From Conscientization to Symbolic Competence: Re-reading Hawthorne's Moral Universe

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Abstract

While much of Nathaniel Hawthorne's moral universe has traditionally been read through the lens of Puritanical sin, guilt, and allegorical didacticism, this essay proposes a dual theoretical re-reading. Moving beyond static interpretations of conscience, we apply Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization (critical consciousness) alongside Claire Kramsch's framework of symbolic competence to argue that Hawthorne's characters and narrative voice engage in a dynamic, unresolved negotiation with moral meaning. In works such as *The Scarlet Letter* and "Young Goodman Brown," the protagonist's journey is not toward redemption or damnation, but toward a critical awareness (conscientization) of how social and theological codes produce their own subjectivities (Freire 35). Yet, Hawthorne simultaneously subverts any final, actionable liberation. Instead, his narrators and fallen heroes demonstrate what Kramsch terms symbolic competence: the ability to perceive and position oneself within the inherent ambiguity of multiple, often contradictory, moral systems without collapsing into certainty (Kramsch 251). The researcher contends that the true Hawthornean "moral" is not a lesson in conduct but an aesthetic of ethical hesitation—a symbolic competence where meaning is perpetually deferred, and the real sin is the reification of any single interpretive code. This re-reading releases Hawthorne from the role of moral arbiter and reframes his universe as a proto-modernist theatre of structural critique and semiotic play.

Keywords: Hawthorne, Puritanism, Superego, Conscientização, Symbolism, Self, Literary Pedagogy.

1. EARLY LIFE

Nathaniel Hawthorne came into the world on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts — a town that wore its dark history like a second skin. The shadow of the Salem Witch Trials had never fully lifted from the place, and Hawthorne grew up in its chill. Guilt, sin, and the tangled nature of moral life became not merely literary themes for Hawthorne — they were something closer to inheritance (Mellow, 1980). His childhood was shaped by loss and withdrawal. His father, a sea captain, died while Hawthorne was still young, drawing the family inward upon itself. The boy who emerged from that quiet, somewhat isolated upbringing was reflective by temperament and solitary by habit — qualities that would serve him well at his writing desk, if not always in the world. At Bowdoin College, where he later studied, he found his way into a circle of remarkable men, forging friendships with the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and the future president Franklin Pierce (Reynolds, 2001).

2. EARLY CAREER AND STRUGGLES

Graduation in 1825 did not open any obvious doors. For nearly a decade afterward, Hawthorne worked in deliberate obscurity, reading widely, writing carefully, and publishing little. When he did publish, he often did so anonymously — partly out of modesty, partly out of a writer's instinct to protect himself from the exposure of early failure. His first novel, *Fanshawe*, appeared in 1828 at his own expense; he later disowned it entirely, embarrassed by what he saw as its raw immaturity (Turner, 1980). Recognition, when it finally came, arrived with *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837. The collection announced the

arrival of a distinctive literary voice — one drawn irresistibly toward allegory, moral symbolism, and the psychological terrain that most writers preferred to leave uncharted. Hidden sin, the burden of conscience, the darkness that coexists with respectability: these were Hawthorne's native subjects, and he returned to them with the persistence of a man who could not quite look away.

3. MAJOR WORKS AND LITERARY STYLE

Hawthorne's most enduring contributions to American literature came through a body of novels and short stories that continue to be read, taught, and argued over more than a century and a half after his death. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) remains his most celebrated achievement — a novel set in the unforgiving world of Puritan New England that uses the story of Hester Prynne's public shaming to probe the deepest recesses of sin, guilt, and the possibility of redemption. Hester is no passive victim; she pushes back against the moral architecture of her community with a quiet, sustained defiance that transforms the novel into something rarer than a period piece — a searching critique of the human instinct to punish what it cannot understand. *The House of the Seven Gables* followed in 1851, trading Hester's open scaffold for the closed, decaying rooms of a family curse — a gothic meditation on ancestral guilt and the terrible persistence of old sins across generations. A year later, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) drew on Hawthorne's own disillusionment after his time at the utopian Brook Farm community, turning lived experience into a cool, skeptical dissection of idealism's inevitable failures. His final major novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), carried his preoccupations across the Atlantic to Rome, where the ancient landscape became the backdrop for a philosophical inquiry into innocence, experience, and the moral cost of entering the world fully.

His shorter fiction proved equally formidable. Stories such as *Young Goodman Brown* and *The Minister's Black Veil* have earned a permanent place in the American literary canon, studied and re-studied for the density of their symbolism and the unsettling precision with which they anatomize Puritan psychology and its discontents. Hawthorne wrote from within a current known as Dark Romanticism — a strand of the broader Romantic Movement that turned away from the period's more hopeful energies and looked instead at what light tends to conceal: human fallibility, the gravity of sin, and the psychological wreckage that guilt leaves behind. Where Ralph Waldo Emerson and his transcendentalist contemporaries placed their faith in the essential goodness of human nature and the redemptive power of intuition, Hawthorne remained unconvinced. His vision was more shadowed and more alert to the ways in which the interior life can become its own prison (Bercovitch, 1991). In this scepticism lay not pessimism exactly, but a kind of rigorous honesty — a refusal to look away from what is difficult about being human.

4. SYMBOLIC IMAGERY IN HAWTHORNE: A PSYCHOANALYTIC AND POST-STRUCTURAL READING

The fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne is distinguished by a symbolic density that refuses easy resolution — an imaginative world in which visible things perpetually gesture toward invisible ones, where objects, landscapes, and figures carry moral and psychological freight that exceeds their surfaces. This quality has long attracted critical attention, but its full complexity comes into view only when approached through the interpretive tools that twentieth-century theory has made available. As Leland Person observes, Hawthorne's symbolic method operates on multiple registers simultaneously, binding the psychological to the social and the personal to the historical in ways that no single framework can exhaust (Person, 2007). Hawthorne's symbols do not illustrate ideas — they perform them, enacting in their ambiguity the very epistemological instability they describe (Bercovitch, 1991).

4.1. The Forest as Unconscious: A Freudian Reading

Among the many interpretive frameworks that illuminate the symbolic architecture of *Young Goodman Brown*, Freudian psychoanalysis offers perhaps the most intimate and psychologically penetrating lens. To read Hawthorne through Freud is to discover that the story's moral surface — its apparent concern with sin, temptation, and Puritan anxiety — conceals a deeper, more unsettling drama: the drama of a psyche in crisis, confronting the repressed contents of its own interior world. The forest, in this reading, is not merely a geographical location on the outskirts of Salem village. It is a symbolic topography — a landscape that maps, with remarkable precision, the structure of the unconscious mind as Freud would come to theorize it more than half a century after Hawthorne set his story there.

4.2 The Village and the Forest: Superego and Unconscious in Spatial Form

Freud's topographical model of the psyche, elaborated across his career from the early meta-psychological papers to the later structural model, draws a foundational distinction between the conscious (*das Bewusste*), the preconscious (*das Vorbewusste*), and the unconscious (*das Unbewusste*) — three regions of mental life differentiated not by their content alone but by the degree to which their contents are accessible to awareness and subject to the censorship of social and moral law (Freud, 1915/2001). What makes this model so productive for a reading of Hawthorne is that Hawthorne has, with apparent instinct, given these psychic regions a spatial form. The Puritan village in which Brown begins his night journey represents the domain of consciousness — a world of order, visibility, social regulation, and moral surveillance, governed by the internalized authority of communal law. This is the space of what Freud would later, in his structural revision, call the superego: the psychic agency that internalizes the prohibitions of culture and enforces them from within, converting external compulsion into the felt pressure of conscience and guilt (Freud, 1923/1961). The village is legible, mapped, watched. It is a space in which behaviour is always already subject to interpretation and judgment.

The forest is its structural inverse. Where the village is open to scrutiny, the forest is closed and obscure. Where the village enforces the reality principle — the subordination of desire to the demands of social life — the forest operates according to what Freud calls the pleasure principle: the unregulated movement of libidinal energy toward its objects, uninhibited by the censoring function of the superego (Freud, 1911/2001). Brown's movement from village to forest is not, therefore, simply a physical departure; it is a descent into the unconscious, a crossing of the threshold that separates what the self is permitted to know about itself from what it is compelled to repress. Hawthorne signals this transition with the deliberate weight of a writer who understands that landscape can carry psychological meaning: the path that Brown follows is described as

"a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest" (Hawthorne, 1835/1987, p. 75).

The lexical choices here reward close attention. "Dreary," "darkened," and "gloomiest" constitute a semantic field not merely of physical obscurity but of psychic opacity — the darkness that surrounds Brown is also the darkness within him, the darkness of the unconscious contents that ordinary waking life keeps at bay. In Freudian terms, darkness is among the most persistent symbolic registers of the unconscious: it figures those desires, anxieties, and impulses that remain inaccessible to conscious awareness yet continue, in their invisibility, to exert decisive pressure on thought and behavior (Freud, 1915/2001). The road into the forest is the road into the self — or rather, into that region of the self that the self refuses to acknowledge.

4.2.1 The Devil as Representative of the Id

The figure Brown encounters in the forest — the older traveller who is at once his companion and his guide deeper into the dark — functions, within the psychoanalytic schema, as a representative of the id: that primitive, desire-driven stratum of the psyche that exists, in Freud's formulation, entirely outside the jurisdiction of moral law, indifferent to the demands of reality, oriented purely toward gratification (Freud, 1923/1961). The traveller's easy familiarity with Brown — his intimate knowledge of Brown's family history, his calm authority, his apparent ubiquity across the moral landscape of the village — suggests that he is not an external figure at all but a projection, an externalisation of psychic content that Brown cannot bear to recognize as his own. This is precisely the dynamic that Freud describes in his theory of projection: the ego, unable to tolerate the presence of certain impulses within the self, expels them outward and locates them in an Other, thereby preserving the fiction of its own moral integrity (Freud, 1911/2001).

The staff that the traveller carries — described by Hawthorne as resembling a great black snake, twisting and writhing as though alive — is among the story's most explicitly Freudian images, one whose phallic symbolism would require little interpretive elaboration for any reader familiar with Freud's work on dream imagery and unconscious representation (Freud, 1900/2010). The serpent is, of course, a figure dense with literary and theological resonance, carrying the weight of the Fall, of temptation, of the knowledge that transgression brings. But it is also, in the psychoanalytic register, a symbol of libidinal energy — of the sexual and aggressive drives that Puritan ideology has most forcefully suppressed and that the forest, as unconscious space, now releases into symbolic visibility.

4.3 Repression, the Return of the Repressed, and Interpretive Collapse

The central psychoanalytic drama of *Young Goodman Brown* is organized around what Freud identifies as one of the most fundamental and consequential mechanisms of psychic life: repression (*Verdrängung*). Repression, for Freud, is not the destruction of an impulse or a memory but its forcible exclusion from consciousness — a dynamic suppression that requires continuous expenditure of psychic energy and that is never, finally, secure (Freud, 1915/2001). What is repressed does not disappear; it persists in the unconscious, investing itself in substitute formations — dreams, symptoms, parapraxes, and, crucially for our purposes, symbolic imagery — until the conditions arise for its return to consciousness. This return, when it comes, is characteristically experienced not as recognition but as shock, horror, or the uncanny (*Unheimlich*) — the disturbing sensation that something familiar has been encountered in a form that renders it strange and threatening (Freud, 1919/2003).

Brown's forest journey enacts precisely this dynamic. The figures he encounters in the darkness are not strangers but familiars — Goody Cloyse, who catechized him; the minister and deacon whose spiritual authority shaped his moral world; and most devastatingly, Faith herself, whose name Hawthorne has chosen with an allegorical deliberateness that the psychoanalytic reading renders newly significant. Each of these figures represents a component of the moral and ideological scaffolding that Brown has constructed his identity upon — and each, in the forest, reveals themselves as participants in the very evil that scaffolding was designed to exclude. What Brown witnesses is not simply hypocrisy; it is the return of the repressed on a communal scale, the eruption of collective unconscious content into the symbolic field of his experience. The village superego, it turns out, has never fully mastered the id it claimed to govern. The repressed has been there all along, hidden behind the faces of the righteous.

The consequence of this confrontation is what Freud might describe as a failure of ego function — a breakdown of the mediating, reality-testing capacity of the self that leaves Brown unable to reintegrate his experience into a coherent framework of meaning (Freud, 1923/1961). He returns to the village, but

he does not return whole. For the remainder of his life, he inhabits a condition of permanent interpretive suspension — unable to trust what he sees, unable to dismiss what he witnessed, unable to mourn what he has lost. This is not moral wisdom; it is psychic paralysis. The man who enters the forest in search of one night's transgression emerges as someone for whom the categories of good and evil have been simultaneously confirmed in their reality and rendered indistinguishable in their application. The ego, overwhelmed by the return of what it repressed, can no longer perform its essential function: it can no longer decide.

4.4 Hawthorne's Anticipation of Psychoanalytic Thought

What is remarkable, finally, about reading *Young Goodman Brown* through Freud is not that the story illustrates Freudian concepts — it was written decades before Freud began his career — but that Hawthorne arrived, through the resources of literary imagination and personal psychological acuity, at insights that Freud would later systematize in the language of science. The recognition that the self harbours contents it cannot acknowledge; that repression produces not safety but deferred crisis; that the moral order is underwritten by forces it officially disavows; that confrontation with the unconscious, without the capacity to integrate what one finds there, leads not to liberation but to destruction — these are Freudian discoveries avant la lettre, embedded in the symbolic fabric of a nineteenth-century short story with a precision that suggests Hawthorne understood, at some level, the territory he was mapping (Person, 2007). As Frederick Crews observes in his landmark psychoanalytic study of Hawthorne, the author's persistent return to guilt, concealment, and the inaccessibility of the inner life marks him as a writer for whom the unconscious was not a theoretical construct but a lived and troubling reality (Crews, 1966).

5. THE UNCANNY AND THE DOUBLE: FRAGMENTATION, PROJECTION, AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE SELF IN YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN

5.1 Freud's Uncanny and Its Literary Dimensions

In his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*, Freud undertakes what he himself describes as an excursion into aesthetics — an inquiry not into the beautiful or the sublime but into a more troubling register of experience: the feeling of unease, dread, and cognitive disorientation that arises when something that ought to be familiar reveals itself as strange, or when something that ought to remain hidden suddenly surfaces into visibility (Freud, 1919/2003). The German word *unheimlich* — literally, "un-homelike" — carries within its etymology the very paradox it names. Its antonym, *heimlich*, means not only "familiar" and "domestic" but also, in one of its secondary senses, "concealed" and "secret." Freud notes this with characteristic precision: the uncanny is not simply the opposite of the familiar but its dark underside — the familiar made strange, the domestic made threatening, the secret that was always already present within the home suddenly exposed (Freud, 1919/2003). This semantic instability at the heart of the word is, for Freud, no accident; it mirrors the psychological dynamic it describes, in which the boundary between the known and the unknown, the safe and the threatening, the self and its Other, proves far less stable than consciousness requires it to be.

Literary fiction, Freud argues, is a uniquely productive site for the uncanny, and the reasons are instructive. The fictional frame suspends the reality-testing function of the ego, allowing material that would ordinarily be censored or rationalized away to surface in symbolic form (Freud, 1919/2003). The reader, protected by the knowledge that the text is not real, can tolerate an encounter with uncanny material — with doubles, with animated objects, with the blurring of the boundary between the living and the dead — that would provoke acute anxiety in actual experience. Hawthorne, writing more than seventy years before Freud formulated the concept, produced in *Young Goodman Brown* one of the most

concentrated and technically accomplished literary explorations of the uncanny in the American tradition — a story in which the familiar becomes horrifying with a precision that reads, in retrospect, like a theoretical demonstration (Rosenberry, 1955).

5.2 The Double and Its Theoretical Genealogy

Central to Freud's account of the uncanny is the figure of the double (*Doppelgänger*) — the uncanny apparition of a second self that mirrors, shadows, or replaces the original. Freud draws here on the earlier work of Otto Rank, whose 1914 study *Der Doppelgänger* traced the double motif across mythology, folklore, and literature, identifying its recurrence as evidence of a deep and persistent psychological preoccupation (Rank, 1914/1971). For Rank, the double originates in the narcissistic desire for self-perpetuation — it is first conceived as a guardian or shadow-self, an insurance against mortality, a way of imagining the self as capable of surviving its own death. But this protective function, Freud argues, does not persist. As the ego matures and the reality principle asserts itself, the double undergoes a transformation in its psychological valence: what was once a reassurance becomes a threat. The double that was originally created to preserve the self becomes associated instead with its dissolution — a harbinger of fragmentation, loss of identity, and death (Freud, 1919/2003). It is in this transformed, threatening register that the double most characteristically appears in literature, and it is in this register that Hawthorne deploys it in *Young Goodman Brown*.

The psychological mechanism that underlies the double, in both Freud's and Rank's accounts, is that of projection: the ego's externalisation of those psychic contents — desires, impulses, aspects of the self — that it cannot integrate without threatening its coherent self-image (Freud, 1911/2001). The double does not arrive from outside; it is generated from within, expelled outward, and then encountered as though it were alien. This is why the double characteristically combines the deeply familiar with the deeply strange: it is familiar because it originated in the self, and strange because the self has disowned it. The uncanny affect that accompanies the encounter with the double is, on this account, the effect of self-recognition under conditions of repudiation — the horror of meeting what one has refused to be.

5.3 Hawthorne's Double: The Devil as Interior Figure

The figure that Brown encounters on the darkened forest road is introduced by Hawthorne with a detail of singular psychological significance: the traveller bears a striking physical resemblance to Brown himself. They might have been taken, Hawthorne tells us, for father and son — or, the implication quietly suggests, for the same man at different moments of his history. This resemblance is not incidental or decorative; it is the structural hinge of the story's psychoanalytic meaning. The devil is not other than Brown — he is Brown, or rather, he is the aspect of Brown that Brown's Puritan identity requires him to disown. He is the double in Freud's precise sense: the projected externalisation of repressed psychic content, encountered in the forest — the unconscious — as though it were an external figure, a stranger on the road (Freud, 1919/2003).

What makes this doubling so unsettling, both for Brown and for the reader, is the quality that Freud identifies as central to the uncanny encounter with the double: the oscillation between recognition and repudiation, between the acknowledgments that what one is seeing is oneself and the desperate insistence that it is not. Brown's growing horror as the journey proceeds is not simply the horror of witnessing evil in others; it is the horror of recognizing himself in what he witnesses. The devil's intimate familiarity with Brown's family history, his easy authority, his calm and almost affectionate manner — these are not the qualities of an external tempter. They are the qualities of a self that knows everything because it is everything: the repressed interior of a man who has built his entire identity on the suppression of exactly what the devil represents (Rosenberry, 1955).

This reading is supported by the structural logic of projection that Freud outlines in his papers on psychic mechanisms. Projection, as Freud describes it, is a defence mechanism by which the ego attributes to an external object the qualities or impulses that it cannot tolerate finding within itself (Freud, 1911/2001). Brown has constructed his moral identity — his sense of himself as a good man, a faithful husband, a member of the righteous community — on a foundation of systematic repression: the denial of his own capacity for transgression, his own participation in the very desires and impulses that Puritan ideology most forcefully condemns. The forest journey does not introduce evil into Brown's world; it reveals the evil that was already there, already his, already constitutive of the self he thought he was not. The devil, as double, is the form that this revelation takes — the repressed content of Brown's unconscious, clothed in human form and returned to him with the full force of the uncanny.

5.4 The Uncanny as Epistemological Crisis

Freud's analysis of the uncanny is not only psychological but epistemological: the uncanny is, among other things, a crisis of knowledge — a moment in which the categories through which the self organizes its experience of the world are revealed as insufficient, unstable, or fraudulent (Freud, 1919/2003). This epistemological dimension is central to understanding what happens to Brown after his forest encounter. The horror he experiences is not simply emotional; it is cognitive. He returns to the village not merely frightened but unable to know — unable to determine whether what he witnessed was real or dreamed, whether the evil he saw in his neighbours was genuine or illusory, whether Faith is corrupt or innocent. His interpretive faculties, which had previously operated within the stable framework of Puritan moral certainty, have been permanently destabilized.

This destabilization is itself a symptom of the uncanny encounter with the double. When the self meets its double — when it recognizes, however partially and reluctantly, that the Other it has projected outward is in fact a component of itself — the binary structures through which it organizes experience are compromised. If the devil and Brown are one, then the distinction between good and evil, upon which the entire Puritan symbolic order rests, is no longer secure. If the righteous are sinners and the sinners are righteous, then the moral map that Brown has used to navigate the world is not a map of reality but a map of his own repressions (Bercovitch, 1991). The uncanny, in this sense, is not merely a feeling — it is a form of knowledge, or rather, a form of the collapse of knowledge: the revelation that the certainties one lived by were always already fictions maintained by the labour of repression.

Tzvetan Todorov's work on the fantastic in literature provides a useful supplementary framework here. Todorov argues that the defining characteristic of the fantastic narrative is the reader's — and the protagonist's — sustained hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation for the events described (Todorov, 1975). This hesitation is never resolved in Hawthorne's story: we never know whether Brown genuinely witnessed a witches' Sabbath or whether the entire experience was a dream or a projection of his own guilty imagination. But this irresolution, far from being a weakness of the narrative, is its most psychologically precise feature. The uncanny, as Freud argues, depends on exactly this kind of undecidability — the impossibility of determining whether what one has encountered belongs to the external world or to the interior one (Freud, 1919/2003). Brown's paralysis is the paralysis of a man trapped in the uncanny: unable to confirm the reality of what he saw, unable to dismiss it, condemned to live in the space between knowing and not knowing.

5.5 The Double, Identity, and the Failure of Integration

The ultimate significance of the doubling motif in *Young Goodman Brown* lies in what it reveals about the preconditions of identity itself. The self, as Freud's work consistently suggests, is not a unified and coherent entity but a dynamic and precarious construction — maintained by the ongoing labour of repression, projection, and denial, and always vulnerable to the return of what it has excluded (Freud, 1923/1961). Brown's identity — his identity as a good man, a faithful husband, a Puritan in good standing — was never simply given; it was produced, and it was produced, in significant measure, by the systematic exclusion of exactly what the devil represents. The forest encounter, by returning the repressed in the form of the double, does not destroy an identity that was previously whole; it reveals an identity that was always divided, always maintained against its own interior pressure.

What distinguishes Brown's trajectory from a potentially therapeutic encounter with the shadow self — to introduce a Jungian term that is not irrelevant here — is the failure of integration. To encounter the double and survive psychically requires the capacity to recognize the repudiated content as one's own, to withdraw the projection, and to incorporate the shadow into a more complex and honest self-understanding (Jung, 1959). Brown cannot do this. He cannot acknowledge that the devil is his double, because to do so would be to acknowledge that the self he has built — the identity of the good man — was always a partial and defended construction. Instead, he responds to the encounter as Freud describes the neurotic response to the uncanny: with horror, with a redoubling of repression, and ultimately with a generalization of the threat that disables his capacity for relation entirely (Freud, 1919/2003). Having met the double and refused to recognize it, he returns to the village unable to look at any face without seeing in it the face he met in the forest — unable to trust any appearance of goodness, because he has seen, or believes he has seen, what goodness conceals.

This is the deepest irony of Hawthorne's story, and the psychoanalytic framework allows us to articulate it with precision. Brown goes into the forest in order to sin once, cleanly, and return — to transgress in a controlled and contained way that will leave his daylight identity intact. What he discovers instead is that sin is not out there, to be visited and left behind; it is in here, constitutive of the self that would visit it. The double will not stay in the forest. It follows him home, invisible but omnipresent, inscribed into every face he looks at for the rest of his life. He dies, Hawthorne tells us, in gloom — a man who glimpsed his own interior and could neither live with what he saw nor look away from it (Hawthorne, 1835/1987).

6. CONCLUSION

This study has approached *Young Goodman Brown* and *The Scarlet Letter* not as period documents of Puritan New England but as texts that speak, with remarkable precision, to concerns that remain urgently contemporary: the construction of the self under ideological pressure, the relationship between power and knowledge, and the psychological cost of refusing to engage honestly with one's own complexity.

Through the psychoanalytic frameworks of Freud and Jung, we have seen how Brown's forest journey enacts a drama of repression, projection, and failed integration — a confrontation with the shadow self that destroys rather than transforms, because Brown lacks the psychological resources to acknowledge what the forest reveals as his own. Through Foucault, we have seen how the Puritan community's mechanisms of visibility and moral surveillance produce not virtue but its simulation — docile subjects who police themselves and one another in the name of a righteousness that the illuminated assembly at the forest's heart exposes as collective fiction. And through the pedagogical frameworks of Freire, Kramsch, and Byram, we have seen how the contrast between Brown and Hester Prynne maps the distance between interpretive paralysis and discursive agency — between the subject who is destroyed

by ideological contradiction and the subject who finds, within that contradiction, the resources for creative and critical resistance.

What unites these readings is a single, insistent claim: that meaning, in Hawthorne's fictional world, is never simply given. It is made — fought for, negotiated, and contested in the ongoing encounter between the self and the structures of power that seek to define it. Hawthorne understood this long before theory gave it language. That understanding is what keeps his work alive.

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