

Abstract

Yuko Takase

In this dissertation I will explore the diverse aspects of inheritance and land ownership in nineteenth-century American culture. In the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Lydia Maria Child, various cases of inheritance, especially those of property are depicted. The notion of inheritance is based on temporal dimension, that is, the time difference between one generation and the next. To inherit what the owner have, such as title, money, or property etc. means to receive what is left at the death of the previous owner. As transferring the ownership from one to the other is the main aspect of inheritance, possession enters into the focal point of this dissertation.

I will discuss the texts of the writers of nineteenth-century America when the national movement of expansion was conspicuous. The expansionism of this period, triggered by Louisiana Purchase (1803), is called the "Westward Movement" which is successive act of possession of the land. I would like to propose a fresh insight into the notion of inheritance by analyzing the cultural texts of nineteenth century writers.

First, I would like to quote one paragraph from the second novel of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of Seven Gables*. In the preface of the novel, the writer talks that what one

generation did transferred through generations as an inheritance.

Not to be deficient in this particular, the author has provided himself with a moral, —the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief; mischief; and he would feel it a singular gratification if this romance might effectually convince mankind—or, indeed, any one man—of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity... (2)

It seems that this whole passage is about the negative inheritance that falls upon all future generations. “An avalanche” here is used as an extended metaphor of the negative aspects of inheritance. An avalanche means “a large mass of snow, mixed with earth and ice, loosened from a mountain side, and descending swiftly into the valley below”. It means here, a large mass of gold or real estate is descending to the posterity. Hawthorne expresses this “folly”, which means “a very stupid thing to do, especially one that is likely to have serious results”. Inheritance occasionally brings “serious results” to the posterity. I explore how serious results are brought by inheritance not only in this work but also other works in nineteenth-century

literature.

I started my journey from my interest in this passage, and I have broadened my perspectives to consider American history, the nature of a house itself, the house moving, real estates, Native American title and ownership and a number of related areas. In the process of undertaking such research, I have come to understand that the concept of ownership of America is based upon suppositions and precedents, which are unstable and ambiguous. This is because the background of the settlement was complicated: when the settlers arrived on the new continent, Native Americans were already resident on the land. Although the idea of “the Discovery of New World” by Christopher Columbus is very much part of Westernized historical discourse, the naming of the historical event itself reveals a strongly European bias. From the perspective of Native Americans, it was, rather, an invasion, or an intrusion. The question of to whom America might belong thus took on increasing weight in my investigations as a result of this research.

If it were to be the case that an ambiguity and unstableness with regard to the process of possessing the land in America existed and / or exists presently, the land of America might be considered a vast negative legacy. Thus, this dissertation explores the process of possessing the land, and how the bequeathing and succeeding to property is represented in American literature.

I have narrowed down the research focus to nineteenth-century literature in this discussion. There are two reasons for doing so: in the first place, it is obviously impossible to cover all generations, and in the second, while I have researched into writers of the American Renaissance such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, I have placed particular emphasis on their critical views with regard to American Expansionism. By researching nineteenth-century American literature, I can thus explore diverse aspects of the system of inheritance and the land ownership, an examination of which has the potential to reveal fundamental problems with the foundation of the nation.

My dissertation explores inheritance not only its representation and depiction in literature, but also analyzing relevant historical and political documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Presidents' addresses, and certain letters. One of the examples of the documents is *Common Sense*. Thomas Paine, who encourages people in the Colonies to become independent of Britain in his pamphlet, refers "monarchy" and "hereditary succession," which imply inheritance, as the evil. Thomas Jefferson once wrote: "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living" in his letter to James Madison in 1789. His view for the land might have an influence on the Declaration of Independence.

I would like to start by dividing the system of inheritance into occupancy, possession, bequeathing property and succession.

There are diverse inheritance in the works; from father to son—primogeniture—, from father to a member of a family except son, inheritance without blood relationship, renunciation of heir and loss of property. In each chapter, I focus on each stage of inheritance.

Chapter 1 explores possession in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick or The Whale* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. One should possess the property, such as the land ownership, before bequeathing a fortune to descendants and succeeding to ancestral estate. Thus, I will undertake an investigation of the process of possession before researching inheritance.

Chapter 2 investigates the concept that the occupancy conquers the law in Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scribner—A Story of Wall Street". Bartleby forces the lawyer to leave his office by occupying the space despite the lawyer having title. However, Bartleby himself are also removed to the Tombs. I explore the meaning of the occupancy in America and the setting of this work, Wall Street, in this chapter.

Chapter 3 sketches an outline of the most general aspects of inheritance of a house and its site from father to son, in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher". However, in this work, it is of especial interest that the inherited house vanishes in the end. I explore the significant of losing the property in the context of the 1830s.

Chapter 4 examines more complicated issues of inheritance in Lydia Maria Child's *The Romance of the Republic*. Switching babies leads to a convoluted inheritance process. I focus particularly on one of the characters, King, who is involved in the switching of the babies, and examine how he acts as an agent in the subsequent restoration of property.

Chapter 5 looks at the renunciation of inheritance in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. The main character, Arthur Gordon Pym has high expectations of his wealthy grandfather, who is expected to bequeath his fortune to him. However, Pym's plan to board a whaling ship enrages his grandfather, resulting in Pym resigning his right of inheritance. I consider the meaning of his renunciation and further analyze the concepts of hegemony within the context of a ship and discuss the authorship of this work.

Chapter 6 explores the idea that primogeniture does not function and the hereditary property negatively affects the descendants in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. This is also used to advance the argument that the land of America is usurped by the settlers from Native Americans unrightfully.