CHAPTER 1

Puritanism

Michael J. Colacurcio

Once it all seemed so simple: "Puritanism" was the haunting fear that somewhere, someone may be happy. Or else, more professionally, it was about the way Covenant Theology took much of the starch out of "Calvinism." So that we have needed a book emphasizing the varieties of radical thought which grew up (if they did not quite flourish) in the first generation of experimental Puritanism; then another called, very pointedly, Orthodox*ies* in Massachusetts (Gura; Knight). And many more. So: if the Puritanism of the professional historians is no monolith, why should we expect Hawthorne's imaginative treatment of his New England ancestors to be anything very simple? Unless of course we wish simply to criticize.

To be sure, the lives of Hawthorne's Puritans are everywhere somewhat grim: in something like a master allegory – except that it turns out to be only partly of his own invention – his Revelers overflow with Jollity and Mirth, while their more aggressive competitors bespeak and predict only Gloom. Which is, of course, the last word in what may be the signature Puritan story: poor (but presumptuous) Goodman Brown gets more than he was asking for, but who ever said playing with the devil was not an extreme sport? In any event he goes to the grave his spirit lifted nevermore. A certain Parson Hooper (in "The Minister's Black Veil") seems to have got his gloom a little more innocently: unlike Goodman Brown, his awakened sense of sin (or sorrow) begins with himself; and whether he was right or wrong in making his private insight general and in expressing it with the obliqueness of a symbol, he can no longer chat with his parishioners after divine service, he misses out on his Sunday lunches with the local squire, and he doesn't even get the girl. If sentiment be the standard, he might just as well be that simplistic "Man of Adamant," whose hysterical fear of praying with the unregenerate keeps him locked up forever in that "saddest of all prisons," the human heart (9:50). Down the road, a rural Puritan named Ethan Brand will make bold to escape, but

with results most unhappy. And then the sad Mr. Dimmesdale, convinced that he needs to stay in his appointed place of worshipful suffering, preaching his sermon of sin at all occasions, terminally unable to "show freely to the world . . . some trait by which the worst [might] be inferred" (1:160). Perhaps Puritanism is better defined as the conscientious determination that no one shall ever be really happy.

Hawthorne's own explicit verdict – if one were needed – is given at a stroke in the meta-historical sketch called "Main-street": "Such a life was sinister to the intellect and sinister to the heart" (11:67). Period. Well, not quite – for why then the lingering fascination? Not quite a "flood subject," the legacy of Puritanism remains for Hawthorne a concern of lifelong meditation. Somewhat overshadowed by the "Transcendental" themes of the early 1840s, the problem of "purity" lies just beneath the surface of several important tales and sketches; and even after the masterful recapitulation of *The Scarlet Letter*, the concern with Puritan inheritance and repetition refuses to relent. Evidently, a topic survives: not so much the psychological question of what about Puritanism so arrested Hawthorne and bent his otherwise worldly literary intentions; not even the more historical one of why in the words of "Main-street" should "we" be in any sense "happy to have had such ancestors" (11:68). But simply this: Culturally, if not literally, from whom exactly are we descended? Misguided utopians or inspired visionaries? De facto bigots or would-be libertarians? Doctrinaire killjoys or sober moral realists? Even a firmly committed "people of the present" (11:267) might need to know.

Appropriately, perhaps, what we likely encounter first from the still-green pen of Nathaniel Hawthorne is a story about witchcraft – the ugly blot on the record of an otherwise exemplary New England. Part of an early "projected" but never published collection titled "Seven Tales of My Native Land," "The Hollow of the Three Hills" survives to offer us the scene of a young woman who has deserted her family, but now, in a fit of remorse, visits a very very old crone, who tells her what she most fears to learn about those she has deserted: desolate parents, husband driven insane from grief, and (of course) a dead baby. At all this, the witchy woman smiles in pleasure, while the fecklessly repentant young woman dies, of shame as much as of guilt, perhaps, as she is shocked to learn that the privileged source of all this information is not at all a clear medium: What? Did she hear the voices *too*?

A bit Gothic, perhaps – insane laughter, of course, but did we really need the rattling chains? And more than a touch sentimental, as family

values come to figure as the worst code a woman can violate. But not a bad story for a college kid to have written. And yet, not about the witchcraft we learn of in the Salem in 1692, nor in fictions called "Alice Doane's Appeal" and, famously, "Young Goodman Brown." There, as we have taken some time to learn, the issue concerns the unhappy surrender of weak faith in the face of suspicious evidence. Here it is the wish for privileged information: if she was *so* concerned, why did she leave? And also, perhaps, about the nature and possibility of diabolical evil. Guilty to the domestic limit, the young woman still cares, and this counts to us in her favor. But that witch – if that's what she is – is a bad one indeed, taking rare delight in the agony of others. Of course, she may be only a moderately competent fortune teller, practicing her shameless art on a woman who seems to have escaped from a seduced and abandoned novel of the 1780s – guessing what her client fears yet wishes to hear – but her perverse sense of pleasure seems not human. Capital-letter Evil, no doubt; but not exactly "What Happened in Salem" (Levin, *Salem*).

Which we do see, emphatically, in "Alice Doane's Appeal," apparently a revised version of some ur–"Alice Doane," which may also have been a part of the "Seven Tales." Framed by the experience of an experimental story-teller who recalls the time he read one of his crazy-gothic early stories to a couple of fair maidens from Salem – who, like their oblivious neighbors, cannot come close to dating the witch trials. Standing on the graves of the supposed witches, he reads a tale in which a young man, separated by time and education from his twin brother, develops an unwholesome attachment to their sister. Brother returns and presents Other Brother with "indubitable proofs" (11:272) that he and the sisters are guilty lovers. Well, what was a brother to do but, in an act the Freudians well recognize as the killing of a "personified incest wish" (Crews 53), he "trod out his accursed soul" (11:273): *mon semblable, mon frere*. Except that we did not witness the murder but learn of it only as confessed to a Wizard, who had in fact arranged the whole affair – caused, that is to say, the "evidences" against poor Alice to appear "indubitable." Oh, dear, I killed a person, not innocent perhaps, but no less guilty than myself: I hate it when that happens. What was I thinking?

Indeed. What were they thinking in Salem when, instructed that, as the Devil has often appeared as an Angel of Light (Levin, *Salem*, 110), so he may in fact have the power to create "spectral" impersonation of saints, implicating them in darkly evil deeds and testing thereby the credence of the otherwise faithful. A lot to ask of an unsuspecting audience, perhaps,

but a final gothic scene confirms the learned reading. A scene in a graveyard: all the devils have come to celebrate the foul crime:

> all the incidents were results of the machinations of the Wizard, who had cunningly devised that Walter Brome should tempt his unknown sister to guilt and shame, and himself perish by the hand of his twin-brother. (11:277)

"Oh, Evil Joy – twin-brother fratricide," we almost hear them sing, in a scene the self-embarrassed Story-Teller "dare not give . . . except in a very brief epitome." But there they all are: husbands, wives, young mothers, defenders of the colony, pastors, illustrious early settlers –

> All, in short, were there; the dead of other generations, whose moss-grown names could scarce be read upon their tomb stones, and their successors, whose graves were not yet green; all whom black funerals had followed slowly thither, now re-appeared where the mourners had left them. Yet none but souls accursed were there, and fiends counterfeiting the likeness of departed saints. (11:276)

One otherwise accomplished critic found this passage self-contradictory: Were they all in league with the devil and therefore damned or not? Another, however, spotted the abstruse point at once: "specters" all, some representing persons actually given over to the Devil and some illicitly simulated by that gifted but evil magician (Levin, "Shadows"; Waggoner). Which is to say: the diabolical simulation that deceived Leonard Doane in the tortuous and self-interrupted narrative has come literal in the spectacular conclusion. Gothic, but too plain to miss.

And the point transfers perfectly to "Young Goodman Brown," whose doctrine of specters "Alice Doane" appears to explicate – but which Herman Melville thought was expressing Hawthorne's own deep intuition of Calvinism, and which Henry James found some sort of rare imaginative play. Yet not quite either: the question is not, How evil does Hawthorne think we all are? but What sort of evidence leads Goodman Brown to decide that everyone (except, in the end, himself) is given over to the Devil? Isn't it just a little too easy? Brown goes to meet the devil, on a purpose fixed enough to be called a "covenant." He suspects his wife suspects his motives for not "tarrying" with her this one peculiar night; but no, he convinces himself, the thought would kill her. Besides, it's just one night; after that, he'll "cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven" (10:75). And this is all we know for sure. Was Goody Cloyse really there? Or only her specter? And if that, was it surrendered to the Devil in her personal covenant or merely usurped by the Father of Lies for his own

malicious purposes? And so with the others: the Deacon, the Pastor, all the Church-people, promiscuously mixed in with all the Tavern-people. All, in short, including Faith herself. Was *she* really there? Okay, let's say she really was, in person and not in spectral simulation: what then? Let's see: she lost her pink ribbons; but did she "look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One" (10:88), when Goodman Brown cried out in torment for her soul? Well, did she? How could he know? Any more than Othello can know about Desdemona. How, that is to say, can anyone ever know what exactly goes on in that privacy of soul which Hawthorne's generation was learning to call the "subject"? Perhaps it all depends on faith.

As Faith is Brown's faith as well as his wife, his cry appears to signal his own last-minute refusal. And not a moment too soon: it seems hard to come back from the blasphemous declaration that "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name" (10:83), but maybe it's just possible. Maybe it ain't over till it's over. Be that as it may, Brown's suspicions are evidently stronger than his faith: unable to believe that a wife may resist the Devil as soon as would a husband, he lives out a most unhappy life – hearing the blasphemous forest songs when his snug little congregation intones its familiar hymns and never again quite trusting the wife he meant to deceive for one night only. Ah, yes guilt is like that: "Maybe you're accusin' me of what you're doin' yourself." Or else, if Sinatra's version seems a little lax, try this: specter evidence expresses and encodes guilty suspicion. As even Edmund Spenser knew: remember how Archimago tricks Red Cross into believing that Una is making love with his page? First he gives him a disturbingly erotic dream of loving her himself, then a second one in which he "sees" the guilty pair making love. Then? Oh, dear, so many dreary cantos – with so many slow-length alexandrines – required to reunite Red with his Una. Whose full name, Hawthorne suggests, is Una Vera Fides, whose tune he can name in just about no notes.

One general name for the region in which Hawthorne reinterprets the superstitious belief in specters might be "The Haunted Mind." Indeed he has a sketch (1835) with that very title: it's not very interesting and it ends, implausibly, with the suggestion that sharing a bed with some gentle lover will keep all the spooks away, but the name suggests his belief that night-thoughts inhabit pretty much the same mental space as love and virtue. And it suggests that ghosts and goblins are not the only thing that may trouble our consciousness. Sin too might haunt an otherwise sane and sober man – not *theirs* but, as in the grave case of Parson Hooper, his very own sin; possibly some literal action or omission, but just as likely something not "actual" but "original," like being born with a nature

selfishly unable to love the good for its own sake. There he was, going along just fine, in the less stressful latter days of some New England parish when it hit him: "I'm not okay, and neither are you." Sinfulness is inherent and, buried in the individual subject, its exact sense is essentially incommunicable. Except perhaps by symbol: don't we all wear the black veil?

Ink has been spilled trying to determine whether this self-veiled but oddly smiling minister is to be admired for his moral consciousness or shunned as obsessive and egotistical, but the more important point, surely, is to notice that his new, more searching manner of preaching divides his own congregation into factions: to one side, he is either a lunatic or a moral monster; to the other, a necessary if painful introduction to the idea that the good news of salvation can come only after the bad news of sin. When we learn that this fictional composite once gave an election sermon before Governor Belcher, and that it brought back "all the gloom and piety of our earliest ancestral sway" (9:49), we begin to see that, with an obliqueness that may depend on the limitation of our story-telling Narrator, we are dealing with a version of New England's revival; and when we notice that the Reverend Mr. Hooper – called a "Parson" by those who have forgotten the historical meaning of that term of Anglican art – has had to stop having Sunday dinner with a local squire who rejoices in the most famous pen name of Benjamin Franklin, we realize that the moment in question is the one in which Awakening and Enlightenment stopped talking to one another. Goodbye Gloom, perhaps, if that's what we decide to call the definitive Puritan sight of sin; but farewell as well to a heightened level of moral consciousness.

But this Gloom, so easy to overemphasize, is by no means the only Puritan story. Indeed in pursuing it this far we have got well ahead of ourselves; for well before Hawthorne wrote the tales which recognize the true (and the false) sight of sin as essential to the Puritan sense of identity, he published some historical sketches – and at least one major tale – that concern other issues entirely and that lend themselves not at all to the familiar reduction by cliché. Coming just after the point when Hawthorne began to immerse himself in the American archive, and appearing in the Salem newspaper in 1830 and 1831, the sketches reveal the growing depth of Hawthorne's interest in the past as such; and, in their own small way, they work quite well.

Predicting the subtext of *The Scarlet Letter*, "Mrs. Hutchinson" reminds us that the heterodox views of this early and outspoken Troubler of the Puritan Zion, dangerous in themselves, were even more objectionable as

they came from a member of the sex that was supposed to listen rather than speak; indeed the sketch asks us to behold not so much the heretic as "the Woman." Less familiar but even more closely historical is the account of "Sir William Phips," which, beginning with a preface concerning the question of how we remember historical personages, proceeds to give us a fictionally arranged day in the life of this outlier from Maine whom fortunes and circumstance had made first a knight and then the first new-charter governor of Massachusetts. A lengthy biography in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* had tried to characterize this best-they-could-do appointee as one more in a long line of Christian Magistrates, but, as he beats up an old enemy in the street and then gets drunk at lunch, the Mathers and other members of the clergy discover to their chagrin that you can baptize a redneck privateer but you can't take him anywhere.

Even more revealing – of a new interest in dense historical specificity in search of an adequate literary vehicle – is the sketch of a certain "Dr. Bullivant," all but unremembered, yet significant as both a royalist and a wit in a world not quite friendly to either. Throughout the years of local rule, this local apothecary is content to dispense little jokes with his pills. When, in a short-lived regime called the Dominion of New England, the Royalists come to power, Bullivant feels free to unleash his satire on the tedious local mores. But then things change again, and, in the sketch's one little scene, Bullivant finds himself in prison, with Puritans passing by the window, making little jokes of their own. Let's see; he who laughs last, laughs . . . well, just barely. The captious critic will conclude that a lot of social history has been invested in not very much. A friendlier view will notice that, since the college days of "The Hollow," Hawthorne has been doing his homework; not surprising, therefore, that his witchcraft would eventually come to the historical point.

The tale in question is even more engaging. Published in 1832 along with "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "Roger Malvin's Burial," "The Gentle Boy" is one of the longest stories Hawthorne ever wrote; and though it attempts more than Hawthorne's scenic method can quite manage, it takes us to the heart of something quite as essentially Puritan as the sight and suspicion of sin. After a lengthy headnote, eager to convince us that there were two sides to the issue of Puritan versus Quaker, the tale opens with a scene in which a less-than-single-minded Puritan named Tobias Pearson encounters a grieving and helpless child: his natural sympathies want to help, but they are opposed by his discovery that the child is an offspring of an "accursed sect" (9:73). The reader may think of

the parable of the Good Samaritan who, outcast from the faithful Jews, yet proves himself singularly a "neighbor" to the man lying helpless in the ditch, or of the New Testament suggestion that "true religion" is caring for widows and orphans. Orphan this gentle child effectively proves to be, his father having been executed by the latter-day rulers of Winthrop's Holy City, and his mother having been called by the Spirit to testify against sectarian violations of conscience. A decisive moment indeed.

Surely, if slowly, the warm heart wins out over the well-chilled head: Tobias takes the outlandishly named Ilbrahim home where he is more than welcomed by a wife who, having lost all her own beloved children, has never managed to wean herself from the need to love and nurture. The child's mother appears, asking Dorothy Pearson whether she can raise the child in the spiritual way of the Quakers. Her answer is both ironic and cogent: "we must do towards him according to the dictates of our own consciences, and not of yours" (9:86). The scene is meant to be quite telling: "rational piety" versus "unbridled fanaticism," both in the figure of a woman. But as the "rational" is also significantly the "domestic," we begin to suspect that, deeper than the discrimination of sects, the issue concerns the place of what Jonathan Edwards would have called "natural virtue" in the orderly working of the world. Or even whether, in somebody's theology, "adoption" might precede and not follow "justification."

In any event, adoption occurs and problems ensue: the Pearsons are scorned by their neighbors for harboring a heretic, and their children (who had to be carefully taught) vent their righteousness out on the foundling. One seeming friend betrays him with a blow that all but breaks his gentle spirit. But then, just as we begin to feel that Hawthorne's will-to-sentiment – which quite won the heart of Sophia Peabody – is pushing some anti-Calvinist argument from nature a little too far, the emphasis shifts from Puritan stricture to Quaker enthusiasm. Drifting toward the newness, Tobias becomes acquainted with an elderly Quaker who, in a discussion about the nature (and difficulty) of true piety, tells the chilling tales of how, in a triumphant epitome of virtue over life, he left a dying daughter to follow a call of the Spirit. Joined by Quaker Catherine, he tells her the good news that the King has demanded that New England give up its bloody crusade against Quakers but also, less happily, the news that her son is dying. Too much, finally. "Will He try me above my strength?" (9:101). Will He, that is to say, insist on a virtue so searingly at odds with ordinary nature?

Readers of Thomas Shepard and Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor may wonder why Hawthorne has associated the recurrent Puritan theme of "weaned affections" with the Quakers. Or else, moving on into the nineteenth century, how deep would be Hawthorne's sympathy with the emerging code of sentiment? Certain it is, however, that he saw quite early the problem of an ethic that threatened to set religion *against* caring. Curious too is Hawthorne's implication, in "The Canterbury Pilgrims" (1833) and, even more sharply, in "The Shaker Bridal" (1838), that certain Quakers-Turned-Shakers are noticeably puritanic in their denial of Nature in its primitive form. Not the women, but the men, with a vengeance the women must silently suffer: sex for the worldlings, perhaps, until soon – and devoutly to be wished – all propagation will cease: then, let this dirty world go to hell and thy kingdom come. Followers of an English woman named Ann Lee (Stanley) – Christ come again, in the female form – the Shakers appeared to have thrived in a New England well prepared by that peculiar strain of Puritan strain of otherworldliness that kept them in the world but warned repeatedly of that idolatry that loves anything – or anyone! – in this world too much. Making love almost as much a problem as sin – for Hooper and Dimmesdale, if not for Elizabeth and Hester.

Though Hawthorne and the Revolution can fairly be considered as a separate topic, still there is an important overlap with the present topic. Predicting what Perry Miller once argued about the recognizably "Puritan" character of the American Revolution ("Covenant"), Hawthorne manages a couple of brief tales in which, well back in the seventeenth century, the definitive American event is predicted – prophesied, that is to say, in the recognizable manner of Puritan typology. With some irony, as the ambiguity of the typic event is permitted to cast a reductive shadow forward across the meaning of what in 1826 had been celebrated as a pivotal event in the (holy) history of human freedom. In one instance, John Endicott (a villain in the headnote of "The Gentle Boy") dares to cut a Red Cross from the banner used by the Salem trainband. In historical fact, the action gets him in trouble with John Winthrop, anxious to maintain the fiction that New England is *not* an overseas outpost of Separatism; and Roger Williams appears to remind us that Separatism can mean a division of Church from and State as well as a refusal to communicate with corrupt churches. But there is a scene: silencing a heretic in the stocks for speaking his conscience, Endicott cuts the cord, with his narrator suggesting we recognize him as a Founding Father. Ironic too is the prediction of

"The Gray Champion" (1835): calling a halt to a procession of British rulers, thus enacting a magic version of the Glorious Revolution; a popular hero, whose hour is "darkness" (9:18) enacts what appears an established law: Providence provides where Puritans resist.

Much the same moral informs the four-part work called "Legends of the Province-House" (1838). Coming at the very end of Hawthorne's Salem period, it attempts nothing less than a connected theory of the Puritan contribution to what we now call "The Ideology of the American Revolution." Telling the story backward, so to speak, it moves from a dramatic moment when, in "Howe's Masquerade," two cultures dramatize their historic opposition, to a less contrived one in "Edward Randolph's Portrait," where a noble-enough American Tory decides that good order in unruly Boston requires the presence of British troops, to one well back in that unfamiliar period of "benign neglect" when, in "Lady Eleanore's Mantle," a native population is as much concerned with the possibly alien source of their smallpox epidemic contagion as with its scientific cure, and when "Boston was ripe for revolt"; indeed New England was "on the brink of rebellion and everyone knew it" (Warden 84). British influence appears in several different forms; everywhere, however, it is resisted by a theory of history that, providential or paranoid, is unmistakably Puritan.

Even the foundational tale called "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" (1836) asks for a reading that is in part political. Morally, so to speak, Puritans battle it out with Revelers, and the learned have defended both sides. More revealing, surely, is a reading that sets this future-determining contest of Gloom and Jollity in the "Story-Teller" in which it was almost certainly planned to appear: running away from the strict control of a step-parent who insists on some warrantable calling, a scapegrace aspiring to a career in oral literature meets up at once with an orthodox evangelist; journeying together, the two itinerant wordsmiths epitomize two opposed yet hardly comprehensive "literary" careers. Unhappily, the richly composite work never appeared as designed, but what if, running away from Thumpcushion's opposition to literature as idleness, the Story-Teller discovers only Endicott? – whom "no fantastic foolery could look . . . in the face" (9:63). That's right, New England never did figure as a culture of play. What? Had no one heard of King James's "Book of Sports"? Probably the established Governor Bradford had not, but the new pro-tem Governor Endicott most certainly had – else why cut down a makeshift maypole when the promiscuous Thomas Morton had long since been deported for trading guns and rum for beaver? James saith, in my Merry Kingdom, my