Bewildered in Salem:
Speech Acts and Sexuality in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"

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This essay examines speech acts and sexuality in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," relying on Lacanian psychoanalysis, etymology, and speech act theory to identify how Brown acts as a split subject. While many scholars have taken a psychosexual approach to Hawthorne's tale, critics still treat Brown's voyage into the forest like a morality tale. This paper's unique approach to the story focuses entirely on the passages before Brown departs from his home and after he returns from the forest, interpreting the man's subsequent trauma as an internal bifurcation rather than a spiritual crisis. When examined side-by-side, the few paragraphs before and after Brown's forest experience reveal a split in the main character, vis-à-vis his relationship to others' speech. Specifically, an eventual fusion of sex and speech puts pressure on Brown's reception of speech acts. This fusion grants Brown sexual productivity but traumatizes him in the process.

Goodman Brown has no first name. To be precise, Nathaniel Hawthorne never grants the eponymous hero of "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) anything but a title. As far back as the thirteenth century, "Goodman" referred to "the male head of the household."[1] By the 1500s, the term would be used with the

possessive pronoun "her" to indicate a man's relationship to a woman.[2] These definitions lasted through the 1700s, the historical backdrop of the story, as well as the 1800s, when Hawthorne wrote the tale. In either case, "Goodman" acts as a cultural signifier which emphasizes masculinity and, implicitly, male sexual productivity. As for the man's surname, "Brown" suggests an unpleasant kind of liminality. Since the eighteenth century, "Brown" could mean "duskiness" and "gloom" — neither of which sounds pleasant, but neither of which implies complete darkness.[3] In short, the man only has two identifiers: an impersonal, loaded title and a bleak surname that he inherited from previous generations.

To contrast, Brown's wife Faith is only referred to by her first name. One might assume that she appropriated her husband's surname at marriage, but the text never refers to the woman as "Faith Brown," "Mrs. Brown," or even "Goody Brown." The couple may possess a ceremonial bond, but Hawthorne does not conjoin the two of them in language. Even when referring to the characters by their proper names, one must resort to "Brown and Faith" from the information provided — a structurally unparallel pairing. This imbalance becomes underscored by the packed signifier of the woman's own name, "Faith," which, in a secular sense, pertains to the "quality of fulfilling one's trust or promise."[4] As the story unfolds, a lack of sexual fulfillment and the inability to connect with others seem central to Brown's struggle. The use of signifiers instead of proper names, along with the disjointed pairing of "Brown and Faith," could imply a somewhat incongruous relationship between body and language.

Hawthorne himself often played with the power of names. Another story of his, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844), contains a preface by the pseudonymous "Aubépine" — the French word for the Hawthorn plant.[5] Through his pseudonym, he reflects on himself as a writer by saying "he generally contents himself with a very slight embroidery of outward manners, — the faintest possible counterfeit of real life, — and endeavors to create an interest by some less obvious peculiarity of the subject" (229). This "counterfeit of real life" that reveals some hidden "peculiarity of the subject" sounds like a kind of symbolic order — not language describing *reality* in the traditional sense but, rather, as a sort of signifying chain. The "embroidery of outward manners" signifies some kind of familiar human experience, which, in turn, signifies "some less obvious peculiarity of the subject." Even in his choice of pseudonym, Hawthorne hints at a kind of double meaning. In a sense,

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[1] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd ed., s.v. "goodman."
[2] *OED*, s.v. "goodman."

[3] *OED*, s.v. "brown."
[4] *OED*, s.v. "faith."
[5] In addition to the preface of "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hawthorne also used this pseudonym in some love letters to his wife Sophia. For more information, see Robert L. Gale, *A Nathaniel Hawthorne Encyclopedia*, (New York: Greenwood, 1991), 22.

"Aubépine" does not translate directly to his name. The word signifies a plant, and only by dissociating the meaning from the word does the pseudonym make sense. "Aubépine" seems like a mask behind a mask.

With Brown, the absence of a name might hint at some kind of extreme vacancy. According to Bruce Fink, whose analyses of literary and cultural sources are as trenchant as his treatment of Lacanian theory, proper names can serve as an individual's most internalized signifier, "inextricably tied to his or her subjectivity . . . [that] will become the signifier of his or her very absence as a subject, standing in for him or her."[6] In this sense, Brown even lacks the personalized signifier for his absence as a subject; the stand-in signifier for his absence, "Goodman," has been coded by others for centuries preceding Brown's subjectivity. From this perspective, the conflict Brown faces in the narrative starts long before the character's birth.

Such a broad focus, however, makes detailed scrutiny of the text impossible. While the majority of the story depicts a surreal trip into a nighttime forest gathering, the focus of this paper will be the brief sections before Brown leaves and after he returns. At the beginning, Brown enjoys a happy yet fruitless marriage. By the end, he has many children, but he becomes cold and detached from those around him. When examined side-by-side, the few paragraphs before and after Brown's forest experience reveal a change in the man's relationship to others' speech. Specifically, an eventual fusion of sex and speech puts pressure on Brown's reception of speech acts. This fusion grants Brown sexual productivity but traumatizes him in the process.

Rather than viewing this fusion dichotomously (as two different Browns, for instance: pre-fusion and post-fusion), one might consider Brown, in Lacanian terms, as a split subject. Recognizing the language of a subject's unconscious "enables us to grasp at the price of what splitting (*Spaltung*) he has thus been constituted."[7] This split creates the unconscious in every human subject and should not itself be viewed as threatening. However, the fusion of sex and speech that results from this process causes Brown to become cold and isolated. This paper's unique approach to the story will examine why, after returning from the forest, "Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around [himself] like a bewildered man" (95).

Psychoanalytic literary scholarship of "Young Goodman Brown" usually biographizes Hawthorne or explores a Puritanical psychology of sexual guilt in the story. Often, these two approaches coincide. One notable exception is David Greven's *The Fragility of Manhood: Hawthorne, Freud, and the Politics of Gender*. Though Greven uses Freud and Lacan as a foundation for his argument — and even, at times, considers the "split subject" — the book focuses on narcissism, and the "schism" he explores puts tension on idealized

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[6] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 53.

[7] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 579.

masculinity versus age, rather than internal bifurcation. Another scholar whose argument falls more in line with the subject of this paper is Frederick C. Crews, who claims that Hawthorne should not be viewed as a "dogmatic moralist," for the fiction writer's "keynote was neither piety nor impiety, but ambivalence."[8] Crews suggests that Brown begins the story with a childish sexual mindset,[9] which aligns, more or less, with this paper's approach to the story. That said, even if Crews refrains from didactic interpretations, he does maintain a certain ethical lens. Brown develops, in Crews' view, a "distinctly pathological abhorrence [that] has come from a deeper initiation into human depravity than his normal townsmen will ever know."[10]

Indeed, critics who try departing from the theological approach still tend to treat "Young Goodman Brown" like a morality tale. John Neary claims that Brown "undergoes more than an encounter with his own private perversity; he has a kind of darkly sacramental experience of something deeply real, of *depth* itself."[11] S. Selina Jamil argues that Hawthorne uses his story "to ridicule the power of the Puritan world of official virtue and, ultimately, to ridicule the power of evil itself."[12] In his well-known essay about the story, Michael J. Colacurcio goes so far as to claim that Brown, because of his bad faith, "deserves whatever happens."[13] Even James C. Keil, who expands upon the psychosexual readings of "Young Goodman Brown" that gained traction in the 1950s, maintains a certain focus on the story's supposed warnings. In Keil's view, Hawthorne seems interested in how traditional notions of gender and space cannot be broken "without some psychological and moral costs."[14] Perhaps this tired emphasis on Puritan morality explains why "Young Goodman Brown" scholarship has waned a bit. Even in the contemporary criticism that exists, the tendency to moralize remains. Despite Dan Clinton's clever exploration of sensory language, for instance, he describes "Goodman Brown's lapse from a pleasurable degree of superstition into a delusion with lasting moral consequences."[15] Moreover, the majority of "Young Goodman

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[8] Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 6-7.

[9] Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers*, 103.

[10] Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers*, 106.

[11] John Neary, "Shadows and Illuminations: Spiritual Journeys to the Dark Side in 'Young Goodman Brown' and *Eyes Wide Shut*," *Religion and the Arts* 10, no. 2 (2006): 255, *EBSCO*.

[12] S. Selina Jamil, "Carnivalesque Freedom in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" *Explicator* 65, no. 3 (2007): 143, *ProQuest*.

[13] Michael J. Colacurcio, "Visible Sanctity and Specter Evidence: The Moral World of Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, 2nd ed., ed. James McIntosh (New York: Norton, 2013), 430.

[14] James C. Keil, "Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': Early Nineteenth-Century and Puritan Constructions of Gender," *New England Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (1996): 36, http://jstor.org/stable/366302.

[15] Dan Clinton, "Holographic Hawthorne," *J19* 3, no. 2 (2015): 417, *ProQuest*.

Brown" scholarship focuses almost entirely on the events in the forest. As neither approach pertains to this argument, the scholarly perspective of this essay will focus on Lacanian psychoanalysis, etymology, and speech act theory rather than literary criticism.

In order to substantiate Brown's initial sexual inaction, the relationship between the man and his wife Faith must be explored. One way to do this is by examining the sexual subtext associated with each character. Faith is consistently associated with the labial image of pink ribbons. Even in her introduction, this symbol comes into the foreground, with Faith "letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap, while she called to Goodman Brown" (84). Already, the text establishes a physical distance between the married couple. "Calling" attracts the attention of someone far away, insinuating spatial separation. However, this supposed distance becomes undermined by the following sentence, where Faith's voice softens to a whisper without any information about the distance being bridged. Not only does "whisper" connote a sense of intimacy, Faith speaks "when her lips were close to [Brown's] ear" (84). Both of these details complicate the initial sense of space between the couple. In other words, an implication of physical distance remains despite their close proximity with one another; Brown and Faith are near to each other but not quite touching.

When one reads "her lips" as both oral and labial, the touch not happening becomes particularly significant. The wind that Faith "[lets] play with the pink ribbons" indicates sexual inactivity between the man and the woman: the symbol of her fertility is stimulated by a passing breeze rather than by her husband. Put another way, the ribbons are aroused by an absence. Lacanian desire is a function of lack and excess, an incommensurability that could be likened to an effect of absence, with lack being recognized as "the continual displacement of the ever-same structural lack or split."[16] From this context, the absence that stimulates Faith not only implies sexual inactivity; it also portends some kind of scission. Since the narrative perspective privileges Brown, this hinted scission reveals more about the husband than Faith (more on this later).

As a symbol for lack, wind could imply a specific type of absence. Dating as far back as the thirteenth century, the term "wind" could indicate "Empty talk, vain or ineffectual speech."[17] In this way, the sexual lack between Brown and Faith could coincide with a failure of speech. What complicates this notion — and what hints at Brown's eventual scission — is that the failure of speech itself stimulates Faith. Specifically, the masturbatory image of playing with pink ribbons is carried out by a word that can mean "empty talk." Before Brown departs, sex and speech have yet to successfully fuse.[18]

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[16] Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004), 22.

[17] *OED*, s.v. "wind."

[18] Another nineteenth century text, Emily Dickinson's "Wild nights! - Wild nights!" (1861), uses wind as a sexual image as well. While many read this poem as an exciting release, the wind arguably signifies an unwelcome or aggressive sexual experience. See Paul Faris,

While the wind's symbolism gives useful information about the dynamics of Brown's marriage, the language adds important implications. "Play with the pink ribbons" evokes an image of sexual stimulation, but the verb "play" also has a childish connotation. Unlike "brushed" or "ruffled," "play" supposes a certain level of exploration — necessitated, implicitly, by inexperience. From this perspective, the image works as a metaphor for masturbation. After all, the woman's ribbons are "played with" despite Brown's physical disconnection to her. Even by definition, "play" means "to exercise or occupy oneself."[19] Faith *lets* the ribbons be played with, meaning she allows an absence to "exercise" and "occupy" herself. Moreover, the details of the ribbon add to the masturbatory quality of the image. Not only do the ribbons appear more labial than vaginal; the cap at the end of the ribbons evokes a clitoris.[20] Unlike yonic symbols, which tend to signify a womb, ribbons cannot contain anything the way a cave or a cauldron can. Instead, Hawthorne's symbol is vulval, making Faith's stimulation be about pleasure, not reproduction. Combining this acceptance of touch with a sense of innocence gives the vulval space a safe and welcoming quality.

This concept is accentuated by the statement that Brown's departure gives Faith "a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons" (85). If her "melancholy air" exists "*in spite of* her pink ribbons," then "melancholy" and "ribbons" are incongruous. Most importantly, Faith's "melancholy" feeling and the vulval space do not fuse, even in the midst of Brown's departure. Despite Faith's sexual arousal and curiosity, the vulval realm appears undisturbed by her partner's distance. On the one hand, Faith appears sexually welcoming to her husband. On the other hand, Brown's decision to leave provokes no "melancholy" in the vulval space.

To negotiate this paradox, one must consider the narrative perspective. With a narrator partial to Goodman Brown, the presentation of Faith is filtered through the central character's psyche. This split between Faith's "melancholy" and her "pink ribbons" comes from Brown's mind and not the woman's. If anything, the welcoming vulval presence might have driven him away. Brown never explains why he must undertake this so-called "journey," but he emphasizes that he must depart "'twixt [night] and sunrise" (85). Simply put, Brown rejects Faith's sexual invitation and insists he must leave at nighttime. Though Brown makes no comment about what he hopes to achieve,

"Eroticism in Emily Dickinson's 'Wild Nights!'" *New England Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1967): 271, http://jstor.org/stable/363772.

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[19] *OED*, s.v. "play."

[20] Darrel Abel also acknowledges the metonymy of the pink ribbons in "Young Goodman Brown," but he does not call the image vulval or vaginal. Instead, he calls the item "a badge of feminine innocence," largely because of the "immemorial custom of decking baby girls in pink ribbons." See Darrel Abel, "Black Glove and Pink Ribbon: Hawthorne's Metonymic Symbols," *New England Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1969): 169, http://jstor.org/stable/363663. This argument seems shortsighted, especially since the color pink was more associated with boys than girls in the nineteenth century.

he claims that "after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven" (85). As some scholars have pointed out, this image is reminiscent of a young boy clinging to his mother, giving Brown a sense of innocence — similar, in a sense, to Faith's playfulness.[21] At the same time, an implication of sexuality emerges from the image of a woman helping to raise a man up. By definition, "cling" means "To adhere together in a stiff or firm mass."[22] In this way, "clinging" to Faith implies some sort of physical fusion with her. However, Brown plans to cling to her *skirts* — a garment designed to cover a woman "from the waist downward."[23] The man may conjoin with an element of his wife, but only an element that covers her lower body — vulva and all. (Notably, this dynamic reveals what Brown *plans* to attain, not what he *will* attain. Partial sexual fusion appears to be Brown's desired outcome.) In short, the prospect of having a partner frightens him.

Metaphor and metonymy synthesize to imply sexual inaction. The phrase "play with the pink ribbons" metaphorically evokes masturbation because the ribbons metonymically suggest a vulva. Even still, implications of sexual inactivity are not reducible to the story's symbolism. One of the few pieces of information Hawthorne provides about the couple's relationship is the brevity of their marriage. According to Brown, just three months have passed since the wedding (85). From a biological standpoint, three months is ample time to have initiated a pregnancy. Showing no signs of fertilization by this time, one must assume that Faith's husband has either made no attempts at reproduction or that his efforts were futile.[24] The text gives no indication either way, and the circumstances of Brown's sexual inaction are only hinted at. For example, Faith begs her husband to "sleep in your own bed to-night," so that she will not be left alone (85). By acknowledging that her husband's departure will leave a vacancy in the bedroom, Faith insinuates that after three short months of marriage, the bed is the proper place for him to be. More than that, the bed is *his*. Faith could have told her husband to "sleep in *our* bed," but she gives him possession of the space. While the pronoun "his" could suggest that Faith and Brown sleep in separate beds, the underlying implication is that they have been sleeping together. After all, Brown's planned absence distresses Faith, meaning Brown has been in bed with her in nights past. With this in mind, the

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[21] Keil, for instance, interprets the image in this way, for it "bears witness to the difficulty Brown has in differentiating love of mother from love of wife." See Keil, "Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" 44.

[22] *OED*, s.v. "cling."

[23] *OED*, s.v. "skirt."

[24] That being said, the three-month timeline is only relevant if it marks the beginning of the couple's sexual interaction. It can be noted that, from a cultural perspective, the historical setting of "Young Goodman Brown" was rigid in its views on premarital intercourse. To expect that Goodman Brown would not transgress from his culture's customs is easy — and perhaps a little tempting. However, such assumptions do not necessarily validate that attempts at reproduction could only have begun on the couple's wedding night. Faith's expressed concerns about her husband's departure are, in this matter, much more revealing.

couple's intimate distance (suggested by Faith's calling and whispering) resonates in the bedroom as well. The couple shares a closeness while maintaining a simultaneous disconnection.

Faith hints at this dynamic herself. Specifically, she pleads with her husband to "tarry with me this night . . . of all nights in the year" (85). "Tarry" is a revealing word choice here. Rather than asking her husband to "stay," Faith uses a verb that can mean "postpone" — particularly regarding another person.[25] Faith does not ask her husband to *abandon* his trip but to *wait* before leaving, giving his departure a sense of inevitability. Furthermore, by requesting that her husband "tarry *with me*," Faith asks for some level of involvement in Brown's postponement. On the surface, this plea suggests Faith bears responsibility for Brown's sexual inaction. However, with the woman's aforementioned sexual openness, such a position seems unlikely. Again, one must take the narrative perspective into account. Deep down, Faith's language is the narrator's language — and the narrator's voice is filtered through Brown. Ultimately, the narrator's depiction of Faith comes from Brown's point of view. When Faith speaks, the words are not so much hers as Brown's *idea* of her words. Any responsibility Faith seems to bear must be viewed as Brown's understanding of the matter.

Nevertheless, Faith conveys useful information about her relationship with her husband. Upon hearing of Brown's imminent departure, Faith laments about being left at home as "a lone woman," revealing not only that the couple is childless, but that, implicitly, no children are on the way (85). In other words, Faith is a single body. Rather than claiming she will feel "alone" or "lonely" in her husband's absence, she expresses grief about being "a lone woman" — a complete being devoid of any extension of life. As if to exacerbate this threatening singularity, Hawthorne puts the exclamation in an existential context. Faith's concerns about being "a lone woman" manifest into "[troubles] with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afeard of herself sometimes" (85). According to the language, Faith's isolation does not incite a fear *for* herself, but the fear *of* herself. The unaccompanied self causes distress, making sexual reproduction more than biologically deterministic. Lack of others in the home incites an identity crisis.

Moreover, by complaining about her "trouble with such dreams *and* such thoughts," Faith distinguishes her thoughts from her dreams; being a single body upsets both her conscious and her unconscious. If one keeps the narrative perspective in mind, Faith's emotional state once again stems back to Brown. The man has insight into his wife's dreams: "Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face," Brown thinks, "as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done to-night" (85). On some level, Brown and Faith share an unconscious understanding of the man's urge to leave. In Lacanian theory, transference involves "desire which lies beyond . . . request — that is fulfilled

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[25] *OED*, s.v. "tarry."

in the dream."[26] Faith's "lone woman" dreams might transfer from Brown's lack. Though Faith worries that isolation will instigate these frightening dreams, some fulfillment might take place in her unconscious. Metonymically, at least, an absence stimulates her, metonymy being central to the intersection between language and dream logic. Lacan describes how one element of a dream is the "transfer of signification that metonymy displays . . . as the unconscious' best means by which to foil censorship."[27] Through metonymy, suppressed desires can be signified. Faith lets the wind play with her pink ribbons as Brown leaves, and despite her conscious protests about her husband's departure, the most frightening aspect of losing him could be the prospect of subliminal satisfaction.

These concepts, however, are challenged by Brown's sexual capacity in the story's final paragraphs. While the narrative opens with fruitlessness despite sexual curiosity, a welcoming vaginal presence, and an expressed anxiety about the isolated self (all of which comes through the presentation of Faith), Brown, upon returning, embodies sexual productivity despite an aged, emotional detachment. He has children, but "a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate, man did he become" (95). While these modifiers paint a picture of Brown's psychological hardening, the heart of the sentence might be "a . . . man did he become." In a conservative sense, attaining virility represents the ultimate achievement of a masculine body. Gaining sexual potency, in this regard, means coming into manhood. At this point, the modifiers complicate matters: the admission that Brown, as a result, has become "stern," "sad," "darkly meditative," and "distrustful" make this apparent maturation seem unsuccessful in some way.

This distress could suggest a traumatic separation from something that has been lost in the process. Brown's bifurcation can be examined in terms of what has been lost as well as what has been attained. Julia Kristeva describes the chora as the pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic space — not reducible to the state of fetal development but part of perpetual processes, or drives, existing in this pre-linguistic realm. These drives, paradoxically, can both dissolve and conglomerate, resulting in a "dualism . . . [that] makes the semiotized body a place of permanent scission."[28] Somewhere between the story's opening and final paragraphs, these drives initiate in Brown. As a split subject, himself a place of permanent scission, Brown acquires some kind of sexual language, which gives him both reproductive capacity and a fear of connecting with others — either sexually, or through speech. All of this points to a larger dynamic, where gaining sexual potency alters Brown's relationship toward speech itself. Nearly all of Brown's encounters with others in the final

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[26] Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 31.

[27] Lacan, *Écrits*, 425.

[28] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 27.

paragraphs are characterized by a prevalence of speech acts.

The fear of connecting with others — either through sex or speech — is the symptom of Brown's repulsion.

Before proceeding any further, "speech act" must have a clear definition. Different schools of thought exist regarding the term, and problems arise when pinpointing the necessary characteristics. Despite his opposition to speech acts in literature, perhaps J.L. Austin should be the place to start.[29] In the simplest sense, Austin's speech acts require certain felicity conditions: the right person must speak within the proper context. As long as these felicity conditions are met, speech possesses, more or less, "the smooth or 'happy' functioning of a performative."[30] That said, too strong a focus on felicity conditions might, in a certain way, nullify the power of the words. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* recognizes that certain speech acts do not require language at all. One can resign from a position or make a vow, for example, through non-verbal forms of communication.[31] In these instances, the "speech act" lacks actual speech, which is the most important element for this argument.[32]

With all these definitions, the attributes of a speech act are qualified by how the speech is given rather than how it is received. What matters in Brown's case is the latter. For this reason, previous notions of what constitute a speech act require a little adjustment. Rather than viewing a speech act as an externalization of one's own language, this paper will consider a speech act as

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[29] Austin argues that "a performative utterance will . . . be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on a stage, or introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy," and one should only acknowledge speech acts given in "ordinary circumstances." See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, 2nd ed., eds. J.O. Urmson and Mariana Sbisà (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1975), 22. Subsequent speech act theorists like Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man do not agree with Austin's dismissal of literary speech acts; J. Hillis Miller explores this argument thoroughly in his book *Speech Acts in Literature*.

[30] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 14.

[31] Mitchell Green, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), s.v. "Speech Acts."

[32] Aside from the issue of felicity conditions, there is also the problem of speaker intention. Attempting to decipher intention can be problematic in many ways, especially because, as Jacques Derrida notes, intentionality always has an unconscious element. See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*., trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 15. Moreover, J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 29, observes an innate paradox in the concern over intentionality. If speaker intention matters most, then authenticity outweighs the speech itself, but if the words matter most, then the speaker must be trusted at face value. That said, John Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," in *Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Literature: An Analytic Approach*, eds. David Davies and Carl Matheson (Buffalo: Broadview, 2008), 14, gives more overt credence to speaker intention. This emphasis extends to literary analysis, where Searle argues that writing can only be regarded as fiction based on "the illocutionary intentions of the author." Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 65, notes that this perspective disempowers readers and has no practical purpose for literary analysis. However, if one should engage in this kind of speculation (the illocutionary equivalent of the classic intentional fallacy), one might say the entire story of "Young Goodman Brown" is itself a speech act.

the internalization of another's language. After all, the important qualifier here is how speech affects Brown. Once a fusion between sex and speech takes place, Brown perceives the internalization of others' language as invasive or threatening. Furthermore, "speech act" and "performative speech" will not be used interchangeably. Unless specifically identified as being performative, the term "speech act" will refer to any act of using one's voice, such as sermons, prayers, songs, or exchanges between interlocutors.

After returning from the forest, Brown spots a minister strolling a graveyard to "meditate his sermon," insinuating a connection between death and speech (95). Instead of "writing" or "reciting" his sermon, the minister "meditates" it. As a transitive verb, "meditate" has meant, since the sixteenth century, "to conceive or design mentally" and "without construction."[33] To "meditate" something into existence suggests tapping into the unconscious, particularly when there is a lack of preposition. The minister does not meditate *about* his sermon or meditate *on* his sermon; he meditates the sermon into being. Moreover, if one requires a specific environment for the meditation to be successful, then the significance of the place must be taken into consideration. The minister chooses the graveyard for the purpose of conceiving speech: he takes "a walk along the graveyard *to . . .* meditate his sermon" (95).[34] In a certain sense, the minister uses the graveyard as a conduit to his speech, making the minister's language that of the graveyard's as well. At least, Brown perceives that some kind of channeling is taking place, with the graveyard providing a necessary environment for speech to flow from the minister's unconscious.[35]

In this regard, the graveyard exemplifies the text's relationship between speech and reproduction in a stark dynamic. From one perspective, a burial site implicates finality to these processes: for a dead individual, the opportunity to perpetuate human life has expired. On the other hand, a buried body is subject to new forms of regeneration by virtue of its nourishment to the earth. The graveyard, in a sense, symbolizes the transmogrification — rather than the annihilation — of reproductive processes. After all, an image of phallic interaction immediately precedes Brown's stroll past the graveyard. His nighttime excursion concludes with "a hanging twig, that had been all on fire [besprinkling Brown's] cheek with the coldest dew" (95). Once Brown attains

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[33] *OED*, s.v. "meditate."

[34] The complete action is: "The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon" (95). Nevertheless, the implication remains the same. Walking may stir his appetite, but the minister chooses the graveyard as his place of meditation.

[35] One might note that Brown becomes "darkly meditative" after returning from the forest. He starts to suffer from tapping into his own unconscious. Of all the words describing how Brown has changed, "meditative" stands out because none of the other adjectives receives a modifying adverb (he becomes "a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate, man." Moreover, the word "darkly" might recall 1 Corinthians 13:12 – "For now we see through a glass darkly" – about gaining knowledge and becoming a man.

sexual potency, the graveyard is his first destination.

Considering the minister's "meditation" in this context helps to justify Brown's reaction. After the minister "bestowed a blessing," Brown "shrank from the venerable saint as if to avoid an anathema" (95). By using the word "bestowed," the text frames the minister's speech as a kind of gift. One would expect a gift to be received, but Brown rejects the speech offering by walking away. In other words, Brown creates a physical distance between himself and the speech, which hints at the major complication he will face for the rest of the narrative. By "bestowing" a blessing on Brown, the minister attempts to create some kind of connection between the two men through language — a connection that ultimately fails because, contrary to the minister's implied expectation, the speech he offers is not welcomed by the receiver.

The magnitude of this offering (and, more importantly, Brown's subsequent refusal of it), is better understood when examining the etymology of "anathema," the word that describes Brown's reaction to the minister. While the origins of the word have connections with "an offering," the Latin definition of "anathema" is "an excommunicated person."[36] "Excommunication" means "cutting off from fellowship," which amounts to the severing of a person from a body through performative speech.[37] This definition reveals some sort of paradox. Brown prevents a connection from forming — yet the minister, to Brown's dismay, signifies a man who has been severed through speech. In a sense, Brown shows both hostility to the forming of speech connections and fear of such a connection coming undone.

Similarly, Brown becomes disturbed when he overhears Old Deacon Gookin praying at home. This time, however, the language has greater emphasis. Passing by the deacon's home, Brown overhears "the holy words of [Gookin's] prayer . . . through the open window," causing him to wonder, "What God doth the wizard pray to?" (95). Not only is the language (or "words") of the man's prayer directly addressed; it is given greater structural value than the prayer itself. Simply put, "the prayer was heard through the open window" makes more linguistic sense than "the holy words of his prayer were heard through the open window." The latter statement, by virtue of its prepositional phrase and uneconomic use of signifiers, gives more attention to "words" than "prayer."

In addition to this emphasis on words, Hawthorne's syntax also dissociates Brown from the deacon's speech. Specifically, the clause uses a passive voice construction to remove Brown from the sentence. Rather than stating, "*Brown heard* the prayer through the open window," the sentence reads, "the holy words of [Gookin's] prayer *were heard* through the open window." Only by assumption can Brown be recognized as the hearer. Removing Brown as the subject disconnects body from speech — the language can be given, but the

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[36] *OED*, s.v. "anathema."

[37] *OED*, s.v. "excommunication."

receiver is lacking. The disconnection gets pushed further by Gookin's physical separation to Brown, vis-à-vis the open window. In a certain way, this passage parallels with Faith's intimate distance at the beginning of the story. Brown overhears Gookin's prayer, but the two men do not see each other. Both structurally and thematically, speech becomes severed from the body. Through passive voice, the hearer gets removed. With a physical boundary between the two men, the speaker also gets taken out of the picture.

Though Brown appears disturbed by the necessary reciprocation with both sex and speech acts, an element of his earlier lack remains. This retained vacancy might be read as a kind of modulation of language as Other. The concept, in the words of Bruce Fink, regards the way "the discourse and desires of others around us . . . are internalized."[38] Despite internalization, the others' discourse and desires "remain foreign bodies in a sense" in a potentially threatening manner.[39] For Brown, the "foreign bodies" can be seen as the discourse and desires of others around him, and also as his own, initial sexual lack: the signification of absence. Sex and speech fuse, but the remnants of his earlier sexual vacancy could cause this fusion to be perceived as a threat.

This concept helps explain Brown's reaction to Gookin's prayer: "What God doth the wizard pray to?" (95). Rather than labeling Gookin with a more antagonistic term like "devil" or "heathen," Brown chooses the word "wizard." Wizards, or male witches, are not always evil figures, but the mythical men do cast spells. If, in Brown's view, a voice from an unseen body uses the most literal kind of performative speech, then speech detaches from Gookin's physical form. Moreover, while reacting to the deacon's prayer, Brown uses a specific type of speech himself: "'What God doth the wizard pray to?' quoth Goodman Brown" (95). Typically, the word "quoth" indicates a repetition of speech — similar, in effect, to *as said by*.[40] However, Brown does not seem to be quoting anybody else here. "Quoth," in an instance like this, refers to speaking "without direct speech."[41] Brown, who has been extricated from the text through a passive voice construction, receives Gookin's speech indirectly. By virtue of the terminology, Brown's reaction to the speech has an indirect quality as well.

Speech becomes sexualized with Brown's next encounter when a woman named Goody Cloyse "stood in the early sunshine at her own lattice, catechizing a little girl who had brought her a pint of morning's milk" (95). A catechism, or a summary of principles for new converts to Christianity, works as a kind of exchange. For one thing, catechisms tend to have prescribed questions and answers.[42] During this scripted dialogue, a physical exchange between Cloyse and the girl takes place as well. The little girl brings Goody

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[38] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 11.
[39] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 11.
[40] *OED*, s.v. "quoth."
[41] *OED*, s.v. "quoth."
[42] *OED*, s.v. "catechism."

Cloyse milk — a fluid of sexual maturity. Cloyse, as developed figure, passes on speech to the little girl who, on a symbolic level, biologically responds. Another way of looking at this scene reverses the relationship. Mothers give milk to their children, but here, the little girl gives milk to the elder. Both suggestions could be true. After all, the text refers to Goody Cloyse's "lattice" rather than her "fence," painting a picture of some crisscrossed network instead of a simple barrier. Even the woman's name hints at some kind of complex fusion: "Cloyse" sounds like a mixture of "close" and "cloy," as if the woman signifies both the ender of something and the giver of a sickeningly sweet language. If one considers the words "clothes" and "coy" as well, then implications of concealment and seductive reservation could also be part of the her name. In any amalgamation of terms, the word "Cloyse" suggests some kind of intense covering — a jarring image for a mature giver of language to a young child.

Through their exchange, the pair achieves something that Brown lacks: a kind of synchronicity between sex and speech. Seeing this connection troubles him so much that he pulls the little girl away from Goody Cloyse (95). Unlike Brown's earlier *prevention* of a speech connection, Brown *severs* the connection this time. (Notably, he does so without speaking — a contrast to excommunication, which severs through performative speech.) Cloyse and the girl inspire a bigger reaction out of Brown than the previous two encounters. While the meditation of speech and the dissociation of speech from the body both disturb him, neither act requires interaction with another person. This time, an actual speech exchange takes place, which inspires a physical response. Perhaps to see the progression taking place, these three speech act encounters should be examined in terms of what Brown observes: 1) conceiving speech through meditation; 2) dissociating speech from the body; and 3) exchanging speech for sexual maturity. The progression in these final paragraphs reveals a kind of externalization of language. Speech gets conceived, leaves the speaker, and then becomes internalized by a young receiver.

After these three encounters, Brown runs into his wife. Faith still gets identified "with the pink ribbons," which indicates a maintenance of metonymy and a perpetuation of Brown's earlier sexual lack. What distinguishes this encounter from Brown's previous interactions with his wife is that the couple never exchanges a word. Rather, Brown "looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting" (95). At the beginning of the story, Brown denies a physical connection with his wife. This time, he denies a speech connection with her. These two forms of connecting have become inseparable.

More importantly, Brown prevents a physical connection with Faith by *not* speaking: he passes on without a greeting. While Brown expresses his distress through his facial expression, he avoids communicating through words. Having said that, the text gives no indication that Faith speaks either — just

that she "[burst] into such joy at sight of [Brown] that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village" (95). Faith *almost* kisses her husband, establishing physical closeness between the two — similar, in effect, to Faith's whisper at the beginning. In this case, Brown's lack of speech has enough power to stop the kiss from happening. Once again, Faith's distant closeness and reciprocation of silence comes from Brown's perspective. The fusion of sex and speech connections in Brown extends, on some psychological level, to his partner. His wife's perceptions and feelings come through him. While being left alone incited Faith's fear "of herself" at the beginning, this near sexual encounter occurs in front of an audience, indicating that Brown's failed fusion comes with a certain level of self-awareness. Not only does he prevent the physical connection from happening; he passes on, opting for isolation despite the fear of the self.

Brown's final two speech act encounters take place in a church in quick succession. In the first instance, "the congregation were singing a holy psalm," but Brown "could not listen, because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain" (95). For the first time in the story, multiple bodies harmonize through speech. Group singing could be considered an ultimate speech connection, making Brown unable to listen. (Outside of the forest realm, the verb "listen" can only be found in this one instance, used in a negation.) The next speech exchange in the story further complicates Brown's trauma. Following the congregational hymn, the minister gives his sermon, and Brown "[turns] pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers" (95). To make this speech act unique, Brown experiences a physical reaction to the circumstance. Turning pale signifies bloodlessness, which has implications about sexual impotence. What might be more disturbing, though, is the connection being drawn between the minister and Brown, despite the latter subject's evident disdain. Within the same sentence, Brown's paleness gets exposed alongside the minister's "grayness" — a detail made significant by the second adjective's relative obliqueness. If the minister's speech makes Brown lose color, then Brown's only physical response to speech is metaphorical impotence and unintentional mimicry.

Structurally, nothing divides this physical response from Brown's next encounter with Faith. Rather, the sentence flows, with no paragraph break, into the information that "Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, [Brown] shrank from the bosom of Faith" (95). If Brown shrinks from Faith's breasts only after waking up, then he must have some unconscious pull toward them. In a dream state, Brown moves toward his wife. After waking up, he draws away from her. Specifically, he "shrinks" from her, a verb that means "To wither or shrivel through withdrawal of vital fluid or failure of strength."[43] Within this context, "shrink" suggests detumescence. Indeed, the phrases "withdrawal of vital fluid" and "failure of strength" both imply a lack of sexual fulfillment. This

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[43] *OED*, s.v. "shrink."

lack resurfaces with urgency and intentionality: Brown stops a sexual connection from forming "often," after "awaking suddenly," frequently combatting his unconscious drives.

That said, Brown's sexual productivity gets revealed in the same sentence as the shrinking from Faith's breasts: "the family knelt down at prayer" (95).[44] Only a semicolon divides the "withdrawal of vital fluid" from the introduction of children, as if the text itself reflects a scission. As the family prays (connecting through speech), Brown "scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away" (95-6). In this instance, Brown reacts with speech "to himself." Self-muttering could suggest masturbation, if a fusion of sex and speech has occurred. Before Brown's bifurcation, the suggestion of masturbation came from the wind. What Brown's absence did for Faith at the beginning, Brown can now do to himself with speech.

Just as Brown "looked sternly" at Faith to prevent a connection with her while the town watched, Brown "gazed sternly at his wife" during the prayer before he "turned away." Although the whole family engages in prayer, Brown only looks sternly at Faith. His sexual partner remains his central focus. When Faith connects with the products of their sexual relationship through speech, Brown turns around and mutters to himself; when Brown wakes up on Faith's breasts, he shrinks away.

By the final paragraphs, his peers acknowledge the conflation of sex and speech. After Brown dies, the attendants of his funeral "carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone" (96). For the first time, others deny offering Brown any form of speech. Hawthorne avoids using passive voice here: rather than stating that "no hopeful verse was carved upon his tombstone," the text says, "*they carved* no hopeful verse upon his tombstone" (96). This time, the subject is clear: "they," in this instance, includes "Faith," "children and grandchildren," and "neighbors" (96). Brown's partner and his offspring both deny him speech. Neighbors do as well — a "neighbor" being "a person or thing in close proximity to another."[45] The story has an appropriate final scene. In a graveyard — Brown's first stop after returning from the forest — individuals who experienced physical closeness with Brown no longer offer him speech. Should the graveyard be read as the transmogrification of reproductive processes, then the lack of text on Brown's gravestone indicates a perpetuation of the language problem even after the man's death.

"Young Goodman Brown" reveals both a split and a fusion between sex and speech acts. The story opens with an unsuccessful attempt to fuse them.

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[44] The presence of children remains implicit in this instance, but the word "family" suggests additional members in the household. While this social unit could refer to ancestors instead of children, the text never mentions the presence of former generations, and the first overt recognition of children and grandchildren appears in the following sentence. Moreover, a "family" is defined as "a group of people consisting of one set of parents and their children." See *OED,* s.v. "family."

[45] *OED*, s.v. "neighbor."

Instead of stating that the couple kisses, the narrative depicts Brown stepping into the street and "[putting] his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife," and in a separate sentence, Faith "[thrusting] her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown" (84). In other words, Brown turns his head toward Faith with the intention of kissing her, but the actual exchange never happens, and he only extends himself to her after distancing himself. Moreover, while Faith reciprocates the extension of the head, she does not kiss him. As she allows the wind to play with her, she "calls" to him instead. The first speech act in the story implies a physical distance between the speaker and the hearer, and it occurs alongside a suggestion of masturbatory play. With no information about this distance being bridged, Faith whispers "when her lips were close to [Brown's] ear." From the beginning, speech has simultaneous distance and intimacy — especially between sexual partners.

A speech act replaces a physical act at the beginning, but by the story's final sentence, nobody scripts Brown's dead body: no words are carved upon his tombstone. After achieving sexual potency, Brown seems hostile toward any offering of speech. Perhaps one element of the fusion that frightens Brown is the apparent permanence of the processes. Not only does the graveyard indicate some sense of infiniteness; the ongoing process becomes underscored by the multigenerational crowd of "children and grandchildren" at his tomb.

Between the man's departure and his death, he returns from the forest, coming "slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man." Grammatically, the sentence should read "staring around *himself* like a bewildered man." Hawthorne refuses to make the pronoun reflexive. The "self" has been removed, and in a sentence where the subject and the object indicate the same person, the phrasing sounds like Brown is staring around somebody else. Lest one assume that Hawthorne merely subscribes to an older grammatical style, the author uses reflexive pronouns elsewhere in the story. For instance, the sentences "Goodman Brown felt himself justified," "Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree," and "Goodman Brown . . . deemed it advisable to conceal himself" all use reflexive pronouns correctly (85, 89). Most importantly, Faith uses a reflexive pronoun to indicate the fear "of herself" before Brown departs. After Brown returns from the forest, the only uses of a reflexive pronoun are when he "snatched away the child as from the grasp of the fiend himself," severing a speech connection between Goody Cloyse and the little girl, and when he mutters to himself in front of his family.

Upon returning from the forest, it seems, Brown's self and his speech have a complicated relationship. After all, in a sentence with a jarring absence of a reflexive pronoun, Brown is "bewildered." This word reveals that he is "Pathless, trackless, mazy," and "utterly confused or tangled."[46] Although he

walks down the street of Salem village (a singular street, so a seemingly straightforward path), the text implies that he has no direction. Even amidst a fusion of sex and speech, something is still lacking in him — something that remains with him for the rest of his life.

This split exists in every human subject, and Hawthorne seems to grasp that psychological truth. After all, Goodman Brown has no first name. He is known as "Goodman," a "good man" — an ironic label for a man who goes from boyishly impotent to coldly reclusive. And yet, perhaps Hawthorne views the notion of "goodness" as nothing more than a cultural signifier. Brown epitomizes neither goodness nor its antithesis; he is not so much a Goodman as an Everyman, a part of the same processes as every individual. In this way, he needs no first name because, as Lacan explains, a person is "the slave of a discourse in the universal movement of which his place is already inscribed at his birth, if only in the form of his proper name."[47] Like everybody else, Brown is split as a human subject in and through language, and he necessarily becomes isolated from others' speech. While Bruce Fink may not be the final authority on Lacan, he most clearly and effectively summarizes Lacan's theories about language and human subjectivity: as Lacanian subjects, "we are born into a world of discourse or language that precedes our birth and that will live on after our death."[48] In the process, we become split "between an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconscious."[49] This language produces desire and lack, occurring prior to birth and remaining after death. In Goodman Brown, this language existed before he began and continues to exist with each new reading. Rather than ending, the story stops.

Acknowledgements

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[46] *OED*, s.v. "bewildered."

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[47] Lacan, *Écrits*, 414.
[48] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 5.
[49] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 45.

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