

BLACKENING CHARACTER, IMAGINING RACE, AND MAPPING MORALITY:
TARRING AND FEATHERING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN
LITERATURE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ritual of tarring and feathering within specific American cultural contexts and literary works of the nineteenth-century to show how the discourse surrounding the actual and figurative practice functioned as part of a larger process of discursive and visual racialization. The study illustrates how the practice and discourse of blackening white bodies enforced embodiment, stigmatized imagined interiority, and divorced the victims from inalienable rights. To be tarred and feathered was to be marked as anti-social, duplicitous and even anarchic. The study examines the works of major American authors including John Trumbull, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, analyzing how their works evidence a larger national conflation of character, race, and morality. Sometimes drawing on racial imagery implicitly, and sometimes engaging in the issues of race and slavery explicitly, their works feature tarring and feathering to portray their anxieties about social coercion and victimization in the context of the “experiment” of democracy. Trumbull’s mock-epic genre satirizes the plight of the Tory and diminishes the forms of the revolution; Cooper’s novel works as a rhetorical vehicle to prevent a perceived downfall of the republic; the short fiction of Poe exaggerates the horror of uneven and racialized power relations; and Hawthorne’s body of work ironizes the original parody of tar and feathers to expose the violent nature of democratic foundation. Relying on an interdisciplinary approach, this first, in-depth study of tarring and feathering in America reveals that the ritual is a fertile ground for understanding the multivalent social constructs of the time.

Examining tarring and feathering incidents can tell scholars about the status of racial feeling, moral values (including sexual and gender norms), and economic fissures of the context in which they occur. Abjecting the body of the victim, the act rewrites the individual's relationship to the body politic, and the performance of the ritual reveals the continuously emergent, publically sanctioned forms of belonging to the community and the nation. Moreover, examining the representation of tarring and feathering can tell scholars about an author's relationship to the ideology of an American way.

To my family

To my mother, Majda, and sister, Andrea

To the memory of my father, Zoran

To the memory of my grandparents, Bogdan, Vera, Milan, and Mira

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The complex intersection of race and morality in Anglo-American discourse has plagued people of color since the first encounter in the New World. As early as 1682, Mary Rowlandson recounts her experience as a hostage among the Wampanoag tribe in terms of Biblical typology, which heavily relies on the dichotomy of light vs. dark to represent the conflict between good and knowledge on the one hand and evil and ignorance on the other.¹ Indeed, this metaphor extends to the supernatural realm in which the ultimate opposition to God—the devil—becomes the *black* man. Rowlandson describes the natives’ evening festivities in the same terms: “Oh the roaring, and singing and dancing, and yelling of those *black creatures* in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of *hell*” (emphases mine)². The Anglo label of Native Americans as “black”³ would be lightened to “red” as the colonists encountered darker shades of skin, and the descriptor would have dire, if not outright deadly, consequences for groups to

¹ Now classic studies, Perry Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness* emphasizes Puritan difference from later generations of Americans while Sacvan Bercovitch’s *Puritan Origins of the American Self* identifies a Puritan symbolic mode which he argues continues to underpin the rhetoric of American identity. I do not propose here to define the extent to which Puritan readings of reality influenced American consciousness by the time of the Revolution, though I would argue that Puritan thought did influence some populations of Americans. I am more interested in the general European-derived understandings of black as an archetypal color of death and/or hell. See Michel Pastoureau’s *Black: The History of a Color* for a European social history of the color.

² Mary Rowlandson, *Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, 71.

³ Larry J. Reynolds, *Devils and Rebels*, 25.

which it was applied. The connection between real or imagined darkness of complexion, as well as character, would persist in the colonial consciousness and beyond. Whether the hue was phenotypically or environmentally influenced, the moral valance of “darkness” mapped itself onto purportedly darker shades of skin.⁴ In fact, by the late eighteenth century, when colonists were already familiar with racialized others, particularly “Indians” and African slaves, one of the most salient intersections of morality and the racialized body occurred in the social ritual of tarring and feathering.

Beginning in 1766 and escalating as the Revolution approached, patriots tarred and feathered loyalists, both demonizing and dehumanizing them (see for example, Figure 1). The practice illustrated the convergence of the dual Enlightenment discourses of racial science and republicanism by enacting a meaning-making ritual in which the moral offender was publicly darkened. Even as actual incidents of tarring and feathering decreased—occurring only intermittently through the antebellum period—this form of punishment appeared in American literature to demonstrate anxieties over various types of freedom and higher law, dramatizing debates between summary punishment on the one hand, and individual rights on the other.

⁴ By the latter I mean that class-based prejudice stemmed from “darkening” by profession, such as laboring with soil, coal, tar, etc., or living conditions that precluded frequent bathing.



Figure 1. Tarred man animalized, with devil. “A tarred and feathered man standing on hands and feet with a rope attached to upper thighs and held by a man standing at left; the man on all fours looks back at a wild-eyed devil standing behind him.” Mezzotint. 1770. *British Cartoon Prints Collection*. Lib. of Congress. 1 May 2013. LC-USZ62-45390.

In the presidential election of 1800, the Federalist outcry against Thomas Jefferson initiated what would be a vital part of the American political process, the smear campaign. As one historian argues, “No presidential election since 1800 has taken place without an attempt to damage at least one candidate’s reputation by innuendo, rumor, and ridicule in order to make him appear unworthy of the nation’s highest office” (Randall 241). The Federalist smear campaign against Jefferson blackened his character by predicting the catastrophic consequences for the morality of the nation that Jefferson’s French connection, deist views, and “Congo Harem” would have. In fact, the opposition further speculated that he was a “half-breed,” born of either a “mulatto” or a

“squaw” (Randall 543). In the Early Republic, therefore, blackening one’s character drew upon the metaphor of darkened skin. Indeed, several decades before the election of 1800, the metaphor was vivified by using tar to literally darken the skin and thereby thwart one’s social and political reach.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the practice of tarring and feathering from prerevolutionary to pre-Civil War America is the dominant organizing trope, through which I examine the literary, political, and rhetorical practices of social coercion in antebellum America. My study brings a dual rhetorical and historical approach to bear on the discursive nature of both the act of tarring and feathering and its literary representations. While endemic throughout nineteenth-century discourse—canonical literature and dime novels alike—tarring and feathering has been largely overlooked by cultural and literary critics because authors primarily exploited the brutal act as a simple way to eradicate troublesome characters from a text. By the time of the Civil War, it had been a century since the practice first occurred on American soil, when, tarring and feathering—a violent discursive act—wrote out the indicted individual from the emerging body politic.

Several historians have contributed to the knowledge of tarring and feathering, usually discussing it in the context of the American Revolution, or, less often, in terms of isolated incidents. While a number of studies touch on the ritual, their analyses tend to be brief.⁵ Benjamin Irvin offers the most elaborate attempt to define the ritual,

⁵ See also Gary Nash, Bertram Wyatt Brown, Anne Fairfax Worthington, and Alfred Young.

concluding in his article “Tar, Feathers, and the Enemies of American Liberties, 1768-1776” that tarring and feathering refigured the population by allowing the colonists to deal with their conflicted sense of citizenship:

By attacking their ‘enemies’ often brutally, the colonists bound themselves ever more tightly to that which they sought to defend: their ‘American liberties.’ ... Tar-and-feathers violence thus became an important means by which the colonists relinquished their British identities and pledged their allegiance to each other and to the new United States. (229)

Irvin’s study convincingly identifies the ritual’s two-fold purpose for the participants—that of rejecting Britishness and fostering a new American identity. I take Irvin’s focus on the pre-Revolutionary period as a point of departure, both to build on his definition of tarring and feathering, as well as to examine the ritual’s literal and figurative cultural underpinnings and ramifications. I also incorporate Patricia Bradley’s work on the ways Revolutionary propaganda characterizes tarring and feathering as an ambiguous ceremony that allowed for multifaceted local constructions; in particular, Bradley comments that one of the meanings behind the ritual “was connected to white understandings of blackness[...] Given the understandings of black as evil, the coat of white feathers [...] suggested ephemerality. The real stickiness was the layer of black tar to the skin, indicating that, for traitors, whiteness was the façade” (57-8). Though the scope of her study goes no further to unpack the mention of this suggestive “blackness,” here read morally, I argue that the practice also increasingly racialized the body—of primarily white males—to exile it from social and political order.

Thus, the political act of tarring and feathering from the Revolutionary period becomes a trope for an insidious, though spectacular, social phenomenon that enacted the social death of an allegedly unpatriotic member. The beginning stages of the American Revolution, the period of the most tarring-and-feathering activity, charged this practice with a patriotic valance as a punishment to perpetrate against all things “un-American.” Thinly veiled in absurdity and humor, tarring and feathering in American discourse indicted individuals’ deeds and words, and, as a result, undercut their freedom of speech. For the aggressors, the practice and the trope indexed self-righteous independence; for the victim, it cataloged the alleged lack of that value, construed by the community as so threatening that he needed to be expelled through means considered above the law. Of course, what the crowds did not realize was that the act of tarring and feathering also temporarily closed their own eyes to the very values they sought so brutally to uphold. In this first context of the ritual, the victims were aligned with the more powerful British government, and ironically, the perpetrators then understood themselves as the underdogs seeking justice. Whig ideology of higher law sanctioned the people taking the law into their own hands when no other channels were available. So, while self-restraint of passions was the ideal, if an individual was seen as excessively abusive or traitorous, some people felt that it was just to resort to mob rule against him/her; vestiges of the punishment persisted long after the resistance of the revolution and began functioning against less powerful dissenters of religious and political ideologies. Silencing dissenters as a way of upholding group values, particularly through the darkening of the body, points not only to the fragility of those values, but also

implies that equality—supposedly unalienable—was construed primarily in terms of external appearances.

Not surprisingly, then, the trope played a noteworthy role in literary nationalism, as antebellum American authors sought ways to distinguish themselves from the British tradition by treating “uniquely American” themes. By situating tarring and feathering within specific political contexts and examining the discourse surrounding the ritual, I argue that, in the nineteenth-century, it became part of a larger process of discursive and visual racializing informed by the social constructs of race and character, both of which attended to an imagined human interiority. If, as Toni Morrison has argued, abstract ideals with which white Americans identified were predicated on their contrast against enslaved black bodies, the discourse of darkening white bodies also enforced embodiment and divorced the victims from inalienable rights. To be darkened was to be marked anti-social and anti-utopian, and indeed, duplicitous and even anarchic. John Trumbull, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe, among numerous others, draw on tarring and feathering to portray anxieties about the “experiment” of democracy in which egalitarian alignment of society yielded a racialized social opprobrium.

The nineteenth-century texts treated in this study engage what Karen Halttunen, among others, has identified as the sentimental ideal of the transparent soul, which demanded a correspondence between appearance, behavior, and inner virtue. Halttunen traces the ways in which middle-class preoccupation with sincerity through dressing both simply and modestly, for example, provided a prescriptive model for impostors of

sincerity. By the 1850s and 60s, the middle class began to accept that social forms were inherently theatrical, a performance in which fashion could reflect personal style. Cooper, Hawthorne, and Poe anticipate this shift in middle-class self-consciousness. Moreover, the ideal of the transparent soul hinged on the idea that one could read skin as indicative of character. In *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush*, Mary Ann O'Farrell suggests that involuntary physiological mechanisms such as a blush, a swoon, or a blunder are used to signify character more stably than showing or telling would do alone. American authors, too, relied on the legibility of skin to index hidden truths of character. Indeed, all the texts treated here attend to the colors of skin, using them as a way to comment on both hidden feelings and material conditions. The insights of Halttunen would suggest that tarring and feathering sought to expose the victims' alleged performance of some identity characteristic, usually class-related, punishing them for inauthentic "uppitiness." The victims' economic-moral transgressions implied the limits of legibility of skin and social forms for sincerity, so tar and feathers were used to ensure the proper labeling of a secret self for all to see.

Being an actor on the public stage warranted the public gaze—readings and misreadings, justified and unjustified commendation and condemnation alike. The public gaze, according to Sacvan Bercovitch's *Rites of Assent* was always inflected by America, the symbol, which bound an individual's identity to the community's (economic) progress. Bercovitch argues that the ideology of consensus preempts radical dissent by setting the terms of any debate within the bounds of "the American way." This discursive organizing force for society is bolstered by the rhetoric of consensus

which blurs the discrepancies between the American dream and the reality of the United States precisely to control revolutionary tendencies. In “The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History” and the afterword to *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, Bercovitch acknowledges the “historical dissensus that has informed every stage of America’s growth from colony to world power” (650). The historical contradictions and discontinuities informed the evolution of American ideology because “the very act of identifying malfunction [became] an appeal for cohesion” (644). For perpetrators of tarring and feathering, then, identifying the victim as a “malfunction” bound the group into “the American Way.” Furthermore, Bercovitch’s insight that individual independence was bound to social economic progress explains why tar-and-feathers always punished individuals posing an economic threat, whether they had the power to tax without consent, collect rent in a perpetual lease, or allow human “property” to walk off the plantation. However, if for the perpetrators, and on the discursive level, the tarring and feathering accomplished a ritual of consensus, for the victim, his dissent (again, perceived or actual) was not co-opted; it was crushed, interred, expelled. Thankfully, Bercovitch outlines at least “two alternatives to the authority of consensus: either to subscribe to a different consensus altogether, or else to confront the problem of ideology, in an attempt to understand its limits and describe its methods of representation” (636-637). As a method of representation, tarring and feathering mapped the mob as the violent executors of the emerging consensus. At the same time, from the victim’s perspective, it exposed the limit of its ideology to absorb.

The work of a number of scholars from a variety of disciplines productively engages in the conversation I am framing here. As a ritual, tarring and feathering can be approached from a number of disciplinary perspectives, including those of anthropology, sociology, ethnography, and cultural and performance studies. While anthropologists like Arnold Van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Erving Goffman certainly present useful ideas for understanding ritual, Mary Douglas in particular offers a salient discussion of ideas of pollution that speak to tarring and feathering, which may be understood as an anti-purification rite from the victim's perspective. Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (1966) speaks to the concept of ritual defilement inherent in the tarring and feathering. Several of her approaches to culture, the body's relationship to society, and the role of dirt help frame the continuities of tarring and feathering. Douglas defines culture as the

standardized values of a community, [which] mediates the experience of individuals. It provides in advance some basic categories, a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered. And above all, it has authority since each is induced to assent because of the assent of others... [Culture] cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces, except at risk of forfeiting confidence. (48)

Furthermore, these anomalies usually come in the form of people in a marginal state "who are somehow left out in the patterning of society, who are placeless. They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is indefinable" (118). All people in the margins are perceived as dangerous and must be dealt with by the culture; they are, as

Julia Kristeva suggests in *Strangers to Ourselves*, a group who obviously and explicitly occupies a place of difference, challenging the identity of a group (41-42). In Bercovitch's formulation, then, American ideology would function to appropriate this difference which, in time, it tends to do, but in the meanwhile, individuals physically, psychologically, economically, and/or socially suffer as they are construed as "placeless" or "indefinable."

In the case of the pre-revolutionary period, no articulated rule existed for remaining loyal to the crown, but when the loyalists were designated as dangerous pollutants undermining the solidarity of the patriotic cause, via newspaper propaganda, a disapproving public was rallied to enact the ritual. Douglas explains that when a transgression "does not provoke moral indignation, belief in the harmful consequences of a pollution can have the effect of aggravating the seriousness of the offence, and so of marshalling public opinion on the side of the right" (165). In defining the relationship between society, individuals, and bodies in analyzing the symbolism of ritual, Douglas argues that "external symbolism upholds the explicit social structure and internal, unformed psychic powers threaten it from the non-structure" (124). Thus, in the case of tarring and feathering, the external symbolism upholds the explicit social structure of the patriotic cause, which reveals the loyalist threat as one emanating from within the body. The body becomes a contact zone, a canvas, to represent the emergent "American way" in which a loyalist espousing polluted and polluting "Old World" ideas has no place.

If, as Douglas explains, people in society "strive continually to impress their view of the relevant bit of [social] structure on other actors in their scene" (124), then

those “actors” who do not fit—who become “placeless”—could be understood as “abject.” In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva speaks to the body’s liminal state when she introduces the idea of the abject, that which disturbs borders and rules, an ambiguous “thing” that disrupts previously held categories of identity (4). If the abject refers to our reaction to a threatening breakdown in meaning, tar and feathers help stabilize the disruption by visually displaying the threat in exaggerated form in order to diminish it.

Within abjection

[t]here looms...one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but *it cannot be assimilated*....The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*.

(Kristeva, emphasis mine, *PH* 1)

Tarring and feathering becomes a sort of anti-purification rite, one that creates a defiled body that is discarded from the “symbolic system,” an action which, in turn, invents a “*classification system or structure*” (Kristeva, emphasis original, *PH* 65). The defiling of the loyalist body, in Bercovitch’s terms, then helps create/revitalize ideology for the perpetrators. Accordingly, “anthropological delineation of the logic of *exclusion* that causes the abject to exist” (Kristeva, emphasis original, *PH* 65) shows that “othering” through the use of tar and feathers was a useful ritual for a community. The body that has been tarred and feathered, however, that has existed in some way in a blackened state and then left with scars, is, in some ways, the ultimate in abjection, the thing that

causes one to be at the “border of [his] condition as a living body,” as “[s]uch wastes drop so that I might live” (3). In order to truly reject another, he or she must be made into an other, the thing that is not quite human, and is most certainly not American. By participating in the creation of the foreigner in form of loyalist, the power is given to those who perform the act, the mob, the political group who structure themselves in direct opposition to the person they punish, who cannot be assimilated.

Tar and feathers dramatize this exclusion from the social body, representing it on the individual body. Douglas further explains that public rituals “work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body” (159). If the body in ritual is used as a microcosm of society as a whole, the covering of the loyalist body in tar and feathers represents the increasingly liminal role loyalists occupy. The materials used upon the body, tar and feathers, may be understood through Douglas’s discussion of dirt as essentially “matter out of place,” which often represents destruction (50). The images Douglas invokes about viscosity provide pertinent insights into why tar, a material fact used by the British navy and a symbol of the very empire colonists sought to reject, was a fitting means to mark the despised loyalist body. Douglas notes via Jean Paul Sartre’s essay on stickiness, the “melting, clinging viscosity is judged an ignoble form of existence in its very first manifestations” (48). Douglas interprets viscosity as an inherently repellent quality because “[t]he viscous is a state half-way between solid and liquid...Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substance flowing into the pool of stickiness...to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity”

(47). Indeed, as figures increasingly seen as “indefinable” anomalies on the margin, tar-covered loyalists were exhibited as lacking boundaries and their stickiness, then, called for repulsion, lest any colonist of the emerging body politic risk “diluting himself into viscosity.”

The feathers, too, signify “matter out of place,” suggesting animality. Kelly Oliver suggests that Kristeva’s abject “is the in-between that challenges all categorization” (95). She later infers that this logic attempts to conceal an ambiguity that is at the very heart

of identity and subjectivity. Universal Principles are defense mechanisms against this ambiguity that threatens the clean and proper borders of all identity. Once we become beings who mean, animals who signify, we necessarily inhabit a world of ambiguity... ‘Evil’ and ‘Monstrous’ are nothing more than defenses against the otherness within—bodily drives and affects that hearken back to the timelessness of animality. (Oliver 96)

In terms of tarring and feathering, then, the victim becomes this animality, or, in slightly different terms, the Other. He represents the uncanny in the sense that he was once a person, one who had been considered part of the community—the one with whom we can identify as human. When he transgresses, he is no longer familiar; that is, he becomes an outsider, one who has gone against what is proper. In order to fix this improper past, to punish the transgressor, the use of tar and feathers immediately marks him as an Other, a foreigner who no longer has rights within a particular community. In making the tarred and feathered person into a foreigner, the perpetrators completely

forget that he is not the one “responsible for all the ills of the polis” (Kristeva, *SO* 1). The foreigner can only be defined by that which he is not. In the case of tarring and feathering, the foreigner has been constructed, through both physical action of tarring and feathering, and its implication of inner deficiency and contagion.

Essentially, the creation of the “foreign” body is brought about by the need to define and then fight against the thing that is not American. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva suggests that the foreigner—in this case, the Other “[P]sychologically...signifies the difficulty we have of living as an *other* and with others; politically... underscores the limits of nation-states and of the national political conscience that characterizes them” (Kristeva, *SO* 103). Because these Others are communally created—their otherness thrust upon them because of some perceived transgression by the perpetrators—they can then justifiably not have the same social status or legal rights. As Kristeva points out, this is a paradox, particularly when legislation defines “the manner in which we posit, modify, and eventually improve the status of foreigners,” as the only reason foreigners exist relates directly to the fact that “[t]he group to which the foreigner does not belong has to be a social group structured about a given kind of political power. The foreigner is at once identified as beneficial or harmful to that social group and its power, and on that account, he is to be assimilated or rejected” (*SO* 96). In the case of the person who has been tarred and feathered, he is immediately identified as harmful before the act, but beneficial after—his skin bears the scars of his shame, and if the act does not kill him, then he serves as a warning to other potential transgressors. An Other, in turn, becomes “the hidden face of our identity, the

space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder” because we recognize him within ourselves (Kristeva, *SO* 1).

Tarring and feathering thus represents a defilement, one that “is an objective evil undergone by the subject.” As Kristeva further notes, “the danger of filth represents for the subject the risk to which the very symbolic order is permanently exposed, to the extent that it is a device of discriminations, of differences” (*PH* 69). As mentioned, by making a loyalist into something different, he becomes the place of an almost reversed purification rite. In order to “purify” the community at large, it must be rid of the person they believe to be the disease. Purification rites function to separate a “social, sexual or age group from another one, by means of prohibiting a filthy, defiling element” (Kristeva, *PH* 65). By making a loyalist into something unclean and improper, and by scarring and marking his skin so that he will be consistently considered an Other, he becomes the abject.

The socio-historical considerations of an event such as tarring and feathering allows us “to understand why that demarcating imperative which is subjectively experienced as abjection, varies according to time and space, even though it is universal” (Kristeva, *PH* 68). Accordingly, my dissertation historicizes the actual and literary instances of tarring and feathering to understand the ritual as at once a method of representation of American ideology, from the perpetrators’ perspective, and a ritual exposing its limits, from the victims’ perspective. Discussing appeals in modern rhetoric, M. Jimmie Killingsworth stresses that “Appeals to the body are contextually determined and are rarely as simple as they seem but usually work in combination with other appeals

to suggest complex understandings of values” (69). Because the practice of tarring and feathering on American soil represented claims for social, if not political, power, the central appeal to the body politic through the deformation of the individual body worked in combination with other body-related appeals, including gender, class, and race. To a greater or lesser degree depending on immediate context, through tar-and-feather defilement victims “lost” across hierarchies. That is, they were (de)racialized as an assumedly inferior race, feminized through symbolic castration, and classed as vulgar, tasteless, tacky.

The first chapter “Tarring and Feathering in Pre-Revolutionary American Literature” examines tarring and feathering in the late eighteenth century through actual incidents, newspaper accounts, and John Trumbull’s *M’Fingal*, a mock-epic poem written during the Revolutionary War (1776-1782) to lay out the history against which to understand later literary incarnations of the ritual. The chapter opens with the histories of racial science and the politics of character, connecting them to a discussion of the inception, perception, rationale, participants, and targets of the practice through the case of John Malcolm, an unpopular British official in Boston. Finally, in order to illustrate a contemporaneous literary response to the ritual, the chapter analyzes John Trumbull’s “The Liberty Pole,” the third canto of his mock-epic, which portrays the tarring and feathering of a hated Tory official when a town meeting turns to violence. Through exaggerated mock-epic similes, Trumbull depicts the ritual as symbolically segregating *M’Fingal* from human existence.

In the second chapter, “‘Tars and Feathers are the Blackguards:’ Anti-rent Racialized Violence and Counterfeit Appeals to Higher Law in James Fenimore Cooper’s *Redskins*,” the focus is on James Fenimore Cooper’s 1846 *Redskins; or Indian and Injin Being the Conclusion of the Littlepage Manuscripts*, which directly engages in the anti-rent debates of 1840s upstate New York, in which farmers, dressed as Native Americans and/or women, tarred and feathered landlords whom they saw as unjust. Cooper’s text is littered with tar and feathers, which he deems the weapons of “petty tyrants” who cowardly abuse the few by hiding among mobs. The third chapter, “Rebellion and Social Inversion: Edgar Allan Poe’s Tarring and Feathering of Masters and Abolitionists,” contextualizes Edgar Allan Poe’s use of tarring and feathering within Jacksonian mobbing. Poe’s “The System of Professor Tarr and Dr. Fether” (1845) and “Hop-Frog; Or Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs” (1849) both treat tarring and feathering as a feature of power inversion, relying on the overlapping discourses of psychiatry, race, and taste.

The final chapter, “Tarring and Tarred Selves: Marking Complexions in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Works,” examines the complicated ways in which the author deals with social coercion through racialized complexions, both the external features of skin and the internal qualities of character. The writings of John Trumbull, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe responded to the various contexts of pre-Revolutionary turmoil, anti-rent struggles, and anti-abolitionist mobbing in which tarring and feathering was used, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings certainly did the same. However, he increasingly took the practice personally, internalizing it. This chapter thus

switches analytic modes and takes a panoramic view of Hawthorne's literary career, illustrating that tarring and feathering became a socializing trope for him, with both national and personal implications.

As a burgeoning liberal democracy with Enlightenment ideals, the early republic championed reason (or at least the perception of it) and tarring and feathering configured the body as an un-reasonable, irrational space to expel it from the body politic. Oliver points out that acts such as tarring and feathering also “internaliz[e] the inferiority/superiority dichotomy that sustains [a society's] self-identity,” but this is a logic that “is full of self-contradictions that insure its failure,” because this logic “is paradoxical” (95) at best. Creating an abjected form only serves as a ritual of delegitimizing and demonizing a political or moral dissenter. In this way, this type of social coercion was manifested on the body at the community level, but it continues to be a metaphor by which Americans navigate the public sphere.

CHAPTER II
TARRING AND FEATHERING IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY AMERICAN
LITERATURE

This chapter examines tarring and feathering in the late eighteenth century, focusing on actual incidents, newspaper accounts, and John Trumbull's *M'Fingal*, a mock-epic poem written during the Revolutionary War (1776-1782). My goal is to provide historical background for my analysis of later literary incarnations of the ritual in the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. I open with the case of John Malcolm, an unpopular British official in Boston. This case provides details of the multifarious practice and can help to unravel the complex historical web of social meanings the practice created. I will be advancing the argument that tarring and feathering was part of a larger process of discursive and visual racializing informed by the social constructs of race and character, both of which attended to an imagined human interiority. While the ritual united the participants into a burgeoning American collective, it revealed a doubleness¹ in the emergent United States culture in which, on the one hand, individualism and liberty were prized, while on the other hand, conformity became compulsory and civil rights were limited.

¹ See Eric Sundquist for his illuminating analysis of this “doubleness.”

In this context, colonial skin was configured as a surface on which to map the community's moral boundaries,² to signal trust and distrust, inclusion and exclusion, in a time of political tension and uncertainty. In particular, during tarring and feathering, the skin was painfully darkened to indicate disenfranchisement and make immorality, irrationality, and inferiority, and the censure of them publicly visible. Only after the "contaminated" body was identified as such through tarring and feathering could it then be purged from the body politic.³ Three major dimensions of tarring and feathering in America emerge out of this discussion, and continue into the later chapters: 1) the patriotic association gained through its use to support the revolutionary ideology of republicanism; 2) the racial component of the practice, which, contributed to the ongoing consolidation of a white identity by connoting a loss of personhood; and, 3) the performative aspect of the practice as political theater which satirized various, real or imagined, stances of elitism.

The Case of John Malcolm

On the evening of January 25, 1774, just four weeks after the Boston Tea Party, a Boston mob dragged, after much resistance, despised British customs official John Malcolm⁴ out of his home. The group gathered when word spread that Malcolm had "cudgel[ed]

² See Moss 234, for a brief discussion of this idea.

³ Mary Poovey discusses the adoption of the term the "social body" as a more inclusive alternative to "the body politic" in the early nineteenth century (7-8). I use "body politic" because it was in currency during the late eighteenth century, and because it emphasizes the less inclusive form of belonging.

⁴ John Malcolm's name is variously spelled Malcolm, as Gary Nash uses it, Malcom, and Malcomb. I use Malcolm for consistency when I refer to him, but keep the spelling as is from the materials I use.

George Robert Twelves Hewes, a shoemaker who had rushed to the defense of a young boy who had collided with Malcom while riding a sled.”⁵ The mob stripped Malcolm of his clothes, beat and whipped him, and covered his body with tar and feathers. In what was euphemistically called a “modern jacket” or a “fashionable suit” of tar and feathers, he was displayed in an open cart and paraded, amidst the cacophony of pots, pans, fifes, and shouts, through town for several hours. The mob stopped and flogged him at symbolic civic centers such as the Liberty Tree, the gallows, Butcher’s Hall, and Charlestown Ferry. Finally, they “forced Malcom to drink tea, toasting one member of the royal family with every gulp, until he vomited.” Because the spectacle took place during the middle of winter, Malcolm suffered frostbite; later, he painfully ripped pieces of dead skin from his body as he attempted to remove the tar. Seeking to secure a pension as a result of this gruesome experience, he “allegedly forwarded several pieces of skin, with the tar still attached, to Parliament” (Hersey qtd. in Irvin 205). When Malcolm gained an audience with George III, he was awarded an annuity of £100 for his suffering, and became “a heroic celebrity and a prime propaganda figure for the government” in England (Levy par. 52). Malcolm eventually wanted to remake his tar-and-feather experience into a badge of honor, asking the king to make him, Malcolm wrote, “a single knight of the tar... for I like the smell of it, this will do me great honour in North America and in a great measure retaliate for all my losses and sufferings” (par. 53). Malcolm’s vision to symbolically invert the parody did not sit well with the king,

⁵ The history of this incident as presented here is based on and quoted from Irvin, 210; 205.

and Malcolm was sent to Plymouth as a minor officer, but was regarded to be, like many Americans, “to some degree insane” (par. 53).

This incident, Malcolm’s second tarring and feathering, presents one of the more violent and perhaps most well-known tarring and featherings which occurred in the context of approximately seventy such unlawful punishments preceding armed conflict between Britain and the colonies. His tarring and feathering resulted from both moral and economic justifications; it was an attempt by the mob to infuse this dreadful ritual “with patriotic significance by forcing him to drink tea,” even though “this second attack was precipitated not by any official act but by his private assault on Hewes” (Irvin 211). However, as one newspaper reported it, the maltreatment of Hewes may have just been the final straw of an already long list of political abuses. When a few bystanders tried to save Malcolm by arguing that, whatever the complaints against him, proper channels of law would remedy them, the crowd proceeded anyway, reasoning that

he had been an old, impudent and mischievous offender—he had joined in the murders at North Carolina—he had seized vessels on account of sailors having a bottle or two of gin on board—he had in office, and otherwise, behaved in the most capricious, insulting and daringly abusive manner—and on every occasion discovered the most rooted enmity to this country, and the defenders of its rights. (“Boston, Jan. 27”)

Immorality, construed both in personal and political terms, was Malcolm’s sin, and the participants, as well as other Bostonians, saw the tarring and feathering as triumphant justice.

Sympathetic news articles, including the one quoted above, often used euphemistic language to report such barbaric acts; for example, Malcolm was not “tarred and feathered” but instead was given a “modern jacket.” This report concluded by deriving a political lesson from the aggression: “See reader, the effects of a government in which the people have no confidence! Let those who pretend to dread anarchy and confusion, at length be persuaded to join in the only measure to be depended on for their prevention, viz. to put the administration into the hands of men revered and beloved by the people.” Eliding the violence of the perpetrators and utilizing the rhetoric of self-government, the article shifts the blame to Malcolm, citing his unfitness for political office. Tellingly, it invokes the character of government officials—who should be “reverenced and beloved” men—as the core value which earned one the privilege of political leadership.

Not all colonists, however, celebrated the ritual and, in fact, some patriots were outraged by the actions of the mob. A number of newspapers publically denounced the practice; the *Pennsylvania Gazette* called it a “horrible discipline,”⁶ and the leader of the “Committee for Tarring and Feathering,” who had been printing threats of tar and feathers to boycott-violators, published a disclaimer asserting that he and his group had nothing to do with the Malcolm debacle (Irvin 211).⁷ The excess of this particular event

⁶ “A few days ago Mr. John Malcolm, an officer of his Majesty’s Customs, underwent the horrible discipline of being tarred, feathered, and carted. It seems he had greatly offended the inhabitants, which provoked them to this expression of their resentment” (“Boston, January 27” 7).

⁷ Joyce Joyner was the pseudonym of the leader of the Committee for Tarring and Feathering, which published cautionary notices in newspapers, threatening tars-and-

undermined the message the patriots wanted to send to the Crown, which was, by their understanding, one that emphasized their central principle (no taxation without the consent of the governed) through a degree of restraint. Even in its early stages, then, the ritual of tarring and feathering was a controversial method of righting a perceived political or moral wrong.

The British reaction to tarring and feathering varied. Though many satirized what they saw as collective American backwardness, some British understood the implications of the ritual the way the patriots intended: as a rhetorical act to support a principle. For example, Edmund Burke's 1774 speech "On American Taxation" urges Parliament to repeal all revenue taxes by invoking the idea of tar and feathers: "You must therefore either abandon the scheme of taxing; or you must send the ministers tarred and feathered to America, who dared to hold out the royal faith for a renunciation of all taxes for revenue" (19). Pointing out the intractable stance of the American public on the issue of taxes, Burke ironically suggests that the Parliament outfit colonial tax collectors in what seemed to be their standard attire, tar and feathers.

In the popular press, however, the event was represented in several British mezzotints, issued by a publisher in London, which satirized the colonists as a whole for their lawless and barbaric methods. The illustration (see Figure 2), attributed to British printmaker Philip Dawe, mockingly entitled "The Bostonians Paying the Exciseman, or Tarring and Feathering," superimposes two events: the tarring and feathering of John

feathers to captains of cargo ships if the goods were brought ashore, thus violating the boycott.

Malcolm, foregrounded and centered, and, on the backdrop, the dumping of the tea at Boston harbor.



Figure 2. “The Bostonians Paying the Exciseman, or Tarring and Feathering.” 1774. n. p. *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*. Lib. of Congress. 1 May 2013. LC-USZ62-33262.



Figure 3. “A New Method of Macarony Making as Practiced at Boston.” n. d. n. p. *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*. Lib. of Congress. 1 May 2013. LC-USZ62-1309.

It thus conflates what the patriots’ saw as more legitimate forms of resistance with the exaggerated display of the Malcolm mob. In each variant of the representation (see and compare Figure 2 and Figure 3), a tar-and-feathered Malcolm kneels by either a Liberty Tree or a Liberty Pole, from which hangs a noose, implying an irony in the rhetoric for inalienable rights. Symbolic of lawless lynching, the noose hangs ominously,

not merely as a prop, but as an aid to interpret the event as rampant summary punishment. Two or more awkwardly dressed, likely working-class, colonists grin sadistically as they hold on to the noose around Malcolm's neck and either force tea down his throat or prepare to do so. The satire suggests that if colonists argued against the Crown's abuses on the grounds of its tyranny, their point was moot because their practices revealed, not the political benefits, but the despotism of democracy. The image of one British official subdued by a number of colonists suggests that the colonists upheld a doctrine of might equals right, in which the ideal of individual liberty was mere rhetoric. Thus, British propaganda ridiculed the idea of tarring and feathering and demonized the colonists who enacted it. More to the point, "The theater of tar and feather inspired horror in the polite English audience, which held the public self as inviolable" (Levy par. 24).

Furthermore, the mezzotint's emphasis on the feathers as opposed to the tar reveals a deep cultural distinction between British and colonial imaginations about social degradation. British understanding of this event drew on the contemporaneous tradition of political prints which satirized corrupt public figures by depicting them as fowl. Geese, for example, indexed politicians' weak intellects and moral unnaturalness to dehumanize and defile them.⁸ Certainly, tarring and feathering "enacted some of the

⁸ Anne Fairfax Worthington explains, "Variants of this ritual dehumanized Tories by associating them with animals. In political prints, men were associated with animals to emphasize certain characteristics. The animals that roamed through the political prints that English and American satirist turned out in the eighteenth century each bore their own messages. Asses plodded; vultures exploited. The cow, a passive female, was brutalized. Animals mingled with humans in scenes that portrayed confusion" (233).

satiric conceits of the prints and turned the prints into real life,” which points to the “symbiotic relationship” between public rituals and satiric political prints (Worthington 229). However, the Malcolm representation largely elides the tar. The lack of attention to this sticky dark substance implies that the complicated, interlocking moral and racialized dimensions of this punishment were lost in translation across the shores.⁹

Tar and Feathers in Context

The peculiar practice of tarring and feathering was not a new American invention, but rather a resurrected adaptation of a longstanding maritime punishment,¹⁰

⁹ Though the example used comes from Boston, tarring and feathering, and sometimes worse, was perpetrated against loyalists throughout the colonies. For example, in South Carolina, “Patriot mobs carrying buckets of tar and bags of feathers often terrorized loyalists in the streets... [A] mob hanged Jerry, a free Negro pilot, and burned his corpse because allegedly he had offered to guide British warships across the bar. Two Roman Catholic loyalists, James Dealy and Laughlin Martin, who reportedly favored arming Catholics, Indians, and Negroes, were stripped, tarred, feathered, carted through the streets, and banished. A gunner at Fort Johnson was tarred, feathered, and exhibited in front of the home of the most obnoxious British officials” (Godbold and Woody 145).

¹⁰ The first time the punishment was administered, as far as written records show, was in 1189 CE when Richard I created several laws “Concerning Crusaders Who Were to Go by Sea.” Among various punishments for murder, attempted murder, assault, and slander on board a ship, tarring and feathering was reserved for thieves: “A robber, moreover, convicted of theft, shall be shorn like a hired fighter, and boiling tar shall be poured over his head, and feathers from a cushion shall be shaken over his head, -so that he may be publicly known; and at the first land where the ships put in he shall be cast on shore” (Henderson). However, Irvin writes that tarring and feathering “may have its origins in antiquity. In post-Homeric Greece, tar was applied to homosexual men to remove body hair as a painful and disparaging signifier of effeminacy” (n. 4, 199). Furthermore, Irvin provides a brief survey of tarring and featherings across Europe through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: “In 1623, the Bishop of Halverstade ordered that tar-and-feathers be applied to a party of drunken friars and nuns, and in 1696, an angry crowd imposed the same punishment upon a London bailiff who attempted to arrest a debtor. Other evidence, too suggests that tar-and-feathers lingered in the folk culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century transatlantic rim. [In 1741, a London] pamphlet

one which resonated with both the elite and the popular consciousness of the colonies. For decades prior, transgressing bodies in New England had been marked by branding or compulsory adornment of letters representing particular crimes—revealing a concern for the legibility of the body—and tarring and feathering demonstrated an expansion of these previous punishments in the apparent desire to cover the whole body. The simple availability of tar,¹¹ with its suggestive color and adhesive texture, contributed to its use for this purpose. Moreover, tar was implicated in British maritime trading and imperial pursuits. Indeed, from the naval stores Act of 1705, which called for tar as one of the chief colonial exports, until the Revolution, “So necessary was tar to English imperial interests that a government bounty was paid on its import from America—that is, merchants were remunerated for bringing it from America into England” (Abelove 22).¹² Its status as a colonial good exported to Britain for the advancement of empire made it an ironic weapon, adding insult to injury.

touting the economic importance of Jamaica told of a plantation master who tarred and feathered disobedient slaves” (199).

¹¹Tar, a viscous substance, is created by distilling primarily the wood and roots of pine, and is thought to have been in use in Northern Europe since the Iron Age. The word entered Old English some years before 700 CE, the first documented usage of the word. An important commodity for hundreds of years, tar has been used for building roofs and roads, protecting orchards from parasites, healing sheep’s wounds after shearing, and, because of its strong antiseptic qualities, it has taken many forms in medicinal uses in the nineteenth century. Perhaps, though, before the twentieth century, it was most famously used as a sealant for planks on wooden ships. Its association with the maritime profession caused sailors to be nicknamed “Jack Tars” because contact with the substance left their hands, arms, and faces blackened for weeks after docking at port. Demand for tar decreased with the advent of iron and steel ships.

¹²For tar as a commodity, see Joseph J. Malone, and Thomas L. Purvis and Richard Balkin.

From the first tarring and feathering in America in 1766, to the point when the punishment began declining in popularity in 1776, the practice merged with other types of public shaming. Alfred F. Young identifies tarring and feathering as “[t]he fusing of three ritual elements—of the skimmington, the public execution, and the maritime punishment” (156). He further distinguishes between the tarring and featherings led by Whig leaders, which were planned in advance and tended to feature a more socially mixed crowd, and the more popular-based tar-and-feather crowds, which usually happened as spur-of-the-moment events of the laboring masses with no clear leader. (155). Philip Deloria locates tarring and feathering in a wider tradition of misrule rituals, such as effigy burnings and disguised riots, which “often occurred in the context of specific holidays, [but] had an aggressive, critical quality that could be mustered at any time to protest transgressions of social order”(14).¹³ Young and Deloria’s assessments are not mutually exclusive, and both point to longstanding traditions of social inversion which primed the colonists for this seemingly spontaneous ritual.

Tarring and feathering worked on multiple levels: it held different meanings for the participants and the victim, and though as a form it was practiced similarly across communities, its function and purpose varied. For some communities, the goal was to shame the individual. Within that logic, it was possible to reform the individual’s behavior through public humiliation; the reprimanded could stay within the community,

¹³ Deloria further defines a related European tradition of holiday celebrations, which featured “blackface, transvestism, the parading of figures in live or effigy form, and the pots and pans of ‘rough music’” and “critiqued not only social but also political order” (15).

but not without some continued public opprobrium. On the other hand, some communities sought to abject the body and irrevocably extricate it from the social fabric. In such cases, the individual was “ridden out of town,” never to return, and sometimes even threatened with death if he were to return. Accordingly, some British officials fled to England upon their experience with tar and feathers. Therefore, the function of tarring and feathering varied from community to community, mostly corresponding to the level of offense that was publicly felt.

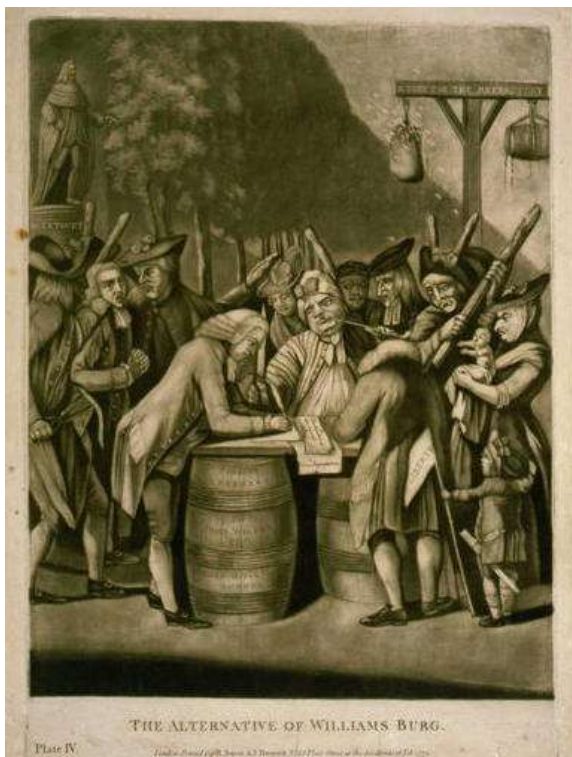


Figure 4. “The Alternative of Williams-burg.” Philip Dawe. London: R. Sayer & J. Bennett, 1775. Mezzotint. *British Cartoon Prints Collection*. Lib. of Congress. 1 May 2013. LC-USZC4-5280.

Although at no time in colonial America was tarring and feathering a legally sanctioned punishment for a particular crime, it satisfied the need for a ritual that would

consolidate the emerging patriot identity and exorcise the frustrations of the participants. Evidence suggests that the Sons of Liberty first appropriated the practice to intimidate customs officials as a means of resisting the series of revenue acts imposed by the Crown (Deloria 201). As a punishment outside of legal definition, tarring and feathering was a “democratically” defined intervention that was sanctioned under Whig ideology, which argued that it was a legitimate way to resist the injustices of British law when no other channels were open. Tarring and feathering was adapted in revolutionary America to target any enemies of “American liberties” including British customs officials and informers as well as colonial boycott violators and loyalists (Irvin 225; see figure 4). These individuals became symbols of Crown tyranny, and growing bitterness from offended feelings and fueled the taking up of tar brushes.

By 1750, the colonies “had to a significant degree been governing themselves, maintaining internal civil order, prospering and building an ever more complex and closely integrated society...[all of which] had prepared them psychologically for self-government and independence” (Green 50-1). As a growing body, the colonies needed to be shielded from social, political, economic, and moral hazards, yet the series of revenue tax legislations, which were perceived as infections, undermined the idea of colonial growth and self-rule. By imposing taxes to manage debt from the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), the British wielded their Parliamentary power, excluding consent from the colonists, save by the Crown’s argument of virtual representation—a system that was antithetical to the kind of political and social bodies that were forming in America.

The historical tradition of town oaths, covenants, and compacts—some variation of which created all communities since the time of settlement—was central to the colonists’ understanding of themselves and their ties to the community as a whole. Donald Lutz argues that such founding documents “knitted” together a people who “shared in the moral life of the community” (19; 14).¹⁴ Thus, the theocratic tradition of these social contracts, or “people-founding documents,” reveals the understanding of the common good related to the idea of individuals as bound to each other for protection, security, and survival. Indeed, the social body was an organism that had to be kept productive, growing, and healthy. In 1762, Congregationalist clergyman Abraham Williams delivered an Election Sermon that embodied many of the underlying principles of American political thought and discourse (Hyneman and Lutz 3). Beginning the sermon with a quotation from Corinthians, Williams elaborates on the relationship between the individual and the state:

I Cor. XII. 25: ‘That there should be no Schism in the Body, but that the Members should have the same Care one for another.’ The natural Body consists of various Members, connected and subservient one to the other, each serving some valuable purposes and the most perfect and happy State of the Body results from all the Members regularly performing their

¹⁴ Lutz identifies four foundation elements, a variation of which was contained in most documents: “1) the founding or creation of a people; 2) the founding or creation of a government; 3) the self-definition of the people in terms of shared values and goals so that the founded people may cross generations; and 4) the specification of a form of government through the creation of institutions for collective decision making” (xxiii).

natural Offices; so collective Bodies, or Societies, are composed of various Individuals connected together, related and subservient to each other. Every Person has his proper Sphere, and is of Importance to the whole; and the public Peace and Welfare is best secured and promoted, by every Member attending to the proper Business of his particular Station. (qtd. in Hyneman and Lutz 3-4)

Like Williams, many colonists understood the relationship of the self to the state in terms of the classical analogy that viewed the individual as a vital organ in service to the whole body. The social body needed to be kept free from “ill effects” caused by unproductive, exploitative parasites (Williams qtd. in Hyneman and Lutz 7). The relationship of the social body to the individual body was a synecdochal one, and any schism in the community was personified by the individual who was divisive—socially, politically, and morally.¹⁵ Therefore, if an organ became infected or no longer productive, thus working against the body, it had to be rehabilitated or amputated. By tarring and feathering the offensive body, the mobs made it unnatural, animal-like, and thus supposedly purified the social body. Furthermore, the Sons of Liberty incorporated the working classes into this patriotic mode of resisting the Crown by courting them with the inclusive phrase “the body of the people” and inviting them to discipline traitorous townsmen, as Gary Nash points out: “Anyone involved in ferreting out violators,

¹⁵ A verse from the Book of Matthew, with which colonists were likely familiar, further illustrates this point with more severity: “If your hand or your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot than to keep both hands and both feet and be thrown into eternal fire” (KJV, Matthew 18: 8).

fastening on them the opprobrium of the community, and coercing them to mend their ways could think of himself or herself as a civic actor” (98). Thus, by acting out frustrations on the body of an alleged oppressor, the perpetrators demonstrated their participation in the body politic.

However unifying, the practice’s inherent contradiction—arguing for liberty while taking it away—was troublesome. Tarring and feathering was both symptomatic and supportive of a polarized populace and group solidarity was thus built on collective punishment of the individual in order to go beyond shaming to abjection. Norma Claire Moruzzi has extended Julia Kristeva’s idea of the abject¹⁶ to national self-identification, writing: “The abject is that which, although intimately a part of early experience, must be rejected so that the self can establish the border of its unified subjectivity: [it is] the familiar foreign(er) who is suddenly recognized as a threat to (national) identity” (144). Thus Malcolm, who had lived in the colonies all his life, and others like him, suddenly became coded as a foreign threat. Furthermore, the discussion of the maternal body as part of the early experience, which must be rejected in order to come into adulthood, resonates with the prevalent metaphor of England as mother to her child colonies, and

¹⁶ “It is...not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady” (Kristeva *PH* 4).

supports the ideas behind the revolution, which disavowed the mother country's influence to become autonomous. In this way, tarring and feathering paralleled at a local level the ensuing national overthrow of the monarchy.

While tarring and feathering was the product and the manifestation of cultural concern, it was a practice deeply entrenched in the sensory experience of both the victimized body and the perpetrating body. Participants' senses irrevocably involved them in the ritual; they ran, shouted, banged pots and pans, gestured with their faces and arms, and smelled¹⁷ the tar in the air. The abstract feelings of frustration from years of British political and economic mistreatment were made materially manifest on the individual body implicated in the continuum of abuse. As such, the ritual served a cultural and a visceral function by making emotions collectively manifest, moving the inner to the outer, the abstract to the material.

Because the method was not lethal and bespoke a certain level of restraint on behalf of the apparently heated and frenzied crowds,¹⁸ news articles in the early nineteenth century favorably contrasted the "minor" aggression of the American

¹⁷ Anthony Synnott points out that there is an inextricable association between the experience of smell and memory (186). Thus, as the stench of tar permeated the entire parade, all participants were permanently *impressed* by the event, with all of its social, political, and moral implications. Expanding on the social symbolism of smell, Synnott explains, "Odours, therefore, both real and imagined, may serve to legitimize inequalities of both class and race, and they are one of the criteria by which negative moral identity may be imposed upon a particular population" (197). As smell is an extension of self, he argues, people have interpreted the possessors of "bad" smells as morally corrupt, economically deprived, and racially inferior. This triple relegation was certainly at play in tarring and featherings, as they demanded that the infected individual body be contained, quarantined, or ejected from the social body.

¹⁸ However, one minister was eventually hung and burned as the violence which started out as a tarring and feathering escalated (Irvin 222-3).

Revolution to the cruel and exaggerated violence of the French Revolution. One such article writes,

The history of the time, however, shows that the people, even in the infliction of punishments on those who had provoked their vengeance, were not sanguinary or ferocious. The French Revolution, unlike ours, was the occasion of shocking cruelties and of the shedding of rivers of blood. One of the most common punishments inflicted by the sons of Liberty, were Tarring and Feathering, which, though rather severe, was still in a degree humane, and contained something of the humorous and much of the grotesque. (“Tar and Feathers” 5)

Although the tone here is somewhat self-congratulatory, the colonists (unlike the French) were not seeking to overthrow the monarchy by annihilating it, nor were they particularly hostile to aristocrats *per se*. Rather, the colonists did not feel the need to behead the oppressors on their soil because their motive was largely a rhetorical one, directed toward two audiences. For one, they were seeking to persuade the British that they had the right to tax themselves, or at least be represented in the body imposing those taxes. This is partly why the practice declined after the Declaration of Independence; there was no need to persuade the Crown after the taking up of arms. Second, in this practice, the colonists addressed themselves,¹⁹ forming a collective identity by identifying, and acting out against, a common threat. Of course, individual

¹⁹ See Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives* in which he outlines internal rhetoric, or an address to one’s “individual soul” (37-39).

participants took part for a variety of motives (political, economic, racial, moral, personal), but the consolidation of these motivations into the act of tarring and feathering nevertheless produced a relatively coherent public statement.

Yet, characterizing the violence of tarring and feathering as relatively “mild” is problematic from the victim’s standpoint. Usually, the clothes from the victim’s upper body were stripped, and tar, heated to varying degrees, was poured onto the head, arms, and torso. Depending on the degree of heat, the victim could sustain burns, which blistered the skin. If the tar was not promptly removed, an infection would result and, sometimes, harsh substances were used to remove it, further irritating the skin. The pain the victim felt correlated with the crowd’s whims; sometimes, along with the tar and feathers, the victim was flogged or forced to straddle a rail while being paraded through town.

Very quickly after the flurry of tarring and featherings, the phrase became part of the American discursive repertoire. The news articles of the late 1760s and early 1770s, which had to describe the process of being tarred and feathered, implied that it was not a widely understood phenomenon.²⁰ However, in a 1778 letter, Benjamin Franklin was perhaps one of the earliest to use a tarring and feathering metaphor. In a letter sent by an unidentified man in Belgium who purportedly had the best interest of the United States in mind, Franklin was urged to adopt a compromise between America and Britain, which would ultimately benefit Britain. Franklin used the phrase rhetorically in his response to British Parliament (whom he inferred to have authored the letter) to interpret the nature

²⁰ See Alfred Young.

of this supposed compromise. In the final sentence of his brilliantly argued, tongue-in-cheek letter, Franklin writes, “We consider [the proposition] as a sort of tar-and-feather honor, or a mixture of foulness and folly, which every man among us, who should accept it from your king, would be obliged to renounce or exchange for that conferred by the mobs of their country, or wear it with everlasting infamy” (443). Humorously bowing out of the offer, he uses the adjective to ironize honor, revealing that he understands the insult posing as an honor, an infamy posing as fame. By invoking the adjective to characterize the offer, he both asserts an American identity and communicates that the colonists will not be blindly appeased by a treaty which will cause them to ultimately lose the powers of mobility and self-government.

Literary Representation of Tarring and Feathering

Though Philip Freneau called the pre-Revolutionary tumult the “the days of riots and mobs,/ Tars, feathers, and tories and troublesome jobs [sic]” (203), John Trumbull, another revolutionary poet, was the earliest writer to represent the tarring and feathering of a Tory in an approving, though satirical, light. The “Connecticut Wit” was asked by members of Congress “to write something favorable to the revolutionary cause,” and responded with his 1776/1782 mock-epic “M’Fingal”²¹ which details the friction between opposing factions at a town meeting: the Tories, led by Scottish loyalist

²¹ *M’Fingal: A Modern Epic Poem. Canto First, or The Town-Meeting* was first published in 1776 and, in 1782 it was divided into two cantos and published with cantos three and four in a new edition: *M’Fingal: A Modern Epic Poem. Canto First, or The Town-Meeting* (Philadelphia: Printed & sold by William & Thomas Bradford, 1776; London: Printed for J. Almon, 1776). *M’Fingal: A Modern Epic Poem, in Four Cantos* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1782; London: Printed for J. S. Jordan, 1792) (Ford 241-5).

McFingal and the Whigs, led by Honorius (Gunn 532). Trumbull's work reveals that tar and feathers merged republican virtue and racial difference to expel those who, by voluntarily committing immoral acts, *de facto* withdrew any claim toward inalienable rights.

The spirit with which Trumbull depicts tarring and feathering, through the mock-epic genre common in transatlantic eighteenth-century writing, resonated with the euphemistic, tongue-in-cheek language used in newspapers to report such incidents. As one Trumbull scholar notes, "A sense that such satiric diminishment might be decisive at a certain moment of ideological wavering in the colonies was in John Adams's mind, one strongly suspects, when he urged Trumbull to write *M'Fingal* as his contribution to the struggle for independence," adding that the poem had "indubitable success in mobilizing revolutionary sentiment" (Dowling 26). The pregnant meaning of the term "complexion," which incorporates both surface qualities of the face such as color and clarity, as well as inner qualities of character, particularly informed the discourse surrounding tarring and feathering. One instructive example of reading complexion comes from the *Virginia Gazette* report of the August 1774 tarring of Anthony Warwick, who was suspected of violating the boycott association:

The populace very deliberately led him to the stocks, and having prepared him for the purpose, gave him a fashionable suit of tar and feathers, being the most proper badge of distinction for men of his complexion. They then mounted him on his horse, and drove him out of town, through a shower of eggs, the smell of which our correspondent informs, seem to

have a material effect upon the delicate constitution of the motleyed gentleman.

The emphasis on “complexion” and “constitution” juxtaposed against “suit,” “badge,” and “motleyed” sets up a dichotomy between the inner and the outer, suggesting that tarring and feathering somehow brought the two into equilibrium: by darkening his skin, the crowd displayed his dark heart. The ritual exemplified the increasing recognition of the slippage between outer appearance and inner reality, through which people began to conceive of skin as legible, foretelling the secrets of one’s private body. Indeed, in her theoretical book on skin, Claudia Benthien points out that

[i]n the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the growing feeling of the unrecognizability of sensations and of the authentic inner character of the other led to a number of unveiling techniques, such as physiognomy, pathognomy, criminalistics, and, finally, psychoanalysis. What emerges is the ideal of a glassy, unveiled human being, whose authentic self is immediately visible to the observer. (29)

If the skin could only *appear* to be a vital part of the body politic, which then made it inaccessible to social regulation, the “real” self must be made perceptible.

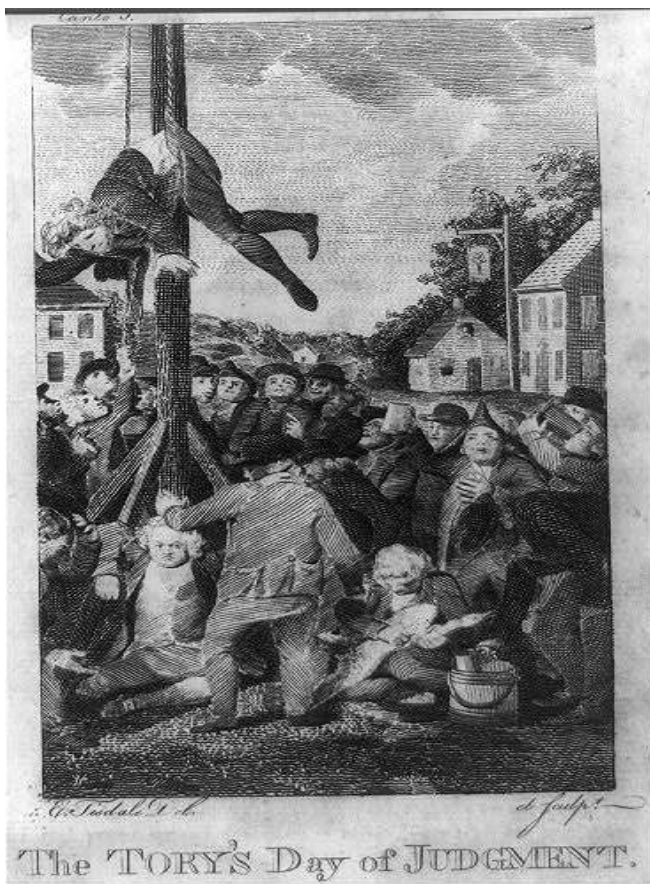


Figure 5. "The Tory's Day of Judgment." Elkanah Tisdale. *M'Fingal*. John Trumbull. New-York : printed by John Buel, 1795. Engraving. *Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division* . Lib. of Congress. 1 May 2013. LC-USZ62-7708.

Tarring and feathering M'Fingal, thus, conquered, labeled, and stabilized this tricky frontier (see Figure 5, which depicts the preparations for the ritual). Trumbull's third canto, "The Liberty Pole," relies on a series of mock-epic similes which comically deflate the revolutionary struggle by characterizing tarring and feathering as comparable to the grand practices of classical times. He painstakingly describes the Tory's tarring and feathering, by which his exterior symbolically comes to represent his inner character through the "sable stream" of the "Jewish oil":

Forthwith, the crowd proceed to deck
With halter'd noose M'Fingal's neck,
While he, in peril of his *soul*,
Stood tied, half-hanging, to the pole,
Then, lifting high the pond'rous jar,
Pour'd o'er his head the smoking tar.
With less profusion erst was spread
The *Jewish oil* on royal head,
That down his beard and vestments ran
And *cover'd all his outward man* [...]
So from high-rai'd urn the torrents
Spread down his side their various currents.
His flowing wig, as next the brim,
First met and drank the *sable stream*;
Adown his visage, stern and grave,
Roll'd and adher'd the viscid wave;
With arms depending as he stood,
Each cuff, capacious, holds the flood;
From nose and chin's remotest end
The *tarry icicles* depend;
Till, all o'erspread, with colors gay
He glitter'd to the western ray

Like sleet-bound trees in wintry skies

Or Lapland idol carv'd in ice. (93-116; emphases mine)

The language follows the flow of the liquid from the beginning, as it saturates the wig, a symbol of aristocracy and authority, to the end, as it covers each cuff of the official's sleeves. There is an overabundance of tar as it coats the face and beard and drips from the nose and chin. Most importantly, the smothering of "Jewish oil on royal head" signifies inversion of authority, class, and race, parodying the anointing ritual that conferred royal or sacramental authority. Though tar varied in color from golden to black, and anointing oil, composed of myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, cassia, and olive oil, was a rusty translucent color, the connection to burgeoning racial hierarchization was part of the humiliation. The tar did not necessarily Africanize M'Fingal, but it did reduce him to his body, with which blacks and Indians were already increasingly identified. As Michael Rogin points out about the practice of blackface:

White men portrayed blacks on the American stage before the revolution as bestial figures of low comedy. In the first native musical *The Disappointment* (1767), a blacked-up white actor plays the vain, greedy, cowardly role that was already the blackface stereotype. But there was no effort to root blackface characters in Afro-American life until the resurgence of American nationalism in the wake of the War of 1812. (27)

Indeed, racial constructions were in flux during the revolutionary period for a number of reasons, including the rhetoric of freedom and liberty and the idea that race is a product

of the environment. As such M’Fingal’s tarred body divorced him from his “European civilization” and aligned him with “savage peoples.”

Some background about racial ideas are useful for understanding this characterization in “M’Fingal,” The Naturalization Act of 1790 asserted that only free white persons would be citizens of the new United States, revealing a growing coherence—particularly with respect to participation in the nation—of racial thought. More generally, the category of race in the late eighteenth century was not yet as systematized, as it would soon become. Enlightenment-driven works of natural philosophy and history by men like Voltaire, David Hume, and Lord Kames rivaled models of understanding creation by Comte de Buffon and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (who were both proponents of American degeneration through environment, at the time).

Polygenism, which advocated separate creations for peoples depending on geographic and climactic conditions, challenged Christian-based monogenism, which saw human origins as coming from a single source. Most damagingly, the polygenism argument extended to identifying differing behaviors and capacities among groups, those divided both by race and gender. The theory of polygenism ultimately proposed “a biologically determined subject whose corporeality contradicted any claim to the Declaration of Independence's higher laws of equality by means of creation” (Soriso 15). While colonists felt “more civilized” than the black and Indian “savages,” the “biological thinking of the eighteenth century” did not develop into “intellectualized racist theory and ideology” until the nineteenth century (Fredrickson xi).

After M’Fingal’s immorality is racialized through the process of tarring, the adhesion of feathers dehumanizes the squire:

And now the feather bag, display’d,
Is wav’d in triumph o’er his head
And spreads him o’ver with feathers missive
And down upon the tar adhesive:
Not Maia’s son, with wings for ears,
Such plumes around his visage wears,
Nor Milton’s six-wing’d angel gathers
Such superfluity of feathers;
Till, all complete, appears our squire
Like Gorgon or Chimera dire,
Not more could boast, on Plato’s plan,
To rank amid the race of man
Or prove his claim to human nature
As a two-legg’d, unfeather’d creature. (117-130)

Again, the depiction of feathers is one of overabundance, exceeding those of plumed figures from both heaven and hell, as M’Fingal’s feathers go beyond those of Mercury and a seraph from *Paradise Lost* as well as those of mythological monsters. The tarred-and-feathered body can no longer be called human, according to Plato’s definition of a human being as a “two-legged animal without feathers.” The feathers mark M’Fingal as not only outside the community, but also outside the human species: a member of an

inferior class, one lacking in the human and quintessentially republican faculties of rationality and morality. The feathers index an instinctual life, nodding to Indian headdresses while simultaneously mocking contemporaneous British fashions. Tar and feathers, thus, united rationalizations for racial difference with the idea of republican virtue, working to exclude those bodies seen as lacking the innate material on which the republic was to be founded.²² As Ronald Takaki argues, “In terms of the American Revolution,” blacks and Indians “were not republicans. The rational part of the self, republican leaders insisted, must be in command. Identifying whites with rationality or mind, they associated peoples of color with the body. Thus the mind was raised to authority over other parts of the self, and whites were raised above blacks and Indians” (Takaki 13). The tar and feathers change M’Fingal’s external complexion to reflect an imagined internal constitution, and his moral taint, then, is externalized and he is showcased as one lacking virtue upon which the early Republic was to be built.

²² The new American character would be based on Thomas Jefferson’s idea of friendship, Alexander Hamilton’s idea of virtue, John Adams’ idea of honor, and James Madison’s idea of justice, according to Andrew S. Trees, who examines the politics of character as differently constructed by these founders in their rhetorical maneuvers. Trees’ point of departure is George Washington’s advice that “We are a young Nation and have a character to establish,” which not only opens up questions about what kind of character that should be, but also implies different understandings of “character:” 1) as revealing a close connection between personal and national character, 2) as a process of invention, and 3) as “uneasily straddl[ing] the fluid and ill-defined boundary between public and private life, a boundary that played a central role in shaping the politics of the new nation. In struggling to create their characters, all the founders also struggled to define the proper line between the personal and the political and between inclusion and exclusion in the political life of the nation” (xxi).



Figure 6. “The Procession.” Elkanah Tisdale. *M’Fingal*. John Trumbull. New-York : printed by John Buel, 1795. Engraving. *Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division* . Lib. of Congress. 1 May 2013. LC-USZ62-7708.

Trumbull closes this episode with the portrayal of the commemorative cart ride around town (see Figure 6) using pagan religious references to underscore the parallels of the New England folk ritual with the Roman republic’s ceremonies to clean public places. The viscous tar and the public gaze mark M’Fingal as the deviant from the participants’ standard, and doubly detestable for being in a position of power upon which their welfare depended.

Then on a two-wheel’d car of state
They raid’ our grand duumvirate.

And as at Rome a like committee
That found an owl within their city
With solemn rites and sad processions
At ev'ry shrine perform'd lustrations.
And, lest infection should abound
From prodigy with face so round,
All Rome attends him through the street
In triumph to his country seat;
With like devotion all the choir
Paraded round our feather'd squire;
In front the martial music comes
Of horns and fiddles, fifes and drums,
With jingling sound of carriage bells
And treble creak of rusted wheels,
Behind, the crowd, in lengthen'd row,
With grave procession clos'd the show,
And at fit period ev'ry throat
Combined in universal shout
And hail'd great Liberty in chorus,
Or bawl'd: Confusion to the Tories! (131-152)

The excess texture of tar-and-feathers is echoed here in the cacophonous tonal texture accompanying the parody of an honorific ceremony. M'Fingal is the contaminated

component who requires a purification process, “lest infection should abound” in the social body. More importantly, he is guest(s) of “honor,” whose double layer of tar-and-feathers suggests that he is a dubious and double-dealing authority: the “grand duumvirate.” Patricia Bradley suggests that tar and feathers represented a “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” which points to a perceived performance on M’Fingal’s behalf: he hid his corruption under the cloak of gentility. The cart ride episode also emphasizes the performative and spectatorial component of the ritual for the participants, who rejoice in outing M’Fingal as an impostor. M’Fingal’s tarred exteriority announces a tarnished interiority not only to instruct the community to distrust the punished individual, but also to caution them to comport themselves in ways that conform to established social values.

In the last canto, M’Fingal has a vision of none other than his comrade in tar and feathers, John Malcolm, who comes in the form of Milton’s Archangel Michael. Malcolm tells him that M’Fingal must rid himself of self-interested monetary schemes, and further warns him of an impending American victory, advising him to flee.²³ By using Malcolm as a reformed angelic voice who would offer wise counsel to M’Fingal,

²³ In her reading of the scene, Constance J. Post writes, “Indicating those who ‘ravish, plunder, burn, destroy’... Malcolm presents a scathing indictment against the British, rendered all the more effective because it comes from one of their own supporters” (44). Furthermore, Post argues that Trumbull, seeking to preserve the inherent conflict of the two sides, leaves both of his heroic figures open to attack: “Honorius and the Whigs are charged with taking inordinate pleasure in the use of the tar bucket and accompanying feathers, and they are accused of faulty exegesis; however, M’Fingal and the Tories, who hover obsequiously about him, are clearly the butt of Trumbull’s jokes more often and in greater degree than Honorius” (43). Although Post commends Trumbull for his “success in portraying the double-voicedness that marked the Revolutionary War period,” she suspects that, because of his attempts to present both points of view, “he failed to represent the mood of the colonies at that time,” particularly as compared to other propagandistic writings (41).

Trumbull imagines the experience of tarring and feathering as having reformed Malcolm. His genre of the epic clearly invokes the representation of the values of a nation, thus exhibiting tarring and feathering as a uniquely American practice; mock-epic, then, not only exposes the self-inflation of the loyalists, but also reveals a self-consciousness about the folly of the ritual. Through his content, Trumbull places tarring and feathering in a continuum of antiquated social rituals, such as the classical lustration ceremonies, showing the (perhaps patriotic, in this context) superstition that attends the practice. Ultimately tarring and feathering, for the revolutionaries, was a caricature brought to life.

As racial difference became the tell-tale sign of exclusion from the new order, communities of whites developed modes of policing each other as well, to ensure and enforce a mythic moral integrity and eradicate all signs of social unrest. White colonists defined themselves and the nation against uncivilized and immoral “races,” and darkening white bodies, then, became a mode of marking them for exclusion and relegating them to the lower ranks, outside of national and human citizenship. To be sure, the taking up of tar and feathers manifested what Eric Lott calls the “racial unconscious” in the service of a primarily rhetorical act. While humiliated and physically hurt, the victims of a tarring and feathering would live, usually to flee from town. The public nature of the event, however, presupposed an audience that would be persuaded to keep in line with communally defined morals. In this way, the ritual served as a safety valve which precluded outbursts of more violent means of condemning loyalist sympathizers: “In the early years of the political crisis, when people were

defining a position, concentration on debasement and defilement of dissenters deflected interest from more drastic violence. Once a Tory had been smeared and reduced to something subhuman, an object of ridicule, he was hardly worth executing” (Worthington 237). As the Tory’s skin was darkened to illustrate his undue elitism and moral deficiency, his reputation, too was stained, and therefore his social power diminished.

By the close of the eighteenth century, however, President George Washington gathered a federal militia to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794 Pennsylvania. The third in a series of tax-related rebellions, the Whiskey Rebellion decried Alexander Hamilton’s tax on corn-produced whiskey, and incited some angry farmers to organize and resist tax collectors by, among other methods, tarring and feathering them. Insisting on the relevance of revolutionary principles to their cause, the farmers thought that “an immoral law might be opposed and yet the government respected, and all the other laws obeyed, and they firmly believed that the excise law was an immoral one.”²⁴ Unlike the British representations of two decades earlier, the American depictions of tar and feathers during the rebellion emphasize the tar, featuring noticeably darker colored victims. Connecting federal officials with the immoral tax, the visual commentary suggested that the Revolution simply replaced one tyranny with another, and thus seemed to support the farmers’ belief that the revolutionary impulse was useful yet. In his proclamation against the rebellion, Washington, renounced, among other rebel wrongs, their “[infliction of] cruel and humiliating punishments upon private citizens for

²⁴ “Country Democrat on the Whiskey Rebellion, 1796” (qtd. in Wilentz 66).

no other cause than that of appearing to be friends of the laws” (Wilentz 67). The Revolution was over, Washington communicated, and the federal government had the power to enforce order.²⁵

Thus the practice and discourse of tarring and feathering from revolutionary America stamped the practice as patriotic, while during the early years of nation-building the practice was quelled. It would not be until the anti-rent struggles in New York, almost forty years later, that the tar bucket was brought out again. The disputes between landlords and tenants, though local, had major national consequences in the eyes of James Fenimore Cooper.

²⁵ Fears of democracy run amok instilled by the Haitian Revolution and the Reign of Terror eventually led to the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts by the close of the century.

CHAPTER III

“TARS AND FEATHERS ARE THE BLACKGUARDS:” ANTI-RENT RACIALIZED VIOLENCE AND COUNTERFEIT APPEALS TO HIGHER LAW IN JAMES FENIMORE COOPER’S *REDSKINS*

During the 1840s, conflicts over land ownership in upstate New York—which came to be known as the Anti-Rent War—once again gave expression to local uprisings, where tenants took up tar and feathers to prevent the daily business of collecting rent, selling lots, or evicting occupants. At the time, large tracts of land were owned by wealthy men who rented out farms to tenants, with favorable stipulations in the short term and increasingly unfavorable ones in the long term. This system of patroonery was distinct from the feudal European tradition in legal terms, but not in effect (McWilliams 331). Although the right to alienate the lease imbued a farmer with more freedom than a vassal—on paper, anyway—selling a lease was not practical; as such, farmers perceived their situation as aristocratic exploitation. Dozens to hundreds of farmers, clad in calico, sheepskin, and painted masks, as well as adorned with exaggerated implements of warfare, came together to defend the interests of their families and friends from those of the landlords and their agents. Furthermore, like the boycott violators of the pre-revolutionary times, tenants who continued to pay their rents, and who thus undermined the solidarity of the anti-renters, were forced to comply through varying tactics of social coercion. As one county history reports, “That portion of the community who frowned upon such proceedings [of harassment or violence] was threatened and insulted” (Howell

n. p.). The tarring and featherings that took place in the struggle that dismantled the patron system continued to appeal to revolutionary patriotism, enact political theatre to satirize and disempower elites, and to feature a racialized humiliation of its victims. However, groups of tenant farmers and local landless or land-poor men also donned Indian-like disguises while enacting various forms of anti-rent resistance. Thus, the racial features of tarring and feathering took on different meanings in this context. Adding to a marriage of republican public virtue and racist science, the symbolism of tarring and feathering accrued another layer, particularly since the disenfranchised white men costumed themselves as Native Americans while they tarred and feathered the landed gentry or law enforcement officials.

Outraged New York native James Fenimore Cooper directly responded to the anti-rent upheaval with his *Littlepage Manuscripts* trilogy, which chronicles three generations of Littlepages from the 1740s through the 1840s, and illustrates the struggles to maintain their lands free from Indians, newcomers, and anti-renters. The trilogy ends with *Redskins* (1846), which is set in the 1840s. Although Cooper treated the American Revolution in *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821) and *Lionel Lincoln; Or the Leaguer of Boston* (1825), he only briefly alluded to tarring and feathering in the latter. Dwelling on cross-racial disguise, *Redskins* more explicitly incorporates tarring and feathering as the central bodily threat to the Littlepages.¹

¹ In *The Spy*, a white man escapes prison by impersonating a black servant, while another moves through enemy lines by passing as an Irish woman.

Although several skirmishes had occurred between landlords and tenants since the mid-eighteenth century, the 1839 death of Stephen Van Rensselaer, who ruled over his large Dutch manor of Rensselaerwyck with a light hand, precipitated the unrest of the early 1840s across upstate New York. Cooper had attended school with two of the Van Rensselaers, his wife was related to several manorial families, and his father modeled the family home, Otsego Hall, on the Van Rensselaer mansion (Franklin 51, 34). His personal connections notwithstanding, Cooper saw the unrest “as one more consequence of the cultural invasion of New York by a social group he had distrusted ever since his tumultuous days at Yale: the transplanted New England Yankees who had begun pouring out of their native domain in the 1780s and by the 1820s had effectively taken over New York” (Franklin 51). Earlier, in *Gleanings in Europe: France* (1837), he voiced his frustration about this Yankee Puritan legacy of pressuring social conformity to the detriment of individual liberty in the United States. Arguing that there is (counter-intuitively) more freedom in France, Cooper writes that an American’s “neighbors form a police, and a most troublesome and impertinent one it sometimes proves to be. It is also unjust for having no legal means of arriving at facts, it half the time condemns on conjecture” (247). Though Cooper’s European writings sought to bring republican principles to bear on European locales, and to instruct (so as to better) his compatriots, his American public did not take kindly to such comparisons.

Cooper’s literary involvement in the anti-rent debates stemmed as much from his personal experiences as from the growing rift between himself and his countrymen. During his travels in Europe from 1826 to 1833, Cooper developed his perspective about

national character and forms of government by comparing the countries he visited to the United States. His series of novels set in Europe defended republican principles, arguing against inheritance, blind adherence to tradition, and aristocratic oppression in *The Bravo* (1831), *The Heidenmauer* (1832), and *The Headsman* (1833). However, his European writings fared badly in reviews, and Cooper defended his novels, advanced his views on abuses of power, and announced his (ultimately, temporary) departure from literature in *A Letter to his Countrymen* (1834). Indeed, during his seven years abroad, both Cooper and American culture had changed. Whereas abroad Cooper saw himself as the patriotic defender of United States' culture, in the *Letter* he expressed a sense of betrayal for the personal and professional attacks he suffered in the mass press (Adams 120). As J. Gerald Kennedy illustrates, "Years abroad...disposed him to view his own country in an increasingly critical perspective; he bristled at the growing tyranny of American popular opinion while valuing in European society a taste and decorum missing in the United States" (92). To the eye-rolls of the public, he battled in court from 1837 to 1842, filing a series of libel suits.

Not simply a knee-jerk reaction against an imagined foe, Cooper's legal actions were justified, according to Barbara Alice Mann. She argues that the onslaught of press abuse commenced even before his European tour, when he dared to favorably depict Chingachgook and imply Cora Munro's mixed-race heritage in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826): "Cooper was absolutely the victim of a large-scale, organized political assault that deliberately sought out and destroyed dissenters, especially when their dissent challenged the primary rationale behind the European seizure of North America: the

myth of racial superiority” (Mann 157). Tracing Cooper’s evolving attitude toward law, Charles Hansford Adams argues that during his trials, Cooper’s growing ambivalence toward legal institutions was only exacerbated: “if at court, he staked everything on the law,” by the time of *Deerslayer* (1841), in the woods and at Lake Glimmerglass, Cooper “reject[s]...[the] legitimacy of civil law” (124). In his Littlepage Trilogy, then, Cooper continues to explore an individual’s relationship to the law in light of majoritarian tyranny, importing his established index of morality—the figure of a Native-Anglo hybrid—Susquesus.

Redskins’ subtitle—*Or Indian and Injin Being the Conclusion of the Littlepage Manuscripts*—explicitly points to the distinction between “Indian” and “Injin.” Cooper grafts claims to land by landlords and tenant farmers onto questions of racial authenticity. Aligning the landed gentry with his noble “Indians,” he constructs the plebian appeals to natural rights and higher law in the Jacksonian era as “Injin,” a derogatory term that mimics a lower-class dialect. Distinguishing racial authenticity from racial performance, Cooper counters anti-renters’ claims of masculinity by arguing that their masculinity is—as their costumes suggest—a poor farce. In donning disguises that index aboriginal identities, anti-renters sought to attain a degree of masculinity denied to them as lower-class citizens; Cooper critiques this political move as a disgrace to real Native peoples. Cooper stresses the legitimacy of contractual law, to which both Native and honorable white men adhere, as the basis on which the tenants have no legal (or social and ethical) right to argue for property ownership.

Anti-Rent Indians

In 1841, New York Deputy Sheriff George B. Allen attempted to collect rent from tenant farmers. After he and his group were accosted by a group of masked men on horseback who were whooping, blowing horns and firing guns (see Figure 7), Allen was tarred and feathered. The deputy was not free to leave until the tar, poured down the back of his neck, “flowed into his boots” (Christman 86). Similarly, in 1844, Sheriff Batterman of Albany County, whose horse was shot on his last attempt to serve process on delinquent rents, returned to Helderberg—only to be captured, tied up, and told to leave town by disguised vigilantes.



Figure 7. “Anti-Rent Insurrection—Attack on the Sherriff of Albany.” Smyth? 1844. Wood engraving. N. p. [British newspaper]. 1 May 2013. Fineartamerica.com

When he refused, they “tore his clothes, seized his pistol and papers, clubbed him in the face, and treated him to a dose of tar and feathers” (Huston 120). Batterman’s deputies were forced to shout “Down with the Rent!” and carry their tarred and feathered employer back to Albany.

After the New York State Constitution of 1846 abolished perpetual leases—the major grievance of anti-renters—such violence continued; this violence slowly waned as legislators further dismantled “a range of landlord self-help remedies” (Delaney 504). For example, in 1847, the *Liberator* and *National Era* both reported incidents of tarring and feathering, as well as terrible beatings of both officers, who attempted to arrest the rebels, and new tenants, who lawfully took the place of those who had been evicted. The *National Era* notes two incidents: for one, “a man who had been put in possession by a landlord, in place of a defaulting tenant ejected, was tarred and feathered,” and, in a separate incident, “an ejected tenant has been restored by his neighbors, and upon the sheriff’s attempting to serve process against him, a riot ensued, in which the landlord, Mr. Livingston [and his company]...were severely injured.” Before the end of the movement, 10,000 of these rebels joined, and two deputies were killed. In 1845, the governor declared a State of Insurrection, resulting in mass arrests and convictions, with some rebel leaders sentenced to death (Delaney 498).

The “Indians,” as those who locally resisted rent collection on the social front came to be known, were integral players in an anti-rent movement that had more formal political and legal dimensions. As Reeve Huston explains, whereas the anti-rent associations articulated “the evils of patroonery as a system and strove to enact systemic

remedies, the Indians voiced local concerns and aims, punished and rewarded individual behavior, and conducted a strategy of local defense” (118). Beginning in 1841, anti-rent meetings gave rise to secret organizations, mostly comprised of young, landless, or land-poor men (117), meant to resist injustices of what proponents deemed a feudal system incompatible with republican liberties. Horns previously blown to signal lunch to farmhands became exclusively used to rally “Indians” when rent collectors were spotted. These men would appear “in bright calico dresses, and with their faces masked or painted to resemble Indians on the war-path. The leaders assumed the names of well-known Indian chiefs and led their forces with the familiar cries of savage warfare” (Howell n. p.). Though political intimidation was the primary goal, the conflicts resulted in occasional pranks and tar and feathers. As previously suggested, however, in several cases, rent collectors, landlords, or law enforcement officers were severely beaten or even killed.

Historically, American reformers relied on the symbol of the Indian, which they interpreted through the lenses of their current ideals.² For the anti-renters, adopting the “Indian” disguise allowed them to simultaneously occupy a variety of ideological positions. They claimed similitude to aboriginal victims wrongfully dispossessed of their lands, powerful warriors ready to assert their rights through physical strength, and

² As John Stauffer, in *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* notes “Identifying with the symbol of the Indian was part of a recurring trend among reformers throughout American history, one that was ‘dedicated to the establishment of a new social order consonant with the liberal ideals of the age,’ according to the historian Robert Berkhofer... Identifying with Indians, who were symbolically free and untrammled by the outworn institutions of the Old World, pave the road to revolution, reform, and a regenerated country” (185).

nostalgic composites of patriotic revolutionary activity. Indeed, their disguises “evoked the Boston Tea Party, republican patriotism, and defiance of aristocracy” (Axelrad 3). One of the dozens of ephemeral poems and ballads printed in support of the anti-rent movement, entitled “A Great Revolution,” rhetorically seeks to align the anti-renters with the Sons of Liberty:

They’re the spirits of freedom, all honest and bold,
And you can’t buy and sell them like Arnolds of old.
They all have the spirit of ’76,
They have got the old landlord in a very bad fix;
Like Bostonian Indians destroying the tea,
By hook or by crook, they’ve resolved to be free. (Anonymous 25-30;
qtd. in Christman 324)

By invoking the American Revolution, the anti-renters sought to elevate the significance of their cause. Indeed, as Philip Deloria argues, those who adopted the disguise of natives “insisted on the continued vitality of the Revolution” (39), a goal of which was to divest the country of any notions of aristocracy. However, for Cooper, the Anti-Rent violence “fulfilled [his] worst anxieties about revolutionary heritage; these latter-day ‘rebels’ had become oppressors” (Motley 149).

Because of their lower social status, anti-renters drew on “Indian” identity to bolster their own masculinity, as well as to emphasize aristocracy as effeminate. These Indians, “Lacking the usual badges of manhood—property, dominion over wives and children, the vote...claimed their manhood” by adopting the martial tone of “the savage”

and serving as self-proclaimed protectors of communities (Huston 123). Furthermore, anti-rent Indians saw themselves as warriors able to resist, thwart, and overtake lands they perceived as rightfully theirs. Indeed, as John Stauffer argues about radical abolitionists a decade later,

They identified with the Indian as a symbol of the savage fighter par excellence, who rejected white laws and civilization and found hope, strength, and courage from the wilderness and the Great Spirit in Nature. Their revolutionary ethos was closely linked to their embrace of the symbolic Indian, their understanding of manhood, their sacred visions of America, and their acceptance of savage means to fight slavery. (183)

The inclusion of “Indians” in these self-conceptions emphasized the American, rather than European or African, roots of the movement. This emphasis “also underscored the need to change existing laws and customs to accommodate the diversity they [radical abolitionists] saw inherent in the origins of America” (Stauffer 185). While anti-rent disguises indexed Indian myth for a variety of ideological purposes, exaggerated imitation reassured both anti-renters and their observers that they were, in fact, white men after all. As Eric Lott argues about black-face minstrelsy, the anti-rent disguise and performance, too, had to be “seemingly counterfeit” (113).

In deriding “Injin” appropriation of Indian identity, Cooper simplifies the implications of this performance and minimizes the plight of the farmers. Cooper’s text wants to assign legitimacy to the “authentic” Indians and present the Injins as adulterated, corrupted versions of a real Native self. Susan Gubar’s concept of

“racechange,” in which she includes “racial imitation and impersonation, cross-racial mimicry or mutability, white posing as black or black passing as white, pan-racial mutuality”(5), applies both to Cooper’s Injins and the anti-rent Indians. For Gubar, this symbolic behavior emerged in the twentieth century as a “crucial trope of high and low, elite and popular culture, one that allowed artists from widely divergent ideological backgrounds to meditate on racial privilege and privation as well as on the disequilibrium of race” (5). In the context of the early nineteenth century, however, race as a category was increasingly gaining traction more in the service of racial privilege rather than a critique of it. So while the anti-renters’ appropriation did not seek to expose racial inequality, they sought to redress (white male) economic inequality by claiming a distant past and a bolstered manhood through racial borrowing. Cooper emphasizes the cowardly and disrespectful phoniness of the Injins, not taking into account the political and personal motives that the racechange provides for them. As Gubar argues, the interracial identification allows white males to channel the trope of low, popular culture against the high, elite culture; they could also simultaneously position themselves as victims of an ongoing, anti-democratic, elite encroachment.

The tarring and feathering perpetrated by the disguised anti-renters added another layer to the trope of high versus low culture. While the anti-renters’ racechange was voluntary and served practical purposes of avoiding prosecution and symbolic purposes of garnering political power, tarring and feathering forced racialized substance onto their victims. Anti-renters would thus use racial surfaces as a trope to distinguish legitimacy

from illegitimacy. Their calico and feathers indexed native masculinity while their victims' tar and feathers parodied this, instead pointing to effeminate luxury.

For Shame, Cooper's "Injin" *Redskins*

Cooper's *Redskins* responds to this assignment of meaning, inverting it to shame, feminize, and deracialize the anti-renters, exhorting them to behave according to their "natural" "white gifts." Their disguises, intended to channel masculinity and courage, are repeatedly assailed by every part of the social hierarchy at Cooper's disposal. Moreover, in his novel, tarring and feathering is a threat that is averted at least twice through the *deus-ex-machina* intervention of "real Indians," against which "Injins" cower. Instead of having the innocent landed-gentry suffer the tar barrel, and thus perhaps garner sympathy from the audience for the land-owners, the only violence that the "Injins" do, aside from intimidating passersby, is to set a gentleman's barn on fire, symbolically blackening his property. Rather than villainize the anti-renters, which might have been more effective to his purpose, Cooper underscores their impotence. Cooper instead counts on the dystopian social relations in which everyone is in disguise *ad absurdum* to point out the dissolution of public virtue and genuine dealings. Moreover, by juxtaposing his "real" noble children of the forest against the laughable Injins, he argues that the latter are the uncivilized ones, all the more because they know better, as their blushing skin reveals. In the conclusion, Cooper's narrative within the narrative teaches these barbaric whites to rely on reason rather than desire. By gathering the entire cast of the novel to hear Eaglesflight tell the story of Susquesus, a here-to-fore mystery revealed in a purportedly climactic scene, Cooper asks anti-renters to emulate

Susquesus' personal sacrifice for the greater good of the tribe. Tribal order is preserved tellingly through Susquesus's adherence to tribal law; this is even more pointed because the majority of the tribe would have supported his bending of the rules, and, as chief, he could have done so by force.

Cooper portrays a clash of disguised land-owners and anti-renters, with painful affectations of dialect, to expose the ludicrousness of the confidence game and the ultimate unsustainable nature of such a social system. The novel opens as Hugh Littlepage, the twenty-five-year-old narrator, and his bachelor Uncle Ro (both are named Hugh Roger Littlepage) travel home from their five-year European tour. Making their way back to their properties of Ravensnest, Satanstoe, and Lilacsbush in New York, they learn, through correspondence, of the anti-rent upheaval that has embroiled neighboring communities and even infiltrated their own regions. Unaware of many specifics, Hugh and Ro discover their (negative) standing within the community through a series of lengthy dialogues with trusted friends. Jack Dunning, the man charged with overseeing daily business while the Littlepages are away, admits that he sent Ro's elderly mother to the farms in his stead to avoid tar and feathers. Though Dunning planned to visit the lady among the "Philistines," she wrote, urging him not to come because he would surely suffer the bodily punishment. Jack warns the proprietors as they depart, "Take care of the tar-barrel, and of the pillow-case of feathers" (67). Hugh and Ro continue to Ravensnest, deciding that, until they determine the state of things, they should adopt disguises because "Tar and feathers would be our mildest fate did we fall into the hands of the Injins" (123). As they set out toward their farms, Hugh and Ro wear wigs, and

further devise the disguises of a German peddler and musician. Hugh insists on incorporating a monkey as part of his ensemble, Cooper's way of satirizing the exaggerated disguises of "Injins." This disguised-ruler trope, however, also implies that the two will be impartial observers of the state of order, or lack thereof, among their people. Indeed, Uncle Ro, not satisfied with hearsay, proclaims his purpose of "getting among these self-deluded men...without being discovered; for I am determined to see them, and to judge of their motives and conduct for myself" (67).

Under the threat of tar and feathers, they trek onward, meeting with a number of people who tellingly believe their exaggerated German identities. For one, they fool Seneca Newcome, the ringleader of anti-rent on their lands. His name symbolically juxtaposes an aboriginal of the New World³ against a newcomer from the Old World, pointing to the absurdity of the combination. Newcome is blinded by the opportunity to recruit unsuspecting immigrants to his cause, while his companions are attracted by the flashy replicas of fashionable watches. However, Hugh and Ro do not prove as wily when they approach Jaaf, a free black servant of the Littlepages, as well as Susquesus, a lone Native American who lives near their property. It is the latter, however, who—significantly—recognizes Hugh and Ro's true identities. Both Jaaf and Susquesus are depicted as permanent fixtures of the land (both said to be over a hundred years old), but Jaaf is an awkward and garrulous, though loyal, clown, while Susquesus is a quiet,

³ The Seneca tribe, part of the Iroquois people, occupied present-day New York State, which acquired many place-names from the tribe. Their descendants are now part of the Seneca Nation (*Seneca Nation*).

contemplative, fiercely intelligent, and reliable marker of ethical behavior.⁴ Susquesus's first words about the anti-rent "Injins" are that they "come to see me face in bag behave like squaw" (130). The rightness of his judgment is testified through stories passed down through the Littlepage line. Hugh's grandmother told of their relative Uncle Chainbearer, who knew

Susquesus, in his time, the reason why he had left his tribe.... and that he had always said the particulars did his red friend great credit, but that he would reveal it no further. So great, however, was uncle Chainbearer's reputation for integrity, that such an opinion was sufficient to procure for the Onondago the fullest confidence of the

⁴ Cooper's use of the Indian in *Redskins* evolved from his *Leather-stocking* series. In *The Pioneers*, for example, Cooper sets his tale in a 1790s frontier town in New York, located on the lands where the aged Indian Chingachgook's forefathers governed over their once populous and powerful tribe. In Chingachgook, Cooper highlights the values that appeal to the dominant American culture: honor, honesty, justice, resolution, fortitude, loyalty and selflessness. Far from being a common tribesman, Chingachgook is a dethroned noble warrior who, in some ways, out-Christians the Christians with his natural laws of ethical human interaction. This pathos calls on the audience to sympathize with him, mourn his disappearance, and improve from his example. Simultaneously inflicting the audience with a sense of complicity, and therefore guilt, in the national drama of the vanishing natives, this literary construction becomes the means by which dominant culture elevates itself. Claiming alignment with native values allows American history to become rooted in a long-standing tradition, which elevates America's status among other western nations by showcasing a distant, not merely recent, past, and allows them to depict national progress from savagery to civilization. Chingachgook serves to guilt/persuade/teach the dominant American culture into behaving with honor. Though Cooper's use of natives has been criticized as simply racist, Barbara Mann convincingly argues that "it was Cooper's frank, compassionate, and for his age liberal-minded discourse on mixed race that marked him as an 'Indian lover' and a 'race traitor,' setting him up for ferocious attack of the racist right. To accomplish this end, discourse was managed through conservative venues such as the *North American Review*, which promoted Lewis Cass and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft over John Heckewelder and, soon enough, Fenimore Cooper" (169).

whole connection, and the experience of fourscore years and ten had proved that this confidence was well placed. (134)

Cooper thus plants Susquesus in a New York manor as a figure who has lived American history, embodies “uprightness” and masculinity, and who thus can reliably know “womanish” behavior when he sees it in the anti-renters. Furthermore, Hugh’s lineage is given credit by the return of loyalty and trustworthiness his uncle exhibited by keeping Susquesus’s story private. Thus, from the outset, the landed gentry are allied with the Native chiefs.

Cooper associates tarring and feathering with “petty tyrants” and “blackguards,” or dishonorable and contemptible people, placing the punishment in his symbolic matrix of Indian (sincere and just) versus Injin (deceitful and avaricious). The Indians in his text thus illustrate the public virtue which should be the pillar of American society. When Hugh reveals himself to his grandmother, he explains, “[W]e have wished to take a near view with our own eyes, and supposed it might be unwise to come openly, in our *proper characters*” (170; emphasis mine). She validates his reasoning for coming in disguise and urges him to keep his identity concealed: “The demons of tar and feathers, the sons of liberty and equality, who illustrate their principles as they do their courage, by attacking the few with the many, would be stirring, fancying themselves heroes and martyrs in the cause of justice, did they learn you were here” (170). By using “sons of liberty and equality” as a synonym for “demons of tar and feathers,” Cooper underscores the perversion of the rhetoric of liberty, and the danger of expanding the term to attack minority rights. Discussing the threat of death, Hugh states, “The country

and the people must have strangely altered, then, in five years. Our New York population has hitherto had very little of the assassin-like character. Tar and feathers are the blackguards', and have been the petty tyrants' weapons, from time immemorial, in this country; but not the knife" (191). While murder is presented as change in the fabric, tarring and feathering is depicted as a staple of American political squabbles.

Furthermore, linguistic variations of "to tar and feather" are utilized as a trope for an unwarranted, imbalanced threat of violence from misguided, irrational, and self-interested crowds.

As the disguised Hugh and Ro, along with the poor clergyman Mr. Warren and his daughter Mary—Hugh's romantic interest—ride toward town to hear an anti-rent speaker, they encounter a group of men, creeping from the bushes to block the road. Armed "Injins" soon surround the travelers. Hugh describes the costumes of this motley crew as

very simple, consisting of a sort of loose calico hunting-shirt and trowsers that completely concealed the person. The head was covered by a species of hood, or mask, equally of calico, that was fitted with holes for the eyes, nose and mouth... A middle-sized man was perfectly safe from recognition, so long as he did not speak and could keep his equipments. Those who did speak altered their voices...using a jargon that was intended to imitate the imperfect English of the native owners of the soil...we knew these disturbers of the public peace to be what in truth they were, the instant our eyes fell on them. (218)

Cooper's narrator describes the "Injin" disguises in detail, advancing the claim that only a certain type of person would be so inclined to assume such garb. He therefore reveals that the recognition of the individual is not as important as the recognition of the *type* of individual an "Injin" represents: whatever the political circumstances may be, an "Injin" uses whatever symbolism he may have at his disposal to persecute others while advancing his own illegitimate self interests. This rhetorical maneuvering is what Cooper fears could cause the destruction of the republic.

Cooper further emphasizes this distinction when Hugh's party is surrounded by a dozen men, one of whom acts as "a chief," and proceeds to accost them in order to ascertain their allegiances. This "chief" uses the rough dialect assumed by the "Injins," asking, "Sago, sago...How do, how do? [W]here come from, eh? [W]here go, eh? What you say, too up rent or down rent, eh?" (218). In his "most desperate dialect," and perhaps in the effort to convince this motley group that they are friendly to the cause, Ro answers, "'Ve ist two Charmans dat ist goin' to hear a man's sbeak about buying rent, und to see vatches. Might you buy a vatch, goot shentlemans?'" (218-9). Hugh finds the whole exchange absurd, particularly since the two men "resort[] to such similar means of deception" (218-9). Although the scene is pathetic, these characters face each other with false identities and uncertain intentions, revealing Cooper's concern for the confidence game. Both parties perform outlandish identities in order to mediate the hierarchy between landlord and tenant: while the tenants appeal to a distant, aboriginal past, the landlords utilize the stances of uninitiated, lower class, European newcomers, who, coming from a different political tradition, do not understand American politics and,

thus, do not represent a threat. Since the gang knows the Warrens and Hugh and Ro as German peddler and musician, their intentions are to harass and bully; however, the proposal of buying trinkets ameliorates the situation, producing “a general jumping up and down, and a common pow-wow-ing among them indicative of the pleasure such a proposal gave” (219). As they all head to the meeting in their various costumes, Hugh comments, “A pot of tar and a bag of feathers had been brought into the road when the gang poured out of the bushes, but whether this were merely accidental, or it had originally been intended to use . . . on Mr. Warren, I cannot say” (228). Cooper hints that the anti-renters intend to tar and feather Mr. Warren, who does not sympathize with their cause, but desist in the presence of the pretend Germans because the foreigners might lose sympathy, and the “Injins” potential converts, to the anti-rent cause. The tar pot, instead, stays intact while the group itself “pours” out of the bushes.

The “Injins,” as is evidenced by their handy pot and bag of tar and feathers, do not respond well to the more moderate content at the anti-rent meeting. The scene testifies to Hugh’s reservation of judgment against the anti-renters, and by extension heightens Cooper’s credibility and evenhandedness in order not to alienate those seeking proper legal channels of reform. Tim Hall, a seemingly reasonable fellow, according to Hugh, “saw clearly, spoke clearly, and demonstrated effectively. As he was well-known in that vicinity and generally respected, he was listened to with profound attention, and spoke like a man who stood in no dread of tar and feathers” (258). This does not last for long, however. The “Injins” see his moderate and well-versed attitude as that of the enemy and shout, “Tar and feathers!... Tar and feather him! Crop him, and send him

home!...Tim Hall has gone over to the enemy” (267). In the cacophony, Hugh recognizes the voice of Seneca Newcome as one of the leading “Injins.” Interestingly, Tim Hall’s approach to the anti-rent meeting showcases his education and even-handed attitude; as a result, the “Injins” peg him for the enemy because he seems to desire peace and logic over chaos and brutality.

Besides Cooper’s comparison of disguised land-owners versus tenants, his more potent technique contrasts “real Indians” and “Injins” to undo the similitude the anti-renters hoped to draw on. After leaving the unsuccessful and rather enlightening meeting, Hugh and his party encounter a group of “real red-men.” For Hugh, the difference between the real and counterfeit Natives becomes obvious:

The difference between the two is very great, as every American will at once admit... There is ‘Indian’ and ‘Injin.’ The Injin is a white man, who, bent on an unworthy and illegal purpose, is obliged to hide his face, and to perform his task in disguise. The Indian is a red-man, who is neither afraid nor ashamed to show his countenance, equally to friend or enemy. The first is the agent of designing demagogues, the hireling of a discontented and grasping spirit, who mocks at truth and right by calling himself one who labors to carry out ‘the spirit of those institutions’ which he dishonors and is afraid to trust; while the other serves him-self only, and is afraid of nothing. One is skulking from, and shirking the duties of civilization, while the other, though a savage, is, at least, true to his own professions. (286)

Indeed, for Cooper, as Richard Slotkin suggests in *The Fatal Environment*, “[t]he racial character of the Indian shows what man is like in his natural, precivilized state, “ and the “white renegade, given over to Indian-likeness,” indicates the lowest rung on the class hierarchy (88, 102). Hugh is able to see and make this distinction after his encounter with the Injins and the “real red-men” and Susquesus. Dressing as an Indian does not make one an Indian; rather, the “white renegades” perform what they believe is a “natural, precivilized” state. Instead, their “precivilized” state is merely “uncivilized”: “The Indian finally serves as a standard of principled fidelity against which whites are judged. Conversely, the Anti-Renters now resemble the savage” (McWilliams 327). For Cooper, using “Indian-likeness” is a resort for those who, like the anti-renters, exist in the lowest strata of the social order. Because they have “white gifts” or natures, as Cooper might say, however, they know better and realize the injustice of their petitions, using their costumes to hide and rationalize their wrongdoing.

It is perhaps most significant, then, that when faced with men who do not pretend, and those whom the text treats as having a stable, honest, and explicit identity, Ro and Hugh reveal themselves to a group of real Natives (290). On the other hand, tellingly, when the Injins are faced with their “real” counterparts, they “instinctively abandon[] the woods, and pour[] down into the highway, speed like theirs demanding open ground for its finest display” (300). For the anti-renters, the “precivilized” virtue of the real Indians reminds them so much of what they cannot imitate. They flee for the safety of the civilization they seemingly eschew, “leap[ing] into wagons, piling themselves up among those virtuous wives and daughters of that portion of the honest

yeomanry who had collected to devise the means of cheating [Hugh and Ro] out of [their] property.” Emphasizing their cowardice, Hugh derides the “Injin” philosophy and practice that might equals right, since the “Injins” “have amply proved that the only thing in which they excel, is in running away[.] They are heroes when a dozen can get round a single man to tar and feather him; valiant, as a hundred against five or six, and occasionally murderers” (300). When faced with actual Natives, the “Injins” scamper away, relinquishing any heroic attributes they sought to appropriate. Hugh reminds his readers that “The very cowardice of the scoundrels should render them loathsome to the whole community; the dog that has spirit only to hunt in packs being cur at the bottom” (300). For Cooper, respectable men are those who, like Hugh and Ro, stay and treat the Natives with respect, not reprehensible “Injins” who, like “dogs,” abandon their rights to society by embracing lowly, animalistic behavior.

During this kerfuffle, Seneca and a fellow “Injin” are captured, which allows Cooper the opportunity to indict Seneca in his undisguised state. Instead of brave warriors, the two prisoners in “bundles of calico[] resemble[ed] children in swaddling-clothes, with nothing partaking of that natural freedom of which their party love to boast, but their legs, which were left at perfect liberty, by way of a dernier resort” (301). The reduction of these men to “children”—ignorant, immature, tantrum-throwers—further emphasizes how Cooper infantilizes anti-renters to diminish their political reach. Cooper paints Seneca, whose face, in shame, has filled with blood, as perhaps the biggest coward of all. Seneca hisses to his partner in crime, “This is all your fault, you cowardly dog. . . Had you kept on your feet, and not run me down, in your haste to get off, I might

have retreated, and got clear with the rest of them” (302). The audience should understand the irony and humor in Seneca’s words; by calling his associate, who prevented a *retreat*, a “cowardly dog,” Seneca dodges the cowardice of his own actions, according to Cooper. Several more iterations of Seneca’s shame and anger producing a red face in this scene has led Richard Slotkin to argue that

In these novels the “redskins” are not the Indians, but the demagogic politicians and anti-rent tenants who use the institutions of republicanism to overturn the authority of the Temples and Effinghams, and to expropriate their property. Cooper thus translates the Frontier Myth into a metaphoric code through which he can interpret the social warfare of a post-Frontier Metropolitan America. (106)

While the Indians are honorable gentlemen with a legitimate right to the land, the Injins represent all those who undermine the democratic process by swaying the opinions of the masses. The fact that Newcome is a lawyer makes the charge all the more pointed, and Hugh reminds him that as such he should uphold the laws, not thwart them, scolding him, “I am ashamed of you, Mr. Newcome I’m quite ashamed of you” (302). Seneca’s conflict-fomenting nature is further revealed when he spreads the news of the Littelpages’ return and agitates the anti-renters by telling them that Hugh had been spying on them during the anti-rent meeting; thus, Hugh knew “their secrets, and had probably made black marks against certain of the tenants, whose leases were nearly expired” (350). While Hugh has not made any “black marks” against his tenants,

Seneca's rumor has certainly "blackened" any unbiased relations between tenant and landlord.

After this Injin vs. Indian display, the anti-renters are depicted as a mere nuisance. Hugh and Ro no longer fear violence from the anti-renters because "there is little to apprehend from [the Injins],...so long as we have a strong party of the real Simon Pures within call" (324). Referring to the natives as "real Simon Pures" alludes to "A Bold Stroke for a Wife," a 1717 British play by Susannah Centlivre, in which Captain Fainwell impersonates four possible suitors for Anne Lovely, one of whom is Simon Pure, who arrives in time to save the lady from the feigner of virtue. In this context, Cooper aligns Indians with the honesty and authenticity of Simon Pure, and the Injins with the deception and pretexts of Captain Fainwell. Moreover, these confidence-men court the hand of American liberty and must be exposed for the rakes who would undo public virtue. Furthermore, when a group of Native chiefs from the West, come to pay homage to the "Upright Onondago," Susquesus, the latter appears in ceremonial costume, giving Cooper the opportunity to juxtapose the Injins' garish costumes with the dignified and authentic one, worn by Susquesus. The evening of the ceremony, Hugh pontificates that, "The craven spirit manifested by the 'Injins' in presence of the Indians, the assumed before the real, had not a tendency to awaken much respect for the disaffected, and quite likely disposed me to be more indifferent to their proceedings, than I might otherwise have been" (342). The audience should also increasingly dislike the anti-renters, not because Hugh's own land is threatened, but because "chance" episodes, like the clash of Indian vs. Injin, objectively reveal Injin ignominy.

The contrast of the real as opposed to the feigned is further cemented when the anti-renters attempt to burn Hugh's property. The comparison is carried through the evening fire scenes, during which Cooper blackens the anti-renters. When the fire alarm is called, Hugh and Mary Warren are both awake, and Hugh seeks the help of the Natives, musing,

If "fire will fight fire," "Indian" ought to be a match for "Injin" any day. There is just the difference between these two classes of men, that their names would imply. The one is natural, dignified, polished in his way nay, gentleman-like; while the other is a sneaking scoundrel, and as vulgar as his own appellation. No one would think of calling these last masquerading rogues "Indians" (355).

The word "masquerade" suggests putting on a play, one where the revelers keep their faces, and thus their identities, hidden in the effort to showcase a carnivalesque face to the world. Cooper leaves no doubt, though, that this performance is not only pitiful but also immoral and unlawful. As the fire advances, Mary warns Hugh to not enter into the kitchen alone, because "[t]here are two of –them, and desperate looking wretches are they, with their faces blackened, and they have muskets" (369). When Hugh orders the two intruders to yield and points his rifle, they surrender; one "black-faced villain shrinking back into a corner, begging piteously not to be shot" (372). Their black faces signify their guilt. Meanwhile, their confederate "Injins" have set fire to the barn. When Hugh comments that "evil deeds...produce the brightest blazes," Cooper suggests that the sensationalist appeals of such symbolic violence tend to overpower the moral

underpinnings of the situation, lionizing misguided groups toward a dazzling cause (355). Furthermore, Hugh reasons that, while violence was not prevalent in New York's history, "fire had been resorted to, and the term of 'barn-burner' had got to be common among us; far more common, I rejoice to say, than the practice which gave it birth" (355). The term "Barn-burner"⁵ denoted radical democrats of the time, figuratively alluding to those who sacrifice entire institutions to prevent their corruption.

When the Natives come to the aid of the Littlepages, Cooper is given yet another opportunity for contrasting "the true and false redskins." From Hugh's perspective, the two groups are visible on the open meadow with the barn between them: "The Indians had formed themselves into a very open order, and were advancing toward the other party in a stealthy manner, by creeping on all-fours, or crouching like catamounts to the earth, and availing themselves of everything like a cover" (383). The Indians are aligned with order, reason, resourcefulness, and prowess as they seek to disarm the intruders. The Injins, instead, display a careless disarray: they "were a whooping, shouting, dancing, leaping band, of some forty or fifty of the 'disguised and armed'" celebrating by the fire (383). While the Indians embody purpose and unity, the latter are associated with chaos, irrationality, and cowardice, as they retreat into the woods when confronted. In the morning, "There lay the smouldering ruins of the barn, it is true; a blackened monument of a wicked deed" (390). Though Hugh is not tarred and feathered, his

⁵ The 1848 J. R. Bartlett *Dictionary of Americanisms* defines "barnburners" as "the opposite school [of Democrats] was termed Barnburners, in allusion to the story of an old Dutchman who relieved himself of rats by burning his barns which they infested,—just like exterminating all Banks and Corporations to root out the abuses connected therewith." (qtd. in "barn" entry of *OED*).

property does suffer the markings of the mob: by burning his barn and producing a blackened heap on the ground, Hugh is figuratively blackened by the “Injins.” However, for Cooper, the blackening, like the feminization, is reversed, and he, like his narrator, indicts the “Injins” for their evil deeds.⁶

The final techniques Cooper applies to rhetorically dismantle anti-rent principles are narratives within the narrative supplied by the ethical Natives. Along with a series of exchanges, Susquesus tells the story of the land in question and Eaglesflight’s narrative reveals why Susquesus chose to live his last days away from his tribe. During this closing ceremony of the visit between the western chiefs and Susquesus, all are present, including the nearby anti-renters. The latter are denigrated in various ways by all classes of the community. Even Jaaf, the black servant, whom Hugh compares negatively to Susquesus, admonishes the “Injins,” “speaking as a scold would break out on some intrusive boy. ‘Home wid ye! Get out!...What you want wid Masser Hugh’s land?’” (476). Uncle Ro, Susquesus, and Eaglesflight, the leader of the visiting Natives, all explain the “Injin” actions as universally immoral, a fact the “Injins” themselves must realize because they hide their (involuntarily-produced) blushes of shame with calico bags. Uncle Ro asks, “Is it then true, that these soi-disant ‘Injins’ have not the ordinary

⁶ One scholar sees Hugh’s narration as a caricatured version of Cooper’s views: “*The Redskins* has an over-the-top quality, both in terms of its plot and its rhetoric, that appears to push the gentrified narrator to a new place. It seems very much as if Cooper is staging outlandish and even cartoonish versions of his own beliefs as a means of examining his own argumentative authority” (Egan 43). Certainly, Cooper presents lengthy dialogues throughout the novel, working through similar arguments from a variety of perspectives, which would suggest that he is examining his argumentative authority. However, while Hugh is somewhat smug, I do not read him as a caricature of Cooper’s own views, rather as a distanced mouthpiece.

courage of their race, and that they are less than Americans, with arms in their hands, and below the level of all around them in spirit? Such is not the case. The consciousness of guilt has made them cowards” (385). Cooper therefore rhetorically saves whiteness from demotion, contending that, instead, these disguised whites “cover their faces...to conceal their blushes, the modesty of their nature sinking under the sense of their own” wrongful intentions (474).

Susquesus, who is endorsed as “the Indian [who] possessed all the manly and high qualities of a warrior of the woods, of a chief, and of one who had never acknowledged a superior” (451), speaks about the anti-rent agitation around Ravensnest before the entire cast of the novel. He begins, “See, there; here are men pale-faces in calico bags. Why do they run about, and dishonor the red-man by calling themselves Injins? I will tell you” (482). Susquesus, who is juxtaposed against Injins—whites drawing on the myth of Indian identity—is very different than Cooper’s other famous Native, Chingachgook. Whereas Chingachgook maintains his ethnicity, Susquesus is whitened. After living for decades among whites, Susquesus’s heart, as he says, is half-red and half-white: “One half is filled with the traditions of my fathers, the other half is filled with the wisdom of the stranger” (481).⁷ Lance Schachterle argues that Cooper

⁷ As Ringe argues, “In the person of Susquesus we see another attempt by Cooper to create a character who, like Natty Bumppo, can contain within him and resolve the dilemmas and contradictions...The false ‘injuns’ hiding their heads in calico rags are emblematic of a state of corruption that is part of the human condition” (406). O’Donnel similarly explains, “*The Redskins*...gets its title from the contrast between the false ‘injuns,’ corrupted white men, and the real Indians, displaced and dying red men. In this last novel the state of decay is about to supplant the forces of morality and justice; and

achieves narrative complexity by counter-balancing the narrative voice of the landed gentleman (with which the author is aligned) “with the voice of ‘the upright Onondago,’ Susquesus, who increasingly challenges the moral legitimacy of the land claims of both land-owners and renters” (91). Because the Natives were the first inhabitants of the land, Susquesus, who has witnessed the march of dispossessions, is the disinterested aboriginal, external to white schemes, and serves as a teacher for the Littlepages and as an adjudicator against the anti-rent claims.

Moreover, Susquesus’ stance as a hybrid figure, like Natty Bumppo, reinforces Susquesus’ ethics through favorable association with Cooper’s most popular character. Through his recounting of the history of the land conflicts as cyclical to an audience of Natives, landed gentry, and Injins, Susquesus explains that all this land once belonged to the Natives, who were driven off by land-hungry whites:

But the wicked spirit that drove out the red-man is now about to drive off the pale-face chiefs. It is the same devil, and it is no other. He wanted land then, and he wants land now. There is one difference, and it is this. When the pale-face drove off the red-man there was no treaty between them. They had not smoked together, and given wampum, and signed a paper. If they had, it was to agree that the red-man should go away, and the pale-face stay. When the pale-face drives off the pale-face, there is a treaty; they have smoked together, and given wampum, and signed a

Susquesus, the ancient Indian whose heart is half red and half white, states the dilemma, the tragic theme” (O’Donnel 405).

paper. This is the difference. Indian will keep his word with Indian; pale-face will not keep his word with pale-face. (483)

For Susquesus, as idealized by Cooper, the true Indian keeps his word, and does so without violence. His view implies that if the legal standard of contracts was not upheld, no land-owner would be secure in his ownership because the spirit of greed would continue further encroachments and dispossessions. During Susquesus's speech, Hugh pauses to reflect that

There was now a decided movement among the 'virtuous and industrious [Injins],' though a strong desire to hear the old man out, prevented any violent interruption at that time. I question if ever men listened more intently, than we all lent our faculties now, to ascertain what the Upright of the Onondagoes thought of anti-rentism. I received the opinions he expressed with the greater alacrity, because I knew he was a living witness of most of what he related. (482)

Hugh's recognition of his own and even "Injin" interest in Susquesus's words adds another testimonial to Susquesus's integrity and wisdom, if not ethical infallibility, making the old Native one with whom audiences should sympathize, rather than disparage, as they should the imposters. Lending credence to Hugh's earlier assessments of the "Injins," Susquesus reiterates the dishonor of attacking an enemy when the fight is so lopsided: "When they take a scalp, it is because they are a hundred, and their enemies one. They are not braves" (483). Furthermore, he, too, feminizes and infantilizes the anti-renters when he points out that they are not, in fact, brave warriors, as they seem to

think, because they hide their faces, and “frighten none but the squaws and papposes” (483). Cooper also has Eaglesflight speak to the issue of shame, as I alluded to earlier when Seneca blushes. Eaglesflight observes that “a red-man knows in his heart when he does what is right.” He explains that, “His face is red, and he cannot change color. The paint is too thick,” suggesting that shame is something that is felt within, and not displayed on the skin. Since shame cannot be written on the skin of an Indian, “When he tells himself how much wrong he has done, he goes into the bushes, and is sorry. When he comes out, he is a better man” (484). That is, when an Indian is wrong, he is ashamed to face others until he corrects the error of his ways. However, when “[Pale-face] tells him-self that he has done wrong, his face can paint it. Everybody can see that he is ashamed. He does not go into the bushes; it would do no good. He paints himself so quickly that there is no time. He hides his face in a calico bag” so as not to be identified as a wrongdoer (484).

Eaglesflight then tells the story of Susquesus when he was young and fell in love, and through this narrative, Cooper compares the desire for land to the desire of a woman. The land-as-woman trope, however troublingly sexist, illustrates the chaos that ensues in the community when two men seek to claim a woman for themselves. Eaglesflight explains that the woman came from a conquered tribe, and, by their law, was the property of another warrior who had seized her. Though Susquesus was chief, the two were in love, and most of the tribe was in favor of their union, Susquesus yielded to the law. Eaglesflight concludes, “Go you, men of the pale faces, who hide your shame in calico bags, and do the same. Follow the example of an Indian and be honest, like the

upright of the Onondagoes!” (487). Cooper uses this narrative to persuade anti-renters that law, however at odds with one’s desires, is the pillar of social order. Marrying someone else’s legal wife, or taking someone’s legal property, because the majority are in favor of abstract ideals—“love” for a someone’s wife, or the “spirit” of republican institutions—used to justify those acts cannot supersede written law.

According to Cooper, this appeal to higher law can only be considered covetousness, dishonesty—indeed crime—and, nationally, a germ of political chaos. At the conclusion of *Eaglesflight*’s tale, “There was a moment during which the Injins seemed undecided. They had come with the full intent to inflict on my uncle and myself the punishment of the tar-bucket, with the hope of frightening us into some sort of a compromise” (497). However, again, they all flee upon realizing that Hugh’s lawyer, with a group of others, stood with pointed guns from doors and windows of the house. Cooper ends the novel admitting that the state courts might maneuver around the anti-rent agitation, but he prophesies (and solemnly instructs) that federal U.S. courts “will treat it as it ought to be treated, and brand it with ignominy” (504). He thus reverses the anti-rent projects of tarring and feathering and demands that, instead, the movement itself be marked as shameful.

Furthermore, whereas the anti-renters widened the definition of aristocracy and used it as a catch-all term signifying a threat to egalitarianism, Cooper identifies anti-rent principles as the dark side of populism: “Oregon, Mexico, and Europe, united against us, do not threaten this nation with one half as much real danger as that which menaces it at this moment, from an enemy that is now in possession of many of its

strongholds, and which is incessantly working its evils under the cry of liberty, while laying deeper the foundation of a most atrocious tyranny” (506). Thus, the anti-renters, to Cooper, instead of the landed gentry, are the inner threat. Cooper’s “Injins” wish only to inflict damage and maximum pain; for them, the shame that they wish to write on another’s body—Hugh and/or Ro’s—with tar and feathers is actually written on their own bodies, and faces. In light of moments like Eaglesflight’s speech about how “red” is quickly “painted” on the faces of white wrongdoers, Cooper has his “Injins” write their *own* shame on their own bodies rather than marking others. He wields the rhetorical weapons at his disposal to emasculate and deracialize the “Injins,” and thus to eradicate the political and social power of the anti-rent movement.

Although the anti-rent movement did not achieve the central goal of legally undoing the landlords’ claims to their properties, it did have more general social and political consequences. Many tenants did suffer, but some, who could afford to, bought the farms they had tended. Those who were able to buy out their landlords, Huston argues, “destroyed an entire system of class relations and consigned a critical part of their state’s elite to the dustbin of history” (194). Capitalizing on the division between Democrats and Whigs, anti-renters placed candidates in office who passed legislation that increasingly pressured the landlords to sell their large tracts of land, dividing them into hundreds of individually owned farms. Moreover, the anti-renters changed political thought by spreading “revulsion at ‘feudal’ inequalities and forcing conservatives to back away from defending social relations that seemed to discourage social mobility and the free transfer of property” (Huston 194).

Cooper's efforts in the Littlepage trilogy, however, did not prove to do much cultural work. His tarnished reputation from years abroad, the lengthy period of libel suits, and his aristocratic associations made his argument for social order seem out of touch with the times. Many read these works, somewhat justifiably, as anti-egalitarian or as a defense of the upper class. However, the racial reversal that Cooper employs in *Redskins* reveals his recognition that a purely racial, as opposed to behavioral, hierarchy of virtue is un-American. He does this elsewhere, of course, notably *The Deerslayer*, but seeing this "liberal" position in novels usually condemned as "conservative" complicates our sense of Cooper's politics and his role in shaping attitudes in Jacksonian America. He may be conservative, but unlike Jackson he finds ethical and political value in Indian culture and, by implication, wants to integrate it into American culture rather than remove it.

Though the anti-rent movement itself garnered some national attention—in newspapers and literature, including Herman Melville's *Pierre*—it was ultimately peripheral to the larger issues of slavery and growing sectional strife (Hecht; Adams 134). The next chapter takes up this larger issue of slavery, which led to the tarring and feathering of abolitionists, examining the writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

CHAPTER IV

REBELLION AND SOCIAL INVERSION: EDGAR ALLAN POE'S TARRING AND FEATHERING OF MASTERS AND ABOLITIONISTS

While in 1840's New York, James Fenimore Cooper was concerned with the anti-rent struggle, other manifestations of tarring and feathering coincided with social conflict throughout the country. Edgar Allan Poe certainly knew about the tarring-and-featherings in upstate New York, as these were widely reported, including in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. As a southerner living in Philadelphia from 1838-1844 and New York City thereafter, he would have been privy to the concomitant tar and feathers which were increasingly used against abolitionists in both the North and South, and which sometimes served as punishment for recaptured slaves in the South. Having read literature which represented tarring and feathering, at the very least reviewing John Trumbull's *M'Fingal*,¹ and no doubt numerous news reports of incidents, Poe saw the potential of the grotesque punishment to suit his own gothic fiction. Toward the end of his tragically short life, he wrote "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" (1845) and "Hop-Frog; Or Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs" (1849), both of which treat tarring and feathering as a feature of an uneasy power inversion.

¹ William E. Burton, Poe's partner with whom he had a falling out a few years later, wrote "A Cape Codder Among the Mermaids" (1839) which references tarring and feathering. In 1849, Poe reviewed John Trumbull's *M'Fingal* as a derivative work, paling in comparison to its originals.

This chapter joins the critical work of the past several decades and seeks to place Poe's writings within their historical context, a removal from which Poe fashioned throughout his literary career.² Much of this criticism investigates Poe's attitudes about slavery³ and the numerous discourses that shaped, and were shaped by, that institution. Indeed, while Poe was keenly aware of the problems of his day, he seldom translated social experiences into straightforward literary lessons, creating works which both sympathize with and attack Southern slave-holding sensibilities. In analyzing "Tarr and Fether" and "Hop-Frog," I will show the ways in which Poe tapped into the overlapping discourses of race, slavery, minstrelsy, psychiatry, and questions of taste.

Poe and Jacksonian Tar

Like the rural tarring and featherings that took place in the struggle to dismantle the patron system, the urban practice of tar and feathers continued to appeal to revolutionary patriotism, albeit in a more diluted way.⁴ Rather than satirizing and disempowering the upper echelons of society, which the practice of tarring and

² John Carlos Rowe stresses the need to reevaluate Edgar Allan Poe's writings from the perspective of Poe's Southern pro-slavery stance. Complicating Rowe's idea, Terence Whalen, who argues that Poe cultivated an "average racism" that appealed to Northern readers, insists that the mediating apparatus of the publishing market creates a difficulty in ascribing clear ideological intentions to Poe's works. Furthermore, I agree with J. Gerald Kennedy when he points out that racism and ideas of black inferiority were such a normalized part of the U.S. culture of the time that it "renders superfluous current efforts to identify and castigate individual purveyors of literary racism" ("Trust No Man" 236).

³ Scholars have illustrated connections between Poe's views on slavery and works such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The System of Professor Tarr and Doctor Fether," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and "The Black Cat."

⁴ For varying reasons for Jacksonian mobbing, see Leonard L. Richards and David Grimsted.

feathering accomplished during the Revolution, the political theatre featured a more overt racialized humiliation attached to its victims in the effort to maintain the racial, political, economic, and social hierarchies of the time. While Cooper's "Injuns" dressed the part of the savage in order to mock landlords' feudal standards, economic threats posed by abolitionists earned them tar and feathers by the hands of "gentlemen of property and standing."⁵ In fact, mobs sought to inscribe the rhetoric of slaves suffering under cruel masters onto the abolitionist body; often, the victims would be first whipped, and then covered in tar and feathers. The "shame" that abolitionists were supposed to feel for aiding slaves became written on their own bodies. Moreover, anti-abolitionist violence escalated further, becoming, at times, fatal, as in the case of Elijah Lovejoy.

Within the racialized violence during anti-abolitionist mobbing, tar and feathers gained a sexualized dimension, as abolitionists were denigrated as "negro-lovers" who embodied the threat of amalgamation. Analyzing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), Elise Lemire argues that Poe's tale of a murderous ape draws on the discourses of amalgamation and race riots in 1838 Philadelphia. The most radical abolitionists argued for immediate emancipation (as opposed to gradual emancipation or colonization), an end to racial prejudice, and the right for blacks and whites to intermarry, and by holding these views—along with racially integrated meetings—they fell prey to charges of amalgamation. "The specter of interracial sex" caused the riot during a meeting held at Pennsylvania Hall, and informs Poe's tale, Lemire shows, via

⁵ See Leonard L. Richards.

natural history's comparisons of blacks to apes (193). The threat against the sexual purity of white women amounted to reactions against black economic mobility.

While the image of child-like docility of black men competed with the image of black male virulent sexuality during this time, the latter would increasingly solidify into the black rapist myth after the Civil War.⁶ At the close of the nineteenth-century, Frederick Douglass wrote that lynch mobs masked their economic usurpations by racist sentiments that appealed to both northerners and southerners: "Hence, we have for any act of lawless violence the same excuse, an outrage by a negro upon some white woman" (19). Though this trend can be traced back well before the nineteenth century, it was increasingly apparent during Poe's time. Two years after Poe wrote "Murders," in 1843, the *Philadelphia Ledger's* "Lynch Law in Pennsylvania" reported that "a fiend-like attempt was made by a negro to commit an outrage on the person of a white girl" causing him to be severely beaten and tarred and feathered (qtd. in *The Daily Picayune* 1). Hearing her cries, a nearby boat-builder "rescued her, and took the negro before Squire Lloyd," who detained him at the town hall. However, upon the news spreading through Columbia, that evening a mob "rescued the negro," and

took him down the beach on the Susquehanna, stripped him of his clothing, and gave him thirty-nine severe lashes. They then tarred and feathered the wretch, gave him thirty-nine lashes more, supplied the place of the feathers which were cut off by the last beating, by a fresh quantity, then pinioned his arms, took him to the door of the house of a leading

⁶ For example, see Robyn Wiegman.

abolitionist of Columbia, and left him, in that condition, tied to the handle of the door. (qtd. in *The Daily Picayune* 1)

The parallel language of “rescuing” white womanhood from the insatiable black man and the black rapist from legal justice, casts the punishment of tar and feathers as commensurate with his alleged crime. Depositing a tarred-and-feathered—and here, a symbolically raped—black man at the door of an anti-slavery advocate clearly implies abolitionist culpability concerning any type of interracial transgression, sexual or otherwise.

Poe’s Insane Tar and Feathers

While “Murders” taps into rioting and amalgamation anxieties, “Tarr and Fether,” published in *Graham’s Magazine* in November 1845, extends on these and further draws on the discourses of the asylum movement to ridicule both abolitionists and their opponents. By beginning with the end of the tale, against which I then analyze the rest of it, I illustrate how Poe’s use of tarring and feathering works on several levels. Presenting it as a method of treating the insane invented by an insane person, he alludes to the tarring and featherings of abolitionists. In this equation, abolitionists are insane, but so are those who resort to tarring and feathering them. Furthermore, using racial signifiers and alluding to revolution, Poe employs the punishment as an agent of social inversion in which the slaves tar the masters, who become apes. Finally, by grafting the plantation onto the asylum, he depicts the tarred and feathered body (here and in “Hop-Frog”) as a crazy ape, which will eventually bust out of its cell and seek revenge. In the tale, patients at a French insane asylum assume control of the mansion by tarring,

feathering, and confining the doctors and staff, marking their supervisors as the marginalized inferiors. Poe mediates the issue of slavery through the use of the asylum, but by blurring the lines between sanity and insanity, he undoes the criteria for confinement. Poe's doctors can be seen as masters and the patients as slaves, but the two positions can also be understood as alluding to the debate between immediate abolitionists and anti-abolitionists, who often tarred and feathered them. While Poe's alternating positions of power suggest that only rigid authoritarianism will keep slaves (or insane patients) from rebelling, the doctors who are subject to such control stage a rebellion themselves. When the tarred-and-feathered medical professionals burst into the room of patients playing at a posh dinner party, the narrator, who cowers under a table, recalls, "I shall never forget the emotions of wonder and horror with which I gazed, when, leaping through these windows, and down among us pele-mele, fighting, stamping, scratching, and howling, there rushed a perfect army of what I took to be Chimpanzees, Ourang-Outangs, or big black baboons of the Cape of Good Hope" (626). For Poe here, as well as in "Hop-Frog," tarred-and-feathered men resemble large apes, an image that was inextricably linked, in the nineteenth century, to black men. Furthermore, "as the former keepers burst forth from the cellar, they appear to embody what Sander Gilman has called 'the nexus of blackness and madness,' which structured perceptions of each group through the lens of the other" (Reiss 150). Thus, the purportedly healthy and sane doctors, dressed in tar and feathers, become the insane rebel-slaves staging a counter-revolution. The superintendent, and narrator's host, had, in fact, been the sane superintendent of the "soothing system" who "grew crazy himself,

and so became a patient” who led the others in rebellion. The narrator learns that twenty-five to thirty patients “suddenly overpowered” the ten keepers of the asylum, numbers that allude to slaves outnumbering owners on plantations, and then the keepers “were first well tarred, then --carefully feathered, and then shut up in underground cells”(627). The rebellion, and the counter-rebellion, serves to augment the previous system that clearly was not working. Thus, neither moral therapy in asylums (paternal master-slave relations) nor the “tarr and fether system” (tarring and feathering radical abolitionists) will ensure the safety of any group, or prevent violence erupting when the oppressed inevitably rebel.

As noted above, Poe’s utilization of the asylum as a parallel institution to that of slavery registers the symbiotic relationship between madness and blackness, at the center of which is Poe’s image of the tarred and feathered body. The two institutions operate on similar hierarchies, and, like other reforms of the time, the asylum movement borrowed the language of slavery in the effort to advance its cause. American proto-psychiatric practitioners and reformers became increasingly visible and active in the 1840s. The asylum movement itself wished to provide state care for financially disadvantaged and mentally afflicted citizens. At the forefront of this movement was Dorothea Dix, who delivered her “Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts” in 1843. Dix’s multiple visits to almshouses and prisons across the state allowed her to attest to the pitiful and degrading conditions being forced upon the mentally incompetent and insane. Dix employed the language of slavery in her appeal to the legislature, “call[ing their] attention to the *present* state of insane persons confined within this Commonwealth, in

cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience” (3; emphasis original). Dix’s emphasis on the language usually used to indicate slavery makes the appalling conditions of these asylums even more transparent, and the urge more desperate, to alleviate the suffering of those afflicted persons.

While there is a chance that Poe might have been familiar with the state hospitals for the insane established across Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York, he most certainly would have known about Pennsylvania’s Hospital for the Insane. This particular hospital became a model in terms of both architectural design and management for mental institutions under Superintendent Thomas Story Kirkbride, who accepted the position in 1841, the same year that Poe published “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Benjamin Rush’s 1812 treatise *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind* advocated “heroic treatment,” or blood-letting, as well as the restraint of mental patients, but by the mid-nineteenth century, “moral treatment,” reflected by Kirkbride among others, like John M. Galt’s *Treatment of Insanity* (1846), became the preferred method.

As the mid-nineteenth century brought about a call for more humane methods of dealing with the mentally incompetent, the increased attention to—and practice of—treating the mentally ill gave rise to the professional establishment of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane (AMSAAI) in 1844. The AMSAAI periodical *American Journal of Insanity* was established the same year and printed by the New York State Lunatic Asylum in Utica. Through its first two years of publication, as Poe composed “Tarr and Fether,” topics of discussion in the journal

included monomania and the question of physical restraint of the mentally insane, both of which Poe's tales employs.

Another way in which Poe merges blackness and madness is through the setting of France. The French locale of the story not only provides the association with revolution, but also grounds the tale in the emergent medical field of psychiatry. During this time, American medical students such as Amariah Brigham and Pliny Earle, two of the founding members of the AMSAII, routinely studied under teachers in Paris (Thielman 35). Suitably, then, the narrator of the tale is a medical student studying in Paris. Moreover, his travels in the "extreme southern provinces of France" associate the tale with the South. The issue of insanity mediates that of slave rebellion as Poe "address[es] [James Kirke] Paulding and all the other northerners who visit the South to examine and change a system about which they have no knowledge" (Sachsman 44).

Indeed, the unreliable narrator sustains the tale with humorous dramatic irony because his incorrigible desire to upkeep manners blinds him to what becomes increasingly obvious: everyone with whom he interacts is insane. Thus, the narrator's perspective mediates the layers of blackness and madness through the category of taste, which, according to Simon Gikandi, was generated by the institution of slavery. Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1855) also features a similar, though slightly less dense, narrator who is lulled by his own prejudices. While Captain Delano's doubts are comforted by what he sees as the idyllic and natural master/slave relations, Poe's narrator's uncertainty is assuaged by marks of taste and civility in his interlocutors. As he meets the superintendent of the asylum, he judges that he is "a portly, fine-looking

gentleman of the old school, with a polished manner, and a certain air of gravity, dignity, and authority which was very impressive”(613). As the narrator enters the “exceedingly neat” parlor, he perceives that it “contain[ed], among other indications of refined taste, many books, drawings, pots of flowers, and musical instruments”; moreover, a “cheerful fire blazed upon the hearth” and a beautiful woman played the piano, “singing an aria from Bellini”(614). Vincenzo Bellini’s *La Sonnambula* appears “often in blackface burlesques” (Maher 340), as did Italian opera more generally in American parodies, suggesting that the piano music is only a sign of taste to the untrained ear. The parlor room is generally a place where middle-class Americans performed and advanced their social status for visitors, as Karen Halttunen suggests, and this particular parlor is one of “refined taste,” which alleviates the dread the narrator feels at viewing the exterior of the dilapidated edifice. The narrator is thus taken in by what he believes to be the trappings of comfort and ease; he does not feel the need to look below the surface, because everything seems to him, at first, to be in working order, appealing to his middle-class tastes.

The signs of taste in the parlor, however, conceal the ongoing revolt from the narrator, but they are, in fact, part of the “moral therapy” needed to “manage” the insane (reading, music, and art were among the activities meant to draw out a patient’s latent reason). As the rhetoric of slavery was also used in conjunction with that of the asylum movement, it is no wonder that, as Simon Gikandi argues in *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, “slavery—and especially the powerful moral, visual and economic claims associated with it—had a salient effect on what one may call the interiorized realm of the

European experience—namely, the space of sense and sensibility” (8). If slavery has “a salient effect” on the “interiorized realm of the European experience,” particularly concerning ideas of taste, then the backdrop of slavery also mediates the narrator’s insistence on reading the room and the attire of the guests to gauge madness. The narrator muses, “They were, apparently, people of rank—certainly of high breeding—although their habiliments, I thought, were extravagantly rich, partaking somewhat too much of the ostentatious finers of the *vielle cour*... [The ladies] were by no means accoutred in what a Parisian would consider good taste at the present day” (616). The narrator, though, attempts to shift his judgment, remembering “that the southern provincialists were peculiarly eccentric people, with a vast number of antiquated notions; and then, too, upon conversing with several members of the company, my apprehensions were immediately and fully dispelled” (617). However, the category of taste proves reliable once again when he notices that the table is too lavish, there is a profusion of candles, and discordant music is playing. This offends his sensibility, and he thinks,

The profusion was absolutely barbaric. There were meats enough to have the Anakim [race of giants in Tanakh]. Never, in all my life, had I witnessed so lavish, so wasteful an expenditure of the good things of life. There seemed very little taste...in the arrangements; and my eyes, accustomed to quiet lights, were sadly offended by the prodigious glare of a multitude of wax candles. (617)

The narrator finds such excess both uncomfortable and in poor taste; furthermore, he notes that a group of people with “fiddles, fifes, trombones, and a drum...annoyed me very much... by an infinite variety of noises, which were intended for music, and which appeared to afford much entertainment to all present, with the exception of myself” (617). Instead of being overwhelmed and impressed with such a lavish, over-the-top display, the narrator instead is wary of cloaked madness. The excess is reminiscent of the aristocratic South, built upon plantation slave labor. Poe’s tableau presented through this unnamed narrator is clearly a critical examination of the superfluous lifestyles those in the South theoretically lived while the slaves suffered around them.

The superintendent embodies master and rebel-slave because he is not only the former proponent of “the soothing system,” but also the co-inventor of the “Tarr and Fether system” of managing the asylum. The theme of slave rebellion is further carried through by the superintendent’s name which alludes to a hero of the storming of the Bastille (Reiss 145). Philippe Pinel, an early French psychiatrist, had great influence on the American understanding of insanity, and his “moral therapy” advocated understanding the insane. Pinel’s ideas (and AMSII’s application of them) influenced Poe’s description of the abandoned “soothing system.”

In 1847, a preacher, invited by Amariah Brigham, the superintendent of the New York State Lunatic Asylum, was invited to deliver a sermon to the inmates. The preacher noted that the three hundred patients, some of whom made up the choir, and one of whom played the organ, sat with “the quietude of almost an ordinary congregation.”

The preacher recounts his conversation with the superintendent, a conversation which Poe's own superintendent mirrors. The preacher writes that Brigham told him,

“Preach as you would to any other congregation,” for added our adviser identifying himself as he does, in everything but disordered wits with his patients—“we don't, any of us, think we are crazy, and of course, don't like to hear ourselves called so.” And this seems to be the fundamental law of treatment with this celebrated physician. “We treat them as nearly as possible, like sane folks,” and indeed, there is nothing that strikes the visitor walking through the wards of this or any well conducted modern asylum, more than the general appearance of sanity. (“Preaching to the Insane” 4)

This “general appearance of sanity” partly helps explain the narrator's confusion, which underscores fluidity of conditions, regardless of who is in power (sane/insane; master/slave). In “Tarr and Fether,” the superintendent explains, “We affected to treat each individual as if for some ordinary physical disorder, and the word ‘lunacy’ was never employed” (615). The narrator describes what he learned in Paris about the “system of soothing” for managing the insane in similar terms: “all punishments were avoided” and “even confinement was seldom resorted to,” such “that the patients, while secretly watched, were left much apparent liberty, and that most of them were permitted to roam about the house and grounds in the ordinary apparel of persons in right mind” (614). The patients, given an illusion of freedom, invoked a specific morality that was concomitant to what was happening concerning both slavery and asylums at the time.

Poe uses the currency of “moral therapy” to further probe how institutions manage inmates, whether those institutions indicate mental illness, criminality, or slavery. The parallel to slavery becomes especially apparent when considering the case of Nat Turner, who “was permitted to preach around the Virginian countryside, [just as] the patients are allowed all the freedom of the sane in the hope they might recover. And just as it proved to create a rebellion in Southampton, the asylum is soon overthrown by the insane” (Sachsman 45). In fact, the superintendent informs the narrator that the system was abandoned because “[t]he danger of the soothing system was, at all times, appalling.” Capitalizing on the multivalent and contradictory term “appalling”—a word that denotes shock, dread, pallor, death, and both sudden courage and lack of courage to self-possession—Poe alludes to the utter dread of paternalistic master/slave relations. That is, the power differentials between masters and slaves, or the keepers of the asylum and the insane, disallow relaxed relations between them because the oppressed, no matter how well-treated, will fight for their freedom.

The inevitably interchangeable roles of master/slave in the tale are reflected by the slippery categories of sane/insane. The asylum residents all suffer from some form of monomania, which makes it difficult to decidedly identify them as insane. Monomania, which was coined at the time and defined as partial insanity, suggests that a patient dwells on one irrational idea while otherwise well-adjusted. The group gathered at dinner, while odd and lacking in taste, appear “well-educated” and reasonable; that is, until they commence with stories about the “whims of patients” (in which each becomes the third-person protagonist of his or her own monomania). Their fixated ideas all

involve an insistence on *what* they are, none of which is human: a tea pot, a donkey, a piece of Cordova cheese, a bottle of champagne, a frog, a pinch of snuff, a pumpkin, and a tee-totum. Poe's comic invention of a self-objectifying monomania, one in which the characters believe they are "things" rather than humans, rings true in terms of the human body as commodity in the institution of slavery. Furthermore, each of these items has a particular use value; that is, they can all function in some way, if put to use, whether for labor, sustenance, or entertainment. Slaves occupy the same position on a plantation—their inherent value was in what function they could perform for their masters.

While most of the patients have alter-egos that indicate they are things, the final patient's alter-ego suggests a monstrous, super-rational human, alluding to abolitionism. This patient, Bouffon Le Grand, "fancied himself possessed of two heads. One of these he maintained to be the head of Cicero; the other he imagined a composite one, being Demosthenes' from the top of the forehead to the mouth, and Lord Brougham's from the mouth to the chin" (620). Through this compulsive orator, the link between the insane asylum and abolition is the most apparent. All three people composing the imagined two heads of "Bouffon Le Grand"—the biggest fool of them all—can be related to the issue of slavery. Cicero, a Roman orator who held a more benevolent attitude towards slavery than did his peers, was studied by many, including Frederick Douglass. Demosthenes, whom Cicero admired, was an orator and politician who led a failed uprising against Alexander the Great; and the highlight of Lord Henry Brougham's political career was the British passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. As the succession of tales aggravates the diners to a raucous excitement, this anti-slavery orator, earlier subdued

from seizing the dining table as a platform for his eloquence, leaps upon the table and quickly “commence[s] an oration, which, no doubt, was a very capital one, if it could only have been heard” (626). The speech that would have been “a very capital one” had it only been audible, of course, would have been about abolition.

As several critics have noted, the cultural connections between blackness and madness inform this tale. Indeed, Nat Turner who, as noted above, was allowed to freely preach, was also considered by some to be mad himself. Discussing “Tarr and Fether,” J. Gerald Kennedy argues that Poe “register[s] his apprehensions about abolitionism and immediate emancipation without dismissing the cruelty of bondage,” by constructing “a problematic analogy between madness and blackness that the tale itself ultimately deconstructs” (16). As the diners mutually exacerbate each other’s monomania, eventually erupting into a synchronized performance of individual discord that mirrors the musical one the narrator noted earlier, the tarred and feathered doctors and staff erupt through the windows of the dining hall. Thus, Poe weaves the issue of tarred-and-feathered abolitionists into the discourse that connected blackness and madness.

Of course, once the keepers regain control, they resume the “‘soothing system,’ with important modifications” (627). The narrator muses, though, “I cannot help agreeing with Monsieur Maillard, that his own ‘treatment’ was a very capital one of its kind. As he justly observed, it was “simple--neat--and gave no trouble at all-- not the least”” (627). The institution of slavery when juxtaposed with the asylum movement indicates a need for radical change, and the patients becoming the instigators and employing vicious tactics such as tarring and feathering not only serves to elucidate the

problem of dehumanizing the insane, but also illuminates the disturbing phenomenon that punishment is incurred through a blackening of skin. While the dense narrator believes that this type of “treatment” is “capital” and, in the end, that such a rebellion worked, his futile search for the writings of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether across the libraries of Europe reveals that tar and feathers do not a rebellion make.⁷

Blackening Revenge in “Hop-Frog”

The discourses of psychiatry and slavery that Poe relies on in “Tarr and Fether” further illuminate Poe’s imaginative evolution to “Hop-Frog,” which was first published on March 17, 1849, in *Flag of Our Union*. In this revenge tale, a crippled servant dwarf gruesomely murders a tyrannical king by tricking the ruler and his councilors into performing a hoax in which they dress up into tarred and shackled apes. This story in particular can be read as the revolt of a slave figure against his master, and indeed, as Paul Christian Jones argues, “Even more than the descriptions of the orangutan in ‘Rue Morgue’ or the lunatics in ‘Tarr and Fether,’ the tale of this dwarfish jester seems to be asked to be read as a slave’s narrative” (246).⁸ Jones further explores the ways in which

⁷ As Larry J. Reynolds argues, European uprisings had an immense impact on American literary production of the period, and “Hop-Frog” is no exception to this, as Poe, according to Silverman, was repulsed by these revolutions (396).

⁸ According to G. R. Thompson, this tale “may have been inspired by the story of the accidental burning death of several aristocrats in the court of Charles VI of France at a masquerade party in 1385, as told by Jean Foissart in chapter 138 of his *Chronicles of the Hundred Years War*... This incident was summarized in an article published in the *Broadway Journal* for February 1, 1845. In ‘Barbarities of the Theatre,’ Evert A. Duyckinck, an editor of the influential *New York Literary World*, likened the recent death of a young dancer in London, whose costume caught fire from the gas lights illuminating the stage, to Froissart’s account” (421). As Thompson also notes, critics are

Poe's story undermines the abolitionist rhetoric of pathos, which sentimentalized the slave and demonized the master. I would add to this that Poe presents these ideas via the discourse of blackface minstrelsy, and I find that Poe drew on a concrete connection between madness and minstrelsy when composing the tale.

Before Poe even penned "Hop-Frog," inmates at lunatic asylums were already participating in blackface minstrelsy. As Benjamin Reiss explains, the patients at New York State Asylum at Utica began putting on an annual blackface minstrel show, a tradition that began on November 30, 1847. Performing in front of the doctors, staff, and other patients, they included in the act "an original play in three acts, a number of songs and recitations, dances, and to conclude, a sketch titled 'Ethiopian Sayings and Doings'" and they tended to conclude the show with "Ethiopian Extravanzas," in which they performed a variety of stock characters: "Sambo, Ned, Jim Gumbo, Cato, Bones, and Quambo'" (Reiss 54). It is not such a hard stretch, then, to imagine Poe making the connections between this practice and his own story "Tarr and Fether" to paint an even more gruesome portrait of insurrection in "Hop-Frog."

Indeed, Hop-Frog's portrayal draws on readers' sympathies with the details of his kidnapping and placement in servitude, his difficulty and pain in walking, his shedding a tear on the mention of his old friends, and the reference to his birthday. The king, on the other hand, is depicted as tyrannical by his abuse of the female Trippetta and his sadistic humor. Poe's manipulation of readers' sympathies toward Hop-Frog and

also fond of interpreting this tale biographically in terms of alcohol and Poe's literary rivalries.

their final rejection of the king's horrific end can be understood through the discourses of blackface minstrelsy. According to William J. Mahar, "Blackface minstrelsy was 'the national art of its moment...the soundtrack for the American 1848'" and Poe had already drawn on its discourse, along with issues of insanity, in crafting "Gold-Bug" in 1843 (9).⁹ In *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993), Eric Lott argues that the popularity of blackface reveals more than the racism inherent in the ridicule and derision of blacks in such performances, exploring the ways in which blackface emerged as a practice full of contradictory impulses and unlikely intersections of working-class white males and black males. His chapter "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Early Blackface Acts, the Body, and Social Contradiction" juxtaposes what he terms divergent kinds of ambivalent racism he sees in the discourse of people like William Lloyd Garrison, who exhibits a "paternalist condescension" and T. D. Rice, who in his blackface acts "mixed equal parts of ridicule and wonder in regards to blacks" (111). Both the Garrisonian brand of abolitionist rhetoric and Rice's "Jim Crow" act emerged almost simultaneously in history, but revealed the way in which the difference of class (Garrison's middle class and Rice's working class) formed diverging vehicles for and concerns of white racial discourse.

Lott's juxtaposition of Garrison and Rice registers the kind of debate Poe played with in "Tarr and Fether," but the more explicit connection to minstrelsy lies in the description of Hop-Frog and Trippetta. Hop-Frog certainly mirrors the stock child-like

⁹ See Stafford, who interprets "Gold-Bug" partly in terms of minstrelsy.

trickster employed in minstrel acts, and Trippetta can be seen as the “elegized dead black woman” (Lott 189). Hop-Frog and Trippetta “had been forcibly carried off from their respective homes” and “sent as presents to the king” from his envoys in “some barbarous region” (423). Furthermore, both of their names suggest bodily movement, the hallmark of blackface acts and visual depictions on posters and sheet music. Because Hop-Frog is a crippled dwarf, he “could only get along by a sort of interjectional gait—something between a leap and a wriggle—a movement that afforded illimitable amusement, and of course consolation, to the king” (422). His bodily movement indexes the jigs of minstrelsy as performed by people like Rice, who, legend has it, based his act on “authentic” black experience. As Constance Rourke writes, “Jim Crow Rice had heard an old crippled Negro hostler singing in a stableyard as he rubbed down the horses, and had seen him dancing an odd limping dance as he worked—’rockin’ de heel’” (72). Rice studied the dance, learned the song, and became one of the most famous blackface entertainers through the 1830’s-40’s.

Moreover, Hop-Frog, while having difficulty with his legs, had tremendous arm strength, so that he was able “to perform many feats of wonderful dexterity, where trees or ropes were in question, or anything else to climb. At such exercises he certainly much more resembled a squirrel, or a small monkey, than a frog” (422). In the context of the new nineteenth-century discipline of ethnology, propagated by the likes of Samuel George Morton and Louis Agassiz, Hop-Frog, with his crippled body, dwarf-stature, and fangs, signifies a lower-level being. In his 1854 “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,” Douglass describes the American School of ethnology’s

conception of the human races in terms of “a sort of sliding scale, making one extreme brother to the orang-ou-tang, and the other to angels, and all the rest intermediates” (qtd. in Warren 134). According to their outer appearances both Hop-Frog and the king, with his penchant for physical violence, orangutan attire, and shackled limbs, become classified in the lowest division of the human race. Moreover, they both perform the identities associated with blackface, illustrated through Hop-Frog’s peculiar step and the tarred-and-chained king’s “rolling” into masquerade ball with his councilors. Indeed, as they enter the hall, their chains cause them to stumble, mirroring Hop-Frog’s gait, and foreshadowing the layered reversal of racial roles. Though masquerades, and performances of blackface minstrelsy, were meant to channel dangerous energies, Poe seems finally to argue that there is no safe way to invert power and no way to supervise and thus contain the imp within.

As Jones points out, Poe ridicules the demonization of masters in abolitionist texts by portraying the king as a caricature of the slave master. The king has a penchant for practical jokes as they “suited his taste far better than verbal ones” (422). Since often the goal of a practical joke is to make the victim suffer a physical outcome of awkwardness or pain and a psychological outcome of humiliation, the king is sadistic. Paralleling the king in his fondness for sadistic surprises, Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*, perhaps the most well-known abolitionist text, explains Covey’s tactics: “When we were at work in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection, and all at once he would rise nearly in our midst, and scream out ‘Ha, ha! Come, come! Dash on, dash on!’” (44). Covey, too, is a sadistic practical joker of sorts.

Furthermore, the king constantly forces Hop-Frog to imbibe alcohol, especially because he “knew that Hop-Frog was not fond of wine; for it excited the poor cripple almost to madness; and madness is no comfortable feeling” (423). Deriving pleasure from knowing that Hop-Frog is being adversely affected by the drink, the king fails to notice that Hop-Frog’s “large eyes gleamed, rather than shone: for the effect of wine on his excitable brain was not more powerful than instantaneous. He placed the goblet nervously on the table and looked around upon the company with a half-insane stare” (424). Precisely this madness exacerbates Hop-Frog’s subjugated “blackness,” and makes Hop-Frog lash out soon after.

The inciting incident which helps Hop-Frog formulate his idea of tarring happens when Trippetta comes to Hop-Frog’s defense. When Hop-Frog hesitates to drink, “The king grew purple with rage” and instead of easing up on Hop-Frog, the king strikes Trippetta down, throwing a glass of wine in her face (424). Upon this outburst, “There was a dead silence for about half a minute, during which the falling of a leaf, or of a feather, might have been heard. It was interrupted by a low, but harsh and protracted grating sound which seemed to come at once from every corner of the room” (424). The king’s violent act of hurting and covering Trippetta with dripping red wine and the possibility of falling feathers provides Hop-Frog with the idea of tarring the masters. Hop-Frog muses calmly that he “cannot tell what the association of the idea” was for him, but that the idea came to him “just after your majesty, had struck the girl and thrown the wine in her face-just after your majesty had done this, and while the parrot was making that odd noise outside the window” (425). The parrot, associated with the

act of imitation and located in the sky-light through which Hop-Frog and Trippetta later escape, adds to the image of further darkening the “purple” king.

Poe’s overt maneuvering of the audience’s reaction to Hop-Frog’s plight, and the misdirection he employs to get the audience to sympathize—if not empathize—with the beleaguered titular character, is not all that surprising. As Eric Lott indicates, such strategies in a culture must be devised to occlude the recognition of the body, which ultimately reveals the exploitative organization of labor that structures the society. The body can be reduced to one of pure sexuality, or it can be colonized by medical discourse which disintegrates it to “discrete parts or organs.” Finally,

[s]hackling the body to a discourse of racial biology is still another [such strategy]. . . In antebellum America it was minstrelsy that performed this crucial hegemonic function, invoking the black male body as a powerful cultural sign of sexuality as well as a sign of the dangerous, guilt inducing physical reality of slavery but relying on the derided category of race finally to dismiss both. The minstrel show was an institution that may be profitably understood as a major effort of corporeal containment—which is to also say that it necessarily trained a rather constant regard on the body. (Lott 118)

Hop-Frog’s trickery not only indicates a type of reverse-colonization—the blackening of the king’s skin, the shackling and play-acting of apery—it also clearly invokes the black body as something which one should mock only at one’s peril. The show Hop-Frog has the king and his court perform is every bit that of “corporeal containment.” Hop-Frog

describes the preparations necessary for the hoax. He explains to the king and his men, “I will equip you as ourang-outangs,” along with chains “for the purpose of increasing the confusion by their jangling”; the premise is that the apes “are supposed to have escaped, en masse, from [their] keepers” (425). Furthermore, Hop-Frog appeals to the king’s obsession with producing effects, saying “Your majesty cannot conceive the effect produced, at a masquerade, by eight chained ourang-outangs, imagined to be real ones by most of the company; and rushing in with savage cries, among the crowd of delicately and gorgeously habited men and women” (425). This hoax embodies, then, “minstrelsy’s oft-remarked capacity to ridicule upward in class as well as downward in racial direction” (Lott 111-112). Hop-Frog proceeds to costume the king and his court by “encas[ing them] in tight-fitting stockinet shirts and drawers. . . saturat[ing them] with tar. At this stage of the process, some one of the party suggested feathers; but the suggestion was at once overruled by the dwarf, who soon convinced the eight. . . that the hair of such a brute as the ourang-outang was much more efficiently represented by flax” (426). Making sure to be “authentic,” Hop-Frog then chains the king and his men into a circle, and “to make all things appear natural, Hop-Frog passed the residue of the chain in two diameters, at right angles, across the circle, after the fashion adopted, at the present day, by those who capture Chimpanzees, or other large apes, in Borneo” (426). Ultimately, Poe’s narrator distances the reader from both the king and the jester, as both become demonized and brutalized. The king becomes an ape and Hop-Frog’s teeth reveal his animalistic revenge as their crossing journeys from victim to victimizer and vice-versa are aided by confidence games of performance.

During the party, the eight wait until midnight to come in and enact the spectacle, thinking they will be the tricksters of the ball. As Lott argues, one of the purposes of blackface was to “‘master’ the power and interest of black cultural practices it continually generated” (113), and, thus, the king is delighted with the effect produced on the crowd, some of whom “supposed the ferocious-looking creatures to be beasts of some kind in reality, if not precisely ourang-outangs” (427). The tumult that ensues mirrors the Jacksonian mob violence, as “there was much real danger from the pressure of the excited crowd” (427). In the excitement, Trippetta secretly helps lower the chandelier hook to which Hop-Frog attaches the chained group so that it brought “the ourang-outangs together in close connection, and face to face” (427). As the party guests recover from the shock, they begin “to regard the whole matter as a well-contrived pleasantry, [and] set up a loud shout of laughter at the predicament of the apes” (427). Hop-Frog capitalizes on this, becoming the master of ceremonies. Leaping about the room “with the agility of a monkey” he purports to “find out who they are,” bringing a lit torch closer to their faces (427). At this point, the king and his councilors still believe they are the agents of the performance as “the whole assembly (the apes included) were convulsed with laughter” (427-8).

However, when the chandelier hook is hoisted up “leaving them suspended in mid-air between the sky-light and the floor” the room turns silent. Again, Hop-Frog’s “fang-like teeth” produce a grating sound as he “he foamed at the mouth, and glared, with an expression of maniacal rage” (428). Thus, just like the demonized master, Hop-Frog, too, becomes a supernatural force of malice, as he lights the chained apes on fire.

The king's former amusement toward Hop-Frog's performance as a racialized jester is parodied with a vengeance as the king performs a racialized jest. As Leland S. Person rightly argues, Poe recognized "that racial signifiers are inherently unstable" and that "efforts to ascribe fixed racial identities lead to revenge" (220). Indeed, Hop-Frog continues, "I now see distinctly... what manner of people these maskers are. They are a great king and his seven privy-councillors,-a king who does not scruple to strike a defenceless girl and his seven councillors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester-and this is my last jest" (428). The authentic-seeming apes are exposed for the moral brutes they are, and their sadistic abuse of Trippetta and Hop-Frog is returned back to them ten-fold. The excessive violence of the murder leaves the reader to question whether the king's promise of "making a man" out of Hop-Frog is fulfilled. Though Hop-Frog regains self-possession, and power, even escaping through the spatially elevated position of the roof, he has no remorse and feels justified in his execution of vengeance, as he "clambered leisurely to the ceiling, and disappeared through the sky-light" (428). As Lott notes, the problem blackface minstrelsy "faced was how to ensure that what it invoked was safely rerouted...through a kind of disappearing act in which blackface made 'blackness' flicker on and off so as simultaneously to produce and disintegrate the body" (117). Indeed, the two racialized servants disappear and are never heard from again, bringing the fiction to a safe close, but the audience is left with the image of "The eight corpses sw[inging] in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass" (428).

CHAPTER V
TARRING AND TARRED SELVES: MARKING COMPLEXIONS
IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S WORKS

The writings of John Trumbull, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe responded to the various contexts of pre-Revolutionary turmoil, anti-rent struggles, and anti-abolitionist mobbing in which tarring and feathering was used in increasingly self-conscious ways; Nathaniel Hawthorne is no exception to this. Having extensively researched Trumbull's era and lived through the concerns Cooper and Poe treated, Hawthorne saw the practice as emblematic of American character, and brought the practice of tarring and feathering from colonial times to bear on his present contexts. In doing so, he significantly called attention to "complexions," denoting both the surface of the face and the composition of one's inner character. Examining how outer appearances become construed as representing the inner qualities of an individual, he used tarring and feathering to ask what happens to us and others when we demand that these directly correspond. In other words, what happens when we mark someone, when we watch someone being marked, when we mark ourselves, or when we ourselves are marked?

Relying on the historical contexts developed in the previous chapters, in which largely establishment figures in the form of Tories, landlords, and anti-slavery advocates were punished using tarring and feathering, this chapter takes a panoramic view of Hawthorne's literary career, showing how this trope evolved from "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1831) to *Doctor Grimshawe's Secret* (1882). In preparation for answering

the call for an American literature—one relying upon American landscapes, characters, and histories—Nathaniel Hawthorne read widely from the colonial annals and periodicals available to him at the Salem Athenaeum. In the course of his reading, the practice of tarring and feathering drew his attention and served as the scene for one of his earliest and best-known tales.¹ Indeed, the ritual he represented in “My Kinsman Major Molineux” (1831) remained in his mind, and would reappear in “Old News III: The Old Tory” (1837), *Liberty Tree, with the Last Words of Grandfather’s Chair* (1842) and in one of his unfinished romances, *Doctor Grimshawe’s Secret* (1882). It would also surface in a letter to his close friend Horatio Bridge after the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*. I link this reoccurring preoccupation to the elements of the practice—darkening of the skin and allusions to feathers— which also appear in “Feathertop” (1849) and *The House of Seven Gables* (1851). Because of Hawthorne’s frequent identification with the

¹ Another part of Hawthorne’s reading and context was the racial dimensions of mob behavior. As insurrection became a palpable threat to communal and national order, tar became a more overt synecdoche for the loss of national identity, which was increasingly linked with white racial identity. “As the crowd scenes in his works reveal,” Larry Reynolds shows, “Hawthorne exploited for effect the demonic symbolism of dark racial Others (both “red” and “black”) yet he also interrogated the mirroring effects of these Others, drawing on his knowledge of American history” (24). Although Hawthorne probably read about the 1739 Stono, South Carolina, slave rebellion, and knew about the 1792 Santo Domingo rebellion in Haiti, mob behavior became increasingly connected to race as the temporally and geographically closer rebellion of Denmark Vessey failed in South Carolina in 1822. The rising fear of slave revolt altered the understanding of mob behavior by the time Hawthorne began to compose “Major Molineux” around 1828, and the tale’s publication coincided with Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831. Moreover, Jacksonian mobbing erupted for a variety of reasons, one of which was anti-abolitionist sentiment, as discussed in the last chapter. I agree with the numerous literary critics, who have placed “My Kinsman” in the context of Jacksonian mobbing and tend to argue that Hawthorne, while celebrating egalitarianism, was wary of this violent tendency of democracy.

position of the victim, his writings help to examine Bercovitch's limits of ideology. Indeed, the ideology could not absorb all victims of tar and feathers, but Hawthorne, urging himself, also urged his victimized characters, like Hester Prynne, to stay within the community, not to undo her free-thinking spirit, but to enrich the community within which she stays.

Hawthorne certainly selected the ritual because of its patriotic association with the triumphant founding of democracy, but he used it subversively, insinuating the connection between abstract ideals and violent tendencies in rule by the people. Tarring and feathering had coded the relationship between dissenter and majority since its inception, and for Hawthorne, it revealed the fluidity between these two categories: how they are discursively and relationally positioned in history. The moments of collective violence imposed on a single victim in tarring and featherings emerge in his fiction in order to dramatize the results of unexamined nationalism, which has the potential to sever the ties of family, friendship, and community, with even more dire physical and psychological consequences for the victim. This exploration of national character through the practice of tarring and feathering, woven throughout Hawthorne's literary career, turned inward. Thus, this chapter moves from the political to the personal, which were inextricably linked for Hawthorne, illustrating both his anxieties about democracy and his place within it. Hawthorne increasingly saw the victimization, public display, and bodily pain and marking involved in tar and feathering as arising out the same sentiment that brought on the witchcraft delusion. Through the ritual of tarring and

feathering, he represented his America as more than a frivolous experiment but certainly less than a city on a hill.

Our Kinsmen: Hawthorne's Re-vision of Tarred Tories

Marking one with tar and feathers, in particular, created complex imagery, calling forth associations with American Indians, British fashion, animal pageantry, and a new American ritual of violence. "My Kinsman" reveals that Hawthorne began his career thinking about the punishment of tar-and-feathers as emblematic of marked victimization, and the resulting culpability that defines —though not necessarily consciously—the community after engaging in such a brutal act. In the years preceding his final composition of the tale, Hawthorne's reading included the colonial histories of Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, and Boston newspapers of prerevolutionary years.² Each of these sources would have exposed him to a number of tarring and featherings across the colonies in the prerevolutionary agitation. Hawthorne accessed Caleb Hopkins Snow's *A History of Boston* at or near the time of his composition of "My Kinsman," and, as Robert Grayson has pointed out, primarily relied on this work, along with Daniel Neal's *History of New England*, for the geographic (Boston), temporal (1730's), and sociological (fashion) details of his story (545). Moreover, Snow's *History* mentions tarring and feathering three times, but mostly obscures its prevalence. Discussing the revolutionary period, Snow writes of a boycott violator who was almost tarred and feathered by a patriot mob but who fainted in the heat of the day, and of Thomas Ditson, who was tarred and feathered by British soldiers

² See Marion L. Kesselring.

on the pretense that he rebelled against the king by seeking to purchase a gun (284; 301). In a note on the same page, Snow writes, “The Act for tarring and feathering, as it was humorously called, had often been held up, *in terrorem*, against obnoxious Tories [sic], but never absolutely executed upon more than one. John Malcom, a renowned informer, suffered its penalty in January 1774, and was most cruelly abused” (301). Though Snow’s history asserts that the practice was merely a way to threaten, Hawthorne’s reading shows that he ran across more serious cases. For example, Samuel Peters’ *History of Connecticut* (1782), which Hawthorne checked out in 1828, credits the town of New-London for “inventing tar and feathers as a proper punishment for heresy. They first inflicted it on Quakers and Anabaptists [sic]” (136).³ It also mentions the burning in effigy—a concomitant ritual of defilement by proxy—of Jared Ingersoll (1722-1781), a renowned loyalist (345).

A more contemporary periodical from Boston, the *Masonic Mirror*, published the article “Tar and Feathers” in 1825, reprinting several reports from the *Salem Gazette* about pre-Revolutionary tar-and-feather activity. The first chronicles a Marblehead-to-Salem procession of a thousand people parading the tar-and-feathered men who stole clothing from a hospital, and the second reports John Malcolm’s infamous incident and aftermath. In the preface to the reports, the *Masonic Mirror* wrote, “When our revolution commenced, the sovereign people took into their own hands the administration of justice... One of the most common punishments inflicted by the sons of Liberty, was

³ Furthermore, an elderly loyal Episcopalian clergyman was almost killed except he blessed the king and the rebels, and they let him go. Perhaps this was material for *Grandfather’s Chair* as well.

Tarring and Feathering, which, though rather severe, was still in a degree humane, and contained something of the humorous and much of the grotesque” (5). The likelihood that Hawthorne read this article is probable, but the clandestine activity of his Sons of Liberty certainly drew on the election of 1828 between Andrew Jackson, a member of the secret fraternal organization of the Freemasons, and John Quincy Adams, a fellow Massachusetts man who had much of the support of New England’s Whigs. Hawthorne thus layers the struggles between prerevolutionary Boston Tories and Whigs with those between the Whigs and Jacksonian Democrats during the presidential election of 1828. Whereas the *Masonic Mirror* describes the punishment of tar and feathers as somewhat “humorous,” the resulting victim to be mocked, Hawthorne portrays the laughter as a compulsory and guilt-inducing rite of initiation into the secret society.

“My Kinsman” is an inversion of the role played by the historical William Molineux in tarring and feathering. Molineux was a merchant who was part of the Sons of Liberty and “led nearly every mass action between 1768 and 1771 to harass the Tory publisher of the *Boston Chronicle*, scourge merchants who refused to abide by nonimportation agreements, or tar and feather customs informers” (Nash 97). Moreover, he led the mob Hawthorne writes about in “The Hutchinson Mob” who ransacked Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s home one evening.⁴ Yet in 1770, Molineux was deterred from promoting a boycott in Salem by rumors that a mob was gathered to tar and feather him (Irvin 209). While in life he was the perpetrator punishing alleged transgressors, in the story he became a victimized character, as Hawthorne switched

⁴ “Hutchinson Mob” is part of *Grandfather’s Chair*.

Molineux's role into that of his juxtaposed other, turning patriot to loyalist and victimizer to victim. Hawthorne introduces a level of irony with this reversal, forcing a historically conscious audience to entertain the incongruity. As Peter Shaw argues, "My Kinsman" reverses a series of historical allusions, alternating between obedience and rebellion of subject-children toward their father-king; from this perspective, tar and feathering symbolizes regicide (216).

The beginning lines of "My Kinsman" call attention to the prospects of reading skin, priming the audience for the most (il)legible character in the tale: the parti-colored organizer of the tarring and feathering mob. The first line sets up the foreign and othered intruder: after Great Britain "assumed the right of appointing the colonial governors...[t]he people looked with most jealous scrutiny to the exercise of power, which did not emanate from themselves"(3).⁵ Hawthorne then details what happened to these Crown-appointed governors, informing us that horrors befell these officials particularly "in times of high political excitement" (3). To put it simply, the "temporary inflammation of the popular mind" (3) took matters into its own hands, and by creating an abject body, in turn created a foreigner, an Other whom the crowd could torture and demonize in the name of their new patriotic consciousness.

Robin arrives on this scene with the expectation that men's faces can be read to reveal the extent of virtue and credibility that lie within. He walks up a road full of shops "thrusting his face close to that of every elderly gentleman," hoping to "recognize his

⁵ For quotations from "My Kinsman" and "Feather-top," I rely on James McIntosh, ed. *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, New York: Norton, 1987.

hitherto inscrutable relative” (7). He continues his search on the other side of the street “with stronger hopes than the philosopher seeking an honest man, but with no better fortune” (8). Hawthorne alludes to Diogenes the Cynic, the Greek philosopher who carried a lantern about in daytime in his sarcastic search for an honest man. While Diogenes’ search is a performance suggesting widespread corruption, Robin’s quest is sincere, and he becomes frustrated when he has trouble locating and reading a trustworthy face, one of public virtue.

Three times in the story, Robin meets the mob leader, and three times Hawthorne dwells on the “complexion” of this unnamed man, mapping the man’s idiosyncratic face in topographical terms. When Robin looks around at the people at the inn, he is particularly impressed by one man’s striking features: “The forehead bulged out into a double prominence, with a vale between; the nose came boldly forth in an irregular curve, and its bridge was of more than a finger's breadth; the eyebrows were deep and shaggy, and the eyes glowed beneath them like fire in a cave” (6). The features of this man are described in geographic terms of mountains, valleys, bridges, caves, and woods. In short, the texture of this man’s face is rough and irregular, full of dents and protrusions, bespeaking as coarse a character. Indeed, with the centrally-indented forehead reaching a symmetrical “double-prominence,” he resembles a ram with his head down or the devil with horns of a ram. Again, Robin meets with this mysterious fellow, and is almost mesmerized by the man’s newly painted countenance:

...the man's complexion had undergone a singular, or, more properly, a twofold change. One side of the face blazed an intense red, while the

other was black as midnight, the division line being in the broad bridge of the nose; and a mouth which seemed to extend from ear to ear was black or red, in contrast to the color of the cheek. The effect was as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage. (10-11)

The duality of the red and black paint, rather than denoting a carnival-like mask, only further inscribes the nuances of his sadistic character, registering the racialized colors assigned to Native Americans and African Americans. Although Molineux is later tarred and feathered, the text does not mention his “blackening,” rather it is the “double-faced” man who is already denigrated before the commotion begins. Hawthorne darkens this character, marking his exterior to match an inner malevolence, suggesting that those who imposed tar and feathers on others were the ones who actually earned them.

Just as Hawthorne inverts the two Molineux’s roles, he inverts the markings of the victim and perpetrator of tarring and feathering. So when the procession of participants and spectators approaches, Robin sees the double-forehead of this apocalyptic war-jester: “The single horseman, clad in a military dress, and bearing a drawn sword, rode onward as the leader, and, by his fierce and variegated countenance, appeared like war personified; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them” (15). In the first scene this man secretly plans the event, in the second, he hurries to the meeting place, and in this final scene, he is unveiled as the leader of the spectacle in which the entire town is participating. Here, the text associates the leader’s redness with bloodshed and

his blackness with death, indexing violence, insurrection, and anarchy. Synecdochically, his outer complexion is the inner constitution of the “common weal.” The “irregularity” of the curve of his nose is echoed in the description of the architecture of the town, and by extension in the people who inhabit it:

The irregular and often quaint architecture of the houses, some of whose roofs were broken into numerous little peaks, while others ascended, steep and narrow, into a single point, and others again were square; the pure snow-white of some of their complexions, the aged darkness of others, and the thousand sparklings, reflected from bright substances in the walls of many. (11)

The description of the differing structures of homes in the town buttresses the inner/outer dichotomy, where architecture reflects mentality and morality. The roofs with a “single point” contrast the roofs with “numerous little peaks,” denoting narrowness or openness of perspective in their inhabitants. The “pure snow-white” and “aged darkness” of their “complexions” bespeaks the distinction between innocence, goodwill, and virtue, and experience, callousness, and corruption, while both point to a lack of knowledge, either from naiveté or hardened cynicism. Thus the face of the leader, the face of the town—the face of democracy—is one of unexamined tendency to violence. Though there is a beauty in the variety of the “thousand sparklings,” any one of the townspeople are interchangeable with and have the possibility of standing in the leader’s place, and as such are complicit in the cruelty.

The recurring images of place—natural and architectural features—to describe the mob leader link place to practice, showing how contingent these performances are on particular American locales. When Robin finally encounters his already tarred and feathered kinsman, Major Molineux is also depicted in terms of an edifice. The parade of the mob is emphasized and significantly, no details of the major's alleged crime are given. In fact, from the following description, which details Molineux's complexion, one can assume that he is the victim of happenstance: simply associated with the British during the inconvenient period of revolutionary turmoil:

He was an elderly man, of large and majestic person, and strong, square features, betokening a steady soul; but steady as it was, his enemies had found means to shake it. His face was pale as death, and far more ghastly; the broad forehead was contracted in his agony, so that his eyebrows formed one grizzled line; his eyes were red and wild, and the foam hung white upon his quivering lip. His whole frame was agitated by a quick and continual tremor, which his pride strove to quell, even in those circumstances of overwhelming humiliation. (16)

Both the external features and the inner soul are portrayed in imagery of a shaking foundation, and his face is puckered up in an image of implosion. In this “anti-coronation ceremony,” Molineux is dethroned as the imposition of tar-and-feathers on

his outer body affects the inner substance of his “steady soul” (Allison 305).⁶ Whereas the agent of tar and feathers is blackened, the victim is “pale,” literally because of fear, but figuratively because his heart—outside his body—is being “trampled” by the crowd.⁷ The double meaning of his “majestic person,” indicating both royal ties and venerable dignity, advances the shocking possibility that one can be a loyalist and a decent person at the same time. However, Molineux is divested of his inalienable rights and his humanity, and instead animalized with “red and wild” eyes and “white foam” on his lip.

Meanwhile, Robin is first bewildered, then mesmerized by the violence, finally joining in with the mad, haunting laugh of the crowd, suggesting an inevitability—of coercion and desire—to join the blackened town. Hawthorne thus capitalizes on the practice of tarring and feathering as an American theme in his response to advocates of American literary nationalism. However, prominent editor Evert Duyckinck,

⁶ Also, as Peter Shaw notes, “The rituals of revolution have been accurately described as reversed ceremonies of legitimacy. But the ceremonies of legitimacy were themselves ambiguous” (*American Patriots* 221).

⁷ Moreover in “The Birthmark” as in “My Kinsman” paleness is associated with being the object of gaze, which severs human connections. Removing the birthmark had never occurred to Georgiana and, at first, she finds Aylmer’s suggestion of it absurd, but “perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply” (119). Though she blushes, feeling self-conscious and embarrassed that she does not fit Aylmer’s ideal, she soon learns to shudder at his gaze. Indeed, his stare brings her to a deathly pallor: “It needed but a glance with the peculiar expression that this face often wore to change the roses of her cheek into a deathlike paleness, amid which crimson had been brought strongly out, like a bas-relief of ruby on the whitest marble” (121). Where the first emotion was associated with heat and the increased flow of blood, the shudder is the body’s involuntary response to a cold temperature. Aylmer’s cold calculations and analyses are contagious and insidiously rob her of her vitality; his imposed interpretation by degrees becomes reality. Her “moral advancement” through Aylmer’s teachings results in her own self- and life-negation (129).

misunderstanding the import of Robin's laugh, and future burden, concludes in his review of "My Kinsman" that the tale has an "impotent," because comic, ending (CE XI 393). Robin's laugh, though, counters Young Goodman Brown's ultimate shrinking from Faith. Whereas Robin's example suggests the cost for belonging—guilt, Brown's reveals the consequences of rejecting society: misery. For Duyckinck, Robin's laughter is the expected reaction to a tar-and-feathered body, but the laugh undoes the intended cultural work of the ritual in Hawthorne's ironic register.

In dramatizing the ritual—in which Robin must participate in order to belong to the community, and by which the crowd seeks to extricate a subjectivity no longer sanctioned—Hawthorne indicts individuals who presume to take social monitoring and justice into their own hands. By doing so, Hawthorne denounces rather than champions what he depicts as the "American" tendency to aggressively silence opposition. As David Leverenz suggests, Hawthorne controls the reader's identification with aggression and deflates it in this tale. This "bully-boy" manhood emerges through the safety-valve of a carnivalesque mid-summer's eve, by which the aggressors feel their violence, and their culpability, is safely contained in the ceremony, a mere performance of their anti-monarchical sentiments. Hawthorne further associates this problematic "bully-boy" discourse of manhood with ostentatious fashion, partly addressed through feathers; after all, the landscape of "My Kinsman" is littered with "wild figures in Indian dress" and "many gay and gallant figures" with "[e]mbroidered garments of showy colors, enormous periwigs, gold-laced hats, and silver-hilted swords" (7-8). Furthermore, Robin becomes ashamed of "his quiet and natural gait" when he spies "[t]ravelled

youths, imitators of the European fine gentlemen of the period, trod[ding] jauntily along, half dancing to the fashionable tunes which they hummed” (7-8). While those who prance about in feathers parodied “fine European gentlemen” in the context of the ritual of reversal, their exaggerated dress still reveals that those who indiscriminately follow new fashions operate on the same brainless following required for tar-and-feather mob violence.⁸

If in Major Molineux Hawthorne employs continual reversals to complicate the relationship between victim and victimizer, in “Old News: The Old Tory” (1837) he directly considers those on the receiving side of the persecution by adopting the persona of a Tory reading through revolutionary newspapers. By doing so, Hawthorne revitalizes the reified losing position of Loyalists to moderate against increasingly polarizing political affiliations in America. He announces this imaginative exercise, using the third-person plural, not only as the “royal-we” but also as a means to invite the audience to

⁸ In England during the second half of the eighteenth century, these imitators of continental fashions and tastes were ridiculed as “macaronies.” A species of penguins were named macaroni penguins at this time for having a bright crescent of feathers on their chest which resembled the hairstyles of these dandies, who wore large, curly, exaggerated wigs. In 1770 *Oxford Magazine* reported, “there is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender, lately started up amongst us. It is called a Macaroni. It talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenches without passion” (qtd. in *OED*). This article characterizes the “macaroni” as a gender-neutral imitator of humanity, devoid of agency or, indeed, a self. In fact, one of the renditions of the tarring and feathering of John Malcolm is entitled “A New Method of Macarony [sic] Making” (see Figure 3), perhaps alluding to the extension of the feather-like hairstyle to the entire body. Of course, “Yankee Doodle” did stick a *single* “feather in his cap and called it macaroni,” not realizing one feather does not a macaroni make. Malcolm’s overabundance of feathers, however, has outdone even British dandies.

inhabit the mindset of those against whom aversion seemed self-evident: “Well, then, here we sit, an old, gray, withered, sour-visaged, threadbare sort of gentleman, erect enough, here in our solitude, but marked out by a depressed and distrustful mien abroad, as one conscious of a stigma upon his forehead, though for no crime” (132). Like Major Molineux, the Tory’s only “crime” is loyalty to the king, but the value of loyalty in the revolution becomes “pliable” enough to earn the community’s “marking” by a “stigma.” While the Tory lived in the colonies through old age, the fact does not earn him a modicum of deference. In fact, he enumerates: “Hustled have we been, till driven from town-meetings; dirty water has been cast upon our ruffles by a Whig chambermaid; John Hancock’s coachman seizes every opportunity to bespatter us with mud; daily are we hooted by the unbreeched rebel brats; and narrowly, once, did our gray hairs escape the ignominy of tar and feathers” (132). As David Anthony writes, Hawthorne associated “dirtiness” with lower classes, often mediating it through the category of race (439-40). In an inversion of power, the text recounts that a chambermaid and coachman heaved filth on their betters. Hawthorne thus attempts to draw on the pathos of his audience through this first persona narration of rejection and defilement.

Part of the verbal (“hooted”) and physical (“hustled”) abuse heaped upon the Tory are several versions of defilement: dirty water, mud, and tar and feathers. This communal desire to sully the Tory’s body, and thus to reinforce and justify the patriots’ condemnation, is mirrored by the Tory’s repulsion to not only the content of the newspaper, but more importantly to the quality of the paper and ink used. The Tory loses identification with an American audience by his disdain for their means of

communication and by proxy their beliefs and selves. The paper “attracts our scorn. It is a fair specimen of rebel manufacture, thick and coarse, like wrapping-paper, all overspread with little knobs; and of such a deep, dingy blue color, that we wipe our spectacles thrice before we can distinguish a letter of the wretched print. Thus, in all points, the newspaper is a type of the times” (132). The texture of the paper represents the interior constitution of the “rebels”: thick—unintelligent; coarse—badly-mannered; knobby—erratic; and dingy-colored—dirty. The Tory thus announces that the sheets are “far more fit for the rough hands of a democratic mob than for our own delicate, though bony fingers. Nay; we will not handle it without our gloves!” (132). Though Hawthorne pokes fun at the Tory’s delicate sensibilities, he also depicts the Tory’s assessment of the patriots, represented by their product, as already sullied. Touching the rough, smeared, inky pages—like tar—would stick to his hands, associating him with his aggressors. The narrator concludes, “Peace to the good old Tory!” and lays out the purpose “to exemplify, without softening a single prejudice proper to the” Tory persona which the narrator adopted:

that the Americans who clung to the losing side in the Revolution were men greatly to be pitied and often worthy of our sympathy. It would be difficult to say whose lot was most lamentable, that of the active Tories, who gave up their patrimonies for a pittance from the British pension-roll, and their native land for a cold reception in their miscalled home, or the passive ones who remained behind to endure the coldness of former

friends, and the public opprobrium, as despised citizens, under a government which they abhorred. (132)

Hawthorne thus asks his audience to consider the subjectivity of the victim, and the abuses he suffered among those he called rebels, not heroic patriots. John McWilliams rightly points out that, “Although Hawthorne’s old Tories are engagingly humane and sympathetic in their victimization, they are never allowed to be models of political behavior” (*Hawthorne, Melville and the American Character* 79), revealing for McWilliams that Hawthorne was considerably more reactionary toward democracy than Herman Melville. Indeed, Hawthorne’s sentiment of sympathy, but not necessarily commendation, toward those on losing sides of political and social conflict underwrites much of his literary explorations and his political philosophy.

Hawthorne echoes this sympathy through the voice of a wise elder in the last volume of *Grandfather’s Chair* (1842), illustrating the most important lessons he wants to impart to American children about the revolution in particular and political conflict in general. When Charley, an impulsive yet well-meaning boy, listens to Grandfather’s story about the American Revolution in “The Liberty Tree,” he asks about the prominent loyalists who publically argued for the British cause. Grandfather enumerates, “Governor Hutchinson, Chief Justice Oliver, Judge Auchmuty, the Reverend Mather Byles, and several other clergymen,” upon which Charley exclaims, “I wish the people had tarred and feathered every man of them!” (83-4). Grandfather cautions that his sentiment is “very wrong” and goes on to explain that Charley

must not think that there was no integrity and honor, except among those who stood up for the freedom of America. For aught I know, there was quite as much of these qualities on one side, as on the other. Do you see nothing admirable in a faithful adherence to an unpopular cause? Can you not respect that principle of loyalty, which made the royalists give up country, friends, fortune, everything, rather than be false to their king? It was a mistaken principle; but many of them cherished it honorably, and were martyrs to it. (84)

Charley then understands and recants, adding, “And I would risk my life, rather than one of those good old royalists should be tarred and feathered” (85). This acceptance and understanding marks Charley’s move from aggressor to protector, a shift that indicates that Charley realizes that it is more important to work and live for the benefits of others, and for himself, rather than join in the mob mentality that dismisses common sense and dialogue for actions that have serious repercussions.

Hawthorne associates tar with unexamined persecution two other times in this volume. First, tar barrels afire light the night gathering of the mob preparing to disturb Thomas Hutchinson’s domestic peace. Then, in the “Tory’s Farewell” Peter Oliver takes a last, emotionally-conflicted walk around his old haunts before departing Boston, while passersby “[shout] in derision” because “[t]hey laid the wrongs of the country, and their own sufferings during the siege...to that of his brother Andrew, and his kinsman Hutchinson” (122). Because of Oliver’s guilt by association, the people cry “with bitter laughter” that the old Tory “is taking his last look at us. Let him show his white wig

among us an hour hence and we'll give him a coat of tar and feathers!" (122). By repeating imagery of tarred white wigs coupled with the public's gaze and derision throughout his fiction about the Revolution, Hawthorne attempted to counter metaphysics of British-hating as part of a larger lesson about political conflict. Moreover, a recurring strain in this fiction suggests that not only is there a difference between humbling and humiliating a person, but more importantly it is not the public's mission, as they seem to think, to perform the latter.

Yankee Doodle's Feather: Fashion, Gender, and Class

Fashion, as a system of signs, indexed gender and class as a way to figure colonial loyalties. In revolutionary discourse the feather became a central trope by which British mocked American sensibilities, and by which Americans in turn satirized loyalist bodies. While feathers were used by mobs to humiliate victims, Hawthorne employs the symbol not only to indict such violence, but also to critique the gullible public. The public depends too much on surfaces when assessing others, Hawthorne shows, in his Pygmalion-like "Feather-top" (1851). Set in the 1700s, the tale begins with the witch Mother Rigby deciding to create a scarecrow out of crude materials to "represent a fine gentleman of the period" (244). The materials she uses associate effeminate masculinity, like that of the macaroni, with devilish activity. For one, the scarecrow's coat, "of London make," was rumored to belong to "the Black Man," while his pants first belonged to an aristocratic Frenchman who had given them to "an Indian powwow," and the Indians, in turn, "parted with them to the old witch for a gill of strong waters, at one of their dances in the forest" (245). Furthermore, by adding to a "rusty three-cornered

hat...the longest tail-feather of a rooster” (245), Mother Rigby endows her scarecrow with several indexes of masculinity. The feather symbolism invokes the satirical British dandy figure, and as a “man” made out of an assemblage representing other cultures—French, Indian, and English—Feathertop embodies the history of New England. As an empty creature made out of hay, the scarecrow indicates that much of the public is also vacuous and without substance.

Hawthorne implies that this “miserable simulacra” contains enough signs of gentlemanly appearance that he will fool any onlookers and, even better, rise in the world based on them (248). The scarecrow is also able to parrot the clichés of the day, and furthermore, to know the appropriate time to speak a myriad of “weighty utterances as imply attention, inquiry, acquiescence, or dissent on the part of the auditor” (250). Mother Rigby repeats her judgment that this charmed scarecrow will be an equal among society where “other men of straw and empty fellows...go bustling about the world,” and “where not one man in a hundred...was gifted with more real substance than itself” (246; 249). Hawthorne suggests that the self-interested crowd operates within the same symbolic matrix of superficiality, where appearances and shadows are taken for substance. If the scarecrow is like the many “bustling about,” then his name, too, applies to them. Mother Rigby christens her creation Feathertop, saying, “if any ask thy name, it is Feathertop. For thou has a feather in thy hat, and I have thrust a handful of feathers in to the hollow of thy head, and thy wig, too, is of the fashion they call Feathertop—so be Feathertop thy name” (251). The three-layered meaning of Feathertop—a mark of honor, an empty-headed person, and an exaggerated wig—then, describes the public, who don

badges of honor and (un)fashionable wigs and, because they mirror pre-defined symbols, thoughtlessly ape appearances and behaviors to gain wealth and distinction.

Feathertop is animated by black magic, a metaphor Hawthorne also clearly ascribes to the general public repeatedly in his works to show the ill-will they hold and the mediated, second-hand agency on which they operate. In fact, Feathertop's pipe, which he needs for life, features "a party of little demons, each duly provided with horns and a tail, and dancing hand in hand, with gestures of diabolical merriment, round the circumference of the pipe-bowl" (255). As in "Young Goodman Brown," the accurate character of a public can be seen only as they dance around a hellish fire. For Hawthorne, then, this trope of diabolical merriment is where collective volition truly lies—not one individual is able to stand up to the masses, and in public, people are only able to perform, rather than to stand on their own and denounce unethical actions. However, Feathertop, unlike the public, acquires self-knowledge once he glimpses his real appearance in the mirror. He abandons his quest for the fair maiden, and thrusting his pipe aside, tells Mother Rigby that he will "exist no longer," if his existence means to rob an unsuspecting maiden's innocence (257). After the dissolution of Feathertop, Mother Rigby soliloquizes, bemoaning his utter integrity:

There are thousands upon thousands of coxcombs and charlatans in the world, made up of just such a jumble of worn-out, forgotten, and good-for-nothing trash as he was! Yet they live in fair repute and never see themselves for what they are! And why should my poor puppet be the only one to know himself, and perish for it?....his feelings are too tender;

his sensibilities too deep. He seems to have too much heart to bustle for his own advantage, in such an empty and heartless world. (257-8)

Hawthorne clearly indicts the class of men who consist of “trash” and the public who allows such men to live in “fair repute.” Even Feathertop, a newly-animated heap of rubbish, gains a conscience and refuses to partake in the confidence game because, paradoxically, he is too “tender” and “deep” and has “too much heart.” He gains his self-awareness because he sees that he is, after all, a grotesque collection of garbage. Reflected back in the mirror, his image shames him to the point that he cannot live with himself. The question for Hawthorne is: how can others? The diction he uses to describe “thousands and thousands of men” is connected to feathers. The “coxcomb,” which combines both a jester’s cap fashioned after a rooster’s head-feathers and a conceited dandy, and the “charlatan,” or quack—the sound a duck makes, and an impostor—both connote an empty performance of manhood and upper class sensibilities. All the worse, because these men are not self-aware they believe their appearance announces an identity of virility and gentility, and because “they protest too much” actually convey an impotent, ridiculous, and unsubstantial self.

Gallows, Guillotines, and Tar for Those of a Different Feather:

The Continuum of Victimization

By the mid-nineteenth century, Hawthorne’s use of tarring and feathering serves more overtly as a metaphor of persecution and victimization, one he intensely felt as a result of losing his customs-house post, as well as the criticism surrounding his publication of *The Scarlet Letter*. Although “Feathertop,” which may be viewed as one

literary response to this criticism, treats the matter through the “neutral territory” of Hawthorne’s art, his sketch of “The Custom-House,” as he well knew, more directly paints disparaging portraits of insubstantial men who worked with him at the office. In his April 13, 1850 letter to his Bowdoin college-friend and U.S. Navy Commodore Horatio Bridge, Hawthorne wrote:

I feel an infinite contempt for them [the people of Salem]--and probably have expressed more of it than I intended--for my preliminary chapter has caused the greatest uproar that has happened here since witch-times. If I escape from town without being tarred and feathered, I shall consider it good-luck. I wish they would tar and feather me; it would be such an entirely novel kind of distinction for a literary man. And, from such judges as my fellow-citizens, I should look upon it as a higher honor than a laurel crown. (Bridge 114)⁹

⁹ In the same letter, Hawthorne elaborates on his ousting from office and subsequent troubles to regain it: “As to the Salem people, I really thought that I had been exceedingly good-natured in my treatment of them. They certainly do not deserve good usage at my hands after permitting me to be deliberately lied down--not merely once, but at two several attacks--on two false indictments--without hardly a voice being raised on my behalf; and then sending one of the false witnesses to Congress, others to the Legislature, and choosing another as the mayor” (Bridge 114). As an interesting point of comparison, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his first series of essays published in 1841, writes in “Compensation”: “The history of persecution is a history of endeavours to cheat nature, to make water run up hill, to twist a rope of sand. It makes no difference whether the actors be many or one, a tyrant or a mob. A mob is a society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason, and traversing its work. The mob is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast. Its fit hour of activity is night. Its actions are insane like its whole constitution. It persecutes a principle; it would whip a right; it would tar and feather justice, by inflicting fire and outrage upon the houses and persons of those who have these.” (*rwe.org* n. p.).

Exploring metaphors for undue persecution throughout his canon, Hawthorne here invokes the witch-hunt and tar-and-feathers, and in “The Custom-House,” the “political guillotine” (32).¹⁰ Knowing the history of the customs officer as a primary target for tar and feathers during the revolution—even mentioning other literary figures, such as Robert Burns and Geoffrey Chaucer, who held similar positions—Hawthorne uses the tarring and feathering metaphor with more weight than the apt joke to his friend suggests. After the presidential victory of Zachary Taylor and Hawthorne’s losing battle to keep the Salem position, Hawthorne was shocked to discover himself as the object of “the bloodthirstiness that is developed in the hour of triumph” (32). The psychological pain of unjust public censure led Hawthorne to write about his particular position, something he referred to as “one of the most singularly irksome, and in every contingency, disagreeable [positions], that a wretched mortal can possibly occupy...[especially when one realizes] that his interests are within the control of individuals who neither love nor understand him” (32). Perhaps one of the most disappointing traits of humanity for Hawthorne was this tendency of people “to grow cruel, merely because they possessed the power of inflicting harm” (32). Having gone through this soul-shaking experience, Hawthorne increasingly began to identify with the position of the victim in his fiction. This empathy led him to declare that he would willingly “take shame” upon himself for the Hawthorne family’s “persecuting spirit,” which left a “stain” upon the family line (11-12).

¹⁰ For references to “The Custom-House” I use Leland S. Person, ed. *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, New York: Norton, 2005. Print.

This family inheritance from his Puritan lineage became central for Hawthorne, and his narratives that treat the issue of political persecution draw on the history of Massachusetts Bay Colony's Puritan intolerance of any kind of sin. Hawthorne's "Old News I" (1835) glimpses over dated reports of murder, adultery, fraud, robbery, and the 1692 Salem witch trials, concluding that "the pillory, the whipping-post, the prison, and the gallows" used to keep order reveal that "There is no evidence that the moral standard was higher then than now; or, indeed, the morality was so well defined as it has since become"(153). In the survey of colonial happenings, Hawthorne advances the argument that corruption existed in America from the outset. Indeed, the nativist diagnosis of a decline in morality presupposed a former purity, both racial and moral. Hawthorne directly engages this myth, identifying corruption and racial intermingling as "old news" for anyone who actually knew the country's history. Hawthorne even reminds his readers about the diversity of the "white population," which included "all sorts of expatriated vagabonds" and "the continual importation of bond-servants from Ireland and elsewhere" (153). In fact, he writes that the importation of white men and women from Europe to be "sold, though only for a term of years, yet as actual slaves, to the highest bidder," must have led African slaves to "reconcile [themselves] to their lot" (153).

More pointedly, he rehearses racist stereotypes about the "natural merriment" of the black slaves and the paternalistic institution of slavery, undercutting it with examples of the frequent advertisements about "these human commodities" (153). In fact, "When the slaves of a family were inconveniently prolific--it being not quite orthodox to drown

the superfluous offspring, like a litter of kittens,--notice was promulgated of ‘a negro child to be given away’” (153). Addressing the yet-to-be wholly enforced Fugitive Slave Law, he writes about the governor’s “hue-and-cry,” language of common law to assist in capturing someone caught in a criminal act. His diction points to the absurdity of slaves who “assumed the property of their own persons” and the outcry to assist in capturing a “human commodity” caught in the act of stealing herself. Echoing his later sentiments in “Chiefly about War-Matters” (1862), the narrator muses that it is generally better for slaves to stay on the plantation “without being harassed by [life’s] cares” (153). After all, he reasons, “The sable *inmates* of the mansion were not excluded from the *domestic affections*: in families of middling rank, they had their places at the board; and when the circle closed round the evening hearth, its blaze glowed on their dark shining faces, *intermixed familiarly with their master’s children*” (153; emphasis mine). Therefore, while one suspects an envy of the purported protection that dependency afforded slaves, Hawthorne does not conceal the abuses of the institution here. His enumeration of historical injustices, both small and large, cautions against subscribing to the myths of an idyllic past and utopian future, both of which continue to underpin abuse and violence.

Hawthorne deals with his own victimization through his writing by identifying with Hester Prynne, among others. Tellingly, in his 1849 “Main-Street” he imagines that Roger Williams, who was exiled to Rhode Island for preaching the wrong doctrine among Hawthorne’s own Massachusetts ancestors, was a “gentler spirit, kinder and more expansive ” (although still too energetic a reformer for Hawthorne’s tastes) than the first Salem minister. Moreover, the language used to describe himself in “Custom-House” is

reminiscent of that used to describe Major Molineux, and suggests, intentionality aside, that Hawthorne associated himself with one in “tar-and-feather dignity.” His self-presentation as a “decapitated surveyor” (34) and the ritual suicide of his art in “Feathertop”¹¹ suggests his disillusioned self-removal from public life: “I am a citizen of somewhere else” (35). Of course, although Hawthorne felt the criticism more personally during his customs-house ousting, as much of his literary endeavors illustrate, he already knew about the community’s tendency to morally map bodies.

The Black Stain of Blood

In *The House of Seven Gables*, Hawthorne discursively tars Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, whose outwardly honorable reputation masks his inner malevolence. Hawthorne depends on dark imagery to portray the Pyncheon’s secret theft of the Maules’ land, the subsequent legend of Matthew Maule’s curse, the house and land itself, and the descendants who continue to thirst for materialism and power. During Hawthorne’s lost battle to regain his customs-house post, his harshest critic was Reverend Charles, Salem Whig and witchcraft expert. As Larry Reynolds shows, Hawthorne in turn modeled Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon after Upham, depicting this wicked character’s death with sadistic excess (*Devils* 164). Judge Pyncheon’s outward smile and unchallenged public praise mask a sin, hidden away from even himself, which is hinted at in the comparison of complexions between the old Colonel Pyncheon’s imposing portrait and the current Judge Pyncheon. The colonel’s face had a “ruddy English hue, that showed its warmth through all the duskiness of the colonel’s weather-beaten cheek”

¹¹ See John Wright.

while the judge's face lacked this warmth "and had taken a sallow shade, the established complexion of his country-men" (100). The reddish flush on the colonel's face illustrates the first generation's sin had not completely robbed the Colonel of his heart; by the time of the Judge's generation, the descendant's pale and ashen face connotes his "iron heart." That is, though Jaffrey's face dons a smile, the heart within pumps no "life-blood" of affection or sympathy toward his fellow men. He seldom consciously thinks of his great sin against Clifford, and when he does, his instinct is self-preservation, not repentance, as his skin reveals when he impatiently demands of Hephzibah to summon her brother, "with a harsh, frown, while his brow grew almost a black purple, in the shadow of the room" (189). Jaffrey's sin of omission, of not lending testimony to Clifford's innocence of murder, his "inward criminality" is "indeed, black and damnable" (244). In concealing the truth and letting his cousin suffer and mentally rot in prison for most of his life, Jaffrey gained wealth, property, and prominence.

But the house executes Maule's curse, incriminating Judge Pyncheon's body with imagery which tars and animalizes him. Indeed, the text lingers over Jaffrey's death scene, as he lays motionless in an armchair, to blacken and dirty his exterior, bringing him to poetic justice. The shadows in the room "grow deeper," "spread wider," and "creep slowly over [its] various objects." However,

The gloom has not entered from without; it has brooded here all day, and now, taking its own inevitable time, will possess itself of everything. The judge's face, indeed, rigid, and singularly white, refuses to melt into this universal solvent. Fainter and fainter grows the light. It is as if another

double-handful of darkness had been scattered through the air. Now it is no longer gray, but sable. (216)

Not coming from the outside night sky, nor from the shadow of the elm tree, the “gloom” manifests from inside the room itself and is given properties of a liquid substance. The dark “solvent” amplifies as if some agent has thrown “another double-handful of darkness.” As in life the Judge’s white skin refused to belong to “the universal throb” (“Ethan Brand” 231), in death the heartless pallor resists “melt[ing] into this universal solvent.” When the gloom becomes black, the Judge’s white skin complexion becomes a “swarthy whiteness,--we shall venture to marry these ill-agreeing words,--the swarthy whiteness of Judge Pyncheon's face. The features are all gone; there is only the paleness of them left” (217). The black gloom of his “inward criminality,” coupled with the “paleness” of his skin, connoting a lack of heart, create this “swarthy whiteness” as he sits, almost tarred in death. Even a rat and a fly have more life in them than Jaffrey ever did, as the former “meditate[s] a journey of exploration over this great black bulk” (220), while a “common house-fly,” attracted by the stench, takes the liberty: “a fly...which has smelt out Governor Pyncheon, and alights, now on his forehead, now on his chin, and now, Heaven help us! is creeping over the bridge of his nose, towards the would-be chief-magistrate’s wide-open eyes!” (212). Hawthorne depicts interconnected “darknesses” by drawing on imagery of shadow and light, death and decay, and complexions of skin to symbolize moral and spiritual conditions. Larry Reynolds observes that Hawthorne “blackens the body as he sends the judge’s soul to hell,” and, although Hawthorne executes his literary revenge on Upham, “the underlying

point of the romance...is the baseness at the heart of the current political system” in which every “house” hides a decaying corpse (172-3). The darkness here, like tar, connotes Jaffrey’s depravity and expulsion to hell, but it too is a surface that does not penetrate Judge Pyncheon’s interiors from which only the heartless “paleness” emanates. Expelled from life, Jaffrey no longer has the power to manipulate appearances to his benefit and to others’ detriment.¹² However, out of the realm his fiction, as Hawthorne saw, the legitimacy of external order, buttressed by both legal and social constructions, continually reasserts its power. Naming, marking, or tarring a person shames that individual while materially empowering the namers, markers, or tar-and-featherers.

**Surviving Exhibition and “Coldness of Former Friends”
in “Tar-and-feather Dignity”**

Hawthorne was never comfortable with being on display or being the object of public scrutiny, so he admired those who could bear both in dignity. “Perhaps the noblest species of courage is, in good cause, to brave the bad opinion of the world” Hawthorne wrote in “Courage” (*CE* 23:41). In a related sentiment, during his Civil War visit to Washington, he wrote to his daughter Una, “I have shaken hands with Uncle Abe, and have seen various notabilities, and am infested by people who want to exhibit me as a lion” (*CE* 18:437). In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne continues to explore the idea from “The Old Tory” of a victim of “public opprobrium” who “remained behind to

¹² Christopher Castiglia convincingly argues that “In killing off ‘Governor’ Pyncheon, Hawthorne kills off as well the legitimacy of external order over citizens who... continually exceed the law’s ability to name them in ways that produce shame and guilt to the named, and power and profit for the namer” (480). I am indebted to his idea in closing this paragraph.

endure the coldness of former friends.” Clearly, Hester Prynne is a radical thinker in her community, but by several parallels of language, her moral position is likened to that of Major Molineux. Though she makes her way to the scaffold proudly, “she perchance underwent an agony from every footstep of those that thronged to see her, as if her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon” (36). As the tar-and-feather mob “trampl[es] an old man’s heart” in “My Kinsman,” the throng gathered to see Hester punished “trample upon” her heart. The metaphor of Hester feeling as if her heart has been flung outside her body bespeaks the terrifying power of the crowd to reach inside her private self. The brand of the scarlet letter upon Hester’s chest, along with her display on the scaffold, doubly traumatize her—she is not only marked as a transgressor, but also she becomes the focal object of the collective gaze.

Hawthorne, interested in the extent to which an individual has agency in such circumstances, begins the novel with the scene of public opprobrium, rather than ending with it as he does in “My Kinsman,” to explore the consequences for the person who stays among the community that shamed him or her. Ultimately, Hester turns the stigma of adultery into her source of agency. Hester is first described as having a “richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes” (36). As she exits the prison, she is already set up to have a deep integrity within: “She was lady-like, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace, which is now recognized as its indication” (36). In other words, she does not simply perform dignified behavior; her dignity emanates from within. The reaction of

the crowd to her release from prison is telling, in terms of their assumptions of interior and exterior states: “Those who...had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped” (136). Her “exquisitely painful” beauty and her dress, which was “modeled much after her own fancy” and which “seemed to express the attitude of her spirit,” illustrate the correlation between her outer appearance and her inner self. Thus, while the townspeople expect her to be smeared by darkness, in her suffering, Hawthorne assigns imagery of light to show her refusal to let her spirit be broken. She even “fantastically embroidered and illuminated” the scarlet letter she had to don as punishment, thus exerting some control over the town’s symbol of shame. The letter still had “the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself” (136). Hester’s fate will be isolation from her community, but not only because they are repulsed by her crime; through suffering in dignity, her soul expands beyond that of ordinary people. The letter, like tarring and feathering, serves as a form of public shaming meant to isolate the victim from the community. While Hester stays within her community, tar-and-feather victims fled for fear of their lives. Through representations of these differing forms of expulsion, Hawthorne wanted to understand how a psychologically scarred member remains in the very community which inflicted those wounds.

Trampled by Footsteps of War

If in the early republic the tar and feathers, Peter Shaw argues, symbolized regicide, as the nation marched into civil war, the ritual increasingly foreshadowed the fratricide to come. Hawthorne was thinking about this fratricide when he “scattered” his “peaceful fantasies” in *Our Old Home* (1863), trying to unite Americans through similar, however Anglo-centric, origins. Each variant of his unfinished *American Claimant Manuscripts* (“The Ancestral Footstep,” “Etherege,” and “Grimshawe”), as Rita Gollin notes, uses footsteps to signify “‘brotherly hatred and attempted murder.’ All are glosses on America’s ties to and severance from England, the archetypal fratricide of Cain, and the inherent fratricide of all civil wars” (163). In attempting to literarily distill the fratricide commencing as he composed *Doctor Grimshawe’s Secret* in 1861, Hawthorne returned again to a treatment of tarring and feathering¹³ more closely than before examining the character of the intended victim and that of the gathering mob. Hawthorne paints a scene in which it is difficult to assign praise or blame, as characters alternate between victims and perpetrators with each passing moment.

The narration describes cruel Doctor Grimshawe as a provincial, yet learned, curmudgeon, who is wedded to his dusty lab of exotic spiders and to his black bottle. Orphaned Ned and Elsie, a distant relation to the doctor, learn to see the good in the doctor after he erupts into an uncharacteristic, spontaneous speech on morality, while he reluctantly grows to entertain almost cordial feelings for them. The whole town,

¹³ Hawthorne perhaps models the attack on the doctor in town after the incident of John Malcolm cudgeling the shoemaker’s child after the little’s sled had had collided with the officer.

however, gossips about his devilish eccentricity and his corruption of the children. As the three stroll around their post-revolutionary American town, women shout from windows “How red his nose is!...he has pulled at the brandy-bottle pretty stoutly to-day, early as it is! Pretty habits those children will learn, between the Devil in the shape of a great spider, and this devilish fellow in his own shape! It were well that our townsmen tarred and feathered the old British wizard!” (*CE XII*: 343). Hawthorne increasingly saw the victimization, public display, and bodily pain and marking involved in tar and feathering as arising out the same sentiment that brought on the witchcraft delusion. The narrator encapsulates the town’s relationship to Doctor Grimshawe:

if we consider the dull little town to be full of exaggerated stories about the Doctor's oddities, many of them forged, all retailed in an unfriendly spirit; misconceptions of a character which, in its best and most candidly interpreted aspects, was sufficiently amenable to censure; surmises taken for certainties; superstitions—the genuine hereditary offspring of the frame of public mind which produced the witchcraft delusion—all fermenting together; and all this evil and uncharitableness taking the delusive hue of benevolent interest in two helpless children;—we may partly judge what was the odium in which the grim Doctor dwelt, and amid which he walked. (343)

As an Englishman still residing in town after the conflict, and a particularly unlikeable person to boot, “Doctor Grim had met with a fortune which befalls many a man with less cause than drew the public attention on this odd humorist” (343). As he walks along, a

boy strikes him with a mud ball, which “incorporate[s]” itself with the man’s beard, and as the doctor chases and captures the boy, others bombard him with mud. Grimshawe proceeds to spank the boy with his cane, provoking the entire town to descend upon him. The mob, “one member of which was raving with delirium tremens, and another... a madman just escaped from bedlam” shout “Down with the old tyrant! Thrash him! Hang him! Tar and feather the viper’s fry! the wizard! the body-snatcher!” (343). The crowd “flashed up like gunpowder along the street” and out of every crevice “rushed fierce avenging forms, threatening at full yell to take vengeance on the grim Doctor” (343). The narrator wonders at the extraordinary speed with which the mob gathers:

It is unaccountable where all this mischievous, bloodthirsty multitude came from,—how they were born into that quietness in such a moment of time! What had they been about heretofore? Were they waiting in readiness for this crisis, and keeping themselves free from other employment till it should come to pass? Had they been created for the moment, or were they fiends sent by Satan in the likeness of a blackguard population?

The sardonic questioning implies that ordinary citizens become transfigured into bloodthirsty devils at the first call of righteous indignation. Among ex-soldiers, sailors, and drunks, who gather at any sign of trouble, the father of the spanked boy, “who had never shown heretofore any care for his street-bred progeny,” and the mother, likened to the devil and a witch, come to seek vengeance (343). Ironically, the absentee parents suddenly fret about their child. While they certainly are justified in protecting their son

from the doctor's heavy whipping, that initial justification descends into a pretense, cloaking further violence. Meanwhile, the equally blameworthy and devilish Doctor Grimshawe, "with that fierce dark face of his,—his muddy beard all flying abroad, dirty and foul, his hat fallen off, his red eyes flashing fire,—was belaboring the poor hinder end of the unhappy urchin, paying off upon that one part of the boy's frame the whole score which he had to settle with the rude boys of the town" (343). As the crowd shouts, "Seize the old scoundrel! the villain! the Tory! the dastardly Englishman! Hang him in the web of his own devilish spider,—'t is long enough! Tar and feather him! tar and feather him!" the narrator comments:

It was certainly one of those crises that show a man how few real friends he has, and the tendency of mankind to stand aside, at least, and let a poor devil fight his own troubles, if not assist them in their attack. Here you might have seen a brother physician of the grim Doctor's greatly tickled at his plight: or a decorous, powdered, ruffle-shirted dignitary, one of the weighty men of the town, standing at a neighbor's corner to see what would come of it. (343)

Hawthorne thus indicts those who "stand aside" as well as those who victimize, alluding to fratricide by speculating that a "brother physician" might not only attack Doctor Grimshawe or watch as others do, but also delight in the spectacle of the doctor's victimization. Indeed, even the "respectable" citizens of the town—a dignitary, a deacon and his church members, and a government official—all recall the parts of Grimshawe's character that stand contrary to their own affinities, justifying their refusal to come to his

aid. Only after a passerby attempts to induce peace, and is accidentally knocked unconscious, do these important men decide to yell out, dispersing the crowd. His final use of the ritual, therefore, complicates justifications for violence, suggesting that not even odious members of society merit tar and feathers. Recalling the betrayals of loyalty he felt throughout his life, Hawthorne bemoans the sudden amnesia of past civility, if not friendship, that people exhibit when they are seduced by the power available to them through their own moral indignation or through thoughtlessly or pragmatically joining that of others.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: TARRING AND FEATHERING BEYOND THE CIVIL WAR

The Compromise of 1850, which postponed the taking up of arms between the North and the South for over a decade, nevertheless polarized the country, especially as the Fugitive Slave Law was put into practice. Furthermore, the issue of abolition grew more pressing, especially to the North, which then became implicated in the ownership of human property. Several decades preceding the Compromise and leading up to the Civil War, abolitionists, and preachers and printers of anti-slavery opinions (and sometimes, those who merely moved from the North to the South) became targets of tar-and-feather mobs. This rise of violence leading to the Civil War accompanied the consolidation of a “white” American identity, and the project of representing national identity in explicitly racialized terms was “so total that by 1857, US Supreme Court Roger Taney could argue for the majority in the case of *Dredd Scott v. Sanford* that African Americans are ‘so far inferior, that they ha[ve] no rights which the *white* man [is] bound to respect’” (Levander 33; emphasis mine). In the revolutionary times, British officials and loyalist sympathizers were dehumanized in an attempt to satirize their purportedly inflated social personae, but by the time of the Civil War, ideas of racial difference were much more crystallized, resulting in the adoption of more racial overtones concerning the practice of tarring. Moreover, the ritual counted as only one of the number of more overtly violent ways, such as lynching, whipping, or killing, to victimize abolitionists.

Abolitionists were abused in ways that mirrored the rhetoric of slaves suffering under their masters. Often, the victim would be whipped first and then racialized by tar and feathers. Sometimes, slave-owners even bade their slaves to inflict the punishment, increasing the insult by using the very people abolitionists sought to free to viciously reject their alleged encroachments.¹⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1856 *Dred* alludes to the tarring and featherings perpetrated against abolitionists who dared to preach or print in the South. In Stowe's novel, father Bonnie espouses pro-slavery rhetoric, vowing to tar and feather abolitionists, while visions of equality between blacks and whites advance Stowe's anti-slavery position. In the novel, the pragmatic Frank Russell, who privately opposes slavery, says, "These negroes are a black well; you never know what's at the bottom" (244). Similarly, white abolitionists, who were seen as duplicitous, were darkened to correspond to the purported color of the slaves they were trying to free.

On the eve of the Civil War,¹⁵ *National Era*, a weekly antislavery journal where Harriet Beecher Stowe's serialized *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-2) first appeared, published an article ironically entitled "Freedom of Speech in the South." The article proclaimed, "We should literally have no room for anything else, if we were to publish

¹⁴ One January 12, 1860 newspaper report featured two examples of this dimension of anti-abolitionist violence: in one instance, "a preacher was found by a slaveholder preaching to his slaves, and forthwith he made his negroes put the man to death, dig his grave, and bury him on the spot where he was found in the act of preaching. In another instance, a planter caused a peddler from the North to be hanged six times by his negroes, merely in sport, on suspicion of his being an abolitionist" ("Freedom of Speech in the South" n. p.).

¹⁵ As mentioned, this article was published January 12, 1860; hostilities started April 12, 1861 with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina.

all the details of whippings, tar-and-featherings, and hangings, for the utterance of Anti-Slavery opinions in the South, which the mails daily bring us,” adding that anyone from the North, including, “schoolmasters, peddlers, and preachers, have been subjected to all manner of indignity and persecution, and we believe that very few of them are permitted to remain on Southern soil” (n. p.). Even in the North and west, anti-abolitionist sentiment drove mobs to assault editors who, or destroy offices and presses which, printed against slavery, including those of the *National Era*, the *Liberator*, and, most infamously, *The Observer*, which resulted in the death of Elijah Lovejoy. Southerners defended their actions by pointing to slave uprisings, such as Nat Turner’s Rebellion and the San Domingo uprising. In short, they felt threatened by possible slave insurrections, seeing abolitionists as terrorists, fanatics or demagogues threatening their families and lives. A number of literary works both reflected and sought to stem this rising tide of violence. Abolitionist literature, on the other hand, sought to evoke sympathy for slaves and hatred of slaveholders.

Thus tarring and feathering once again attended pre-war violence, but became explicitly connected to race, gaining also a component of gender. On February 2, 1856, the *Louisville Courier* reported that a man named Brady, who was allegedly “guilty of great wrong in...[slandering] the people and institutions of” the South, was tarred and feathered at night by a “party of almost two hundred” men. He was taken to the “court-house yard, and there stripped”:

A large quantity of pitch had been prepared for the occasion, with the contents of several bags of feathers. The clothing was speedily removed

from the body of Brady, and the pitch applied to the thickness of an inch. Then the feathers were nicely planted, and Brady's head shaved close to the scalp, save two locks, near the forehead. He was then set loose, and charged to go and sin no more. More severe punishment (!) would have been administered had it not been for the wife of Brady, a beautiful and [admirable] lady. Brady applied to a physician to remove the tar, but it was found utterly impossible. He left on the morning train for Covington and the land of Black Republicans. (qtd. in "Chivalry in Kentucky" 2)

This Kentucky report simultaneously bespeaks the pride of giving an offender his "just desserts" while refraining from further violence for chivalrous deference to the "fairer sex." Mary Jane Holmes, who spent part of her life in Versailles, Kentucky, teaching there from 1849-1852, may have drawn on incidents like this in *Rose Mather* (1868). Holmes's protagonist Maude de Vere employs feminine privilege derived from Southern chivalry to protect stray Northerners from Southern guerrillas. Lesser known post-Civil War works, like hers, abound in their mention, if not treatment of tarring and feathering.

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), perhaps more than any other literary work, immortalized the punishment dealt out by townspeople to the "Royal Nonesuch" players. Foreshadowing their ultimate fate, the duke and the king are introduced as the former escapes a tar-and-feather mob. Again, when Mary Jane Wilks learns that the two con-men are not really her long-lost uncles, she wants to have them tarred and feathered and thrown into the river (240). Having lied, cheated, tricked, manipulated, abused, and stolen from a number of towns and families through various

scams, the king and duke certainly deserve to be stopped, arrested, and fined. Huck even assents to Mary Jane’s suggestion, but tells her to hold off on exposing them to save Jim, still providing her with details of their next location. But even for all their crime and abuse, when Huck learns that the townspeople know about their scam, he sneaks out with Tom to warn the “royalty.” Seeing a rowdy mob, Huck laments that “we was too late—couldn’t do no good” (290), the “good” being to save two swindling, opportunistic frauds from bodily harm.

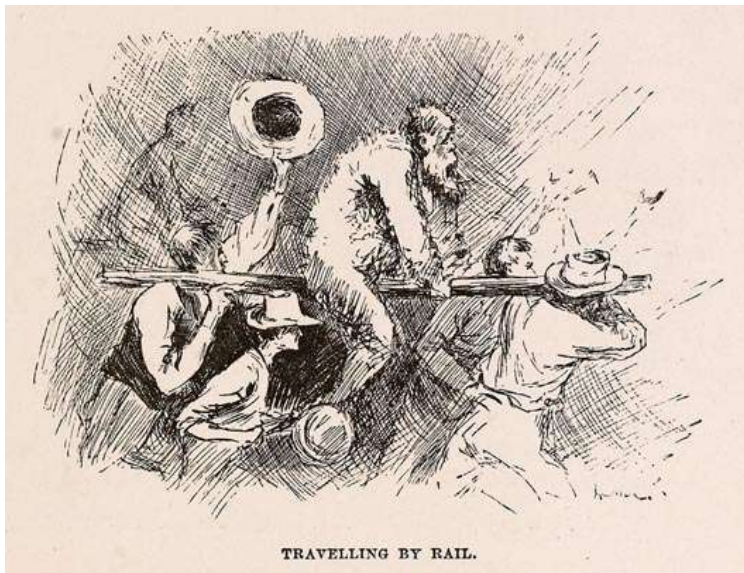


Figure 8. “Traveling by Rail.” E. W. Kemble. Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*. 1884. Los Angeles: U of California P, 2002. 1 May 2013. Commons.wikimedia.org. Web.

Realizing that the “good” he did by helping Mary Jane now makes him feel guilty, Huck wishes he could just kill his conscience, which is always “after him.” Huck learns that the townspeople went to the show “looking very innocent, and laid low and kept dark” until the show was in progress (290). The town’s collective performance

mirrors that of the confidence men as the townspeople become “low” and “dark”—morally degraded—waiting to enact their violent purpose they see as just. Huck’s dilemma of conscience—what is “good”?—and description of the tarred and feathered men directly juxtaposes the illustration of the men ridden out of town on a rail (see Figure 8). E. W. Kemble’s caption is “Traveling by Rail,” employing the euphemistic tradition of describing tar-and-feathers. The understatement of the caption, comic only if one thinks the two frauds deserve their punishment, implies justice has been done.

Huck’s reaction stands in contrast to this uncomplicated judgment:

I see they had the king and the duke astraddle of a rail—that is, I knowed it *was* the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn’t look like nothing in the world that was human—just looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes. Well, it made me sick to see it, and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn’t ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another. (emphasis original; 290)

The past tense—that it *was* the two scoundrels—suggests they are no longer themselves or, therefore, their past actions, allowing for Huck’s visceral reaction against the scene. Seeing the two in dehumanized form, with a queasy stomach, Huck lets go of “any hardness” toward them. The image of “monstrous big soldier-plumes” comments more on the mob than the king and duke; the two sides become part of one large soldier-body. Astride the rail and elevated above the crowd, which becomes the soldier’s body proper,

the king and duke become feathers in the soldier's hat, attesting to the crowd's power and masculinity. Huck tries to ward off feelings of guilt by denying any complicity with the crowd and ultimately pities the tarred-and-feathered king and duke, revealing that even those who deserve blame do not warrant punishment outside the law. Of course, Huck becomes Pap and the king and duke reappear unreformed in Twain's later writings, but that is beside the point.

Huck Finn also alludes to the increasing activity of the Ku Klux Klan during the post-war aftermath when Colonel Sherburn shames a would-be lynch mob into dispersing. He accuses the crowd of cowardice, of tarring and feathering poor cast-out women, and says, "If any real lynching's going to be done, it will be done in the dark, southern fashion; and when they come, they'll bring their masks" (191). From the Reconstruction and its revival in the early twentieth century, the Ku Klux Klan began using tarring and feathering as one only form terrorism against African Americans or whites who aided them. In *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, David Mark Chalmers writes that one statistic from Texas attributes "the Klan with over 500 tar-and-feather parties and whipping bees, plus other threats, assaults, and homicides" (41-42).¹⁶ By the mid 1930's, noted columnist for the Pittsburgh *Courier* referred to the south as the "tar and feather belt" (George Schuyler, qtd. in Krenn 139). In *American Anatomies*, Robyn Weigman argues that at the end of the nineteenth century, lynching, which frequently employed castration, becomes racialized,

¹⁶ Like this one, statistics I have found do not distinguish among the types of violence enacted

sexualized, and gendered around the myth of the black male rapist. Identifying lynching as an interesting case of Foucault's punishment and discipline, she asserts: "lynching must be viewed in its performative, spectacular dimension, as a disciplinary activity that communalizes white power while territorializing the black body and its movement through social space" (13). With its association with racist violence, tarring and feathering increasingly earned public scorn during the twentieth century.

As we witness various acts of terror here and abroad, recent American novels, films, and series take up tarring and feathering, examining how communities violently mete out blame and discipline. My work locates tarring and feathering in the tradition of rhetorical acts that respond to a perceived ideological menace and reveal deep cultural and communal anxieties. This social phenomenon appeals to an audience with the intent of modifying belief about or behavior toward an individual who represents a set of beliefs deemed threatening. Tarring and feathering is an interesting case of the *ad hominem* tactic because, at its base, it is an attempt to attack character in order to take away credibility, and thus the social power, or inculcate against the social contagion the individual represents. This state of abjection forced upon unsuspecting and frequently innocent folks forces a conversation about anxieties that often play out on skin. Oliver notes that:

Colonization and occupation attempt to force the colonized to take on the white man's anxiety over his uncertain and ambiguous borders (both physical and psychological). This anxiety is manifest in the white man's

phobia, which acts as a defense against unwanted affects that are projected onto racialized others. (94)

The “colonization” associated with the co-opting of another body for the express purpose of creating an Other allows us to see the symbolic function of such an act. Kristeva suggests, “One is then led to conceive of the opposition between pure and impure not as an archetype but as *one* coding of the differentiation of the speaking subject as such, a coding of his repulsion in relation to the other in order to autonomize himself. The pure/impure opposition represents...the striving for identity” (*PH* 82). In short, then, the act of tarring and feathering, and thus *impurifying* a body, creates an identity which cannot be assimilated anymore into the body politic. However, through the act of tarring and feathering, a national identity begins to appear.

Beginning with the smear campaigns introduced in the presidential election of 1800, and continuing through such twentieth century events as McCarthyism and HUAC, blackening an opponent has been a popular suppression tactic in American politics. This blackening renders one as “radically separate, loathsome,” and becomes “[a] ‘something’” that is unrecognizable and survives “[o]n the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture” (Kristeva, *PH* 2). Whether it is the character, the values, or even the skin, this blackening separates a citizen from the rest of society, causing him or her to become an individuated outsider, a foreigner, a being which, as Kristeva informs us in *Strangers to Ourselves*, we can all become. It forces a recognition of sorts, a discovery of a “disturbing otherness” so much so that the

“threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid ‘us’” is disturbed. However, it is not until we realize that *anyone* can be blackened that we are confronted with our own uncanny strangeness, one that we cannot enjoy. “[W]e are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners. . . [This] sets the difference within us in its most bewildering shape and presents it as the ultimate condition of our being *with* others” (Kristeva, *SO*, emphasis original 192).

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