The Transcendental Imagination: The Mark as Focus

Every unique object in the physical world bears some visible or invisible mark by which it may be distinguished from its closest kind. Without contradicting the founding fathers who made an American literature possible, Americans from the time of the first explorers have considered themselves unique; we have not interpreted the equality of all men to mean that all men are identical. Even such individual and original difference, however, holds no semantic meaning apart from the concept of similarity. When contemporary linguists refer to the "marked" case, they imply the existence of a logically bounded semantic or syntactic context within which a particular word or construction achieves its relative distinction. When Kenneth Burke formulated his *Grammar of Motives*, he argued that "to tell what a thing is, you place it in terms of something else. This idea of locating, or placing, is implicit in our very word for definition itself: to define, or determine, a thing, is to mark its boundaries."1

But marking involves more than classifying objects and distinguishing among individuals; it describes a process by which we not only learn about each other but also communicate that knowledge. This process, what I've termed "marking," involves both noticing and attributing. Therefore, in asking the paradoxical yet familiar question, what is "American" about American literature, we may consider that the exploration of the new world and the literature that recorded that exploration (roughly from Cooper onwards) have marked trails that turn the literary critic into a pathfinder. The notch on the tree that reads "American" tells us not that we have arrived at the end but that we have not lost the trail. When explorers, historians, and inheritors all join in a search for an American identity (which the act of defining America as a democracy did not
resolve), they indicate, by marking, that the concept of similarity (among individuals who join together in order to form a community) has no social or political meaning apart from the concept of difference.

The fiction of social and metaphysical isolation, as I will define it in this study, provides the context within which American literature becomes "American." Of course, even this distinction is only relative, for studies of outcast and scapegoat individuals have abounded since the Old Testament. Americans did not invent the theme of social difference, and yet the marked character—solitary, excommunicated, expatriate—becomes a significant concern for our best nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists. What relationship exists between the artist and the social outcast in American fiction or between the social phenomenon of lynching and the creation of a literary work? If a novel does more than reflect and report, if it becomes not simply the record of a search for American identity but a means of searching, then the novel itself becomes an American problem: how to write one? how to read one?

In my study of American fiction, I have been intrigued by the novelist's frequent choice of the mark or brand as his central symbol. A survey that includes Stephen Crane’s Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* and Henry Johnson in "The Monster," Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome, Henry James’s John Marcher, Sherwood Anderson’s Wing Biddlebaum and other characters in *Winesburg, Ohio*, Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby, Hemingway’s Jake Barnes, Flannery O’Connor’s "grotesques," and marked outsiders in Mark Twain and Richard Wright only begins to suggest the range of the American novelist’s concern with stigma. It might prove illuminating to examine each of these works and others in order to demonstrate the significance of the theme that links them; certainly a literary historian could write a comprehensive study of social deviance in the American novel. My method in this book, however, has been to choose a few representative texts that clearly emerge, on any list of major American novels, as studies of marking, and then to interpret the fictional societies each work creates. In each of these texts—Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Faulkner’s *Light in August*, and Ellison’s *Invisible Man*—the principle of exclusion by which a community creates and affirms its own identity finds its artistic correspondence in the process of selecting names and symbols by which the fictional narrator expresses and transcends social and metaphysical isolation.

The recurrent focus on marked characters may profitably be described as both the method and the consequence of the American
transcendental imagination. In each of these four novels, the narrator's attempt at aesthetic resolution depends on, and derives from, the social, religious, and political transcendence of the outcast figure. I have chosen the phrase "transcendental imagination" deliberately, because, although the philosophical foundations of American transcendentalism remained nebulous, even for those central figures in the movement—Emerson, Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott—who articulated them the most clearly,² the attempt of the transcendentalists to provide religious and philosophical solutions for social and historical problems becomes one characterizing mode of the American consciousness after Emerson as well. American fiction has its roots in transcendentalism.

It has become a critical commonplace to state that the concerns of the early nineteenth-century writers center on the relationship between the individual and society. In particular, as Emerson suggests, the transcendentalist viewed solitude as a solution to the problems of society. In his essay, "The Transcendentalist," he characterizes the representative man as aloof and withdrawn from community. "This retirement," he states, proceeds not "from any whim on the part of these separators" but "is chosen both from temperament and from principle; with some willingness too, and as a choice of the less of two evils."³

The idea that the transcendentalist chose his isolation willingly does not imply that he escaped society's notice. On the contrary, in spite of the seriousness that the transcendentalists attributed to their withdrawal from society, they became, as Emerson describes it, "still liable to that slight taint of burlesque which in our strange world attaches to the zealot." Thus the label "transcendentalist" carried the force of social stigma: "The Philanthropists inquire whether Transcendentalism does not mean sloth; they had as lief hear that their friend is dead, as that he is a Transcendentalist; for then is he paralyzed, and can never do anything for humanity." As early as the transcendentalist movement, then, the American understanding of social stigma included a metaphysical dimension. A philosopher's or a writer's ideas might be irregular enough to merit labeling him in consequence. By ending his essay with some moderating words on hermits, Emerson suggests a need for tolerance for the "one or two solitary voices in the land, speaking for thoughts and principles not marketable or perishable."⁴ Society ought to be large enough, he seems to be saying, to accommodate a few eccentrics.

In the case of the hermit, whose isolation from society results from mutual agreement, the psychological stigma of exclusion becomes inconsequential and even amusing. For the individual who wishes
to remain part of his community, however, to solve its problems without losing his citizenship, social stigma defines the boundaries within which he must confine his individuality. This individual becomes the province of the American novelist, and as we read the fiction of the past two centuries, we discover that society has not been large enough for a long time to include its cripples, its artists, its dissenters, and its minorities, all of whom share, if not physical marks or brands, evidence of social and metaphysical difference apparent to the discerning eye.

Unlike the American transcendentalist who withdrew from society in order to establish a more principled relationship with it, the individual who tries to live within society's boundaries may risk involuntary isolation from community. From the Old Testament on, society has ritually characterized its response to such individuals by identifying them and excluding them as scapegoats of one kind or another. What is interesting as a general observation is that both individual withdrawal and social exclusion create caricatures either physically or symbolically marked by their transformation from individuals into representative men. Furthermore, these figures express, and by expression attempt to resolve, the hidden conflicts and internal contradictions of individual and collective human behavior.\(^5\)

The American experience of internal contradiction, namely, that we are a society of equal individuals, may be historically and nationally explored in our treatment of the Negro. As Ralph Ellison implies in *Shadow and Act*, what was romantic and transcendental about early and mid-nineteenth-century American literature was a "conception of the Negro as a symbol of Man." This conception receded, post-Reconstruction, into what Ellison describes as a general repression of the American consciousness. For Ellison, evidence of this repression—that social problems have not been transcended but simply ignored as a result of civil war—may be found in the absence of social reality in the "realism" of the late nineteenth century, with the exception of Stephen Crane. It was not until the "emergence of the driving honesty and social responsibility of Faulkner,"\(^6\) according to Ellison, that an awareness of ongoing civil war returned to the American literature. This civil war may be seen, in psychological terms, as the American fight "against our own religious doubts, the insecurity of our own political position, and the one-sidedness of our own national viewpoint."\(^7\)

The American Negro has held from the time of his first enslavement the social position of national scapegoat. In this sense Ellison is correct in identifying the Negro's social and psychological as well as physical segregation as a symbol. Yet the scapegoat psychology is
really an inversion of the transcendental view that solitude might contribute to a solution of society’s problems. The latter is an attempt to achieve social integration without the formation of “shadow” consequent to lynch laws and witch trials. But the attempt at metaphysical transcendence, a concomitant problem for the transcendentalist, fails because there is no equivalent in Western religion to the vehicle of the ritual scapegoat. The characteristics of this vehicle—that it is tangible, literal, and visible—find no analogy in Western metaphysics except the Easter passion, in which, although Christ died for us, we must accept the guilt for his crucifixion without experiencing the cathartic joys of joining his accusers. The bread made flesh serves as our only tangible contact with the crucified victim, and the Puritans refused to accept literal transubstantiation. Thus social exclusion served one function of religious ritual for the Puritans and their descendants. Social exclusion, dramatized most clearly in our historical treatment of the Negro, has provided American community with transcendent catharsis.

For Emerson, the world existed as expanding circles, as correspondences, as analogy; and the power of the analogist lay in his ability to create his own world, thus affirming his organic relationship with the universe without relying on ritual. In his journals Emerson writes: “It seems to be true that the more exclusively idiosyncratic a man is, the more general & infinite he is, which though it may not be a very intelligible expression means I hope something intelligible. In listening more intently to our own reason, we are not becoming in the ordinary sense more selfish, but are departing more from what is small, & falling back on truth itself & God. For it is when a man does not listen to himself but to others, that he is depraved & misled.” The asocial individual—the hermit—creates an entire world by becoming the only person in it, and he locates the source of divinity within his own spirit. In Quentin Anderson’s terms, “In the particular cultural circumstances Emerson’s imaginative leap was decisive; he not only said himself, but made it possible for others to say, that the more clearly distinctive the voice of the celebrant, the more unmistakably does he attest the divine in him.” Transcendence depended on self-realization.

Emerson’s own parenthetical remark, that his statement “may not be a very intelligible expression,” explains the logician’s frustration with Emerson’s conclusions about the nature of reality and his dismissal of Emerson’s analogical method. The logical contradiction inherent in these conclusions is that the particular limits our perception of the universal and must be transcended; at the same time it becomes the analogic vehicle for doing so. The transcendence of
the particular is not possible without the existence of the particular. Thus, as Quentin Anderson writes, "transcendentalism is a carefully measured madness, which admits its aberration when ordering coal. It does not sustain; it is occasional like the revival."\textsuperscript{11}

The Eastern philosopher's reevaluation of Emerson would be more charitable. Eastern philosophy, one influence among many on American transcendental thought, postulates a logic in analogy that is as "true," as useful in the pursuit of knowledge as Western rationalism. In the analogical pursuit, as the romantics and the transcendentalists have tried to show us, subjective knowledge (as opposed to objective or scientific knowledge) is accompanied by moments of integration between the perceiver and his world.\textsuperscript{12} These moments amount to experiences of enlightenment in the form of self-realization—precisely the enlightenment that becomes the goal of Eastern means of gaining knowledge.

But Emerson lacked what the Indian philosophy incorporates in its analogical pursuit—a technique (some form of yoga, for example). And it is the emphasis on technique, on individual practice of some method for increasing perception and achieving knowledge, that, had the American transcendentalists articulated it, would at the very least have lent method to that "carefully measured madness." In the absence of a sustaining methodology, in the chasm between scientific "enlightenment" and romantic organicism, transcendentalism became, as Perry Miller points out, primarily a religious or a philosophical movement rather than a literary one.\textsuperscript{13}

In the light of other influences on American transcendentalism, perhaps Miller's distinction is too rigid. The metaphysical poetry of Donne and Herbert, for example, created in literary forms the structure of the practice of religious meditation. Closer to home, the Puritans viewed meditation as a rigorous method of self-examination, following Thomas Hooker in \textit{The Application of Redemption} (1657), and the American poet Edward Taylor wrote his \textit{Preparatory Meditations}\textsuperscript{14} as the "last heir of the great tradition of English meditative poetry that arose in the latter part of the sixteenth century." Although Taylor was born and educated in England, Louis Martz asserts that his \textit{Meditations} reflect the condition of the American poet conversing with God in the wilderness, in a "peculiar mixture of the learned and the rude, the abstract and the earthy, the polite and the vulgar";\textsuperscript{15} and as a result, Taylor created an "American" work. To the extent that transcendentalism was already part of the English literary tradition in the late sixteenth century, then, it was also part of the early American Puritan literary tradition.
In her introduction to *The Metaphysical Poets*, Helen Gardner writes that "the metaphysical manner of setting a subject, 'hammering it out,' and then 'shutting it up' is closely allied to the method of religious meditation and . . . many metaphysical poems are poetical meditations." Thus, even Donne's secular poems may be termed metaphysical "in its true sense, since they raise, even when they do not explicitly discuss, the great metaphysical question of the relation of the spirit and the senses." She emphasizes the "concentration" of metaphysical poetry—"The reader is held to an idea or a line of argument"—and its development of the conceit. "All comparisons discover likeness in things unlike: a comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness."

In their emphasis on method, Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville emerge from the tradition of English metaphysical poetry. Emerson's doctrine of the "over-soul" derives from his attempt to create metaphysical correspondences to express "the relation of the spirit and the senses." Melville's notion of "trying-out" his theme in *Moby-Dick* may be likened to the metaphysical poets' penchant for what Gardner calls "hammering out" their subject, and in the first chapter of the novel, Ishmael explicitly refers to the white whale as one of the "wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose." And Thoreau's *Walden* is a carefully constructed analogy between natural life cycles and daily processes, a work that Stanley Cavell goes so far as to describe as scripture.

Cavell's statement that "a writer in meditation is literally a human being awaiting expression" may recall one of the passages from *Walden* in which Thoreau implicitly refers to the cycle of meditation and expression as the prelude to his own creation:

> In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

In a concluding remark, Cavell states, "I do not wish to claim that Thoreau anticipated the Civil War; and yet the *Bhagavad Gita* is
present in *Walden*—in name, and in moments of doctrine and structure."\(^{21}\)

Cavell’s comparison is useful in extending his own correspondence of *Walden* as scripture, for the particular “despair” that the hero of the Indian epic confronts is civil war: Arjuna does not wish to take arms against his relatives, the Kurus, and calls on Lord Krishna for aid. The aid Krishna gives is contained in verse 48 of the second part of the *Gita*: “Established in Yoga, perform action.”\(^{22}\) With this verse, Krishna begins to expand the subject of the epic, whereby self-consciousness is attained by practicing a technique of meditation (loosely referred to as “yoga”) and alternating meditation with “karma” (work or activity). Thus Cavell can conclude that in *Walden* as in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “the way of knowledge and the way of work are one and the same.”\(^{23}\)

In a consideration of the mechanics of social exclusion—marking as a prelude to self and social knowledge—it is useful by analogy to examine the principles of yoga, the generic name for meditation techniques that have been associated with Eastern philosophy for centuries. The only technique I am familiar with firsthand is the one taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (known in this country as “transcendental meditation”). In this technique, a variant of a type of yoga known as “mantra yoga,” the meditator is given a mantra (a Sanskrit word or phrase) by a teacher and shown how to use this mantra as a focus of sound and thought that produces the subjective effect of “diving” within consciousness until, at some point, waking consciousness is “transcended” (in Maharishi’s terms\(^{24}\)), the meditator may lose the mantra for a short period, and for the duration of the transcendence, the individual sits in “bliss consciousness,” “satori,” the presence of the Absolute, the oceanic universal, “pure awareness,” or “pure being,” as the state has been variously described.

It is significant that mantras are specific sounds, or signs, that may not be translated into English or any other language because they have no referential meanings in Sanskrit. They are what the linguist would term “content-free” symbols. Theoretically, the mind can only transcend the content-bound thoughts of the waking state when it becomes absorbed in a thought that contains such a symbol. But the mantra is a literal sign; it may be spelled, spoken, and communicated. To the moment of transcendence during meditation, it remains literal, part of the world of physical signs and symbols. As I understand what Maharishi calls “transcending,” the meditator focuses on the literal mantra (or “mark”) until the boundaries of the symbol dissolve and the meditator experiences a state of mind.
that for American readers must resemble Thoreau's description of sublimity at Walden Pond.

In the absence of a technique like the one Maharishi proposes for the meditator, American transcendentalism failed to provide a physical vehicle by which its adherents could attain Thoreau's "sublimity." It is worth conjecturing that, had the transcendentalists succeeded, they might have eliminated the seeming inevitability of the witch trial or the lynch mob from our history. Like the community in the scapegoat ritual, the meditator in mantra yoga chooses a physical vehicle to contain his impurities. By focusing on this vehicle during the meditation, he transcends his individuality. Like the mantra, the scapegoat bears the burden of communal evil—the marking agents assert that he is not part of them, that they are not responsible for the evil he carries. However, ritual social purification, unlike meditation, has only a temporary effect, and thus, as Sir James Frazer wrote, "a general clearance of evils is resorted to periodically." 25

The subjective experience of transcending during meditation may be compared to the catharsis of ritual purification, the temporary effect of the scapegoat ritual. But unlike the social enactment, in which for the physical vehicle—the human scapegoat—ritual death is real death, in mantra yoga, as I have explained, the mantra is content-free. Only the teacher, by tradition, knows the effects of the mantra; the student is told only that the mantra will be a life-supporting vehicle for him to achieve periodic transcendence and to evolve towards personal enlightenment. Such a tradition releases the meditating individual from a need for Puritan self-analysis by assuming that if he has not attained enlightenment, his analysis would be faulty; and at the same time, it locates the presence of evil as well as the possibility of salvation within the individual, theoretically eliminating the need for social scapegoats. In this last respect, it differs considerably from the Puritan tradition of meditation, which, content-bound in both its epistemology and its theology, places the burden of moral judgment on the human memory and locates specific evils in marked individuals.

F. O. Matthiessen writes, "The tendency of American idealism to see a spiritual significance in every natural fact was far more broadly diffused than transcendentalism. Loosely Platonic, it came specifically from the common background that lay behind Emerson and Hawthorne, from the Christian habit of mind that saw the hand of God in all manifestations of life. . . ." 26 The recurring social and individual emphasis on "the mark" in American fiction provides a focus for exploring consciousness that may be interpreted as similar
in intention to the mantra in mantra yoga, to the victim as physical vehicle in the scapegoat ritual, and to the "particular" or the "relative" in the transcendentalist system. Early nineteenth-century transcendentalism may be viewed, then, as just one manifestation of the American search for self-consciousness, and its literary significance described as the formal attempt to find natural correspondences for metaphysical truths by means of a "transcendental meditation."

In American fiction, the focus on physically or metaphorically marked characters replaces the "concentration" of metaphysical poetry; but as epistemology, the scarlet letter, the whale, the racial identity of Christmas, and the theme of invisibility all hold the reader to a single "idea or line of argument." In addition, the four novels of my study may all be described as religious meditations, in the sense that, as I will show in subsequent chapters, the narratives are "preparatory," like Edward Taylor’s poems, for transcending the American dialectic—the conflict between equality and identity. These four works portray individuals in conflict with their communities. Yet the narrators and the narrative designs of each novel suggest that there exists a system of metaphysical, social, and artistic correspondences in which becoming the enlightened American, achieving American community, and creating the American novel require following the same marked trail. The novelist searches for symbols, the penitent discovers sins, and the lynch mob chooses victims; the American epistemology becomes a cyclical pattern of marking, analyzing until the limits of the analysis are transcended, then returning to re-mark and re-view.

Hester Prynne, Ishmael and Pip, Joe Christmas, Hightower, Byron Bunch and Lena Grove, and Invisible Man all oppose prescribed forms in the communities they inhabit. They possess, in Hawthorne’s terms, a law to themselves. Others, either unable to exist outside the canons of social convention (Arthur Dimmesdale), or unwilling to do so (Percy Grimm), contribute to the creation of an American social religion, where law and theology become identical forces, subjecting humanism and spirituality to strict definition and excluding metaphysical paradox. In portraying the conflict between the individual and the community, Hawthorne, Melville, Faulkner, and Ellison reveal the transformation inherent in the Puritan sensibility by which metaphysics becomes "social physics," but is accompanied by no less fervor.

The Puritans interpreted metaphysics as the study of God and everything in the physical world as a manifestation of God’s will. In their divine interpretation, marks symbolized God’s imprint on the
world, his presence as the wrathful avenger or the granter of grace. The impulse to mark within the Puritan consciousness expressed a pervasive metaphysical insecurity that cannot tolerate paradox or ambiguity, desires not that God's will be grace but that God's will be known, and forces this "knowledge" by assigning labels (Adultery, Evil, Negro) to individuals (Hester Prynne, Moby Dick, Joe Christmas) who then serve as scapegoats in modern enactments of ancient rituals. The path to self-knowledge for the Puritans and their heirs lies in the creation of a social symbolism—a system of marks and brands. The subject matter of the American novelist reflects the symbolizing process of his own art as well as his historical consciousness.

I have chosen to include a discussion of two stories by William Faulkner in this book because in them Faulkner clearly establishes his awareness of the relationship between the social and the metaphysical. The social outcast becomes a vehicle for the inclusive community to create, however erroneously, a sense of its own identity and union, as Faulkner indicates in "Dry September"; yet social exclusion and metaphysical isolation may become corresponding existential situations, as the body servant in "Red Leaves" realizes. For the marking agents in these stories (Jefferson and the Indian community), marking out specific individuals is intended as catharsis (the social equivalent of individual transcendence), a means of strengthening the social center. Such community action, however, leads to further blindness and a perversion of spirituality; it is only the outcast individuals, carrying the social burden, who achieve transfiguration—who literally transform the "figure" by which they are marked into a state of quasi-social, quasi-spiritual transcendence.

Marius Bewley states, "If we except Calvinism which, as an active theology, had already given way before the growing popularity of Transcendentalism at the time Hawthorne began to write, America inherited no great theological system with which to order experience." Certainl Faulkner and Ellison, however, share the transcendental consciousness of Hawthorne and Melville, and convey it in their fictional worlds. The principles of social definition by exclusion, and solitude as a solution to social problems, which Hawthorne and Melville explore and for which, as I have indicated, Emerson was a major spokesman, become social substitutes for theology in Faulkner and Ellison. The transcendental epistemology incorporates the attempts of both Joe Christmas and Invisible Man to transform personal knowledge into social action, to achieve social and political change by transforming the mark-as-brand (for Invisible
Man's literary predecessors) into the mark-as-password to social identity.

As I understand the concept of marking, and as the preceding discussion should indicate, Western logic plays a very small role in tracing the effects of the transcendental imagination on the American consciousness. In fact, as Hawthorne, Melville, Faulkner, and Ellison demonstrate, and as I will illustrate in the chapters to follow, the novelist, who works analogically, is able to perceive as well as to articulate the relationship between social and metaphysical isolation in American culture. Because the process of making symbols, and even of using language itself, is analogous to the process of noticing and recording by which I have defined marking, the novelist has it within his power to create a work that will both correspond to the Emersonian universe and become yet another expanding circle, part of the natural world and bounded by it, yet at the same time containing it. As Harry Levin writes, "language was related to perception through the doctrine of correspondences. For the writer who accepted the Emersonian metaphysic, there was no choice but to be a symbolist." This awareness, which makes the novel part of the world and yet the physical vehicle for transcending it, defines the transcendental imagination of our greatest fiction writers. Symbol making converts social problems into aesthetic and metaphysical ones; and if the resulting fictions transform the "bad art" of the social marking agents into the materials for symbolism, their creators are only attempting to construct a scaffold, a masthead, a high tower, or a Harlem ladder that will bridge the social and the metaphysical.

I have loosely followed Emerson's own blueprint in constructing my study of the marking process in American fiction. Analogy justifies digression. One of the dangers in writing a thematic criticism is the tendency to use novels as logical "evidence" to prove a point by inductive reasoning. Yet just as the mathematician can never reach infinity by induction without calling on intuition, so the literary critic must also work intuitively sooner or later in order to transcend the linear limits of Western reason. I have chosen to rely on my own transcendental imagination sooner perhaps than many of my readers will feel comfortable with, but I have done so with the goal of any work of literary criticism in mind: I have wanted to construct a chart that may increase the reader's understanding of novels that are already familiar, yet continue to fascinate us because we can never fully apprehend their meaning except by finding new critical analogies.

As a result, although I have indicated here the usefulness of examining "the mark" in a reading of American literature, I later
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subordinate social and theological interpretations to specific narrative and thematic concerns in the novels, and, in doing so, must claim an absurdity inherent in the entire study. The logical ending point in a discussion of markedness involves not a conclusion but rather another question—what would a study of the concept of non-markedness involve? For I have assumed that certain characters are marked and that we may study them. Writing a book on the topic tends to overemphasize the very phenomenon, tends to "mark" it, unfortunately, as the only significant approach to American literature. But as Erving Goffman points out in Stigma, "The occasionally precarious and the constantly precarious form a single continuum, their situation in life analyzable by the same framework . . . it is not to the different that one should look for understanding our differentness, but to the ordinary. The question of social norms is certainly central, but the concern might be less for uncommon deviations from the ordinary than for ordinary deviations from the common."29 And as Invisible Man states, "Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible." Perhaps it is also possible to make literary criticism out of the visibility of stigma and symbol without losing sight of the mystery that remains undefined. The concept of markedness obscures as well as reveals, for the marked individual, for his community, and above all, for the reader who would be an interpreter of signs.

Notes

2. See Perry Miller's introduction to The Transcendentalists (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950). Howard Vincent, in The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), writes, "Transcendentalism in New England is difficult to describe. . . . Transcendentalism had many faces, but whether the term was used to describe a philosophy of individualism, a religious attitude towards life, a collection of individual lunacies, or man's intuitive understanding of Truth, it was fundamentally, to quote Emerson . . . , 'a protest against usage, and a search for principles.' No more definite than that, Transcendentalism may be briefly labeled as 'an enthusiasm, a wave of sentiment, a breath of mind,' as its chief historian, Frothingham, described it; while Santayana summed it up best of all: 'Transcendentalism is an attitude or a point of view rather than a system'" (pp. 154–55).
5. In The Golden Bough (London: Macmillan, 1955), Sir James Frazer wrote that the idea that we can "transfer our guilt and sufferings to some other being who will bear them for us . . . arises from a very obvious confusion between the physical and the mental, between the material and the immaterial" (9:1). When the victim is a human sacrifice, the scapegoat becomes the individual who possesses a birthmark or other distinguishing physical characteristic, which the group interprets as a sign from the gods. "Evils are invisible and intangible; and, on the other hand, there is a
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visible and tangible vehicle to carry them away. And a scapegoat is nothing more than such a vehicle" (9:224).

8. Neumann describes a process by which the negative part of both the individual and the collective psyche becomes purified in ritual projection of the shadow—"making evil conscious through making it visible and by liberating the unconscious from this content through projection" (Ibid., pp. 51–52). He predicts, "It will continue to be necessary for the collective to liberate itself by exploiting the psychology of the scapegoat so long as there are unconscious feelings of guilt which arise, as a splitting phenomenon, from the formation of the shadow. It is our subliminal awareness that we are actually not good enough for the ideal values which have been set before us that results in the formation of the shadow" (Ibid., p. 45).
11. Ibid., p. 47.
12. Harry Levin writes, in The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville (New York: Knopf, 1958): "Transcendentalism, shifting its base from the inscrutable to the scrutiny, still retained the premise that matter was the mere external manifestation of spirit. Revelation was no longer based on dogma, but upon the mystical intuition or the poetic insight that could scrutinize the welter of appearances and discern the presence of hidden realities. To read those hieroglyphics, to interpret the analogies whereby the soul of man might link itself with the physical world, such was the imaginative challenge that Emerson's Nature held for the generation that grew up with it . . . " (p. 14).
14. The poems were written from 1682 to 1725; for first complete publication, see The Poems of Edward Taylor, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).
15. This quotation and the one preceding are from Martz's foreword to Stanford, pp. xxxv–xxxvi.
19. Ibid., p. 58.
24. My references to Maharishi and to transcendental meditation are taken from notes made during the Humboldt, California, lectures (August 1972). His particular interpretation of Eastern philosophy and scriptures is recorded in his translation of The Bhagavad-Gita.
25. Frazer, p. 224.