

Université de Montréal

**The Career of the Missed Encounter in Classic
American Literature**

par

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Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures

en vue de l'obtention du grade de Philosophiae Doctor (Ph.D.)

en études anglaises

Aout, 2012

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Université de Montréal
Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales

Cette thèse intitulée:

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the career of the Lacanian missed encounter in canonical nineteenth-century American literature through the lens of psychoanalysis, deconstruction, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. In particular, I concentrate on Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Moby-Dick*, showing how they are invested in the narrative economy of the missed encounter, the economy of that which is beyond symbolization and assimilation. The introductory chapter investigates the historical, philosophical, and theoretical contours and detours of the concept of the missed encounter. This dissertation, then, has two goals: on the one hand, it attempts to examine the status and function of the missed encounter in nineteenth-century American literature, and on the other, it explores how theorizing the missed encounter might help us move beyond the binarist theorization that characterizes the current geopolitical scenes.

My first chapter on Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* attempts to map the career of the signifier as a shuttling between the archive and the future, between the subject and the object, and between the signifier and the signified. The aim of this chapter is to account for the temporality of the signifier and the temporality of subjectivity and how they meet the temporality of the *Tuché*. By exploring the crypto-temporal dimension of the missed encounter, this chapter studies the excess of crypts through poetics (mainly prosopopeia, anasemia, and tropes of exhumation).

The second chapter elaborates the contours of the missed encounter. This chapter approaches, from psychoanalytic and deconstructive viewpoints, the temporality of the missed encounter (the temporality of automaton and repetition). By exploring the narrative temporality (prolepsis and analepsis) in conjunction with the psycho-poetics of the double, this chapter attempts to lay bare the vicissitudes of melancholia and "narcissistic depression" in *Moby-Dick* (especially Ahab's repetition of his unnarrated or disnarrated original encounter with the White Whale and his melancholic position in relation to the object he lost). By exposing the nature of trauma as a missed encounter, the

residues of which manifest symptomatically through repetition (and doubling), this chapter explains the *glissement* of the letter (through the work of the supplement and *différance*).

Chapter three broadens the scope of the missed encounter to the Others of America. The main purpose of this chapter is to assess the political, cultural, imaginary, and libidinal investitures of the missed encounter in the Real, the national Symbolic of the United States, and the current geopolitical reality. It also deals with the ambiguous relationship between *jouissance* and the Symbolic: the way in which *jouissance* animates and governs the Symbolic, while at the same time it blurs the boundary lines between the Real and reality and protects its excessive maneuvers.

Keywords: American literature, the missed encounter, theory, *tuché*, automaton, trope, archive, trauma, narrative, temporality, prosopopeia, *jouissance*, Hawthorne, Melville, Lacan, Derrida, Freud, Žižek.

Résumé

Cette dissertation explore la carrière de la rencontre manquée Lacanienne dans la littérature canonique américaine du dix-neuvième siècle à travers le prisme de la psychanalyse, la déconstruction, le postmodernisme et le postcolonialisme. Je me concentre particulièrement sur *La Lettre Écarlate* de Hawthorne et *Moby-Dick* de Melville, en montrant comment ils sont investis dans l'économie narrative de la rencontre manquée, l'économie de ce qui est au-delà de la symbolisation et l'assimilation. L'introduction examine les contours et les détours historiques, philosophiques et théoriques du concept de la rencontre manquée. Cette dissertation a donc deux objectifs: d'une part, elle tente d'examiner le statut et la fonction de la rencontre manquée dans la littérature américaine du dix-neuvième siècle, et d'autre part, elle explore comment la théorisation de la rencontre manquée pourrait nous aider à aller au-delà de la théorisation binaire qui caractérise les scènes géopolitiques actuelles.

Mon premier chapitre sur *La Lettre Écarlate* de Hawthorne, tente de tracer la carrière du signifiant comme une navette entre l'archive et l'avenir, entre le sujet et l'objet, entre le signifiant et le signifié. Le but de ce chapitre est de rendre compte de la temporalité du signifiant et la temporalité de la subjectivité et d'expliquer comment ils répondent à la temporalité du *tuché*. En explorant la dimension crypto-temporelle de la rencontre manquée, ce chapitre étudie l'excès de cryptes par la poétique (principalement prosopopée, anasémie, et les tropes d'exhumation).

Le deuxième chapitre élabore sur les contours de la rencontre manquée. En adoptant des approches psychanalytiques et déconstructives, ce chapitre négocie la temporalité de la rencontre manquée (la temporalité de l'automaton et de la répétition). En explorant la temporalité narrative (prolepse et analepse) conjointement à la psycho-poétique du double, ce chapitre essaie de dévoiler les vicissitudes de la mélancolie et la "dépression narcissique" dans *Moby-Dick* (en particulier la répétition d'Achab lors de sa rencontre originelle dénarrée ou jamais racontée avec le cachalot blanc

et sa position mélancolique par rapport à l'objet qu'il a perdu). En exposant la nature du trauma comme une rencontre manquée, dont les résidus se manifestent symptomatiquement par la répétition (et le doublement), ce chapitre explique le glissement de la lettre (par l'entremise du supplément et de la *différance*).

Le troisième chapitre élargit la portée de la rencontre manquée pour inclure les Autres de l'Amérique. Le but principal de ce chapitre est d'évaluer les investitures politiques, culturelles, imaginaires et libidinales de la rencontre manquée dans le Réel, le Symbolique nationale des États-Unis et la réalité géopolitique actuelle. Il traite également de la relation ambiguë entre la *jouissance* et le Symbolique: la manière dont la *jouissance* anime et régit le Symbolique tout en confondant la distinction entre le Réel et la réalité et en protégeant ses manœuvres excessives.

Mots-clés: littérature américaine, la rencontre manquée, théorie, *tuché*, automaton, trope, archive, trauma, récit, temporalité, prosopopée, jouissance, Hawthorne, Melville, Lacan, Derrida, Freud, Žižek.

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Acknowledgements

Is not acknowledgement but another symptom of the missed encounter?

A throw of the dice will never abolish chance.

—Stéphane Mallarmé

Introduction

Contours and Detours of the Missed Encounter

In fact, the history of Western thought begins, not by thinking what is most thought-provoking, but by letting it remain forgotten. Western thought thus begins with an omission, perhaps even a failure. So it seems, as long as we regard oblivion only as a deficiency, something negative. Besides, we do not get on the right course here if we pass over an essential distinction. The beginning of Western thought is not the same as its origin. The beginning is, rather, the veil that conceals the origin—indeed an unavoidable veil. If that is the situation, then oblivion shows itself in a different light. The origin keeps itself concealed in the beginning. (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking* 156)

Is not the dream essentially, one might say, an act of homage to the missed reality—the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly, in some never attained awakening? What encounter can there be henceforth with that forever inert being—even now being devoured by the flames—if not the encounter that occurs precisely at the moment when, by accident, as if by chance, the flames come to meet him? Where is the reality in this accident, if not that it repeats something actually more fatal by means of reality, a reality in which the person who was supposed to be watching over the body still remains asleep, even when the father re-emerges after having woken up? (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 58)

I begin by asking how one should read Heidegger's words about the difference between "origin" and "beginning" quoted in my epigraph. Of what does the omission consist? If it is, as Heidegger suggests, a failure and a veiling of the origin, how might it be read as a missed encounter with the origin? The *veil*, here the embodiment of the Lacanian *Thing*, to which I will come back in due course, conceals and cancels something; in reality, and in the field of the Real, it harbors someone, something, a concept, as well as an absence and a trace. What it conceals emerges from its sudden eruption through a linguistic transparency, which it both creates and negates. In the philosophic tradition, from Aristotle, all the way through Descartes, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, to Lacan, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of origin provides an indubitably rich perspective from which to survey and to study the plethora of literary representations which point to the missed encounter with historical and narrative origin. The existence of the origin can only be explained by the dynamics of repetition, the incessant attempt to return to a primal, Symbolic state, which is, Freud tells us, the aim of the death drive. Why the missed encounter?

The loss Freud conceptualizes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* may be said to constitute the temporality of the subject: it is an indispensable loss through which the subject retroactively, following his entry into the Symbolic, *re*-constructs his missed origin as a repetitive performance of the traumatic symptom. The dynamics of this loss is demonstrated by Lacan's concept of the *vel*,¹ the forced choice the subject has in his relation with the signifier, a forced choice that precedes and conditions the entry into the Symbolic. It is this very *vel*, the necessary loss, that

allows the intrusion of the traumatic Real, thus constructing something that defies symbolization. In fact, the missed or lost origin does not precondition the Symbolic; rather, it is the Symbolic that constructs the missed origin as impossibility. Since the missed encounter with the origin, Lacan tells us, amounts to the impossibility or failure of assimilating the Real, it is important to explore its investitures in other discourses. Literature is one of the discourses in which the missed encounter exists. In fact, literature itself could be said to be missed encounter with reality and with other discourses. Nineteenth-century American literature, the focus of this dissertation, is full of examples of the various configurations of the missed encounter with that which escapes symbolization and containment. Often praised for its implication in discourses of the nation, progress, and democracy,² nineteenth-century American literature, and Hawthorne and Melville in particular, display an obsession with the *Thing*. It will be one of main contentions of this dissertation that the Real—the placeless, formless *Thing*—becomes the parasitic intervention in reality, an interference that disturbs and perturbs historical reality. It is this gap that ascertains the contingency of history, and it is in this sense that the excess is uncanny. At every turning point of time, the subject is confronted by an unforeseen gap, an erratic eruption; at such moments, as we shall see throughout this dissertation, the subject seeks refuge from the vicissitudes of temporality. As suggested by Joan Copjec:

The intrusion of the real makes it impossible for language to function literally. One way of recognizing this is to say that the real marks the failure of the signifier. Language fails to designate literally what it wants to say. But it is precisely this failure that allows the symbolic to grasp hold of some excess, some surplus existence over sense, over what it signifies. This *excess*, which produced by language is not to be confused with a true beyond, since the actual existence of this excess is not posited. (96)

The paradox lies in the failure of the signifier: that is, the origin, the traumatic primal scene, can only be articulated by the signifier, which does not actually exist before the entry into the Symbolic, the space in which the signifier fails again to represent the origin. The temporality and repetition of the missed origin is what gives the signifier at once its inadequacy and materiality. It is in the field of the signifier and only in this field that we can have an access to the *arche* through repetition, symptoms, and traces—that is, through the spirals of *différance*.

The process by which the concept of ‘the missed encounter’ has burst onto the literary, psychoanalytic, philosophical, political, and religious scenes is not a simple one. National literary traditions, the canon of literature, have always been a history of missed encounters and failures. As in literature, psychoanalysis registers a whole history of missed encounters (between the ego and the superego, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, between the conscious and the unconscious, between lack and excess, and between the Real and the Symbolic). Politics, likewise, brings us to the New World Order and its subsequent global capitalism, with all the antagonisms and missed encounters that characterize it. A more cultural and political conception of the missed encounter seems to me very important to the understanding of the subject’s symbolic exchange with other subjects, to the archive, to language in general, but also, and more importantly, to the reality of modern America. Another aim of this dissertation is to free the psychoanalytic and deconstructive models from the prison of the unconscious and language. In this dissertation, we shall come across various lacks and excesses of America. The reason why I chose lack and excess as the two defining poles of the American imago is that, as we shall see in the course of this dissertation, America, to contain its excesses, is invested in a shuttling between extremes.

A constellation of concepts and tropes—such as signifier, anasemia, supplement/*différance* and crypt, archive, shadow, melancholia, narcissism—will come together in the protean space of the missed encounter. The incessant sliding-away (*glissement*) and shuttling, to use Lacanian and Derridean phraseology, will be at the core of my dissertation: they entail no slow movement and no collision between the two sets of concepts but a swift, significant conceptual rearrangement around a new displaced space, which is but the scheme of the missed encounter. Adopting Derrida's concept of shuttling (*navette*) and Lacan's notion of *glissement*, this dissertation will be performing a shuttling between nineteenth-century American literature, namely Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and various theories ranging from psychoanalysis, to hermeneutics, to deconstruction, to postcolonialism, to postmodernism. In *Glas*, Derrida defines shuttling as follows:

The word—*la navette*—is absolutely necessary. It will have had to be there. ... It concerns a small metal vessel in the form of a boat (*navis, navetta*). They keep incense in it. And then the weaver's *navette* [shuttle]. He makes it run [*courir*]. Coming-and-going woven in a chain. The weave is in the *navette*. You see all that one could have done with that (*ça*). Isn't elaboration a weaver's movement? (208b)

Weaving different theories together, one of the arguments of this dissertation consists precisely in uncovering the residues left and recuperated by the act of weaving, in bringing into the open the anxieties of *re-turn*. In shuttling, which becomes a trope of writing and reading, we always end up discovering a long-left residue and, unintentionally, leaving another. This is the danger of this method that privileges juxtaposition. While it attempts to recover, or rather to uncover, the residues residing in the narrative, shuttling, as a trope of reading and writing, accidentally leaves

some other residues. Although shuttling might end up causing a *glissement* toward the abyss of the Real and *différance*, it is only through it that we can witness the residues left by previous carriages. Moving between two sites/cites, Derrida's reading methodology sews up (*coudre*), recovers and "betrays, exhibits what it should hide, dissimulacras what it signals" (*Glas* 209b). This is the kernel of the missed encounter: while it gives the impression (and impressions are very important for the structure of trauma) of reconstructing the primal scene in the Symbolic, such reconstruction is displayed as an impossible reconstruction. The underlying logic of the missed encounter, of course, is again that of a forced and continual shuttling: the necessity of the encounter and its eventual impossibility.

The title of my dissertation, "The Career of the Missed Encounter in Classic American Literature," suggests that the development and movement of missed encounter, perhaps inevitably, folds and unfolds in the domains of the impossible and the temporal. The etymological archive of the English word "career" includes the following: a road or a racecourse (from the French *carrière*); a track for wheeled vehicles (from Latin *carrus*); a quarry (*une carrière*) from which minerals are extracted. We can establish in the etymology of the word "career" that, on the one hand, its modern temporal denotation originates in spatial figures; and, on the other, correlatively, it refers to an origin that is also posited as spatial. However, this *carrière* is empty. Its emptiness requires the incessant return to it. The fact remains, however, that it is necessary, as Kant tells us, to talk about the a priori rules according to which temporality as a closed system is constructed. From a purely philosophical perspective, the Real could be said to be some kind of an essential existential necessity. Considering the missed encounter as a missed event, we can ask

a series of philosophical/existential questions: what happened? What is the *Thing* that is missed? Why is the encounter always already missed? What does this always already constitute?

It now remains to explain the ways in which my analysis will develop the work of theorists addressing the concept of the missed encounter. A concise methodological presentation is in order at this point. Although I will be relying widely on psychoanalytic concepts developed by Freud and Lacan (and their disciples), my approach touches on other psychoanalytic models including, but not limited to, Otto Rank, Melanie Klein, Abraham and Torok, Julia Kristeva, Cathy Caruth, and Fanti (with his micropsychoanalytic approach to the void). I have extensive recourse to Žižek (especially with regard to his study and application of Lacanian concepts to popular culture and to the modern political social sphere). I must emphasize that my way of proceeding—and the *déroulement* of the argument that follows—is highly influenced not merely by the arguments, but also by the organization, structure, and stylistics of European theory in the wake of Lacan, as opposed to the more linear and straightforwardly “expository” models of American writing. Drawing extensively on French/European models of theoretical discourses, which are exploratory, provocative, and less expository, my dissertation, structured around a necessary argumentative circularity and accumulation, offers an alternative theorization of the missed encounter, bringing together a kind of deconstructive critique of narrative with multifaceted psychoanalytic models from Freud, Lacan, and Jung all the way through Abraham and Torok to Kristeva and Kathy Caruth. For the psychoanalytic tradition, the missed encounter, in its various configurations, is a complex problem, not an easy solution, perhaps not even a problem leading to symbolization. The missed encounter, trauma, or the failure of signification and representation, are, moreover, not discrete or separable, in nineteenth-century American

literature, nor are they separable in Western culture in general, from its ideological/political origins. As the chapters of this dissertation study the various configurations of the missed encounter, each chapter applies, revisits, and extends the use of one or more psychoanalytic, deconstructive, or postmodern model. Offering an alternative theorization of the missed encounter from all these angles, this dissertation seeks to lay bare the relay of the subject's *letter* in the Real of America, in temporality. It remains to say that there are reasons why this particular field of study has been the focus of my work. The first (the encounter between the East and the West) goes to the roots of the missed encounter and locates it at the Nineteenth-century American Real. The second goes beyond the binarist discourse of East and West, subject and object, presence and absence to the domain of the abject, simulacra and *jouissance*.

1. The Missed Encounter and the Real

There would have been something sad, unutterably dreary, in all this, had I not been conscious that it lay at my own option to recall whatever was valuable in the past. (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* 26)

The obsession of nineteenth-century American literature, and literature in general, with the past and with the question of origin, is attributable to an epistemological predicament: this obsession lodges a gap, a lack, or a missed encounter with this incessantly unattainable *arche*-text. Carrying us along some twisted, or less linear, paths of theory and literature, this dissertation

will try to provide an explanation of how the missed encounter might be read through tropology and how it becomes itself the trope of modern America. Revisiting the literature on the missed encounter, the dissertation begins from the premise that there is a missed encounter at the center of everything and claims that the proper referent of the missed encounter lies as much in the sphere of the linguistic as in the extra-linguistic (material and ideological) reality. By holding that point, by staying focused on the narrative scenes of the missed encounter, we can make it possible to relocate the “missed encounter” within the realm of the subject and its various psychological, political, and historical realities. Only through reading literature as the site and cite of the residuum or the Lacanian *Thing* can we have a grasp on the non-literary or political unconscious, of the literary texts. If we limit the “missed encounter” to translucent intrusion of the *Thing* (the kernel of the Real) that must always be chased but can never be attained, we relegate it to constitutive impossibility. Indeed, there is a traumatic absence—what Lacan calls a “missed encounter—at the heart of the classic American literature. My primary concern is to trace—through an anasemic reading that brings together various discourses on subjectivity, signification, and trauma—the roots of the missed encounter and to show how the temporality of the signifier ultimately meets the temporality of the *Tuché*.

The aim of the dissertation is to revisit, through the study of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, the missed encounter and point to the impossibility inherent to it. Why Melville and Hawthorne? We will see in many instances that Melville wanted something from Hawthorne, something Hawthorne could not give. In fact, *Moby-Dick* could be read as Melville’s letter to Hawthorne. Hawthorne and Melville: two major figures of the American literary canon, two friends, two interrelated perceptions of the word and the world. There is

always already something—and we will see that nineteenth-century American literature has many things—in excess of language and representation. I am attending to the missed encounter, then, because: it is constitutive of Melville’s and Hawthorne’s narratives and of modern America’s investment in what Irwin calls “value and meaning” (239), and because its impossibility helps to reveal the contingency of postmodern attachment to simulation and simulacra. As Žižek acutely puts it, “the price of the global reign of simulacra is extreme violence to the bodily Real. (Long ago Lacan provided the formula for this paradoxical coincidence of opposites: when symbolic efficiency is suspended, the Imaginary falls into the Real)” (*The Ticklish Subject* 374). Because my argument maintains that the missed encounter lies at the heart of articulating the subject/object, signifier/signified, body/Real, Occident/Orient (missed) encounters, it reflects the relays of the Real, its irruption in the Symbolic, and its effects/affects; in other words, it does not tend to follow a linear development. The various junctures of psychoanalysis and deconstruction are indispensable to my project of exploring the temporality of the subject and its relation to the temporal trajectory or “career” of the sign.

On this score, it is important to note that the excess and lack around which the missed encounter revolves can be applied to spheres other than the psychic reality. On the one hand, Lacan, returning to Freud, contends that the encounter “*qua* encounter [is] forever missed” and that “The place of the real, which stretches from the trauma to the phantasy—in so far as the phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinant in the function of repetition” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 60). On the other hand, defending psychoanalysis, he argues: “No praxis is more oriented towards that which, at the heart of experience, is the kernel of the real than psycho-analysis” (53). “The kernel

of the real” suggests an inextricable coexistence of presence and absence, temporality and materiality, residuum and lack. Lacan poses the question “Where do we meet this real?” (53). To answer that question, he makes recourse to Aristotle and borrows his concept of *tuché*, which is the traumatic encounter (i.e., the traumatic driving force that accounts for the Real and the Freudian compulsion to repeat). Lacan’s *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* delivers a compelling reconfiguration of many Freudian concepts while laying bare the residues of the *tuché*. Anchored in certain void, the Real, although impossible and unsymbolizable, accounts for the essence of trauma. The Real is, I shall demonstrate further, impossible, not only because of the inassimilable lack that the subject maintains, but because of the structure of the psyche.

In his “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject,” Žižek, defending psychoanalysis against the reproaches of neurobiology and neuropsychology, argues that the current approaches to trauma, unknowingly, tend to forget one basic tenet of Lacan’s theory: that trauma has always already happened. Any particular trauma would trigger another trauma, an originary, a Real trauma that had always already happened. Any trauma would be a repetition of that initial trauma. “In this way,” he continues to argue, “for Freud (and Lacan), every external trauma is “sublated,” internalized, owing its impact to the way a pre-existing Real of the “psychic reality” is aroused through it” (11). We shall see that the “always already” (*toujours déjà*) is very important in the Lacanian and Derridean models, important because it is around this always already that the traumatic scene and the scene of writing are constructed. Herein lies the kernel of the economy of the Real, of the incessant repetition of the primal scene. The kernel of the Real is superbly explained by Žižek:

The Lacanian subject as \$ is thus a response TO/OF the real: a response *to* the real of the brutal meaningless intrusion—a response *of* the real, i.e., a response which emerges when the symbolic integration of the traumatic intrusion fails, reaches its point of impossibility. As such, the subject at its most elementary effectively is “beyond unconscious”: the empty form deprived even of unconscious formations encapsulating a variety of libidinal investments. (“Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject” 27)

Arguing that the subject is “beyond consciousness,” the Lacanian statement that the “interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it—namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet a*” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 83). In the Lacanian paradigm, the loss of touch with the past, the lack that inheres in the Real, the absences in the Symbolic, are all modalities that impel the unceasing pursuit of *jouissance*.

The traumatic encounter with the Real is conceptualized by Lacan as follows: “[f]or what we have in the discovery of psycho-analysis is an encounter, *an essential encounter—an appointment* to which we are always called with a real that *eludes* us” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 53; emphasis mine). Explaining and defending Lacan’s contention that trauma has always already occurred, Žižek argues:

We should thus nonetheless apply even to the post-traumatic subject the Freudian notion that a violent intrusion of the real counts as trauma only insofar as a previous trauma resonates in it – in this case, the previous trauma is that of the birth of subjectivity itself: a subject is “barred,” as Lacan put it, it emerges when a living individual is deprived of its substantial content, and this constitutive trauma is repeated in the present traumatic experience. This is what Lacan aims at with his claim that the Freudian subject is none

other than the Cartesian *cogito*: the *cogito* is not an “abstraction” from the reality of living actual individuals with the wealth of their properties, emotions, abilities, relations; it is, on the contrary, this “wealth of personality” which functions as the imaginary “stuff of the I,” as Lacan put it. (“Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject” 27)

This means that the always already—the structure that governs trauma and repetition—is also to be understood as the automatism that structures any other subsequent traumas or missed encounters. The point I want to raise here is that the appointment is, like the Lacanian missed encounter, always a missed appointment. Lacan, much like Freud, sees repetition as the “career” of the subject, that is, the subject’s temporality in the wake of the missed encounter with the Real. Appointments, unlike encounters, are predetermined and voluntary. The place and time of the appointment are scheduled ahead of time. In his *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, Lacan uses both terms. In another passage from the same book Lacan elucidates the nature of the appointment: “That is why, in the misunderstood concept of repetition, I stress the importance of the ever avoided encounter, of the missed opportunity. The function of missing lies at the centre of analytic repetition. The appointment is always missed—this is what constitutes, in comparison with *tuché*, the vanity of repetition, its constitutive occultation” (127). In short, the essential encounter is a necessary, not an accidental, encounter. It is in this light that I shall attempt to understand the career of the missed encounter, its temporality and its ties to other discourses. It seems to me that the temporality of the *tuché* is the ultimate impetus for new discourses and ideologies.

By way of an introduction and to ground the concept of the missed encounter in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a few theoretical specifications are in order about the major concepts that are

essential to this dissertation. Lacan tells us that the analytic experience is organized by the *tuché* in terms of the accident. The *tuché* literally means “chance” or “accident.” In Lacan’s nomenclature, the encounter with the Real is accidental and it is impossible for the subject to foresee what will happen, because what happens happens by accident. Here we see the Freudian understanding of trauma as accidental and contingent. This does not mean that I am invoking an opposition between Lacan and Freud. In fact, the Freudian conception of trauma—entailing a shift from a theory of repetition and transference to a theory of the death drive and its slide toward an anterior biological state—is approached as an actual event that happened in reality (a train accident, for example, or the shell-shocked soldier returning from World War I). *Le rendez-vous* (the appointment) is a noun derived from an imperative: the subject is expected to be at a certain place and a certain time. The point I want to raise here is that Freud’s attribution of repetition compulsion to the death drive is indeed an obligation on the part of the subject to attend an appointment he did not schedule in spite of what awaits him at the meeting place and what repetition entails (failure, missed encounter, gap, etc.). Freud states that “*a drive is an urge inherent in living organic matter for the restoration of an earlier state—one that a living being has had to give up under the influence of external disturbing forces*” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 75-76; original emphasis). These external forces are not clear in the Freudian model, suspended as it is between evolutionary biology and philosophical hypothesis. With Lacan we could say that whatever we lost is the outcome of our entry into language. In his analysis of the function of the Real as a missed encounter and appointment, Lacan proposes many clinical examples: dream and awakening, the analysis of the Freudian “father can’t you see I’m burning?”³, the insistence of the child that “the story should always be the same” (*Four*

Fundamental Concepts 61), the reinterpretation of the *Fort/Da* game and its association with *objet a* and repetition. Lacan's child is "traumatized by the fact that [he] was going away despite the appeal, precociously adumbrated in [the child's] voice" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 63). Yet the missed encounter is located primarily in the domain of the grieving father, who has failed to witness the "second death" of his child occasioned by the falling candle. The original trauma (the child's death), beyond the father's ability to assimilate in the Symbolic, is thus repeated. We should remember that Lacan's context is repetition, and within this overarching context he presents the function of the *automaton* and the *tuché*. He outlines the *tuché* by summarizing the dream of the burning child. At issue is how the father misses (again) the trauma that he cannot symbolize. Its poetics are essentially prosopoetic: the father dreams that the dead child is a revenant, who says to him "can't you see that I'm burning?" This is the juncture, and the puncture, of the *tuché*. The following Lacanian questions are very crucial to the understanding of repetition and the missed encounter/appointment:

What, then, is this function of traumatic repetition if nothing—quite the reverse—seems to justify it from the point of view of the pleasure principle? To master the painful event, someone may say—but who masters, where is the master here, to be mastered? Why speak so hastily when we do not know precisely where to situate the agency that would undertake this operation of mastery? (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 51)

In other words, "This requirement of a *distinct consistency* in the details of its telling signifies that the realization of the signifier will never be able to be careful enough in its memorization to succeed in *designating the primacy of the significance* as such" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 61; emphasis mine). Significance, therefore, is not the equivalent of the signifier; rather, it stands

for the murdering of the *Thing*, it is the name of that impossibility the subject is desiring. Significance is then transformed into a game of repetition “giving it certain outlets that go some way to satisfying the pleasure principle” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 62). In fact, what is repeated in an identical repetition of a story or in a dream is the missed encounter/appointment. What is repeated is precisely this impossible conjunction between the subject and the Real, the signifier and the signified, being and meaning, and so on. In short, the missed encounter/*rendez-vous* is defined by and structured around a perpetual failure. The subject, however, is doomed to fail and, of course, to look for another missed encounter/appointment. This Freudian “earlier state”—the Real in Lacanese—is always missed because the subject is heavily dependent on language.

The *tuché*, around which the psychoanalytic experience is organized, is contrasted with the *automaton*—the spontaneity that characterizes the insistence of the sign. Lacan translates Aristotle’s *tuché* “as *the encounter with the real*. The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 53-54; original italics). The *automaton* is, then, the network of signifiers that keep (ex)changing places. The spontaneity of the *automaton* means that chance is arbitrary. Lacan goes on to argue that, “nothing, in effect, can be grounded on chance—the calculations of chances, strategies—that does not involve at the outset a limited structuring of a situation, in terms of signifiers” (40). Since the *automaton* is the network of signs, it is, then, associated with speech and writing. The speech/writing, repeated as it is, is regulated as a mathematical equation (that predicts and presupposes the rules according to narrative grammar). Although the repeated

discourse may seem to be freely and accidentally associated, it is governed by the regularity and spontaneity of the *automaton*.

The movement of the signifier is structured by the psychoanalytics of the *Tuché*; the circulation and recirculation of the sign is predicated upon the circulation of the subject in the Symbolic to object to abject. Here lies the riddle of the missed encounter: the impossibility of the Real is also its very condition of existence, that is, to have access to the Real there should be no assimilation and no symbolization. Insofar as the impossibility of the Real is central to the understanding of the proximity and over-proximity of the Real—it is a precondition that prescribes and proscribes the encounter as a missed or failed encounter. As Žižek argues:

The subject is not only under a threat of separation, it IS the effect of separation (from substance). Furthermore, insofar as a traumatic encounter generates anxiety, we should bear in mind that, for Lacan, in anxiety, what the subject is exposed to is precisely the loss of the loss itself—Lacan here turns around Freud: anxiety is not the anxiety of separation from the object, but the anxiety of the objet (-cause of desire) getting too close to the subject. This is why trauma belongs to the domain of the uncanny in the fundamental ambiguity of this term: what makes uncanny uncanny is its homeliness itself, that fact that it is the rise-into-visibility of something too close to us. (“Descartes and the Posttraumatic Subject” 25)

The ultimate complexity of the missed encounter lies in the infinite *mises en scène* of the encounter. If the proximity of the Real has dangers, if the encounter is predicated upon an impossibility it would perhaps be beneficial to analyze the concept of the *Thing*, which defines this proximity or *ex-timité* to/of the Real.

2. The American *Thing*

In his analysis of Freud's distinction between "word-presentations" (*Wort-vorstellungen*) and "thing-presentations" (*Sachvorstellungen*), Lacan argues that the Thing (*das Ding*) inhabits the Real and that it is the object of language as well as desire. The pleasure principle—the law (as the etymology of the German word *Ding* and the French word *la chose* suggest)—structures the subject around the impossibility of arriving at *das Ding*. He argues:

The reason is that *das Ding* is at the center only in the sense that it is excluded. That is to say, in reality *das Ding* has to be posited as exterior, as the prehistoric Other that it is impossible to forget—the Other whose primacy of position Freud affirms in the form of something *entfremdet*, something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me, something that on the level of the unconscious only a representation can represent. (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 71)

To define the *Thing* as "characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it" (125) is to evoke both a gap, an empty space left by the lost object and a residue that is brought into the Symbolic. This residue is the *Thing* around which the subject's desire circulates. Transgressing the law of the Symbolic, the residue exhibits a certain *jouissance*. It is "as a function of this position," Lacan tells us, "which is itself dependent on the paradox of the Law, that the paradox of *jouissance* emerges" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 193). The paradox of *jouissance* is that it only exists if it keeps an ongoing shuttling between pain and pleasure. It is in this Freudian space of beyond the pleasure principle that the *Thing* exists. As Žižek points out in *Tarrying with the Negative*, "the status of the Thing-*jouissance* becomes epistemological; its unattainable character

is perceived as unknowableness the moment we ‘substantivize’ it and assume that it ontologically precedes its loss, i.e., that there is something to see ‘behind the curtain’ (of the phenomena)” (37).

Arguing that the Real is the ideal, pre-linguistic state means that it is impossible to have access to it, that the subject is doomed to try incessantly to recover that idealism. This, however, does not mean that the Real disappears completely; there is always a residue, a leftover, or a remainder of the Real that persists in the Symbolic. “If we think of the real as everything that has yet to be symbolized, language no doubt never completely transforms the real, never drains all of the real into the symbolic order; a residuum is always left” (Fink 26). A remainder perseveres in the Symbolic, reminding the subject of a lost unity, a lost materiality. Lacan’s contention—that “[t]he subject in himself; the recalling of his biography, all this goes only to a certain limit, which is known as the real” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 49)—can be located in Hawthorne’s and Melville’s narratives. If the locus of their narratives is the hole in the Real around which *jouissance* revolves, it is occasioned (in narrative terms) by the shadow of the Father, in the case of Hawthorne, and by the inaccessible trauma situated in the pre-history of the narrative, in the case of Melville. One can repeat Lacan’s view of the impossibility of representing the Real and locate it in the *textual itineraries* of the scarlet letter A and the White Whale, which could be said to be *Things*, in the Lacanian sense of the word, impossible to contain or to domesticate in anything approaching a coherent Symbolic order.

Drawing upon Žižek’s argument that postmodern art⁴ is obsessed with the *Thing*, the residue of the Real (the foreign piece of the Real that erupts continually in reality) and extending it to nineteenth-century American literature, I want to argue that America’s obsession with the Real, with the *Thing*, with the archive, with the disnarrated, and the Other is an obscene obsession

that accounts for nineteenth-century's America's literary national anxiety and, of course, its persistent desire for a unique, post-colonial American literature. To find something useable, something to identify with and build upon, in the American past, Melville and Hawthorne returned incessantly to the archive. Such a return, which stems from—as Derrida tells us in *Archive Fever—the mal d'archive*, is linked to, like *jouissance*, both the life drive (i.e., the desire to conserve the archive) and the death drive (i.e., the desire to destroy the archive): “It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation” (*Archive Fever* 10). The death drive, however, spirals toward an illusory origin, exhausting itself in the business of searching. By this logic, repetition works to arrive at the unavoidable conclusion that there is no origin. Being the immaterial archive of memory, the death drive keeps going back to an origin that is no longer there. Derrida's “mal” is connected to the desire to return to a national primal scene as origin—as commandment. It is this desire that is “feverish” and dangerous. This danger results in the violence narrated in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* in ways that are attributable to the author's intentionality (to establish an original American literature) and quite beyond their control (the series of missed encounters that the novels narrate and are organized around).

The obscene proximity to/of the Real accounts for the “tendency” of American classic literature toward an ideal national narrative, an ideal that structures the archive fever. This “tendency” is interrupted by the return of certain obscene, Gothic, or uncanny remainders that are shadowed forth in a complex tropology in the process of the construction of the American national project. I am referring to Eric Savoy's argument in “The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic” that the American Gothic should be considered as a tendency rather than a genre (6), a tendency toward the Real. I will come back in due time to the Gothic's ties to the

Thing and the uncanny in my treatment of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*; suffice it for now to stress that Melville and Hawthorne are fascinated by the *Thing*, by its paradoxical nature, by its being "something strange to [them], although it is at the heart of [them]" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 71).

Taking my lead from deconstruction and psychoanalysis, I shall deal—in the first chapter of my dissertation, focusing primarily on Hawthorne and entitled "The Dialectics of the *Tuché* and the Automaton: Repetition, the Trajectory of the Signifier, and the Missed encounter"—with the ways in which the impossible becomes real (experienced actuality) in its encounter with the Real. Studying the various functions of the missed encounter, my chapter expands the deconstructive matrix of trauma theory and, at the same time, moves beyond the deconstructionist argument that trauma and experience in general are beyond representation. It focuses on Derridean *différance* as the temporal matrix for the unreadable signifier and, because experience is tied to the repetition of impossibility, reflects (on) the social beyond the Real, which is tied to the materiality of the signifier. Like Lacan's necessary but impossible missed encounter with the Real (the kernel of the Real), Derrida's *différance* is not, I shall argue, cause free. *Différance*, like the unavoidable *objet a*, shows the inescapable gap in discourse. *Différance* is this void. It is the spiraling *glissement* that eternally changes; it is not (as Derrida famously insists) a word, it is not a concept, it is unsymbolizable. The (Lacanian) economy of the impossible encounter causes the (Derridean) encounter between the subject and the materiality and inadequacy of the signifier—this encounter, failed as it is, inscribes the experience of knowing in the realm of impossibility. While Lacan's model offers the theoretical foundation for a new understanding of the missed encounter, it does not address the tropics of narrative or the temporality of the scarlet

letter itself. This is why making a detour through Derrida, Paul de Man, Kristeva, Abraham and Torok, and Butler is crucial to the approach of the archive of “The Custom House.”

Drawing upon Hawthorne’s problematization of the missed encounter, and in light of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, I shall examine how the missed encounter becomes apparent in the realm of trauma. With the scarlet letter A on Hester’s breast, the temporal materiality of the Real comes back, confronting the present with a past that is ungraspable and that escapes hermeneutic mastery. This materiality of the Real requires the supplement of “The Custom House;” it is the residuum that comes back in the form of the bones of Hawthorne’s persecuting ancestors and the ghostly, uncanny medium of Surveyor Pue’s exhortations. Restructuring the dusty residues of the historical archive, the narrator has recourse to the tropics of ghost writing, prosopopeia, and disinterment. This figurative exhumation of the dead ancestors, I shall argue, arrests the reader and the archivist in state of suspense, between absence and presence, materiality and abstraction. The figurative disinterment frames what Eric Savoy calls “Hawthorne’s readerly visits to the archive” (“Filial Duty” 400). Essentially, I shall demonstrate how Hawthorne’s writing encrypts the fathers’ corpse/corpus, and I shall study the connections between Abraham and Torok’s psychoanalytic theory of encryptions and the literal crypts of the narrative—the crypt as the place out of which the story arises (the event of the archive and the office of surveillance, the *assujettissement* of the author and the crypt with which the novel closes). As we shall see, everything starts with the crypt of Pue’s document and ends with it.

On this score, it becomes clear that the psychoanalytic model is adequate to the understanding of the Hawthornian “filial duty,” (*The Scarlet Letter* 31), an Oedipally determined obligation that is predicated upon the extension of *assujettissement* and the restoration of the law

of the Puritan fathers. It is the archival event per se. In this respect, the contribution of the psychoanalytic model to a novel interpretation of the *The Scarlet Letter* consists, I think, in giving the residues of the Puritan fathers a material and psychic significance. Applying Freud's model of narrative, Derrida's theory of the trace, and Lacan's concept of the missed encounter, this chapter places the emphasis on the temporality of the sign and the subject—a temporality that stages, while accentuating the performative nature of the sign (the letter) and on the ability of the subject, as we shall see through Butler and Althusser, to resist, re-signify, and (re)cite, the belated impact of trauma. However, the psychoanalytic economy of the missed encounter is, I am tempted to say, an economy that is based on the management of the excess (surplus) of the crypt, the residue that inhabits the space of anasemia and on filling in the gaps left by the catachrestic maneuvers of the scarlet letter. This shuttling between anasemia (*arche*)—be it material, prosopoetic, psychological, or ideological—and the future (will-to) defines the narratives of both Hawthorne and Melville.

Parallel to my exploration of the issue of the missed encounter in *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, I shall investigate the temporality of the sign and the subject. In the temporal matrix of repetition, there is a series of traumas that unwittingly re-enact the primal trauma, which is lost in the mists of time (and available for witnessing only by the prosopoetics of exhumation). What Dimmesdale knows, therefore, is only what he understands as sin. His sin of fornication re-enacts what he understands, in his Christian system, as the Fall. Dimmesdale's understanding of the initiatory trauma is as "blind," as Chillingworth's who says to Hester: "My old faith, long forgotten, comes back to me, and explains all that we do, and all we suffer. By thy first step awry you didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment it has all been a dark necessity" (129). But

as we know, all of this traumatic relay is but the *différance* of the sins of the fathers, the trauma they perpetrated, themselves arriving with their “Bible[s] and [their] sword[s]” (13) as Hawthorne puts it, and thus drawing upon a foundational, *arche*, commencement and commandment. The origin of trauma, then, is God. In this vein, I shall show the ways in which prosopopeia, for example, serves as trope of the missed encounter and of reading. On this score, tropology proves a very helpful deconstructive tool. Like the temporality of trauma, the psychoanalytics of anasemia, prosopopeia, and exhumation work to delineate the contours of the missed encounter.

The primal scene of *The Scarlet Letter* is a temporal (historical) event that is reconstructed in the narrative. Using Freud’s model of belated trauma and Lacan’s theory of the symptom, I shall analyze how the residues of the scarlet letter come back in different forms, and how meaning emerges only symptomatically. In fact, the impossibility of symbolization guarantees the work of *jouissance*, a concept that I will analyze at length when I study the circulation of the letter⁵ and its symptomatic returns. Studying the ways in which the economy of *jouissance* has to do with excess and lack, pain and pleasure, I maintain a focus on the archive. The point I want to emphasize is that the archive unfolds in the field of the supplement, prosopoetically inscribing the American Subject in the field of temporality. In fact, Hawthorne’s narrative is a literary witness to American national trauma, a trauma that is intensified by the Gothic turn or tendency of the narrative, and an attempt to save the national document (the document left by surveyor Pue). Preserving the document arises from the tension between the act of archiving (repetition) and petition, or what Michael J. O’Driscoll calls the tension between “the material conditions of one’s socio-historic position and the dynamics of writing practices

that are at once both transgressive in their movement or ex-citation and regulatory in their summoning or legal citation that is in question” (286).

In approaching the materiality of the archive and trauma, I argue that the missed encounter arises from the return to/of the material (or corporeal) in a process of what I call crypto-temporal compulsion, or the compulsion to exhume, to double and re-double, to supplement, and to enjoy. While the Derridean archive originates in the very model of “the origin” of national subjectivity, in commencement and commandment, the figure of the double (shadow) is brought to the scene of writing through the (ab)use of tropics, mainly prosopopeia and chiasmus. On this account, the crypto-temporal and psycho-poetic compulsion stands as equivalent to the Freudian compulsion to repeat or the Lacanian persistence of the *Thing*. Now, after my exploration of the economy of the missed encounter (between the archivist and the archive, the sender and the receiver, the legatee and the inheritor, the corporeal and the abstract, the double and the shadow), it will become clear through the detour of deconstruction that the impossible encounter with the traumatic Real can only be supplemented. Such supplementation, as we shall see in the first and the second chapters of the thesis, functions as the Symbolic desire/fantasy to domesticate the *Thing*, the *objet a*, the residue beyond symbolization. However, as I shall demonstrate in these two chapters, supplementation ends up extending the work of the missed encounter. Following the detour of deconstruction, the residue acquires a new dimension. It becomes the *pharmakon*, that paradoxical concept that mimics the work of *jouissance*.

I intend to explore—in the second chapter of my dissertation titled, “Encounters and Missed Encounters: The Double, the Post Effects/Affects, and the Loss of Origins”—the ways in which *Moby-Dick*, a narrative full of doubles, shadows, and duplicates, is invested in the

effects/affects of the business of double—a business that is, much like the residue that acquires a new dimension following the detour of, or rather through, deconstruction, problematized by the business of letter writing and letter sorting. In *Moby-Dick*, there are, I shall demonstrate, many missed or failed encounters: the poetic missed encounter between allegory and failed symbol, the psycho-poetics of the double and the interweaving of narrative temporality, the image of wholeness one sees in the mirror and the split that happens after the missed encounter with the Real. Drawing upon Freud’s analysis of the shadow in “Mourning and Melancholia” and Otto Rank’s theory of the double, I shall explain how the origins of doubling, the split the subject undergoes, inhere in the subject’s narcissism. Drawing upon Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” and Kristeva’s Freudian model of “narcissistic melancholia,” I shall analyze the concept of narcissism and its libidinal investiture. Freud tells us that all libido is narcissistic because it is related to the ego. In his later works, the narcissistic libido becomes associated with the formless drive. Narcissistic libido is never self-evident: all we have is object libido and object cathexes. It will become clear—once I have studied the model of melancholia and how the subject displays a fantasmic, identificatory *re*-turn to an original state—that the lost origin (object) cannot be assimilated.

To talk about this impossibility, a recourse to poetics is necessary. As I shall demonstrate, Ahab’s anxiety, or his melancholia, is multifaceted; it requires the supplement of poetics to be explained. It becomes patently obvious that the intervention of chiasmus (the trope of narrative trauma that signals a shuttling between lack and excess, between the inability of language to assimilate the traumatic event and the surplus created by trauma) and prosopopeia (the trope that accounts for narrative bearing witness to trauma) is crucial to Melville’s project – that is, of

approaching an originary traumatic event that is not merely unnarrated but indeed disnarrated, and concurrently, of symbolizing the impossibility of such a narrative course. At the narrative level, through the activity of doubling the trauma beyond the narrative, we witness an impossibility of having access to the primal traumatic scene. This impossibility is congruent with the Lacanian psychoanalytic model which places trauma in the impossible Real. The impossibility of representing the hole at the center of the Symbolic necessitates, once again, the recourse to the supplement, which is but another double that, while trying to account for the loss, invests Melville's narrative in the spiral movement of *différance*.

3. The Missed Encounter and the Detour of Orientalism and Postmodernism

Every act of *jouissance* gives rise to something that is inscribed in the Book of debts of the Law. (Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 176)

Broadening the repertoire of the missed encounter to include the missed encounters between the Orient and the Occident, between American and its excesses, this chapter attempts to remap the configurations of the missed encounter across postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and postmodernism. At stake in the missed encounter between the Orient and the Occident is, as we shall see through postcolonial theory, an aporetic gesture of fascination and

fear, lack and excess, ambivalence and difference. I shall demonstrate how the dynamic of lack and excess are the political ground of the missed encounter, and the very juncture at which the psychoanalytic meets the political. This idea, however, gains strength as the chapter progresses toward its end. Staging the various missed encounters with the Real of the body, the second section of this chapter aims to shed light on the mystery of the hole in the body—a hole that epitomizes the obscene, perverse hole in the modern reality of America.

Dethroning the Cartesian sovereign, white subject⁶ from its powerful position, psychoanalysis has created another duality that has relegated the body to the domain of the Real. The body could only be understood in terms of the hole that inheres in the Real. The entry into the Symbolic results in a double loss—a loss of being and a loss of meaning. This is why Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, Žižek are crucial to the management of the economy of the *Thing*. If, as I shall demonstrate via the Lacanian/Freudian psychoanalytic model and the Deleuzian/Guattarian schizoanalytic model, the *Thing* finds representation, or rather dissolves in simulacra, and such simulacra discloses no resolution, the American modern *Thing* is this void, lack, or hole that indexes the construction of a fantasy about how the *Thing* is prescribed and proscribed in the Other. In seeking to locate the American *Thing* in modernity, we are inevitably left face to face with the Real. The proximity or rather over-proximity could be said to suspend us between two seemingly opposite yet, in reality, similar choices: to enjoy or not to enjoy. This Hamletian wager means that the *Thing* is not banished in modern America; it just *takes* a new form, blurring the boundaries between the Real and reality, between death and life, and between the interior and the exterior of the body. Its debt, however, is *jouissance*. Before talking about the *Thing*, it is perhaps

essential to note that the obsession with the residue of the Real persists in the Symbolic and in the social reality.

Let us consider the concept of the Symbolic. The concept of the Symbolic has witnessed many developments; suffice it to underline, for our purposes, the major developments. Many commentators argue that in Lacan's "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" the emphasis is laid on the symbolization or rather unsymbolization of the subject's Symbolic realm (symptoms, traumas, past experiences). For example, the recurrent symptoms in *The Scarlet Letter* and the disnarrated trauma in *Moby-Dick* could be said to be the unsymbolizable aporias in the subject's Symbolic. The analytic experience, consequently, bestows, retrospectively and symbolically, some meaning on these traumatic symptoms. As Lacan puts it, "All analytical experience is an experience of significance" (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan II* 325). The other major development is mainly structural and could be seen in Lacan's interpretation of "The Purloined Letter." This development places the accent on the signifying chain that functions as an accidental *automaton*, around which the signification revolves. As Lacan points out, "At the heart of flow of events, the functioning of reason, the subject from the first move finds himself to be no more than a pawn, forced inside this system, and excluded from any truly dramatic, and consequently tragic participation in the realization of truth" (*Seminar II* 168). The other important development places the emphasis on the articulation of the barred Other, the Other that holds an ex-timate, unsymbolizable (i.e., "something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me") essence. The rift in the Other means that there is a residuum, an inassimilable remainder, an *objet a*, in the Other. This relationship between the

desiring Other that lacks the object-cause of desire and the subject is predicated upon the Lacanian question “*Che Voy?*” (what does the Other want from me?).

In the last chapter of my dissertation—“Historicizing the Missed Encounter: America and its Excesses/*manques*”—I extend further the scope of the missed encounter to the Other of America (i.e., to the exterior of Empire), reflecting on the various imaginary, political, cultural, and ideological configurations of the missed encounter between the Occident and the Orient, and particularly between America and its various Others. More precisely, by staging the violent intrusion of the Real in reality and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of distinguishing between the Real and reality, between fantasy and *jouissance*, I attempt to demonstrate how the Orient functions as a symptom that, much like the Lacanian residuum of the Real, erupts in the Real of America. Staging the missed encounter as the impossible assimilation of the Real, extending it to include the missed encounter with the Real of the body, we witness an urge to enjoy the symptom. Making a detour through postcolonial theory, mainly Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, I shall show how the construction of the Orient in the literary imagination of America and the Lacanian/Freudian psychoanalytic model of subjectivity are repeated in tandem in the literary and cultural/*ideological mises en scène* of the residuum of the Real. I shall also demonstrate how the Lacanian/Freudian psychoanalytic models and the postcolonial theory of Edward Said present fundamental alternative theorizations of the mechanisms of power discourses. It does not require further argument to mention that the construction of the Other, the conception of Orientalism and the reversed Orientalism—Occidentalism—correspond with the psychoanalytic development of the subject. Representing the Other, the subject sends a message to the Other, and as we will see

later on, the post activity, suspended between arrival and non-arrival, is subject to the work of residuum or the revenant.

After investigating the aporetic economy that regulates the Symbolic exchange between America and Orient, the excess it created and yearns, but ultimately fails to contain, I shall demonstrate how the shuttling between the material and the immaterial, between the physical body and the Real of the body is reflective of the anxiety of postmodernism (an anxiety that is staged through the discrepancy between the Real and the corporeal). The body is the favorite site of the parasitical intrusion of the remnant, an intrusion that moves the missed encounter closer to the obscene and the uncanny. Freud tells us that the *unheimlich* is not the opposite of the *Heimlich*. In fact, it is this reference to homeliness that gives the uncanny its particular nature.⁷ Because of this unhomeliness-in-homeliness, or obscenity-in-*jouissance*, the subject experiences a mixture of pleasure and pain. In the following passage Žižek elucidate this complexity:

Do we not encounter here again the Freudian/Lacanian paradox of *jouissance* ‘beyond the pleasure principle’, as pleasure-in-pain - of *das Ding* which can be experienced only in a negative way - whose contours can be discerned only negatively, as the contours of an invisible void? Similarly, is not the (moral) Law itself a sublime Thing, in so far as it also elicits the painful sentiment of humiliation, of self-debasement, mixed with a profound satisfaction that the subject has done his duty? (*The Ticklish Subject* 40)

The complexity of *jouissance*, which will be the focus of the last section of the third chapter, lies in its mediation between pain and pleasure, a mediation that is operated by a shuttling between the Real and the Symbolic. Does the idea of an impossible *jouissance* refer to a possible *jouissance*? In other words, we have to accept the fact that it is impossible to enjoy—and confirm the Lacanian argument that the entry into the Symbolic is equated with a loss of being—or we

have to argue in favor of theory of fantasy, which is after all but another version of *jouissance*. In conclusion, I show how the Symbolic violence serves the epistemology of our modern realities and how it is problematized by an excessive, dysfunctional *jouissance* that reflects America's excessive investment in containing its excesses.

Chapter 1

The Dialectics of the *Tuché* and the Automaton: Repetition, the Trajectory of the Signifier, and the Missed encounter

I will tell you in a few words; but before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confined it to any one. (Poe, "The Purloined Letter" 126)

Fluctuating between offices, between the office of the Custom House and the ancestral graves, *The Scarlet Letter* protracts the career of the signifier and the missed encounter. That signifier serves many functions, all of which are slippery and not subject to authoritative control, among which is that it bears witness to a sin and to a trauma of punishment. At another level the signifier situates the narrator's "continual hope—a hallucination, which, in the face of all discouragement, and making light of impossibilities haunts him" (*The Scarlet Letter* 35) in a fluctuating position between the corpse and the corpus. This quest for the validation of the fathers links the scenes of writing to the scenes of ghost reading in the archive and the metaphoric disinterment of the corpses of the dead fathers. Situated halfway between offices, *The Scarlet Letter* determines the narrator's position in relation to both. Hawthorne's desire for "presence" informs not only the writing of "The Custom House," but it infects the trajectory of the scarlet letter in the novel. This is readable in light of 'the missed encounter.'

The situation of the letter between two realms, its materiality and its temporality, refers to Lacan's model of the letter. In this model, the letter has no content and the signifier persists as a meaningless letter which marks the destiny of the subject and which he must decipher. The letter is essentially that which returns and repeats itself.⁸ The displacement of the subject is regulated

by the place the main signifier—the letter—occupies. In fact, there is no displacement of the signifier, but rather a series of subjects whose subject position is formed by the relay of the letter. Lacan’s argument, which is about an actual letter that performs a certain function in a short fiction of Poe, sheds some light on the scarlet letter, which is not a letter at all, but rather a symbol. I will speak at length in this chapter about the various configurations of the letter; suffice it now to stress that the scarlet letter arrives at each scene of interpretation in the manner of an actual letter. The letter is the pure signifier that eludes even the compulsion of repetition and its insistent attempt to access the content of the letter. The pertinaciousness and pretentiousness of the signifier, which is the result of Symbolic determination, allow Lacan to see an automatic repetition in the Freudian sense of the word. Upon reflection, the letter seems to me to be addressing itself to everyone—perhaps, every gazing eye—trying to organize the primal and repetitive scenes by anchoring them in a discourse of the *tuché* and *automaton*. Because traumatic experience is tied to language and tropology, it is important to focus on the role the signifier plays in trauma. This is the major contribution of psychoanalysis and deconstruction to trauma theory.

Lacan tells us that psychoanalysis studies the subject in terms of the *tuché*, the missed encounter, which is a reflection of the chance that determines the construction of the subject. Psychoanalysis, then, rests on the analysis of the impossible—the tropic logic of the missed encounter and the return of the repressed. As a study that addresses the “*unassimilable*” traumatic experience or the impossible lost experience, psychoanalysis, Lacan asserts, brings trauma to the scene of analysis by repeating it as an experience in the present. This does not mean that psychoanalysis does not consider the missed encounter or the lost experience as beyond the limits of representation. This tendency results in the need for what Freud terms “construction in

analysis.” Primal scenes, Freud suggests, could be cured by making the unconscious conscious, that is, by an excess of conscious knowledge, either by transference, as outlined in *A scheme of Psychoanalysis* (1940), or by construction, as proposed in *Constructions in Analysis* (1937). For him, the primal scene of trauma is not subject to recollection or to reconstruction by the analysand. But this did not mean, for him, that such a scene could be reconstituted, and thus represented, by the analyst, subject of course to the proviso that such reconstruction is speculative, hypothetical, beyond contingent. This means that the unspeakable is only possible through language. Here the temporality of trauma is structured according to the rules of the missed encounter. Studying the incommensurable origin of the analytic experience, Lacan argues:

Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and *imposing on it an apparently accidental origin*? We are now at the heart of what may enable us to understand the radical character of the conflictual notion introduced by the opposition of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 55; italics mine)

By Staging the encounter—the *tuché* that organizes the analytic experience in terms of the accident—analytic experience, Lacan tells us, advocates the materiality and inadequacy of the signifier. However, the analytic experience repeats the impossibility that structures both the subject and the traumatic experience. This repetition is evoked by Cathy Caruth, whose model of trauma intersects with Lacan’s.

Trauma theory, as articulated by Caruth, brings very basic psychoanalysis (mainly Freudian) to deconstructive historiography. She explains that something is missed in the initial encounter with the traumatic event. The importance of psychoanalysis to the analysis of a

narrative is explained by Caruth who invokes the work of Freud: “If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature like psychoanalysis is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (3). According to Caruth, trauma is the story of a wound that addresses us, through the disruptions in language, to tell us of a reality that is not available. Trauma returns in flashbacks, nightmares, and traces and reappears out of the past like a ghost. Re-appearing in a different form, the event of trauma is betrayed by the event of narration; however, it can only be witnessed as a break in language qua event. Caruth argues that the repetition of the traumatic event extends it beyond the limits of representation and knowledge. This repetition is linked closely to the belatedness and inscrutability that is at the center of the repetitive activity. As Freud and Caruth argue, trauma is not a simple memory; it is inaccessible to consciousness because it has never been fully assimilated into knowing.

Expanding the psychoanalytic basis of trauma theory from Freud to include Lacan, I shall explain how trauma and the Lacanian Real are entirely bound up with each other. In fact, both involve the shattering of the Symbolic Order and the slide toward death. What Lacan calls automatism (or compulsion) of repetition—Freud’s *Wiederholungszwang*⁹—and its link to the network of signifiers is explained in his *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. In the former he claims that repetition goes beyond the pleasure principle. We shall see that for Freud, and for Derrida, the phenomenon of repetition is irreducible to any principle, and is destructive of the idea of principle. Like Freud’s repetition which linked to the death drive, Lacan’s repetition is not the

result of the desire to reproduce a lost or past desire. What is repetition, then? Repetition is, if we are to adopt Lacan's words, "tied to circular process of the exchange of speech. There is a symbolic circuit external to the subject, tied to a certain group of supports, of human agents, in which the subject, the small circle which called his destiny, is indeterminately included (*The Ego in Freud's Theory* 98). The Symbolic exterior and interior exchanges determine what is called destiny. Destiny, however, could be also coincidences, accidents, chances, and alternatives. In his analysis of the question of hazard, Aristotle divided it into *automaton* (spontaneity) and *tuché* (causality). A set of events, he expounds, that happen accidentally constitute for us the veridical hazard of the encounter (*tuché*) between the events. Lacan takes up Aristotle's concepts and expands them.

What happens if there is an irregularity or rupture in speech or writing? What is sometimes called error or slip of the tongue is what Aristotle calls *tuché*. *Tuché* is, however, the encounter with the Real. Such an encounter, as I will explain in this chapter, is a missed encounter that brings the *tuché* closer to the uncanny (i.e. the return of something that is only indirectly familiar). The *tuché* deconstructs the concept of determinism and introduces the concept of the uncanny to subjectivity and causality. The *tuché* is the pure hazard that defies prediction. Defying prediction, the *tuché* bonds to repetition.¹⁰ "What is repeated," Lacan tells us, "is always something that occurs" (54)—something that is in the process of happening. He continues to argue that, "the function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter—an encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma" (55; original italics). Trauma, as such, has a vital role in the compulsion to

repeat¹¹ because it is only in making reference to trauma that repetition occurs. It is the subject's refusal to meet the Real that allows repetition to re-occur. It requires no further argument to say that *automaton* is linked to the domain of spontaneity and necessity as it is always already written, while the *tuché* is invested in the field of hazard and the missed encounter—an encounter that is not written. Although *automaton* and the *tuché* are interlaced, the *tuché* goes beyond the expectations of the subject and freezes the moment of the encounter with the Real through a repetition of the network of signifiers—a repetition that is doomed to miss that encounter. Lacan sees the repetition compulsion in the persistence of the purloined letter in Poe's story. Organized by an accidental *automaton*, the various scenes of the purloined letter are repeated almost identically in tandem while the *tuché* keeps missing the encounter with the letter, the content of which is inaccessible.

The relevance of this analysis to *The Scarlet Letter* is that it sheds light on the various investitures of the letter. Striving to articulate the theoretical and narrative configurations of the missed encounter, this chapter makes recourse to anasemia to draw the contours of the primal scene. In his foreword to *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, Derrida divides anasemia¹² into three elements: narrative, angle, and sepulcher. The narrative—the anasemic structure—describes a story “as a path followed backward by the structure in order to reach all the way back beyond the origin ... The concept is re-cited in the course of this journey” (xxxiv). Anasemia creates also an angle “within the word itself” (xxxiv) and the significance of the word regresses to an original meaning. Anasemia, then, “diverts its account toward *another* event that takes place where it has never been ... The anasemic account has an essential relation to a sepulcher. *A fortiori* in the case (of the Wolf Man) where the trauma did not take place only once: One can less than ever

dispense with a narrative account” (xxxiv; original emphasis). Going back to the dead father’s sepulchers is in fact the tracing back of the anasemic interpretation of the crypt.

I shall examine the psychoanalytic, deconstructive contexture in which the issue of “the missed encounter” is posed. In other words, this chapter situates Hawthorne at the juncture of trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. Trauma theory, as articulated by Freud and Caruth, is very important to the understanding of a narrative. With Lacan, we reach the point at which we are left to stare into the face of the missed or impossible encounter which is said to suspend the subject between two impossible choices – two missed encounters: (1) to know his/her suffering and therefore to repeat it or (2) not to know and to forget. My project addresses the function of the missed encounter in trauma writing. The missed encounter and trauma writing are both based on repetition—a repetition that centers on the temporality of the subject and writing. The temporality, however, is tied to impossibility. This impossibility drives the subject beyond the Real to a failed or missed encounter with the insufficiency of knowing his/her suffering. Placing the traumatic experience beyond representation and the materiality of experience and signification, one misses the ethical dimension of trauma. According to Lacan, it is the unreadability of the missed encounter which forms the essence of trauma. He argues that “the missed encounter” that structures the temporality of trauma is a failed encounter with the “timeless” Real. Structured around the repetition of the subject’s traumatic primal scenes, psychoanalysis studies the missed encounter—the primal scene—as a missed event. According to psychoanalysis, the traumatic primal scene is an impossible scene that, forever missed and forgotten, determines the repetitive structure of trauma. I shall argue that the real event is not only reproduced in repetitions but also in aporias and absences, in the archive, and in the act of

writing/reading itself. The missed encounter is, for Hawthorne, a matter of the impossibility of writing history from the perspective of romantic narrative and symbolization.

To grasp the extra-literary dimensions of American literature while maintaining a deep appraisal of its literary qualities, recent critics of American literature were faced with the challenge of interdisciplinarity. By asking what direction “the writing of literary history [may] take in the aftermath of deconstruction,” (83) Gregory S. Jay’s *America the Scrivener: Deconstruction and the Subject of Literary History* argues that the archival recovery of American history and literature can only be the result of interdisciplinarity. According to him, “each writer offers a powerful example of the interplay among the literary, the historical, the political, and the subjective” (xii). It is within this context of debate that this chapter will revisit certain assumptions about the traumatic missed encounters in Hawthorne’s text—encounters between the characters, between the reader and the text, between letters, between the living and the dead, and between the author/archivist and the archive.

Studying Hawthorne’s conception of the missed encounter, and in light of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, I shall examine how the missed encounter unfolds in the realm of the archive and in trauma. The temporality of Hester’s scarlet letter alludes to the temporality and materiality of the Real. However, this symbol acquires its signification within the epistemic and ideological contexts of nineteenth-century American literature and its obsession with staging the challenge of interpretation or what Irwin calls “reciprocal questions of the origin and limits of symbolization and the symbolization of origins and ends” (xi). Accordingly, stable meaning and coherent subjectivity are under siege and threatened by the multiplicity of interpretations.

The scar symbolically forged on Hester's body becomes a physical reminder of a history of violence and mystery and demonstrates the impossibility of forgetting. The disfiguring and misrepresentation of the body expose the gap between the Real and reality, between the missed, impossible encounter with trauma and the narrations of the traumatic event, and between the Symbolic and the material/domestic. Studying the chiasmic implosion of ghost writing into the (im)possible return to and encounter with the American Real through the (ab)uses of the trope of prosopopeia, I want to present the ways in which trauma and the missed encounter engage with absence that signals presence, and vice versa. Folding and unfolding into chiasmus, trauma theory and the missed encounter play out in various forms and figures. Rather than studying the literary, historical, and political encounters—a task well done by Jonathan Arac, Sacvan Bercovitch, Gregory S. Jay, to mention only few—my interest in this chapter tries to lay bare, through a deconstructive and psychoanalytic reading, the vicissitudes of the missed encounter and its engagement with loss and origins. This chapter also investigates the various configurations of the problematic of ghost writing and archival authorship/authority. The affective bifurcation following the archive *fever* explains the obsession with the past and the future anterior—an obsession that is activated by repetition compulsion. In fact, to know what the archive “will have meant” is to argue that the impossible recovery of the original meaning, of “commencement and commandment” gives us the very concept of futurity, but that futurity is condemned to unfold in the spiral of *différance*.

1.1 The Game of Difference/Différance: Anasemia, Interpellation, and Encryptions

There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 36)

Suspended between the office of the Custom House and the office of writing, Hawthorne's narrator, through the business of interpellation and subject-formation, digs into the material debris of the Custom House archive (and metaphorically, into the graves of the forefathers which constitute the spectral origin of the colonial archive) in search of the paternal letter—a letter that would approve the narrator's business. Such a Gothic journey from one office to the other—a journey that cannot be said to conclusively “arrive”—is reflected in the office or function of the scarlet letter itself, which, once disinterred, circulates in the community. This circulation and circularity are continually ‘staged’ in the hermeneutic game, by which the sequence of interpretations fails to arrive at authoritative closure and thus arrest the spiral of *différance*. The game of repetition and difference/*différance* is a case of anasemia (something lost in the origins that haunts the present repetition). In this process of repetition and difference/*différance*, we have a series of encryptions.

Hawthorne's narrator, Eric Savoy argues, “obsessively returning to the graves of the dead fathers and impelled to figure his own grave as the site of reading and writing, ... consistently inflects filial desire through the sign of the corpse” (397). The narrator's quest for approval reflects his fear of castration. The dead fathers' graves, as the site of the pre-Oedipal stage, are

absorbing. The outcome of the narrator's fear of castration and loss is his submission to the filial (reality) principle. His entry into the Symbolic Order or the language system requires the submission to the rules of language—the Law-of-the-Father, which is at the center of Puritan America. To be recognized as a literary figure, Hawthorne's narrator submits to the law of his Father—Surveyor Pue, by giving a prosopoetic figure to the 'bones' of the ancestors which he has figuratively disinterred earlier in "the Custom House." By this logic, the narrator's primal scene is also the Father's. The narrator's identification with the dead Father is erotic and literary. The latent content of the narrator's scarlet letter suggests that the very image of phallic authority, the primal scene, is disrupted and challenged by the forbidden desire, which is a desire to return to an origin identified with the absent or lost mother. This thwarted desire comes symptomatically and is often encrypted within the archive.

The dead fathers summon up the narrator to the realm of history. The narrator's difficulty in reading the residues of Pue's dusty residues reflects his hermeneutic bewilderment in front of Hester Prynne's scarlet letter and his obsession with recovering the past. Figuratively disinterring his fathers, Hawthorne, although he gives them a voice and face, only supplements the "musty papers" (27) and complicates the work of both the archivist and the reader. As Eric Savoy argues in his "'Filial Duty': Reading the Patriarchal Body in the 'Custom House'":

the novel itself produces an inconclusive history of interpretation; Hester Prynne's letter remains, in scene after scene of reading, a silent and uncorroborative sign ... it *is*, in fact, *recovered* rather than *uncovered* by every interpretive motion. While it symbolically extends the invitation to decipher and thus instigates the allegory of reading, Hawthorne's narrative recurrently restores it to its simple materiality and robs it of allegorical signification: it remains ... *disfigured*. (399; original emphasis)

This suspension between *disfiguration* and *figuration*, *materiality* and *abstraction*, *absence* and *presence* structure *The Scarlet Letter*. In fact, the scarlet letter is the material debris (*restes*) of history.

I would like to build upon Eric Savoy's argument by suggesting that "The Custom House" functions as a ghostly crypt that encrypts the father's corpse/corpus. Such encryption is done through *anasemia*, *prosopopeia*, and *disinterment*. Returning to and *re-reading* the historical events of Puritan America, Hawthorne makes use of *tropology* to reconstruct the dead fathers' narrative. In doing so, he participates in the *hauntological*¹³ work of the letter. In "The Burden of History," Hayden White writes:

We should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch or complex of events in the past 'correspond' to some preexistent body of 'raw facts.' For we should recognize that what constitutes the facts themselves is the problem that the historian, like the artist, has tried to solve in the choice of metaphor by which he orders his world, past, present, and future. (47)

Like art and history, psychotherapy is an attempt to access and represent the repressed and forgotten events. However, none of them yields an accurate recall. The circularity of crypts is resonant with the hermeneutic circle that the *mise en scène* of the novel stages: the repeated encounter of the reading subject with the letter, the drama of *différance*. All arises *from* the crypt of Pue's document, and all is referred by the narrator *back to* the document. It is this circle in which the missed encounter is repeatedly staged throughout the novel: where the *Thing* evaporates and slips away toward death and the grave.

I would be remiss not to mention, though, that the question of the grave is linked to the office or business of anasemia. When I first started studying the work of anasemia, I found myself attracted to debris and traces of and in the archive and the grave. I make no claim to covering all the theoretical turns of anasemia, much less to assessing its validity. What is important about anasemia is that it opens up a new window for hermeneutics and becomes itself a trope of reading. To better understand the work of anasemia, let us quote at length from *The Shell and the Kernel* in which Nicolas Abraham defines anasemia as the “scandalous anti-semantics” (105) of psychoanalysis. He points out:

the allusion to the nonreflexive and the unnamed in fact induces this strange semantic phenomenon. Thus the language of psychoanalysis no longer follows the twists and turns (*topoi*) of customary speech and writing. Pleasure, ID, Ego, Economic, Dynamic, are not metaphors, metonymies, synecdoches, catachreses; they are, by dint of discourse, products of de-signification and constitute new figures, absent from rhetorical treatises. These figures of anti-semantics, inasmuch as they signify no more than the action of moving up toward the source of their customary meaning, require a denomination properly indicative of their status and which—for want of something better—I shall propose to designate by the neologism *anasemia*. (85; original italics)

The anasemic economy is thus characterized by the movement back (ana-) to earlier sources of signification (semia). Inspired by the Lacanian conception of desire as metonymy and lack, anasemia, which is developed by post-Freudian psychoanalysis, stages the abysmal nature of signification and deconstructs the old conception of semantics. Anasemia, however, refers to the temporality of the sign and signification. I’m interested in tracing back repressed signifiers and primal scenes through an anasemic ana-lysis in which psychoanalysis and deconstruction intersect and interact. In his foreword to Abraham and Torok’s *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*,

Derrida demonstrates that “Anasemia creates an angle, within the word itself. While preserving the old word in order to submit it to its singular conversion, the anasemic operation does not result in growing explicitness, in the uninterpreted development of a virtual significance, in a regression toward the original meaning” (xxxiv). The regression or return to the original meaning registers anasemia in the realm of ontological hauntology¹⁴ and narrative ghost writing. In fact, anasemia is both a matter of the trace (residue) left by the past utterance upon the present and also of what is encrypted in the signifier as the archive of its past. Anasemia—*re*-turning to the original meaning—contains within it the Freudian repetition compulsion that structures the uncanny, the death drive, and trauma writ large. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, repetition is theorized in relation to the traumatic wound or to anxiety disorder. In *Writing and Difference*, which gives us another understanding of repetition, Derrida expounds that “is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve? For repetition does not *happen to* an initial impression; its possibility is already there, in the resistance offered *the first time* by the physical neurones” (202; original italics). Situating the letter in anasemia, one faces the epistemological and ontological question: does the letter arrive at its destination or does it fail to reach it? Does the letter reach its destination in a different “form,” a form which is haunted by anasemic traces of its origin?

Derrida’s response to the avowal of Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” is that the letter also fails to arrive at its final destination. Lacan’s structural model maintains the claim that a letter does reach its final destination. However, as Žižek argues in his *Enjoy Your Symptom*, “a letter always arrives at its destination—especially when we have the limit case of a letter without addressee, of what is called in German *Flaschenpost*, a message in a bottle thrown into

the sea from an island after shipwreck” (10). This kind of letter without addressee is bound to arrive at its destination since wherever it arrives is its final destination. Is the scarlet letter A a letter without an addressee? The answer is that we have a letter with multiple or indefinite addressees. Is the letter’s itinerary governed by the arbitrariness of the sign? Is the letter doomed to reach its destination? And if it fails to reach it, is that part of the dynamics of destiny? As Žižek argues, a letter always reaches its addressee because “one becomes its addressee when one is reached” (12). According to Žižek, who draws in his analysis of ideology on Lacan and Althusser, the letter interpellates the subject when it arrives at its final destination in the subject. By this logic, the letter functions as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). As an ISA, the letter “function[s] massively and predominantly by ideology” (Althusser 149). To what extent is the historical document—signified in “The Custom-House” and in *The Scarlet Letter* by the debris of the dead fathers and their literal and literary remains—readable? How can the document be recovered? Is the recovering process free from interpellation and *assujettissement*? These questions are *points de capiton* on which the meaning is distributed, disseminated, and hidden. Meaning is produced retroactively and prospectively through anasemia and the interpellative nature of the future anterior.

The scarlet letter—a product of Puritan America—produces ideologies which are internalized by the individuals. The ideological function of the letter is to serve as “a sermon against sin” (52) and thus interpellate and subjectify women. It is worth noting that Hawthorne’s narrative is an extension of the Puritan project of controlling women. In her feminist reading of Hawthorne’s narrative, Louise DeSalvo disapproves of Hawthorne’s ancestors and she is offended by his portrayal of women. For our purposes, I find it particularly useful to consider

DeSalvo's analysis of the narrator's statement that "[t]here were several foolscap sheets containing many particulars respecting the life and conversation of one Hester Prynne, who appeared to have been rather a noteworthy personage in the view of our ancestors" (30). DeSalvo notes that what is at stake here is the telling of the story of patriarchy: "Hawthorne does not perceive the function of telling his tale as serving the causes of women's history; rather, Hawthorne is using one woman's story to serve the purposes of male history, both his own and men in general (62). Consequently, Hawthorne's reworking of this history, she argues, is activated by a process of interpellation. Through this process of ideological interpellation, women and individuals in general are turned into subjects. In "The Custom House" and *The Scarlet Letter* ideological interpellation is conveyed through the use of tropology, mainly prosopopeia. This (ab)use is essential to trace Hawthorne's response to the fathers' call to remember them and reinscribe their ideology. As Althusser argues, the existence of ideology and interpellation of individuals as subjects are two faces of the same coin since

what thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology. One of the effects of ideology is the practical *denial* (denegation) of the ideological character of ideology: ideology never says, "I am ideological." (118; original italics)

Most subjects, according to Althusser, are caught up in the meshes of their so-called free will, which is but ideological. Accordingly, they fail to recognize the ISA, which is created to punish anyone who resists the dominant ideology—the ideology of the Father or the Subject, to use Lacanian terminology. I take up Eric Savoy's argument that "Hawthorne's recurring images of

marks upon women's bodies function in a complex semiotic field: Hester Prynne's scarlet letter circulates in a larger economy of surveillance and punishment, for it is continuous with, and figuratively gestures toward, the legibility of the tortured female body" (403). These images or marks, as Eric Savoy argues, are literal and at the same time tropic. The scarlet letter—the material *reste* of history—functions as a living sermon to Puritan misogyny and to the exclusion of women. Although the study of Hawthorne's misogyny is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is crucial to the understanding of Hawthorne's gender politics and psychoanalytics of the scarlet letter. The hegemony of the letter, which rests mainly on ISAs, is presented and inculcated in all subjects. As Althusser clearly puts it, “the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’*” (123; original italics).

Althusser presents the process of interpellation as a temporal process. When an individual is interpellated, he becomes a subject; and when he becomes a subject, he enters ideology. A letter, temporal as it is, never says it is ideological; it interpellates the subject unconsciously. Following the Althusserian model, the subject-to-be is always already there even before the moment of the letter's arrival at its destination. By this logic, the letter interpellates individuals and reaches its destination by means of the already existing category of the subject. The individual, according to Althusser, is a structural association of relations of subjectivity and relationships between subjects and objects. This does not mean that the subject exists prior to interpellation. As Butler argues, the subject may not be said to exist prior to such interpellation—or rather, since *assujettissement* is continual and without end, the subject may be

said to be consolidated by such repeated interpellation. The “Subject”—the structure—is there before the moment of birth but the subject is not yet there. This structure is one of enabling repetition (of assujettissement). The individual is “created” through the process of interpellation that follows the act of sending the letter.

Interpellation is closely linked to punishment and the spectacle. The law, however, permeates the first scaffold scene—the place that stages social punishment. Such punishment is staged in Hester’s wearing the scarlet letter A—which is a perpetually circulating stage—or, as Chillingworth puts it, “a living sermon against sin” (52)—that guarantees the spectacle. The gaze of the community keeps the letter shining. “Hester Prynne had always this dreadful agony in feeling a human eye upon the token; the spot never grew callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with daily torture” (68). The trajectory of the gaze of the other, petrifying as it is, is broken at the limits of the letter which functions as a shield. Hester adheres to the letter of *nomos* only to restructure its office, by redirecting the vector of the gaze. The scaffold scene is very important to the narrative as it will determine the contours of desire and shame, which will later explain the splintered nature of the subject. I shall study how the representation of the Puritan dialectics is tied to the matrix of biopolitics. Here I shall concentrate on the first scaffold scene—a heterotopia of deviation where all forms of corporeality traverse power and ideology.¹⁵

For Althusser and Lacan, it is impossible to gain entry into the Real of existence due to our heavy reliance on language. Nevertheless, they argue that it is possible to see the plethora of ways that we are written in ideology through a structural approach to society. Traditional Marxists come to realize that ideologies are false by referring to the true reality concealed by them. Following the Lacanian understanding of the Imaginary Order, Althusser argues that

Ideology does not reflect the real world but “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (109). In fact, individuals are always already within ideology because of their dependence on language to understand themselves and the world around them. Ideology has a material existence because “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (112). Althusser argues that it is our performance of our relation to other subjects and to social institutions that interpellates us as subjects.

Foucault distinguishes between two kinds of practices which led to the disappearance of old forms of punishment: the first was the spectacular punishment; the second was the change of the ends of punishment. The aim of traditional form of punishment was to inflict physical pain. However, the public spectacle surrounding punishment has not disappeared; rather, it has come back in a more organized form. The theatricality of punishment, a characteristic of the old regime of punishment, concentrates on the manipulation of the body through the infliction of unbearable physical pain. The public gaze participates in the execution of prisoners. I shall explain how punishment as spectacle is the form of punishment Puritan America uses to carry on the transhistorical project of the dead fathers and I shall use the Althusserian and Foucauldian models of subjection to study the subjugation and subjectivation of Puritan society—namely Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and Pearl.

Interpellative as it is, the letter, I will explain, can also fail to reach its destination when it keeps roaming in the realm of *différance*. Such *différance* parallels the dynamics of the missed encounter between the sender and the receiver. Explaining Derrida’s understanding of the letter, Barbara Johnson brilliantly states:

When Derrida says that a letter can miss its destination and be disseminated, he reads “destination” as a place that preexists the letter’s movement. But if, as Lacan shows, the letter’s destination is not its literal addressee, nor even whoever possesses it, but whoever is possessed by it, then the very disagreement over the meaning of ‘reaching the destination’ is an illustration of the nonobjective nature of that “destination.” (248)

What the sender sends will be sent back to him/her by the receiver. This symbolic and anasemic relationship between the sender and the receiver sets the frame for what might be called the ‘debt of anasemia’. Anasemia is, then, closely linked to death. ‘The debt of anasemia’ is in fact the debt of inheritance and desire. The point I want to raise is that the narrative scenes displaying Puritan hegemonic values embed an anasemic crypt that carries the affective investment of the narrative in the original scene to (dis)place it elsewhere. In grammatological terms, the relevance of the anasemic core of the scarlet letter to the study of interpellation is that it, while it displaces the affective investment and haunts the fringes of the signifier, connects the crypts to the ideology of the fathers and their dream of preserving it. The circuits of anasemia inscribe the act of writing in the realm of absence and transference. The real sender in *The Scarlet Letter* is Surveyor Pue, the receiver is Hawthorne, and the message is *The Scarlet Letter*. The scarlet letter A has many referents and many meanings. Is the letter the site of prohibition? Is it the site of “embarrassment” (Savoy “Embarrassments”)? These catachrestic maneuvers, which dwell in gaps and in the loss of referentiality, stage this debt and evoke the anasemic return of and to the past and the impossibility of the encounter between the sender and the receiver. The chiasmic relationship between the sender and the receiver suggests that the business of the letter is suspended between the impossibility of the encounter and its necessity.

What happens if the letter is not received? The answer is that the roaming letter keeps looking for a destination. While looking for a destination, it could be claimed by a ghost and could be stained with the blood of the dead corpse. These forays could be considered as a prime and indeed initiatory moment of encryption. What, in the end, does the “stain” signify? The “stain”—an example of the eruption of the Real of the body—seems to require investigation through a bifocal lens. On the hand, we have, as I argued above, a moment of encryption and figuration. On the other hand, it seems that the blood stain is a kind of literalization, or *point de capiton*, of the *tache* that Lacan posits as the screen in the mapping of the look and the gaze. Taking into account Lacan’s theory of the symptom and Derrida’s theory of the trace, I shall explain how the ultimate destiny of the letter is to reach a destination in the form of symptoms. Being symptomatic, the scarlet letter can be said to have no verifiable content. The lack of content, which is the problem of all problems in *The Scarlet Letter*, frames the contours of the letter and suggests that such content is perhaps always and only a symptom of reading. Once the letter is set loose to be read at large and over time, it becomes the property of everyone who happens to lay his hands on it. What the receiver sees and what the reader reads is always already constructed through a myriad of culturally mediated set of frames. Accordingly, the encounter between the reader and the text, on the one hand, and the receiver and the letter, on the other, is an impossible encounter. This is due to the fact that “the frame of our view is always already framed (re-marked) by a part of its contents” (Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom*, 15). This chiasmic relationship is explained by what Žižek calls the “dialectic of view and gaze” (15). The moment a person looks at a picture and his view freezes is the moment when the pictures gazes back at him. In this abysmal relationship, the viewer encounters himself in an anasemic way. The play of the

evil eye is enigmatically visible in the narrative. Even the custom house turns out to be gazing at characters and the reader much like Hitchcock's films in which houses look back in hunger to devour their victims. What the Custom House may be said to "want" is articulated in the discourse of Surveyor Pue as ghostly revenant: it "wants" the event of the archive, the continuation of the chain of *assujettissement*, and thus the prolongation of the law of the puritan fathers. Inscribing the cradle of the scarlet letter in the custom house allows Hawthorne, in an attempt to control female sexuality, to project and to extend the Puritan patriarchal gaze. However, as Žižek contends, this gaze is the missing gaze—"an impossibility that gives rise to the fetish object" (202). The impossibility of the subject to see and to fix the object allows the latter to give substance to that missed gaze and ultimately become the gaze itself. This anasemic abysmal encounter with the self is at the center of Western thinking. Nietzsche states that "when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you" (89). Like a mirror, the abyss creates the sensation of vertigo. This vertigo and unease is the fracturing of the gaze of the abyss. The trajectory of the gaze that runs between the viewer and the abyss, much like the viewer and the painting, redirects the gaze back to the viewer. If the abyss is bottomless, then, there is no falling and if there is no falling, there must be a return. Accordingly, the letter *must* and will eventually either find a destination or return to the sender. What happens if the letter fails to reach the intended receiver and if it does not return? The answer is that it either reaches a random receiver or it is destroyed. In both cases it fulfills its ontological function of conveying a message and the sender's evaluative and deontic modalities which are strictly conditioned by generic and contextual parameters.

The letter always arrives at its destination because it is closely linked to death. A form of writing, it is the subject's or the receiver's relation with his own death. This ghostly aspect of the letter, as the loss of the letter, is a Derridean pun on loss and mourning—concepts which are explained in “Fors.” The letter's arrival at its final destination equals the meeting of death and writing. Each one carries his/her own letter. Although the final destination—death—is inevitable, the course of the letter is contingent upon the chaotic and unpredicted flow of events. In *Enjoy Your Symptom*, Žižek states that “the only letter that nobody can evade, that sooner or later reaches us, i.e., the letter which has each of us as its infallible addressee, is death. We can say that we live only in so far as a certain letter (the letter containing our death warrant) still wanders around, looking for us” (21). The letter, however, is identified with its unfolded exteriority. It explains and represents the interplay of signs arranged according to the addressee. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the letter functions not only as a container of a death warrant but also as a perpetrator of life, which is why the letter has a specific function (*différance*), but not a content, because that content remains—as it is clear in the final explanation offered by Dimmesdale before his death—ungraspable, inexpressible. It can only be expressed obliquely in the circuitous discourse of catachrestic tropes. It forestalls and defers death by giving the narrator the ability to tell stories and by giving voice to the dead. Hawthorne's narrative is, then, an endeavor, renewed in every chapter, to keep death outside *The Scarlet Letter*. The desire to ward off death is not perpetual as death conquers the living at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*. At the beginning of the narrative, death is present through ghostly injunctions. This relationship between the letter (writing) and death is also manifested in the subjugation of authorial voice in *The Scarlet Letter*. The real author of *The Scarlet Letter* is the archival dead father and the real narrative is the letter.

The question the letter brings into the narrative is a reminder of mortality—the modality of which delineates the nature of the relation between writing/reading and death. The reader of *The Scarlet Letter* traces the letter only to be handed his ineluctable letter—death. Thus, the act of reading which indexes the act of writing brings the shadow of death which is always already there in the narrative. The Derridean *écriture* reflects Hawthorne’s writing. The concluding words of *The Scarlet Letter* draw the temporal and the spatial together and attach the letter A to the domain of death. However, excavating the archive as a material object becomes the fulfillment of the journey of the letter from grave to paper and back to grave again.¹⁶ The material inscription: “all around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon”(191). Such transformation of the indefinite letter A into armorial bearings marks the authorial presence. Hawthorne’s attempt to undo the origin of *The Scarlet Letter* takes on an uncanny dimension. At issue here is that the letter arises from the grave (the dust and bones of the Puritan forefathers, transmitted through the “office” of Surveyor Pue) and it returns to the grave of Hester Prynne. From death it arises and to it it returns. This, of course, mirrors the unending hermeneutic circle that is staged in the narrative itself as the letter passes from reader to reader. If the narrative is the impossible attempt to encipher the American Real into symbolization, the letter A becomes the uncanny material index of that impossibility.

While trauma is always a matter of the impossibility of adequate representation, Hester’s trauma is not primarily discursive; rather, it has a ripple effect in the community, for it becomes a question of ethical reading and hermeneutics. The question is how can we do justice to this

woman, since the trauma of Hester and that of the Puritan community cannot be inscribed. What is pretermitted from the American Puritan tradition re-appears as signifying traces. Tradition—*traditio*—means both handing over (*tradere*) and betrayal (*traditore*). However, the trace is a material one. Hawthorne's recuperative disinterment of Surveyor Pue's text and his advocacy of the politics of his Puritan fathers reveal Hawthorne's investment in a gendered writing—a writing that blurs all boundaries. A signifying trace, the letter A, inscribed as it is on Hester's breast, implies the materiality of the sign and trauma. It is both recorded on and in the body of Hester and in Hawthorne's narrative. The letter A is the material reminder of the signifying nature of discourse at the moment of trauma. It is also revelatory of the effect of the violent linguistic inscriptions on the psyche. Such violence creates an illusion of comprehension. Hawthorne's narrative gives body to the unspeakable. Such prosopoetic operation testifies to the violence of the moment of trauma. The letter A appears on the page, on Hester's chest, on the sky, and in the reader's imagination. The letter gives a temporality and location to the discursive trauma Hester and the Puritan community go through. *The Scarlet Letter* stages the non-representationality of trauma through the materialization of the letter. The non-representationality of the traumatic experience is tied to the materiality (inadequacy) of the signifier. We are taught by psychoanalysis that this inadequacy is the determining characteristic of the signifier. This *mise en scène* stresses the fact that the language of *The Scarlet Letter* is always directed backward, to the moment of the origin of history and consciousness—to the *ana-* or the *arche-*. This originary moment originates another indexed moment—textuality. The retrospective temporality of the archive, of anasemia allows us to talk about what can be recovered only indirectly in looking at the past. A close look at the tropological representation of the origin

enables us to better grasp the *déjà vu* in *The Scarlet Letter*. We have the feeling that we have already read *The Scarlet Letter*. This *impression* constructs the temporality of the act of reading itself.

As I will explain in this chapter, prosopopeia, which is a hallucinatory Gothic trope of haunting, is the solution of the problem of how to meet the desire to make the dead speak, to return to presence the ultimately absent. In prosopopeia we have the illusion of the immediacy of the spoken word because absence and presence work as the matrix of desire to bring back the dead subject to life. However, this anasemic operation is invested in the prosopoetic Gothic mode. In “The Custom-House,” the picture of the dead father comes back to gaze at and to embarrass the narrator. In embarrassment we have an excess of knowledge and an inability to have access to the secret of the narrative. This surplus is an uncanny element that elevates “The Custom-House” to the field of the abject.¹⁷ Like the triangular relationship between child, mother, and father, Hawthorne’s narrative constructs a triangular relationship among absence, the desire for presence, and the absent desire (the *Thing*). The letter A becomes a target for the energy of desire which is ungraspable. At the level of the signifier, there is a slippage between the figurative and the literal. The letter A is both metaphoric and material. At the same time there is an oscillation between desire and disgust. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva rightly observes that “in the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept” (*Powers of Horror* 3). The fluctuation between desire and disgust, between attraction to and repulsion from the *Thing* is intensified by Dimmesdale’s statement: “oh, Hester Prynne thou little, little, knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame!—the indelicacy!—the horrible ugliness of this exposure of a sick and guilty heart to the

very eye that would gloat over it” (143). The *Thing*’s abjection as the un-named, indefinite body whose will is held by a non-negotiable *something*.

The Scarlet Letter is replete with corporeal images. The body and the text are sheer matter—a *Thing*—of which the corpse is the remainder. *The Scarlet Letter* is a narrative that is full of bodies that *matter*. In this sense, we have bodies that are reduced to matter (bones and dust) that speak prosopoetically, and bodies that materialize under the law and in relation to the letter. I want to demonstrate, drawing upon Butler’s conception of performativity and citationality, Derrida’s theory of language, Lacan and Freud’s theories of the sign, and Foucault’s theory of power and knowledge, that iterability cannot be limited and that it forms the subject’s agency within the law—the possibility of subverting the system from within. The letter A could be read as a citation,¹⁸ the iterability of which cannot be controlled by the author’s intentions and, as a result, it is impossible to wrap it in any context. The A is a citation that records Hester’s movement from a social outcast to an active social agent. However, citation misfires the possibility of reaching the origin—be it the author, the *arche-text*, or the sign. The events in the narrative are created as affects of various citations—effects that are spiraling around a past that cannot be presented to the scene of writing. Like Derrida, Butler is interested in the non-explicit performative (what Derrida calls citational utterance). Since language is performative by nature, the act of naming or hailing is a discursive act that is performative. To declare that Hester should wear the mark of her shame is not a neutral act of description but a performative declaration that interpellates her. “fully revealed before the crowd,” Hester holds her baby closer to her bosom in an attempt to hide the letter A—“one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another”

(45). Performative as it is, the Puritan community's decision that Hester wear the mark of shame for the rest of her life forces the letter A to cite Puritan norms and laws.

Perhaps we should understand the chiasmic relationship between body and speech in light of Butler's *Excitable Speech*, which claims resistance is grounded in the body, and Derrida's "Signature Event Context," which is a deconstruction of Austen's argument that a performative utterance can only succeed if it remains within the confines of its contexts and authorial intentions. The letter A is reiterated and transplanted into a different context. The letter A is an indefinite article that resembles the Wolf Man who refers to himself as the unspeakable *Thing* "tieret." The refusal of the Wolf Man to name himself is a rejection of the Name-of-the-Father. Much like the Wolf Man, Hester holds back from naming the Father. This citation transcends the historical context of the scarlet letter (17th century) and inscribes it in a timeless temporality. Dimmesdale's *illocutionary* utterance: "I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! Be not silent for any mistaken pity and tenderness for him ... What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him—yea, compel him, as it were—to add hypocrisy to sin?" is in fact a performative binding speech act that summons Hester to keep the secret. Talking about himself in the third person, Dimmesdale cites himself and distanciates himself, in the Brechtian sense of the word, from his name. "It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony as well as mine," responded Hester to Dimmesdale's utterance (56). Hester's utterance recites Dimmesdale's citation and interpellation in a way that destabilizes Puritan patriarchal hegemony.

Since language is a signifying chain stretching the utterance behind and beyond the speaker, then, it is a mistake to assume the speaker is the only generator of meaning. However, a

word is not only the condensation of past, present, and future but also the displacement of this temporal continuum. There is, as Butler argues, no sovereignty in speech as words are not always *felicitous* or effective in performing what they name. In fact, as Hester has demonstrated throughout the narrative, neither context nor norm is binding. Although interpellation is a performative utterance that constructs the subject in the act of naming him/her, its citationality rests upon context and norm to be *felicitous*. In other words, interpellation is a citable utterance that goes beyond the limits of the speaker—“It is an address that regularly misses its mark” (*Excitable Speech* 33). This is where resistance lies. Since power is everywhere (Foucault), since interpellation can be *infelicitous* (Althusser), since a text can go beyond its contexts (Derrida), since the encounter with the Real (*tuché*) in the network of signifiers (*automaton*) is a missed encounter, it is possible to resignify. Such resignification provides the opportunity for agency and resistance. Re-inscriptions or re-citations, as Butler calls them in *Bodies that Matter*, construct the subject’s agency with the law. Hester “forbore to pray for enemies, lest, in spite of her forgiving aspirations, the words of the blessing should stubbornly twist themselves into a curse” (67). Hester appropriated and re-cited the letter, making it stand for power. The result is that “many people refused to interpret the scarlet letter by its original signification. They said that it meant Able, so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (120). Hester who is thought to be the “living sermon against sin” (52) turns out to be a symbol of resistance. However, resignification, as I shall explain in the following paragraphs, is possible through the use of the crypt.

To understand the Wolf Man’s case and his memory tableaux, Abraham and Torok replaced Freud’s theory of “primal scenes” with a theory of “primal words.” This means that the

primal scenes that haunted the Wolf Man had been part of his words. This is what Abraham and Torok mean by incorporation,¹⁹ which is a replacement of Freud's theory of repudiation. Freud's classic paradigm of melancholia explains not only how psychic split occurs, given the ego's inability to incorporate the lost object, but also why keeping the lost object's image is satisfactory and compensatory:

The free libido was not displaced on another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. ("Mourning and Melancholia" 249)

According to Freud, the Wolf Man's sexual desire was splintered up by a primal scene—his parents having sex *a tergo*. Abraham and Torok came up with a different approach that replaced the "splintered" libido with the "shattered symbol"²⁰ and the construction of the crypt. Abraham and Torok based their analysis on rhetoric. According to them, the Wolf Man's words hide other words. His words hide secrets concerning his older sister. As he wanted both to forget and hide these secrets, the Wolf Man, encrypted his sister but he disclosed these secrets through rebuses, metaphors, and wordplays. The six wolves (*siestra* in Russian) means that his sister is at the center of the nightmare.

What is a crypt? Derrida argues in his foreword to *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*: "No crypt presents itself. The grounds [*lieux*] are so disposed as to disguise and hide: something

always a body in some way. But also to disguise the act of hiding and hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds” (xiv). This constructs a chain of spaces and events that guarantee the survival and the encryption of the *Thing*. Incorporation produces a psychic and linguistic gap (the crypt). Confronting “the fantasy of incorporation,” the ego has two alternatives: loss of the self or loss of the other. In his foreword, Derrida purports that the crypt defers the decision: “the otherness of the other installs within any process of appropriation (even before any opposition between introjecting and incorporating) a ‘contradiction,’ or ... an undecidable irresolution that forever prevents the two from closing over their *rightful, ideal, proper* coherence, in other words and at any rate, over *their death*” (xxii; original italics). The concept of introjection is central to Abraham and Torok’s project. Whereas incorporation, as in Freud’s model of melancholia, extends the life of the lost object within the psyche, introjection responds to traumatic loss by absorbing the lost object. My focus here is not to study the concepts of introjection and incorporation but to explain the relation between the discourse of encryption according to Abraham and Torok and the literal crypts that form the narrative poles and origin of *The Scarlet Letter*. We know that the lost object is not an object of identification but a phantasmagoric presence within the psyche that gives rise to the topography of the crypt—a topography that structures anasemia: “inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. Reconstructed from the *memories of words, scenes and affects*, the object correlative of the loss is buried alive in the crypt as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography. The crypt also included the actual or supposed traumas that made introjections impracticable” (*The Shell and the Kernel* 130; italics mine). The inscriptional space of literal crypts of *The Scarlet Letter* is located in anasemia. Read as a tale of crypts and encryptions, Hawthorne’s narrative, in its

attempt to have access to the past, focuses on the excess of crypts—an excess that enables Hawthorne, through the business of prosopopeia, to encrypt the Father as phantomatically and phantasmatically present as a ghost or a remainder, and to be subject to his interpellative injunctions, which is the origin of writing and reading. In other words, Hawthorne, the implied author of “The Custom House” and of the novel, lives under the shadow of the dead Puritan fathers, who may be said to be incorporated (via melancholy) and introjected (via Surveyor Pue and the event of the archive), and takes on the functions of the fathers (i.e., the functions of discipline and punishment) through reinscribing the story of the scarlet letter. This turn toward the debris of the letter and *restes* of the dead fathers starts when Hawthorne encrypts “their blood [which] may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him” (14): such affective traces left by the encryption suggest the crypt’s logic of order, blame, guilt, and necessity.

Although Hawthorne seems to hide the unspeakable encryption, the encrypted object enfolds and becomes enfolded by the writer, and so their traumatic missed encounters (and their shared incorporation and introjections) appear through the anasemic ruminations of the subject’s business. With the support of prosopopeia, Hawthorne turns the narrative to the Gothic and paves the way for the collapse of the crypt and the symptomatic re-enactment of the encrypting trauma. Not surprisingly, what returns in the series of re-enactments is reducible, as a kind of zero degree of the signifier, to the color red or to the word “scarlet”: the blood of the ancestors’ victims that have figuratively stained their buried bones returns in the piece of scarlet cloth that is also a sign and a (failed) symbol. At a second degree, the reiterated question “what does the scarlet letter mean?” repeats the primal question: “what is the law and the will of the Father?” And at a third degree, what is encrypted, I argue, is the violence that sustains the relation between the two: i.e.,

the historical violence, the violence done to Hester and by extension to women, and the violence of symbolization itself. These turns help account for the interruptions of the Puritan transhistorical project and the eruptions of the unspeakable as the shadow of the subject. My point, essentially, is that the reader, like the analysand, can deduce from these interruptions and eruptions the contours of the loss that is cryptically secluded from the author. Trying to liberate himself from the charge of the affect tied to the memory of the loss of the object, the subject's abreaction—the emotional liberation and reaction to the affect—relies heavily on anasemia. Going back to the event of loss and *Working-Through* the trauma of loss, the subject reacts adequately to the affect. Working-Through (*Durcharbeitung*) permits the subject to acknowledge certain repressed things and free himself from the confinement of repetition. As I will explain in this chapter, the passage from repetition compulsion to working-through is made possible through transference.

Wanting to forget the *Thing*, Hester asked for forgiveness for having failed to conceal Dimmesdale's identity from Chillingworth: "forgive me! In all things else, I have striven to be true! Truth was the one virtue which I might have held fast, and did hold fast, through all extremity; save when thy good—thy life—thy fame—were put in question!"(143) Rather than alleviating Hester's pain, Dimmesdale held her responsible for what happened: "woman, woman, thou art accountable for this!—I can't forgive thee!" (143). According to Derrida, forgiveness is the enshrouded signifier that is responsible for all hope, growth, giving, and faith, it is not possible to forgive if "the person asking forgiveness is always, to some extent, another person" (*Paper Machine* 160). The clergyman's actions work against his persona and functions as his shadow that won't leave his consciousness until he discloses the secret and dies. What we have is

a missed encounter, an impossible exchange of gifts. Derrida continues to argue that forgiveness is given “without exchange, without change” (160). Like anasemia, forgiveness turns us towards the past. However, forgiveness does not mean forgetfulness. Only death can accord the impossible gift of forgiving. As Derrida elegantly puts it: “forgiving requires the absolutely living memory of the ineradicable, beyond any work of mourning, reconciliation, or restoration, beyond any ecology of memory. Forgiveness is possible only in recalling, and even in reproducing, without mitigation, the wrong that has been done, what it is that has to be forgiven” (160). Caught in the logics of anasemia, forgiveness is only possible when we talk about the unforgivable. Death, however, extends the work of forgiveness to the future anterior or, rather, it suspends it between the future anterior and the conditional mood. Like the archive, forgiveness, is anterior to life and posterior to death. Hawthorne’s ancestors might forgive their heir *if* he carries on their project. Like melancholia, “inheritance would only be possible at the point where it becomes the im-possible” (81). The impossibility of inheritance would guarantee the return of the repressed and the impossibility of the encounter with the Real—an impossibility that combines the pleasure of narrative with the anxiety of completeness. Although, as Savoy argues, “the consequence of Surveyor Pue’s prescription is an act of writing which, in its containment of Hester Prynne’s political power and imposition of narrow boundaries of feminist resistance, aligns Hawthorne with a transhistorical male project of surveillance and punishment. In rendering legible the will of the fathers in a handful of dust and in causing their bones to live, Hawthorne acquires a fearful assignment,” (411) there is an *unnamable* Thing that stakes the remains of the letter. The heart of *The Scarlet Letter* is *something* which has *nothing* to do with the novel. This unnamed something goes by different appellations—for Lacan and Kristeva, it is “the Thing”; for Deleuze, “the

event”; for Freud, “the primal scene.” These concepts concern something which appears in the guise of the encounter, as something that happens to us; surprises us, because it always inscribes itself as a rapture or interruption. Lacan argues that the Real is “impossible.” The fact that it happens to us does not refute its basic “impossibility.” We encounter the Real as impossible, as the impossible *Thing* that wreaks havoc in our Symbolic. Hester’s encounter with the Real leads to the reconfiguration of this world. The Real is linked to ethics. Hester acted in conformity with the desire which inhabits her. It is desire that aims at the impossible—the Real. In his *Civilization and its discontents*, Freud studies the sources of human suffering. Insofar as the subject is constructed in the materiality of the signifier, he remains subject to the affects of Real and “unsuccessful . . . precisely in this field of prevention of suffering” (33). In other words, Hester’s shame is the psychological affect of the missed encounter, its residue (i.e., the non-fulfillment of the demand for forgiveness).

Many critics have emphasized the underlying importance of *The Scarlet Letter* to the understanding of shame. The embroidered A on Hester Prynne’s chest represents a symbol of social shame. The public display of this symbol of stigma is countered by an ostensibly private display of shame in the case of Dimmesdale. This play of internal and external shame dynamics makes shame itself unbearable. The birth of shame has long been considered as a sign of human tolerance and social bonding. Dimmesdale interprets the A-shaped meteor in the sky as indexing his own scarlet letter and his own guilt: “what shall we say, when an individual discovers a revelation addressed to himself alone, on the same vast sheet of record! In such a case, it could only be the symptom of a highly disordered mental state” (116). This is explained by:

the disease in his own eye and heart, that the minister, looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter—the letter A—marked out in lines of dull red light. Not but the meteor may have shown itself at that point, burning duskily through a veil of cloud; but with no such shape as his guilty imagination gave it, or, at least, with so little definiteness, that another's guilt might have seen another symbol in it. (116)

Dimmesdale's guilt is repeated, remarked this time in the sky, giving him the possibility to restore his subjectivity by means of suicide. Meeting his own demise, Dimmesdale's fate brings us to the encounter with the Real. The end (direction and destruction) of Dimmesdale's letter's trajectory equals its expenditure. Standing on the scaffold where Hester first faced her community, Dimmesdale exposes his breast and provides a discourse to supplement and to explain his gesture of revelation. Bearing his ghastly A, Dimmesdale confuses his community and the reader and bids farewell to Hester. Does the letter really appear when Dimmesdale exposes his breast? What does it mean? The answer is that Dimmesdale, in his re-enactment of the scaffold scene and taking the letter on himself, stages the confusion that has *ab initio* been the matrix of hermeneutics. Even the narrator is confused: "The reader may choose among these theories. We have thrown all the light we could acquire upon the portent, and would gladly, now that it has done its office, erase its deep print out of our own brain, where long meditation has fixed it in very undesirable distinctness" (187). Through a careful study of these theories, this re-enactment calls reflectively and symptomatically to the reader for an encryptive rapport, and identificatory transference. Similar to the way the inassimilable past events can be staged through and in language, like the looming of the shadow, Dimmesdale's death scene reflects in part the

impossibility of the encounter with the Real (and the *Thing*). In this sense, Dimmesdale turns away from the mandate of the Real—the displeasing affect of shame—to the impossible *Thing*.

As for Pearl, she “had been offered to the world, these seven years past, as the living hieroglyphic, in which was revealed the secret they so darkly sought to hide—all written in this symbol—all plainly manifest—had there been a prophet or magician skilled to read the character of flame! And Pearl was the oneness of their being” (152). She is their *sinthome*, the surplus of their *jouissance*, and the symptom of their sin. She is the material manifestation of the sign A. She represents also the missed encounter between colonial and *antebellum* America. Bercovitch posits that Pearl represents the rupture or “the broken links between child and parent, between one generation and another, between the New World and the Old, between colonial and antebellum America” (203). Pearl is a figure for the letter and the literal imago of the impossibility of fixing the meaning of the letter. What happened after “the scene of the great grief, in which the wild infant bore a part had developed all her sympathies” (186) is that she left the Puritan community with her mother and never returned. Pearl, the wild child, has been normalized and domesticated. Domesticated, the letter of Pearl, the *sinthome* of Hester and Dimmesdale, has done its office.

Chillingworth, an elderly English scholar, marries Hester Prynne and sends her to Puritan New England. There she had an affair with Dimmesdale and found herself pregnant with a daughter, Pearl. Her refusal to name the father of her daughter led to her public shame manifested in her wearing a visible sign of her adultery—the letter A. When Chillingworth arrives, he finds her with the baby, the fruit of her adultery and social disgrace. Wreaking revenge, he disguised himself as a doctor in order to know and name the un-named father. This quest for knowing the

father—"thou wilt not reveal his name?"—is preceded by the injunctions of the father—Dimmesdale—to Hester to keep the secret. Chillingworth, a neurotic, conceals his sadistic fantasy of torturing and psychologically destabilizing Hester and her lover. His fantasy serves to kill, and conversely to blaze up, the desire of the other—Dimmesdale. This sadistic fantasy is explained by his participation in the game of the other and his ultimate revenge on him.

Idealized by his congregation and affected by the private dynamics of shame, Dimmesdale is carrying the burden of his shame and secret privately. Unable to communicate with either his daughter or with Hester, he decides to publicly confess and to name the origin of his shame after giving his most powerfully crafted sermon and thereby having tried to keep social integrity. Keeping society's norms, Dimmesdale manages to escape the unbearable burden of his shame. His shame, epitomized by the half-seen A seared into his breast, explains his ambiguous death. Dimmesdale is a

man, rendered morbidly self-contemplative by long, intense, and secret pain, had extended his egotism over the whole expanse of nature, until the firmament itself should appear no more than a fitting page for his soul's history and fate. We impute it, therefore, solely to the disease in his own eye and heart, that the minister, looking upward to the zenith, beheld the appearance of an immense letter—the letter A—marked out in lines of dull, red light. (116)

In Freudian terms, Dimmesdale's libido is directed towards his lost object—an act that is initiated by the ego and activated by the id. Since the ego and the id are not given free rein in the Freudian model, the super-ego intervenes and activates the feeling of guilt and goes as far as to push the ego into thinking about death and suicide. The unequal distribution of libido leads to what Freud calls in his *Instincts and their Vicissitudes* a reversal into the opposite (*Verkehrung*

ins Gegenteil). There is also a turning round on the subject's self that goes hand in hand with the reversal into the opposite. There is an inversion of roles and a turning round on the subject in the case of Dimmesdale: he moves from sadism into masochism, from being the subject who inflicts suffering to the object who undergoes suffering. What does Dimmesdale miss to communicate? What does Hester remember or miss to remember? Or what can she not remember? What makes her traumatic experience an irrevocable one? I shall study the psychoanalytic function of the letter A: the incorporated, introjected, and the encrypted "object" with which the characters have a traumatic missed encounter. The only letter that is self-referential is the scarlet letter, yet it anchors (as a *point de capiton*) the sequence of the scenes of hermeneutic struggle. To put this another way, the entire sequence of scenes, and the narrative tout court, is self-referential, but this is the necessary economy of *différance*. We have seen that Pue's manuscript is clearly such a letter, a letter that is enfolded in itself and around the material object of the letter, but it too is but a version or indeed a temporal "stage" or archival residue of the letter proper. Hawthorne's text is full of letters that are self-referential. This allegory of the supplementarity of language leaves its impact in the exercise of mourning. Language is relevant to the design of the crypt as the crypt is relevant to the structure of the letter. In fact, there can be no crypt without a secret and no letter without a riddle. The letter A is unclear because it has many referents. Such referents are conjectural but are not understood as such; the non-duped interpretant must necessarily err and there is no final ironizing of their *méconnaissance*.²¹ Part of these referents is unacknowledged. What is unacknowledged is Dimmesdale's trauma, which is guilt driven and Hester's traumatic shame which is fear driven. These unacknowledged events are incorporated in the living events.

The dynamics of this incorporation explain Dimmesdale's complex trauma. He is a witness and a cause of Hester's trauma. Since he knows the traumatic event of the book, he is a witness to the trauma of Hester and a witness to his own. The traumatic event of *The Scarlet Letter* can only be understood as a symptom and as a result of an encounter—a missed encounter—with the past. This encounter, missed as it is, is to be understood in terms of absence—the absence of spatial and temporal referents. Such absence leads to what I call crypto-temporal construction. Because of this crypto-temporal trauma, Dimmesdale is so possessed by his traumatic experience. This absence allows for more experiences. This repetition that is at the center of traumatic belated experience and absence alike makes the traumatized subject—Dimmesdale—survive the trauma by bearing witness to it and by creating another experience. By this logic, Dimmesdale's death is the culmination of his various attempts to survive trauma.

1.2. Psychoanalytics of the Symptom and the Temporality of the Sign/Desire

What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. (Nicolas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom" 87)

Whenever A appears, I expect the appearance of B.
(Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 90)

The first work on trauma is Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* written after WWI. This book studies the relationship between trauma and historical violence and it could be said to ask what it would mean for history to be understood as the history of trauma. Freud's book introduces a theory of repetition as the symptom of trauma. Freud's theory sees trauma as a theory of the incomprehensibility of human survival, a concept that further developed by Cathy Caruth who associates trauma with survival. Trauma theory has grown widely since the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* in 1996. Trauma theory as articulated by Caruth, brings very basic psychoanalysis (mainly Freudian) to deconstructive historiography. She explains that something is missed in the initial encounter with the traumatic event. She argues in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* that "it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (8). Traumatic events are historical events which are not accessible despite the mind's recurrent endeavors (repetition compulsion) to comprehend what it has failed to understand in the original encounter. This failed encounter leads to the mind's failure to figure out the unclaimed circuits of trauma and experience. This failure is governed by what Freud calls repetition compulsion. This is a reenactment (symptom) of psychic traumatic events that have not been assigned to a particular past and that have kept the emotional and physical severity of the lived experience. This restoration of these psychic events interrupts the present with memories, nightmares, reminiscences, and dreams. These are interfering

remnants of an unknown past that transcends the coherence of the present and the written story yet they do not arrive at presence in the present—only as residue, trace, or debris.

Faced with debris of stories, critics have long preferred to work on texts that seek to represent to the reader the experience of traumatic juncture. However, Hawthorne's statement that the reader "must not doubt" (30) is in fact an invitation to participate in the making of meaning. However, it is also a ghostly invitation to enter the realm of the archive. The setting of the novel keeps the reader suspended in the world of literality, symbol, union, pluralism, and fiction. "This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history" (42). This statement claims that the novel is set in the real world. More exactly, the rose is part of a larger symbolic (or allegorical) economy of figuration in which it is in dialectical opposition to "the black flower"—the figure of prison, punishment, and human frailty. In *The Scarlet Letter* we have a movement from the fictional to the real. The rose traverses the fictional and enters the factual only to decorate *The Scarlet Letter* as real. Hawthorne understands the rose as literal, and his gesture of offering the plucked rose to the reader is performative. By "Pluck[ing] one of its flowers and present [ing] it to the reader," (42) Hawthorne invites the reader to this Gothic world and violates the art of writing fiction. This image of reaching out to the hand of the reader mixes the figurative and the literal and brings the narrative a step closer to the Gothic. What we have here is an author who is haunted by the ghosts of his dead father and who haunts his readers. Such hauntology offers the narrator the possibility to extend the work of the Gothic to the reader who finds himself already in the realm transferenceal hauntology. This chiasmic relationship invokes the timelessness of the unconscious itself. The narrator can touch the rose, pluck it from its fictional setting, and offer it to the reader. This transgression of the law of narration makes it

possible for disembodied voices and signs to communicate with the reader. The relationship between the *Thing* and the abstract idea that are signified by the same words reflects the relationship between the author and the reader, between fiction and reality, and between the text and its (sub)texts. Although the New Critics' claim that a close reading of a text—a reading that joins meaning to experience—can trace how its different parts relate and achieve order and harmony, I want to focus on the ways in which the text defamiliarizes reality. The reader, however, is drifting away. What he sees is the glowing A—an image that resembles the light of the psychologist who hypnotizes his patient. By the end of the narrative, the reader meets his own letter and faces his own primal scene of the encounter with this narrative. Hawthorne's symbolic economy in which the narrator extends his hand to the reader transgresses the rule of fiction and time diexis. In fact, Hawthorne wants simultaneously to pretend that he is offering a literal historiography and to concoct allegory at the same time. He surreally makes the reader participate in the production of meaning and at the same time in the exhumation of the dead paternal figures. The reader, then, is a witness who will testify to the re-creation of the past.

Although the primal scene in *The Scarlet Letter* is a historical event (i.e., both the encounter with Surveyor Pue, where Hawthorne assumes his "filial duty" and the plethora of encryptions), it is very important to the narrative. The Freudian scenic model is a model of temporality of the subject that functions through the belated impression of trauma that is reconstructed in analysis and/or narrative. This is done on the level of the unconscious. Since the unconscious does not measure time, we are left with the traumatic imprint, mark, or symptom memory of loss and castration. Hester represses the father's order. Her ego—an agency of defense—attaches the desire to the buried memory of the primal scene to protect the ego from the

threat of patriarchy. Although Hester's primal scene is different from that of "The Custom House," it intersects with the narrator's, for it is this conjuncture that generates the narrative. We have seen that the impact of trauma is always belated. It does not yield itself to simple narrative and its effects are going to show up as symptoms of trauma. The need to trace the letter A back to its origin marks the belatedness of trauma and the temporality of the subject. The primal scene of the narrative is Hawthorne's (missed) encounter with Surveyor Pue²². Following Freud's model of belated trauma, I want to argue that the traces that are left by the impression of the scarlet letter A come back in various different ways, and that meaning can emerge only symptomatically. I shall open up this register by expanding the analysis of desire.

The desire of the characters in *The Scarlet Letter*, much like the reader's, to penetrate the secret of the letter is in fact part of the letter's game—the game of *jouissance*. Disclosing the secrets of *The Scarlet Letter*, or having access to knowledge and truth would lead to the loss of what Lacan calls *jouissance* which exists only as an index of *manque* (lack), deferral, and secrecy. It is in this sense that Lacan's idea of lack gains importance as the subject can only be supposed (assumed). Supposing the subject, however, necessitates barring the subject. Pointing to a historical necessity, *The Scarlet Letter* is also linked to the death of the author which is in fact the death of authority, truth, and certainty. Deconstructive as it is, Hawthorne's fetishized writing is understood as an attempt to revive the affects of the past. As in psychoanalysis, the reader of *The Scarlet Letter* should not know in order not to lose *jouissance*—the concept that structures both psychoanalysis and the act of reading. However, as I shall explain, visiting the future to change the past fails at the Real of America which defies symbolization. The impossibility or failure of symbolization guarantees the work of *Jouissance* and ensures the return of the

traumatic event that is always already missed. The missed events—be they related to subjectivity or hermeneutics—define the circuits of the Lacanian *jouissance*. In this sense, the scarlet letter A is a Lacanian *Thing*—as *Ding*. It is the materialization of the impossible *jouissance*. If the scarlet letter were to arrive at its destination, the impossible *jouissance* would be lost. A central question, of course, is whether it does arrive, and what would constitute such arrival. Certainly, as we know, the letter never closes in on a particular signified; it merely keeps turning in the spiral of *différance*. That, however, is not to say that it does not arrive at its destination (because the letter always does arrive in one way or another, as Lacan points out). The arrival of the letter, like its hermeneutic deciphering, registers the letter in the uncertain space of *différance*. It follows, then, that to assign a monolithic meaning to the letter A, which is but a dissolution of hermeneutics, would be followed by psychoanalytic cure which is but the eventual dissolution of transference. This spiral transference means that the relationship between the analyst and the analysand is paranoid. Having said that, I do not, however, wish to study the work of transference, since the available tools (tropes) are, as it were, similar to the work of transference; I would like rather to comprehend the investment of transference in *jouissance*.

The analysand fears the loss of his kernel of *jouissance* and the subject does not abandon his symptom after the psychoanalytic cure. This pathological dependence on the symptom leads to the creation of what Lacan calls “*Sinthome*.”²³ According to Žižek, the *sinthome* is a “terrifying bodily mark which is merely a mute attestation bearing witness to a disgusting enjoyment, without representing anything or anyone” (76). Indeed, the *sinthome* is more immediately the symptom that is beyond reading, interpretation, or “healing,” hence the injunction to enjoy the symptom. Also, the *sinthome* is that meaningless ritual, gesture, or mark that gives a precarious

coherence to the subject. The scarlet letter A is Hester's symptom that embodies her adultery, enjoyment, and shield. At the end of the narrative, Hester's symptom becomes her *sinthome* because in resuming the letter at a later period when no magistrate would require it of her, she demonstrates the letter as the very mark around which she constructs her identity: as a prophet among women. The letter A, however, is the graphic truth of her "*sinthome*." The "*sinthome*," which is seen as the summit of enjoyment and the limit of psychoanalysis, cannot address the various affects of trauma and does not satisfy the deconstructive reader of *The Scarlet Letter*. In other words, a focus on the *sinthome* is entirely beyond the protocols of deconstruction because it refuses analysis and hermeneutics.

Following Derrida's reading of the letter, I want to stress that the letter A keeps wandering the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic through its endless recurrence and repetition. The *sinthomatic* materialization of writing allows for the encryption of trauma. Lacan states that the letter entails "that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language" (163). The materiality of the letter is symbolized by writing or inscription—which is to say, the encryption and materiality of trauma. As in the Lacanian paradigm in which subjectivity rests upon the materiality of the letter and the contingency of its itinerary, approaching and then withdrawing from the subject, Hawthorne's narrative demonstrates that inscription/writing is both in the body and on the paper. Such encryption is made possible through the uncanny redoubling within discourse. The uncanny, as I shall explain later, emerges at the hinge between narrative frames—where the death of the ancestors Hawthorne narrates enters the narrative frame of that telling. The ability of the uncanny to (re)produce itself brings it a step closer to the domain of the

Gothic. The supplementarity of language which is advocated by both Derrida and Lacan is clearly manifested in Hawthorne's narrative.

Derrida locates the referent of his theory in the human body. His materialization of the letter sees writing as an investment in the act of survival. According to him, language is a performative act of signifying. Performative as it is, materiality is permanent and does not decay. In the Derridean epistemological paradigm, the letter does not perish or stop at a destination, although, unstable as it is, it plays with impossibility and the danger of non-signification. In this deconstructive model, history is seen as intertextual. Intertextuality is highly pertinent to my analysis of Hawthorne's narrative economy. The archive, as I shall explain in this chapter, is intertextual. Its textuality provides Hawthorne with a missed paternity, making the material incarnation in or as a letter. Here I take up Eric Savoy's argument that "Pue's text and his ghostly exhortations render legible, become a tropic substitute for, and supplement the limited legibility of the ancestral body, just as Hawthorne's own *Scarlet Letter* is a supplement to Pue's text (401) and extend it to the missed encounter. Savoy's argument that the slippage between the signifier of the blood-stained bones of the ancestors and the "scarlet" letter of Pue's archive sheds light on the paternal project: to material and tropic exhumation of the fathers' bodies. This slippage is precisely what allows Pue to be the official ancestor or legatee in the economy of writing. Pue, in short, is the nexus of archival transmission (i.e., its agent). My point is that the economy of *The Scarlet Letter* is post-material in which filiation is married to affiliation—a contract passed on through the word, through textuality. As in translation, which causes a certain frustration on the part of the translator, reading yields frustration which is necessary to keep a text alive. For Derrida, the materiality of the letter (writing) is the unremitting activity of (inter)textual

production which engenders a disincorporate memory. For Lacan, however, the letter is the material inscription of language in the body or rather (in the case of the situation of Hawthorne's narrator) the remainder of the body/corpse. With the letter blazing on Hester's chest, she is seen "as the figure, the body, the reality of sin" (63). Such inscription re-appears symptomatically as the meteor in the sky. However many addressees it has, it returns to its original sender (the Puritan magistrate, i.e., the voice of the law of the father, i.e., the Father.) The letter A must, however, be read within its material and abstract contexts. In this regard, the letter A is the crypt of subjectivity and hermeneutics in which Hester's entombment is ironic. The indefinite A is an open crypt into which the reader strolls in search of meaning. The A is a symptom and a precondition of enunciation and recognition of trauma. Hester's A is a symptom of her traumatic past and a manifestation of her ability to deconstruct the Puritan social codes. Hester is a dissident subject: that is why Hawthorne can write "the scarlet letter had not done its office" (124). The letter is therefore a paradoxical sign of power: the power of the social abject. At issue is distance: only when the subject is expelled to the social margin can the social per se be analyzed and deconstructed. That is why "the world's law was no law for her mind" (122).

The symptom is built around the concept of enjoyment. Since enjoyment is located between the two poles of pain and pleasure, the symptom is always already suspended between its evident painful nature and the subject's paradoxical pleasure produced by the (missed) encounter with the *Thing*. That's what happened to Dimmesdale who rebutted his symptom only to find himself among the dead. Dimmesdale's temptation to flee with Hester and his ultimate Law abiding (the acceptance of the Puritan social codes and the Patriarchal project of interpellation and control) lock him in a zone that is neither directed toward the mother nor

toward the father. Hawthorne's tropo-psychoanalytical disinterment of the fathers and staking of their interpellative politics sparks the emergence of *objet a*,²⁴ or the unattainable object of desire, which signals a regressive libidinal attachment (object-cathexis) to the lost mother. What Hawthorne fails to see is the injunction of the Other to "enjoy" the symptom. "Enjoy!" Žižek argues that "the voice of the Other impelling us to follow our duty for the sake of duty is a traumatic irruption of an appeal to impossible *jouissance* disrupting the homeostasis of the pleasure principle and its prolongation, the reality principle" (81). To obey and to follow the injunction of the Other is to renounce enjoyment. Renouncing *jouissance*, Žižek argues, is a kind of sacrifice. This operation produces a surplus-enjoyment which Lacan calls *objet a*. Žižek contends that this "dialectic of enjoyment and surplus enjoyment—i.e., the fact that there is no 'substantial' enjoyment preceding the excess of surplus enjoyment, that enjoyment itself is a kind of surplus produced by renunciation—is perhaps what gives a clue to so-called 'primal masochism'" (*Enjoy Your Symptom* 22). In Lacan's topography of the subject, *objet a* denotes the function of the object of desire. This function is relational with the subject as it admits substitution. In the economy of desire, the *objet a* gives a coherence to *The Scarlet Letter*. Like the fetish, it promises a substitution for the Real, a substitution for the absent mother. The circuits of the letter and its fluctuation between the womb and the tomb explicates the Oedipus complex—a state of fluctuation between identificatory object-cathexis, between the patriarchal filial duty and the phantasmic, regressive identification with the lost mother. The containment of Hester Prynne and the description of her body are the site of punishment on which the narrator and the characters project their regressive identifications with the maternal body. The *objet a* is also a substitution for the *Thing* that is beyond naming and knowing.

The *objet a* is a *Thing* that is related to the Gothic. The narrative economy of the Gothic constructs a fetishized object that is organized by the logics of synecdoche. The letter A which is only part of the whole narrative becomes the fixation of desire and hermeneutics at the same time. Like synecdoche, the letter A functions as an index. The letter A is not the *Thing* itself but it points to the *Thing*—the past, the archive, or memory. It, however, participates in the circuits of *différance*. Like the Derridean and Lacanian models which are structured around a certain void or aporia, the Hawthornesque model stages the impossibility of the encounter between the *Thing* and its signified. To see the letter A as a Lacanian *Thing*—particularly in its discursive manifestations—is to say that the *Thing*, as a signifier that indexes multiple signifieds or as one that resists signification altogether, is an extension of the void that moulds the figures of Hawthorne’s narrative. The letter A is a nodal point (*point de capiton*), a discursive point which fixes meaning only ironically and temporally, depending on the context and the desire of the interpreter at any given moment in the narrative. In short, it promises coherence (i.e., as the Coleridgean symbol does) but it reneges continually on that promise. In other words, as a *point de capiton*, it is fixed only in the sentence in which it recurs; it will subsequently slide in the narrative. The promise of coherence maintains the narrative of desire by constructing a knot of meanings and by concealing secrets and ambiguities. However, the letter A—a fetish—is determined and over-determined²⁵ by the logics of desire. The *Thing* itself (i.e., the thing behind the Lacanian *Thing*) is never present in *The Scarlet Letter*. What we have is a chain of supplementarity that allows us to argue that the narrator in both the “The Custom-House” and *The Scarlet Letter* is a mere pulsation of desire. He is a desiring subject that stages the politics of the missed encounter at the level of the narrative. In fact, “The Custom House” comes to supplement

the narrative of Pue, which, in turn, supplements a missed Puritan history. The work of these supplements is done through prosopopeia. Here, I want to link the trope of prosopopeia to desire. This desire to restore voice to the dead corpse/corpus allows for the exchange of gazes. Since desire is surplus that is (over) determined by lack, it can only unfold in the field of the subject. Much like “The Custom-House,” the letter A becomes an occulted object that promises access to the desired absent *Thing*. By this logic, both the narrator and the reader are suspended in the field of promise as desire conditioned by lack and absence. The narrator’s desire, however, is a biographical desire. The narrator goes back to the archival document to look for secrets. However, biography is also subject to the play of *différance*.

What does the letter A mean? There have been many attempts at understanding the underlying meanings in *The Scarlet Letter*. The unfathomable repetition of the scarlet letter A is a repetition that creates an imperceptible plurality that permits the reader to go beyond the hermeneutic closure of *The Scarlet Letter*. Henry James argues that the letter A is “in danger of seeming to stand for nothing more serious than itself” (94). Then, he apologizes and says, “*The Scarlet Letter* has the beauty and harmony of all original and complete conceptions, and its weaker spots, whatever they are, are not of its essence; they are mere light flaws and inequalities of the surface” (95). Hawthorne’s narrative could be said to sacrifice symbolic complexity for the simplicity of a moral lesson. However, Hawthorne offers a moral at the end of the narrative, but he also plays with the witnesses’ accounts of what appeared on Dimmesdale’s breast, and he refers the reader, at the end, back to the Custom House’s primal scene. Arac argues that *The Scarlet Letter*—a cultural product—reflects a theory of ideology: it “addresses the anonymous toil of women under the barbarism of patriarchy” (248). One of the anxieties of the reader of *The*

Scarlet Letter is to see, without being able to stop it, the scarlet letter A twist itself to become a cipher or a crypt. The letter A slips in the suspense of the interval between origin and destination. The metonymic repetition of A is a chain of interlocked signs in which each signifier—that does not begin or end—refers to an absent referent. The absent signifiers that are freely associated introduce the compulsion of repetition. In free association, the signifiers are linked to one another according to the economy of hazard that has nothing to do with randomness. Such hazard leaks symbolic persistence that is connected to a missed Real that can only be distinguished by the insistence of its absence. Repetition, therefore, is the symbolic illusion—an illusion that keeps absence inaccessible in the series of hazard and missed wagers. This decentralization of all transcendental, transparent signifiers is central to Hawthorne's and Derrida's works. Much like Derrida's *différance*, the letter A does not have a beginning or an end. It is an incomplete, unfinished, and purloined letter. The letter A is a relation and a process of enunciation that is always in movement. *Différance* is, he insists, not a concept, but rather the movement that opens up the interval, the gaps, the non-presence, that are paradoxically the very foundation of any discursive economy.

The Derridean deconstructive model has taught us to be suspicious toward language. Language is a free system of floating “signs” that are related arbitrarily to each other and that are incapable of referring to any substantiality. Metaphors refer to themselves and comment on their own *raison d'être*. Although the letter A seems to reach its final destination when Dimmesdale acknowledges his sin and dies, it continues its endless journey. Many critics such as Jonathan Arac have argued that *The Scarlet Letter* reaches a final closure. Jonathan Arac sees in the indeterminacy that governs the text a kind of closure. He contends that “Hawthorne's own

authorial meaning establishes an ‘indeterminacy’ that is not merely a modern critical aberration” (261). This closure is in the new symbolic horizons that the book opens. However, to accept the openness of the novel is to forget a major part, which is the ideological and historical subtexts of *The Scarlet Letter*. It requires no further argument to stress the fact that the narrative is, among other things, an allegory of reading a symbol. It demonstrates the illusions of symbolic promise, and dismantles the symbol’s status. Put another way, it critiques allegorically, the literary ideology of symbol. *The Scarlet Letter*, however, is an allegorical fiction that lends itself to endless readings. Among other things—namely, the “political unconscious” that permeates any discourse—Jameson deconstructs the traditional binarist discourse of law and literature by emphasizing the omnipresence of the historical and the influence of the social on the literary. Much like Jameson’s Marxist purport that everything is political, Arac argues that *The Scarlet Letter* reaches back to America’s founding texts (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution). Reaching back to these originary texts, *The Scarlet Letter* tries to elevate itself to the level of a founding canonical literary text. Both Bercovitch and Arac demonstrate how symbol and allegory reflect a political and social need of *antebellum* America for harmony and unity. However, ideology and symbolization work hand in hand in the letter A, which undertakes new meanings throughout the novel: from a symbol of adultery to an abstract symbol ‘for’ Puritan America. These meanings do not cancel one another but reveal a larger hermeneutic economy in which any reading can be valid. The narrative has two systems of signification which are interrelated: one is the event and the concept of historicity, and the other is affect. Hawthorne relies greatly upon affect, frequently deploying phrasing as “that mystery of a woman’s soul” (55). The letter A stands as a material shifter that indexes an event. It also stages repetitively

Hester's shame although the word "adultery" is not spelled out in the novel, rather perhaps like the word "slavery" that is not mentioned in the American founding documents.

Hawthorne's narrative can be said to possess a biographical and autobiographical unconscious, one whose contents are perhaps all the more meaningful for their being largely unavailable, repressed. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida posits that:

totalization no longer has any meaning, not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. (289)

Hawthorne's narrative reveals an ideologically suspect unwillingness to relinquish the problematic fantasy of stable subjects for a more sophisticated if less comforting concept of the subject as dispersed, multiple, more other than itself. In fact, Hawthorne's 'apparent' desire to preserve the fixity of the subject is ideologically driven. Insofar as he intended this to be a moral tale, then it would require a certain fixity of the subject in order to consolidate the object-lesson. In "The Death of the Author," Barthes argues that "writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142). Hawthorne's narrative is quite different from yet dependent upon its referents or sources. Riffaterre gestures toward a hidden intertext which gives meaning to the text. Read in light of Riffaterre's model of intertextuality, Hawthorne's narrative maybe considered as a "generalized, all encompassing catachresis" (*Semiotics of Poetry* 21). By this

Derridean logic, one can say that Hawthorne's narrative is a haunted text that primarily haunts Hawthorne himself. Haunted by and obsessed with the letter of the dead fathers, Hawthorne's narrative remains under the shadow of the Father. This intertext, having the function of the shadow, explains the textual *mise en scène*. Using Kristeva's term "transposition,"²⁶ I want to emphasize the fact that to move from the past to the present and vice versa is a relational activity. It is during transposition that indeterminacy emerges. Stable meaning and coherent subjectivity are under siege and threatened by the multiplicity of interpretations. Donald Pease expands that Hawthorne "returned from the past, moreover, with a different moral faculty for the American people to exercise: a collective memory capable of re-establishing their relation to purposes from the past in need of present enactment" (46). In this respect, the force of the letter, its performative effect on the characters and the reader alike, is paradoxically its weakness and its impossibility. At the end of the story, Dimmesdale, along with the reader, finds himself embracing his own letter, yet always without actually holding it.

The A floats freely within a structure of endless symbols and allegories. Throughout its narrative trajectory, the scarlet letter remains mired in its sheer materiality, in the literal circumstantial reality of its readers, who project onto it what they want to see and believe. The result of this transcendental chain of signification is that the reader is caught in the labyrinth of hermeneutics. Semantic determinacy is always already put under erasure by the free play of signs. The point I want to raise is that the letter A does not engage in dialogue, although it engages in the play of the gaze. It conducts a monologue with the void—the indexation of the materiality of the subject. However, everything corresponds discursively in Hawthorne's narrative including inanimate letters. Everyone in *The Scarlet Letter* speaks of the letter A. All critics and readers

attempt to decipher it. Although they seem to have a dialogue with the narrative, only the letter A allows them to communicate with the void. The void, bound as it is to the episteme of death and absence, scares us. Why? The letter A which allows for the communication with the void imposes a check on the characters and the readers alike as the ghosts of the dead fathers exert pressure on the narrator. The letter has an intimate relation with death. This relation is at least in part literal: the letter arises from the grave (archive), it is presented by a ghost, and its final appearance is on the tombstone of Hester Prynne. It is also connected to death in the sense that death, according to Derrida, is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament. However, Hester has to be guilty for the A—an image—to enter the abysmal field of the void and macabre. *The Scarlet Letter* makes recourse to this artifice to put Hester in a continual state of guilt. Such continual state of guilt brings the narrative into dialogue with the absurd.

The scarlet letter A is repeated endlessly and this repetition creates an imperceptible plurality that permits the reader to go beyond the interpretive closure of *The Scarlet Letter*. As Derrida argues in *Writing and Difference*:

Repetition does not reissue the book but describes its origin from the vantage of a writing which does not yet belong to it, or no longer belongs to it, a writing which feigns, by repeating the book, inclusion in the book. Far from letting itself be oppressed or enveloped within the volume, this repetition is the first writing. The writing of the origin, the writing that retraces the origin, tracking down the signs of its disappearance, the lost writing of the origin ... what disposes it in this way, we now know, is not the origin, but that which takes its place; which is not, moreover, the opposite of an origin. It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun. (295)

One of the anxieties of the *The Scarlet Letter* reader is to see, without being able to stop it, the scarlet letter A curve itself to form a cipher or a crypt through the act of repetition. It follows, then, that the semantic certitude that the reader seeks is always already put under erasure by the interplay of past and present—in the dynamics of signification. The metonymic play of signs that *The Scarlet Letter* is structured around is a chain of signifiers that refer to one another without evoking a sense of beginning or end. *The Scarlet Letter* is incomplete, unfinished, and purloined by hermeneutics. There is no clear *arche* or *telos* hence transforming interpretation into implicatures. *The Scarlet Letter* is abysmal and conceals many secrets. Without an organizing center and a referential origin, it adumbrates the Derridean deconstructive model. If, as I have said, the temporality of the letter operates in relation to the temporality of the subject, then the temporality of signification makes meaning—much like the work of the signature—concealing and canceling, transferential and referential. The endless deferral of the meaning of the scarlet letter A brings into question the notion of *truth* which is at the center of Western metaphysics. This means that the scarlet letter is a symptom. In fact, the scarlet letter A might be said to be the trace of history that operates symptomatically precisely as trace. As such, it activates our impossible desire to grasp it.

1.3. Correspondence of Drives: Troubles of the Archive, Troubles of Psychoanalysis

I like the dead, they are the doorkeepers who while closing one side “give” way to the other. (Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* 7)

Arkhé, we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 1)

From the outset of “The Custom-House”, Hawthorne’s narrator declares that he has “an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me, in addressing the public” (9). As autobiography, “The Custom-House” functions as a primal narrative scene.²⁷ Its project, however, is to elaborate a case history. Since every narrative needs an equivalent of a primal scene in the larger, framing economy of origins and closures, “The Custom-House” goes back to something that is supposedly already written—Surveyor Pue’s narrative. It *appears* as a canonical apparition on the horizon of *The Scarlet Letter*. Invested in the economy of ghost writing, “The Custom-House” circles around the repetition of this hidden text in order to be comprehensible and authentic. J. Hillis Miller argues:

Narration is the attempt to respond to the metaphysical injunction in the compulsion to biography and autobiography. This is the obligation to bring people into the space of immediate presence where they may be. The demand for biography or autobiography is the obligation to keep people in the open through writing. Such writing makes them enter the general archives where all that we know is stored and kept available. (143-144)

“The Custom-House”—an archive²⁸ of the past—is invested in the economy of ethical responsibility. Structured around the responsibility of the modals “should, ought to,” Hawthorne’s paratext²⁹ was written to supplement and illuminate *The Scarlet Letter*. The fact is that the narrator/author is so enchanted by the ghostly fictional conjuration of Pue that the lines of demarcation between his fictional *re*-creation and reality collapse at the threshold of *The Scarlet Letter*. Thus, it is crucial to stress how this fictional *re*-creation attaches to a prosopoeitic representation whose function is to blur the distinction between presence and absence and to define the temporality of the sign and the subject.

“The Custom-House” conflates narrational and authorial voices. Hawthorne is writing about his life as inspector of customs revenue and he adds to that the fact that he found an actual scarlet letter and an actual roll of explanatory manuscript. This amalgamation of fiction and reality is linked to the literary national anxiety and, of course, the desire to establish a distinctive, post-colonial American literature, and thus to find a useable subject in the American past. Anxious as he is, Hawthorne is trying to find something interesting in the “Custom-House”, as he “chanced to lay [his] hand on a small package, carefully done up in a piece of ancient yellow parchment” (28). The “fine red cloth” of the letter is “greatly frayed and defaced” (29). The materiality of the letter signifies its temporality. However, the re-turn of the letter becomes only visible as a ghost to witness the mourning of the dead father—a compulsion to repeat and an impulsion to remember. In the final scaffold scene, the visibility of the invisible Dimmesdale’s guilt inflected letter A correlates with the invisibility of the visible letter A of Hester. Dimmesdale’s returning to the haunted Custom House, a *re*-turn that is invested in the prosopoeitic *re*-surfacing of Hawthorne’s lost love-objects, addresses the fact that the dead are

excessively cathected—an excess of cathexis that promises re-unity with the dead (the lost love-objects). This excess of cathexis stages the origin of the letter in the grave. In prosopopeia—as a metamorphosis—the dead are not only given a face and a voice; they are transformed phantasmagorically. This hallucinatory representation stems from the embarrassing injunctions of the prosopoetic. Phantasmagoria, in other words, is another name for the prosopoetic conjuration of the other. Yet, the trope of prosopopeia, promising as it is, fails to fulfill the end or to achieve the affective closure—a closure offered by the Freudian model of mourning. What we have is a failed attempt to re-unite with the dead. This failure or missed encounter with the dead, de Man purports in “Autobiography as De-Facement,” is caused by the inability to stand face-to-face with death—a threat that explains the faulty distribution of libido in the prosopoetic economy. The dysfunction of the libidinal system is intensified by the prosopoetic conjuration of the lost love-objects.

Hawthorne has incorporated³⁰ his dead father³¹—his lost object—inside his psyche as a way of not giving up the one who is lost. His life in Salem is characterized by isolation. The death of his father is covered over by a literary father—Pue. In a letter to his friend Longfellow, Hawthorne says: “I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again” (*Portable Hawthorne* 4). In this model, Hawthorne would be a successful mourner because although he goes into the graveyard and the archive to reclaim his father from death, he loses him again in the folds of the archive; he lives on while his father inhabits the archive waiting for someone else to claim him. Hawthorne brings his ancestors back by reincarnating them into the material world. Such reincarnation is the result of what Eric Savoy calls “necro-*filia*.” This desire for the cadaver, for death, is predicated upon the revenant’s return.

Examining Hawthorne's narrative and from the point of view of Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia and Abraham and Torok's theory of the crypt, one can say that reading is itself structured around necrophilic desire—prosopoetic desire *writ large*. Whatever biographical, textual, or historical background the reader has can only be a dead man's remnant. The remnants of the melancholic figures or corpses that populate Hawthorne's narrative tend toward ontological and historical recognition. Recognized and reorganized, the figures in "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter* reconfigure the American Gothic by defining its elements and contours.

Prosopoetically determined, the destination of one letter is the departure point for another person. This circularity of correspondence extends the circle of *The Scarlet Letter*. The breaking of the traditional structures and the deconstruction of canonical traditions frees the letter—a text—to float endlessly. In *The Scarlet Letter*, letters forever cross in a transitional and relational mode. Hester's letter is Dimmesdale's; Dimmesdale's letter is Chillingworth's; the narrator's letter is also the reader's. As a result, meaning is never fully grasped—it is always in the process of doing, undoing, and re-doing. If the letter A is both laid open and encrypted, concealing and canceling, then as long as the letter as a signature is not authenticated, it cannot be accredited except by another, by the reader. Although the letter A indexes continually what is precisely dis-narrated, excluded from representation (i.e., Hester's adultery), it becomes an empty signifier unable to signify. As Henry James puts it, Hawthorne "goes too far and is in danger of crossing the line that separates the sublime from its intimate neighbor" (94). Naming and un-naming adultery, the letter A stages Hester's attempt to avoid the law. Hester attempts to evade the law by the "sin" of sex and also by the subversive manufacture of the letter, and by the freedom of speculation that it earns for her. However, the law, much like ideology, works implicitly and

inhabits silence, absence, and all tropologies. Does symbolization fail in *The Scarlet Letter*? Does failure suggest a tropology that attempts to control the economy of the letter—from adultery to able, to angel, to indefiniteness? These signifieds that are attached to the scarlet letter in the scene of reading, however, do not cancel one another; they demonstrate a semiotic economy in which any approach can be convincing as long as it does not violate the hermeneutic certitude of indeterminacy. Following Derrida’s logic in *Of Grammatology*, one can talk about literature as a “supplément” which “means both a substitute and an addition” (Garber 14). By this logic, Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House” is a supplement to another text—*The Scarlet Letter*. It is an archive that substitutes for the absence of biographical facts and contextual referents. It is also a remedy for that absence. A form of cultural production in the West, the archive hides its status as a supplement.

“The Custom-House”—an archive—can only unfold in the field of the supplement because it is insufficient. Yet, it poses as totalizing and complete. To save *The Scarlet Letter* from forgetfulness and misinterpretation, “The Custom-House,” a ghostly archive, itself an image of spectrality and referentiality, covers over, through the imperative of the narrator and the injunctions of the ghosts of the dead fathers, the fear of death and loss. This reminds us of the certain “secret” or “something” which can never be present to the scene of the archival interpretation if the archive is to maintain its paradoxical adherence to the *tuché*, to the impossible or missed encounter with the Real. The imperative of “The Custom-House” is to “miss” or to “disavow” an encounter that is, paradoxically and at once, central to an understanding of historical Hawthorne and whose suppression is needed in order to present a “coherent” version of Hawthorne. It would seem, in order for the narrator to offer a genuine

analysis of Hawthorne's life and primal scenes, he must hold back "something" from the experience. In this way, the reader must be suspended, traumatically, in a desiring relation to reality insofar as the scene of (dis)closure remains deferred. Hawthorne's own primal scenes remain concealed in order to structure the entire archival reading as a successful event. In fact, the event of the archive succeeds, in terms of Derrida's "archive fever," in that there is a scene of filiation and affiliation. Hawthorne's recognition of an impossible gratification in his (missed) relationship with the ghosts of his ancestors exposes the structure of the missed encounter. Structured through a failed symbolization and an insufficient exercise of reading the *tuché*, unable to step outside the repetitive structure of the impossible encounter, "The Custom-House" can never elevate itself to the level of authenticity. The visibility of the invisibility of the ghosts that inhabit "The Custom-House" is smuggled in both *The Scarlet Letter* and in the memory of the narrator/author. The ghost of Surveyor Pue emerges from a cadaver and his wig and clothing are described at length. The encounter with the material remains, the corpse, of Pue is, like that with the bones of the dead fathers, imagined any yearned for in a necro-filiac fashion, but they are missed in the narrative. The ghost, then, is that which makes up for that impossible encounter, that impossible task of bringing the will of the Father, or the voice of the Father, to life—save through the figure of prosopopeia. The ominous invisibility of the ghosts in the narrative as a ghost story suggests Hawthorne's desire to conceal it. What is at issue in terms of the psychoanalysis of the Gothic is the way in which Pue supplements the ghosts that are felt but do not coalesce into prosopopeia or speak (i.e., the fathers).

Hawthorne removes any trace of this forbidden desire to return to an early, identificatory encounter with the maternal *Thing*. Disguised and displaced, this desire plays out in his narrative,

in anticipation of Derridean theory. The text exposes the instability of the boundary-making process that creates identity. Derrida points out that the invisible prohibition on which any cultural or social system rests is "a pure, fictive and unstable, ungraspable limit. One crosses it in attaining it ... before the prohibition, it is not incest; forbidden, it cannot become incest except through the recognition of the prohibition" (*Of Grammatology* 267). The father's prohibition—a prohibition that is inscribed in the Puritan model of active masculinity and imaged in the primal scene of writing marks a perimeter, but, as Derrida directs us to think, perimeters are intrinsically leaky; while they assign identities, they are also the space where identity melts. Hawthorne stages the ghosts of his ancestors criticizing and shaming him, dismissing him as an “idler” and a “writer of story books” (9). The maternal is disavowed and by extension the effeminate is treated as abject.

Hawthorne’s mourning of his ancestors brings back the ghost/father and fuels its request or rather command: that the son—here Hawthorne—do what the mother, as represented by Hester, who is one could say, extraneous to the “The Custom House,” will not, legitimize the father and the patriarchal order. Hawthorne’s Father epitomizes the absorbing father figure of the pre-Oedipal stage. It could be said that the effeminate son, the mere writer, can redeem himself by disseminating the will of the Father. Whereas the Fathers had their bibles and their swords, the Son has his pen. The outcome of Hawthorne’s fear of castration is his submission to the reality principle. His entry into the Symbolic Order or the language system requires the submission to the rules of language—the Law-of-the-Father, which is at the center of the system. To be recognized as an eminent literary figure, Hawthorne submits to the law of his literary ancestor—Pue. By this logic, Hawthorne’s primal scene is also Pue’s. Hawthorne’s

identification³² with Surveyor Pue is erotic and literary. Were my focus the question of gender politics, I would discuss the significance of Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of the homosocial continuum. The latent content of Hawthorne's inscription suggests that the very image of phallic authority, the primal scene, is disrupted and challenged by the forbidden desire, which is both a desire for incest, and a desire to return to an origin identified with the mother. The paradox is, as in the case of the Oedipus complex, the identification and erotic bond with Pue/fathers and mother as origin. It should be noted that there is a conflict between the desire to be pleased by the Father and the threat of castration implied by this desire. It is very important to bear in mind the fact that identification activates the Oedipus complex and at the same time dissolves it through the excess and abandonment. To understand this conflict or paradox, we need to follow the career of identification, or rather the identificatory circuits of the figuration that are at work in the Custom House. There is a melancholic incorporation of the Father via Pue, and an erotic attachment to the mother, via Hester. What Hawthorne, the narrative agent in the Custom House, has in common with Hester and the mother figure is that they have both known shame, shaming. Just as Hester has been shamed and made into a public figure of shame by the Puritan law of the father, so too is Hawthorne mocked by the ghosts of his fathers.

The desire to return to an origin that is no longer there stages the primal scene in the field of a primal story, which, for both Freud and Lacan, is a male story. For Freud, the father's authority derives from his biological difference—which is to say, a man is empowered because he is the possessor of a penis. For Lacan, however, the father's power is not biological but cultural: culture assigns power to the penis and semen is at the origin of dissemination and seminar. The

primal scene poses an answer to the critical question—what makes a father? In Freud’s reading, the father’s role is defined by castration: the father appears to be castrating the mother and holds the son thrall by the threat of castration. This interpretation seems to inscribe the argument that one is empowered by removing the sign of power.

Although “The Custom-House” seems less interested in autobiographical coherence than in historical revenants, it tends toward coherent subjectivity. In fact, the case history of Hawthorne narrates the incoherence and temporality of the subject. Invested in *différance*, “The Custom-House”—a historical autobiography—is implicated in the chain of supplements, traces, and residues of a haunting past. These chains are overarching trajectories or frameworks: they bind “The Custom-House” to the narrative it prefaces, just as they bind figuration in the Custom House to the genres of both autobiography and historiography. Everything is haunted by the *Thing* that remains unnamable and therefore requires the supplement. The supplement inscribes the narrative in the Gothic. The Gothic dimension of “The Custom-House” is produced by the semantic indirection which resides in the narrative, which appears as a series of specters—ghosts of the dead ancestors and the forgotten history. This obsession with the past is central to the American Gothic tradition. In fact, Hawthorne is following the injunctions of the father to remember him: “do this, and the profit shall be all your own. You will shortly need it; for it is not in your days as it was in mine, when a man’s office was a life-lease, and often times an heirloom” (31). Ghostwriting—invested in the economy of cryptonymy—is associated with incarnation and exorcism of the dead fathers’ ghosts. However, these ghosts do not disclose any secret like the Derridean ghost, which is “*le re-venant*, the survivor [that] appears only as a means of figure or fiction, but its appearance is not nothing, nor is it a mere semblance (“Memoires” 85). The dead

fathers' ghosts are rather what Abraham and Torok call "phantoms."³³ The focus of my chapter is the transgenerational haunting that is conveyed through the concept of the "phantom." As Abraham defines it in *The Shell and the Kernel*,

the 'phantom' is a formation in the dynamic unconscious that is found there not because of the subject's own repression but on account of a direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object. Consequently, the phantom is not at all the product of the subject's self-creation by means of the interplay between repressions and introjections. The phantom is alien to the subject who harbors it. Moreover, the diverse manifestations of the phantom, which we call haunting, are not directly related to instinctual life and are not to be confused with the return of the repressed. (181)

These are unconscious secrets passed down from one generation to the other. The phantom, however, *re*-appears not as disseminated symptoms but in the unconscious as the inadmissible secret of the Other. This secret could be anything. As far as *The Scarlet Letter* is concerned, the filial secret is to carry on the Puritan patriarchal project. Knowing the secret, however, leads us, via the concept of transhistorical haunting, to a new understanding of the symptom and the phantom as they slide toward death.

The "phantom" is associated with the ghostly presence of the dead ancestors in the living narrator's ego and with the prevention of its historical and traumatic secrets from coming to the fore. These secrets are incorporated in the phantom's discourse and voice which hides an unspeakable secret of the other—a love object. Abraham continues to argue that:

The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious—for good reason. It passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent's unconscious into the child's. Clearly, the phantom has a function different from dynamic repression. The phantom's periodic and compulsive return lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in

the sense of a return of the repressed. It works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography. The imaginings issuing from the presence of a stranger has nothing to do with fantasy strictly speaking. (173)

The narrator is caught between two inclinations: to keep the secret (the project) of his lost loved ones, or to try disclose the secret altogether. This is also paralleled by a desire to recover the lost mother. This unthwarted desire has to remain unknown because the narrator's patriarchal project of *re-writing* the colonial history out of residues. These residues, as the narrator of "The Custom-House" argues, render history inaccessible. Such inaccessibility allows the narrator to imaginatively reconstruct this history while hiding some elements from the scene of writing. Eric Savoy argues that "Hawthorne seeks connection to the Puritan fathers by writing his participation in the transhistorical project of surveying and containing women's resistant energies" (398). The representation of Hester, albeit misogynic, tends toward the absent mother. Participating in the reconstruction of the Puritan project, Hawthorne keeps this secret blotted out in order to be legitimized by the fathers. This is the lie of Hawthorne who, while withholding some secrets from the Puritan fathers, is deceived by the phantoms of the dead fathers. While Hawthorne succumbs to the affective maneuvers of prosopopeia and welcomes the revenant in order to fulfill and sustain the filial duty, he fails to sever his connection to the past (the maternal connection)—a failure that stages the writing subject as melancholic. Such melancholia, epitomized by the indefinite *Thing* that is cast upon the split ego, is explicated by the narrative's investment in chiasmus and prosopopeia, or rather the will-to-prosopopeia. Essentially, the phantom of the Custom House stages the impossibility of representing the past and the inevitable failure of mourning, a failure that is worsened by the phantom's lies.

The “phantom”, however, is a liar whose coming back to haunt the living works to lead astray the narrator’s haunted ego and to guarantee the unawareness and mystery of the secret. In fact, the lie is in the nature of a promise. Hawthorne’s dead ancestors and Surveyor Pue, his literary father, are given voice and figuratively disinterred through the use of the trope of Prosopopeia. In *The Shell and the Kernel*, Abraham and Torok posit that, “a ghost returns to haunt with the intention of lying: its would-be ‘revelations’ are false by nature” (188). It returns, as such, as the phantasmal confirmation of hermeneutic ambivalence. As a result, Hester’s letter, like the remainders of Pue’s letter, remains an inscrutable sign. The letter cannot be deciphered; it can only be *recovered*. Calling for interpretation, the letter is repeatedly *restored* and *returned* to its material origin. What returns, however, is always linked to desire—the desire to be remembered. Derrida points out that “one *must* always begin by remembering” (“Mnemosyne” 35). Dead Surveyor Pue signs an agreement with Hawthorne to write him out of death. Defining signatures in Hawthorne’s narrative becomes difficult because voices are mixed up. When a writer dies, his text is passed on to new authors who sign it—an authenticating activity—and, in turn, pass it on to new writers. Signing becomes an uncanny activity that doubles the text. Signature has a concealing and a canceling effect; it conceals a present signature and cancels a previous one. When signed by Hawthorne, Pue’s narrative takes on new spectral dimensions. In fact, ghost writing is Oedipally determined. Only by bringing the dead to life, can living Hawthorne appropriate his literary father’s voice and transcend embrace his authority or what Hawthorne calls “filial duty”—staged here by the event of the archive. The ghost in Hawthorne, however, is a living voice, speaking on behalf of the original author. In this sense, the author, unlike in the Barthesian paradigm, is not dead. The author never dies since authorship is handed

over to a new author—the ghost. The point I want to raise here is that in both Barthes' paradigm and that of the Gothic death is a metaphor and at the same time literal. In fact, death is necessary for tradition itself, tradition being that which needs ghosts and orders and injunctions.

In Hawthorne's narrative, person deixis is displaced since the distinction between the "I" of the living narrator/author and the "not I" of the absent-present ghost is blurred. The displacement of referents and the spectrality of the narrative is in fact a manifestation of a haunted writing, a writing that talks about itself only in relation to and in terms of other preceding writings. This fascination with absence and death suspends Hawthorne's narrative between the Gothic and romance. In "Custom House," we have mixed modes of narrative: on the one hand, there is an autobiographical story; on the other, there is a gradual solidification of ghostly presences, culminating in the (dis)appearance of Pue in the archive. The ghost, instead of being exorcized, turns out to be the exorcist and forces Hawthorne to write down his story, and speak the unspeakable. Being an exorcist, the ghost inscribes fear and loss. His emphatic injunction, "I charge you, in this matter of old Mistress Prynne, give to your predecessor's memory the credit which will be rightfully due" (32) refers to the power of the invisible to disrupt and delegitimize the order. The answer of the narrator is "I will."

The buried narrative of Surveyor Pue comes back in a new form. Figuratively disinterring the remainders of the dead fathers and reading the archival text of Pue, Hawthorne realizes that the scarlet letter remains "frayed and defaced" (29). The text that comes back to haunt, Derrida argues, "is always distorted" ("Roundtable on translation" 158). This distortion is always already there in the act of the exhumation of the dead and the transference of their discourse. To recall Pue is to recall a dead Father's name. Derrida argues that the exercise of naming is closely linked

to haunting. According to him, “only the name can inherit, and this is why the name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man’s name, a name of death” (“Otobiographies” 7). Pue, the initial signature of the narrative, and a name that alludes to death and history “is the name of someone dead or, of a living someone whom it can do without” (“Roundtable on translation” 53). I am writing this paper for the dead, for Hawthorne. My name, the initial signature of the chapter, spectrally refers to the initiary, initial name—Hawthorne’s ghost. I am dead and my chapter is initiated by the dead. Hawthorne is writing *The Scarlet Letter* for the dead Pue, for America. Furnished with ghosts that ask to be remembered and written into the American history, Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House” functions as an exercise in melancholia.

“The Custom-House” inhabits the liminal space between mourning and melancholia. Settling the act of mourning cannot happen without the painful act of traversing melancholia. This shift, Eric Savoy argues, “is from mourning to an altogether productive melancholia that generates a Gothic scene of writing: this book of the dead can be addressed only *to* the dead in a tropic moment that constitutes the narrative that follows as an extended prosopopeia that accrues under a shadowy address” (461). Does the author/narrator fail to mourn the lost object? Hawthorne can be considered as a melancholic subject. Part of his ego is identified with the lost object of desire—the dead Father. Because of the identification of the ego with lost object of desire, the “object-loss [is] transformed into ego-loss” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 249). Unlike normal mourning,³⁴ in melancholia the lost object is not relinquished in the fullness of grieving time. Instead, the mourning ego splits and identifies with the lost object to support the flow of libido towards that object. Studying Freud’s model of melancholia, Abraham and Torok propose that this process be renamed a process of encryption, one’s psychic encryment of the

other within oneself in a safe crypt within the ego. The crypt is a symbol in which the ego preserves the corpse of the dead other. It is worth signaling that the psychic crypt is also related to the encrypted word as message. The lost Pue is incorporated within Hawthorne's split ego and his letter is encrypted as the transhistorical message. As Derrida elaborates in his discussion of Abraham and Torok:

the incorporated dead, which one has not really managed to take upon oneself, continues to lodge there, like something other and to ventrilocate through the "living." The living dead ... is the one who is enclosed in the crypt. For instance, I lose a loved one, I fail to do what Freud calls the normal work of mourning, with the result that the dead person continues to inhabit me, but as a stranger (*The Ear of the Other* 57-58).

The psychoanalytic exegesis of Hawthorne's attachment to the lost object—its important function in identity-construction—is articulated by the act of owning Pue. In this context, any narrative is, like the photographic negative, a shadow of a work that stands in the shadow of different texts and contexts. Any narrative would be, like the photographic narrative, "very like a ghost; it reifies the concept of an absent presence, existing positively as a negative image. In a negative we see light as dark and dark as light; we see, in effect, what is not there" (Garber 17). Hawthorne, in fact, is writing out of the crypt, out of the remainder without presence; it is through this residue of the other, a ghostly outside secretly placed inside, that the author is able to write and to fulfill the filial duty imposed by his dead fathers. I want to argue that the super-ego is not a derivative of melancholia; it is the cultural imperative. At issue is the shared function of the encrypted father with the super ego as "voice" of obligation, of "filial duty." Hawthorne's narrative leaks the desire to engage with death and forgetfulness—primal scenes that foreground any narrative.

Hawthorne has internalized his dead father—his lost love object—inside his psyche as a way of not giving up the one who is lost. In this model, Hawthorne would be a successful mourner because although he goes into the graveyard and the archive of the Custom House to reclaim his father from death, he finds him, or his *restes*, again in the archive; he lives on while his father rests in the archive waiting for someone else to claim him. What we have is a fluctuation between mourning and melancholia—a process that is fueled by repression. The *mise en scène* of the Custom House archive fulfills Derrida’s model of the filiation event of the archive, as well as its toxic burden, its eternal *mal*.

Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House” charts an undoing of primary repression (*Verdrängung*) that is initiated by the narrator’s remembering the ghost—who, in Lacanian terms represents the *objet a*, that is a substitute for the dead paternal body—and writing him out of death into the narrative of survival. The desire for a lost, prohibited father-child relation³⁵ is perhaps most surprisingly evoked in the fictional and factual presence of male figures in most of Hawthorne’s narratives. He removes any trace of this forbidden desire to go back to an early stage where he can put it in check. Disguised and displaced, this desire plays out in *The Scarlet Letter* as, in anticipation of Derrida’s deconstructive model, the text exposes the instability of the process of identity construction. The father’s prohibition imaged in the primal scene marks an obstacle, but, as Derrida directs us to think, obstacles are inherently aporetic and leaky; while they assign new paradigms, they are also the site where hierarchical binary oppositions meet, where identity crashes. Hawthorne’s mourning of his ancestors brings back the ghost/father and fuels its uncanny request or rather command: that the son—here Hawthorne—legitimize the

father. For mourning to be possible, Derrida, like de Man, thinks of memory as a multiple concept.

The unspeakable yet speaking voice of the ghost of Hawthorne's literary father—Surveyor Pue—"speaks and lives [Hawthorne's] words and affects" (Abraham and Torok 150). Talking about Derrida's works, which can be applied to Hawthorne and his literary father, and following the steps of Abraham and Torok, Castricano argues that "encrypted and encrypting, these works lead us to reflect upon the nature of language and writing in special terms (of the crypt) that, in turn, produce a radical psychological model of the individual and collective 'self' configured in spectral terms of phantoms and haunting" (13). We end up having many Pues and many Hawthornes. This spectrality of authorship or what Harold Bloom calls "anxiety of influence" creates a spectral readership and makes the encounter between the readers and the authors and between the narrative and the Real impossible. Pue's buried text and the secrets it contains come back in new hallucinatory forms. However, it would not perhaps be going too far to say that repression is necessary for the preservation of life. The repressed *verdräng*, Silvio Fanti points out, "could have been expelled in any direction. It thus has nothing to do with the 're' of 'repression', which is borrowed from the Latin *re* and indicates motion toward the rear ... the *verdrängt* object is neither abolished nor annihilated. It persists with its own dynamism, which may even be greatly intensified" (112). This means that repression, related as it is to memory, presupposes the subject and comes before history. While the narrator reads Pue's narrative, Pue's ghost summons us to the realm of memory. Remembering the ghost of Pue and following his injunctions make any act of reading or writing spectral and transferential. Castricano, following the injunctions of Derrida's ghost, suggests that "whenever a text 'calls' to

us, it is for the purpose of (doing) dream work with ghosts, phantoms, specters, revenants: all those whose return prompts us to remember that dreamwork is also memory work which manifests itself in terms of haunting” (17). Thus, Hawthorne’s haunted narrative teaches us how to die and give life to the dead. To start writing and reading, there must be death and memory. We must, “learning to live”, write and read, “learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts” (*Specters of Marx* xviii). Invested in the economics of “the commerce without commerce of ghosts”, Hawthorne’s narrative posits itself as a work of American memory and history.

To make the encounter with the American Real³⁶ possible, Hawthorne makes recourse to prosopopeia to give the dead father a face or a substance. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida argues:

the production of the ghost, the constitution of the *ghost* effect is not simply a spiritualization or even an autonomization of spirit, idea or thought, as happens *par excellence* in Hegelian idealism. No, once this autonomization is effected, with the corresponding expropriation or alienation, and only then, the ghostly moment *comes upon* it, adds to it a supplementary dimension, one more simulacrum, alienation or expropriation. Namely a body! In the flesh (*Leib*)! For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility, like the disappearing of an apparition. For there to be ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. The spectrogenic process corresponds therefore to a paradoxical *incorporation*. Once ideas or thoughts (*Gedanke*) are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by *giving them a body*. (126; original italics)

The return of the body in Hawthorne’s narrative is, however, preceded by the unburial of the remnant of the body-corpse—“an imperfect skeleton”. This passage is very useful in terms of the

specifics of Hawthorne's spectral economy, his hauntology: all this originates in his meditation upon the grave, upon the decomposed body. Prosopopeia then may be said to "recompose the body—but, of course, to produce "a body that is more abstract than ever." The fleshing of the skeleton is a return to and a reincarnation of the original body. This uncanny return to the graveyard is predicated upon memory. However, "The Custom-House" is the spectral archive of the national, historical, political, and religious past of Salem. As Eric Savoy argues, "Gothic texts return obsessively to the personal, the familial, and the national pasts to complicate rather than to clarify them, but mainly to implicate the individual in a deep morass of American desires and deeds that allow no final escape from or transcendence of them" (169). The Historical aspect of "The Custom-House" and its fascination with the Real—the various archival residues of the American history that haunt the narrative—inscribes the American subjectivity in the realm of temporality. However, the Real—the American Real—is an impossible Real. The impossibility of representing the Real suspends and links it to the Gothic. "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter* strive to give the American Real a voice. This attempt reflects the nineteenth-century American anxiety about the nation's destiny and destination. This anxiety is explained by Eric Savoy's argument that the American Gothic is "symptomatic of cultural restlessness, the fear of facing America's darkly pathological levels. It is also ... what gives rise to the Gothic verbal figures, their urgent straining toward meaning, and their consequent strains upon the limits of language" ("The Rise of American Gothic" 169). Savoy's argument that the American Gothic is the domain of transhistorical and pathological levels alludes to the Real of the Gothic that is signaled by the linguistic ruptures that cause these psychological and cultural troubles to incessantly return, suggesting that "the gothic tendency in American culture is organized around

the imperative to repetition, the return of what is unsuccessfully repressed, and, moreover, that this return is realized in a syntax, a grammar, a tropic field” (4). There is a double-voiced discourse in “The Custom-House”: a fascination with unveiling the truth about the past and a fear of the return of the repressed—a fear that defines the uncanny circuits of trauma in Hawthorne’s narrative.

This double-voiced discourse is further complicated by the tension between an impossible—or rather, missed—encounter with the Real, at one level, and the linguistic representation of the Real, at another level; this doubleness marks the investment of Hawthorne’s narrative—itself a reading about the impossibility of reading—in cryptonymy and ghost writing. Hawthorne is suffering from *le trouble d’archive* which stems from *le mal d’archive*. For both Derrida and Hawthorne this *mal d’archive* is produced by the burden of the question of identity in the field of the national, of the tradition. What this suggests is that Hawthorne is troubled by what Derrida calls the “visor” (84) effect of his haunting fathers. To have this trouble, Derrida explains, “is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, and irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (90). This nostalgia³⁷ explains the subject’s obsession with the past, with the lost love-objects. Like the Freudian model of melancholia, nostalgia initiates a mania of desiring and a propensity for suicide if the affective closure of re-uniting with the love object is not achieved. This spectral effect suspends the act of writing between the present, the past, and the future. This suspension links the domain of the archive to the domain of possibility and promise. In the beginning there was “The Custom-House.” This introductory narrative is the object of nostalgia on the part of the narrator who takes it as the origin of the

American national identity. The American Real is the absolute origin of American national literature. This great desire for an American national literature is played out in Hawthorne's introductory narrative. However, "The Custom-House" works according to the circuits of desire. The anxiety of the narrator of "The Custom-House," much like Dimmesdale's, is about the public role his Puritan dead ancestors would have advocated.

Hawthorne's narrative is an archival act of witness to an American national trauma and an attempt at preserving the national document from the vicissitudes of temporality. Hawthorne's investment in the Gothic is interlaced with his *mise en scène* of the troubles of archive, the troubles of masculinity. The troubles of the archive are activated by the traumatized masculine subjects. *The Scarlet Letter*, the scene of writing, displays the inaccessibility of the past, the impossibility of representation, and the consequent effect/affect on and of a traumatic writing that tries to reconstruct an historical past. Aligning the paternal body with the Puritan letters, Hawthorne connects the "dry bones" of the Puritan fathers with the literal and figurative remains of Pue's letter. Preserving the document, however, is subject to the violent act of archiving it and re-writing it. Violent as it is, the act of archiving is centered around re-petition. The archive petitions and re-petitions to be remembered and preserved much like the unconscious that is itself another kind of archive. Or better, to write, to reinscribe, to repeat, is indeed to petition the Fathers, and it is also to petition, i.e., to solicit, the Real in the very gaze of the Father. The archive must be conceptualized as a depot of debris and as a personal and national unconscious.

The archive is closely linked to death which is linked to the void.³⁸ Derrida argues that the death drive "seems not only to be an-archic, anarchontic (we must not forget that the death drive, originary though it may be, is not a principle, as are the pleasure and reality principles): the

death drive is above all *anarchivic*. It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation" (10; original italics). The death drive, the desire for destruction and aggression, Derrida argues, incites amnesia and forgetfulness. He continues to argue that "there is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside" (11). Much like the death drive that is opposed by the life drive, the desire to destroy the archive and fall into the void is contradicted by the life drive that conserves the archive. This perspective enables us to argue that the desire to destroy the archive has a very specific American resonance, one that is important for Hawthorne: founded upon Revolution, America sets out to reject History itself, to start anew, to build a Utopia.

The contradiction between the ethics of Eros and Thanatos stages what Derrida calls "the archive fever." The very evidence of this contradiction is repetition itself, which cannot be dissociated from its Freudian investment in the death drive. What we have in "The Custom-House" is centered on an extremely dense nucleus of matter and materiality. Hawthorne's narrative is mainly composed of void and belongs to another dimension of time and space. Derrida's theory of the archive fever is based on Freud's concept of death drive (*Todestrieb*) which also implies inertia and a counter-movement. The death drive, Derrida points out, "works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own 'proper' traces—which consequently cannot properly be called 'proper.' It devours it even before producing it on the outside" (*Archive Fever* 10; emphasis original). The death drive that governs the archive has an eternal penchant for the return to the void. According to micropsychoanalysis, it is the death drive that yields the life drive. Fanti's argument that "the life drive is born as a chance 'rebound' effect of the death drive" (81) allows us to say that the archive is the rebound

effect of the drives that try to destroy it. Within the void of the archive the Thanatos protects Eros. As demonstrated by Fanti, there is no death anxiety; the only anxiety is the anxiety of the void—an anxiety that defines nineteenth-century America’s anxiety about its national archive.

As *Thanatos* takes over the world of Hawthorne, as *terra*—the American archive—is crammed with dead bodies, as letters are rumbling the Symbolic, as signifiers fall part, I cannot but pose the Kantian question “what is man?” What is the future of human subjectivity? Who is responsible for the death of *Eros*?³⁹ As the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* has imploded,⁴⁰ power relations has been remodeled. The archive, the real site of terror, is imbricated with violence, but also desire plays an important role in the construction of American Puritan subjectivity. What comes first in the archive? Derrida argues that it is not only the question of the past that is at stake when we dig into the archive; the future plays an important role in determining the spectral nature of the archive. He posits that: “it is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want *to know what that will have meant*, we will only know in *times to come*” (*Archive Fever* 36; italics mine). The archive, then, is a mere promise of coherence that unfolds only in the field of the future anterior—“will have meant.” It circles around a kind of repetition in order to be comprehensible and comprehensive. Since there is no future without repetition, we cannot talk about the archive without invoking the specters or the ghosts of the dead. As a result, the meaning of the archive is always deferred and the archive must replay the act of archivization endlessly. According to Derrida:

the strange result of this performative repetition, the irrepressible effectuation of this *enactment*, in any case what it unavoidably demonstrates is that the interpretation of the

archive ... can only illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, namely a given inheritance, by inscribing itself into it, that is to say by opening it and enriching it enough to have a rightful place in it. (67)

This “performative repetition” inscribes the archivist and his future—a synecdoche of the American future—into death and memory of the dead fathers. Are we talking about the future of the archive or the archive of the future or the future *qua* archive? Following Derrida’s argument that the archive is the domain of the past conditional—“would have been”—I want to link this analysis to the nineteenth-century American project of nationhood and national literature. In this sense, subjectivity becomes the archive and the archival narrative becomes caught up in *différance*. Invested in deferral, “The Custom-House” yearns to coincide with a consciousness that is no longer there. The experience of reading of “The Custom-House” allows one to account for the attempt to assimilate the future and the past into the present. The non-linearity and multi-directionality of time in Hawthorne’s narrative experiments with time and offers a new horizon of expectation—or what Sacvan Bercovitch calls in *The Rites of Assent* the idea of progress, which is central to the American national project. This idea of progress structures the narrative of temporal evolution and condensation of experience and spatial expansionism and makes sense of why Hester comes back to America at the end. Such progress is possible only through the re-turn to the past.

The impossible dialectics of the desire to return to the origin and to understand the true nature of the ghosts or revenants (and understanding their messages) structures the work of Hawthorne as an impossible haunted archive. We meet the ghosts of Hawthorne’s fathers in the experience of excavating his archive. They return, as such, as the spectral manifestation of

ambivalence and doubt. Derrida argues that archiving the other⁴¹ within one's narrative unfolds always in the realm of violence (78-79). This encounter between the archivist and the other is made violent and, ultimately, impossible due to the investment of the archive in the Freudian psychoanalytic retrospective model in which there is a chiasmic logic between cause and effect. In the archive, the axes of time are reversed: the past becomes future and the future becomes past. This temporality of the archive or what Dominick LaCapra calls the "repetitive temporality" (9) sees history as transference. Transference, however, is activated by the dialectics of psychological trauma. The archive is traumatic because it is governed by what Paul de Man calls in his "Literary History and Literary Modernity" the "*desire to wipe out* whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, *a point of origin* that marks a new *departure*" (148; emphasis mine). It is a testimony to and a manifestation of an unresolved or missed encounter with the past. The missed encounter, however, might be conceptualized as a kind of paradox or irony. The desire "to wipe out the past" is paralleled by an obsession with and an investment in the past (archive), in a kind of national psychology. Bringing the past to the present through the tropological disinterment of the corpses of the fathers invests Hawthorne's narrative in the national literary project of nineteenth-century American literature. The effect of trauma is always belated, and trauma does not yield itself to simple narrative. The effects of trauma, as I shall demonstrate, are going to show up as symptoms or traces of trauma. The Freudian Oedipal economy shapes Hawthorne's archive. He receives the authority to write or inscribe his narrative from his Oedipally inflected relationship of attraction and repulsion with his patriarchal figures. Hawthorne's chiasmic relationship with his lost love-object—the

letter—allows him to be the subject and the object at the same time. The letter that indexes his ancestors comes alive in his psyche but it is also he who lives in it.

The traces that are left by the activation of the primal scene of the death or rather the murder of the father come back in symptomatic, indirect ways. This temporality of the subject is paralleled by a temporality of the archive. In his *Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek argues that the construction of the subject is regulated by the trauma of the death of the father that Freud spelled out in *Totem and Taboo*. The temporality of subjectivity presupposes the ambivalence of writing. Read in light of the Freudian psychoanalytic model, “The Custom-House”—an archival writing—unfolds in the field of temporality and impossibility. It is an impossible writing that refers to itself. The dead fathers carry on their authority and power in the disguised power of the cultural—a repetition that guarantees the survival of the Father and his narrative. Such a survival is made possible only through re-repression, which is at the root of the Law. In his analysis of Lacan’s Real, Žižek argues that the Real is the trauma that activates the cultural heritage. According to him, “the paradox of Lacanian Real...exercises a certain structural causality” (136). The Real appears as an absence, a lack, or a fantasy but it has violent effects. The primal animation of violence is at the root of trauma experience.

In this respect, Hawthorne’s recovery of the patriarchal lost letter vacillates his narrative between prosopoetics of disinterment and the Gothic. This vacillation, however, perpetuates violence and inscribes the narrative in the politics of *assujettissement*. The economy of violence is, however, at the center of Western metaphysics: Hegel’s slave/master dialectics is a theory of trauma that is structured by violence; Marx’s dichotomous model of culture in which the economic relations, or modes of productions, are the basic elements in determining social

relations or formations called the superstructure; Freud's model of the primal scene of the violent murder of the father; and so on. All these paradigmatic models stage violence at the center of the subject's construction. In his *Totem and Taboo*, Freud argues that "the violent father had doubtless been feared and envied of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength" (142). The dead father's Law (Surveyor Pue)—an emblem of violence and arbitrariness—inscribes a continuing fear and love that sustains the Law-of-the-Father. In this sense, Hawthorne chooses to live with his dead father to avoid the violence of the Real that is initiated by the return of and to the debris of the past. It should be noted, at this point, that the violence of *mal d'archive* is different. It is the violence that ensues upon *not* repudiating the Father. It is the violence that defines the "one" of the nation in opposition to the Others. It is instructive to remember that Derrida's *mal d'archive* is a meditation on his Jewishness. However, it has distinct relations to "American Zion". So, the Father must be placated or petitioned.

The return of the repressed misogyny (the patriarchal project) is made possible through transference. As Freud explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, transference repetition explains the need for the repressed to be re-enacted. This is due to the resistant nature of the unconscious material which tends to re-emerge into consciousness. In doing so, the repressed takes devious routes to evade the policing ego. In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, Lacan defines the symptom as the return of the repressed; it "initially appears to us as a trace, which will only ever be a trace, one which will continue not to be understood until the analysis has got quite a long way, and until we have discovered its meaning" (159). The repressed, however, is oriented toward the future. This transference dwells in the realm of the

future and possibility. Žižek poses the question, “And what is the ‘journey into the past’ if not this retroactive working-through, elaboration, of the signifier itself?—a kind of hallucinatory *mise-en-scène* of the fact that in the field of the signifier and only in that field, we can change, we can bring about the past” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 58-59). The field of the signifier is the field of temporality of history and the subject. What Pue “will have been” is what Hawthorne will do in the subjunctive. The subjunctive is the grammatical mood of desire and identification. However, the circuits of identifications never end, they are endlessly spiraling. The supplementarity of transference relates it to the field of illusion and ambivalence. Transference is an illusion, a phantasmagoric (re)appearance by means of which truth—the truth of the symptom—is produced. Transference, however, implies repetition. Why repetition? Žižek points out that the recognition of the past, through repeating it, requires the figurative act of murdering the father to achieve an “objective necessity”(61)—historical indebtedness and affiliation. The most significant corollary of assuming the mission of repeating the letter that, because it would seem that Hawthorne accepts the obligation to re-vivify the Fathers and their Will, Hawthorne supplants and therefore “kills” the father. It is only by repeating the Letter, that is, by extending the business of the Letter, that the anxiety of influence is turned into the influence of anxiety. This historical necessity is initiated by a “symbolic necessity” or subjective (internal) debt to the dead father. It follows, then, that “The Custom-House” is a compensation for Hawthorne’s symbolic duty or debt to Pue. This compensation—an acknowledgement through repetition—announces the coming of the Father or the Name-of-the-Father. However, the event did not repeat itself because of a historical necessity; it is a repayment of Hawthorne’s Symbolic debt to Pue. As argued by Žižek in his *Looking Awry*, “[t]he return of the living dead, then,

materializes a certain symbolic debt persisting beyond physical expiration. It is commonplace to state that symbolization as such equates to symbolic murder: when we speak about a thing, we suspend, place in parentheses, its reality” (23). The assassination of the Father—the repressed symbolic event—receives its Law and power retroactively through repetition and extends Hawthorne’s narrative to the domain of the Gothic. In other words, what was excluded from the symbolic returns in the Real in the form of symptomatic traces. This means that any symbolic structure is organized around a certain void. It is this void that stages the contours of the archive. In other words, the archive consists of the fragments, the debris, the traces shored up against the ruin of the subject. The archive is, then, not simply an example of “symbolic structure”; it is but another name for the Lacanian term, “the Symbolic.” In the archive, memory displaces time deixis and place deixis. What we have is a coexistence of presence and absence, place and space, memory and forgetfulness, substantiality and abstraction. In fact, what are we talking about in the archive? Are we talking about the spectrality of the archive or the archive of the specter or the specter as archive or the archive of the archive? The work of the psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok is crucial to the study of this transgenerational and relational transference of events, especially the peculiar ways in which the buried traumas of the past might haunt and affect the lives of the following generations. Read in light of psychoanalysis, Hawthorne’s relationship with the dead is a chiasmatic relationship: he is haunted by them and yet he still haunts them.

Giving substance to abstract thoughts, *prosopopeia*⁴² allows the ghost to make vocal a buried past and to haunt the living. It follows, then, that *prosopopeia* works hand in hand with trauma and the uncanny. Drawing upon psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Lacan, Abraham and

Torok, and Kristeva, I shall demonstrate how prosopopeia makes the traumatic experience of death “homely.” Prosopopeia—a trope of the Gothic *par excellence*—inscribes the narrative in the space of *différance*. Freud asserts that the uncanny is something which is originally homelike and familiar, which has been repressed and then comes back to haunt. The working of the uncanny impedes the effort to understand it and thus refers us back to the impossibility of understanding which at the center of the uncanny. “Das Unheimlich”—the uncanny—inhabits “The Custom-House” which produces a tropological substitution for the absence of the body. Like the dead fathers, the buried text is given a voice. However, in prosopopeia—as a metamorphosis—the dead are not completely dead and forgotten; they remain suspended, waiting to be archived in the work of mourning that may never be done. Lukacher perspicaciously depicts the prosopoetic nature of the voice of the dead. He argues that “the voice of the text, like the voice of the patient, is a verbal mask that conceals forgotten words and the forgotten scenes they compose” (68). The presence of a voice necessitates a listener or an addressee—the ear of the other. Freud claims that it is through listening that the analyst could unpuzzle the mystery of the primal scene.

What is, therefore, the role of the voice and the act of listening? In the Barthesian narrative model, which is derived from Freud’s psychoanalytic model, the fear of castration and the death of the father are mingled in the voice. Like Freud, Barthes argues that the voice includes other parasitical voices. In *S/Z*, he states that the voice is “the direct product of castration, the complete, connected evidence of deficiency” (110). However, the voice of the father is both readable and unreadable, present and absent, heard and unheard, the emblem of subjectivity and the very symptom of the erasure of that subjectivity. The narrator of “The Custom House” states,

“with his own ghostly hand, the obscurely seen, but majestic, figure had imparted to me the scarlet symbol and the little roll of explanatory manuscript. With his own ghostly voice he had exhorted me on the sacred consideration of my filial duty and reverence toward him (31). Performative as it is, the voice of the father is necessary to build and authorize the historical and authorial bridge between the letters of the past and the interpretive text of the present—which is to say, the validating voice of the ghost is required to document or write down the reading of the debris of the letters. What is lost is the origin—an origin the ghostly voice tries to restore. Barthes points out that:

It is impossible to attribute an origin, a point of view to the statement. Now, this impossibility is one of the ways in which the plural nature of a text can be appreciated. The more indeterminate the origin of the statement, the more plural the text ... it may happen that in the classic text, haunted by the appropriation of speech, the voice gets lost, as though it had leaked out through a hole in the discourse. The best way to conceive the classical plural is to listen to the text as an iridescent exchange carried on by multiple voices, on different wavelengths and subject from time to time to a sudden “*fading*,” leaving a gap which enables the utterance to shift from one point to another, without warning. (*S/Z* 41-42; original italics)

Barthes’ understanding of the primal scene is made clear through his claim that the primal scene is initiated by the “fading” of the voices—a “fading” that refers to an unrepresentable past or origin. Applying Barthes’ model to Hawthorne’s narrative, I contend that “The Custom-House” places the reader in an ambivalent position in his connection with the voice of the dead—a voice that becomes, much like “The Minister’s Black Veil”, an obstacle that hides deficiency or lack. The voice is no longer a presence; it drifts into the realm of the dead. Since the voice is only the

voice of the dead, we can no longer trace the name. In his brilliant analysis of the trope of prosopopeia in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, de Man argues: “*to read is to understand, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat*—that is to say, the endless prosopopeia by which the dead are made to have a voice and a face which tells the allegory of their demise and allows us to apostrophize them in our turn” (122; emphasis mine). De Man’s argument is that to read is, performatively, a will to prosopopeia and a will to reading. Like reading, naming implies calling implies apostrophizing. Since we can no longer trace the name because of the spiral nature of the act of apostrophizing and remembering, then, the primal concept is confusion. Lukacher posits that “in assuming the voice of the dead—the masked actor performs an act of half-mourning, reminding the audience not only that the voice that speaks is already dead but also that it lives behind the mask” (90).

Hawthorne is unable to respond to the uncanny voice of Pue. In his quest to understand the meaning of the letters of the fathers, Hawthorne visits literally the second storey of the Custom House, an archival space that validates his ghost story. The fluctuation between storey and story, between spectrality and materiality, or between prosopopeia and the will to prosopopeia is in fact a fluctuation between corpus and corpse. Such continual slippage toward the corpse links writing to the uncanny and the Gothic. Hawthorne’s discovery of the scarlet letter is the moment psychoanalysis intersects with the Gothic:

Poking and burrowing into the heaped-up rubbish in the corner; unfolding one another document, and reading the names of vessels that had long ago foundered at sea or rotted at the wharves, and those of merchants, never heard of now on ‘Change, nor very readerly decipherable on their mossy tomb-stones; glancing at such matters with the saddened, weary, half-reluctant interest which we bestow on the corpse of dead activity,—and

exerting my fancy, sluggish with little use, to raise up from these dry bones an image of the town's brightest aspect. (28)

Hawthorne's stressing the materiality of the "dry bones" figures forth the Gothic subject. I shall study the business of prosopopeia to elucidate the career of the Gothic story as it moves from one grave to another. The figurative and literal disinterment of the *restes* of the fathers and their sermon suggests an obvious connection between prosopopeia and the uncanny, between the ghosts and the splintered subject, and between the voice and the corpse.

The uncanny dimension of the voice is elucidated by Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*:

Fragments:

what constitutes the voice is what, within it, lacerates me by dint of having to die, as if it were at once and never could be anything but a memory. This phantom being of the voice of what is dying out, it is that sonorous texture which disintegrates and disappears. I never know the loved being's voice except when it is dead, remembered, recalled inside my head, way past the ear; a tenuous yet monumental voice, since it is one of those objects which exist only once they have disappeared. (114)

The play of repression and return or what Freud calls the play of "disappearance and return" refers to the tone change in his grandson's *Fort/Da* (gone/there) game which is a *mise-en-scène* of the absence and return of the mother. In *The Scarlet Letter*, we have a fading of the father figure and his petrifying return. Writing "from beyond the grave," Surveyor Pue validates the narrator's writing, which "may be considered as the posthumous papers of a decapitated surveyor" (39). Much like Freud's *Fort/Da* game, Hawthorne drifts into the structure of disappearance and return. Inspired by the game "even-odd" and Freud's *Fort/Da*, Lacan links the

binary structure of symbolic thinking to the mathematical concept of probability or as he puts it in

The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis:

The wager lies at the heart of any radical question bearing on symbolic thought. Everything comes back to *to be or not to be*, to the choice between what will or won't come out, to the primordial couple of *plus* or *minus*. But presence as absence connotes possible absence or presence. As soon as the subject himself comes to be, he owes it to a certain non-being on which he raises his being. (192; original italics)

I want to emphasize the fact that the emergence of the symbol into the Real begins with a wager—an original wager—or a probability: will it be this or that? Will the letter arrive at its destination or not? Will the pleasure of the text be sustained or not? In the *Fort/Da* game, language changes and there is an element of surprise in the encounter of consciousness with death—the encounter of writing with its own impossibility. Consciousness, Freud explains, seeks to preserve the life drive. The child's re-enactment of his mother's departure and loss constructs a new tableau that *re*-stages the repetition compulsion in the form of a game. Like the archive's harbor which is guarded by the life drive which protects the death drive, the game is initiated by the same anxiety. As Cathy Caruth rightly argues, “the language of the life drive does not simply point backward, that is, but bears witness to the past by pointing to the future” (“Parting Words” 54). Pointing to the future while visiting the past, the language of the game inscribes the child's language into *différance* and the repetition compulsion. Applying the semiotics of Freudian *Fort/Da* to Hawthorne's narrative, one can say that *The Scarlet Letter* is a *memento* of Surveyor Pue. Hawthorne wants “to give to the dead something that can never, now, be returned” (“Parting Words” 57). Naming *The Scarlet Letter* as a memento of Pue and Puritan America, Hawthorne

ties his life with his father's death. In his reclaiming of *The Scarlet Letter*, he, I would say, does not simply re-enact Pue's death by communicating phantasmagorically with him, but he also loses himself in this identificatory cathexis. However, the work of mourning, Freud tells us, might be put on hold by the survivor's attachment to his lost object. As I have explained earlier, this unsuccessful mourning—a melancholia or incorporation—is the sequel to the survivor's (Hawthorne) missed encounter with his ancestors. It is precisely this relation to the missed encounter that both psychoanalysis and the archive expose as the traumatic essence of subjectivity. A spectral *différance* is at work in Hawthorne's narrative. Like writing, like history, like biography, Hawthorne's archive remains a mere promise of possibility and a reflection of its anxiety about its own authenticity as a complete and true document. With Lacan's theory of the missed encounter, Freud's model of mourning and melancholia, and Derrida's concept of *différance*, we are left with a wager or a throw of dice which might give many possibilities or rather impossibilities: anasemia, correspondence, Mnemosyne, the encounter with the Real, and death. The question is whether the letter litters its destination or not. Otherwise, how can one meet with his name, the name of the impossibility of meeting? Everything starts with a name and the name starts everything.

CHAPTER 2

Encounters and Missed Encounters: The Double, the Post Effects/Affects, and the Loss of Origins

The uncanny double is clearly an independent and visible cleavage of the ego. (Otto Rank, *The Double* 12)

Call me Ishmael! (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 21)

There is no letter—at least no understanding of the letter—without its loss. The main purpose of this chapter is to reflect on, while it studies how the Hawthornesque lost letter is recovered in the form of *Moby-Dick; Or The Whale*, the various psychological, tropo-psychoanalytical, and narrative configurations of the missed encounter by staging its historical and hermeneutic validity in the study of Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Suspended between prolepsis and analepsis, the letter in *Moby-Dick* indexes, I argue, following Derrida's theory of *différance*, an empty space and fails to reach its destination. The novel keeps postponing the beginning of the letter. My understanding of the letter in *Moby-Dick* is the sliding that explains the spiral movement of the letter from Hawthorne to Melville, from Melville to the characters, from the characters to their double and to the reader. The letter is this sliding supplementarity that revolves around a certain excess and lack. Moreover, the chain of digressions keeps the letter roaming in the field of *différance*. This means that the narrative itself can only unfold proleptically. Melville learnt from Hawthorne that the return of the letter demonstrates the fantasy⁴³ of the symbolic promise and deconstructs the status of the symbol. Full of encounters and missed encounters, *Moby-Dick* examines some disconcerting effects/affects of the business of the double—a business that is further complicated by the business of letter writing.

Strangely, through the trope of the double, which occurs at the level of narrative, characters, ideas, and trauma itself, the missed encounter stages the impossibility of accessing the primal scene (original scene) and the failure of assimilating the primal experience, especially when it is implicated in the business of duplication. As argued by Robert K. Martin, “The conflicts of *Moby-Dick* are the conflicts of pastoral and epic, of lyric and dramatic, as much as of freedom and fate, or any such abstract concerns. Characteristically, *Moby-Dick*’s resolution is hermaphroditic: the heterogeneity of the novel’s final shape is Melville’s attempt to create a form that encompasses forms, a ‘symphony’ or ‘marriage’ that brings together all opposites” (67). The point I want to explain is that there are at least two levels of encounter at work: first, the construction of the whale itself (the discourse of which, suspended as it is between failed symbol and obscure allegory) is derived, via Hawthorne, from a long history of Romantic semiotics. On the one hand, Melville is really trying to domesticate the White Whale and make it legible to American readers, by comparing it to distinctively American hieroglyphics—aboriginal art, American geography, etc. On the other, of course, he is trying to render its illegibility mysterious in decidedly Orientalist terms. The second level of encounter involves not so much the poetics of the whale-construct itself as the *mise en scène* of the encounter: how Ahab and others see the whale and their doubles, how their seeing of others/Others (Queequeg, Fedallah, Pip) sets up this encounter, and how the inter-subjective encounter is predicated upon another covert, non-narrated encounter. As far as the subject is concerned, however, there is no ontological existence before the recognition of the Other, and the existence of *ana-* time can only be understood through the work of repetition or what Freud calls the death drive and through Lacan’s rethinking of the Freudian repetition as automaton, the very matrix in which the *tuché* occurs. This *ana-* time is

lost by the subject who is, following the loss, capable of determining his encounter with his loss as a repetition.

In what follows, I will formulate a psychoanalytic and deconstructive study of the poetics of the double and examine its theoretical implications for the missed encounter. My argument is that unassimilated opposites and contradictions, or missed encounters, produce dangerous areas of supplementation, slippages, doubles, impasses, and missed origins. The double, strange as it is, gives the reader a sense of the uncanny and invokes him to the uncanny scene of writing. Relying on the figure of prosopopeia to figure the double, Melville's narrative conjures up the lost object by figuring it as the double, shadow, or phantom. Here, I wish to take up Rank's pioneering study of the figure of the double, Jung's interesting theory of the archetype of the shadow, Freud's theory of the uncanny, Lacan's theory of the mirror,⁴⁴ and Derrida's theory of the specter as explanatory of the dialectics of the missed encounter and the *Thing* that haunts—the *Thing* that is cast upon the split subject. This *Thing*, Kristeva tells us, is complicated by the melancholic identifications (of fear and desire). These identifications find identity and are identified by the figure of the double.

The double, however, has always been regarded by critics as a reflection of madness, narcissism, or delusion. The marginalization of the double by literary, philosophical, and cultural studies sheds light on the power of this figure to transgress and to destabilize orders. Through Rank's study of the double, Freud's illuminating concept of the uncanny, and Jung's theory of archetypes and their impact upon modern psychoanalysis, literary theory and critical theory, it is possible to talk about the figure of the double in terms of subversion and reversal.

Nineteenth-century American literature in general and Melville's *Moby-Dick* in particular could be said to reveal the psychological and inner origin of the double.⁴⁵

I do not here intend to study the limits of psychoanalysis of which Derrida and the analytical school of psychoanalysis have spoken at length. I have no intention either to study the differences between psychoanalysis and deconstruction when it comes to approaching the subject, for according to deconstruction, the subject is impossible, while for psychoanalysis, it is but that very impossibility. However, what interests me is the connection between psychoanalysis's investment in the double or what Freud calls "the existences of countless egos" (*Ego and Id* 378) and deconstruction's theory of *différance* and all the other associated concepts of *destinerrance*, supplementarity, inheritance, and trace and their effects/affects on the subject. Freud's structural model of the psyche describes ego-construction in terms of identification with former egos and lost objects of desire. Being haunted by other egos, the ego, according to Freud, inherits from multiple former egos the legitimacy of existence. The point I want to raise is that the ego inherits these other egos (or their remains or remainders) from earlier phases of the ego's evolution, from the encrypted ego of the Father, and from culture and history writ large. It is worth mentioning that Melville lost his father at an early age. This loss explains, as emphasized by many critics, Melville's omnipresent search for a father figure in fiction and life. This inheritance of legitimacy from the remains leads us to talk about the theory of double as a manifestation of the missed encounter. What is important to stress, however, is the impossibility of assimilating and representing the remainders (*restes*) that inhabit the subject and double him, and hence the impossibility of representing the origins of the subject. Beyond the structural doubling, it is very important to consider the French verb "dédoubler." Although there is also the verb "doubler," it

would seem that “dédoubler” oscillates between splitting and doubling in psychoanalytic terms—especially since what we understand as the literary figure of the double originates in a split in the subject’s ego, i.e., the failure of the ego to cohere.

2.1. “All Visible Objects, Man, are but as Pasteboard Masks”: The Psychoanalytics of the Missed Encounter and the Poetics of Doubling

There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee. (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 477)

And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all. (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 23)

While Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* offers, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a theory of the materiality and temporality of trauma and the sign, *Moby-Dick* is different in its exposition of trauma and the missed encounter, ranging from doubling, the impossibility of accessing the primal scene, melancholia, narcissism, to supplementarity and *différance*. *Moby-*

Dick inscribes through the protagonist Ahab a missed encounter with the primal experience of trauma that is beyond the narrative. Likewise, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan psychoanalytically articulate the impossibility of having access to the traumatic event and emphasize the importance of language and the unconscious in the articulation of such impossibility.

This chapter considers certain psychoanalytic theories of trauma and deconstructive approaches to language and writing to help explicate the parallels between the literary and poetic manifestations of the missed encounter, and the psychoanalytic exposition of the vicissitudes of the missed encounter: its impossibility, materiality, and supplementarity. Not only will the psychoanalytic models of Rank, Freud, Jung, Lacan, and Kristeva enable us to better grasp the various contours and detours of the missed encounter in general, but will also help to unpuzzle Ahab's and Melville's mysteries. My approach to the missed encounter is not a matter of conjecturing what that encounter should have been, or could have been, or would have been, if such an encounter had been possible. To do so would be indeed to write a fictional supplement, to hypothesize. This is to say, by implication, that the missed encounter is by its very nature traumatic, and indeed trauma can be and ought to be understood precisely as a missed encounter, the residues of which are harbored in the unconscious, and which manifest through such symptomatic expressions as repetition (which indeed is part of the economy of doubling). As argued by Cathy Caruth, trauma emerges as "the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (*Unclaimed Experience* 2).

If we consider Lacan's theorization of the missed encounter in the context (in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*) of trauma and repetition—that *tuché* appears in the temporality of

automaton, of repetition—then, in the missed encounter(s) of *Moby-Dick*, we have a hole, an absence, an *abyme*, a *manque*, that can never be filled; it can only be addressed in the margins, through the logics of the supplement. And indeed, it is precisely this logics of the supplement that explains the slide from the imperative of cohesive symbol to the *différance* of allegory, that explains the movement from Poe to Hawthorne, from Hawthorne to Melville, from Melville to Ahab, from Ahab to the whale, and so on. Much like the missed encounter, the insufficiency and unreadability of which forms the essence of trauma, the *glissement* is itself, I venture to conjecture, the letter.

Before we analyze the literary manifestation of the missed encounter with the traumatic experience, we have to study and clarify the concept of the double in its relation to a certain gap in the psyche. Working from Freud's account of the shadow in "Mourning and Melancholia" and Otto Rank's analysis of the figure of the double in his *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, I argue that the figure of the double inhabits the symbolic abyss created by the aporia between the image of wholeness one sees in the mirror and the fragmentation that follows the (missed) encounter with the Real. In his seminal study of the double, Otto Rank argues that the double follows the path of the man who gave it form, causing splitting, duplication and *re*-duplication:

The most prominent symptom of the forms which the double takes is a powerful consciousness of guilt which forces the hero no longer to accept the responsibility for certain actions of his ego, but to place it upon another ego, a double, who is either personified by the devil himself or is created by making a diabolic pact. This detached personification of instincts, and desires which were once felt to be unacceptable ... this awareness of guilt, having various sources, measures on the one hand, the distance between the ego-ideal and the attained reality; on the other, it is nourished by a powerful

fear of death and creates strong tendencies toward self-punishment, which also imply suicide. (76-77)

According to Rank, the split is occasioned by the dual direction of aggression: outward, toward that which is projected onto the double, and inward, toward the annihilation of the ego and the death drive. It is clear in Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* and Freud's "The Uncanny" that the origins of splitting (doubling) are located in the narcissistic features of the subject. Robert K. Martin argues that narcissism is *not* what the character *was*, but rather what it *becomes* (73). I want to build upon Martin's argument by suggesting that becoming is a process that is followed by splitting and doubling. Splitting the ego, the double, in its defensive forms, has an obsessive return to narcissism that produces another duality—desire and death. Again, the connection between desire and death, between writing and death is illuminating.

If we follow Rank's argument that the ego's consciousness of guilt drives him to place that responsibility on another alter ego, another double that is either described as the devil or the devil's incarnation (double), then we accept the argument that Ahab's behavior is driven by a fascination with and a fear of the double. In other words, the oscillation between fear and desire is given form and figure through the figure of the double which arises from the tension between unity and division. In fact, the double, a fictional motif, puts under erasure the traditional concept of unity of character, time, and space, introducing a novel approach to things and beings based on multidimensionality and the co-existence of and tension between opposites and doubles. This ability of the double to disrupt the order is eloquently explained by Rank in his "The Double as Immortal Self":

In confronting those ancient conceptions of the dual soul with its modern manifestation in the literature of the double, we realize a decisive change of

emphasis, amounting to a moralistic interpretation of the old soul belief. Originally conceived of as a guardian angel, assuring immortal survival to the self, the double eventually appears as precisely the opposite, *a reminder of the individual's mortality*, indeed, the announcer of death itself. Thus, from a symbol of eternal life in the primitive, the double developed into an omen of death in the self-conscious individual of modern civilization. This reevaluation, however, is not merely due to the fact that *death no longer could be denied as the end of individual existence but was prompted by the permeation of the whole subject of immortality with the idea of evil*. For the double whom we meet after this completion of this developmental cycle appears as "bad," threatening self and no longer a consoling one. (74; emphasis mine)

This might seem, of course, very simplistic, yet if we follow the career of the double we find that the emergence of the figure of the double stakes the epistemological rupture in the Western philosophy of humanism. Since the appearance of this motif, man has been considered as containing multiple competing forces. Once the double occurs—rather, once the encounter between these competing forces is missed—it is impossible to avoid the unpredictable effects of the missed encounter.

One of the constituent elements of representation, the poetics of the double serves as an attempt to recreate a reality, primary or secondary. *Re-creating reality*, literature (as a form of duplication) imitates, while defying the rule of creation. Such imitation draws from the writer's fear of death and his or her vacillation between narcissism and melancholia. Creating a new Real and shoring up a life on the hinge between these two poles, the double invokes the figures of the shadow, the copy, and the ghost. In all these figures, there is the duality of the material and the abstract. In fact, the figure of the double is central to philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis,

literature, to name a few disciplines. One cannot talk about something without evoking its double. Since times immemorial, the human existence has depended on the double. Plato talked about two worlds; Nietzsche came up with the concept of *Übermensch*, the Superman—a concept that doubles the image of God; Freud discovered the unconscious; and so on. Man has always been interested in the hereafter, in the life in a parallel world, in a life beyond the constraints of the confining materiality. In *Der Doppelgänger*, Otto Rank demonstrates how the soul and its shadow are inseparable companions in the minds of primitive men. Rank was the first to study the successive steps: the identical (shadow) double that guarantees eternity, the regressive double (of the lost youth) that guarantees the return to the womb, and the opposite double, incarnated by the devil. The contrast between the living person and his shadow is made possible during the day. During the night, the shadow hovers over the living and is everywhere, hence the association of horror with darkness and night. Otto Rank's anthropological conclusion that all taboos are obsessed with the shadow leads to the argument that the shadow is closely related to death. A chiasmatic reading of Melville's double accounts for his *unheimlich* suspension between desire and fear, between life and death, and between absence and presence. Freud's reading of the *unheimlich* is very important to the understanding of the double, for the double is always the repressed Other.

In *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, we have a series of doubles and re-doubles that include events, characters, stories, and even narrators. Right from the beginning, we know that we are entering a world of doubles. The reader begins by having to work with the doubling of the name, and by having to recall the biblical archive and to import the symbolic meaning of the biblical Ishmael into Melville's character. This is the first double and the first uncertainty. The narrative

starts with “call me Ishmael”. This injunction echoes the biblical reference. The biblical references in the narrative frame the reader’s splitting and doubling in attempting to comprehend the excess of meaning and the intricacy of referents. Recognizing the biblical Ishmael (the disinherited and abandoned son, the son who was spared, the ancestor of the Arab peoples) frames our initial reading of Ishmael the character in *Moby-Dick* and moves the narrative toward the Greek Narcissus. Ishmael’s dual presence as both a character and a narrator explains his polyvalence and the dialogic nature of the narrative. As the title of the chapter “Loomings” suggests, Ishmael is coming into view indistinctly and threateningly.

Let us now consider the issue of duplication in the narrative. In *Moby-Dick* there are many spare boats, lines, and harpoons. In “The Carpenter,” for example, the narrator raises a very philosophical point: “Seat thyself sultanically among the moons of Saturn, and take high abstracted man alone; and he seems a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe. But from the same point, take mankind in mass, and for the most part, they seem a *mob of unnecessary duplicates*, both contemporary and hereditary” (441). However, nothing is unnecessary in *Moby-Dick*; everything serves for something. All the copies and duplicates we see in the novel form doubles and re-doubles. What we have here is the doubling of significance: material objects on the ship have also a symbolic significance, which unfolds under the sign of this Biblical Ishmael, and of the temporal difference between a disaster that looms and the present moment of narration.

The double, like any other concept, is governed by two seemingly opposed poles: harmony (reflection) and disjunction (reversal of reflection). I want to argue that the double is not only opened by the split between the self and the other, but also, and more importantly, between the “I” and the “me”. We find these two concepts in all discourses. The common concept of

duality is based on the perception of the other. To situate ourselves in an environment, we need the perception of the Other. Such encounter with the Other, Lacan tells us, is by nature an antagonistic encounter in which the Other tends to be different. In the dialectics of this encounter we have a fear of assimilation and extinction. This duality between the “I” and the Other is based on difference (i.e., the Other is defined as different from the “I”). In return, this practice, allows the “I” to define itself as different from the Other, who is now the “I”. As in political forums, we have a discourse and a counter-discourse. What is the original discourse becomes a counter-discourse and vice-versa. Such circular bipolarity yields a multiplicity of discourses. Let us begin with the first instance of duality, that of the shadow. The shadow is there to reify and displace the perceptions of the two components of duality. The disjunctive shadow, however, transforms the bi-polar relationship and goes beyond it, yielding a reciprocal relationship of difference that produces, in the end, a state of complementarity.

This quest for complementarity that blurs the distinction between past and present, absence and presence is present in *Moby-Dick* and in the works of many modernist writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Dostoevsky, and Kafka. My approach to the double, however, does not simply seek to study the poetics of the double; rather, it focuses on the various functions of the double and its ties to the missed encounter. However, the more one is aware of the complementarity between doubles, the more one is aware of the differences between them. The more one understands the continuum between past and present or between subject and object, the more one is able to discern the moments of disjunction that interrupt this continuum. Such moments, as I shall explain later in this chapter, are inhabited by ghosts that, in their conjuration, miss the encounter with their interlocutors and complicate the act of reading and

writing. In this relationship there is an endless exchange of positions between the subject and its shadow.

The study of the shadow goes back to the Platonic conception of twin souls which seek reunion to form a whole. Jung was, however, the first to study the shadow as an archetype or a structural function in the psyche. Structural as it is, the archetype of the shadow dwells on the hidden, darker aspects of a person's psyche. These aspects are denied and repressed into the unconscious only to be projected unto others. The shadow also reflects something that was once sundered from the psyche in its early channeling and command of objects of desire. This has obvious connections to the subject's missed encounters with the origin or what Lacan calls in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts* "causal gap" which is "at the heart of the structure of the unconscious" (46). The shadow is this gap. Jung was the first psychologist to offer a detailed analysis of the figure of the shadow and its psychological function. Jung contends that the shadow can be incorporated harmoniously in the psyche through the process of "individuation" which is achieved by the acceptance of the shadow and the recognition of the darker sides of the psyche—a recognition that is indispensable for an archetype of wholeness. Apart from the incorporation of the shadow, there should be an acceptance of the anima—the female element of the psyche. The Jungian analytic theory of psychology, however, is based on the principle of opposites—which is to say, every thought produces its opposite. The dualistic nature of things and words has always been the focus of all discourses from time immemorial.

Because of the hole the shadow leaves in the subject, and because the subject can never entirely know itself and fill in the void left by the shadow, the subject maintains a dual relationship with the shadow, an acute duality that is inassimilable and that is constantly missed.

It is worth noting that for Freud in “*Mourning and Melancholia*” and “The Uncanny” the shadow is the trope by which he explains melancholia. In a sense “the shadow of the lost object falls upon the ego” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 249), transforming object loss into an ego-loss. It requires no further argument to stress the importance of the model of the shadow to the analysis of the Freudian trope of melancholy. In the following section of this chapter, I will explain this interconnection and the extension of the Freudian concept of melancholia to signification itself and the dialectic of self and Other. The shadow then is both the antagonist and the lost object.

Applying Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian theories of psychology, I shall study in this chapter the tropology of the double and its ties with trauma, the missed encounter, and the Derridean concepts of *différance*, *destinerrance*, trace, origin, and supplementarity. Gothic literature is replete with doubles, re-doubles, ghosts, *restes*, and shadows. The double is introduced in the Gothic text and blazes the inner struggles of the characters and their combat with the other doubles. Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a perfect example of the Gothic co-existence of protagonist and antagonist. Dorian Gray is the protagonist and the antagonist at the same time. He is the desiring subject and the object of desire, the mirror and the reflection,⁴⁶ presence and absence. Melville’s characters’ narcissistic attitude is not, like the case of Wilde’s Dorian Gray, driven by a fear of death and a libidinous fixation on the ego; rather, it is pursuit of unity with the double. Dorian Gray lives and grows in his portrait, fixated upon his unimaginable beauty when the portrait was painted. Ahab, however, lives in the White Whale and embraces his own death.⁴⁷ Like Wilde’s Dorian Gray, Melville’s protagonist, Ahab, provides us with the poetic and psychoanalytic tools to understand the figure of the double. In Wilde’s narrative, the double (the portrait that re-duplicates the young man) extends, in terms of narrative

economy, the life of the double. The portrait, marked with stigmas of moral degeneration of a protagonist who does not age, is turned into a mere *cadere* on the ground. Such metaphoric exorcism allows the protagonist to free himself from the chain of the double. Yet, this decision is fatal as it ends his life. The same *Thing* happened to Melville's protagonist who, like Dorian Gray, causes his final demise. The White Whale is his portrait and on it he projects his inner thoughts and desires. As I will explain in due course, Ahab, much like Dorian Gray, is obsessed with himself, with his portrait, which is elusive and illusory and that "inscrutable thing is chiefly what [he] hate[s]; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, [Ahab] will wreak that hate upon him" (167). Projecting his desire and fear on the White Whale, he chases the whale only to be chased and killed by it. When Ahab is killed by the whale, consciousness falls on itself and the drama is done.

We have figures that multiply infinitely, doubling and re-doubling themselves, in an infinite chain. The narrative of the double, however, is based on the two interdependent and inseparable structuring motifs: reflection and the reversal of that reflection. I want to build upon Jung's concept of the shadow to study the poetics and psychoanalytics of the shadow. By poetics, I do not refer to the Aristotelian conception of the word, or the thematic approaches to it—be they structuralist or poststructuralist. I study poetics as a concept that is suspended between symbolization and the failure (in imitation or mimesis) to assimilate the primal experience. Unable to symbolize, incapable of assimilating the primal event, the double, corresponding or trying to correspond with the origin, creates various psychoanalytics. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into Jung's theory of archetypes and collective unconscious;⁴⁸ it suffices, however, to stress the fact that the figure of shadow is invested in psychoanalysis.

Structured around repetition, the narrative gestures toward an unassimilable trauma, that of the non-narrated traumatic encounter between Ahab and the White Whale. Although Ahab recovered from the injury caused by the whale, he projects onto the whale his own psychic frustration and instabilities. The psychic and affective tumult that is Ahab's experience is, as I shall explain in due course, heavily precipitated by the prosopoetic business of the double, the very conundrum of trauma, which is to say, the missed encounter, that which remains ungraspable. The reason why the double is feared is its investment in the unknown and the unfamiliar—things that have long haunted Ahab. *Moby-Dick*, however, reveals the internal origin of the double. The great double in the novel is sustained between Ahab and the whale. The characters are, I shall explain, precipitated by the intractable and untraceable prosopoetic detours of the double in the route to subject formation. It follows then that Melville's narrative portrays conversations not only between the ego and the double/other but also between the ego and ego as other/double. This is why, in order for us to understand the career of the double, it is very important to secularize the double and bring it into dialogue with Melville's text and context. Only through a chiasmatics of presence and absence and the psycho-poetics of exchange can we understand the surge of the double in the psyche of the characters. The reason why the double is feared is its investment in the unknown and the unfamiliar—things that have long haunted man.

Melville's probing into the inner self and his philosophical questions regarding existence and the unknown spark the emergence of the compelling theoretical question: what makes a shadow? Ishmael's statement, "Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance" (53), his claim that "the shadow often goes back" (142), his description of the White

Whale as “a broad white shadow [that] rose from the sea” (307), his description of Ahab who “leaned over the side, and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more he strove to pierce the profundity” (506), or when the Parsee and Ahab are “fixedly gazing upon each other; as if in the Parsee Ahab saw his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the Parsee his abandoned substance” (502)—all these references reveal to us the investment of Melville’s narrative in the theory of the shadow and the collective unconscious. Rather than dwelling on the maneuvers of the shadow, I ask in this chapter whether the shadow, for example, in its desiring of difference and change, can meet the Real by revealing its absences, its unseen, and its unconscious. Taking into account the fact that the Real is the site of emptiness, the void that is the annihilation of both the Symbolic Order and the Subject, we can argue that the shadow moves toward a recessive space, toward asymbolization and death. Symbolizing a desire to be reunited with the lost origin, the shadow shows in poetic forms a tension between the laws of the collective unconscious and the laws of the personal unconscious—a tension that indexes another tension between the immateriality of the shadow and the inadequacy of the original. Such tension, as in the Freudian and Lacanian models of psychoanalysis, stages the impossibility of representing the subject’s lost origin of trauma.

The point I want to raise is that the characters, going on journeys of the mind, encounter and fail to encounter their doubles. The outcome of this journey into “ungraspable phantom of life” (23) is either the incorporation of or the obliteration by the shadow. Ishmael’s journey is initiated by “a damp, and drizzly November in [his] soul” (21); Ahab’s journey is activated by a revengeful desire to chase the White Whale. Between the necessity of encountering and therefore incorporating the shadow and the failed attempt to kill the shadow, the characters of *Moby-Dick*

are perpetually suspended. Ishmael realizes the necessity of encountering and incorporating his shadow: “what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance” (53). This encounter and recognition of the shadow is very important to the development of the self and. In fact, the shadow is the bridge that connects the conscious and the unconscious. The shadow is first perceived as an evil and dangerous force that can destroy the integrity of the psyche. The shadow, it is thought, can also be helpful when it opens the gate of the unconscious and unveils the repressed elements that the ego needs to achieve individuation, mainly the erotic desires. This is the case of Ishmael who displays equilibrium in the libidinal expenditure. Indeed, Ishmael wants to shore up his journey on the hinge between the haziness of the shadow and the abyss of the unconscious. Incorporating his shadow, Ishmael embraces the philosophy of Eros and achieves “individuation”:

I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers’ hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! *Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.* (398; emphasis mine)

The invocation to collective experience reflects Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, the symbolism of which refers to Ishmael’s quest for “individuation” and the achievement of personality integration. Such a scene reads also as a mutual masturbation scenario.⁴⁹ The phallic symbolization, the absent leg, although relevant to the understanding of the erotics of the

narrative, is beyond the scope of this chapter. Surely, the homosocial is the matrix in which a certain order of the missed encounter takes place.

Unassimilated, like the traumatic experience, the shadow becomes dangerous and can only be represented through rhetoric and trope. In fact, there is a parallel between the psychoanalytic model of the shadow and the poetic construct of the double. Read in light of Rank's theory of the double, Jung's and Freud's theories of the shadow, *Moby-Dick* engages the characters and events in many missed encounters and concentrates on the effects/affects of the work of doubling. What happens when the shadow is unassimilated and inaccessible? Like psychoanalysis, which dwells on the inassimilable and the inarticulate, the failed encounter with the shadow functions as a mere iteration of the impossibility of assimilation and therefore as representation, as a mere repetition of an encounter that is unavoidably impossible and missed. Based on a repetition of the subject's traumatic primal experience, psychoanalysis focuses on the materiality and inadequacy of the signifier and of trauma writ large. Yet, what exactly is the business of the double in the narrative? Does the shadow originate in the subject's primal trauma?

To make headway into these challenging questions, let us first study Ahab's missed encounter with the shadow and the effects/affects this failed encounter yields. Unlike Ishmael who sails on "the ungraspable phantom of life" looking for a cure to his malaise, Ahab knows the *Thing* that haunts him and he is possessed by and obsessed with the *Thing*—the White Whale. In fact, "the firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab" (401). Here we have a Whitmanesque hero who contains multiplicity within himself. Containing multiplicity does not mean that Ahab succeeds in incorporating all these different elements. Ahab struggles with anything that is inscrutable:

with glaring eyes Ahab would burst from his state room, as though escaping from a bed that was on fire. Yet these, perhaps, instead of being the unsuppressable symptoms of some latent weakness, or fright at his own resolve, were but the plainest tokens of its intensity. For, at such times, crazy Ahab, the scheming, unappeasably steadfast hunter of the White Whale; this Ahab that had gone to his hammock, was not the agent that so caused him to burst from it in horror again. The latter was the eternal, living principle or soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its outer vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the scorching contiguity of the frantic thing, of which, for the time, it was no longer an integral. But as the mind does not exist unless leagued with the soul, therefore it must have been that, in Ahab's case, yielding up all his thoughts and fancies to his one supreme purpose; that purpose, by its own sheer inveteracy of will, forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own ... God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates. (202)

The “scorching contiguity of the thing” enacts the inscrutability of trauma, hence the projection onto the other (the very embodiment of trauma). In fact, Ahab's fascination with and fear of the inscrutability of White Whale connects his tendency toward mania and the unity with the whale—the empty signifier that he fills with his unconscious desires and anxieties. A consequence of his compulsive and excessive obsession with the White Whale is that he loses any sense of reasoning. Obsessive as he is, he takes his double as his past, present, and future. Ishmael tells that, “in his narrow-flowing monomania, not one jot of Ahab's broad madness had been left behind; so in that broad madness, not one jot of his great natural intellect had perished. That before living agent, now became the living instrument. If such a furious trope may stand, his

special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it” (187). The lunacy of Ahab is the result of an unequal libidinal expenditure and a compulsive obsession with the *Thing*.

To trope the *Thing* is in fact a manifest claim to impossibility, to the Promethean repetition (to master the fire that has injured him), and to the failure of stepping outside the overdetermining confines of the *Thing*. What interests me is that the *Thing* is marked not only as a claim to the *tuché*, to the missed encounter, but also as an image of the functioning of that missed encounter, emphasizing ever more its affects and effects. This is what I consider the slide of the *Thing* toward death or more exactly, and more generally, toward the Real. In this respect, the figure of the double inscribes, in my view, the anasemic movement toward the *Thing*—that is, from inscrutability and multiplicity to regression and the impossibility of representation. In his *Writing and Difference*, Derrida argues that “the pure book, the book itself, by virtue of what is most irreplaceable within it, must be the ‘book about nothing’” (08). This nothingness becomes the most critical of concerns for the critic. The negative phenomenology of appearance and disappearance that governs the double is the field in which, on the one hand, meaning becomes possible and, on the other, *nothing* becomes possible. The possibility of nothingness is in fact the possibility of something. If we argue with Derrida that the text is nothing, then, to say that the *something* (language and words) of the text appears/disappears at the same time as the *nothing*. Appearing and disappearing, the White Whale’s inscrutable *Thing* turns the reader’s obsession with understanding its inscrutability into a motive for projecting his own anxieties, desires, and fears on it, thus participating in its game of duplication. Duplication is always already thus—the impossible unity, par excellence.

Is the theory of the double a theory of repetition? Does the double double the ego's narcissistic obsession with the return to the womb, to the lost missed origin? I will come back to the melancholic and narcissistic turns in *Moby-Dick* later, but let me first quote from *The Specters of Marx*:

Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost. What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a last *time*. Each time is the event itself, a first time is a last time. (10; original italics)

Derrida gets at the essence of repetition, of the automaton. Consequently, the motif of the double⁵⁰ allows the image of the self to be exteriorized and reflected upon an object of narcissistic projection. The subject, however, enters in dialectical relation of desire and hatred with his double. Like the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg which is initially characterized by fluctuation between fascination and horror, Ahab and the white whale portray the same relationship of love and hatred. In fact, the characteristics projected upon the whale are mere projections of Ahab's fascinations and worries. "The whale fishery furnishes an asylum for many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men, disgusted with the carking cares of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber" (162). The supernatural powers of the whale are in fact the contemplative powers of Captain Ahab to ponder his inner self. His search for the white whale is in fact a search for his mirror image—an image of "monomania" (186). Ahab's violence is reflected by the white whale's violent behavior.

One of the main purposes of this chapter is to offer a tropo-psychoanalytics of the understanding of the figurations and configurations of the double. Like Narcissus, Melville's heroes are interested in imagery, shadows, and doubles because they find it difficult to construct their identities without relying on an Other. What does Ahab reflect? What happens to the reflected image? Ahab sees himself as an other (the whale), thereby putting the Other *en abyme* but he also decomposes (*s'abimer*) in the Other's realm and sees it as a dangerous abyss. We have an inter-change of *mise en abyme* and decomposition (*s'abimer*). The *abyme* of a work hosts more than the specter of the author. As Derrida argues in his *Specters of Marx*:

The specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and what one projects—on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. Not even the screen sometimes, and a screen always has, at bottom, in the bottom or background that it is a structure of disappearing apparition. But now one can no longer get any shut-eye, being so intent to watch out for the return ... The perspective has to be reversed, once again: ghost or *revenant*, sensuous non-sensuous, visible-invisible, the specter first of all sees us. From the other side of the eye, visor effect, it looks at us even before we see it or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition. (100-1)

This Gothic relay of the specter and its invading the subject account for the duality that governs the economics of ego-formation—the duality between the residual and the individual, between the past and the present, between the heir and the legatee. Given that the trajectory of the specter might involve a reversal of positions, it eventually exposes the encounter as a missed or

impossible encounter. Exposing the question of the encounter coincides with the exhumation of the residues of an object that is nowhere to be located within the repertory of the libidinal expenditure of the ego. Apart from comprising within itself the spectral reflection of the author, *Moby-Dick* can be read as attempting to put *en abyme* its own event of reading as a shadow of the actual event to which it bears witness. It also reflects on the successfulness of this attempt to put *en abyme* its own event of writing, for in Melville's work, the event of an oeuvre is at the same time an event of intrinsic failure. Most often considered as the play of signifiers in a text, *mise en abyme* (also spelled *mise en abysme*) complicates the business of exchange. The figure of the double is traumatically linked to *mise en abyme*.

In fact, the game of the double (*le jeu du double*) highlights the stakes (*enjeu*) of representation. In *Moby-Dick*, the double plays a structural as well as an ontological role. The plurality of referents and doubles complicate the act of understanding and engender a hermeneutic impasse. In *Moby-Dick*, the characters are placed in a chain of *mises en abyme*⁵¹ and see infinite reproductions of their images. The double between the Ahab and the White Whale can split into other doubles and re-doubles. The relationship between Ahab and Fedallah is actually a re-doubling of the double. What we have is another repetition of the figure of the double, a figure that suggests the presence of countless doublings in the narrative. Placed in an infinite series of *mises en abyme*, the play of doubles stages the narrative in an abysmal act of duplication and *re*-duplication. However, there is always a missed something, an aporia, or an absence in any *mise en abyme*. The gaps contained in these doubled images spiral them into self-referential *mise en abyme*. I have bestowed this much attention on the figure of the double and the eventual *mise en abyme* not only because they allow me to account for the theoretical contextures

of the missed encounter, but also because of their relevance to the work of Melville and to the understanding of the functions of the missed encounter in nineteenth-century American literature, and more particularly the current debate over the missed encounter between the Occident and the Orient—which is the focus of my third chapter.

The point I want to raise is that the impossible encounter between the double, which is at once symbolic and that which contests the Symbolic Order and slides toward the Real, and symbolization, or rather the impossible duplication of the Real, structures the economy of the narrative and activates the recurrent trauma of the characters. To study this impossible encounter, let us consider some of the effects that define the recurrent trauma of the characters. The relationship between the subject and its double is also governed by another duality of desire and horror. Initially, Ishmael and Queequeg, different as they seem, have a relationship of desire and fear. Ishmael was “as much afraid of [Queequeg] as if it was the devil himself who had broken into [his] room at the dead of night. In fact, [he] was so afraid of him that [he] was not game enough just then to address him, and demand a satisfactory answer concerning what seemed inexplicable in him” (40). Ishmael’s fear is associated with his not knowing Queequeg (the Other). As Sedgwick observes in “Privilege of Unknowing,” ignorance circulates as powerfully as knowledge because it is a knowledge formation: “Insofar as ignorance is ignorance *of* a knowledge—a knowledge that may itself, it goes without saying, be seen as either ‘true’ or ‘false’ under some other regime of truth—these ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth” (25). Then, Ishmael’s ignorance and fear turn into fascination and desire. He says, “Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg’s arm thrown over me in the

most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife” (43). Leslie Fiedler points out in *An End to Innocence* (1948) that Ishmael, the narrator of *Moby-Dick*, and Queequeg, the cannibal, are dubiously associated in bed when they awake at the Spouter Inn. Melville is thus quite implicit about the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. Queequeg is, of course, the racial Other.

Let us now study one of the shadows or doubles of the Ahab, Pip. Pip fell out of time. He was left alone to float on the ocean. “Out from the center of the sea, poor Pip turned his crisp, curling, black head to the sun, another lonely castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest” (396). Stubb’s racial comments: “we can’t afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, pip, in Alabama” (395). The ship’s organizational economy resembles any of today’s societies. Pip, much like Narcissus, is looking for transcendence within the oceanic void or “the intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity” (396). Pip was considered mad. “Indifferent as his God,” Pip is Ahab’s double because of his trauma, because he has looked into the face of death and annihilation; he has met the Real. This renders him mad, but also the double of the madman, the philosopher or the negative theologian. Pip resembles Ahab but at the same he fails to be his shadow. Ahab takes Pip as his double: “Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart strings, come let’s down” (489). The cord reminds us of the cord connecting Ishmael and Queequeg. He is the philosopher and Ahab is the thinker. Ahab, a Hamletian thinker, says to himself: “Now, then, Pip, we’ll talk this over; I so suck most wondrous philosophies from thee! Some unknown conduits from the unknown worlds must empty into thee!” (495). A whale line causes the death of both Pip and Ahab. Plunging into the oceanic abyss—an epitome of

existential abyss—Ahab and Pip could be said to be metonymies of limitation; they cannot be enclosed in any economy nor represent any figure of the past or future. Ahab's existential attitude and his sense of loss in the face of the absurdity of existence and things play out in chapter 132 where he poses existential questions:

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I. By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike. And all the time, lo! that smiling sky and this unsounded sea!
(508; emphasis mine)

Here, Ahab is a Nietzschean superman, a Cartesian reasoning subject, a Freudian melancholic subject, and an anxious nineteenth-century American writer. These philosophical questions reflect Melville's anguish and supply us with a psycho-poetics of tracking the materialization of the double into writing itself and into the poetics of the double.

Paralleling the psycho-poetics of the double is the translation of the histories of sailors who died at sea into inscribed memorials and inscriptions. When Ishmael enters the Chapel, he

finds “a small scattered congregation of sailors, and sailors’ wives and widows” (51) silently contemplating the inscriptions. In fact, the frigid inscriptions on the walls of the Chapel are “deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave” (53). The visual *re-*presentation of the inscriptions on the marble of the chapel proleptically announces what will happen to the Pequod and its crew. The first inscription memorializes a whaleman who “was lost over board near the isle of desolation, off Patagonia” (51) and foreshadows the death of a whaleman who fell from the mast, “the first man of the Pequod that mounted the mast to look out for the White Whale, on the White Whale’s own peculiar ground; that man was swallowed up in the deep” (491). The second inscription which records the death of the crew of “the ship Eliza who were towed out of sight by a whale, on the off-shore ground in the pacific” (52) refers to the disappearance of the whaling ship Rachel and the ultimate destruction and disappearance of the Pequod in the vortex the White Whale created. The third inscription is dedicated to the memory of captain Ezekiel Hardy “who in the bows of his boat was killed by a sperm whale on the coast of Japan” (52), and it foreshadows the death of Ahab. Even the painting in chapter 57 foreshadows the death of Ahab:

On Tower-hill, as you go down to the London docks, you may have seen a crippled beggar (or *kedger*, as the sailors say) holding a painted board before him, representing the tragic scene in which he lost his leg. There are three whales and three boats; and one of the boats (*presumed to contain the missing leg in all its original integrity*) is being crunched by the jaws of the foremost whale. Any time these ten years, they tell me, has that man held up that picture, and exhibited that stump to an incredulous world. *But the time of his justification has now come.* (266)

The painting represents and reproduces the three whaling ships as well as the moment when the whale chops off Ahab's leg, indexing re-doubling in retrospect a narrative that is outside the narrative. We should bear in mind the obvious phallic significance of the white whale and Ahab's "castration," the wooden leg being his phallic substitute.⁵² It is worth noting that the painting, like the wooden leg, is most often associated with a mirror, an index, a simulacrum, an allegory, an uncanny return, of the narrative of *Moby-Dick*. This is an uncanny moment in the narrative, a narrative moment that allows writing to fold back on itself and uncover the embedded text. This is the place where symbols meet, where a gap is created between the text and the crypts it contains. Such delay suspends the reader in an identificatory relationship with the future, doubling the event to come—the death of Ahab. In all of these assorted functions in the economy of representation, the painting may be said to double. But to double suggests a single and singular relation to repetition, whereas the painting—as ekphrasis!—sustains multiple resonances and repetitions. Like the painting, Ishmael's tale, the frame tale, comprises second-level narratives establishing thematic relations among the different groups of stories through flashbacks, foreshadowing, and digressions. Thus, it contributes to textual coherence and extends the work of the double to the thematics of the psyche. Indeed, at the end of the story, if ever we could use the word end, Ishmael remains suspended between the various narratives instances, at the crossroads between the freedom of narration he proclaims and the affects of the double he is subject to.

The continuous dream of fusion and confusion of the referent and the sign, the signifier and the signified, the dream that a word and sonority become one thing—this illusion exists as a paranoia. The fantasy of the double marks the various impossibilities that govern Melville's text. There could be no pure double of reality—be it a copy or an invention—because the double by

definition is second, symbolic, and indirect. What remains is the difference that indexes distance. To be unique, Ahab has to be different, and it is this difference that counts. Like Ahab who fell into the abyss of the ocean, the reader falls into the topographical abyss of hermeneutics. The world appears to be an appendix to the ego and an exposure of it. If the world is an extension of the ego, then, it is full of the ego and becomes a gigantic mirror that reflects different aspects of the ego. This reflection creates a surplus that has to be channeled in order for the ego to survive. Ahab is so full of himself that he seeks his own death.

Can it be argued, then, that in the theory of the double one can speak of the excess of cathexis and psycho-poetics of duality? In general terms, poetics provides us with various representations of the uncanny double, the double or shadow of the lost object that obsessively haunts and drags anasemically the subject to the primal experience. Melville's observations about the opposing designs of the double reflect the plethora of meanings attached to the figure of the double. In Melville's narrative, a *bildungsroman* par excellence, Ahab constructs an idealized image of himself, an image that doubles the yearning for the lost object of desire, but fails to reach self actualization. The image Ahab constructs of himself and projects onto the White Whale and onto his doubles or shadows has come to wreak havoc not only in the doubles but also in his psyche. Why is it that the double is dear and alien to the subject at one and the same time? Does the double cease to be uncertain and therefore claim symbolically the position of the subject, or does it keep roaming the unfathomable symbolic? The line between the exterior and the interior, between the reflecting surface and the image, and between the viewer and the view is characterized by a certain indeterminacy—an indeterminacy that indexes the lack of demonstrable referentiality. This need for referentiality explains the repetitive regressions toward

the primal scene of experience and of narration. Such regression accounts for the impossibility of conceptualizing the figure of the double, itself a figuration of regression and impossibility. In fact, the disseminated textual signs and the similarities between them contribute to the creation of doubles and re-doubles.

Emerging from the need for referentiality—or, really, from the prosopoetics of the narrative—the specter, another manifestation of duality, offers the possibility of re-covering some origins. The specter as defined by Abraham and Torok is a metaphor of the unconscious representations of a subject that contains a conflict, a pain that is outside of it, that inhabits itself in a crypt. Trauma as exposed by Freud and developed by other contemporary theoreticians explains the work of the double. Freud talks about everything that is related to the poetics of the double. However, it is very important to note the immaterial dimension of the double. The poetics of the double, like the Freudian concept of the uncanny, goes beyond the confines of life and death. This theory is expanded by the work of Abraham and Torok who, with their theory of cryptonymy, will recover *something* of the original meaning of the double in the form of a crypt. In this respect, there is, of course, something disruptive in the figure of the double. It is very common that the *doppelgängers* that inhabit Melville's narrative are manifestations of psychological phenomena. We have learnt from Freud and from the analytical school of psychoanalysis that the double is a manifestation of a desire—or, a lack emanating from social and cultural constraints—that seeks to coincide with something that is not accessible. Humanist tradition used the double is used to confirm the unity of the human subject, or what Paul de Man calls the transcendent symbol, or signified—the unity of the self, God, and the word. Read in

light of transcendentalist idealism, *Moby-Dick* is a critique of the “das absolute Ich” or “the absolute ego” from which reality and truth stem.⁵³ The nineteenth-century German idealism influenced the American transcendentalists whom Melville critiques. Although *Moby-Dick* could be said to be the locus of the “das absolute Ich,” as embodied by the allegory of White Whale, the study of and limits of the transcendental “I” does not operate as the focus of this chapter and is pushed to the background, but it persists in powerfully haunting my reading of Melville. This is to say that the reading of *Moby-Dick* is, if anything, an interplay of gazes and an infinite *mise en abyme* of referents. I contend, however, that it is precisely this infinite *mise en abyme* that complicates the work of double, since its regressive and spiral nature is expressive of the narrative’s infinite regress to the lost origin.

The *mise en abyme* structures the work of Melville: the fact that Ishmael, the second narrator of the events, keeps projecting his literary experiment allows us to locate the aporia of doubling operative in the narrative. Derrida’s argument that “the origin is possible and conceivable only in disguise” (*Writing and Difference* 08) further complicates the business of writing. The point I want to raise here is that Melville’s world is a world of allegory; it is not a world of Coleridgean symbol in which “it would be possible for the image to coincide with the substance, since the substance and its representation do not differ in their being but only in their extension: they are part and whole of the same set of categories” (de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” 207). The representation of the White Whale exceeds its substance. Ishmael states that “Moby Dick [is] a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory” (205). The point of nineteenth-century American allegories of the Hawthorne and Melville type is that there is no transcendence, and coherence of the

metaphysical, but we are left with the ineffable material world and the detritus of history. Rather, the representation of the White Whale is always at odds with its substance. Like Keats Grecian urn, it is silent. It cannot respond to Ahab's, Ishmael's, our desire to fix a certain meaning, because nothing is inherent to it. Like the scarlet letter, it is the zero degree of the signifier. Is the White Whale substantial, or "is it that by its *indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe*, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way?" (196; emphasis mine). Lifting the verb "to shadow forth," which connotes allegory, from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* which is full of shadows and doubles, Melville inscribes *Moby-Dick* in the realm of *différance*. The verb "to shadow forth" is thus a means of connecting the shadow with the event of writing—of connecting, that is concept and process.

What we have is a haunting alliance of author, narrator, and characters—an alliance that produces an endless *mise en abyme*. However, this *mise en abyme* is also related to the author's metaphorical decomposition (*s'abimer*). This decomposition is the result of the postal effect and writing under the shadow of Hawthorne. Derrida brilliantly explains the dangers of representation in his *Of Grammatology*:

Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reaction of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring [source]. There is no longer simple origin. For what is reflected is split in *itself* and

not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of addition of the origin to its representation, or the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three (36).

There is a paranoid effect in a reflection, multiplying and decomposing identities. The tension between the double and identities prompts us in the direction of studying the *mise en abyme* as (s'abimer) decomposition. This kind of *mise en abyme* is in fact a failed reflection. In this sense, the White Whale is but an alter ego created by the split in the psyche. The characters are ghosts, products of a mind divided by competing forces.

This double-effect, or error-effect makes the encounter, that is already missed, between the ego and its double(s) impossible. Transposed on the double apparatus of the narrative, the double-effect draws a structural matrix, a dialectics of signifier and signified exchanging places under the guise of the double. When the drama is done, there remains only Ishmael. Like Queequeg's coffin, Ishmael's narrative is the rhetorical premise that constitutes the material continuity of the past and of the various doubles that dwell in the narrative. As suggested by Robert K. Martin, "Ishmael's return to the surface, and resumption of the narrative, is an indication, in one of the novel's symbolic patterns, of the emergence of the circle out of the straight line. It is also the restoration of the feminine and maternal" (70). At another level, the novel is more about the melancholy in which the act of writing is situated rather than the mere representation of the hunting of the whale. The whale—a sign—is clear and elusive at the same time. It stems from an anomalous absence, an absence that finds its resolution in the figure of the double. If the missed encounter, seen as an absence, finds its resolution in the double, then the

narrative investment in the Gothic is fueled by the maneuvers of the *Thing*—maneuvers activated by prosopopeia.

In reading *Moby-Dick*, we find, following the logic of the double and prosopopeia, that both the narrator and the reader end where they began—onshore. Melville's first person narrator creates a connection with the reader. However, this connection is disrupted by the appearance of the double—an appearance that reiterates an economics of libidinal identifications. While it remains plausible that Ishmael wants to shore up a narrative in the hinge between death and desire, between the double and the lost origin, between the libidinal regression and libidinal incorporation, he ends up being the epitome of all these gaps. The gap between the doubles in the narrative that doubles between the reader and the narrator activates the reader's libidinal identificatory and indemnificatory desires. The narrator's poetics of libidinal direction teases the reader into the journey and unfolds on the threshold of death. Hence, there is more to their identifications. These identifications, as I will explain in due course, emerge from and return to the figure of Narcissus. Exposed to the trap of the double, the narrator and the reader are left onshore, suspended between the inside and outside, between truth and distortion—which is to say, at the level of poetics and narrative strategy, the boundary is external and metaphorical; at the level of psychoanalysis, the boundary is obviously internal and metonymic. Irwin's analysis of the double suggests:

It is this simultaneous internal splitting/external doubling that renders the notion of a limit problematic in a mutually constitutive opposition. For example, in the opposition between body and shadow, there is an essential (that is, original) uncertainty as to whether the dividing line between the two should be interpreted as an internal or an external limit,

whether the line should be read metonymically (as the internal boundary between two halves of a whole—splitting) or metaphorically (as the external boundary between two similar wholes—doubling). (156)

In Irwin's analysis of the "constitution of both a polar opposition and the condition of mediation" (182), opposition is linked to doubling while mediation tends toward suspension. Irwin's brilliant analysis of Poe's investment in doubling applies perfectly to Melville's psycho-poetics of doubling and the missed encounter.

By this logic, identification is the absolute effect of repetition and trauma. Letter writing, too, or at least a certain type of letter writing, inscribes the reader and the narrator in a symbolical relationship of exchange: "But thou sayest, methinks this white-lead chapter about whiteness is but a white flag hung out from a craven soul; thou surrenderest to a hypo, Ishmael" (195). In this chapter and in many other situations, the narrator and reader exchange roles, thus doubling and *re*-doubling the scenes of writing and reading. In his correspondence with Hawthorne, Melville responds to Hawthorne's appreciation of *Moby-Dick*, "I felt pantheistic then—*your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's*. A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb. Ineffable socialities are in me" (*Correspondences* 212; emphasis mine). Here Melville articulates the encounter with Hawthorne in erotic bodily terms. This encounter is occasioned by a literal exchange of letters. The letter, however, either unites or distances the writer from the reader. As I shall explain in this chapter, this duality, albeit described in literal corporeal terms, is negotiated through the duality of desire and fear or narcissism and death. Such duality displays the ego's plunge in the abyss of regressive narcissism. In other words, between

the ego and the double, there is not a clear encounter but an economic expenditure of libidinal drives that are lodged in the abyss.

In Melville's other novels, however, we see that the postal effect of the letter at work. Drawing upon Derrida's "envois," I want to examine the performative nature of the relay of the address. The letter, structured around postal relay and reserved for a specific addressee, engenders a repetition of the address. In *Pierre*, the protagonist's calamity is caused by his receipt of a letter from his lost sister; In "Bartleby," the main character works in the dead letter office; in "The Encantadas", where the post office is shown to be vital for society; and in *Moby-Dick*, which is full of letters. *Moby-Dick* deals with the representation of allegory and the various scenes of readings that allegories produce. Melville's letter to Sophia Hawthorne shows the complexity when the initial reader—Hawthorne—initiates meaning and becomes the author and Melville turns into a mere projection. To better understand the complexity of this exchange, let us quote at length from Melville's letter:

It really amazed me that you should find any satisfaction in that book ... But, then, since you, with your spiritualizing nature, see more things than other people, and by the same process, refine all you see, but things which while you think you but humbly discover them, you do in fact create them for yourself—therefore, upon the whole, I do not so much marvel at your expressions concerning Moby Dick. At any rate, your allusion for example to the "Spirit Spout" first showed to me that there was a subtle significance in that thing—but I did not in that case, *mean* it. I had some vague idea while writing it, that the whole book was susceptible of an allegorical construction & also that *parts* of it were—but the speciality of many of the particular subordinate allegories, were first revealed to me, after reading Mr Hawthorne's letter, which, without citing any particular

examples, yet intimated the part-&-parcel allegoricalness of the whole. (*Correspondences*, 219)

The exchange of letters between Melville and the Hawthornes, whose instigation and hermeneutic concerns have significant symbolic effects on Melville's fiction and life, is indeed reflective of the relay of the letter in *Moby-Dick*.

2.2 The Post Effects and Melancholy Writing: The Ripples of the Real

I would prefer not to. (Melville, *Bartleby; and, Benito Cereno* 10)

But it is a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the Post-office is equal to it. (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 139)

Like Hawthorne who opens his narrative by demonstrating how filial duty can be achieved successfully and by literally opening the package that contains the scarlet letter, Melville tries to list the possible meanings of the symbol of the White Whale by positing naming his project of cetology as a postal work. Ishmael clearly states that, "I shall not pretend to a minute anatomical description of the various species, or—in this place at least—to much of any

description. My object here is simply to project the draught of a systematization of cetology. I am the architect, not the builder. But it is a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the Post-office is equal to it" (139). This statement is related to the crowded pages of citations with which the book begins. These citations, we should bear in mind, are drawn from the massive cultural archive of the whale and are not "sorted" in any way whatsoever, but merely accumulated. In this sense *Moby-Dick* is a perfect example of letter writing and the postal effect this activity has on both the reader and the characters. Literal correspondence of letters becomes the metaphor of symbolic exchange between the various poles of writing. The characters, narrator, and author of *Moby-Dick* are charged with delivering different letters, and the entirety of the narrative deals with the dangers and effects/affects of the postal activity.

This postal work is explained by the logics of traumatic repetition: Ahab goes on a voyage to repeat his encounter with the White Whale; in the non-narrated (or disnarrated) original encounter with the white whale, he suffers a trauma, and he consequently adopts the melancholic position of knowing what object he has lost (his member, his leg) but not the *Thing* he has lost. The recirculation of the letter—the letter of the original trauma and Melville's repetition of Hawthorne's poetics of failed symbol—sets up doubling, prosopopeia, and melancholy in terms of symbolization and failed symbolization. However, the recirculation of the letter is activated by what Žižek calls "the Bartleby politics". Ahab "prefers to" relive and repeat the encounter with the whale. "I would prefer not to"—not to prefer is to prefer, as the saying goes—but does this conformation, this *yes* to negation, ever refer to something else? To be able to prefer is not the same as to be able not to prefer. This begs the question of the relation between the indicative (I prefer) and the conditional (I would prefer). This fluctuation between the indicative and the

conditional, between choosing and the negation of choosing is, of course, characteristic of all discourses. As expressed by Žižek in *The Parallax View*:

[Bartleby's] "I would prefer not to" is to be taken literally: it says "I would prefer not to," not "I don't prefer (or care) to"—so we are back at Kant's distinction between negative and infinite judgment. In his refusal of the Master's order, Bartleby does not negate the predicate; rather, he affirms a nonpredicate: he does not say that he *doesn't want to do it*; he says that *he prefers (wants) not to do it*." (381; emphasis original)

Žižek presents Bartleby's well known "I would prefer not to" as a form of new politics, the Bartleby's politics,⁵⁴ which moves beyond mere resistance, "from the politics of "resistance" or "protestation," which parasitizes upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position and its negation" (381-382). In the case of *Moby-Dick*, we see many variations of the Bartleby politics: from absolute negation to complete surrender.

In his *Demeure* Derrida talks about the "slippage between the three I's" (72)—that is, the slippage among the narrator, author and character. The spectral connection among the three I's produces an infinite *mise en abyme*. There are of course major overlaps among the three I's, namely that they exchange positions. Ishmael, the narrator of the narrative, is not so much a character as a narrative effect. Like a ghost, he is lurking behind the other characters. He is torn between many letters: the non-return of Ahab's letter, the impossible arrival of Pip's letter, and the return of Queequeg's letter, to mention only a few. He finally appropriates Queequeg's and Melville's letter and sends it to the reader. I shall study the various ways in which Melville may be said to read the letter of *The Scarlet Letter*, taking a closer look at the inter-weaving of narrative temporality (prolepsis and analepsis) with the psycho-poetics of the double and

prosopopeia. Melville multiplies the letters, the recipients of the letters, as a function of his proliferation of the traumatized. *Moby-Dick's* discourse is more overtly speculative and philosophical, as opposed to the concise economy and narrower formula of Hawthorne's allegory. In other words, Melville takes Hawthorne's bid and 'ups the ante.' In fact, Hawthorne is concerned with what might be called the archival letter, the letter from Surveyor Pue and implicitly from the 'dust' of the ancestral patriarchy. The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* chooses not to choose: he refuses to, or cannot, fix the meaning of the letter or arrest its temporal course (and curse). But *The Scarlet Letter* as narrative project revolves narrowly around the scarlet letter as failed symbol. Melville's circumference is much greater—a circumference he literalizes by the global voyage of the Pequod. Maybe this is why *The Scarlet Letter* is so claustrophobic, while *Moby-Dick* is expansive as the prairie.

I have already shown that arrival undermines any possibility of a final destination. In this sense, Ishmael is the narrator, in effect, the letter or the post, because of the presence of the debris of Queequeg's letter within his letter and because of his appropriation of Melville's own letter. Ishmael, like Socrates who wrote nothing but appeared as a character in Plato's dialogues, writes in the shadow of Melville and follows his injunctions. This complicates the question of legacy. Here, the legatee is Ishmael who hands down this legacy to the reader—I am the legatee. Inheritance is a process that activates transgenerational communication. The heir is at one remove from the inheritance and remains always indebted⁵⁵ to the other.

This relationship of indebtedness and inheritance structures any work of fiction. Ishmael is not the legatee of Melville unless he accepts his letter and sends it to the reader. Peculiarly secluded, neither strictly included nor completely excluded, each letter reflects on its (con)textual

losses through the poetic (ab)uses of the figure of the double. The double emerges from phantomatic and phantasmic regression that tends either toward the original loss of a necrophilic desire or toward the haunted fading and manifestation of a cryptic and traumatic memory. With this map of some exchanges and contours that tropologically structure the doubles spread in the novel, light can be shed on the affects and effects egressing from the cryptic and what I call maso-necrophiliac⁵⁶ associations. This maso-necrophiliac drive, which is structured around filial inheritance (duty) and masochism, remains active in the narrative, waiting for the right moment to project on and introject the lost object of desire. I want to use Kafka's famous passage to deal with the postal effect of letter writing:

The easy possibility of letter-writing must—seen merely theoretically—have brought into the world a terrible *disintegration* of souls. Writing letters is actually *an intercourse with ghosts* and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with *one's own ghost*, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing or even in a whole series of letters, where one letter corroborates another and can refer to it as a witness. How did people ever get the idea that they could communicate with one another by letter! One can think about someone far away and one can hold on to someone nearby; everything else is beyond human power. Writing letters, on the other hand, means exposing oneself to the ghosts, who are greedily waiting precisely for that. Written kisses never arrive at their destination; the ghosts drink them up along the way. It is this ample nourishment which enables them to multiply so enormously. (223; emphasis mine)

In this passage Kafka reveals the complex dynamics of letter writing and writing writ large. Kafka's view of letter writing corroborates Melville's perception of writing. In Melville's world of allegory, the letter is reproduced infinitely by the ghosts that evolve inside it. In fact, allegory is a special case of the refraction of the letter and the ghosts presumably are the traces of the lost

origin, the lost referent, which allegory explicitly raises and foregrounds as lost and occluded. Such reproduction deforms the content of the letter, if we can use the term ‘content.’ Derrida argues in *The Post Card, Archive Fever, Limited Inc*, and many other books that the medium we use to convey a message is not just a purveyor of information; it deforms, reforms, deters, and defers the message. The medium creates the message. The rule is, convey in the future and in the past, but never convey in the present. The medium interferes and alters the message. In *The Medium is the Maker*, Miller argues, “We never, with any medium, have an instantaneous presence of the distant present. The medium comes between, and delays, even if only for a fraction of a second, not to speak of reworking, of turning “facts” into “artifactualities” (13). Of course, the medium is the ghostly intervention that stains the letter and postpones its arrival.

In *The Post Card*, Derrida purports: “one of the paradoxes of destination, is that if you wanted to demonstrate, expressly for someone, that something never arrives at its destination, it’s no use. The demonstration, once it has reached its end, will have proved what one should not demonstrate. But this is why, dear friend, I always say ‘a letter *can* always *not* arrive at its destination, etc.’ This is a chance (187). By this logic any discourse is haunted by *destinerrance*, a wandering of the letter that keeps it subject to interpretation and reiteration. Talking about Derrida and Melville, quoting them, speaking *for* them is, to follow the filial rule, a Gothic act, a conjuring up of the dead, of the ghost, a disinterring of the remnants of the corpse/corpus. To inherit is not a given; it is an injunction to which we must respond. Derrida’s entire body of work unfolds as a work with the dead. To understand Derrida’s work, one has to go back to the texts he responded to. Like Derrida who *destinerrrs*⁵⁷ when reading the dead’s work, the reader/heir of *Moby-Dick* *destinerrrs* and converses with the dead.

Reading and writing are uncanny activities that are inhabited by the ghost. As Cixous points out, “each of us, individually and freely, must do the work that consists of rethinking what is your death and my death, which are inseparable” (12). Thus, Melville’s narrative teaches us how to die and give life to the dead. To start writing and reading there must be death. We must, “learning to live,” write, and read, “learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts” (*Specters of Marx* xviii). Circularity is the main narrative framework of *Moby-Dick*: it begins after the sinking of the Pequod, and it begins to bear witness to that death, to converse with the dead—the scene of whose death marks the climax and arrival of the narrative. “[T]he commerce without commerce of ghosts,” Derrida suggests, is linked to memory. In this chapter, however, I am following Melville’s injunctions to remember him. In Melville’s narrative, person deixis is displaced since the distinction between the “I” of the living writer/narrator and the “not I” of the potential reader is blurred.

What Melville writes is in fact a specter of other writers, mainly Hawthorne. To recall Melville is to recall death. Derrida argues that naming is associated with haunting. According to him, “only the name can inherit, and this is why the name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man’s name, a name of death” (“Otobiographies” 7). My name, the initial signature of this chapter “is the name of someone dead or, of a living someone whom it can do without” (“Roundable on Translation” 53). I am writing this chapter for the dead, for Melville. My name, however, spectrally refers to the initiary, initial name—Melville’s ghost. I am dead and my letter is initiated by the dead. The exchange of letters, initiated by the deranged split between symbolism and the commitments of the various encounters with the double, reflects on the

diffusion of arrival (i.e., psychoanalytic cure) and *destinerrance*. Following Derrida's theory of *différance*, the letter in *Moby-Dick* indexes an empty space and fails to reach its destination. The novel keeps delaying the letter. Ahab and his crew meet the unavoidable letter (death). One might say that the letter from Hawthorne does not arrive until the famous scene of the doubloon. Yet, the narrative is haunted by Hawthorne's poetics of the enigmatic long before this scene. The chain of digressions keeps the letter roaming in the field of *différance*. This means that the narrative itself can only occur proleptically.

The letter can always not arrive at its destination and is thus involved in an endless *destinerrance*. As Miller points out, this endless delay is related to the *à-venir*, the will-to, the *to-come*, voice, and translatability. We have a turbulence of movements in *Moby-Dick*, without destiny or destination. The moment the reader thinks the letter reaches its destination is the moment when the wind of *destinerrance* blows and delays the arrival of the letter. The point I want to raise here is that in every encounter—and every encounter is a missed and spectral encounter—it is *as if* one is encountering a ghost.⁵⁸

Let us now return to investment of the business of the letter in the affect of fear and fascination. The double, let us not forget, expresses the fluctuation between the desire and the fear of the absolute resemblance with the other. Pygmalion, Prometheus, and Narcissus are examples of this eternal circulation of fear and desire. Pushing desire to the limit is to arrive at the fact that there is no possible identification between the subject and the signifier. This is where catharsis takes place as the purification of desire. The Real, singular, can only be described when the double is no longer there. It follows, then, that the double is by nature different and unique. In chapter 36, Ahab nails a gold coin to the mast, the center of the ship and the narrative, as a reward

for the person who first raises a white-headed whale. Like the letter that begs for replies, “the coin produces as many responses as there are characters to observe it” (Martin 68). We learn in chapter 99 that the gold coin, round as it is, forms the “ship’s navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it. But, unscrew your navel, and what’s the consequence?” The consequence is destructive: to find the whale is to find one’s own death and to do the drama. The doubloon is “but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician’s glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self” (410). This term evokes both the Real and the Imaginary. At the end of the narrative the Real and the Imaginary unite “with ironical coinciding, over the destroying billows they almost touched ... and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago” (535). Everything revolves around Ahab and even the exterior world becomes a double of him: “There’s something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,—three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; *all are Ahab*” (410; emphasis mine). This alludes to Ahab’s reading of the doubloon. Here the word doubloon is a pun: everything is an empty signifier, ready to receive Ahab’s narcissistic self-projection. Perhaps I should ask the question: how is it that when Ahab seeks to unite with the Real, he is, in a very Derridean way, seen to slide toward another double? Ahab slides toward another constellation of signifiers, or a supplementary Symbolic economy, in which he loses himself. The double and the doubloon cannot duplicate the Real, hence the impossibility of representing the Real. The impossibility of duplicating the Real refers to its singularity and its invisibility.

Likewise, the White Whale is invested in the business of catachresis and chiasmus. The White Whale was referred to indirectly in the first 132 chapters. This invisibility pertains to dialectics of the double. Ahab's statement:

Oh, hard! that to fire others, the match itself must needs be wasting! What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do! They think me mad—Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself! The prophecy was that I would be dismembered; and—Aye! I lost this leg. *I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one.* (171; emphasis mine)

The amount of emphasis laid on the catachrestic reunion of opposites suggests, however, something else, something related to nature of the double itself: principally, that the double is the psyche's search for wholeness. The reunion of opposites is also chiasmic: wherein the object becomes the subject who will return and repeat the act, or resend the letter, and thus make an object of the prior subject (the Whale as the "original" agent of trauma, of dismemberment). The return to and of the double remains perched on the abyss of the missed encounter between the ego and the non-ego, between the inadequacy of the shadow and the fullness of the ego, and between the impossibility of the encounter and its inevitability. When Ahab is there death is not, and when he is not there death is in the circularity of chiasmus that repeats the letter of the doubloon.

The circle is full when everything returns to the grave, to the unfathomable depths of consciousness. This absolute return is expressed at the conclusion of *Moby-Dick*: "Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (535). As is always the case in literature and cinema, there remains a chance survivor, someone

who would pass on the story. During the last encounter with the whale, one of Ahab's oarsmen "helplessly dropping astern, but still afloat and swimming" (532), much like a returning ghost, reappears in the epilogue as Ishmael, "escaped alone to tell thee." "The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?—Because one did survive the wreck" (536). The survivor's account is a memoir and mourning, an attempt to restore the voices of the dead. The "epilogue," Ishmael explains, stands outside the narrative and supplements it. In fact, the epilogue is not the traditional conclusion towards which the narrative moves. Rather, it is a supplement to it—a supplement that stages the anxiety of closing the narrative and the urge to tell the story. Like Hawthorne's "The Custom House," Melville's epilogue is a sequel to the narrative and does not do anything to the narration. As Ishmael says, "For the rest, blame not Stubb too hardly. The thing is common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself" (397). The prophetic reference to the epilogue in the narrative deconstructs the classical structure of the narrative.

What we have in *Moby-Dick* is a circular economy of fluctuation between prolepsis and analepsis, a fluctuation that structures modern and post modern narratives. It is Ishmael who will re-tell the events and make his own interpretations. All of his shipmates are dead and he is the only one to survive the wreckage and mourn their death and narrate their untold story. The topographical representations in the chapter "the Chapel" and the inscriptions engraved on the marble reveal proleptically the destiny of the Pequod. The chapter "The Castaway" anticipates the epilogue of the narrative. The narration is very pre-figurative and anticipatory. When read in light of the narrative sequel, Ishmael's narration gains its intricacy prospectively. Prolepsis exceeds its traditional function of foretelling to overlap with the prophetic and visionary. "The

Castaway” is Pip’s obituary and Ishmael’s journey into the abyss of death. Read as an existential epitaph, *Moby-Dick* could be said to have a chain of encounters and missed encounters between the survivor and the dead, encounters that complicated further by the suspension of narration between prolepsis and analepsis. Pip’s plunge into the “endless end” (451) would leave a blank space in Ishmael’s narration. Ishmael is the only character to survive at the end of the novel, allowing for the story to be told. Sharon Cameron states that “Ishmael is the lone character who does not lose his body to death. But he does become pure voice, relinquishing his life as a character ... So the novel seems culpable of enacting the very wishes for which it kills its characters” (66). This means that Ishmael survives in the form of a voice, a voice that prosopoetically gives a head to the dead bodies and mixes literary genres—dramatic, epic, Gothic—thus, much like a postmodern narrative, blurring the boundaries between discourses. The characters of Pip and Ahab embody perfectly these fusions. Ishmael writes, “thy wretched laugh, thy idle but unresting eye; all thy strange mummeries not unmeaningly blended with the black tragedy of the melancholy ship, and mocked it! (462) Like Hawthorne’s literary corpus which is authorized by the paternal corpse, Melville’s narrative refers to an overdetermining absent paternal figure. This Gothic affiliation resonates with the Freudian psychoanalytic project. The argument I want to raise here is that the narrative, like psychoanalytic theory, is situated within a chain of relations—indeed, inherited and (over)determined by the paternal figure and then by the heir who becomes the legatee. This reversal of roles, always already determined via analepsis and prolepsis, is what I would like to call reversed prosopopeia.

In *Moby-Dick* we have a reversed prosopopeia that conceptually accounts for the narrative business of bearing witness to trauma: it is the dead who give a voice to the living. Queequeg’s

coffin is Ishmael's lifebuoy. What I am talking about here is not an actual prosopopeia—that is, the actual trope occurring in an actual sentence. The condition I am describing is an effect or a register rather than a trope per se. In fact, "Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last" (455; emphasis mine). The living Ishmael receives the letter of Queequeg's "proper person" twice, once during his lifetime, and again, retrospectively, after his death and during the narrative which stages the (missed) encounter. These mysteries will remain unsolved because, like the narrative structure itself, they are always deferred. Quite oxymoronicly, the trope of prosopopeia, which phantasmagorically gives face to the defaced, suspends the promise of ending it originally promises. In fact, Melville's play with prosopopeia is registered in his theory of the double. The double complicates the work of prosopopeia and makes it unfold in paradox—the very essence of the double itself. The marriage between prosopopeia and the double is soon brought to the court of *différance*. Yet, the relation between the double and prosopopeia is complex and contingent. Sometimes the double is generated by prosopopeia, as in the case of Henry James's Gothic stories. In *Moby-Dick*, I would say that doubling and prosopopeia are in a relation of narrative economy to *assujettissement*, which is to say, the unfolding of prosopopeia within the economy of doubling, both subjective (i.e., characters) and narrative temporality (i.e., prolepsis and analepsis).

Let us consider Queequeg who carves copies of some of the tattoos of his body on his coffin. Creating the double of his hieroglyphic marks, he carves a whole theory of writing. His

hieroglyphic marks, inscrutable as they are, structure the whole work of Melville and give life to Ishmael's story. The point I want to raise here is that the figure of the double, though illusive and inscrutable in most cases, is at the core of literature and life in general. Without a double—be it harmonious or competing—there is no life. I will talk in the next chapter about the necessity of the cultural Other or double. Queequeg is resurrected as a carved hieroglyphic mark. Even Ishmael, who was astounded by Queequeg's tribal tattoos, has become illustrated himself:

The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics. But as I was crowded for space, and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing — at least, what untattooed parts might remain — I did not trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all enter into a congenial admeasurement of the whale. (429)

My reading attains to “the skeleton dimensions” of *Moby-Dick* and the specters of prosopopeia. This epitaphic resurrection explains Melville's interest in inscriptions, monuments, hieroglyphics, and tombs in his later work. This interest leads us to talk about the relationship between death and writing, between the Gothic and psychoanalysis. I want to argue that the Gothic is essential to the understanding of psychoanalysis as is psychoanalysis to the Gothic. The investment of the narrative in the Gothic tropology of the double, hieroglyphics, shadows, ghosts, and corpses posits a crisis in the constitution of the subject—a crisis that is described in narrative terms. The tropes of the double and its derivatives, and prosopopeia evoke such narrative trauma, which is in fact the trauma of the subject. Prosopopeia, the trope of the dead and the double, allows us to

underpin the origins of trauma—indeed the origin of everything. What is the aim of (reversed) prosopopeia? It requires no lengthy argument to stress the fact that it the dead that give voice to the living.

Melville’s narrative arrives at the unavoidable narrative impasse where catharsis is needed and considered as the purgation of the Imaginary through an image. Prosopopeia enters the narrative to dissolve the impasse and postpone this imaginary purgation further. Prosopopeia does this, I shall argue, by presenting *en abyme* the encounter between the subject—quite often associated with the abject—and its double, be it the lost object of desire, or the imaginary object of desire. Such *mise en scène* requires Gothic tropics to be validated. The image that authorizes catharsis can only be a blinding Gothic image—an image that goes beyond (*au-delà*) the narrative. The Gothic image conflates the traumatic, the melancholic, and of course the monstrous: all of these things come together in the prosopoetic figure of the White Whale. We find an illustration of this image when Ahab describes the White Whale in “The Quarter-Deck”:

How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes, I think there’s naught beyond. But ‘tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him ... who’s over me? Truth has no confines. (167)

Chapter 42 is devoted to the whiteness of the whale. Melville avows that it is not the size of whale nor its monstrous appearance that renders it appalling; rather, it is its whiteness that “strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood” (190). The image of the White Whale refers to another image—the surplus of representation. How do we read this?

Considered a prosopoetic surplus, the White Whale has to do with both scale (the figures of vast expanses) and emptiness. This image creates a barrier and at the same time refers to something beyond the text. The subject gets closer to the point where he wants the image to emerge as a barrier. Is the reader another image or rather shadow that traverses the text?

Ishmael is haunted by the ghostly shadows of a past we do not have access to. Right from the beginning of the text, he invites the reader to enter his world of shadows. This invitation (re)turns to the Gothic when the reader becomes a character in the novel and when extra-textual elements such as the painting in Chapter 57 participate prosopoetically in the production of meaning. This generates a Gothic scene of writing in which the reader becomes the property of the narrator. The reader becomes the fish and reverses the law of prosopopeia: “And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too” (381). The reader is thus subject to the trope of prosopopeia because he is called to language, to the economy of language, by the dead, by the obligation to bear witness, comprised as it may be by a certain melancholia (though this is more typical of Hawthorne than of Melville). The obligation to bear witness is the very basis of trauma theory, that is, the ways in which this obligation is countered by the missed encounter, which is the very core of the traumatic primal scene. What interests me is the doubling of event and non-representation: the trauma is a missed encounter; in the wake of trauma is the obligation to bear witness to the dead, to represent what happened and what it meant, which leads of course to the repetition or doubling of the missed encounter, which perseverates the trauma. Hence the circularity of inscription, literalized both in the circularity of the novel (ending where it begins, beginning where it ends) and the voyage of the Pequod (another doubling). This links the trope of prosopopeia to the psychoanalytic project. The narrator, through the use of the trope of

prosopopeia, moves the economy of subject and object relations toward the Gothic—the realm of excess par excellence. Like the analysand who fears the loss of his kernel of *jouissance*, the subject, after the psychoanalytic cure, does not relinquish his symptom. The narrative moves from representing the ghost to addressing it—that is, when it re-turns to the dead (past) through the use of prosopopeia. Melville’s ghostly narrative is explored within a theoretical framework articulated at the intersection of psychoanalysis and the Gothic—indeed, the threshold of death and desire.

Unlike many Romantic authors, Melville, like Hawthorne, argues that writing comes from death and that the dead, in the form of ghosts, hieroglyphics, or just memories, continue to exert their authorial power from beyond the grave. Like Queequeg’s coffin that rises from the vortex to serve as a lifebuoy (a literal and literary) record for Ishmael, the dead authors rise from graveyard and change the direction of the mirror by refracting its vector. Queequeg’s sepulchral monument is, in fact, a memorizing of the dead. These epitaphic monuments allow the author to write. Instead of being given a voice, this senseless monument gives Ishmael the possibility of writing and literally saves him from the circling waves of death that absorbed the coffin. In fact, the narrative structure of *Moby-Dick* and the chiasmic relationship between the three “I’s” is an allegory of the business of the missed encounter. What Melville’s play with allegory and the theory of the double entails is an anxiety about writing.

Let us consider the White Whale to understand the career of an allegory of reading. The whiteness of the whale—an allegory of indefiniteness, blankness, and *différance*—refers to the multivocality of this image. Following de Man’s analysis:

The relationship between signs necessarily contains a consecutive temporal element; it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by allegorical sign can then consist only in *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority. (207)

Such anteriority refers to the supplementarity of representation and language. Derrida's argument in "White Mythology" that thinking about metaphor takes place as a thinking through metaphor shapes my argument that thinking about repetition takes place through repetition. To assign a meaning to a signifier is to kill its ability to signify. Signifying, according to the deconstructive school, is the endless play of language. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida writes: "Everything became discourse . . . everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum* (249). The White Whale, however, is a signifier that refers back to other signifiers. In fact, it is an elusive signifier that denies any definition, it is "the one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last" (*Moby-Dick* 262). The White Whale, much like the scarlet letter, is made up of two signifiers, but their combination produces a literary image that, I would argue, desires symbolic transcendence but collapses into allegory. Like the Orientals, it is described in a grotesque defamiliarized way. The White Whale's "nameless horror" (189) evokes the danger the Western traveler might face in the seemingly peaceful Orient. Like the Orient, the White Whale is associated with the sublime, "for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an

elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood” (*Moby-Dick* 190). This “elusive something” is in fact the elusive signifier that denies any categorization. The Orient, much like the White Whale, is a transcendental signifier that hides a void—which is to say, the impossibility of interpretation. The White Whale—composed of two signifiers—produces in the combination of the two signifiers a literary image that, I would argue, desires symbolic transcendence but collapses into allegory. In Derridean parlance, the “elusive something” is a classic example of *différance*: it marks the place of reference as outside the discursive economy, as something that can never be present within that discursive economy, and at the same time, this opening of the gap or interval, of the absence, is precisely what constitutes this discursive economy. Allegory, then, makes evident the absences that structure *différance*.

The White Whale is in fact an elusive image that denies any definition; it is “the one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last” (262). Like the double, like the Other, it is described in defamiliarized way. Its “nameless horror” (189) evokes the danger the traveler might face in the seemingly calm waters of the far oceans and the danger man might face in his psychoanalytic regressions toward an original state. Like the double, the White Whale is associated with the sublime, “for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and *sublime*, there yet *lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue*, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood” (190; emphasis mine). This “elusive something” is in fact the elusive signified that resists any symbolization. The patent location of the “elusive something” in the space of the recessive is a remarkably Hawthornian⁵⁹ gesture: the idea that truth is there, but its special positioning can never be

reversed into presence and that allegory, of course, turns upon the episteme of the “innermost.” The double, much like the White Whale, is a transcendental signifier that hides a void—which is to say, the impossibility of signifying. Another figuration of the double is the doubloon.

Before turning to the use of the symbol (that fails as symbol, and unfolds into the allegory of reading becoming a double constructed by Ahab’s narcissism) of the doubloon in *Moby-Dick* and its Gothic supplement, the hieroglyphic inscriptions, I want to gesture briefly to the correspondence between Melville’s narrative and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of the uncanny and the shadow. This chapter delves into to the zones of slippages of hermeneutics, the unresolved identifications, and the fear and desire provoked by the figure of double. Freud’s conception of the *unheimlich* is in fact a cause and effect/affect of the double. The *unheimlich* means the unfamiliar element inside the house, all that is strange and different (i.e., that which was familiar at one time but has been repressed and now returns). *Heimlich*, however, pertains to everything that is familiar and ‘homely.’ This duality refers to the secret that hides in the uncanny. As Freud argues, the *unheimlich* and the *heimlich* ultimately coincide or circle around to meet one another. The *unheimlich* is the return of the once familiar, but it remains remote and inaccessible, or as Derrida would put it, caught up in the circuits of *différance* and inaccessible to symbolization. The secret then is the traumatic Real per se. The double figures the void at the center of the subject, or the originary trauma that split the subject. An example of the uncanny is the White Whale, the spout of which, represented as poison and as remedy, shows the characters’ trauma of castration. In fact, the figure of the White Whale figures the anxiety of castration in the Freudian model of the Oedipus complex. Freud contends that the double or the *doppelgänger*

functions as protection against the fear of death. However, this role is reversed and the double harbors inside it the idea of death and the uncanny.

The doubloon, another kind of *doppelgänger*, revolves around Ahab's egotistical sublime. Like the whale, the doubloon is an explicit allegorical sign and it invites allegorical exegesis. This allegory does not attempt to avoid or transcend the inescapable fact of temporality. In this world of allegory, the meaning constituted by the allegorical sign refers to the meaning of a previous sign. The doubloon, like the White Whale, expresses the inscrutability of the figure of the Other. The act of reading the doubloon is posited as an impossible and arbitrary act. This is determined by Pip's conjugation: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (413). We see that the value and meaning of doubloon is determined by the inscriptions on it. These inscriptions cast on the coin are laden with history and allusions to Hawthorne. Reading the doubloon, Starbuck says:

A dark valley between three, heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity, in some faint earthly symbol. So in this vale of Death, God girds us round; and over all our gloom, the sun of Righteousness still shines a beacon and a hope. If we bend down our eyes, the dark vale shows her mouldy soil; but if we lift them, the bright sun meets our glance half way, to cheer. Yet, oh, the great sun is no fixture; and if, at midnight, we would fain snatch some sweet solace from him, we gaze for him in vain! This coin speaks wisely, mildly, truly, but still sadly to me. (411)

This is reminiscent of Hawthorne's invocation of the Sun of Righteousness in *The Scarlet Letter*. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab "seemed to be newly attracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on [the doubloon], as though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them. And some certain significance

lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher (409). Reading these inscriptions is prone to error because writing becomes inscription.

Inscriptions and figures—some of the basic characteristics of language itself—express the stark separation between the reader and the text. As Irwin argues, “an undecipherable inscription is disturbing precisely because here writing seems to commemorate its own inability by itself to transmit memory, its status not as a substitute for memory but simply as an aid to memory” (179). Reading becomes potent when linked to, but impossible in the absence of, memory. However, the fantasy of the double marks the impossibility of the text—indeed, there is no pure double of the Real, because, as I have explained, the double is by definition secondary and spectral (and indeed doubles that are not strictly spectral incarnate the spectral traces of prior splitting and trauma). Every text is a double, as it tries to recreate the Real. We have learnt that representation fails at the Real because it is at many removes from it. Doubling the creator, the writer proposes a world of signs without referents. Literature re-doubles reality and stages the act of creation and death. Being the mirror of life and death, it mirrors its own impossibility. The double is poetic in the sense that it structures and defines. When refusing to die, people forge a double, a shadow, an *anima*, an indestructible soul. Everything is doubled and inhabited by phantomatic doubles. The only real world is the world of ideas. To believe in the double is to relinquish the real and follow the shadow.

The Real is impossible to duplicate because it is that which remains stubbornly inaccessible to the resources and the reach of the Symbolic, and toward which the Symbolic cracks and slides when it is deranged or traumatized. However, the double is often associated with illusion—be it a metaphysical recreation of the world or a hallucinatory duplication of

events. Then, the double is a prosopoetical allegorization of the divided subject. In *Moby-Dick*, we have a prosopoetic investment in the psychoanalytics of trauma, the splitting of the subject in the wake of trauma. Many of the events in the narrative are uncovered proleptically. Fedallah's prophesy of the final tragedy of the book appears in chapter 117: "But I said, old man, that ere thou couldst die on this voyage, two hearses must verily be seen by thee on the sea; the first not made by mortal hands; and the visible wood of the last one must be grown in America . . . Hemp only can kill thee" (469). The last chapter of the narrative, prophesized by the Parsee, one of the doubles of Ahab, coincides with itself. Suggestively enough, it is Fedallah—one the shadows—who foresees the improbable circumstances in which Ahab will die. At the end of *Moby-Dick*, the Pequod is destroyed by White Whale and Empire sinks with the Pequod. The Indian harpooner Tashtego had nailed a red flag to the mast that caught the wing of a

Sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling the ethereal thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-gasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with the ship. (535)

The sinking of the Pequod is but an allusion to the ultimate end of every system. Many would argue that the sinking of the Pequod is but an allegory for the ineluctable end of Capitalism. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to study the semiotics of this ending, it is very important to relate it to the current economic situation. All die at the end of the novel except Ishmael, who is saved by Queequeg's coffin. Melville's conception of history, much like Marx's,

is helical. The recurrent references to “vortices” in *Moby-Dick* show Melville’s understanding of history as teleology. Perhaps the sinking of the Pequod stands for the ultimate destiny of Empire. The ending of *Moby-Dick* can be read as a manifestation of the last elementary change in the mode of production—socialism. At the end, all have the same fate.

If the double perpetuates the Real, the White Whale proceeds from the Real because it is unique. Ahab is obsessed with the uniqueness of the Whale and from the onset of the narrative he reiterates this obsession. During the second day of the chase, Ahab rejects Starbuck’s request to renounce the chase: “Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act’s immutably decreed. ‘Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool, I am the Fate’s lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling! That thou obeyest mine.—stand round me men” (524). Ahab identifies with the White Whale—such identification allows for the reversal of roles: “Aye, he’s chasing *me* now; not I, *him*—that’s bad” (526). Ahab and the Whale become one and exchange positions.

After the exchange, Ahab unites with the Whale:

Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole forgone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I *grapple* with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to *one common pool!* (534, emphasis mine)

The invocation of this common “pool” repudiates the possibility of doubling in this place. Although there is doubling and re-doubling before getting to this atemporal place, where there is only unity and uniqueness. This inescapable “pool,” death, is achieved through representing prosopoetically the White Whale. Like Ahab who tries to hunt the White whale, Ishmael assays to determine the meaning of the Real. Both arrive at the unavoidable illusion of getting at what they want. Ahab’s illusion is metaphysical⁶⁰ and ontological and Ishmael’s is poetic. In fact, the novel is more about the unsurpassable melancholy in which the act of writing is situated.

I wish to take up Kristeva’s “narcissistic melancholia” “in which the dying out of all libidinal bonds appears to be not a simple matter of turning aggressiveness toward the object back into animosity against the self but is asserted as previous to any possibility of object positioning” (*Black Sun* 16) as explanatory of the tropics of the double. It follows, then, that Ahab is a *depressed* narcissist,⁶¹ to use Kristeva’s words. As she argues “the depressed narcissist mourns not an Object but the Thing ... The ‘thing’ [is] the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated” (13). Here Kristeva’s explanation is entirely resonant with Freud’s model of melancholia in “Mourning and Melancholia.” Freud’s model demonstrates how the melancholic knows what object he has lost, but not what that object means. The *Thing* that haunts is the shadow (double) cast upon the split subject.⁶² Holding on to the phantasmic *re-turn* to and of the lost object of desire, the depressed melancholic starts to fluctuate between the desire of recovery and the anxiety of disappearance. According to Freud, in melancholia there is a regression to an identificatory state. The relationship between Ahab and the White Whale is characterized by the

exchange of positions. Ahab, the original hunter of the whale, turns out to be the hunted and the White Whale the hunter.

One would need to explain what it is that Ahab mourns: it is most immediately his ‘member,’ his leg, but of course the *Thing* therein embodied is not susceptible to explanation, and requires the supplement of poetics and Ahab’s philosophy—and of course epic. Ahab’s angst cannot only be existential: it has everything to do with the ‘disnarrated’—i.e., the undelivered prequel, the primal scene, the initial encounter with the white whale and the repaint of Ahab’s “member.” As Kenneth Burke observes in *A Grammar of Motives*, “When the attacker chooses for himself the object of attack, it is usually his blood brother; the debunker is much closer to the debunked than others are; Ahab was pursued by the white whale he was pursuing; and Aristotle says that the physician should be a bit sickly himself, to better understand the symptoms of his patients (406-7). This chiastic relationship explains Ahab’s ambivalence with respect to his object of desire and mourning. He loves and hates it at the same time and in order not to lose it completely, he encrypts it in himself. Such duality of love and hatred creates paranoia and leads the subject ineluctable death. The chiastic interpretation of Melville’s narrative’s investment in the economy of prosopopeia explicates Ahab’s suspension between melancholia and its closure—between the tropics of the double and identification. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud speaks of the splitting of the ego, in that one part of it becomes a critical agency that abjects the ego. Clearly, what is at issue here is the fact that object loss becomes an ego loss. This suspension is complicated by what Kristeva calls “the mechanism of identification”—the dialectic of love and hatred of self and other. As she argues, “my identification with the loved-hated other, through incorporation-introjection-projection, leads me to imbed in myself its sublime component, which

becomes my necessary, tyrannical judge, as well as its subject component, which demeans me and of which I desire to rid myself” (11).

If, as I shall demonstrate via Melanie Klein and Kristeva, melancholic identifications find identity in the figure of the double (and all its derivatives) of the lost object in which the ego is cloaked, and the figure of the double accommodates no closure, but rather activates what Klein calls “the internalized good objects” or the infantile incorporation of the parents, then Melville’s writing is the object of melancholia and the subject that activates it. More precisely, the melancholic ego remains laminated to the lost object; the cathexis cannot be dissolved. Klein argues that the child “not only takes into himself (reincorporates) the person whom he has just lost, but also reinstates his internalized good objects (ultimately his loved parents), who became part of his inner world from the earliest stages” (353). According to her, to work through mourning is possible through a decreased ambivalence—an ambivalence that creates vehement fantasies. To safeguard the lost object within constitutes, according to Klein, a creative mourning.

The prosopoetically produced Gothic specters of the narrative account for the multiple doubles and shadows that will, following the work of prosopopeia and melancholia, abject the ego. Disinherited of the *Thing*, the subject either goes on various unsatisfying journeys to find the lost object of desire—the *Thing*; or, in the case of melancholia, he identifies with the *Thing*. As argued by Kristeva in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* and Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the chiastic relationship of love and hatred between the subject and its lost object (*Thing*) revolves around the death and life drives. The destruction (death) drive and the pleasure (life) drive are intertwined in Melville’s narrative. The *Thing* that haunts is eroticized and demonized at the same time. Ahab’s refusal to accept the loss of his object of desire leads to his

narcissistic melancholia. In other words, Ahab's desire is vanquishing the White Whale, obtaining revenge, and thus fulfilling the contract of his subjectivity/agency. Let me here go back to the question of the demonic nature of the double and stress the fact that the appearance of such double signifies disequilibrium in the exchange between man and his *Things*, and in the libidinal expenditure. As Kristeva argues:

The excess of affect has thus no other means of coming to the fore than to produce new languages—strange concatenations, idiolects, poetics. Until the weight of the primal Thing prevails, and all translatability become impossible. Melancholia then ends up in asymbolia, in loss of meaning: if I am no longer capable of translating or metaphorizing, I become silent and I die. (*Black Sun* 42)

In fact, Ahab's melancholia would be the expression of his unsymbolizable narcissistic wound, a wound that is so illegible that all referents could be valid indexes. The perceived connection between Ahab and his object of desire is clearly revealed when Ahab, much like Hamlet, invokes death, "Oh, Lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief" (534). In the tension of his erotic identifications, Ahab experience both a connection and a distance from the White Whale, an object that still eludes symbolization, "towards thee I roll, thou all *destroying but unconquering* whale; to the last I grapple with thee" (534; italics mine). Inscribing his violence on the sign of his melancholia, his *Thing*, Ahab merges with his *Thing*. Facing the threat of Thanatos, the threat of loss and, Ahab, much like Oedipus and Prometheus, opts for Thanatos as the ultimate refugee from the recurrent trauma of loss. The negativity of melancholia in *Moby-Dick* tends toward psychological coherence of the narcissist. There is a kind of eroticization of death in Ahab's Hamlet-like discourse. To use Kristeva's words, Ahab

eventually “cannot endure Eros, [he] prefer[s] to be with the Thing up to the limit of negative narcissism leading [him] to Thanatos” (20). Ahab desires death. Does death kill desire, or does this mean the paralysis and death of writing? Does the dissolution of desire mean the hermeneutic impasse, or does it signal the beginning of ghost writing. The dissolution of melancholia is, in fact, followed by asymbolization. Such failure of symbolization is one materialization of the missed encounter between the reader and the text, between the author and the reader, and between the ego and the object of desire.

Unlike Ahab whose death drive is directed toward the exterior world, the other characters like Pip, Fedallah, and Queequeg choose to yield to the *Thing*. Ahab’s masochistic projections suspend melancholia which can find its resolution only in the *re*-turn to the Gothic—to *cadere*. This *re*-turn, itself ghostly, moves the narrative toward the Gothic. Such shift is impossible without the tropics of the Gothic. Apostrophizing the lightning in the “Candles,” Ahab shouts, “Oh, thou magnanimous! now I do glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my *fiery father*; my *sweet mother*, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my *puzzle*; but thine is greater” (477; emphasis mine). This prosopoetic invocation of the universe ties Ahab’s existential quest for answers to the quest for the lost mother. As argued by Robert K. Martin, “It is through the opposition of the two elements that Melville establishes his fundamental structure of the encounter between the two great myths of Western culture, the romance of the Golden Land, or the search for a lost Eden, and the quest for knowledge and power, or the legend of Faust (69-70). In fact, the narrative raises many existential questions: the ambiguity of the world, the reason of existence, the origin of life, the ambivalence of representation, and so on.

Like Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden as the result of their knowledge, Melville's characters should pay the price of their entry into the Symbolic. The point I want to raise is that the return to the lost Edenic origin is impossible. This lost origin is impossible because it can never be recovered as it used to be. However, it can only be encountered through the act of representation and repetition as an impossible encounter in the present moment. The impossible return to the pre-symbolic unity with the mother is played out in *Moby-Dick*. This impossibility, however, is valid when we look at the lost unity from a linguistic perspective, since there is no understanding of this unity without its loss and without the entry into language.

As far as the characters of Melville's narrative are concerned, there is no existence prior to the whale. The understanding of the original state can only be understood through the dialectics of repetition. However, as Freud argues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, there is a close relationship between drives and repetition. The compulsion to repeat is in fact an unconscious attempt to return to a primal state (satisfaction). Freud argues: "It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life" (36). By this logic, the existence of the *ana*-time can only be understood through the work of repetition and the death drive. This *ana*-time is lost by the subject who is, after the loss, able to realize his association with his lost origin as a repetition. It is this loss that paves the way for the traumatic Real as it defies symbolization. In a post-humanist world in which man ceases to exist, there remains only the reflexivity of the mirror—a mirror alone in nature. Apart from the mirror, Ishmael needs another agent to validate his narrative. That other agent is provided at the end of

the narrative—the return of the Rachel. Melville’s narrative validates Lacan’s theory of the mirror. Ishmaels stands for the camera that is positioned in front of a mirror. This double mirror, that reflects and transmits, allows Melville, while complicating the business of the letter, to deal with the material and symbolic.

By and large, *Moby-Dick* does not seem to offer any closed or totalized answer to the psychoanalytic and hermeneutic questions of the double and the origin. Because of the rift created by the double, because of the *mal* of the supplement, because the subject can never fill in the gap left by the double, the subject and the narrative sustain a *manque* that cannot be filled either by the subject or by the reader. The unassimilability of this *manque*, Lacan and Žižek argue, maintains the business of *jouissance* and accounts for the impossibility of assimilating or having access to the subject’s primal origin either by symptom or, ideally, by *sinthome*. In fact, *Moby-Dick* plays with the impossibility by staging it as the only possible account for the primal origin. It is at this point that psychoanalysis and deconstruction intersect and diverge. Psychoanalysis shows that there is more significance in the *mise en scène* of the linguistic reiteration of the primal experience of the subject than in the primal experience itself; deconstruction helps psychoanalysis with the necessary tools to trace and explain the maneuvers of the double as it repeats the original.

2.3 The De-centered Center and the Loss of Origins: The Work of the Supplement and *Différance*

May I, monsieur, offer my services without running the risk of intruding? (Albert Camus *The Fall*, 3)

We have seen how the slippage among the narrator, author and character is effected—or performed—through the infinite spectral *mise en abyme*. Parallel to this slippage is the one whereby Ishmael would be the puppet of the ghost effect. My speculation on the shift from Ishmael to Melville as narrator in tandem with writing and hauntology stems from the perpetual play of ghosts. Clearly, the association—both tropic and literal—of writing with haunting undermines traditional binaries. The relationship among author, reader, narrator, and narrative is structured by the post effect. The narrative is not at the center and these different poles, ghostly determined, exchange positions in a Gothic manner. Subject to the post effect, the reader enters the narrative and participates in the production of meaning, and the narrative becomes the author. Melville himself enters the narrative in the guise of sporadic omniscience. The first 25 chapters exhibit a first-person narration. The remainder of the narrative is permeated by omniscience. Especially the chapter “The Fountain” questions the nature of the “I” of the narrative. The chapter starts with an unknown narrator, someone that is known to the reader. Like a ghost, Ishmael disappears from the narrative leaving no notice, and Melville, like a revenant, enters the narrative without prior notice. The reader receives an invitation from the narrator to enter the narrative.

This invitation is open, sudden, and binding. The reader has no choice but to accept it. The first sentence of the narrative, written in the imperative mode, establishes an intimacy with the reader and announces the first person point of view. Ishmael's problematic status as a first-person narrator invites us to investigate the indexation of the narrative. The name chosen by the narrator hums with religious significance. The injunction "call me Ishmael" lends the narrative a power and binds the reader to follow the command of the narrator. Although the imperative suggests authority and obedience, it is also an invitation to a greater intimacy and equality. In fact, Ishmael is a pseudo-narrator, a puppet controlled by another agent—the ghost or the double.

Like the letter, desire can be lost, deferred, or can go astray, producing a counter effect. It should be noted that, besides signifying the letter's arrival or not, the postal affect also conjures the "-post" effect, i.e., belated, or post-traumatic (in the wake of the event). When a letter is relayed or delayed, it becomes haunted by the various ghosts that happen to read it and therefore it can signify differently according to the law of the ghost and not the original sender. The grounding of the relay of the letter in hauntology and the performative could be explained by Abraham and Torok's volume of essays *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* in which the concept of the transgenerational phantom is seen as a gap in the psyche engendered by a transgenerational secret. Who is the addressee of *Moby-Dick*? My argument is that the narrative addresses the dead, the living, and those to be born. Derrida's statement, "If I say that I write for dead addressees, not dead in the future but already dead at the moment when I get to the end of a sentence, it is not in order to play" (33), applies to *Moby-Dick* in the sense that its unusual narrative structure and the corporeality of Ishmael's narrative voice subject the narrative—a ghostly letter—and its sender(s) and receiver(s) to the Derridean postal effect. The relationship

between sender and receiver is the effect of a postal relay inscribed in the domain of hauntology. Derrida's formulation that the letter might wander and err means that the active agent in letter writing, letter sorting, and letter sending is the ghost. We know that Hawthorne is one of the main addressees of the novel, but we will see that the referential complexity of the address complicates the itinerary of the letter.

What complicates the postal activity is the impossibility to represent the letter. The question of representation is one of the main concerns of the narrative. Ishmael shows the failures of the various attempts to represent the whale. In fact, his claim "I shall ere long paint to you as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale" (258) is but another failed attempt to decipher the true nature of the Leviathan. In fact, Ishmael tries to give representations to the various elusive ghosts or shadows that populate the narrative. The point I want to raise is that desire, like the elusive ghosts, revolves around an absent center, and this absence structures both the content and contours of the letter.

The notion of representation is also related to the question of writing, letters, and signs. The narrative is full of letters or signs that call for an interpretation. The various signs that constitute *Moby-Dick* create a symbolic economy in which the letter exists as a trace and a projection of absence and distance. Using Derrida's deconstructive model, we can say that the representation of writing as a system of signs reveals and hides in an infinite way. All the signs in *Moby-Dick* are orphan signs looking for a reference and an origin that is always already fleeing as the narrative unfolds. The absence of an origin denotes an empty place, from which writing emerges. Always moving, this empty place redefines the traditional conception of writing. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues:

Reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within *secondariness*. They are preceded by a truth or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos. Even when the thing, the “referent,” is not immediately related to the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an *immediate* relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a *mediated* one with the signifier, that is to say with the *exteriority of writing*. (14-15; italics mine)

The superiority of the divine logos structures writing and speech. However, Derrida explains that the logos, or transcendental signifier, is always outside the economy of the signifier: never present, never encountered, always deferred and displaced. He points out that: “the paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and non-temporal writing, is thus named by metaphor. A writing that is sensible, finite and so on, is designated as writing in the literal sense; is it thus thought on the side of culture, technique and artifice; a human procedure, the ruse of a being accidentally incarnated or of a finite creature” (15). However, *Moby-Dick* does not revolve around a logos or transcendental signified. In the narrative, language ceases to be a mirror that reflects the relationship between things and words. The words mean nothing or mean many things. The repetition of the symbols in the narrative produces and distorts the network of signification. Indeed, it is that very repetition that resituated the failure of symbol in the discourse network of allegory and its ineluctable distancing of referent and origin. Allegory would then constitute the ghostly double of symbol, its return.

Suspended between symbol and allegory, the double that conjures up death, ghosts, crypts, and epitaphs poses and exposes the opposition between materiality and abstraction. But, Ishmael tells us, “this critical act [i.e., harpooning] is not always unattended with the saddest and

most fatal casualties ... you must know that when the second iron is thrown overboard, it thenceforth becomes a dangling, sharp-edged terror skittishly curvetting about both boat and whale ... Nor, in general, is it possible to secure it again until the whale is fairly captured and a corpse (283-4). Yet, as Ishmael continues to argue, “it very often happens owing to the instantaneous, violent, convulsive running of the whale upon receiving the first iron, it becomes impossible for the harpooner, however lightning-like in his movement, to pitch the second iron into him” (283). My argument is predicated upon the relationship between the first and the second “iron” or attempt to land the harpoon in the whale and thus render it a “fast fish.” The failure of hunting the White whale duplicates the hermeneutic impasse and the failure of language and writing. What is at stake here is the absence of a center, of a logos—an absence that, according to Derrida, should be linked to the absence of origin and father. Derrida writes:

The absolute invisibility of the origin of the visible, of the good-sun-father-capital, the attainment of presence or beingness in any form, the whole surplus Plato calls *epekeina tēs ousias* (beyond beingness or presence), gives rise to a structure of replacements such that all presences will be supplements substituted for the absent origin, and all differences, within the system of presence, will be the irreducible effect of what remains *epekeina tēs ousias*. (*Dissemination* 164)

Just as the quest for the White Whale is a quest for an absent father, Ahab’s obsession with this quest should be linked to the various missing fathers in the novel. In a very abstract sense, to master the whale—not just by apprehending it physically, but also by making sense of it philosophically—would be to master the universe, to read it correctly. It would also be, as a work of repeating the encounter so as *not* to miss it, the resolution of trauma. In both senses, the White Whale represents the “beyond beingness” of the ultimate laws of the universal Father. The

question of the father is linked to that of the origin—an origin that is lost within the abyss of doubling and redoubling. We see that “Ahab, seated in the bows of his high-hoisted boat, was about taking his wonted daily observation of the sun to determine his latitude . . . Well that Ahab’s quadrant was furnished with colored glasses, through which to take sight of that solar fire” (470). The sun refers to a father who resembles the sun, a father whose injunctions should be taken as guidelines. The origin, like the White Whale, is inaccessible and elusive. Thus, the absence of the father in *Moby-Dick* could be seen in two characters. In his search, Ahab is an orphan who declares his filial attachment to St. Elmo’s Lights (474). Rooted to the deck, Ahab, much like a son to a father, speaks to the lights:

Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and e’en for hate thou canst but kill; and all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe’er I came; wheresoe’er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights.” (476-477)

Then Ahab realizes that there is something beyond this fire—father—that indexes another fire beyond it. Ahab’s search for his Father is paralleled by Melville’s missed encounter with his father. Looking to substitute the lost Father, he offers a figurative tribute to Hawthorne: “Shall I send you a fin of the *Whale* by way of a specimen mouthful? The tail is not yet cooked—though the hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled might not unreasonably have cooked it all ere

this. This is the book's motto (the secret one),—Ego non baptiso te in nomine—but make out the rest yourself" (*Correspondence* 196). Hawthorne is surely the Father of *Moby-Dick* as Surveyor Pue is the stand-in for the Father in *The Scarlet Letter*, because Hawthorne invented the American allegorical romance that Melville turns to the service of the epic. What is interesting here is the non performative of the Roman Catholic sacrament of baptism, which normally reads "ego te baptiso in nomine de patri, de filii, et de spiritus sancti." Does not the idea of the missed encounter signify the possible encounter here? Does not Melville's protagonist depend on the unnamed *Thing* and tries to get rid of it at the same time?

Let us recall the passage in which Ahab addresses the lightning: "there lies my puzzle; but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came ye, hence called thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself unbegotten ... There is some unsuffising thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time" (477). The father becomes child, and both child and father keep looking for an elusive father—a father that reflects the movement of the whale and the narrative structure. This infinite quest leads to the dissolution of all origins. The father—the origin—disappears, leaving a child, an orphan, without guidance. Even writing is affected by the dissolution of origins. Writing, in its quest for an origin, is torn between the dialectics of doubling and redoubling that structures it. In *Dissemination*, Derrida states that writing is "the process of redoubling in which we are fatally (en)trained: the supplement of a supplement, the signifier, the representative of a representative" (112). This quest for an original point leads us to consider writing as *différance* and as lost in translation (i.e., in the sense of the French verb "trainer"). The perpetual deferral of beginning in *Moby-Dick* is similar to the mysterious and swift movement of the whales.

My critical study thus far has been to locate, in the supplementarity of Melville's narrative, the affective detours of the origin and the supplement. It is worth noting that the narrative opens with two paratextual references: "Etymology" and "Extracts"—paratexts that could be read as archaeological and temporal references, and perhaps, more acutely, as archival in Derrida's sense of "commencement and commandment." In this sense, Melville writes *en sillage*—in the wake of. It is no accident that "wake" has two meanings in English: the "wake" which attends the dead, and the wake that is left by a ship as it moves through the water. The first paratextual reference is composed of dictionary entries and the second, much like Hawthorne's "The Custom-House," alludes to extracts "supplied by a sub-sub-librarian." These paratexts, to use Genette's word, are the parasitical sites that call for a reading of the question of the origin. Here, Melville yearns for an encounter with the two surveyors of the letter, a "late consumptive usher to a grammar school" (ix) and "a sub-sub-librarian" (x), by recording his contribution to the transhistorical project of writing. However, we learn that the two surveyors are cloaked in oblivion and defacement—the first "loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality" (ix) and the second "appears to have gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth, picking up whatever random allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane" (x). This defacement marks the narratological place of Ishmael who, like these two surveyors, will be cloaked in the veneer of absence and whose "Call me Ishmael" alludes to indefiniteness and origin at the same time. What the narrator calls for is, in other words, an archival origin in the Old Testament that is, however, performatively marked as contingent.

In fact, this name becomes an *antonamasia* when all it refers to is an inaccessible religious referent. Much like Oedipus, it refers to an abandoned child. He, like the other characters of the narrative, has to be remembered in terms of religious temporality. This religious temporality gives the illusion of referentiality and demonstrates the illusions of symbolic promise, and dismantles the symbol's status. In other words, the narrative critiques, allegorically, the plethora of symbols it contains. The place of the narrator, however, is variable, changing according to the movement of the symbol. This means it is an intertextual transference, or, more precisely, an index that opens, through the use of allegory, new horizons of writing and reading. Likewise, the opening of the narrative with a double—the two surveyors and the contingency of nomination of Ishmael, animates the work of the signifier as it incessantly moves from the identical to the different, or, in the economy of the narrative, from New York to the Pacific or from Ishmael to the Whale. And only through *différance* can the horizon of the origin begin to loom.

According to Derrida, *différance* is a conjunction of “temporization” and “spacing” (09). The conjunction between the “spacing” and “temporization” in the approach to language is interpreted by Derrida as an integral part of signification. By “spacing,” Derrida does not mean the poetics of space, of course, but rather the interval or gap that is opened in various ways between the economy of the signifier and the impossible presence. When referring to something not present, the sign is therefore, deferred presence—signification is the *différance* of temporization. However, the sign is also defined in terms of what it is not compared to the other elements of a system of differences—which is to say, signification is also the *différance* of spacing. Derrida explains this overlapping in his “Différance”:

The signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general. For the same reason, *différance*, which not a concept, is not simply a word, that is, what is generally represented as the calm, present, and self-referential unity of concept and phonic material. (11)

However, the infinite play of *différance* is “spacing”, and the becoming-time of space or the becoming-space of time is “temporization.” Such movement is a conjunction of infinite supplements in a structure without center, without present, in which the supplements refer only to themselves in spatial and temporal terms. According to this logic, the written sign—second to the spoken sign—is derived from a missing origin, an origin that keeps sliding in the text, endlessly sliding toward death. The Derridean theory of signification animates Melville’s text.

Full of Derridean signs, *Moby-Dick* undergoes the same movement of difference and *différance* by postponing the real narrative beginning—a deferral that keeps the reader’s desire to know blazing. The first chapter does not actually start the narrative; it plays with signs and looms over the reader and summons him to the world of *différance*. In the “Cetology” chapter, the narrator, after many narrative digressions, reminds and assures the reader that this is the beginning of the story: “*already we are boldly launched upon the deep*; but soon we shall be lost in its unshored, harborless immensities... at *the outset* it is but well to attend to a matter almost indispensable to a thorough appreciative understanding of the more special leviathantic

revelations and allusions of all sorts which are to follow” (137; emphasis mine). This chapter is presented as the beginning of the narrative, yet it only comes to supplement the previous chapters and thus to postpone further the beginning. This chapter is indispensable to the comprehension of storyline. It gives the illusion that there will be a beginning, but it only clarifies the system of signs that the whole narrative is dealing with. This spatial and temporal conjunction of the signs delays the unfolding of the question of the “origin” and question the possibility of understanding the nature of the Sperm Whale: “the Sperm Whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature. Far above all other hunted whales, his is an unwritten life” (139).

The presentation of the system of cetology resembles the re-presentation of the White Whale’s movement—a movement that also parallels the text’s folding and unfolding. Both corpus and corpse deny any definition and delay any final denouement. Even the epilogue, with its declaration that “the drama is over,” is only another supplement in the chain of signification. The epilogue is in fact the actual narrative prologue. This circular movement, very central to Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, structures *Moby-Dick*. This economy of circularity may be said to be narrative pedestal upon which reposes the three chapters that constitute “The Chase.” Those three chapters, the center of the narrative, are about trauma, which is of course but another version of a missed encounter. Ishmael wants to leave his cetological system open, leaving it to posterity: “God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of draught” (149). This cetological system is but a displacement of the sign system, a displacement that goes beyond the scientific or literary sign systems. This chapter explains that any taxonomic attempt to define the whale is doomed to fail. Although Moby Dick belongs to the family of Sperm Whales, it is different from them in many respects (whiteness, size,

inscrutability). We learn from this chapter that any “systematization” (139) leads to failure. Interpreting the whale becomes as difficult as hunting it down. In this chapter, Ishmael indicates that “utter confusion exists among the historians of this animal” this confusion expresses the impossibility of pursuing “our research in the unfathomable waters.” Such impossibility evokes the “impenetrable veil covering our knowledge of the cetacea” (137). The veil makes hermeneutics impossible and promotes a theory of indeterminacy. The White Whale functions as “an ‘image’ of the fictive transcendence of language in the sublime, that is, of language understood as pictographically inscribed” (Irwin 291). The marks inscribed on the whale’s face resemble the image of the hieroglyphics:

These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious cyphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connexion. By my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the famous hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi. Like those mystic rocks, too, the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable. (*Moby-Dick* 298-9)

We witness Melville’s desire to naturalize the Oriental shadow in the American landscape—really, the desire to domesticate the shadow—that lurks at the very back of Melville’s narrative. However, the shadow broadens culturally and temporally in this passage. The whale is a transcendent illegibility that defies the reader’s intention to comprehend it. It therefore “cannot be read, because it refers to nothing other than itself” (Dimock 113). Ishmael illustrates the impossibility of representing the whale. The long list of illustrations do not do the Whale justice. The text is also full of letters, signs, and hieroglyphs that need to be defined. These various signs form a symbolic system, a system in which the letter appears as a mere trace, or a symptom of an

absence. Why do we need the concept of the letter, since the sign-system itself could be understood in relation to trace and absence? Surely because there is some overarching “address” in the sign system, an “address” seeking an addressee and a destination. The inability to pin down the Leviathan lies at the borderline between the double—comprising its narcissistic rebuses, excesses, and regressions—and the aporias of language. In *Moby-Dick*, the impossibility of representation is presented as a phantasmic and phantomatic regression to a missed primal experience and a projection of this impossibility on the double. One should be properly aware of the differences and similarities between doubling and supplementarity, since although they are distinct things, they shade into each other in certain places in the narrative. The business of doubling and the double manifests in diverse ways. Thus, one can speak of Ahab and his doubles, refer to the economy of repetition, and gesture toward the doubling that occurs at the archival beginning of the text. All of these are part of the larger economy of doubling. This leads me then to the matter of the whale: I do not think the whale is ‘doubled,’ but rather, the whale is the *point de caption* around which all the economy of doubling is developed. As point de caption, the whale serves as the ‘object’ to which the doubling economy gestures or points, but of course it is itself beyond our grasp. In this sense, then, all doubling is a form of supplementarity.

The “Cetology” chapter, deconstructive as it is, puts the whole narrative quest for completeness under erasure and confirms the supplementarity of the narrative scenes. We learn that the White Whale goes beyond the discourse of science. To understand the whale’s hieroglyphics, Ishmael refers to popular sciences of the mid nineteenth century such as physiognomy and phrenology. Yet, all these analyses arrive at the inescapable indeterminacy of the whale’s head. Ishmael anasemically reverts to another discourse when he invokes Jonas.

Religion serves as a source of cetology. Here, we have a re-turn to the question of the origin. The story of Jonas functions as a supplement to Ishmael's narrative. As in Oedipus, everything starts with an oracle and a sermon. In *Moby-Dick*, we have many sermons. The oracle is that of the stranger (The Prophet Elijah) who is considered to be crazy and who (fore) tells Ishmael the events as they will happen. "The Sermon Chapter" talks about Jonah and the whale: "it is a two-stranded lesson; a lesson to us all as sinful men and a lesson to me a pilot of the living God" (57). Jonah sinned and when he realized his sin was the cause of the calamity, he asked his crew to cast him into the water—a metaphoric purging of his sins—only to be swallowed by a whale. Swallowed by the whale, Jonah regains his unity with the mother. God—the Father—"spoke unto the fish" (63). The whale "vomited out Jonah upon the dry land," a duplication of the literal giving birth. When Ahab encounters the one-armed captain we see two points of view: one is happy and the other is not.

The link between Ahab's frustration and his castration is very clear in the narrative. In both cases, everything boils down to the Lacanian *manque*—a lack that is at the heart of desire and writing. The ivory leg refers to the absent present phallus, which brings the *fort/da* game to the fore. Ahab is mutilated by the whale and his satisfaction depends on his lodging his harpoon in its belly. It is interesting to consider the matter of the prosthesis as the inadequate corrective to castration, or the very mark of lack. Just as the ivory prosthesis is the sign of the traumatic dismemberment, so too the harpoon cannot fail to be a sign of phallic aspiration. The other one-armed captain has renounced the search by saying, "didn't want to try to: ain't one limb enough? What should I do without this other arm?" The other captain tells him, "give him your left arm for bait to get the right" (419). Getting the right is getting the right to write. One captain renounces

the mother and the other keeps looking for her (i.e., the reality principle versus the incurable melancholic). The idea I want to raise here is that the story of Ahab is a duplicate of the story of Oedipus. Newton Arvin argues that *Moby-Dick* stems from Melville's undue love for his mother. He goes on to purport that the relationship between Ahab/Melville and Moby Dick/father figure is a symbolic extension of Melville's Oedipal attraction to his mother; Moby Dick's claiming of Ahab's leg can be seen as a symbolic castration of Melville by his father in order to deny Melville his mother (248). In other words, Ahab's prosthesis is also a symptom of his linguistic failure because, as Kristeva would say, he cannot recover the mother in language.

Rewriting the story of Oedipus, Ishmael signs an agreement with the whale. He does not uncover its mystery. In this sense, we have various letters in the narrative. Haunting the religious texts, the whale haunts Ishmael's narrative—a narrative that places the origin of the whale in the religious text. Ishmael says: “the unaccompanied, secluded White Whale had haunted those uncivilized seas mostly frequented by the Sperm Whale fishermen” (180). The origin that is endlessly deferred and hidden refers to a writing that can only unfold in the field of *différance*. The various references to the White Whale revolve around a major sign—a sign that escapes representation and unfolds in the field of the void. This void is supplemented by death, which is to say, the pointing to death by the whale, by the encounter, and by the rumors of other encounters. The circularity that structures the narrative is evoked by the various rumors referred to in the text. The water becomes the field of rumors par excellence “as the sea surpasses the land in this matter, so the whale fishery surpasses every other sort of maritime, in the wonderfulness and fearfulness of the rumors which sometimes circulate there” (181). These rumors take the form of invented whales and stories that compose the narrative. Cetology, however, is a system of

signs that has many referents, many of which do not even exist. As Derrida argues in *Writing and Difference*:

Everything begins with reproduction Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified is always reconstituted by deferral, *nachträglich*, belatedly, *supplementarily*: for the *nachträglich* also means supplementary. The call of the supplement is primary, here, and it hollows that which will be reconstituted by deferral as the present. (266)

The mode of reproduction—a *mise en scène*—inscribes cetology in the realm of temporality. The whale, here, is both the letter and the pen. Its breathing rhythm resembles the structure of a sentence, its movement leaves various traces on the surface of the water: “if you regard him very closely, and time him with your watch, you will find that when unmolested, there is an undeviating rhyme between the periods of his jets and the ordinary periods of respiration” (357-8). The “Cetology” chapter produces a figurative or analogic “resemblance” between two objects; the point of the analogy is an indirect one: that the periodicity of the whale’s spouting resembles the gradations of a sundial. So, the periodic temporality is thus re-imaged as a spatial mapping of that temporality: “when the sea is moderately calm, and slightly marked with spherical ripples, and this gnomon-like fin stands up and casts shadows upon the wrinkled surface, it may well be supposed that the watery circle surrounding it somewhat resembles a dial, with its style and wavy hour-lines graved on it” (142). Everything is supplemented in the narrative, even the writing itself—a writing that hides its origin and delays the beginning of events. Indeed, the White Whale is a concept, or better, motif, or better still, temporal figure that connects silently with the other

figures in the novel. It's connected to difference/*différance*, to the trace, to the letter, and to anasemia. Clearly, the association I have made between *différance* and anasemia calls for more theoretical investigation—particularly into the ways in which it is possible to articulate the cultural and political aspects of the double and the *unheimlich*.

What we have is an arche-writing—a writing that appears only symptomatically through the trace, the mark, or the hieroglyphic. As Derrida purports: “arche-writing as spacing cannot occur *as such* within the phenomenological experience of a *presence*. It marks *the dead time* within the presence of the living present, within the general form of all presence. The dead time is at work.” (*Of Grammatology* 68). If arche-writing links the letter to the realm of *Thanatos*, then what we have in *Moby-Dick* is marriage between *Thanatos* and *Eros*. Entering the economy of the supplement, *Thanatos* and *Eros* cancel and defer all the signs that come along their ways to finally face each other. Melville's use of hieroglyphics to characterize the suppression of the trauma beyond the text and the psychic life of the characters should put us on guard as the narrative is saved from forgetfulness and the savor is the dead. This reversed prosopopeia gives Ishmael the possibility of telling his story and thus protecting the chain of supplementation. The image of the hieroglyph is, of course, one of the major repeated tropes in Melville's work. In its recurrence, the hieroglyph is usually accompanied by a textual explanation and a phonetic representation.

In the linguistic sense, writing remains a dead letter, as opposed to the immediacy and liveliness of speech. The metaphysical presupposition which privileges the immediacy and liveliness of speech over the stagnation of writing is played out in *Moby-Dick*. Melville has so closely linked the “indefinite” (applying to the mist of the spout and “dissemination” (from

Derrida, referring to the obscuring and supplementary effects of writing). In “The Fountain” chapter, which describes the phenomenon of the whale’s spout, we learn that the whale lives in intervals and that “he carries a surplus stock of vitality in him, just as the camel crossing the waterless desert carries a surplus supply of drink for future use in its four supplementary stomachs” (356). The indefinite nature of the whale’s mysterious mist defines the whole nature of the narrative and the whale. In Plato’s *The Republic*, we see a clear definition of the *pharmakon*.⁶³ As Derrida argues in his *Dissemination*, “contrary to life, writing—or, if you will, the *pharmakon*—can only *displace* or even *aggravate* the ill. Such will be, in its logical outlines, the objection the king raises to writing: under pretext of supplementing memory, writing makes one even more forgetful; far from increasing knowledge, it disseminates it” (102). The indecision and inscrutability that characterize the *pharmakon* are clearly present in *Moby-Dick*: “Speak out! You have seen him spout; then declare what the spout is; can you not tell water from air? My dear sir, in this world it is not so easy to settle these plain things. And as for this whale spout, you might almost stand in it, and yet be undecided as to what it is precisely” (358). We first learn the spout could be beneficial and in this chapter the narrator tells us that “the spout is poisonous”. Irwin argues: “Melville ... link[s] the uncertainty of human verification and the indefiniteness of the veil of mist to the indeterminacy of self-reflective thought as it attempts to deal with the notion of eternity, with the survival of the self as a linguistic (that is, repetitive) entity in a condition of atemporality” (291-2). The inability to define the nature of the spout reflects the inscrutability and undecidability that structure the narrative—characteristics that shape the dialectics of the *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon* is also referred to as the perfume that conceals “the dead under the appearance of the living” (*Dissemination* 142). We see that the *pharmakon*, like *Moby-Dick*, is

structured around ambivalence, undecidability, and supplementarity. “While composing a little treatise on Eternity, [Ishmael] had the curiosity to place a mirror before [him]; and ere long saw reflected there, a curious involved worming and undulation in the atmosphere over [his] head. The invariable moisture of [his] hair, while plunged in deep thought, after six cups of hot tea in [his] thin shingled attic, of an August noon; this seems an additional argument for the above supposition” (359). The supposition is that the sprout is just mist, but this supposition is supplemented by other suppositions.

The reference to the perfume is evoked many times in the narrative: “but owing to the mystery of the spout—whether it be water or whether it be vapor—no absolute certainty can as yet be arrived at on his head. Sure it is, nevertheless, that the Sperm Whale has no proper olfactories. But what does he want of them? No roses, no violets, no Cologne-water in the sea” (357). Later on, the perfume will be mixed up with bad smells, fulfilling the *pharmakon*’s dialectics: “suddenly from out the very heart of this plague, there stole a faint stream of perfume, which flowed through the tide of bad smells *without being absorbed by it*, as one river will *flow into* and then *along* with another, *without at all blending with it for a time*” (390; emphasis mine). This is exactly the economy of the supplement. The narrator tells us that the essence of ambergris is “found in the inglorious bowels of a sick whale” (391), reminding us of the inherent duality in the *pharmakon* and in the narrative itself. There is, one would assert, a confrontation between Eros and Thanatos: where there is death, there is life, and vice versa. Like the *pharmakon*, like the perfume, like the whale, like writing itself, amber’s essence and origin remain “a problem to the learned” (391). Here, ambergris shares the same characteristics of the *pharmakon*—ambivalence, supplementarity, absence of origin, and duality. In fact, it activates

the dialectics of poison and remedy, absence and presence—doubles that supplement one another without ever fusing. Ambergris is also related to death. This relates writing to death. In seeing ambergris as a precious commodity generated by disease and putrefaction, one can argue that writing is but the double of death—a repetition of death. The *pharmakon* evokes also painting and representation. Painting and writing are in fact two techniques of mimesis and both of them are invested in the theory of the double. Painting, like writing and any other form of representation, is the representation of the living. We have learnt that any attempt to represent the White Whale is doomed to fail. Even Ishmael’s attempt to paint the monster with words fails at the end.

These mimetic techniques, according to the Platonic paradigmatic mode, are unambiguously dissociated from reality. Writing is at many removes from reality because, cryptomimetically inhabited by ghosts and residues, it does not offer any genuine image of speech; rather, it creates a different reality. These mimetic techniques are but shadows that mask death by the giving it the appearance of the living. When the Pequod meets the Rose-Bud in chapter 91, we see the *pharmakon* at work. The name given to the ship “Bouton-de-Roses”—“romantic name of this romantic ship”—is very ironic and does not reflect the bad smells that come from it. The Rose-Bud’s “upper part ... was carved in the likeness of a huge drooping stalk, was painted green, and for thorns had copper spikes projecting from it here and there; the whole terminating in a symmetrical folded bulb of a bright red color” (386). Like the representation of the White Whale, the representation of the rose is doomed to fail. Stubb “cried with his hand to his nose, ‘that will do very well; but how like all creation it smells!’”(386) Here the name does not match the smell of the cadaver. Again, the *pharmakon* effect saturates the

narrative. The rose becomes the index of death and the whale becomes the index of ambergris. We have an imitation of the real rose, an imitation that can never render the original justice because by nature it is unauthentic and secondary.⁶⁴

The supplementarity of language and the impossibility of representation refer to an absent origin—a father in whose shadow lives all the supplements. Demonstrating the difficulty of comprehending the nature of the whale and the disappearance of its head, Ishmael admits his failure to give an explanation,

dissect him how I may, then, I *but go skin deep*; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the *tail* of this whale, how understand his *head*? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, *but my face shall not be seen*. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his *face*, I say again he has *no face*. (363; emphasis mine)

Hypothetically, to face the whale would be to face the father's face and to face one's own face. The inability to face the father's face is, in fact, writing's impossibility of finding its origin. The point I want to raise here is that there is a missed encounter with this origin or reference—be it national, literary, or even theoretical. Writing is here suspended between absence and presence, between the supplement and the text. However, the supplementary representation, Derrida argues, “approaches the origin as it distances itself from it. Total alienation is the total reappropriation of self presence” (295). Yet, as Derrida states, the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace and thus gives the illusion that it approaches the origin, when it only displaces it. It is adjunct and its place is not assigned as a presence; rather, it *takes the place* of an empty mark in the structure. To talk about the origin—the *Thing*—through the sign theory, is to accept the argument that the

sign is the supplement that supplements the *Thing* and can never face it. The supplement, therefore, is *exterior* to the presence of the origin that it supplements. It should not be confounded with the complement because it does not complement the *Thing*; it contemplates it by supplementing it and eventually displacing it.

Read in light of the Derridean deconstructive model, Melville's writing can be said to possess a supplementary truth and dispossess the narrator and the reader alike from attaining any destination. Saying the letter does not arrive at its destination is to place it in the *abyme* of presentation and representation. The infinite supplementarity that governs the narrative inscribes presence in the field of the double and repetition and yields a representation *en abyme de* presence. In *Moby-Dick*, we witness also the disappearance of the origin in the abyss of supplementarity, the end of logocentrism, and the birth of multiperspectivism—a characteristic of modernity. The theory of the double emphasizes the modern nature of the narrative. We have many stories, many narrators, many points of view, and many authors. Such heterogeneity inscribes Melville's narrative in the realm of modernity.

Following Derrida's logic in *Of Grammatology*, one can talk about literature as a *supplément* which "means both a *substitute* and an *addition*" (Garber 14). By this logic, literature is a supplement to another previous text or entity, a quest for a harmonious stable subjectivity, a substitution for the absence of the body, and a remedy to that absence. A form of cultural production in the West, literature hides its status as a supplement. Literature can only unfold in the field of the supplement because it is insufficient. Like Freud who argues in "the Uncanny" that "[t]his invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of a

genital symbol” (235), literature, another ghostly narrative, comes as a manifestation of the fear of loss and extinction. To save the dead from forgetfulness and loss, the double, an image of proliferation and multiplicity, covers over the fear of death and is opened up to catachrestic manipulation. Likewise, Melville’s *Thing* remains outside the narrative. This reminds us of that certain something which can never be present to the scene of analysis if analysis is to keep its devotion to the “*tuché*”, to the impossible or missed encounter with the Real. Thus, it would seem, in order for the reader to offer a genuine analysis of Melville’s life, he must recognize the significance of certain limits, he must hold back something from the experience. That is, the reader is suspended in a desiring, quite often regressive, relation to the real/Real (i.e., the ways in which the sheer materiality and embodiment of the traumatic wound intersects with, but does not wholly account for, the Lacanian Real) while the scene of disclosure remains concealed as another scene. Read as an (auto)biography, *Moby-Dick* stages Melville’s various encounters with other literary figures, most immediately Hawthorne, and keeps these encounters concealed in order to structure the entire action of the biography and as an impossible event. Melville’s recognition of an impossible gratification in his relationship with Hawthorne, his literary double, exposes the structure of the missed encounter. It is interesting, if ultimately impossible, to hypothesize what that gratification might entail. Surely, it is in part a matter of filial duty: in the cycle of repetition and re-inscriptions, Melville wants to be the destinee of Hawthorne’s letter, to read it, and to send it along to the reader. He wants to read and to write in seamless continuity. It is precisely this relation to the missed encounter that both (auto)biography and psychoanalysis expose as the traumatic origin of subjectivity. By performing the impossibility of a total knowledge of the origin through a narrative matrix that conceals recognition of the impossible

psychoanalytic regressions to the womb, and by desiring an exchange of letters, Melville's protagonist treads the road that leads to the tomb. This (auto)biography in which Ishmael—or call him Melville—exposes the malleable contours of psychoanalytic regression, allows the anxiety of the *re*-turn to the womb, the fear/desire of death, and the (missed) encounter with the Real to fuse. Such fusion of trauma and its temporality does little to account for Melville's choices. Structured through a failed reading of the inscrutable *Thing*, unable to step outside the repetitive structure of this impossible encounter, Melville's narrative can never free itself from the confines of the double.

This catachresis forces the reader to go beyond the “mimetic” reading to “poetic” reading of *Moby-Dick* and of Melville's work in general. This reading refers to Barthes' statement that “writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (142). Melville anticipated Harold Bloom's theory of the psychology of “misreading.” According to Bloom, the history of Western poetry has been a “history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism” (30). Poets and critics “misread” their own precursors to confirm their originality. Because traumatic experience, as a primal experience—and experience *writ large*—is tied to a process of representation, to language, it is indispensable to come to an understanding of the role that the material signifier plays in trauma. Because traumatic experience is grounded in the repetition of impossibility, it is indelibly tied to the Real beyond the signifier. In this sense, trauma opens up an ethical space beyond the symbolic which is, nevertheless, intimately tied to the materiality of the signifier and, therefore, to our social and linguistic destiny. Thus, Melville's perverse scenarios may restage the primal scene with the aim of eliminating the father and

recovering a romanticized idealized relation with the mother. Thus, the biographical Symbolic collapses at and unfolds in the traumatic Real.

But there is another, hidden sense in which the Real illustrates the homosociality, not to say the homoerotics of Melville's relation with Hawthorne, under the aegis of filial duty and patrilineage, under the influence of the Hawthorne letter. This illustration may in some way account for Melville's attempt to recover the idealized relation with the mother. Keeping in mind the fact that Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* immediately upon the death of his mother; what the letter transmits has everything to do with the melancholic attachment to the mother. Hawthorne in a sense misread the letter from Surveyor Pue: he thought it was about filial duty, preserving the patriarchal project of regulating women, but in another sense, he read it exactly right, hence his great ambivalence toward Hester Prynne, and toward the female body. Melville, too, both misreads and (unconsciously) reads the letter: the narrative thinks it is 'about' men on ships, but it is ultimately 'about' (in the sense of circling 'about' or around) the absent mother.

Marked by the traces of the double and the missed encounter with the original/primal experience, Melville's narrative brings various discourses into dialogue with the impossibility of representation, which is at the center of trauma theory. Trying to go beyond the limits of the double, trying to assimilate the original experience, the events and characters in Melville's narrative double and become doubled by, envelop and become enveloped by an uncanny missed encounter and an unassimilable lost event. Seeking the lost object of desire and lost past, Melville's narrative, suspended between the loss of origins and the supplementarity or complementarity of signifiers, yearns for a wholeness, or what Fredric Jameson calls "the melancholy of disbelief, the nostalgia of the nineteenth century intellectual for the 'wholeness' of

faith that is no longer there” (*The Political Unconscious* 252); as such, it parallels the characters’ yearning for psychological unity. As Melville’s characters’ responses to the figure of the double are inscribed in the malleable space of the missed encounter, each reacts differently to the effects/affects of this figure. The impossible return to the primal scene—to the womb—becomes so unbelievably unbearable that a phantasized double or a crypt is created to lodge the lost object of desire. In fact, the loss of origins and objects of desire threatens to turn cryptic and phantasmic objects into duplicate representations.

Originating from substantial doubles and imaginary phantasms, the obligation of the encounter, both as a possible and a missed encounter, makes possible the circulation of libidinal drives, and attempts to look back in desire and to recover the dusty residues of history. Ghostly as they are, these dusty residues are, however, invested in the play of signs, in the supplementarity of language. Enfolding and enfolded by necromancy or necrophilia, the double, a manifestation of both a missed and a successful encounter, tries to situate itself outside and its contexts. However, the various interruptions, suspensions, aporias, *mises en abyme*, supplements, and exchanges haunt these intermittent encounters with phantomatic regressions. Lodged between the economics of the impossible encounter and the necromantic regression to an originary experience, the double remains in an ambivalent position and must redouble all interrupting experiences to claim his role in the Symbolic.

Demonstrating a regressive and identificatory libidinal desire for the lost maternal object of desire and expressing a transcendental desire for unity with the lost Father, the double expresses itself as a violence done to the human desire for unity and exposes the paradox of the Oedipus complex. As a symptom of a prohibited libidinal attachment to the mother, as a

manifestation of everything that is lost, the figure of double paves the ground for the possibility of disruption. It requires no further argument to stress the fact that the double, benefiting from the ability to hide in language—in any system, it anasemically traces the tacit and hidden origins of a society—can be mistaken for the trace. In other words, it recovers and uncovers in its anasemic identifications with the silenced, invisible, and latent content and context of a society. Abraham and Torok's anasemic analysis which, as I have explained in the first chapter, studies the encryption and the representation of a traumatic event, allows them to account for a person's traumatic experience as made up of recurrent symbols (crypts), which are in reality symptoms of the *Thing*.

Via the various psychoanalytic theories, it has been possible to theorize the double as a manifestation of the duality that governs the subject's formation (from the paradox at the center of the Oedipus complex to the multiplicity of egos). The double might be said to index the subject's desire for the Imaginary. If the Symbolic, following Lacan, is the linguistic system that is rigid, the Imaginary signals a slide toward the other/Other. The Imaginary, the space of the production of the ego-ideal, the hypothetical plenitude of the subject, is teeming with subjects that are not yet produced within a social frame. In this regard, the double offers an account for ego formation and deprecates all the rigid orders—be they social, political, psychological, or even literary. The point I want to raise is that the double, suspended between regression and transcendence, reveals nineteenth-century American literature's desire for something different, *something* other. The paradox that is at the core of this desire can only be represented and experienced through the work of the (missed) encounter and/or the figurative devouring and abjection of the other/Other.

Following these (con)figurations of the (missed) encounter, one might conclude that trauma focuses on the ways in which the rhetorical and formal *mise en scène* of witnessing hinders any direct access to the archive of history, troubling an unquestioned concept of history and historicity that characterizes any national literary tradition. Throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, trauma studies centered on the historical traumas of Europe. Neglected still today is a thorough investigation of spectral, traumatic events—most of the missed events—that trouble witnessing outside of the master narrative. Bringing post-colonial studies into dialogue with trauma studies allows one to investigate trauma through analepsis and anasemia and to expand the scope of the missed encounter.

Chapter 3

Historicizing the Missed Encounter: America and its Excesses/*manques*

As for the emperor himself, he saw the Orient only as it had been encoded first by classical texts and then by Orientalist experts, whose vision, based on classical texts, seemed a useful substitute for any actual encounter with the Real Orient. (Said, *Orientalism* 80)

It is the excess in the Idea which explains the lack in the concept. (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 220)

Many critics have worked on the Americanness and greatness of American literature. Ideological critiques of nineteenth-century American literature have focused on the American context, on the struggle for democracy in America. An example is David S. Reynolds' *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* which is an excellent contextualization and ideological critique of this historical canon. However, very little has been said about the "non-American" subtexts of American classic literature. Early discussions of classic American literature, influenced by F.O. Matthiessen and Newton Arvin, tended to focus primarily on thematic interpretations of the American literary canon and to neglect the interdisciplinary nature of nineteenth-century American literature. More recently, critics like Herschel Parker, Andrew Delbanco, Sharon Cameron, and Robert K. Martin sought to uncover certain historical and gender realities in the nineteenth-century American literary archive. My dissatisfaction with the limits of the thematic study of literature led me to probe further into the connection between American literature and other cultures, between the Occident and the Orient, between the literary and the non-literary. John T. Irwin's *American*

Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance, a deconstruction *avant la lettre*, serves as a bridge between the anxieties of “symbolization” and the dynamics of Orientalism. Although Luther S. Luedtke’s *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient* offers an analysis of Hawthorne’s involvement in the symbology of the Orient, it does not account for the suspension of meaning between failed symbol and obscure allegory and does not offer a satisfying analysis of the various stains and symptoms that determine classic American literature. It is within this context of debate that this chapter will reconsider certain assumptions about the plethora of missed encounters in Hawthorne’s and Melville’s texts. My argument is that fiction, much like any other discourse, is, clearly, overcharged with theory and in charge of the representing the missed encounter, while assuming an inscrutable charge of effect/affect. The shift from the modern to the postmodern, from the literary to the non-literary, and from the local to the global, from reality to the Real, and so on is always already shaped by the economy of the missed encounter.

Many Western and Eastern critics consider the union of the East and the West impossible and speak about the encounter as an antagonistic one. Using Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic models, the object of my analysis is not to study the sites of the presence of America in the literary and cultural imagination of Europe (which has been the focus of many studies and critics). However, the focus of one major part of this chapter is the missed encounter between the Orient and the Occident, and particularly America and the various directions and forms this missed encounter takes and entails. In order to define itself, America had to construct and eventually destruct its Other(s). In other words, to emerge as a modern nation state, America had to have Others. Said’s *Orientalism* lays bare these binary constructions. He sees Orientalism

“as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). As argued by Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm, Orientalism produces another reversed Orientalism, an “Orientalism in reverse”:

I would like to point out that the analyses, beliefs and ideas produced by the Islamanic trend in defense of its central thesis simply reproduce the whole discredited apparatus of classical Orientalist doctrine concerning the difference between East and West, Islam and Europe. This reiteration occurs at both the ontological and epistemological levels, only reversed to favour Islam and the East in its implicit and explicit value judgements (234).

This means that America has increasingly become the object of the Orient’s imagination. In fact, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture” (*Orientalism* 1-2). This materiality of the encounter is crucial to understanding the encounter between the West and the East. Staging the missed encounter between America and its Other(s), this chapter studies the Orient as a symptom among the various symptoms that hover over the Real of America. This is why psychoanalysis and deconstruction are relevant to the study of the New World Order and the current changes in its geopolitical scenes—or rather its *mises en scène*. If we pursue the questions that have been opened up by the missed encounter, then the very value of the encounter, the very contours of the encounter, can perhaps no longer be determined because it is self-sufficient and at the same time contingent on other *Things*.

Freud’s analytic cure—which is a discursive space in which two people have a dialogue—is complemented by Lacan, who sees psychoanalysis as a comprehensively linguistic event. Influenced by the work of Freud and Lacan, modernist and postmodernist theorists have

revisited certain psychoanalytic concepts and have tried to fill in the gaps left by psychoanalysis, by either studying the cultural and political aspects of the missed encounter or by bringing Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis into dialogue with other theories, such as Marxism, deconstruction, cultural materialism, and Orientalism. In this chapter I offer a study of the missed encounter in which the positions of Žižek, Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard, Jameson, Derrida, and Said join forces to complement the Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic approaches to the missed encounter. This approach is intended to salvage the gaps left by the psychoanalytic model. If the psychoanalytic model (Freudian and Lacanian) has destabilized the Cartesian *cogito* from its deceptive realm, it has constructed another kind of duality in which the Symbolic (language) is given primacy over the body which is ostracized and left in the Real. The main result of the relegation of the body to the impossible Real is the creation of another gap, this time not between mind and matter, but rather between being and meaning. In the Lacanian structural psychoanalytic model, the entry into the Symbolic (language) is equated with a loss of being—a loss around which the drive relentlessly revolves, creating a painful pleasure (*jouissance*). The gap created by the entry into language is irredeemable and is necessary for the construction of subjectivity. This is why Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis is very important if we want to expand the scope of the missed encounter. Their alternative schizoanalysis does not see the subject as split and does not relegate the body to the impossible Real; rather, it considers the subject and the object as interacting and exchanging positions and sees the body as a series of organs or flows that constitute active agents. At another level, desire, unlike in the Lacanian model where it is considered as emerging from a lack, is replaced with a theory of positive becoming. As a result, the bulk of my investigation will revolve around the Freudian-Lacanian

psychoanalytic (linguistic) model and the (extra-linguistic) models of Žižek and Deleuze and Guattari.

Is not the New World Order structured like the Lacanian three orders⁶⁵? Are not Orientalism and Orientalism in reverse other versions of the Lacanian mirror stage and the Derridean *différance*? Is not the argument that the Orient is the excess or the *objet a*⁶⁶ of America a reflection of America's *manque*? Is not this fantasy of fixing the Real invested in the spiral movement of *différance*? To understand these questions is to understand the career of the missed encounter. In other words, understanding the narrative and temporal poetics of the missed encounter gains us an entry into the theater of the Real where the politics of the missed encounter between America and the Orient is staged.

I wish to stress here that the missed encounter is built upon a certain gap or aporia in the symbolic exchange between America and the Orient. Another point this chapter argues is that the Lacanian *manque* (lack) that lies in the abyss of the Real ought to be understood as a missed encounter. This *manque*, Žižek argues following Lacan, defines subjectivity and the Real. What interests me in this dissertation is to shed light on this *manque*—the “unassimilable” excess, *restes*, supplements, and symptoms in all the systems I have studied thus far. This chapter brings the missed encounter to the abyss of the Real of our modern reality. It does not in any way attempt to arrive at a Hegelian totalizing synthesis. Rather, its main *jouissance* is to lay bare the vicissitudes of the missed encounter and broaden its repertoire. Studying the achievements, the limits, and the challenges of the missed encounter, this chapter focuses on the aporias, the excesses, and the residues that structure the missed encounter.

With psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and postmodernism as my theoretical framework, I want to explore the extension of the missed encounter beyond (*au-delà*) the Real, beyond the unconscious, beyond the archive, beyond Orientalism—which is to say, beyond representation and language. This does not mean that historicizing⁶⁷ the missed encounter relegates it to the domain of the impossible. The question I am tempted to pose is: How can the missed encounter be seen as anything but missed and unassimilable when we know that it is primarily linguistic? Hawthorne's investment in the transhistorical project of Puritan America; Melville's play with duplication, letters, and supplements; and Said's analysis of the encounter between the Orient and the Occident seem to allude to the terms of the paradox that lies in the missed encounter. They do so in a way akin to the career of the missed encounter as it traverses the abyss of the Real. Read as signifiers, these different approaches to the missed encounter turn out to be representations of impossibility—failure to pin down the essence of the missed encounter.

The turn from the missed encounter in cultural terms of the East and West to trauma theory would illuminate the obsession with the Real and with the Symbolic. To argue in favor of contemporary trauma theory⁶⁸ and its emphasis on the excesses of the Real of trauma does not mean that the Freudian psychoanalytic approach to trauma, a theory that is concerned with the construction of trauma in the Symbolic (i.e., language), is obsolete. For Freud, trauma is mainly characterized by belatedness (*nachträglichkeit*). Trauma, because of its sudden eruption and its detrimental effects, manifests itself temporally in the compulsive and repetitive return of the event (and segments of the event) in the symptom, in dreams or in partial consciousness. In fact, Freud's talking cure could be clarified by Lacan's concepts of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary. The entry into the Symbolic, Lacan tells us, creates a perpetual lack and an ongoing yearning for

the impossible pre-linguistic Real: a desire for a recovery in which both senses of the word may be said to coincide. Such desire for the Real is activated by the omnipresence of *objet a*. Situating trauma in the Real, Lacan defines the human experience of a traumatic event as a missed encounter with the Real. As I explained in the first chapter of this dissertation, the automaton is linked to the spontaneity and regularity of the Symbolic; *tuché* is associated with the domain of hazard and the Real.

The entry into the Symbolic Order creates a perpetual lack, a viral return to/of the Real, which Lacan calls *objet a*. Lacan's theory emphasizes the impossibility of having complete access to this impossible state. This, however, does not mean that trauma is beyond representation. In other words, trauma exists only in its symbolic construction: "It is the world of words that creates the world of things—things which at first run together in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of becoming—by giving its concrete being to their essence, and its ubiquity to what has always been" (Lacan, *Écrits* 229). This is reminiscent of Freud's dream analysis which offers free access to the unconscious.⁶⁹ The failure of the inscription registers trauma in the domain of the Symbolic. This means that the Real of trauma is intrinsically Symbolic. This is the common ground between Lacan and Freud. It is only through language that there can be a Real. Freud refutes the argument that trauma is inherently beyond representation and argues in favour of a theory of working-through trauma. Raising the threshold of Freud's concepts of working-through, dream-work and Lacan's concepts of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary to literature and culture, one can argue that these practices not only reflect reality but also, and more importantly, produce it.

Reading Žižek reading Lacan, I investigate the ways in which language, predicated as it is on the ruling out of the Real, is subject to recurrent ruptures by the return of/to the Real and compulsive irruptions of the *Thing*. Inspired by Lacan and Derrida, I want to explore how any binarist study of the (missed) encounter between the “I” and the “Other”, or between the Occident and the Orient, as Said formulates it in his *Orientalism*, is doomed to fail when it does not take into consideration the lack and the aporia that harbor and in which is harbored the Real. Touching upon various disciplines and theories, the first part of this chapter brings Said’s *Orientalism* into dialogue with nineteenth-century American literature. Bringing Said into dialogue with Melville and Hawthorne, we can see a fear of and a fascination with the Other (Orient). This is why Lacan is crucial to the understanding of the encounter between the Occident and the Orient. The Orient, I want to argue, becomes the Real of America—the Imaginary and Symbolic space at the doors of which the American master signifiers (democracy, progress, liberty, and so on) collapse. In *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, we witness an experience, through various tropes, of the American Puritan Real—a Real that is invested in transhistorical violence. This transhistorical violence is sustained in the national Symbolic of America. Likewise, *Moby-Dick* attempts, but eventually fails, to represent the psychological and political of America. Here the Lacanian theory is tremendously helpful in understanding the construction of subjectivity and the temporality of the missed encounter. The relays of the scarlet letter in Hawthorne’s narrative, the various *mises en scène* of duplication and the effects/affects they produce in *Moby-Dick*, and the discourse of binarism in Said’s *Orientalism* explain a certain quandary in these narratives.

What the Other promises in both Hawthorne and Melville is a *jouissance*—a *jouissance* that is essential to the development of the ‘I.’ Here *jouissance* is generated not only by the

phantasmic (mis)representation of the Other but also by the phantomatic residual repetition of the past. To recover these *restes* and to guarantee the survival of the master signifier, a detour through the Other is essential. The point I want to raise is that a Lacanian *manque* and a Derridean *différance* are played out in the narratives of Hawthorne, Melville, and Said. In fact, there is a missed encounter between language and the subject, a missed encounter that lodges at the same time a fear of the Other and a promise of *jouissance*.

The second part of this chapter studies the shuttling between the materiality of the body and the Real of the body. Both *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* deal with the issue of communicating trauma: on Hester's chest, with Surveyor Pue's remains, on the scaffold, Ahab's ivory leg, Queequeg's tattoos, Ishmael's text, on the Pequod, and between the lines of both narratives. We see that the characters have difficulty expressing their traumas in the Symbolic. In both narratives, there is only a corporeal materialization of trauma. Preoccupied with trauma and the difficulty of representing it, both narratives function at the level of the Symbolic and deal with the various symptoms of trauma and its corporeal manifestations. They explore the difficulties of representing trauma and the limitations of language within the Symbolic and the desire for a pre-linguistic state (this constitutes only part of the novels' function as trauma narratives). To understand the functioning of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* as trauma narratives, we should study the excesses and residues that structure both narratives. Therein lies the libidinal strategy of the characters who function as the instrument of the Other's *jouissance*. As Žižek asks, "Do we not find enjoyment precisely in fantasizing about the Other's enjoyment, in this ambivalent attitude toward it? Do we not obtain satisfaction by means of the very supposition that the Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to us?" (*Tarrying with the Negative* 206). It is my contention that the

Real of the body characterizes the fiction of the authors I study, insofar as changing images of the body incessantly erupt through its pages to interrupt its narratological development and to thwart the reader's *jouissance* in traumatic ways.

Desire has occupied a central place in poststructuralist thinking. Among those whose thinking revolves around desire as a founding element in the economy of criticism are Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida. Desire in poststructuralist thinking occupies a place similar to the Derridean *différance* or the Lacanian *manque* or the Freudian drive. Desire manifests itself as a disrupting power that manifests itself via the text and beyond it. Going beyond the text, through the detour of the subject, it changes the world and creates different effects/affects.

Taking up Žižek's reading of Lacan's psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari's reaction to psychoanalysis, and other postmodern theorists' conceptions of reality as simulacra and corporeality, the second and third sections attempt to shed light on the incessant circulation around the unknown dark zone—the Real of the body. What interests me is postmodernism's obsession with “the foreign body within the social texture,” or “the unfathomable element” that undermines our assessment of reality. The focus of this chapter, and the overarching argument of the dissertation, is on the extension of the missed encounter to the vicissitudes of the cultural Other, the paradoxes inherent in the encounter, and the double bind of “to enjoy or not to enjoy the symptom.”

Let us Raise the Threshold of the Missed Encounter: Orientalism as a Missed Encounter

The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty. (Said, *Orientalism* 59)

Read in light of Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, American classic narratives work as a sequel to and a manifestation of the strong presence of "American Holy Land literature" in the nineteenth-century literary scene. For example, Melville's preoccupation with the Orient and its sacred geography allows for the construction of national values in which transcendental concepts of liberty, expansionism, and democracy overlap with colonial settlement. Studying America's obsession with the past and the bible as an archive of origins, Obenzinger, continuing Said's argument, points out:

While the persistent preoccupation with the Bible and biblical geography stood at the ideological core of American colonial expansion, actual travel to Palestine allowed Americans to contemplate biblical narratives at their source in order to *reimagine*—and even to *re-enact*—religio-national myths, allowing them, ultimately, to *displace the biblical Holy Land with the American New Jerusalem*. (5; emphasis mine)

"The American New Jerusalem" is a construction that dates back to Puritan colonial era. This quest of American Holy Land literature to restore the Holy Land, Obenzinger explains, is tainted with the desire for settler-colonialism and imperial expansionism. This argument further complicates the dynamics of colonialism and imperialism within American discourse of

nationalism and identity. I want to consider this desire for “more” as part of the dialectics of excess. Such expansionism and desire for more necessitate an encounter with other cultures.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha acutely points out:

the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as *original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference*. It is a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis, or as the “other scene” of *Enstellung*, displacement, fantasy, psychic defense, and an open textuality. (107-8; original italics)

This oscillation between ambivalence and difference is what characterizes the colonial and imperial architecture. Following Bhabha’s logic, *Moby-Dick*, for example, undergoes “an *Entstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, repetition” (105). Undergoing this change, Melville’s narrative becomes as ambivalent as the colonial project itself. In a sense, Melville’s narrative personas are always ambivalent. Contextualizing the missed encounter in the deconstructive postcolonial theory, I shall demonstrate how power and fantasy function to shape the failed encounters between the East and the West.

Jacksonian ideals equate America’s future with its geographical expansionism. “For to be ‘manifest,’” Dimock writes, “America’s future must become ‘destiny’—which is to say, it must be *mapped* on a special axis, turned into providential design” (15; emphasis mine). This emphasis on space characterized both the expansionist discourse of Jacksonian America and the literary productions of the time. To shift from time to space, *antebellum* America wanted to extend its expansionism with no regard to time. Quite different from the other Western Empires, expansionist America appeared, in nineteenth-century literary productions, as a *timeless* Empire.

This subjection or rather elimination of time legitimated *antebellum* America's discourses of expansionism. To degrade time is to postpone the disintegration of Empire, "for temporal decline remained an imperial fate, the subordination would put off that fate indefinitely. Expanding not only continentally but eventually to include the entire hemisphere, America would dispense space as a sort of temporal currency, buying its tenure in time with its expansion in space" (Dimock 15). This extension in space, however, reflects America's anxiety about decline—the eventual fate of all Empires. The narrative of progress had to deal with the natives who were considered as a threat to the prosperity of the nation. However, "at the frontier [the American Empire] falls off. Going from one hemisphere to another, what does it become? Nothing" (Diderot 177). To assure the survival of Empire abroad and harmony at home, *antebellum* America offered the narrative of progress as "a narrative that admitted no warring polarity, only orderly succession" (Dimock 18). Considered as "barbarous" people, the Indians had to be civilized and made to submit to the rules of the narrative of progress. *Moby-Dick*, a narrative of progress, evokes a rather different way of taming the shrewd. Death or extinction of the first nations is what *Moby-Dick* illustrates. In fact, the Pequod, Ishmael tells us, is but "the name of a tribe of Massachusetts Indians, now extinct as the ancient Medes" (82).

Melville's complexity and ambiguity lie in his affinity with many competing discourses: Orientalism, imperialism, and post-colonialism. As Edward Said has shown in *Orientalism*, "the generalization about 'the Orient' drew its power from the presumed representativeness of everything Oriental; each particle of the Orient told of its Orientalness, so much so that the attribute of being Oriental overrode any countervailing instance. An Oriental man was first an Oriental and only second a man" (231). According to Melville, America's corruption is not part

of what Knapp calls the “evolutionary perfectibility” (12). He does not see America’s problems as a step in the Hegelian dialectical triadism. Much like Althusser, Melville posits that production of knowledge develops by breaks with and critiques of previous ideological thoughts. In this logic, *Moby Dick* is a critique of race in America and American imperialism. At this point, it behooves us to mention that Melville’s other narratives such as *Typee* and *Clarel* are but another harsh critique of European colonialism and an evaluation of the American ideals.

To further investigate the issue of colonialism as a form of a missed encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, I find it particularly useful to refer to Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* in which he argues that when the colonized avoids the colonizer’s gaze, he discards “the narcissistic demand that [he] should be addressed directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines” (98). Bhabha’s passage is indeed an exemplification of the exchange of gazes in Melville’s narrative. In *Moby-Dick*, for example, Ishmael deconstructs the binarist discourse that considers all non-white people as savages and the Westerners as civilized: “what is called savagery. Your true whale hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage, owing to allegiance but to the king of the cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him” (267). In the second chapter of this dissertation, I lingered on the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. I want to briefly allude to that relationship and show how Ishmael and Queequeg become intimate friends, and engaged in a marriage-like relationship: “I found Queequeg’s arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife....For though I tried to move his arm—unlock his bridegroom clasp—yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly as though naught but death should part us twain” (43-5). Many critics link the effeminization to the whole

project of Orientalism, which is, as Joseph Boone argues, “an occidental mode of male perception, appropriation and control” (90). Melville’s discourse promotes ideologies of inferiority and effeminacy of Orientals. In fact, *Moby-Dick* and *Typee* portray a typical Orientalist fantasy that depicts and deploys the American ideology of imperial expansion and erotic adventures on the Polynesian islands. However, as I mentioned before, Melville has affinities with various competing discourses. This sexual poetics or what Robert K. Martin calls “masturbatory poetics” which is “transformed from the personal encounter with Queequeg to the anonymous encounter with all men, cannot be realized on board the Pequod, captained as it is by Ahab, the representative of Western man’s Faustian drive for power” (83). This drive for power, then, is never merely sexual; it is also political, cultural, and philosophical.

As Said argues in *Orientalism*, the Orient provides the Western traveler with sensuality and “freedom of licentious sex” (190). In this sense, “the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe” (190). What is unobtainable in the West is the accessibility of homosexual eroticism. Said posits that “Orientalism itself, furthermore, was an exclusively male province; like so many professional guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself as and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially in the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy (207). Assigning feminine attributes, Melville, as Said argues, participates in the Orientalist project that emphasizes the difference of the Other. This mutual exchange of erotic desire destabilizes the ideology of Western male encounters because in nineteenth-century America, a heathen was to be Christianized, tamed, and excluded—not fantasized about. The Ishmael-Queequeg encounter is

perhaps reflective of Melville's erotic fantasy about the recessive Hawthorne, which echoes the colonial fantasy that incorporates and consumes the Other.

The assimilation of the Others is part of what Fernando Ortiz calls "acculturation" by which these Others acquire a new culture. Ortiz argues that

the word transculturation expresses better the different phases of the transient process from a culture to another one, because it does not only consist of acquiring a different culture, [that is the acculturation], but also implies necessarily the loss of a preceding culture, which could be said of a partial deculturation, and, in addition, it means the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena that could be denominated neoculturation. (103)

Ortiz's term and what Homi Bhabha calls "hybridity" reflect a rejection of the colonialist dichotomous discourse. Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture* that, "the representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities" (2). Hybridity is produced in the liminal space between national communities. By this logic, the question of identity is closely linked to representation and cannot go outside the paradigm of language. *Moby-Dick*, however, is an elaboration of Bakhtin's concept of novelistic hybridity which allows for a contestatory setting of cultural differences.

Said's *Orientalism* studies the logocentric basis of the Occident's hierarchical and binarized (mis)representation of the Orient. My aim, however, is not to validate Said's theory, nor to critique it. Staging the missed encounter as the impossible assimilation of the Real, extending it to include the missed encounter between the East and the West, I shall demonstrate in the

following paragraphs how the gaps, left by the incessant irruption of the Real, are in fact symptomatic of Said's assimilation of the post-structuralist binarist tropics. Here I am referring to residues of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Nietzsche, Lacan, and many others. The question of the Other, which is at the center of western metaphysics, is elaborated in Said's *Orientalism*. These binaries, as Said has elaborated in his book, have determined the Occident's representation of itself in relation to the Orient. I want to argue against William V. Spanos's claim that the fourth phase of Said's analysis of the genealogy of Orientalism, "in which America replaces Europe as the arbiter of knowledge concerning global space, ... is informed by two apparently conflicting initiatives, one, as noted, intent on characterizing the completion of the Orientalist project and the other pointing to a crisis that threatens its hegemony, that is that *symptomatically intuits its self-destruction and the collapse of the Orientalist edifice*" (105; emphasis mine).

Said's analysis of the history of the missed encounter between the Occident and the Orient, although not comprehensive, and it cannot be comprehensive, is informed by his reading of postmodern theorists. Inspired by Lacan and Foucault, Said extends the domain of the missed encounter. He sees the encounter as one between a hegemonic power and an imaginary knowledge. This encounter is explained at length by Foucault, whose archaeological⁷⁰ method digs for what is beyond (*au-delà*) the archive. This *au-delà*, Freud has taught us, allows us to see the conflicting drives inherent in human subjectivity and in any phenomenon. Studying the libidinal investiture of the relationship between the Arabs and the Jews, Said argues that "[t]he transference of a popular antisemitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same" (286). This is in fact one of the symptoms of post-Holocaust prejudices that the Arab suffers from. Said contends:

the Arab is conceived of now as a shadow that dogs the Jew. In that shadow—because Arabs and Jews are Oriental Semites—can be placed whatever traditional, latent mistrust a Westerner feels towards the Oriental. For the Jew of pre-Nazi Europe has bifurcated: what we have now is a Jewish hero, constructed out of a reconstructed cult of the adventurer-pioneer-Orientalist . . . , and his creeping, mysteriously fearsome shadow, the Arab Oriental. Isolated from everything except the past created for him by Orientalist polemic, the Arab is chained to a destiny that fixes him and dooms him to a series of reactions periodically chastised by what Barbara Tuchman gives the theological name “Israel’s terrible swift sword.” (286)

The Oriental body becomes the object of desire—an object that is designed for American consumers. In fact, the mapping of anti-Semitism onto the Arab is a defense mechanism, a version of the missed encounter with Otherness as otherness.

The constructions of Otherness and difference prevail in *Moby-Dick*. Melville was preoccupied with negative aspects of the Orient. His description shows “the eccentricities of Oriental life, with its odd calendars, its exotic special configurations, its hopelessly strange languages, its seemingly perverse morality, were reduced considerably when they appeared as a series of detailed items presented in a normative European prose style (*Orientalism* 167). For example, Melville’s comparison of Queequeg’s paganism to Islam—in the chapter entitled “The Ramadan”—is reminiscent of medieval propagandist myths about Islam and its depiction, albeit its incomparable monotheism, as a pagan creed. Melville equates Queequeg’s Ramadan with “Humiliation” (94). Likewise, he compares the patriarchal authority and sexual indulgence of the male whale over its females to that of an Ottoman (Muslim) over his “concubines” or harem—a word used to refer to Oriental polygamy and sexuality. Melville writes:

in truth, this gentleman is a luxurious Ottoman, swimming about over the watered world, surroundingly accompanied by all the solaces and endearments of the harem. The contrast between this Ottoman and his concubines is striking; because, while he is always of the largest leviathanic proportions, the ladies, even at full growth, are not more than one third of the bulk of an average-sized male. (*Moby-Dick* 375)

Apart from the degradation and exoticization of Fedallah and his crew, Melville seems to deliberately equate Islam with paganism. Ishmael “labored to show Queequeg that all these Lents, Ramadans, and prolonged ham-squattings in cold, cheerless rooms were stark nonsense; bad for the health; useless for the soul; opposed, in short, to the obvious laws of hygiene and common sense” (98). Fedallah, as Melville tells us is a sun worshiper and the “devil in disguise” (315). His very name suggests that he cannot be but a Muslim. It is a very popular Arabic and Muslim name. It, indeed, includes the name of Allah, and the word Feda, which means sacrifice or martyrdom. The derivation of the name is very suggestive of a great number of most common Muslim names such as “Abdallah” (slave of Allah), “Saifallah” (sword of Allah). “Fedallah” is a “gamboges ghost” whose presence disturbs the other harpooners. Melville, one must remember, seems very familiar with Islam and the Arab world because of his perpetual references to Islam and Muslims in *Moby-Dick* and his actual pilgrimage to the Middle East. However, this familiarity is determined by the rhetoric of empire. Melville’s world is shaped by the ideologies of imperialism and colonialism. He posits that “the ringed crown of geographical empire encircles an imperial brain” (*Moby-Dick* 151). What we have is a series of fundamentalisms: Occidentalism, Orientalism, Secularism, Capitalism, and so on.

This brings one, finally, to Anouar Majid's argument in *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World*⁷¹ that there is a strong affinity between secularism and capitalism. Secularism, a post-Enlightenment ideology, reduces religious thought to fundamentalism, which is the excess the system wants to eradicate. The hegemony of modernization and secularism precludes any plausible understanding of the Orient and other non-Western societies. Majid states that "the project of demonizing Muslim others meets various interwoven ideological needs, including the control of third world resources and persuading citizens of Western societies, through manipulated differentiation and consent, that they are members of a superior civilization" (138). Melville's modernization program, however, is part of a larger program that tries to tame the Orient and redefine Islam.

Majid argues that Orientalism and Enlightenment ideals are all formulated in a Eurocentric paradigm which is ideologically and historically associated with capitalism. He posits that "postcolonial theory has been particularly inattentive to the question of Islam in the global economy" (19). Secularism and utopian cosmopolitanism as advocated by Said are, according to Majid, idealistic concepts that cannot withstand the capitalist system. He thinks that "the status [Said] confers on the migrant or the exile as the best situated intellectual and contrapuntal reader of culture in the age of global capitalism" is not convincing since postcolonial intellectuals, who are inside capital and outside the realm of the outsider looking in, are but products of Western imperialism. When the postcolonial intellectual does not put into question his/her secular assumptions, s/he cannot speak for and in terms of his/her society. Staging this inability to speak as a missed encounter, *Orientalism* portrays this failed encounter as discontinuity, subscribing to the Foucauldian conception of the individual as an effect of power relations.

Following Foucault's archaeological method, Said goes back to the Western archives to discover that the discourse of Orientalism belongs to a long history of discontinuities—discontinuities that work in favor of Western colonial interests. However, his deconstruction of Orientalism is framed within the discourse of secularism. He formulates his secularism as an antithesis to the discourse of Orientalism in his article, "Figures, Configurations, Transfiguration." He argues: "we should begin our acknowledgement of a world map without divinely or dogmatically sanctioned spaces, essences, or privileges. It is necessary therefore to speak of our element as secular space and humanly constructed and interdependent histories that are fundamentally knowable but not through grand theory or systematic totalization" (25). Instead of the binarist discourse of the Orientalists, Said proposes a secular space with no borders where people contribute to history regardless of their race or gender. However, the hybridized space of openness it offers as an alternative to the Orientalist paradigms, Said's secularism remains within the limits of its own binarism, particularly when it situates itself in the space of humanism which includes the very Orientalism that Said criticizes. While he rejects the binarism of Orientalism, Said adopts Vico's humanism which is itself binarist. Jonathan Arac notes in "The Social Text" that this view is "a Western formation that perpetuates the dominance of Western reason over other epistemologies" (42). Said, like the Orientalist, thinks in terms of binarism. In his book, *In Theory*, Aijaz Ahmad studies Said's ambivalent humanistic stand. He argues that "what is remarkable about this ...very resounding affirmation of humanist value is that humanism as ideality is invoked precisely at the time when humanism as history has been rejected so unequivocally" (164). Ahmad points out that while Said critiques the humanist tradition from

Aeschylus to Marx for its Orientalist ideas, he adopts the same discourse of humanism in the name of Vico as an ideal intellectual.

In *Orientalism* Said observes that the “knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world” (40). This knowledge, however, is associated with the concept of lack which will legitimize the American military presence in the Middle East. It should be noted, at this point, that the dynamics of the less (lack) forays into the economy of the more (excess). Said has not considered the importance of reading the Oriental Hieroglyphics in generating a colonial discourse. His claim that “Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East” (*Orientalism* 1) fails its own criteria when we take into account the actual American military presence in the Middle East (as the image of excess and abundance). The Orient, however, is of a vital importance to the Americans. Nineteenth-century terracing and exotic journeys are now replaced with military and economic presence in the Orient. In this logic, the excessive proximity to/of the Other brings about not so much the reversal of lack into excess as the inextricable interrelation of hermeneutics and imperialism.

For its critical, paradoxical drive, its emphasis on the pervasiveness of the missed encounter between the Orient and the Occident, Said’s *Orientalism* appears astonishingly useful to the study of classic American literature, at the same time it studies how every nation constructs its own Orient. America, like all the other Western colonial empires, has its own Orient. However, it is important to notice that the nineteenth century witnessed a shift in the perception of imperialism; the century brought a new paradigm in which imperialism and colonialism are clothed in the discourses of nationalism, modernization, and progress. Accordingly, we have

many Orientalisms, not just one. For example, the Ottoman Empire embraced the Enlightenment ideals. The modernization of the Ottoman Empire necessitates an internalization of the West's representation of its colonial subjects. The Ottoman reform system matches the European understanding of imperialism. The European discourse of imperialism sees the colonial subjects as inferior and, mainly, dependent on the West. Likewise, the Ottoman Empire legitimized the Ottoman Turkish rule over the other subjects, mainly Muslims. Ottoman reformers wanted the Arab provinces to be Ottomanized. What we have here is an Orientalism within Orientalism, an Orientalism in excess of representation. While subjecting Muslims and other minorities, the Ottoman Empire is itself considered by the West as a fertile territory that needs to be cultivated and governed by the West.

The desire to domesticate the exotic East and reorder it according to an idealized image of the West's class hierarchy makes it clear that it is *Sameness* rather than Otherness and the desire to replicate a certain vision of the imperial order throughout the world that have motivated the colonial enterprise. What needs to be noted at this juncture is that, besides staging the missed encounter between the Orient and the Occident, Said's work falls into the trap of the Western essentialist discourse. The West's representation of the East constitutes a Foucauldian discourse—a system governed by discontinuities and interruptions. These discontinuities, however, construct knowledge and are characteristic of the missed encounter. Interested in the construction of knowledge, the Western discourse establishes a network of power relationships. Said does not talk about the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. What we have is another binarist discourse. Though he is preoccupied with the construction of the Orient in the Western discourses, Said considers all Western discourses about the East as misrepresentations

and a kind of cultural domination, thus working within the dichotomous Western discourse that emphasizes the superiority of the West.

In this view, many postcolonial critics fail to see that the implausibility of reading and understanding the Oriental cipher might be linked to the Orient's strategy of defense which favors hermeneutic puzzlement as a way to trouble the Western critic-imperialist's assumptions about the Orient. This conjunction of imperialism and criticism—a fundamental aspect of Western literary tradition—is suspended in the baffling Oriental text. It follows, then, that what is unreachable, uninterpretable, and unknowable would be considered strange, bizarre, and should be subjected to Western scrutiny. The bafflement of the Western reader reflects the excess of the Oriental figures—an excess which further complicates and inscribes the Western colonial project in the realm of impossibility. Ahab, for example, claims to have understood the unearthly figure of the White Whale and to have had the creature captured. However, he ends up being disfigured by that very strange figure. Dismembered and disfigured by the White Whale, Ahab allegorizes the dismal ending of any person who thinks he is able to eliminate excess.

In fact, Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* confirm the authors' concern for the complex assemblage where the body and politics, the unconscious and the historical are held in a difficult tension by the Symbolic. The affinities between their view of the body as the site of interpellation and *jouissance* and Lacan's theory of subjectivity have been astutely underlined by postmodern theorists such as Žižek, Agamben, and Deleuze and Guattari, especially in the case of Melville's *Moby-Dick*. *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* could be said to focus on the representation of the body, respecting the economy of an incessant shuttling between lack and excess. Let us remember that this recurrent structure of the missed encounter between the two

poles is emphasized by the nature of the protagonists' quest for *jouissance* in a dynamic of lack and excess.

Hawthorne and Melville: Facing the Real of the Body

There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh inasmuch as it is suffering, is formless, inasmuch as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. (Lacan, *Seminar 2* 154)

The issue of the body is central to Hawthorne's and Melville's criticism as it is the site where the missed encounter is always made excessive by the irruption of pain and pleasure. The numerous attachments to objects of desire in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* are the measure of the move from the horizon of the material body to the Real of the body. The polyvalence of Hawthorne's and Melville's texts is better understood, as I have already demonstrated, through a synthetic amalgam of theoretical approaches. This is why I find Lacan and Žižek very useful to study the body and the Real, or the body as the domain of the Real. This means that the body as the site of the unspeakable cannot exist outside language as it can only be seized through representation. However, language's capacity of representing the body is not infinite; it is

occlusive, partial, and deformed by many twists—be they ideological or psychological. This is why it can only represent the impossibility of representing the body which can be completely reduced to the Symbolic. I do not wish to eliminate the body or reduce it to a function of language or relegate it to the domain of the impossible Real. Here Lacan returns again, with force this time, to show that language and body are entirely interrelated. Like the subject that can never know itself entirely, language can never, and will never, according to the psychoanalytic and deconstructive models, make sense entirely. It is in these very moments of language's inconsistencies that the body exists. It requires no further argument to emphasize the fact that language and body can never exist without each other, but neither can they be identical. Like the Lacanian Borromean rings of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, they are interlaced, and only in their interdependence can the subject exist.

Perhaps the most concise instance of this interrelation and interdependence of body and language, excess and lack is the excessive corporealized language that characterizes Melville's and Hawthorne's narratives. Language is in fact inscribed in materiality and corporeality—or better yet, the body. Clearly, we see a desire to reduce everything to the Real of the body—the monstrosity and the enthrallment of the body. Everything, albeit inscribed in the Symbolic, comes to be expressed in corporeal terms. Moreover, even emotional effects and affects tend to be apprehended through corporeal images. However, something is missed in this reduction to corporeality. In *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*, we see the ramifications of an event, an idea, or the letter on the body. The point I want to emphasize is that the translation of the *unassimilable* or the unfathomable into the discourse of the corporeal misses part of the letter. This residue inhabits the Real of the body—a Real that does not do the body or language justice. We have seen

that in both Melville and Hawthorne the corporeal functions as the foundation that permeates the poetic and the linguistic. Could not these residues be proof that something in excess of the Symbolic always permeates language—a process reflected by the encounter of language with the Real?

No wonder, then, that words and symbols, in both *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*, are invested in the economy of materiality. Is not Hester's letter A a letter that signals a sexual *rapport*? Is not Ahab's discourse self-reflexive, referring to his trauma beyond the narrative? On the level of narration, discourses of archivization—as a material act—permeate the narratives. These different discourses refer to or, perhaps, parody the Real of these narratives. It is true that the materiality of the signifier saturates both Melville's and Hawthorne's narratives, but this materiality refers in fact to the residue beyond the narrative, the residue that can be apprehended only through and in language. This residue is the *objet a*.

Melville's and Hawthorne's obsessive repetition of the *objet a* (Hester's scarlet letter and Ahab's severed limb) is the most explicit evidence of the authors' obsession with the Real of the body in its most material manifestation. A parallel can be drawn, in fact, between Ahab and Hester, between Hawthorne's narrator and Ishmael, and between Hawthorne and Melville. In all these cases, our gaze oscillates between the darkness of the body's interior and the exterior environment. In fact, there is an endless circulation of the narrative of and as a drive around the *objet a*—a circulation that signals an obsession with the Real. There is no longer a gap between the inside and outside. We have seen that Hester's and Ahab's traumas, although located in the pre-history of the narrative (and thus constitute the disnarrated), are rewritten as pulsations of the Real of the body. In both cases, the exterior of the body is displayed as an extension of the

psychic reality: the impossible recuperation of the past. That extension is also a tension between the interior of the body and its exterior. This tension leads to the burst of the Real of the body. Ahab's missing limb calls our attention to that lack or hole that snatches our gaze from reality and holds it in the Real. Like the "a" in *différance*, like the *objet a*, like Hester's scarlet letter, Ahab's ivory prosthetic directs our gaze toward the world of the unknown, the Real.

But what are, eventually, the contexts in which we can argue that the exterior stands for the irruption of the Real into reality? The abrupt burst of the Real into the reality of Ahab's crew is what caused the sudden sinking of the Pequod. The final scene happened as a real event. The trauma that inheres in the lack (hole) of the Real is most perfectly exemplified by Melville's depiction of Stubbs' dream about losing his leg: "Such a queer dream, King-Post, I never had. You know the old man's ivory leg, well I dreamt he kicked me with it; and when I tried to kick back, upon my soul, my little man, I kicked my leg right off! And then, presto! Ahab seemed a pyramid, and I, like a blazing fool, kept kicking at it" (135). Among the many displays of the encounters with the Real of the body in *Moby-Dick*, there is the hole in the body. "With his ivory leg inserted in its accustomed hole, and with one hand grasping a shroud, Ahab for hours and hours would stand gazing to windward, while an occasional squall of sleet or snow would all but congeal his very eyelashes altogether" (233).

This is what Žižek means by the horror of absence: "what horrifies the child is the very *absence* of the penis, i.e. the fact that there is nothing to see when the gaze expects something" (*Enjoy* 114). The fear of castration and the *jouissance* of uncovering the mystery of the hole is, in this regard, similar to the fear and *jouissance* the readers experience in the encounter with Melville's and with Hawthorne's narratives. This fascination with the mysterious hole provides

evidence for the postmodern obsession with the gap that characterizes reality. In fact, the proximity of the Real engenders an increasing interest in materiality—in the body. This is what explicates the fixation of the gaze on the absent limb—a fixation that is provoked by the fear of being engulfed by the rift and by the impossibility of seeing what lies in the hole. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan links the Real to absence: “The lack of the lack makes the real, which emerges only there, as a cork. This cork is supported by the term of the impossible—and the little we know about the real shows its antinomy to all verisimilitude” (ix).

Translated into Melvillian language, the lack of lack would be that which is hollow:

There’s a sight! There’s a sound! The greyheaded woodpecker tapping the hollow tree!
Blind and dumb might well be envied now. See! that thing rests on two line-tubs, full of
tow-lines. A most malicious wag, that fellow. Rat-tat! So man’s seconds tick! Oh! how
immaterial are all materials! What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts! Here
now’s the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of
the help and hope of most endangered life. A life-bouy of a coffin! Does it go further?
Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality-preserver!
I’ll think of that. But no. So far gone am I in the dark side of earth, that its other side, the
theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to me. Will ye never have done,
Carpenter, with that accursed sound? I go below; let me not see that thing here when I
return again. Now, then, Pip, we’ll talk this over; I so suck most wondrous philosophies
from thee! Some unknown conduits from the unknown worlds must empty into thee!”
(494-495)

This passage emblemizes the hollow and the hole—the hole in the body, and the hole in the Real. The hole in the body and the hole in the Real, in sum, are conjoined in the psychic economy. It should be mentioned that, for psychoanalysis and for Lacan in particular, certain

material elements of the body⁷² (lips, eyes, ears, and other erotogenic zones) are linked to the Real and that they occur where there is a cut or a hole. The notions that interest us here are the gaze, the voice, and the nothing. In other words, the encounter with the Real of the body is sudden, erratic, and obscene. The traumatic events are often accompanied by a shock when thought is achieved on the material body. Passages like the following account for the sensory effect of the Real: “the ghastly whiteness it is which imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathsome than terrific, to the dumb gloating of their aspect” (*Moby-Dick* 190). In fact, there is a *glissement*, a process of association, between the hole and blankness: both are related material manifestations of nothingness. In another passage, “Ahab, without speaking, was slowly rubbing the gold piece against the skirts of his jacket, as if to tighten its luster, and without using any words was meanwhile lowly humming to himself, producing a sound so strangely muffled and inarticulate that it seemed the mechanical humming of the wheels of his vitality in him” (*Moby-Dick* 165).

In Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the narrator eloquently states:

With his own ghostly hand, the obscurely seen, but majestic, figure had imparted to me the scarlet symbol and the little roll of explanatory manuscript. With his own ghostly voice he had exhorted me, on the sacred consideration of my filial duty and reverence towards him—who might reasonably regard himself as my official ancestor—to bring his mouldy and moth-eaten lucubrations before the public. (31)

Fundamentally, the narrative trajectory of “The Custom House” stages the turn toward exhumation, toward the ancestral grave, culminating in a figurative exhumation of the ancestors. This figurative recuperation or what Eric Savoy calls “the materiality of figuration” (“Necro-filia, or Hawthorne’s Melancholia” 465) posits a missed encounter between the narrative construction

of subjectivity and the figurative recuperation. We see this missed encounter at work in both texts where bodies engage in associations with uncanny and ghostly voices and remnants. Significantly, the missed encounter is produced as missed because the overarching narrative frame is one of autobiography inflected through a Gothic figurative economy: graves bones, exhumation, and finally, the gravitation of all these toward *prosopopeia*, i.e., toward haunting which is the return of the Real. Working within the Gothic economy, Hawthorne generates figures that he cannot properly read as figures: he literalized them as the body of the ghost. In fact, the uncanny nature of the *pharmakon* or what we might call the *pharmakon* of the Real is best summed up by Melville's hypothesis about the nature of the spout: "You have seen him spout; then declare what the spout is; can you not tell water from air? My dear sir, in this world it is not so easy to settle these plain things. The oxymoronic nature of the spout as *pharmakon* (by the way, very relevant to the study of the Real)⁷³ reveals that we are dealing with the impossible. We may want to recall, in this regard, the disfiguration of Ahab by the White Whale.

As an *objet a* supplementing the Real of the body, Ahab's prosthesis may stand at the same time for excess and for lack of *jouissance*—the excessive *jouissance* linked to the Real of the body and the hole that is at the center of the Real. This incorporation of the prosthesis into Ahab's body reflects the horror of the sinking of the Pequod. We have a movement from disassembly to assemblage and again to disassembly. The uncanny nature of this movement is probably best summed up in chapter "The Fossil Whale": "I am horror-struck at this antemosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the whale, which, having been before all time, must need exist after all humane ages are over" (434). The absent leg—the ivory substitute—is indeed a reminder and a remainder of a traumatic past which, in this quotation, assumes a

geological temporality rather than a strictly historical one. The perturbing reality of the disfigured body is linked to the crack that lies in corporeality. This is why we witness a pursuing of corporeality in both *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*. However, as Sharon Cameron argues in *The Corporeal Self: Allegories of the Body in Melville and Hawthorne*, “[i]f the central fiction of *Moby-Dick* is that the dismemberments of which Melville writes are literal and of monster bodies, the central fiction of Hawthorne’s tales is that the dismemberments are allegorical and are of human bodies” (80).

As I argued previously, the figurative exhumation of the residues of the dead fathers, the missed encounter with the Real i.e., with the inarticulate past of Puritan America or the archive, made it possible for Hawthorne to carry on the legacy of the Father. In *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, Bruce Fink understands the trauma of the Real as the residue that is not overwritten by the Symbolic:

One of the faces of the real that we deal with in psychoanalysis is trauma. If we think of the real as everything that has yet to be symbolized, language no doubt never completely transforms the real, never drains all of the real into the symbolic order; a residuum is always left. In analysis, we are not interested in just any old residuum, but in that residual experience that has become a stumbling block to the patient. (26)

In other words, the obsession of Puritan America with the spectacle of the Real makes disciplining any deviant subject possible—that is, to effectively produce, through the investment of the missed encounter in the microphysics of power, obedient bodies that cannot trouble the order. In fact it is an obsession with sin as workings of the devil, the material sign of the hand of the devil at work in the world. To put this another way, it is an obsession with sinful bodies. As in

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, modern America's obsession with the Real has always ended violently. The obsession with the Real is also an obsession with the Imaginary—the Orient. The excessive obsession with the Other has yielded an excess that ricochets back on the “I”. The American subject is, as a result, embarrassed between excess and lack. This binary of excess and lack dissolves in the missed encounter.

Contextualizing Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Moby-Dick* within the economy of Lacanian concepts, I argue that these narratives engage incessantly with the Real of the body. I venture to argue that Hawthorne and Melville are modern writers *avant la lettre* and that their engagement with the excess and the *manque* of the Real offers a model of the career of human subjectivity. Melville and Hawthorne argue in favor of multiplicity of the signifier. The letter A, the doubloon, the hieroglyphics, and the White Whale are all functions in the Real. To be more precise, they are signifiers that fail to meet the rigors of the Symbolic, and thus crack and slide toward the Real. As Hawthorne writes, “the scarlet letter had not done its office” (124). The same is true for all of these signifiers. A simplistic reading of these works would see them to be invoking a coherence of the signifier. Upon deeper scrutiny, however, this reading loses credibility and pushes the reader into the abyss of the Real. Rather than tending toward coherence, I suggest, Melville and Hawthorne regress toward the Lacanian Real, the third space between the Imaginary and the Symbolic exchange. Like the Lacanian Real which is outside or rather beyond the analytic experience, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Moby-Dick* incessantly slide toward death—toward the abyss of representation and hermeneutics. In fact, we have a series of appointments, missed appointments, and disappointments.

This regression to the liminal space between the Symbolic and the Imaginary signals the limitation of the symbolic exchange—an exchange that circles around a certain *différance* and repetition compulsion—and invests their letters in the thriving economy of the missed encounter. Hawthorne’s transhistorical project—his anxiety about the impossibility of communicating with the dead fathers and his inability to assimilate their primal scenes—expresses his libidinal desire to recover the lost Real. Unable to step outside the burning contours of the archive and unable to recover the Father, despite his attempts to figure the Father tropically, Hawthorne is thrown in the darkness of the Real. Fixing a *rendez-vous* with the Father seems to exist only as function of the letter as it circulates in the community and as it circles around the spiral movement of *différance*. Yearning for pre-symbolic unity with the fathers, Hawthorne’s regressive fantasy is traversed by the trajectory of *différance* that consigns it to the economy of the impossible Real. As suggested by Lacan in his *Four Fundamental Concepts*, “the impossible is not necessarily the contrary of the possible, or, since the opposite of the possible is certainly the real, we would be lead to define the real as impossible” (167). It would be hard to miss the similarity between Hawthorne’s transhistorical project and Lacan’s conception of identity: the subject is constructed around an aporia, which is to say, around the Real or the impossible territory that breaks out of the limits of representation. The transhistorical project, much like Ahab’s mythological journey to repeat the primal encounter with the whale, calls attention to the impossible of language, the Real of language.

If we follow Lacan’s argument about the impossibility of the Real and that about the petrifying gaze, we realize that Hawthorne’s fantasy is not so much about the encounter *per se* as it is about the gaze – that is, the gaze as the only possible remainder of the missed encounter.

Since it is impossible to have access to the Real of the dead father(s), Hawthorne seeks to relive the experience through the gaze that is metonymically present in the document Hawthorne happens to find. In the Lacanian psychoanalytic model, the gaze is associated with the Real and in particular with the *objet a*. No wonder, then, that Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a theory about the fascination with the letter, *objet a*. Hawthorne's fascination with the letter is not with the letter *qua* letter because, as I have mentioned before, the letter does not have content; rather, it is with the effect or the excess of the letter—the gaze or the stain of the Puritan fathers. Hawthorne's *re*-turn is to the remainders of his fathers, who “may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him” (14). In fact, we are talking about the blood of a victim staining the perpetrator of violence so deeply that it penetrates to his very bones, which bear the stain later upon a hypothetical exhumation. Analyzing Hitchcock's *The Birds* and *Psycho* in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan*, Žižek argues:

the intrusion of the stain in the scenes from *Birds* and *Psycho* is of a psychotic nature: here, the non-symbolized returns in the guise of a traumatic object-stain. *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*; designates a *signifier* which fills out the void of the excluded representation, whereas a psychotic stain is a *representation* which fills out a hole in the Symbolic, giving body to the ‘unspeakable’—its inert presence testifies that we are in a domain where ‘words fail’. The surplus-signifier ‘hystericizes’ the subject, whereas the effect of the non-signifying stain is psychotic—we are thus again at the opposition hysteria-psychosis, the elementary axis of *Psycho*'s universe. (238-39)

This stain is in reality the stain of the Real that troubles the symbolic stain of language, the stain that appears in the guise of lack (i.e., *objet a*). The surplus traumatic stain of the Real intrudes the Symbolic and escapes the grip of the Symbolic and persists as asymbolization.

Following Žižek's reading of Lacan's reading of "The Purloined Letter," the letter is "no longer the materialized agency of the *signifier* but rather an *object* in the strict sense of materialized enjoyment—the stain, the uncanny excess that the subjects snatch away from each other, forgetful of how its possession will mark them with a passive 'feminine stance' that bears witness to the confrontation with the object cause of desire (*Enjoy Your Symptom* 22-23; original emphasis). This quotation refers to the circulation of the purloined letter and might be applicable to the circulation of the scarlet letter. The symbolic dimension of the exchange is evident in the relay of the letter; Hawthorne's intent here is to imbue the letter with a temporal dimension while emphasizing its circulation in the community. The residues of the letter, therefore, can never coincide with the Puritan social reality, but they nevertheless materialize symbolically as the psychic Real of Puritan America. Following Lacan, Žižek argues: "When the letter arrives at its destination, the stain spoiling the picture is not abolished, effaced: what we are forced to grasp is, on the contrary, the fact that the real 'message,' the real letter awaiting us is the stain itself" (*Enjoy Your Symptom* 8). Like the letter, the gaze functions, I suggest, as a symptom of the psychic Real of the dead fathers. Rather than achieving an imaginary unity with the Father, Hawthorne encounters the gaze. Given the interrelation between the physical and psychic domains, we can argue that any interruption of the physical would lead to the eruption of the Real. Is not Hawthorne's encounter with the gaze as a failed or missed encounter with the ancestors similar to the exchange of gazes in *Moby-Dick*?

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan studies the concept of the gaze as the opposite of the eye. The gaze places the subject in ambivalent position, a position that dethrones it from its central Cartesian position: "What we have to circumscribe, by means of the

path [Maurice Merleau-Ponty] indicates for us, is the pre-existence of a gaze—I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides” (72). Since the gaze, according to Lacan’s interpretation of Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors*, is dependent on the stain, it is not difficult to see the link between the inside and outside. The case of Ahab is a case in point: “Did you fixedly gaze, too, upon that ribbed and dented brow; there also, you would see stranger footprints—the footprints of his one unsleeping, ever-pacing thought” (163). In fact, “From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure” (Lacan, *Concepts* 83). The gaze (stain) is but the unfathomable and mysterious *Thing* that is the “underside of consciousness” (83). The gaze in *Moby-Dick* operates in the realm of the Real. “Slowly crossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more he strove to pierce the profundity” (502). Whenever the obscure hole is apprehended, the subject finds “Something of the order of the non-realized” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 22; original emphasis). Most of *Moby-Dick*’s inroads into the horrific irruption of the Real of the body are made in the context of lack. Ahab’s tenacious attachment to the Whale, Melville’s fascination or desire for the East could be analyzed by the psychoanalytic model, Freudian and post-Freudian, of the burst of the Real of the body and the subject’s attachment to objects of desire and the surplus values that are accrued to them.

Is not the excess of images of the Orient, to use Lacanian and Derridean terminology, a covering over or a substitution for a certain void, *manque*, or aporia? Like Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, Melville’s *Moby-Dick* puts, in Derridean parlance, any unified concept of

knowledge or subjectivity under erasure. Lacan shows how the self is constructed by and dependent on the Other, on the symbolic exchange of letters, on the unconscious, and on the double, and demonstrates that, like the split subject, all economies are internally ruptured, thus creating room for excess to exist. My argument here is that *Moby-Dick* is not only about duality and splintered subjectivity; rather, it is about the missed encounter with the *Thing* of the Real. I want to refer to Agamben's article "Bartleby, or On Contingency" in which he studies the scrivener's repeated use of the phrase "prefer not to" as referring to something "whose opposite could have happened in the very moment in which it happened" (262). This applies to all Melville's works and in particular to *Moby-Dick*, in which the Real is the matrix of the missed encounter. The narrative plays with the consciousness of the inadequacy of the *Thing* and the impossibility of naming it.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz* and "Bartleby, or On Contingency," Agamben elaborates on the four modalities that structure subjectification and desubjectification: "The subject is thus the possibility that language does not exist, does not take place—or, better, that it takes place only through its possibility of not being there, its contingency ... contingency is not one modality, alongside possibility, impossibility, and necessity: it is the actual giving of a possibility, the way in which a potentiality exists as such" (*Remnants of Auschwitz* 146). These modalities, Agamben argues, are "ontological operators"—ontological because they are the terrain of the subjectivity *par excellence*. According to him, "possibility (to be able to) and contingency (to be able not to be) are the operators of subjectification." These modalities are countered by two other modalities: "Impossibility, as a negation of possibility (not [to be able]), and necessity, as negation of contingency (not [to be able not to be]), are the operators of desubjectification" (147). From this

perspective, the Real represents the epistemological and ontological point in which these modalities merge. This merging does not mean that *jouissance* is achieved. What is at stake here is the complexity and impossibility of the encounter with the Real. If the Real is possible in its impossibility, contingent in the chance that regulates its events, impossible to comprehend and apprehend, and necessary to pursue a fantasy, then we can argue that *jouissance* is always already thwarted. We know that fantasy, much like desire and *différance*, is viral, reproducing itself indefinitely. As Žižek argues in *The Plague of Fantasies*, “fantasy animates and structures enjoyment, while simultaneously serving as a protective shield against its excess” (1).

However, there is a way out of the prison of this impossibility, a way that is suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, who argue in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that

Moby-Dick in its entirety is one of the greatest masterpieces of becoming; Captain Ahab has an irresistible becoming-whale, but one that bypasses the pack or the school, operating directly through a monstrous alliance with the Unique, the Leviathan, Moby Dick. There is always a pact with a demon; the demon sometimes appears as the head of the band, sometimes as the Loner on the sidelines of the pack, and sometimes as the higher Power (*Puissance*) of the band. (243)

To recognize *Moby-Dick* as a masterpiece of “becoming” is to redeem it from the vicissitudes of negativity. Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion is that the process of writing is in fact a process of inventing the future. Writing, according to them, is becoming. My focus here is not to study the rhizomatic dimension and investiture of writing, although it makes perfect sense if applied to both Hawthorne and Melville, but rather to study the concept of becoming. I am interested in making a connection between Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of becoming and the circuits of desire in order

to formulate my argument about the missed encounter as a “becoming.” To better understand this link, let us quote at length from *A Thousand Plateaus*:

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. The whole structuralist critique of the series seems irrefutable. To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination, even when the imagination reaches the highest cosmic or dynamic level, as in Jung or Bachelard. Becomings-animal *are neither dreams nor fantasies. They are perfect real.* But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not “really” become an animal any more than the animal “really” becomes something else. *Becoming produces nothing other than itself.* We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. *What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.* (238; emphasis mine)

As they argue, becoming is at the heart of desire which is in turn at the heart of the missed encounter. Ahab becomes the White Whale and the Whale becomes the Real of America; the scarlet letter A, which is originally the letter of the Puritan fathers, becomes the letter of America and the letter of writing *writ large*. Since “becoming” is not “an evolution, at least not an evolution of descent and filiation,” since “all filiation is imaginary” (238), we cannot talk about linearity when it comes to studying the economy of the missed encounter that is at the heart of “becoming”. “Becoming” is not, strictly speaking, a temporality, a trajectory from A to B: it is not a movement from one coherent identity position to another. Rather, it is endlessly protracted. This means that the missed encounter is a “becoming” suspended between the excitements of the future and the sudden, unexpected eruptions of the past—what happened. Such, I suggest, is the

matrix of the missed encounter, its investment in the recessive allegories of language and the regressive tropes of desire.

To speak plainly, I am interested in the ways in which the missed encounter expands to touch upon the American ideals. Is not Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming suggestive of the residues produced and left by the Real of America? Is not the American dream a dream of becoming or a dream that unfolds in the field of *manque* only to produce an excess that guarantees the continuation of the dream? To follow this line of inquiry is not to suggest that the obsession with the Real loses its political or historical dimension. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which this missed encounter might serve the epistemology of reading modern America's encounter with its Real—with its excess, which is conversely its *manque* or void. In fact, the missed encounter between America and its Real—the excess of its symbolic representation and imagination of the Orient—is sustained by the investment of the missed encounter in *différance*.

If we accept the argument that the Orient or the Other becomes the Real of America, through the work of *différance* and *manque*, then we must consider the deconstructive, binarized hierarchy in which we witness, in the economy of symbolic exchange, a violent reversal of positions. In *Moby-Dick*, for example, Ishmael, in a passage I quoted previously, deconstructs the binarist discourse that considers all non-white people as savages and the Westerners as civilized: “what is called savagery. Your true whale hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage, owing to allegiance but to the king of the cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him” (267). In this violent reversal of binaries, the missed encounter finds its true definition—and, I would add, its deconstructive detour. The moment we think we grasp the

essence of the missed encounter is the very moment when our attention is drawn by a lingering residue or a recurring symptom. This is doubtless the work of the *Thing*.

And so the *Thing*—a figure of *manque* and excess at the same time—keeps circulating the American Real in indefinite rounds of *différance*. The *Thing*—always a new thing or something new—is the nodal point of the missed encounter. The *Thing* should always remain unnamed to guarantee the work of *jouissance*. However, the flood gates of *jouissance* seem to be breaking loose when brought to the realm of *différance*. To understand this fantasy of *jouissance*, it is useful to consult Derrida's theory of *différance* and, more importantly, Lacan's theory of desire and Žižek's reading of it. According to Lacan and Žižek, the subject's desire never coincides with the object of desire. What we have is an exchange of positions, from subject to object to indefinite. Instead of an encounter we have a fantasy of encounter—a fantasy that stages a paradox at the heart of desire. This fantasy does not, however, stage the encounter or *jouissance*; rather, it is a *mise en scène* of the circuit of desire as it spirals around the *Thing*. In Lacanian terms, America's compulsion to devour the *Thing*, or rather new things, unfolds in the symbolic economy of the missed encounter—an economy that is beyond categorization. In fact, Lacanian economy of the Symbolic is the *Thing*. Like Lacan's *Thing*, which is but a series of transcendental things, the White Whale, the scarlet letter A are but things that index other things that are outside the narrative—they all point to America through the detour of the archive and tropology. However, it is worth noting that the "I" and the "it"—the *Thing*—are collated. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, there is a chiastic relationship between the Real and the "I" that has eventually slid into the spiral movement of the abject.

To think of the Other or the Orient as the *Thing* of America is to see a multiplicity of specters or things. Let me here analyze briefly Said's argument in an interview by David Barsamian following the 9/11 attacks:

in the final scene of the novel, Captain Ahab is being borne out to sea, wrapped around the white whale with the rope of his own harpoon and going obviously to his death. It was a scene of almost suicidal finality. Now, all the words that George Bush used in public during the early stages of the crisis – “wanted, dead or alive,” “a crusade,” etc. – suggest ... something apocalyptic. ... And it would seem to me that to give Osama bin Laden – who has been turned into Moby Dick, he's been made a symbol of all that's evil in the world – a kind of mythological proportion is really playing his game. I think we need to secularize the man. We need to bring him down to the realm of reality. (54-55)

By this logic, we need to secularize the whale. To secularize the whale means to redeem it from history and to study the various contexts in which it exists. It is also an attempt to critique ideologically the allegory that produces the whale. In the new Christian paradigm, the Other has become part of Guy Debord's society of spectacle, where there is an excess of representations and a condensation of images.⁷⁴ As Žižek asks, “Do we not find enjoyment precisely in fantasizing about the Other's enjoyment, in this ambivalent attitude toward it? Do we not obtain satisfaction by means of the very supposition that the Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to us? Does not the Other's enjoyment exert such a powerful fascination because in it we represent to ourselves our own innermost relationship toward enjoyment?” (*Tarrying with the Negative* 206). In other words, what makes the Other's enjoyment inaccessible is the excesses that structure the relationships between subjects.

3.3. To Enjoy or not to Enjoy the Symptom: The Kernel of *Jouissance*

There is a question, and nothing that can be said, but just this nothing, to say. (Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* 9)

Enjoyment is not an immediate spontaneous state, but is sustained by a superego imperative. (Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* 220)

In *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*, the demand for *jouissance*—or rather the command of *jouissance*, for something in-excess—is activated by a compulsion to enjoy trauma, to enjoy death. *Jouissance* is made all the more ambivalent in its apparent fusion with the death drive. Indeed, the injunction to enjoy and the compulsion to go “beyond the pleasure principle”⁷⁵ is linked to the loss the subject undergoes following his entry into the Symbolic and to the incessant circulation of the drive around the lost object. The drive, in Lacanese, emerges from the residue in excess of circulation around the unfathomable. This residue is the undomesticated remainder of the lost unity of the subject. *Jouissance* allows us to understand why the protagonists of *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* do not relinquish their pursuit of the unattainable. What is most noteworthy is how Hester, for example, enjoys seeing her body as the site of punishment, and likewise, Ahab could be said to enjoy being dismembered by the whale. This is why we have an exhibition of the protagonists’ attachment to inanimate, unattainable objects. The point I want to

raise is the fact that a certain power accrues to Hester—a power that arises from the marginalization of her abjection. Why else would she choose to return to New England at the end of the narrative, and to assume the scarlet letter once again?

Because the missed encounter is beyond representation, because of our heavy dependence on language, we find ourselves face to face with our own symptoms. The ontological and epistemological wager reduces to a dilemma: to enjoy or not to enjoy the symptom. To better understand the politics of the missed encounter we need to research the aporia and lack at the heart of the missed encounter, and effectively read the affective politics connected to the Symbolic representations of the Orient and the Occident. To understand these symbolic missed encounters would allow one to better understand the politics of the material encounter. My argument is that the missed encounter is closely linked to its affects, which can be experienced only in non-presentational and non-decomposable spaces.

If we consider the mutual implication of Orient and the Occident, although I prefer not to use these categorization, as circles revolving around their impossibility, are we not referring to the Lacanian Borromean rings in which the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real overlap without losing their characteristics? We have learnt from Lacan that the Symbolic can never fully account for the Real as there is always a residue of the Real that resists representation. Each space is trapped in a kind of impossibility, confronting primarily its own fantasy. In order to displace a political, an economic, or an ideological impasse, cultures invest in this fantasy, a fantasy that is always associated with a certain violence—Symbolic or Real.

However, the mutual encounter of the Orient and the Occident is not just about violence. It also a quest for the sublime. The sublime, I suggest, is one of the excesses that lie at the heart

of the missed encounter. Is not the White Whale's "nameless horror" (189) an invocation of the danger the Western traveler might face in the East? Like the Orient, the White Whale is associated with the sublime, "for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, *and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue,* which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood" (*Moby-Dick* 190). This "elusive something" is in fact the elusive *Thing* that is beyond any categorization. Such impossibility of representing the Whale, of understanding the scarlet letter A, and of comprehending and apprehending the Orient refers to the sublime dimension of these signifiers—which depends on their position in a fantasy sphere. This is explained by Hegel's description of Islam as the religion of the sublime:

Mohammedanism is, therefore, in the strictest sense of the word, the religion of sublimity. The character of the western Asiatics, particularly the Arabs, is completely in accord with the religion. This people is, in its aspiration to the *one* God, indifferent to everything finite, to all misery, and gives generously of its life and its goods; even today its courage and charity earns our recognition. But the Western Asiatic mind which clings to the abstract One does not get as far as the determination, the particularization, of the universal nor, consequently, to a concrete formation. (59)

This reflects America's quest for a place where it can achieve its *jouissance*. Mohammedanism, the religion of sublimity, is in fact a perfect example of the Hegelian fantasy of resolution (synthesis). This could be an argument against the claim that every representation of Orient is a misrepresentation. This imaginary representation of the Orient, which is studied by many post-colonial critics, is not the main focus of my project. What interests me is the impossibility of representation as the ultimate representation. Is not Hegel's Absolute Spirit, the only thing in his

philosophy that could be considered as a synthesis, but an impossible and an unattainable absolute (state)? The impossibility of *jouissance* is superbly analyzed by Žižek in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: “the Real, *par excellence* is *jouissance*: *jouissance* does not exist, it is impossible, but it produces a number of traumatic effects. This paradoxical nature of *jouissance* also offers us a clue to explaining the fundamental paradox, which unfailingly attests the presence of the Real: the fact of the prohibition of something which is already in itself impossible” (164). The impossibility of *jouissance* is related to its paradoxical nature. To exist it has to maintain this shuttling between the two poles of pain and pleasure. This is described by Žižek in his *Tarrying with the Negative*: “[enjoyment] designates paradoxical satisfaction produced by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the ‘pleasure principle’ ” (280). We have seen that the *Thing* is at the center of everything. Continuing a series of returns, let us now return to American-Arab relations, shifting our attention toward the investigation of the driving forces of such relations.

In the context of current American-Arab relations, the Other is a Real Other—Real in his effect. Here we encounter the paradox that lies at the heart of the missed encounter with the Real: to enjoy or not to enjoy? This ontological and at the same time epistemological question, Hamletian at it seems, is the question that is recurrently posed by both parties. What we see is an exchange of positions. The Other, the Orient that is seen as the perpetrator of violence and terror, returns the gaze of the Occident and participates in the Symbolic and Imaginary game of the missed encounter. I am interested here in the dynamics of the missed encounter or what might be called the shared zone of fantasy. What Orientalism shares with Occidentalism is not the reversal of positions but rather the impossibility of communication. What we have is a cobweb of

symbolic images and representations that inhabit the barren land of the Real and that are linked to the Orient and the Occident. In other words, this is a situation of the mutual interlinearity of *méconnaissance*—and of constructions of ignorance that circulate as powerfully as knowledge, indeed more powerful because more toxic. As the zone of fantasy is hard to pin down, the duality between the Orient and the Occident is elusive. This duality, in political terms, is the New World Order. The bipolar world (the Cold War) ceased but given that the Real of America has to continue, *jouissance* has to be postponed. The New World Order, in Lacanian terms, is the world of the Master Signifier, the Super Power, which, like the Master Signifier, can only exist when it has other dependent signifiers that sustain its position. The point I want to raise is that the Orient is the Imaginary, the mythical place where the subject (America) fantasizes about fulfilling its *jouissance*. This is what Žižek means by “the opposition between reality and its fantasy supplement.” Analyzing this paradox, he argues that “[T]he topology is more complex: what precedes fantasy is not reality, but a *hole* in reality, its *point of impossibility* filled in with fantasy” (*The Plague of Fantasies* xiv; original emphasis). This topology is the topology of the *objet a* which is at the center of fantasy. In fact, the *objet a* is, although presented as the ultimate object, the symbolization of the hole or lack around which the drive revolves. What interests us here is the perverse tendency of the drive to cause an amalgamation of pleasure and pain.

Let me turn briefly to what is called the “Arab spring,” which is indeed a perfect example of the logics of the missed encounter and the fantasy and anxiety such missed encounter entails. The “Arab spring”—I prefer to call it the spring of the symptom—has in reality engendered two seemingly opposed yet really intertwined reactions in the national Symbolic of America: on the one hand, it is regarded, and we have learnt from Lacan that the letter always

arrives at its destination, as a possible return of the symptom (the possibility of producing a democracy *à l'américaine*); on the other hand, it is regarded as a possible threat to the symptom and a rupture of the course of the letter and *jouissance* with the rise of anti-Americanist thinking. This anti-Americanism circulates in one form in the Arab world, but it has its counterpart among the Americans whom Republicans dismiss as the crowd 'who blame America first.' Let me add to this Sacvan Bercovitch's argument about progress. Sacvan argues that to talk about America is to talk about the future, the will-to that is linked to the literary and cultural project of nationalism and progress. What is *unassimilable*, or what is beyond the hermeneutic scene, is America's symptom. In this regard, America's symptom—America's Other—has to remain eternally deferred.

Clearly, figuring the Occident, and America in particular, is uncannily linked to inventing the Other, and especially, but not only, the Orient. It is at this Orient, as a horizon of imaginary fantasy, that the American subject enjoys its symptom. This is why Lacan, Freud, Žižek, and Said are so essential to the understanding of the Symbolic representations of the missed encounter that lie in the encounter/appointment—as a missed encounter/appointment—between the Orient and the Occident. The missed encounter, I suggest, is at the center of everything. My project, however, does not claim in any way to cover all the theoretical investitures of the missed encounter. I deal mainly with the missed encounter in the context of the subject formation and the temporality of the sign. To show how the missed encounter traverses the reality of the New World Order, I will have to make a detour, invoking Žižek's quote from *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* in which he analyzes Lacan's concept of "traversing the fantasy":

In our daily existence, we are immersed in ‘reality’ (structured and supported by the fantasy), and this immersion is disturbed by symptoms which bear witness to the fact that another, repressed, level of our psyche resists this immersion. To ‘traverse the fantasy’ therefore, paradoxically, means fully identifying oneself with the fantasy—namely, with the fantasy which structures the excess that resists our immersion in daily reality. (17)

What we have is a missed encounter between fantasies. Fantasies are there as defense mechanisms against the intrusion of the desire of the Other. The Lacanian lesson is that fantasy determines one’s reality.⁷⁶ That is the only way that promises the domestication of *jouissance*. However, this domestication is structured around a fantasy and therefore it cannot pin down *jouissance*. Let us go back to the Real and pose the Lacanian question: “what does the Other want from me?” (*Écrits* 693). What determines the encounter, to adjust Lacan’s question, between America and its Other(s)?

What we have here is a fear of the Other stealing one’s *jouissance*. This, in fact, determines much of today’s encounters or rather missed encounters. There is always a fear of the Other who might intrude in our reality and rob us of our fantasy. The recurrent phrase of George W. Bush, “you are either with us or against us,” is in fact a call to join our fantasy against theirs. Their *jouissance* is different from ours and they are not like us—this is what we always hear and watch when it comes to dealing with the Other.⁷⁷ This tension, Žižek purports, is caused by ideology and globalization. The investment of the Real in ideology and capitalism, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation, explains many aspects of the missed encounter. To avoid the clash between the “I” and the Other, fantasy should, in Lacanian terms, be traversed. For our present purpose, it is enough to mention that what we have is a war of fantasies—a clash of

fantasies. What we are witnessing today are, rather, clashes *within* each civilization. As Žižek argues in *The Desert of the Real*, “[t]his notion of the ‘clash of civilizations’, however, must be rejected out of hand: what we are witnessing today are, rather, clashes *within* each civilization” (41). The terrorist, for example, is but a reflection of the failure of the system—a system that cannot contain the surplus it created. The fantasy figure is there to cover over the failure of the system to fill in the gaps. As Žižek and Agamben argue, the impossibility of existence of a harmonious system finds its resolution in the insistence of the need to invent the Other to fill in the gap or void that lies in the center of the system. This is what Žižek means when he argues that “[i]n ‘traversing the fantasy,’ we find *jouissance* in the vicious cycle of circulating around the void of the (missing object), renouncing the myth that *jouissance* has to be amassed somewhere else” (*The Plague of Fantasies* 33).

According to the Lacanian psychoanalytic model, the Other is structured around an abyss or a *manque*. The entry into the Symbolic, in Lacanian parlance, is followed by the submission to the Law. What is barred from Subject is the residue of the material body, or the materialization of *jouissance*. Material *jouissance* is in conflict with the immaterial nature of the Symbolic. This is why to enter the Symbolic and to be recognized necessitates that *jouissance* be abandoned. To enter the Symbolic, in other words, is to kill the *Thing*. Lacan and Derrida have taught us that there remains always a residue and that, to follow their line of argument, *jouissance* is not utterly evacuated. This is why the Other is said to be lacking *jouissance*—a lack that lies in language and in the very essence of the Symbolic. Such argument is in line with Žižek’s argument that we only die twice: once in the Real and once in the Symbolic. In other words, Hawthorne, Melville, and Said, although dead in the Real of America, continue to live in its

Symbolic. Their ghosts continue to enjoy their symptom and therefore to trouble the cohesiveness of the Symbolic, to invite its rupture. In fact, this is the difference between the ‘canonical’ Hawthorne and Melville and their troubling status in relation to the Real. Surveyor Pue, for example, is dead in the Real but appears in the Symbolic of the archive. He persists as a terrifying gaze or symptom because he died before settling his symbolic debt, which he passes on to Hawthorne who, in turn, passes it on to America. Once the debt is completely repaid – an impossibility -- the ghost or remnant ceases to inhabit the Symbolic. This is only a fantasy and it is always traversed by a reality that postpones settling the debt *ad infinitum*.

Let us return to the Real of America. The American obsession with the Real which is, much like White Whale and the scarlet letter A, impossible to assimilate and define produces its very *doppelganger* which comes back to haunt the American Symbolic. Ahab’s figurative castration, for example, explains his obsession with the Real of the material or corpo-Real. The same thing applies to Hester’s community’s obsession with corpo-Real inscriptions which mark the desire for the Real. However, this desire is of course not conscious. As the scarlet letter continues in its career to invite radically different and incompatible interpretations, it reflects the conscious determination of the reading subject to fix and to stabilize the import of the letter. But subtending all of this is the desire to enjoy the symptom: i.e., to return to the letter its indeterminacy, and therefore to shove the Symbolic along its deathward path to the Real, and to the collapse of signification and of the national Symbolic and of the Law. This is why Hester’s wearing the scarlet letter could be said to function as a reflection of the obsession with the Real. This desire for the Real is present both in *Moby-Dick* and in *The Scarlet Letter*. This desire, as I have shown, is a desire for *jouissance*. The inscriptions on Queequeg’s body, the references to the

hieroglyphics, the scarlet letter, all represent fantasies to return to the Real. This is what Žižek means by “virtual reality” which “simply generalizes this procedure of offering a product deprived of its substance: it provides reality itself deprived of its substance, of the hard resistant kernel of the Real—just as decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like coffee without being real coffee, Virtual reality is experienced as reality without being so” (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 11). This means that reality becomes virtual. Žižek goes on to argue that the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 constituted primarily “events on the TV screen” (11). This is explained by his provocative statement:

When, days after September 11 2001, our gaze was transfixed by the images of the plane hitting one of the WTC towers, we were all forced to experience what the ‘compulsion to repeat’ and *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle are: we wanted to see it again and again; the same shots were repeated *ad nauseam*, and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was *jouissance* at its purest. (12)

What happened? This is a Deleuzian⁷⁸ question that everyone has tried to answer and for which we have many answers—or rather, hypotheses. In fact, there was a desire to meet with the Real, a desire manifested in the disbelief that the Real could become real. Since this desire is invested in the Lacanian automaton (the insistence of images in print and on the screen), it becomes impossible to distinguish between the Real and reality. The moment reality is hit by the affect of the Real—the void that has been over-represented—is the moment at which reality is mistaken for the Real. This is elegantly expressed by Žižek in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*: “is this not yet further proof of how, even in the tragic moment, the distance which separates Us from Them, from their reality, is maintained: the real horror happens *there*, not *here*?”(13). September

11 was on the one hand an irruption of the Real, but there are at least two ways in which this spectacle of the Real was shaped by the Symbolic order. First, American popular culture had, for years, been shaped by the images of the destruction of American cities by alien forces: a pure death drive couched in the Symbolic. Second, there is no encounter with the Real, because the whole event is subtended by geopolitical reality and by colonial history. Thus, the encounter with the Real was missed precisely because what happened was returned to the ‘explanatory logics’ of the Symbolic order: the Other is evil, we are virtuous (i.e., the Other wishes our destruction).

The investment of reality in simulacra and its attachment to the Lacanian automaton led us to argue that the *Thing* has disappeared and what we have is the utter absence of things. This is what Baudrillard means by the question: “Why is there nothing rather than something?” (*The Perfect Crime 2*). The image of the Other as lack and void has traversed the American reality and, as a result, has become the Real itself. Baudrillard continues to argue that “the image can no longer dream it, since it is its virtual reality. It is as though things had swallowed their own mirrors and had become transparent to themselves, entirely present to themselves in ruthless transcription, full in the light and real time” (4). The question we might ask is: is it possible to enjoy if the *Thing* is excavated of its thingness or if it is no longer there? Has *jouissance* reached its theoretical dead end? That is the true mystery of America’s Real.

A fuller grasp of *Jouissance* requires that we conceptualize desire in ways other than its simple link to fantasy. This is in fact not a matter of simply evoking fantasy, for fantasy is the domain of the impossible: no fantasy is completely graspable, either as an object or as a mere idea, nor (more importantly in the context of the American Real) do we witness a complete disappearance of the fantasy. Any attempt to ascribe content to fantasy would be a mere failure,

for fantasy is the mysterious object of desire that determines the barred subject's oscillation between attraction to and repulsion from the object of its desire. This fluctuation is related to what Lacan calls the *objet a* (or what is most often called the sublime object cause of desire) which keeps postponing the pledge of filling up the gap at the core of our being while it is in fact the materialization of that gap. Lacan often argues that the subject holds its position in regard to the real *Thing* through the construction of a fantasy about how the *Thing* is inscribed in the big Other:

I am speaking of the mark on the skin, which, in this fantasy, inspires nothing other than a subject identifying itself as the object of *jouissance*. ... Whose *jouissance*? Is it the *jouissance* of whosoever carries what I am calling the glory of the mark? Is it certain that this means the Other's *jouissance*? Certainly, this is one of the ways in which the Other enters one's world, and assuredly, it is an irrefutable one. But the mark's affinity with *jouissance* of the body itself is precisely where it is indicated that it is only through *jouissance*, and *jouissance* alone, that the division distinguishing narcissism from the relation with the object is established. (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 49)

Jouissance or (surplus-*jouissance*) is in fact a painful transgression of the pleasure principle, a transgression that produces the *objet a*. This is elegantly explained by Žižek: "This point is the *objet a*, that which is *subtracted* from reality (as it's impossible) and thus gives it consistency - if it gets included in reality, it causes a catastrophe. In what sense does the *objet a* (surplus-enjoyment) frame reality? Think for example of the 'production of a couple' motif that frames a Hollywood narrative about a big historical event like a war or natural catastrophe: this motif is, quite literally, the film's ideological surplus-enjoyment" (*The Plague of Fantasies* xvi-xvii; emphasis original). The inscription on the body registers the painful circuit of *jouissance*. Such

inscription is recognized through the little residue (piece) of the Real that can be enjoyed as a substitution for the loss of the *Thing*. “In effect, if *jouissance* is forbidden,” Lacan continues to argue, “then it is clear that it only comes into play by chance, an initial contingency, an accident” (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 50).

If we argue that the Real is unimaginable and impossible, we end up posing an insoluble conundrum: how can fantasy traverse the impossible? Is not fantasy itself, to use Agamben’s terminology, a possibility contingent upon a necessary impossibility? For fantasy to be sustained, it has to remain impossible, beyond the reach of reality. The horizon of the Real and fantasy is, therefore, a horizon of impossibility. It is not, then, fantasy that is the opposite of the Real—the Real, as we know, is the domain of impossibility *par excellence*—but reality. What is at stake in negotiating the American Real is the uncanny and obscene ways in which the impossible (the attacks on America) has become possible. No wonder, then, that the circulating images of the September 11—like the images of the scarlet letter or the whale—generate various Symbolic spectacles out of the missed encounter(s) between the Real and the image. To a degree, it is, in so far as there is an excess or *manque* of exchange, the image that circulates between the walls of the Real and the Symbolic—a circulation that is activated by the impossibility. Our reality, as Žižek and Baudrillard argue, has been flooded with images that have created a new reality. Žižek suggests

We should therefore invert the standard reading according to which the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory sphere: quite the reverse—it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, *perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality, as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition* on the (TV) screen—and what happened on

September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. *It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality.* (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 16; emphasis mine)

The hole that defines the Other ends up being the main characteristic of the American reality after the attacks. Who is this Other? As I have explained through the course of the dissertation, the Other—the racial Other or the Other of gender—is but the fantasy of the powerful, the fantasy of America, or its excess. The encounter is in and with the abyss of the Other. Lacan states that “the relation of the subject to the Other is entirely in a process of gap. Without this, anything could be there. The relations between beings in the real, including all of you animated beings out there, might be produced in terms of inversely reciprocal relations” (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 206). This means that everything emerges from this gap. In other words, what happened in America seems to have happened elsewhere repeatedly. This in fact explains the urge to return to the Real and to the origin. As Žižek argues, we are witnessing the effect(s) of the Real—the image—not the Real itself.

Negotiating the historical trauma of September 11, Žižek argues that “[i]n the traumatic aftermath of September 11, when the old security seemed to be momentarily shattered, what could be more ‘natural’ than taking refuge in the innocence of a firm ideological identification?” (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 45). America and the world will not be the same again—this is the recurrent sentence. Commenting on this, Žižek contends:

What if, precisely, nothing epochal happened on September 11? What if—as the massive display of American patriotism seems to demonstrate—the shattering experience of September 11 ultimately served as a device which enabled the hegemonic American ideology to ‘go back to its basics’, to reassert its basic

ideological co-ordinates against the antiglobalist and other critical temptations? Perhaps I should none the less qualify this statement by introducing the temporality of *futur antérieur*: on September 11, the USA was given the opportunity to realize what kind of world it was part of. It might have taken this opportunity—but it did not; instead it opted to reassert its traditional ideological commitments: out with feelings of responsibility and guilt towards the impoverished Third World, *we are the victims now!* (46-47)

What shattered was the illusion that what happened elsewhere cannot and will happen here. What will follow? To answer this question, Žižek states:

Either America will persist in—even strengthen the deeply immoral attitude of ‘Why should this happen to us? Things like this don’t happen *here*’, leading to more aggressivity towards the threatening Outside—in short to a paranoiac acting out. Or America will finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen that separates it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival in the Real World, making the long-overdue move from ‘A thing like this shouldn’t happen *here!*’ to ‘A thing like this shouldn’t happen *anywhere!*’ (49)

This is the real challenge. For many, what happened was beyond the limits of language. This inability to comprehend this event prompted a *return to/of the Real*. How can this traumatic event be articulated and represented in the symbolic world of literature? What is the relevance of literature to the study of this traumatic event and the event in general? This is one of the incentives that prompted the writing of this thesis.

Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* is a good example of the power of writing and language to talk about that which is “outside.” According to him, disaster “cannot

make itself present, or enter into presence, and is still less able to be represented or to constitute itself as a basis for representation” (33). The traumatic event gains meaning through linguistic repetitions and fragmentation. This does not mean that writing is capable of representing trauma.

To write, he argues, is:

To surrender to the risk of time’s absence, where eternal starting over reigns. It to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous insofar as concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal. Writing is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless. (*The Space of Literature* 33)

At stake in the work of Blanchot is a witnessing of trauma in language. Herein lurks the kernel of trauma: the impossibility of representing it and its compulsive repetition in language. Witnessing does not point to the speaking “I,” but rather to the third person “it.” As in the Lacanian model, the abyss of witnessing is without location, defined by the inevitable, indefinite *il y a*.⁷⁹ The Levinasian *il y a* refers to trauma, to the un-pleasure that irrupts in and disrupts the structure of *jouissance*.

Another aspect of the impossibility of representing the Real is its capability of reversing things, making it possible to materialize the abstract and abstract the material. The absence of the material object might be compensated for by a fantasy. The Real is, as I have explained throughout the dissertation, impossible to assimilate. In this regard Lacan wonders:

Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it—in the form of trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin? We are now at the heart of what might enable us to understand the radical character of the conflictual notion introduced by the opposition of the pleasure principle and the reality principle—which why we cannot conceive the reality principle as having, by virtue of its ascendancy, the last word. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 55)

The “unassimilable” experience is the bodies of the dead (Hester, Ahab and his crew) that enact a certain *différance* that is typical of trauma. Out of the realm of death, as it were, the effects of trauma come to the fore in the form of discourse, or, better, to borrow a Lacanian concept, the scars of the unconscious. This is what Freud considers language’s ability to treat in the process of re-transcription. The return to the past (the archive of the past) is also a revision (transcription). The unconscious becomes the adequate language. It is useful, in this context, to recall Fredric Jameson’s reading of Althusser’s reading of history. Jameson argues:

What Althusser’s own insistence on history as an absent cause makes clear, but what is missing from the formula as it is canonically worded, is that he does not at all draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the “referent” does not exist. We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. (*The Political Unconscious* 20)

Let us accept Jameson’s description of history and pursue its ramification in the representation of the Other. Absence of “referents” and the excess of representation may be even the essence of

this representation. What is important to bear in mind here is that many things can be discerned in the excess of representation of the Other. Preeminent among these things stand the reversed representation, vengeance, and resistance. The site of the double representation emerged in the Symbolic and moved to the Real and, ultimately, to reality. In other words, the violence of the Symbolic is also supplemented by the *real* effect of the Real—material damage, many dead bodies, and many letters (books). The inconclusive and *unassimilable* nature of this missed encounter, however, keeps it postponed and suspended in the abyss of the Imaginary and Symbolic.

Hawthorne's, Melville's, and Said's various accounts of America's obsession with the Real, with wholeness and harmony, echoes my negotiating the ways in which the Real of America has become its reality—an impossibility that has finally happened. This obsession, as I have explained, is invested in the libidinal economy of the missed encounter. This libidinal investiture is further complicated by the anxiety created by the proximity to/of the Other and the fear of losing one's fantasy. The aspect of this proximity is manifested in the over-proximity to the Real. For this particular reason, the symptom, which is but the residue of the failed encounter with the Other, continues to haunt America. It requires no further argument to stress literature's function as the archive of *manque*—or, perhaps, better yet, a fantasy of filling in this lack or gap. Thus the missed encounters, registered in literature, leave their trace in the form of anxiety or fantasy. Do not such fear and fascination structure Melville's doubles, Hawthorne's transgenerational project, and Said's depiction of the encounter between the Occident and the Orient? What seems essential is the fact—barely, if at all, studied by critics—that the missed encounter concerns both lack and excess: it is in reality suspended between them.

Derrida's *différance* intervenes at this very juncture: its course, indefinite as it were, widens the gap and creates yet another fantasy—that of arrival. Would it not be possible to interpret the works of Hawthorne, Melville, and Said as attempts to arrive at an understanding of the missed encounter? Since literature, and discourse in general, produce eventually its counter discourse, since *manque* paradoxically generates excess, it is possible to argue that America is trying to manage the economy of its own excess. It is for this particular reason that we see an obsession with the archive, with anasemia, and with the double. Such obsession causes *jouissance* to slide toward impossibility. For *jouissance* to be sustained it has to remain thwarted eternally.

To postpone the fulfillment of *jouissance* means to adopt a theory of war without substance, a war with multiple potential enemies. Since it is impossible to locate the Real, its tropics should be left behind as the horrible *Thing* might happen and disrupt the fantasy. In other words, an alternative domesticatable *Thing* is required. This, however, entails creating something new to avoid talking about the real *Thing*. What is the real *Thing*? The real *Thing* encompasses the problems that saturate the inside of the system—problems that disturb the Real and require Baudrillard's "simulacrum" to remain untreated. In this regard, let us quote at length Fredric Jameson's statement:

the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where *exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced* ... The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time. The past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lucás defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project—what is still, for the redemptive historiography of an E. P. Thompson or of American "oral history," for the resurrection of the dead of anonymous and silenced

generations, the *retrospective* dimension indispensable to any *vital reorientation of our collective future*—has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a *multitudinous photographic simulacrum*. (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 18; emphasis mine)

The desperate attempt to resurrect the past and project its fantasy of progress onto the future has generated many competing images. I would like to build upon the concept of “simulacrum” to show how the image, in America’s fascination with the superlative, is favored over content, how the *jouissance* is devoid of its essence and *sens* (meaning).

Since we are negotiating *jouissance*, I want to ask the question: can the Other enjoy? Drawing upon Lacan’s and Žižek’s discussion of *jouissance* in the economy of the impossible, I argue that the Other—here the Oriental—enjoys a fantasy, a fantasy that is traversed by a reality. This reality interrupts the American dream. What is this reality? The reality is that the Other only enjoys the impossibility of enjoying the dream. Enjoying the ideals of democracy, progress, and dream—ideas that are inherent in the American Real (or rather the very construction of the American national Symbolic as the defense against the Real)—the Other fails to recognize that he is the excess of these ideals. Žižek’s conceptualization of the betrayal of desire as a composite category involves not only excess but the Other. This betrayed or failed desire is happiness. Generated at the intersection of the philosophical and the psychoanalytic, the concept of happiness, Žižek contends, “is thus—to put it in Alain Badiou’s terms—not a category of truth, but a category of mere Being, and, as such, confused, indeterminate, inconsistent” (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 59). However, as Žižek argues, truth can easily be missed because, like the purloined letter, it is not hidden. This is where psychoanalysis comes to the rescue of the reader

who is looking for truth. What psychoanalysis brings to the hermeneutic scene is the claim that everything makes sense and that even the most insignificant symptom might be crucial to the understanding of major issues. In fact, as Freud and Lacan argue, all letters, all signifiers, all symptoms are essential to the psychoanalytic experience and to experience *writ large*. It is worth noting that the triad of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic reproduces itself endlessly. As explained by Fink:

We can think of the real as being *progressively symbolized* in the course of a child's life, less and less of that "first," "original" real (call it R1) being left behind, though it can never all be drained away, neutralized, or killed. *There is thus always a remainder which persists alongside the symbolic*. We can, however, also show that the symbolic order itself gives rise to a "second-order" real. (27; emphasis original)

This means that we have a pre-symbolic (before the letter) Real and a post-symbolic (after the letter) Real. The first instance of the Real (R1) leaves a residuum in the symbolic, which generates, due to the plethora of missed encounters between its elements, the second instance of the Real (R2)—a Real that is characterized by the impossibilities and failures of the Symbolic. We end up having the Real Real (the sense of horror in the September 11 events or in horror movies), the Symbolic Real (in which signifiers are reduced to mere abstractions), and the Imaginary Real (the unrepresentable *Thing*—the object cause of desire/horror—that slides in the Real in attempt to present the impossible). The traumatic nature of the 9 11 events, their scale, their proximity, and ultimately the over-proximity of the Real complicates the task of any critic or author to represent them and to elevate the event to the level of the impossible Real.

What complicates the business of *jouissance*, however, is the proximity to the Real. As Derrida states in *The Post Card*, “what is closest *must* be avoided, by virtue of its very proximity. It must be kept at a distance, it must be warned. It must be turned away from, diverted, *warned* (263). The closest, although set in the Freudian context of Fort/Da (which has as its imagined limit event the permanent disappearance of the child’s mother), could be said to represent the event that has not happened, the impossible event that is unthinkable and only possible on the TV screen. In other words, the closest maintains the pleasure principle but brings no *jouissance*. The attacks of September 11 represent the unthinkable that has become real. After the events have happened, we have a recurrent repetition that signals the detour, or what Freud calls in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the *Umweg*—the detour that *Fort* takes to bring *Da* home through the death drive. The Freudian *Umweg* is given a deconstructionist touch in Derrida’s *Post Card*: “No *Weg* without *Umweg*: the detour does not overtake the road, but constitutes it” (284). This means that “it would already be pleasure that, by itself protecting itself too much, would come to asphyxiate itself in the economy of its own reserves” (286). In other words, “to go to the end of the transactional compromise that is the *Umweg*—pure *différance* in a way—is also the *arrêt de mort*: no pleasure would ever present itself” (286). Of course both the reality principle and the pleasure principle are inscribed in economy of *différance*. Perhaps the spectacle of *jouissance* in (and of) *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* is after all only an allegory of reading, an allegory that will enable Melville and Hawthorne to offer “the analysis of society and the search for another, almost utopian world” (Robert K. Martin 125). What we have is clear relation between the Freudian detour, as read by Derrida, and the detour that is constitutive of allegory.

The ineradicable link between literature and *jouissance* has been brilliantly established by Blanchot, who sees literary language as referring to the *il y a*, or to “the presence of things before the *world exists*, their perseverance” (*The Work of Fire* 328). Enacting various encounters and missed encounters, classic American literature bears witness to the torment of language. Condemned to always make sense, to produce *jouis-sens* (enjoyment-in-meaning), American classic literature, and literature in general, portray a corporealization of language, or an inextricable interrelation, if not fusion of bodies and words. Since language is incapable of fully understanding the body, since it is bound to fail at the Real, I would prefer to say that the missed encounter’s drama, to adjust *Moby-Dick*’s epilogue, is not yet done and that the desire for the Real lies beyond language’s constant *Fort/Da* game with the Real.

Conclusion

**Something is Burning in the Real: The Relay of Politics
and the Violence of the Symbolic**

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. (Shakespeare,
Hamlet 1.5.90)

This dissertation, in its scouting of the missed encounter and its various configurations and its multiple complexities in relation to the Real, has tried to map the troubled and troubling engagement of classic American narratives with the Symbolic. Following Žižek's example of real democracy, we can see that the impossibility of universal democracy, of constructive encounters between the constituent elements of the universe, lies—as we have seen in working among the discourses of psychoanalysis, deconstruction, postmodernism, micropsychoanalysis, and post-colonialism—in their inherent paradoxes and antagonisms. To understand the ideological and political investitures of the missed encounter is to clarify an excessive and dysfunctional Symbolic violence. Here, the violence by which the missed encounter came to be posited as a failure, a contingency, or the impossibility of returning to the *arche* has been replaced by an unresolved relation with the Symbolic (language).

The complex, unresolved relation with the Symbolic extends the narratives I have studied and the theories I have utilized beyond the historical limits of postmodernism. What we have called the prosopoetic archival investment of Hawthorne and Melville in the Real elicits a *mal d'archive* that is activated by the death drive, which in turn exposes the traumatic essence of the subject. In my examination of the missed encounter within Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic and poststructuralist/postmodernist theories, I have tried to unveil the temporality/psychoanalytics and narrative/prosopoetics of the missed encounter. This unveiling takes place in subjectivity/*assujétissement*. For example, Hawthorne's exposition (or more exactly his confirmation and extension, as DeSalvo argues, of patriarchal gender codes) points to

literature's and modernity's engagement with the issue of the body and textuality. The gothic matrix of exhumation and archive, inflected through the tropes of prosopopeia, catachresis, and allegory deployed by Hawthorne and Melville, shed light on many psychoanalytic and deconstructive tenets, especially Lacan's concepts of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, as well as his concept of the missed encounter with the *tuché*; and Derrida's concepts of *différance*, archive, and supplement. What we have here is an extension of the model of the missed encounter to include every aspect of life.

In addressing the missed encounter with the Real of the body, I have used Žižek's conception of perversion or obscenity to talk about the bizarre representation of the body as the site and citation of trauma. Here, the question of the missed encounter brings the reader to the realm of the obscenity of the Real, that is, by bringing him/her close, probably too close, to the obscene scenes of representation and by implicating him in the game of *jouissance*. As Žižek points out, "What ultimately interrupts the continuous flow of words, what hinders the smooth running of the symbolic circuit, is the traumatic presence of the Real: when the words suddenly stay out, we have to look not for imaginary resistances but for the object that came too close (*Enjoy Your Symptom* 23). This proximity to the obscene, or the over-proximity to/of the Real, signals the persistent attempts of the Symbolic to contain such excess. The violence of the Symbolic, enacted by the Puritan transhistorical patriarchal codes and the compulsion to domesticate the White Whale and decipher its 'hieroglyphics' are reflected in the psychoanalytic emphasis on the compulsion to repeat and the deconstructive theory of *différance* and supplementation.

The violence of the Symbolic is reflective of modern America's desire to contain, master, and domesticate its excesses. In the shuttling between reality and the Real, between excess and lack, there is always already a monstrous or perverse residue around which being and meaning revolve. Lacan, in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, defines perversion as:

an inverted effect of the phantasy. It is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity. ... It is in so far as the subject makes himself the object of another will that the sado-masochistic drive not only closes up, but constitutes itself. ... The sadistic desire exists in a crowd of configurations, and also in the neuroses, but it is not yet sadism in the strict sense. ... the sadist himself occupies the place of the object, but without knowing it, to the benefit of another, for whose *jouissance* he exercises his action as sadistic pervert. (185)

This passage sheds light on policy-makers' obscene *jouissance* and their claim that what they are doing (wars, killings, security codes) is merely the implementation of the law's injunctions, or the fulfillment of the will of the Big Other. Is not the war on terrorism but a war on the obscene residue of America's missed encounter with its Others? For example, waging a war on "terrorism" in the name of the Law is perversion at its purest. The transgression of the Law in the name of the Law (to punish those who transgressed it originally) displays perversion as "a socially 'constructive' attitude: one can indulge in illicit drives, or torture and kill for the protection of law and order, and so on. This perversion relies on the split of the field of Law into Law as 'Ego-Ideal'—that is, a Symbolic order which regulates social life and maintains social peace—and into its obscene, superegotistical reverse (Žižek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan* 225).

We have seen Melville's and Hawthorne's narratives announce and denounce the power and violence of language to interpellate and manipulate the reader's expectations and even his *jouissance*. The complicity of literature in imposing the economy of obscene and Symbolic violence is deconstructed only through the reader's severing the rope of libidinal identification and the temptation of the Symbolic. The violence of the corpoReal sustains and is sustained by the archive of both narratives: Hawthorne participates, however ambivalently, in a transhistorical project that is similar to Melville's (ab)use of the disnarrated archive of trauma. Language in both narratives welcomes the readers to the "desert of the Real," but the Real—as has been established by Lacan and further explored by Žižek—is the realm of violence par excellence. Grasping the essential violence of the Symbolic enables us to read truthfully our quotidian reality with all its perverse versions of fundamentalism. The same logic of violence and perversion is readily apparent in mediated images of war, catastrophes, scandals, disasters, and obscenity—the pornography of the geopolitical, on screen and in print. However, all these images that we consider to be generated by our historical moment have, without exception, a permanence in the obscene fantasies which circulate in our Symbolic. I think for example of H. G. Wells' novel, *The World Set Free*, which was written in 1914, as a proleptic fantasy announcing the violent irruption of the Real of the nuclear war into our reality. The fantasy of *The World Set Free* burst in the reality of WWII (i.e., the atomic bombings of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan). The bombings of 1945 would be, in Baudrillardian terminology, a simulation of the literary anticipation of the events. By saying that literature is complicit in the fantasies of disaster, I mean that, as in all other discourses, *a thing* before becoming something, before acquiring its meaning, it has a prior textual/symbolic being. Before becoming material, before becoming real,

it was literary/symbolic and only belatedly does it exemplify the over-proximity of/to the Lacanian Real. The 9/11 events and the consequent war on terrorism signaled the eruption on the global scene of excesses, residues, and antagonisms that global capitalism has been unable to assimilate and contain. Consequently, as argued by Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, people have become absorbed by the hyper and virtual reality of media and cyberspace, thus murdering reality and blurring the distinctions between reality and the Real.

The dominance of the Real over reality, simulacra over materiality, the signifier over the signified evokes the prevalence of the signifier in our time. Violent as it is, the eruption of the Real means that what is construed and constructed in the Symbolic will slide toward and materialize itself in the Real. This ought to encourage us to reflect seriously upon the Lacanian and Derridean questions about the letter's destination. We might say that the fever of literature's letter is in reality the fever of the Law and the big Other. Talking about the violence of the Symbolic, and of literature in particular, we now may ask the question: What happens if the letter explodes? It is a sort of letter bomb, as Peter Schwenger suggests in his book on the nuclear age entitled *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word*. This question emphasizes the role that literary narrative—as a letter—plays in shaping the current geopolitical scenes. Since any letter is a residuum of a former letter, are we left with a persistent residue—that which for Lacan and Derrida is unassimilable and unrepresentable—that reflects and deflects our political and cultural remainders? To have a better grasp of the career of the career of this residue or stain, the strategy of Žižek's 'looking awry' is necessary:

A goal, once reached, always retreats anew. Can we not recognize in this paradox the very nature of the psychoanalytical notion of drive, or more properly the Lacanian distinction

between its aim and its goal? The goal is the final destination, while the aim is what we intend to do, i.e., the way itself. Lacan's point is that the real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, to continue its path to and from the goal. The real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit. Therein consists the paradox of Sisyphus: once he reaches his goal, he experiences the fact that the real aim of his activity is the way itself, the alternation of ascent and descent. (4)

This strategy of looking awry at psychoanalysis and deconstruction, and at literature and life in general, would allow us to see at an angle the real logics of the *Thing*. Only through this anamorphic, distorted perspective might we understand the twisted career of the missed encounter.

Notes

¹ For Lacan, the *vel* is the space between the two overlapping circles: that of meaning (Other) and that of being (Subject). It is in this alienation, Lacan argues, that the subject is constructed. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, he explains this overlapping:

If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realisation of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges from the field of the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier. (211)

This is reminiscent of Lacan's Borromean knot (Real, Symbolic, Imaginary). The orders overlap but do not disappear. Their shared zone creates this alienation, this forced choice. Like the Real that does not require any permission to erupt in the Real, there is an uncontrolled overlap between being and meaning.

² For a full-length elaboration of this argument, see Jonathan Arac's *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), or Sacvan Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978).

³ Commenting on the Freudian "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" Lacan argues:

But the terrible vision of the dead son taking the father by the arm designates a beyond that makes itself heard in the dream. Desire manifests itself in the dream by the loss expressed in

an image at the most cruel point of the object. It is only in the dream that this truly unique encounter can occur. Only a rite, an endlessly repeated act, can commemorate this not very memorable encounter—for no one can say what the death of a child is, except the father qua father, that is to say, no conscious being. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 59)

It is not the actual smoke coming out of the room where the child is that awakened the father; rather, it is the atrociousness of the fact that his dream delved deep into the Real of his desire.

⁴ See Žižek's *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁵ In “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud,” Lacan refers to the letter as that “material support that concrete discourse borrows from language” (147). Language, according to him, is this structure that precedes the subject's entry into it. He continues to argue that it is “in the chain of the signifier that the meaning ‘insists’” (153). Deconstructing Saussure's model which favors the signified over the signifier, Lacan argues in favor of the “notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier—which Ferdinand de Saussure illustrates with an image resembling the wavy lines of the upper and lower Waters in miniatures from manuscripts of Genesis; a double flux marked by fine streaks of rain, vertical dotted lines supposedly confining segments of correspondence” (154). This suggests the “dominance of the letter in the dramatic transformation that dialogue can effect in the subject” (154). In his analysis of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Lacan asserts that a dream is a “rebus” “which must be understood quite literally” (159). In the Hawthornian narrative paradigm we have this sliding-away of the signified but the letter is depicted

as the material symbol. In Melville's *Moby-Dick* we have a spiral movement of the letter from Hawthorne to Melville, from Melville to Ishmael, from Ishmael to the reader.

⁶ A long philosophical tradition, going back to Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Marx, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and down to recent work of Derrida, Bataille, Žižek sees the question of body/mind (material/immaterial) as major contention in Western philosophy.

⁷ In his analysis of anxiety, Žižek's point out:

we should bear in mind that, for Lacan, in anxiety, what the subject is exposed to is precisely the loss of the loss itself – Lacan here turns around Freud: anxiety is not the anxiety of separation from the object, but the anxiety of the objet(-cause of desire) getting too close to the subject. This is why trauma belongs to the domain of the uncanny in the fundamental ambiguity of this term: what makes uncanny uncanny is its homeliness itself, that fact that it is the rise-into-visibility of something too close to us. (“Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject” 25)

⁸ In his seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's “The Purloined Letter,” Lacan shows his interest in demystifying the repetition compulsion within the chain of signifiers associated with the Symbolic Order. In this order the signifier is displaced and the letter is hidden or forgotten. Hidden or forgotten, the letter keeps missing its place within the Symbolic. The story depicts the protagonists' exchange of roles and repeats the inaugural scene in which the eye (I) sees the object or misses it. Seeking a missing object, one looks everywhere to find it and finds nothing. When almost abandoning the search, someone else finds the object in question and the chain of displaced signifiers

continues. At the end of the story, the purloined letter, somehow wandering, is displayed within the reach of every looking eye, yet everyone seems to miss it except Dupin, who is not hypnotized by the orbiting motion of the letter. Lacan interprets the first act of purloining the letter as the primal scene and the second act as a repetition of that primal scene. The letter can be seen as an axis of rotation, around which the protagonists exchange gazes.

⁹ Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" explains how repetition is tied to the death drive.

¹⁰ In his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan argues that "there is no question of confusing with repetition either the return of the signs, or reproduction, or the modulation by the act of a sort of acted-out remembering. Repetition is something which, of its true nature, is always veiled in analysis, because of the identification of repetition with the transference in the conceptualization of analysts" (54). What happens in fact is a pursuit of the real—a pursuit that is not available through transference.

¹¹ This is also the Freudian model.

¹² In his *Cast by Means of Figures: Herman Melville's Rhetorical Development*, Brian Collier Short points out that anasemia is the discourse network by which terms have referential value only within a closed discursive economy and not in language generally: anasemia's "terms signify in relation to each other, within their own closed economy, but refuse determination by ordinary language" (116).

¹³ I am borrowing this term from Derrida. I want to link it to the ontology of the letter.

¹⁴ I am borrowing this term from Derrida. “Hauntology,” comprised of haunting and ontology, is linked to the paradoxical nature of the specter, to the past and the present at the same time. As Derrida argues in his *Specters of Marx*: “To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration (161).

¹⁵ The sovereignty of the subject is no longer located in the confined realm of the *cogito*; it is located in the microphysics of power. Instead of the classical Cartesian *cogito*, we have a new *cogito*—I control, therefore I exist. The crisis of subjectivity and the implosion of the Cartesian *cogito* are emphasized by Althusser whose works come as an “epistemological break” with traditional Western philosophy. His re-reading of Marx and Ideology promote a new model of subjectivity. Althusser draws upon Lacan’s theory to understand the dynamics of ideology. He argues that for Marx, Ideology is “thought as an imaginary construction whose status is exactly like the theoretical status of the dream among writers before Freud. For those writers, the dream was the purely imaginary, i.e. null, result of the ‘day’s residues’” (108). Althusser, unlike Marx, builds his understanding of Ideology on Lacan’s understanding of reality and the world individuals construct around them after their stepping into the Symbolic Order. The Symbolic Order is the realm of language, inter-subjective linguistic communications, and the knowledge of ideological standards. To be recognized as a speaking subject, one has to submit to the Law-of-the Father.

¹⁶ Derrida's *écriture* enacts Hawthorne's circular structure from "The Custom-House" to the grave, from the archive and back to it.

¹⁷ In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva defines the abject as a "pre-object" that is situated in the Imaginary. The abject, then, represents the child's effort to detach itself from the pre-Oedipal mother. The construction of the "I" is preceded by a sense of nausea, disgust, and horror. Abjecting the mother, the child creates a separate space that demarcates its own identity. This space remains void. This void refers to patients whose problems are situated at the borderline between neurosis and psychosis.

¹⁸ Butler's theory of the citational subject is based upon Derrida's theory of performativity and language and Althusser's theory of interpellation. It deconstructs Austen's speech act theory and proposes a theory of performativity and agency. By this logic, to cite is to (re)iterate, quote, and refer to.

¹⁹ Although Abraham and Torok's theory of mourning is caught in Freud's model, they link *introjections* to successful mourning and *incorporation* to unsuccessful mourning. Abraham and Torok's theorization of the term *incorporation* as a metaphoric devouring of the lost love-object is still invested in the Freudian model of mourning and melancholia. The "fantasy of incorporation," Abraham and Torok point out, "is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full impact of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us" (*The Shell and the Kernel* 127).

²⁰ My argument is that the symbolic representation of sexuality, impossible as it is, implies the lack of a signifier. This lack signifies that the sexual encounter is an impossible encounter that goes beyond symbolization and spills over into *différance*.

²¹ In Lacanese, *méconnaissance*—the failure to recognize—evokes the child’s knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition that the image he sees in the mirror does not in fact correspond (*méconnaissance*) to his experience.

²² In Hawthorne’s narrative, there is a variety of primal scenes. The author’s primal scene can be grasped only indexically, through his obsession with the graves, bones, and ghosts of the fathers.

²³ Lacan’s understanding of *sinthome* is the surplus of enjoyment or *jouissance* that goes beyond hermeneutics and constructs fantasy. In this respect, it is the pure *jouissance* of the subject beyond analysis. In other words, it is something topographical that goes beyond consciousness. This is why one can never know entirely the *sinthome*. The inability to know it is due to its non-referentiality. The *sinthome*, however, brings together symptom and fantasy. Such amalgamation complicates the work of the *sinthome*.

²⁴ As defined by Lacan in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, “The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself; has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must,

therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack” (112). In fact, it this lack or split creates our subjectivity.

²⁵ The floating signs that constitute a *point de capiton*—a master or an empty signifier—are roaming in the field of discursivity as they go through an emptying of their contents. What happens is that meaning is partially fixed by the intervention (over-determination) of a master signifier that sets up retroactively the identity of these floating signifiers by keeping them within the bounds of what Laclau and Mouffe call “ the logics of equivalence and difference” (142).

²⁶ In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva argues that “The term *inter-textuality* denotes the transposition of one (or several) sign system[s] into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources,’ we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality (59-60; emphasis original).

²⁷ A primal scene is constructed by the analyst through hypothetical and explanatory fiction. It is a hermeneutic allegory whose function is to explain the origins of neurosis and psychosis. Since everything leads out from the primal scene, it is clear that the primal scene is pre-conscious in the life of the subject. The Wolf Man case, however, is a theory of narrative that has two functions: a hermeneutic function that digs for origins (origins of neurosis and psychosis) and a function of narrative structuration that elucidates the circuits of the primal scene (how everything leads out from it and returns to it).

²⁸The meaning of the archive comes to it from the past, from the Greek *arkheion* which originally meant a house, an address, and a residence of *archons*. As Derrida argues, the name *arkhé* contains in it the meaning of commencement and commandment. The archive invokes the origin and at the same time the command of the patriarch. The figure of the patriarch, which is derived from the Freudian psychoanalytic model, is always already there lurking in the archive. This omnipresence postpones the act of obedience but it keeps it alive even if the document is burnt. The patriarch, then, inhabits the pages of the archive and is contained within its ashes when it is destroyed.

²⁹ Gérard Genette argues that the paratext is the liminal zone between the “peritext” or all that is contained within the text and the “epitext” or all that comes from outside the text (5). My understanding of the term brings Genette’s theorization into dialogue with the Derridean deconstructive model in which both writing and reading dwell in the fissures and the residues of the *arche-text* and *différance*.

³⁰ I am using Freud’s model of melancholia which invokes incorporation.

³¹ I am alluding to Hawthorne’s various fathers: his biological father, whom he lost at a very young age, his Puritan ancestors, and his literary fathers.

³² Diana Fuss differentiates between the two seemingly associated words, identity and identification. She argues that identifications are erotic, intellectual, and emotional. Thus, identification is identification with another. This means that identity is relational and is never identical to itself but only a possibility in relation to an other.

³³ The phantom does not literally exist; it is a metaphor that traces the archival truth.

³⁴ Normal mourning is a successful mourning that is brought to a conclusion. When mourning fails, the introjection of the object is suspended or annihilated. Affective as it is, the re-turn of melancholia explains how the lost object is not completely incorporated in the psyche. This failure of integration leaves an impact on the psyche. Melancholia might lead to mania and suicide.

³⁵ The lost father-child relationship would be one of the unspeakable “secrets” that stake the narrative. Are we to understand that prohibited relation as an erotic one? Although we tend to think of the child’s desire for the approval of the father and the unconditional love of the mother (hence the development of identification and desire in the heteronormative subject), there are such strong currents of ambiguity and ambivalence in Hawthorne’s writing that the desire for the paternal penis may indeed be the unspeakable secret, the repressed which can return only in a highly disguised form. Were my focus the question of erotic investitures of the narrative, I would study the various levels of the erotics of the missed encounter.

³⁶ In the Lacanian psychoanalytic model, the Real defies symbolization. According to Lacan, it is impossible to have access to the Real due to our dependence on language. Commenting on Lacan’s psychoanalytic model, Žižek argues that the Real is a fantasy; it does not exist, yet its effects on the subject are so indelible.

³⁷ My understanding of nostalgia draws upon the Freudian model of psychoanalysis, the Derridean theory of the archive fever. The Greek *nostos* implies a *re*-turn home. My emphasis is not so much on

re-turning home as on studying the archive as home. The fever that follows the archivist's encounter with the archive explains his afflicted imagination. Based on a sense of loss, it promises *re*-turn home and re-unity with the love-objects. Although nostalgia has always been seen as a *maladie du pays*, I see it as mourning for the impossibility of *re*-turn, the expression of longing mania. Looking for a unity of time and space, *nostos* encounters silence and projects meaning on it.

³⁸ The void is the theoretical and practical nodal point of micropsychoanalysis developed by Silvio Fanti. In his *Life in Micropsychoanalysis*, Silvio Fanti divides the void into two categories: the material void and the psychical void. The void, unlike in orthodox psychoanalysis, offers an explanation to the life/death drives through what Fanti calls The Ide (*Instinct d'essais* or Instinct of trials), NDV (Neutral Dynamism of the Void), and Trials. The concept of the void is not an abstract, metaphysical concept; it is invested in the psychomaterial reality and energy that governs our lives. Fanti contends:

Ndv is inherent in the void—when activated it transcends the void—the Ide changes one state into another—the trial is born and dies. In other words, the Ndv is, the Ide does, and the void is the continuum of being and doing ... the combination of void—Ndv—Ide forms the basic texture of my life and death. From the Ndv, the Ide creates the raw energy material on which the death/life drive will continue to invent, at random, the psychical and organic, life and death, in order to satisfy the principle of the constancy of the void.” (49)

³⁹ The First World War provided Freud framed Freud's theory of *Thanatos*. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud points out that, “on the basis of theoretical considerations, supported by biology, we put forward

the hypothesis of a *death instinct*, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state; on the other hand, we supposed that Eros ... aims at complicating life and at the same time, of course, at preserving it (380-1).

⁴⁰ The Cartesian transparent, self-reflexive subject has lost currency in Hawthorne's world in which subjectivity correlates with power. It is no longer self-reflexive and independent. The dissemination and regulation of power function through the deregulation of the subject—the supposedly transparent and self-reliant subject.

⁴¹ Here Derrida is alluding specifically to the racial Other, to Israel. In my dissertation, I am talking about an indefinite Other. It suffices to say that any archivization involves, as a transposition of the Other's narrative, a violent encounter.

⁴² Prosopopeia is derived from the Greek *prosōpon* (a face or a mask). It is the trope of the mask or veil that allows for the reanimation of the dead by giving them a voice and a face. The mask is also linked to transference. Bakhtin points out that “the mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful image of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles” (40).

⁴³ In his early writings, Freud studied the existence of real trauma in the experience of the child. Then, he realized the limitations of this approach and, as a result, set up a theory of fantasy. In other

words, the sexual aggression has not necessarily happened; it can be imagined, fantasized, and invented. In his analysis of the Wolf Man and the Rat Man, Freud has realized that the fantasy is more important and productive than the event itself. This means there are two moments of trauma: a original (repressed) event and a second (fantasized) moment. As we know, trauma is by definition unrepresentable and unassimilable. Yet, it finds representation in the symbol of the double.

⁴⁴ The mirror, one of the figurations and configurations of the double, reflects and thinks. It is the symbol of all symbols. In this way, all knowledge and any representation are only reflections. Therefore, any reflection is very elusive and subjective. I am not interested in valuing the validity of this syllogism. It has long been proved that the senses are not reliable, but they are the only vessel that guarantees the reflection. Beside the literal mirror, there exists a mirror stage through which any person goes. At this stage, the child starts to know the human condition because he starts to think symbolically (i.e., the subject who looks and the image of the subject that is looked at). To know oneself, one has to be recognized first as an individual. One needs an Other—as a shadow—to have a reflection that allows one to say “I am.” For a mirror to play its symbolic role as an effective reflective vessel it has to be held by someone else. Without the Other it is nothing.

⁴⁵ The origins of the double in American literature, and in American culture in general, have not been elucidated satisfactorily. This voluntary marginalization of the double attempts to restore the unity of the self and to repudiate separation and difference at the level of society. The motif of the double,

however, has an important place in nineteenth-century American literature, especially the work of Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, and Whitman.

⁴⁶ A mirror can reflect anything and can reflect another mirror. In doing so, it reflects itself again. In reflecting the other reflected mirror—a counter *abyme*—it is a container of the act of mirroring—a reflection that is mirrored as content. This content, however, is mirrored as a container. What we have is infinite chain of containers and contents. In this sense the reflection of the original—be it container or content—is always already deferred: the original is a mirror that is doubled and redoubled, facing itself and mirroring other mirrors. Consequently, the contour of the double is brought closer to the center or to the original.

⁴⁷ The similarities between Ahab and Dorian Gray are striking. As Dorian's portrait lives, ages, and fades away, inscribing the immoral deeds of an immortal protagonist, his double grows and devours his life. Likewise, Ahab's fixation on the whale grows to be an obsession with and by the Leviathan that puts an end to his illusory quest.

⁴⁸ The focus of this chapter is to study the ways in which the shadow has become an aspect of the conscious and unconscious, personal and collective life. According to Jung, the shadow, which is positive and negative at the same time, forms the evil, uncontrolled part of the human psyche. It has two aspects: the first is associated with the personal (un)conscious and the second overlaps with the collective unconscious. It is worth noting, however, that Jung's theory of the shadow rests upon

Freud's theory of sexual instinct and departs from it when it touches upon the collective unconscious and the occult.

⁴⁹ Here I am alluding to Robert K. Martin's pioneering work on the work on the homosexuality of and in *Moby-Dick*. (see *Hero, Captain, and Stranger*, especially chapter three).

⁵⁰ Plato talks about the impossibility of the double. There is only one world, and that world is the world of wisdom and truth.

⁵¹ As Derrida argues, *mise en abyme* is in fact a *mise en scène* within an abyss of infinite layers. *Abyme* which rhymes with *abyss* spirals representation into self referential staging. In other words, the main aspect of the *mise en abyme* is the relation of repetition and mirroring the embedded narrative (second-level) harbors with the main narrative.

⁵² This analysis would reveal Ahab as a repressed homosexual in contrast to Ishmael and Queequeg's continuum. This argument is not the focus of my thesis. However, it is very important to understand how an author can distort his narrative structure in order to remain in the closet. For more information on this topic, see Leslie Fiedler's *An End to Innocence* (1948).

⁵³ Ahab who represents the obsession with and critique of the "absolute ego" reminds me of Feuerbach who sees "man—this is the mystery of religion—projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself object of this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject: he thinks of himself, is an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself.

Thus here. Man is an object to God” (29-30). This infinite projection of images is at the center of *Moby-Dick*.

⁵⁴ What Žižek calls Bartleby’s politics is different from Hardt and Negri’s understanding of Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to.” While they see Bartleby as the figure of resistance and refusal as the first step toward the construction of a new paradigm, Žižek considers Bartleby’s statement not as an abstract negation but as an integral element in the construction of a something new. He contends that Bartleby’s politics

merely *gives body* to this negativity. The difficulty of imagining the New is the difficulty of imagining Bartleby in power. Thus the logic of the move from the superego-parallax to the Bartleby-parallax is very precise: it is the move from something to nothing, from the gap between two “somethings” to the gap that separates a something from nothing, from the void of its own place. (*The Parallax View* 382)

Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to,” Žižek argues, does not initiate an “abstract negation”; rather, it is an “arche” that cannot be filled with any content. Here, refusal is in reality a refusal of content as *objet a* continues to be empty.

⁵⁵ Freud, Nietzsche, and Derrida were interested in the inversion of signs in a practice of appropriation operated by debt. Debt is always signed by the other. My focus here is on the figure of the whale as a simulacrum, as a question of appropriation.

⁵⁶ The vexing eruptions of necrophilia in *Moby-Dick* are linked to the economy of melancholia and masochism. The phantasmic necrophilia is invested in the anasemic economy of filial legacy and thus engenders masochism when it is impossible to fulfill the duty.

⁵⁷ “Destinerrrs” alludes to destination (*pour destiner*), errancy (*errance*), and inheritance. That informs Derrida’s argument that a letter can fail to arrive at its destination. *Destinerrance* is characterized by the play of the possible and the impossible in the larger field of hermeneutics. As argued by Derrida:

what’s needed, if you prefer, is that inadequation should remain always possible in order that interpretation in general, and the reply, be possible in its turn. Here is an example of this law linking the possible and the impossible. For a faultless interpretation, a totally adequate self-comprehension, would not only mark the end of a history marked by its own transparency. By ruling out the future, they would make everything impossible, both the event and the coming of the other, coming to the other. (*Machine Paper* 89)

Destinerrance is closely linked to Derrida’s other concepts. For example, it is related to *différance*, which is to say, to the temporal economy of differing and deferring. It is spatial and temporal: spatial because the letter might err and not arrive at its destination, temporal because it narrates the possibility of wandering and, as a result, not arriving on time.

⁵⁸ When addressing the other, the speaker renders himself vulnerable to the other, who might respond in different ways. Not knowing the response of the other confirms the impossibility of talking about the present in communication: all we know is the past and the *à-venir*. The example of the

infelicitous performative utterance, “I love you” *destinerrrs* and might be assigned other meanings not intended by the speaker/sender. Writing *for* and *about* Derrida, Miller says in *The Medium is the Maker*: “Any utterance or writing I make may escape my intentions both as to what it should mean (for others) and as to the destination it is supposed to reach. It may be destined to err and to wander, even though it may sometimes, by a happy accident, reach the destination I intended for it (33). The postcard is open to all those who happen to see it. Anyone who reads it can interpret it as addressed to him or to her. Anyone can change the destination of the postcard or disrupt its journey to its addressee. Anyone can add, delete, or hide parts of the message. In doing so, the “I” ceases to be the owner of the message, as it is doubled and re-doubled, endlessly. Letter posting is an invocation of ghosts. These ghosts are created by the senders and receivers of letters. When the letter goes astray, the ghosts disappear. To send a letter is to make oneself naked before the naked specters generated by the letters. To write a letter is to depend on the ghosts the letter conjures up. What is supposed to be private—the letter—turns out to be open and accessible to the public.

⁵⁹ This is reminiscent of the dialogue between Chillingworth and Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*: “And so, Hester, I drew thee into my heart, into its innermost chamber, and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there!” (61).

⁶⁰ One of the main components of metaphysical discourse is the argument that the world has a double. The immediate real is validated by another real—a real that gives meaning and essence to

this double. According to Plato, our world is only the shadow or the double of the real world. The metaphysical thinking doubts the immediate because it could be a doubling of another reality.

⁶¹ Kristeva argues that “depression is the hidden face of Narcissus, the face that is to bear him away into death, but of which he is unaware while he admires himself in a mirage ... We shall not encounter the bright and fragile amatory idealization; on the contrary, we shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the *loss* of that essential other. The shadow of despair” (*Black Sun* 5). Indeed, there is meaning in despair. This melancholy finds its resolution in *Moby-Dick*’s turn toward the Gothic.

⁶² Kristeva’s concept of the shadow of the lost object is similar to that of Freud. However, my argument rests also on the Lacanian understanding of the *Thing* as impossibility. This impossibility structures everything including the Real, desire, and writing.

⁶³ Derrida studies the concept of the *pharmakon* as a game of question and answer, sender and receiver, interlacement and separation. This economy allows for the circulation of concepts and opposites—opposites that contain the poison and the remedy. According to Derrida, the structure of the *pharmakon*, the pharmacy constitutes a reserve that only stops the exchange between the opposites. The logic of the *pharmakon*, however, produces an intricate circular structure of opposites: poison becomes remedy, evil becomes good, memory becomes oblivion. On the one hand, the *pharmakon* is beneficial and necessary for hermeneutics. On the other hand, it is dangerous and could cause death. In *Dissemination*, we learn that “the *pharmakon* can never be simply beneficial” (102).

⁶⁴ In Plato's work we learn that art is a presentation, *re*-presentation of a similar or different reality. In other words, all art is a double and *re*-presentation is turning reality into two or multiple realities. For Aristotle, however, art is an imitation of life—an imitation that is in fact a *re*-creation of life in action (*mimesis* and *poesis*).

⁶⁵ The Lacanian orders (or the Borromean circles of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary) overlap but not merge. The Real precedes the infant's entry into the Symbolic Order—the linguistic recognition. The Symbolic overwrites the Real and creates the Symbolic reality. Overwriting does not mean to completely erase the Real, because the Real does not exist (i.e., it precedes language). In his innovative exploration of the work of Lacan, Bruce Fink argues:

In Lacan's terminology, existence is a product of language: language brings things into existence (makes them part of human reality), things which had no existence prior to being ciphered, symbolized, or put into words. The real, therefore, does not exist, since it precedes language; Lacan re-serves a separate term for it, borrowed from Heidegger: it 'ex-sists.' It exists outside of or apart from our reality. (25)

Explaining the precedence of the Real, Fink contends:

we need not think in strictly temporal terms: the real need not be understood as merely before the letter, in the sense of disappearing altogether once a child has assimilated language (as if, in any case, a child could ever assimilate all of language, or all at once). The real is perhaps best understood as that which *has not yet been symbolized, remains to be symbolized, or even resists symbolization*; and it may perfectly well exist "*alongside*" and *in spite of* a speaker's considerable linguistic capabilities. (25; emphasis mine)

⁶⁶ In his analysis of the Lacanian *objet a*, Žižek argues that “*objet a* is the reef, the obstacle which interrupts the closed circuit of the ‘pleasure principle’ and derails its balanced movement . . . the *objet a* prevents the circle of pleasure from closing, it introduces an irreducible displeasure, but the psychic apparatus finds a sort of perverse pleasure *in this displeasure itself*, in the never ending, repeated circulation around the unattainable, always missed object” (*Enjoy your Symptom* 48; emphasis original). In other words, *objet a* is associated with the Real as lack. As explained by Lacan, “The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself; has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 103).

⁶⁷ Historicizing here means contextualizing not normalizing. The challenge of historicizing the missed encounter is reminiscent of the problems of historicizing the trauma of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was considered as an event that is outside history, an event that goes beyond the limits of representation. For more on the debate on the uniqueness of the Holocaust, see LaCapra’s *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994).

⁶⁸ Influenced by Paul de Man’s deconstructive thinking, Yale scholars such as Shoshana Felman, Dori laub, and Cathy Caruth laid the ground for a new understanding of trauma theory. Their theory is predicated upon the impossibility to represent trauma because of the inadequacy and limitation of language to represent reality. This approach engages with the study of the ineffable, the void in discourse, the unassimilable, and the Real.

⁶⁹ In Freud's model of psychoanalysis the "latent content" (censored by the unconscious) of a dream becomes the "manifest content" (the dream as it is remembered) via a process of dream-work. The latent content resists analysis. Freud is interested in the dream-work itself and not in the latent content per se. Because trauma can only be known in its belated form and because the essence of the dream, and trauma does not lie in the abyss beyond language but rather in the process itself, Freud does not try to reach the Real of trauma. This means that Freudian psychoanalysis is focused on the construction of trauma in the Symbolic rather than its association with the Real. In fact, the talking cure is less preoccupied with having access to the Real of trauma because the lost origin never existed.

⁷⁰ According to Foucault, the term archaeology "does not imply the search for a beginning; it does not relate analysis to geological excavation. It designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs" (131). In other words, Archaeology discards any notion of stable unity and coherence. This is also true of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage which shows, while also studying the ruptures inherent in any discourse, how the subject is divided and constructed through the help of an Other and through language. This gap in subjectivity is where resistance and change are lodged and nurtured.

⁷¹ Anouar Majid's study is a critique of both Western and Islamic theoretical assumptions. He critiques the western secularism liberal tradition, which, according to him, is a form of neo-Orientalism. At the same time he argues that postcolonial critics, who advocate a theory a hybridity or exile, have worsened the conditions of the Other.

⁷² Bruce Fink, in his *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, writes:

The real is, for example, an infant's body "before" it comes under the sway of the symbolic order, before it is subjected to toilet training and instructed in the ways of the world. In the course of socialization, the body is progressively written or overwritten with signifiers; pleasure is localized in certain zones, while other zones are neutralized by the word and coaxed into compliance with social, behavioral norms. Taking Freud's notion of polymorphous perversity to the extreme, we can view the infant's body as but one unbroken erogenous zone, there being no privileged zones, no areas in which pleasure is circumscribed at the outset. (24)

⁷³ The contradictory nature of the *pharmakon*—its necessity and danger—reflects the unavoidable danger that follows the intrusion of the Real in the texture of the Symbolic.

⁷⁴ See Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Benjamin's analysis of the deauratization of art through photography in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. When applied to the representation of Others during the various steps of imperialism and colonization, these analyses can be used to assert that the Others, while geographically and temporally difficult to contain, are available in estranged different forms that substitute their original aura. To tame the uncivilized

Others, nineteenth-century America made recourse to product substitution of aura. Since getting rid of these Others cannot be achieved, Americans, through travel narratives and other discourses, sell a very particular image of the Other—an irresponsible infidel who needs to be tamed.

⁷⁵ Freud's realization that there is an antagonism between the "reality principle" and the "pleasure principle" led him to conclude that there is a "beyond the pleasure principle." This conclusion is developed by Lacan who, unlike Freud, sees the drive as circulating around a traumatic experience. Revisiting Freud, Lacan calls the pivotal point around which the drive circles *objet a*. This *objet a* keeps desire incessantly unfolding thereby producing a pain. However, there is, to borrow the word from Žižek, an obscene pleasure in this pain, a compulsive circulation around the lost object, around the unfathomable or the "unassimilable". This painful pleasure, Lacan's version of the Freudian "beyond the pleasure principle" is named *jouissance*.

⁷⁶ In his analysis of the difference between the Real and reality, Žižek contends that "the crucial point on which the consistency of Lacan's position hinges is thus the difference between reality and the Real. If the Lacanian Real is simply another version of 'reality' as the ultimate and unsurmountable point of reference of the symbolic process, then Lacan's endeavor to formulate a new 'ethics of the real' effectively amounts to a return to premodern substantialist ethics" (*The Plague of Fantasies* 214).

⁷⁷ Žižek approaches the concept of *jouissance* through Butler's notion of performativity and Althusser's concept of interpellation. In his analysis of the Lacanian *Jouissance*, he purports that

“sexual difference is the Real of antagonism/deadlock that the two positions, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ endeavour to symbolize, but can do so only by way of getting involved in their own consciousness” (*The Plague of Fantasies* 214).

⁷⁸ According to Deleuze, the event is closely linked to the sense. The sense of the event emerges from the gap between subjects and objects. Consequently, its indefiniteness resists interpretation, structure, and symbolization. The event’s temporality defies the linearity of past, present, and future. It inhabits the horizon of what just happened and what is about to happen. The temporality of the event is also supplanted by the impossibility of locating it. For more on the issue of the temporality of the event, See Deleuze’s *The Logic of sense* (Columbia UP, 1990).

⁷⁹ The *il y a*, for Levinas, much like Derrida’s *objet a*, works as the discontinuation of enjoyment. In *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, Levinas approaches the *il y a* through his reading of Heidegger’s phenomenology. Something is happening, Levinas would argue. In fact, “the indeterminateness of this ‘something is happening’ is not the indeterminateness of a subject and does not refer to a substantive. Like the third person pronoun in the impersonal form of a verb, it designates not the uncertainly known author of the action, but the characteristic of this action which somehow has no author” (*Existence and Existents* 52). The *il*, translated in Lacanian parlance, is the *Thing* that is associated with horror, the abject, the temporality of subjectivity.

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