns which see women question

themselves out of fear of being labeled mad or invalid. After being faced with the physical move of a dress back to the closet, the text describes that “Amanda Gill was not a woman of strong convictions even as to her own actions.” This leads her to question herself and she “thought that possibly she had been mistaken and had not removed it from the closet” (128). This crucial moment, like Rebecca’s in “The Wind in the Rose-Bush,” demonstrates the immediate recourse to self-questioning that women are encouraged to take, to police themselves for possible signs of mental weakness or instability. As Dana del George suggests of women’s experience in this genre, the “supernatural is an imaginary creation of or—worse—a symptom of madness” (59). But Freeman complicates our understanding of this dynamic to show the limits of an individual’s ability for self-questioning, suggesting that denial of one’s experience is the actual danger. “There is a limit at which self-refutation must stop in any sane person,” Freeman writes, and “Amanda Gill had reached it” (129). Rather than continue to deny her experience out of fear of being seen as mad, Amanda asserts precisely what she *knows* in the strongest of language:

She knew that she had seen that purple gown in that closet; she knew that she had removed it and put it on the easy chair. She also knew that she had not taken it out of the room. She felt a curious sense of being inverted mentally. (129)

This moment illustrates Amanda’s choice to neither refuse nor fully acknowledge her experience, recognizing the social marginality of the supernatural. The phrase “inverted mentally” is crucial not just because it demonstrates the gymnastics of disbelieving one’s own senses but because it also suggests a challenge to the hierarchy of rationalism as an epistemological certainty.

This concern for being marginalized becomes more pronounced as Amanda prepares to face her rigid sister. We see the precise threat to women’s confidence when they are faced with

the inexplicable and find the open-minded and sympathetic spiritual community absent. "How silly I am," Amanda says to herself and resolves that "she could not tell her sister what had happened, for before the utter absurdity of the whole thing her belief in her own reason quailed" (129-130). The language of "silly" and "absurdity" both indicate the power-relation which infantilizes her experience. But it is the fear of her quailing reason which really demonstrates the stakes of this concern: namely, that to go forward with belief would be to undermine her own validity. Just as she knew what she experienced in the supernatural, Amanda "knew what Sophia would say if she told her [...] 'Amanda Gill, have you gone stark staring mad?' (130). This fear of being positioned as mad perfectly encapsulates the dramatic tension of women's experience in these supernatural stories: to follow the inclination of their experience of the ineffable or numinous is to risk censure by society, even as it opens up the possibility of meaningful spiritual communion and community.

The next of the household to test the room is a boarder, proud of her stable consciousness and defiant of the supernatural possibility. The concern of her stay in the room revolves precisely around these terms, as they ask her if she is "so strong-minded you don't object to sleeping in a room where anybody died a few weeks ago?" (142). She scoffs at the suggestion, but as she stays in the room the supernatural once again causes her to question herself, acting as a "doubt being cast upon [one's] own memory and reasoning powers" (142). Indeed, as she lies in the bed observing mysterious and ineffable phenomena:

She was more credulous as to her own possible failings than she had ever been in her whole life. She was cold with horror and terror, and yet not so much horror and terror of the supernatural as of her own self. The weakness of belief in the supernatural was nearly impossible for this strong nature. She could more easily believe in her own failing

powers. (142)

We are privy to the concern of women in these supernatural stories insofar as their reason is always already subject to doubt—the supernatural merely exacerbates this subjection. The supernatural exposes the biases toward the totalizing rational certainty which Levinas describes and women's suspect position in this dynamic. Lying in the bed, the boarder tries to reassure herself with “something distinctly tangible” (143), a phrase in keeping with the earlier point that rationalism must dismiss the immaterial as non-existent or outside consideration.

Despite her commitment to not acknowledging the intangible, the boarder eventually experiences enough and abandons the room to the exact censure she expected. “If folks are going to act like fools,” Sophia says, “we shall never be able to keep this house” (144), voicing the immediate recourse to dismissal which the boarder fears. But the more open-minded sister, Amanda, teases that “I guess we can't both be getting loony,” using the less medicalized or serious “loony” to resist the attempts to seriously undermine and dismiss the boarder's account. More importantly, this “we” functions to establish precisely the sort of solidarity toward which the women's circles of communication aspire.

In a compelling fashion, the only male figure in the story helps to flesh out the intersections of the supernatural, certainty, and the need for spiritual communication among women. While the minister is described as “very spiritual” (139) in alternation to some of the hard-headed and dismissive male figures, his religious inclination functions similar to many such figures in supernatural fiction who reduce the numinous and ineffable to a series of their own rationalized and accountable terms, so that religion differs only in name from the terms of mastery which rationalism promises over the empirical world. “You do not for a minute believe,” he asks, “that a higher power would allow any manifestation on the part of a disembodied

spirit—who we trust is in her heavenly home—to harm one of His servants?” (140). His words reveal precisely this sense that belief has its own fixed laws by which one may control one’s own experience, in line with the buffered self in Taylor’s configuration. “It certainly passes [my understanding] how anybody with Christian faith can believe in ghosts,” says the minister to the delight of the dismissive Sophia, who “loved to hear two other women covertly condemned by him and she herself thereby exalted” (152-3). This passage functions to illustrate how even belief in spiritual concerns can become oppressively closed-minded in terms of its own mastery. It likewise specifically illustrates how such oppression functions in gendered power differentials. The words of the male figure of master serve as a means to exalt or diminish (usually) women. Likewise, this figure perfectly parallels Mr. Townsend, who uses inflexible religious views to undermine his wife’s openness to a spiritual possibility. In both tales the religious figures dismiss the uncertain supernatural by suggesting that right action always insulates one from spiritual effects. In their formulation spiritual events can only be causally correspondent and thus exist within the control of the individual self. Similar to the materially bound rationalists in some stories, it is the religious figures’ sense of certainty and mastery over understanding which is stifling, oppressive, and closed-off to the supernatural’s possibility.

Fittingly, the minister is himself barred completely from engaging with the supernatural. Despite his desire to test himself in the room, “he could not enter. Whenever he strove to do so he had a curious sensation as if he were trying to press against an invisible person who met him with a force of opposition impossible to overcome” (153). This passage works beautifully to show how the minister’s view of the spiritual realm, in the strict terms he has internalized and about which he sees himself an authority, literally bars him from engaging with the miraculous possibilities. Put another way, his bufferedness bars him from entering the women’s supernatural

spiritual circles, from entering into the fantasy. Instead, being “overwhelmed with spiritual agony as to the state of his own soul,” he “was simply powerless against this uncanny obstacle [and ...] fairly fled to his own chamber and locked himself in” (153). His response reflects that of the rational-materialist when faced with the supernatural, and the text makes clear the importance of this similarity, describing the occurrence as that about “which modern faith and modern science know nothing” (154). By putting religion and science in the same epistemological category, the text makes clear that neither is necessarily opposed to the spiritual sensitivity so crucial to women in these texts, but only to the posture of certainty which can run through them both.

And in the end, when Sophia faces the room herself, the text demonstrates that it is precisely those women’s circles of friendship and support which are at issue. The backstory which has been revealed in pieces and glimpses, comes full circle as we discover that the women of the home had been riddled with internal strife, including the banishment of Sophia’s mother. We learned earlier that Sophia’s “mother and the elder sister had been pitiless to the last. Neither had ever spoken to her since she left her home the night of her marriage. They were hard women” (131). Sophia had unwittingly replicated the hard and dismissive attitudes of the aunt whose death dealt them the house and now haunted it. In the room, the supernatural force pushed Sophia toward “remembering what she could not have remembered, since she was not then born: the trouble over her mother’s marriage, the bitter opposition, the shutting the door upon her, the ostracizing her from heart and home” (154). Here, it is exactly the legacy of the aunt’s cruel closedness which haunts Sophia and the home, infusing her with the very opposite to the spiritual sensitivity. Finally realizing the affective meaning of the poisonous home, that the haunting legacy of closed-doors is the true trauma, the story ends when Sophia tells Amanda, “I am going

to sell this house” (156).

Adding this theme of pathology to those of women’s doubted reliability and the insubstantial nature of the supernatural, one can see the many ways that the collection allows for a “reasonable” reader to dismiss the fantastic in these stories. Against this tendency, we see the occasional flashes of support and encouragement which take place on the fringes of accepted discourse between women who give credence to these events. And it is not just the structures of rational materialism which threaten women’s experiences in the tales. In this final story, and hinted elsewhere, we also see the failures of conventional religion to provide a viable openness to meaning which exists beyond the mastery of the buffered and sovereign self. Rather than nurture this masterful subjectivity, Freeman’s collection continually imparts to the reader the importance of accepting uncertainty as a means to be open to the spiritual or emotional experience of an other. Like the previous collections considered in this study, Freeman uses the inherent instability of the genre—Mrs. Meserve’s commitment to not “say positively that I believe or disbelieve”—as a means to cultivate an acceptance of this absence of knowledge and truth. This disruptive supernatural uncertainty requires one to extend their view of the possible, to “enter into the fantasy,” as a means to forge meaningful communities of support, healing, and communication. Like the collections studied in previous chapters, Freeman’s uses the generic qualities of supernatural short fiction to help model an ethics which does not reduce the other. But particular to this collection, *The Wind in the Rose-Bush* demonstrates the specific ways faith becomes a crucial means for women to embrace and communicate concerns deemed outside of the dominant materialist discourses.

Epilogue: LingerinG Ghosts and Afterlives

The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same. The basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies, is to interpret meaning on the model of truth.

Hannah Arendt (99-100)

In Chapter Two, I briefly touch on the above words of Hannah Arendt to suggest that Melville's repeated deployment of uncertainty takes aim at monolithic truth claims. It strikes me, here at the end, that this is one of the most essential threads running through these supernatural short story collections. It is not merely that these texts produce alternative views of science or of the miraculous, but that they seek to supplant aims toward exhaustive truth with an alternative pursuit of meaningfulness. In this fashion, Hawthorne's appeal to "imaginative faith," Chesnutt's to "what might be," and Freeman's to "entering the fantasy," in comparable ways describe an invitation to reorient a reader or listener away from a focus on veracity and toward a model of meaningfulness—in these cases, modeling a posture which can meet and accommodate the lives of others. Meditating on the various meanings of this dissertation, I would like to linger for a moment on how these collections cultivate an alternative subject position for the reader and what the implications of this subject position suggest more broadly for the nineteenth century.

Across these four chapters, I have demonstrated the consistent recourse to supernatural short story collections by artists interested in resisting the Enlightenment narratives of mastery and the buffered subjectivity which they shore up. The uncertain and irrational elements of the fantastic—appearances of ghosts, instances of impossibility, conjure—call into question the

world view described by the rationalism of the nineteenth century and the sense of confident certainty it provides the subject as master of understanding. The supernatural's insistent uncertainty helps to condition a reader into an alternative posture of openness to possibilities in the texts. This openness, at its most ethically effective, describes a means to approach alterity in a fashion that is without the totalizing certainty which so often reduces the other to an object of use or within the framework of the self's totalizing knowledge. The function of my term "faith" is crucial here, as a means to lend numinous or transcendent meaning to the world beyond the reach of rational materialism, setting limits on its scope. But faith also functions on the ethical and interpersonal level, in the act of believing the testimony of an other despite the assumptions of the self.

As my chronology demonstrates, beginning with *Mosses from an Old Manse* in 1846 and ending with *Wind in the Rose-Bush* in 1904, this ethical orientation towards uncertainty evolved over time from allowing for a more general sense of alterity to actually providing specific support for marginalized figures in society. Melville and especially Hawthorne address the self/other divide philosophically, as a more universal obstacle, which the specific ideological frameworks of the period helped to reinforce and which readers must work to overcome in themselves. Their resistance to the allures of totalizing mastery comes either as an avoidance of replicating the oppressive figures in the text who fail to do so—Aylmer, Amasa Delano, the piazza owner—or in sympathy to those more open and accommodating figures—Beatrice, Owen, and, at times, Bartleby's boss—whose openness to the fantastical possibility is mirrored in their capacity for empathy. By the end of the century, however, Chesnutt and Freeman demonstrate how the figures who internalize these totalizing ideologies disproportionately threaten those already marginalized and disadvantaged. Pseudoscientific discourses of race and

gender which emerged from rationalism reinforced both the undergirding logic of slavery and patriarchal hegemony. In this fashion, rationalism's influence on interpersonal interactions had pronounced effects across racial and gender divides. But this heightened influence also intensified the capacity of supernatural elements which destabilize hierarchical impulses. This intensified effect of the supernatural lent greater stakes to the act of giving credence to it—especially as an expression of faith in the voice of the other. What we witness in these collections is essentially the conditioning of a reader, via the short story, via the supernatural, a reader who is encouraged to confront the structures of the sovereign and buffered self, the assumptions on which it rests, and the relations it produces.

Significantly, the supernatural short story collection, as a genre, contributes directly to the social and ethical purposes outlined in this project: the uncertain supernatural challenging discourses of mastery, the short story resisting exhaustive and totalizing narrative impulses, and collections producing a plurality of voices which destabilize monolithic perspectives. Each of these elements helps free the texts from the aesthetic aims of natural or realistic representation based around truth and allow for an orientation towards meaningfulness. Uncle Julius, for instance, uses conjure ironically to describe what “things were possible” (23) under slavery, not insofar as the magic existed but in terms of the trauma it inflicted—as when a slave was cursed to wither and ripen with the seasons, demonstrating his valuation as equal to a crop. The “possibility” of this event in terms of scientific or historic veracity is overshadowed by the community of recognition and amelioration forged by hearing and participating in its meaningfulness. But looking back across my chapters as they stand, I cannot help but see the discussion haunted by the powerful texts to which it does not give voice. The fantastic stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Mark Twain, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Louisa May

Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett, Gertrude Bonnin, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Elizabeth Stewart Phelps, and others participate in various ways in the practice of using the supernatural short story to explore uncertainty as it resists social and ideological impulses toward totality. Likewise, some of these authors as well as those I *do* examine also produced novels, fantastical and otherwise, which help to resist the domineering impulses these collections work so diligently to critique. Novels can articulate similar critiques and cultivate the same sorts of conditions which I demonstrate in the supernatural short story collection. The difference between the forms is one of degree, insofar as the aims and expectations of novels sometimes run counter to those of these stories which work primarily to *unsettle* a reader's sense of understanding.

An example of a novel which *does* effect similar expressions of uncertainty is Melville's (rather ironically titled) *The Confidence Man*. The novel contains supernatural undercurrents similar to Melville's short stories, is broken up into something resembling vignettes, and explores uncertainty as a means to approach alterity. Examining it alongside *The Piazza Tales* shows how the explorations of uncertainty persist, change, and wane across formal modes. *The Confidence Man* applies supernatural tropes and fractured narration reminiscent of story collections to reinforce its critique of confidence, as both an epistemological posture of certainty and a misleading sham in the title's double entendre. But the dismal reception of Melville's novel suggests the difficulty of carrying over the prolonged uncertainty of supernatural short stories into the novel form. One of Hawthorne's novels, *The Blithedale Romance*, also delivers material for contextualizing and clarifying the arguments which persist through this study. *The Blithedale Romance* explores utopian impulses, which can be seen as eventualities of Enlightenment narratives of perfectability, along with its themes of spiritual yearnings. The novel makes for a compelling comparison to Hawthorne's more discrete short stories which

focus on similar topics. In particular, the novel's exploration of women's spirituality, sustained over a longer duration than a short story allows, leads to a cynical sense of *disenchantment* as the exhaustive plotting reveals the text's secrets.

In my chapters on Hawthorne, Melville, Chesnutt, and Freeman, I show the suitability of the supernatural short story collection in pursuing uncertainty against the trends of contemporary culture and towards an ethical openness. They were not alone. Other key voices of the period also contributed to these specific aims. Washington Irving's later short stories turned increasingly away from his earlier mode of debunking the supernatural, illustrated in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," a story which seems mostly to reassure the secular rationalism of the buffered self and give the reader a sense of knowing superiority to the superstitious figures of the story. In later works, such as "The Devil and Tom Walker," Irving turns toward a more ambiguous exploration of the fantastic which produces the sorts of effects I examine. This mode of short stories which reveal the supernatural to be false and dismiss as superstitious those who fall into its traps, was popular during the nineteenth century. Stories such as Louisa May Alcott's "Clams: A Ghost Story," reiterate this sensibility, wherein belief is aligned with parochial superstitions and rational skepticism with a rather smug superiority. Dana del George describes "nineteenth century authors [as having written], to some extent, in a mixture of the premodern and the modern *episteme*" (56), navigating between an enchanted and disenchanting world view. Exploring the mixing and moderating of epistemes alongside the four collections examined in this study helps enrich and complicate the confrontation between the cultural narrative of rationalist thinking and the supernatural short story. Charting out this historical lineage which authors like Irving and Alcott buttress, brings further illumination to the forces and counter-forces at work in the cultural discourses and their placement in the century's timeline.

The supernatural, even as it almost necessarily disrupts certain elements of the dominant cultural narratives, fails in some hands to reach a satisfying political or ethical articulation. Two compelling parts of this conversation, and two gaps in this project in terms of history and cultural impact, are the very different works of Edgar Allan Poe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Poe wrote prolifically in the supernatural genre up to his death in 1849 in works such as “Ms. Found in a Bottle” and numerous poems. But even as these works might be said to push back against Enlightenment narratives—and H. Bruce Franklin goes so far as to include Poe’s work with Hawthorne’s as “anti-science fiction” (17)—one would be hard pressed to discover in Poe how this is driven by or results in the sort of inter-personal relations which Hawthorne suggests lie beyond reductive rationalist postures. Indeed, though Poe’s work almost nihilistically catalogues the failures of human connection in his society, in part due to reductive perspectives, the faith in uncertainty to nurture an alternative means of approaching otherness that we see in Melville and Hawthorne is almost wholly absent.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s immensely influential writing after the Civil War and through to the end of the century relates to this current study in a fashion which is almost the opposite of Poe’s uncertain but faithless supernatural work. Phelps’s supernatural oeuvre, beginning with short stories and then expanded on in novels, most notably, *The Gates Ajar*, gained popularity in depicting an afterlife characterized as a continuation of earthly existence. Most significantly, her works emphasized the ability to carry over into the spiritual world the identity and those relationships one had on Earth. Phelps’s spiritualist depiction gave voice to the country’s shared sense of loss after the Civil War and was widely read by families grieving the dead due to its portrayal of posthumous reconnections. But where Phelps’s supernatural mode places emphasis on the interpersonal and spiritual in ways that Poe’s does not, her writing fails to achieve the

disruptive uncertainty which is so crucial to the ethical aspirations embedded in the works of Hawthorne, Melville, Chesnutt, and Freeman. Her idea of an afterlife, that spiritual realm beyond the material, as an almost perfect extension of our physical reality is not only described in profoundly confident terms, but also seems as familiar and disenchanted as a secular view which can only accommodate the physical world. In neither Poe's nor Phelps's work do we see uncertainty deconstructing the oppressive totalities that is central to the works gathered here, the former because it lacks that "affirmative exigency" which Derrida says uncertain abstraction enables and which "never proceeds without love" (Points, 83), the latter because it assumes a translatability between faith and certainty.

Taken together, these additional examinations of novels and stories from a more distributed representation of the nineteenth century help clarify how the supernatural short story collection is distinctive in its capacity to cultivate an uncertain and perhaps more ethical subject position in its reader. Showing the short story's and the novel's concern with ethical uncertainty on a continuum rather than in opposition, helps to illustrate precisely how deliberate the departure of the short story and the sketch from traditional narrative can be, even if they may work toward similar aims. Reading the works examined here against more skeptical depictions of the supernatural or alongside stories without either an uncertain or ethical framework likewise throws into sharp relief this ethical openness propounded by the authors I study. Hawthorne, Melville, Chesnutt and Freeman explore a compelling variety of supernatural forms and focus on different barriers to and expressions of otherness. But together they demonstrate a remarkably consistent return to uncertainty as a foundation for structuring an ethical relation, prioritizing an abiding emphasis on meaningfulness over certainty in the nineteenth century.

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