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What Drove Peter Rugg Raving Mad: a Psychoanalytical Inquiry

Part of the fascination emanating from Austin's short story is unquestionably due to its historical dimension. The looming presence of famous Revolutionary figures and the wild demeanor of Paul Revere's supernatural double[1] makes it an eerie, romantic rewriting[2] of a critical episode of American History. But beyond the semi-conscious recognition of that facet of the tale — which makes it definitely American —, the reader is recurrently seized by a series of uncanny feelings articulated around facts or details which merge the unfamiliar with jumbled sentiments of familiarity. This chaotic atmosphere may account for the perplexity affecting many early readers of the *New England Galaxy*, who "mistook this fictional tale for fact" (Zimbalatti vi). Although the confusion of some of Austin's naive contemporaries has since long been dissipated, the modern reader feels nevertheless deeply concerned by Rugg's misadventures, as though the story were still up-to-date and the bewildering literary devices it conveys still active. The dominant feeling suggested is one of anxiety, not far from the effect of a nightmare which may invade anybody's sleep, at any time. This timeless quality evokes that of the unconscious and suggests a psychoanalytical approach. In his essay, "The Story of the Missing Man," Philip Young wrote:

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[1] See *infra*, Geoffroy "From Peter Rugg to Paul Revere: an Account of some Bostonian Revolutionary Rides."

[2] Harry Levin, in his study of American romanticism, *The Power of Darkness*, makes of William Austin a precursor of Melville, Poe and Hawthorne (4-5).

> Anyone secretly knows how delicate is the balance whereby he maintains his security; anyone can participate through Austin's symbols in the anxiety of the man who was suddenly missing. Pity, we suspect, comes chiefly from the ability to see ourselves in the misfortunes of others, and when the horse and the little girl and Peter Rugg go riotously by in all the wrong directions, we pity Peter because our own anxieties tell us that there, but for the precarious grace of control, go we (157-58).

Young even proposes a structural interpretation of the infernal trio — Peter, Jenny and the horse — as a literary representation of the three agencies of the unconscious, according to Freud's classical definition:

> Peter is the self, tied to the horse and hopelessly out of control. And the little girl increases his sense of guilt in sitting mutely by and providing a witness to the shameful display; her very presence is a grim reproach; she is, in short, conscience. The image presents a vivid and classic picture of the situation that produces anxiety. The horse, id, overwhelms Peter, ego, while the little girl, superego, sits in silent but terrible judgement (157).

However seducing this interpretation might seem, it presents a curious blind spot in the fact that it deliberately disregards the text itself, for Austin does not so much insist on a party of three as on a group of four (ten occurrences in the 1824 section): "a man with a child beside him, with a large black horse, and a weather-beaten chair" (20); "man and child, horse and carriage" (21); "a stranger, with a child by his side, in an old weather-beaten carriage, with a black horse" (24); "Rugg took his child with him, and his own horse and chair" (26); "Rugg and his child, horse and chair" (26); "Peter Rugg and his child, horse and chair" (26); Rugg, in his own chair with a fine large bay horse, took his daughter, and proceeded to Concord (27); "Peter Rugg, with his own horse and chair, and child sitting beside him" (28); "Rugg, and his child, horse and chair" (28); "Peter Rugg and his child, horse and carriage" (29). Unquestionably, the symbolic importance of Rugg's chair must not be underestimated (25 occurrences of "chair;" 16 of "carriage;" 3 of "chaise;" 1 of "coach;" 1 of "vehicle"), all the more so as Rugg systematically appears sitting in it with Jenny, as if they were nailed to their seat. The chair is then their prison, and constitutes a perfect *negative* counterpart of their lost home: they have no longer a roof, for it is an open vehicle that offers no protection from bad weather; it has no specific location as it travels at express speed and cannot stop anywhere for long; it is uncontrollable and unpredictable, which symbolizes Rugg's deprivation of any kind of mastery or ownership in this world. In fact, this negative of a home "possesses" Rugg, which epitomizes the total reversal of values affecting his existence. The master is now the horse, and Rugg is no longer the master in his own home, which, pertinently, Dunwell observed with a shiver: "It appears to me that Rugg's horse has some controul of the chair; and that Rugg himself is, in some sort, under the controul of his horse" (36). Young rightly suspected that the ego's loss of control was central in the psychological web of Austin's tale, but his system failed to assign to the chair a foreground place in Rugg's ordeal.

On the very first reading, the reader realizes — not without fright — that Rugg is a persecuted man. Not only does the rain give him no respite, but the whole world — beings and elements alike — seems, if Rugg and several more or less reliable witnesses have to be trusted, in league against him. The storm, for instance, is never presented as an enemy to which he is confronted, but, literally, as a persecutor. As the coachman remarks: "the storm never meets him; it follows him" (20). Rugg himself acknowledges the persecuting side of his lot. When Dunwell asks him in New York: "Mr. Rugg," said I, "you must excuse me, pray look to the West, see that thunder-cloud swelling with rage, as if in pursuit of us." "Ah!" said Rugg, "it is in vain to attempt to escape, I know that cloud, it is collecting new wrath to spend on my head" (45). Not only does foul weather relentlessly dog him, but everybody seems to mislead him deliberately. Whenever he asks someone his way to Boston, the answers he obtains sound unacceptable to him, for he immediately suspects others of having evil intentions: "how can you deceive me so? It is cruel to mislead a traveller"(22) . . . you impose on me; it is wrong to trifle with a traveller" (23); or to Mrs. Croft: "Why, woman! you mock me." (17). Even the geography of the towns and the rivers contribute to confuse him for good and all: "Boston shifts with the wind, and plays all around the compass (23). . . . Have the rivers, too, changed their courses, as the cities have changed places? (24) . . . The streets are all changed, the people are all changed, the town seems changed (24). . . . The highways refuse me a passage, the rivers change their courses, and there is no faith in the compass" (39). Rugg is definitely "lost," as he has no longer any confidence in the persons he meets and in the things surrounding him: "One man tells me it is to the East, another to the West; and the guide posts too, they all point the wrong way (23). . . . The highways refuse me a passage, the rivers change their courses, and there is no faith in the compass" (39). Rugg's concern to be exhaustive in his enumeration of "persecuting objects" — "the guide posts *too*..." (emphasis added) — and the fact that his list suffers no exception — "they *all* point the *wrong* way" (emphasis added) are relevant of a regressive paranoid position in which Rugg interprets the world around him in terms of persecution and aggressiveness.[3] He has indeed developed the most salient feature of paranoia — persecutive ideas — and he is convinced that the whole world is intriguing against him: "here is evidently a conspiracy against me" (38). Like a paranoiac, Rugg behaves as if he had been chosen by a malevolent, overpowering persecutor: "heaven sometimes sets a mark on a man, either for a judgement or a trial" (22).[4] Another typical trait present in the paranoiac delirium is the compulsive tendency of the delirious to rationalize a biased perception of reality. This is precisely what Rugg does, when he denies, in an unconvincingly pathetic rationale, what his senses insistently tell him:

> "City of Boston it may be; but it is not the Boston where I live. I recollect now, I came over a bridge instead of a ferry. Pray, what bridge is that I just came over?" "It is Charles River Bridge." "I perceive my mistake; there is a ferry between Boston and Charlestown; there is no bridge. Ah, I perceive my mistake, if I was in Boston my horse would

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[3] According to Melanie Klein, this specific mental stage, typical of early childhood, may reappear in adulthood, in particular in psychosis. Its major characteristics are a high rate of aggressiveness, the projection of aggressive drives and an intense anxiety of persecutive nature (see Klein: 1932).

[4] The identification of God as a persecutor is not uncommon in the delirious ratiocination of paranoiacs to account for their symptoms.

> carry me directly to my own door. But my horse shows by his impatience that he is in a strange place. Absurd, that I should have mistaken this place for the old town of Boston! it is a much finer city than the town of Boston. It has been built long since Boston. I fancy Boston must lie at a distance from this city, as the good woman seems ignorant of it" (25).

Undeniably, Rugg shows signs of mental imbalance which evoke the symptomatology of paranoia. As a consequence of his demented perception of the exterior world, his inner world becomes one of overall disorientation and depression. He is successively depicted as "dejected, and looked anxiously at the passengers" (20); "bewildered" (21, 25, 38, 44); "wet and weary" (22, 23, 25); "sad-looking (34, 42); "anxious" (20, 22, 42); with a "chaotic mind" (44); "as though he never ate, drank, or slept" (22). He seems to have lost not only his way, but the sense of place and time. When Dunwell asks him when he left Boston, Rugg answers: "I cannot tell precisely; it seems a considerable time" (23). The stranger of the Marlborough Hotel concludes: "He seems to have an indistinct idea of day and night, time and space, storm and sunshine" (36). Peter Rugg's wanderings are reflections of his wandering mind.

A well-known psychic malfunctioning in paranoia is the projection onto others of traits or intentions that are in fact those of the mentally ill, which fortifies the persecutive interpretation of reality and gives the delirious the illusion of always being right. Thus, rejecting irrevocably Dunwell's indications, Rugg soon suspects that *he* must be insane:

> "Sir," said I, "this town is Concord, Concord in Delaware, not Concord in Massachusetts; and you are now five hundred miles from Boston." Rugg looked at me for a moment, more in sorrow than resentment, and then repeated, "five hundred miles! unhappy man, who would have thought he had been deranged, but nothing is so deceitful as appearances, in this world" (37).

In what resembles a fit of disorientation, he even accuses his wife of having abandoned her husband and her daughter: "The streets are all changed, the people are all changed, the town seems changed, and what is strangest of all, Catherine Rugg has deserted her husband and child"

(24). In New York, Rugg refuses what his senses show him and sees the town as "a grand delusion, nothing real" (45). One sees here that Peter Rugg is not only perceived as *alien* because he is an eerie survivor of the past, but also for his bizarre behavior which evokes that of somebody insane.

Do all these symptoms indicate that Rugg is actually suffering from paranoia? Not exactly, for Peter Rugg undergoes a very traumatic experience, which is responsible for his mental troubles: one may wonder if anyone, even the most well-balanced person, would not react similarly under so unusual and bewildering circumstances. Indeed, one must keep in mind, all along this analysis, that Austin's fable is by no means the romanticized portrait of a mad man, but a story permeated with the supernatural, and that any trace of insanity or the bizarre found in it regards more the story itself than the protagonists. However, we have gathered enough pieces of evidence, at this point of our study, to suspect that *the structure of the narrative parallels that of a paranoia*. If this hypothesis proves to be true, we should be able to find some element in the narrative that triggered off the ineluctable process which led Rugg to the verge of madness and made the story tip over into an atmosphere of insanity.

According to Jacques Lacan's theory,[5] there is always a releasing factor that precipitates the apparition of a psychotic state in the so far most ordinary life of a paranoiac. Backing up his analysis of one of Freud's famous case histories — *Senatspräsident* Schreber's[6] — Lacan revisits the etiology of psychosis by linking it to the father function — or rather the defect of it. Lacan observed that many psychotic persons have lived a good part of their lives without presenting alarming mental troubles (Lacan, *Séminaire* 231), until some minor event enters their existence and irremediably overthrows their unnoticed fragile balance. Considering the decisive factors triggering off the development of psychosis, Lacan evokes:

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[5] Most of the ideas developed here are inspired by Jacques Lacan's *Les psychoses*, le Séminaire (Paris: Seuil, 1981). We propose here our own translation.

[6] For a complete study, see Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories*, 131-220.

> the most laborious task a man can meet in his life, something that his being in the world does not impose on him so often — what is called *to speak in one's name,* I mean, in one's *own* name, which is quite different from saying *yes, yes, yes* to somebody. . . . Observation shows that it is at this very moment, if one knows how to spot it, that psychosis breaks out (Lacan, *Séminaire* 285).

Of course, this tragic denouement presupposes a peculiar psychic structure in the subject. Theorizing the unconscious as a network of signifiers, Lacan postulates a fundamental lack in the symbolic network, which does not enable the psychotic subject to assume his position in language: "psychosis consists of a hole, a lack at the signifier level. . . . One must conceive, not imagine, what happens for a subject when he is questioned whence there is no signifier, when the hole, the lack manifests itself as such" (Lacan, *Séminaire* 227-28). According to Lacan, the missing signifier is precisely that of the father function — the "Name-of-the-Father." As Lacan puts it: "Psychosis breaks out precisely when the missing Name-of-the-Father — which is *verworfen,* debarred from the Other and which had never been in its place — is questioned in the subject on the symbolic level" (Lacan, *Ecrits* 577, his italics; our translation). In other words, when the missing symbolic meaning of the father function is suddenly prompted by somebody else, the subject reacts by trying to reorganize the world around him or her in order to compensate for the symbolic lack. This generates a faked conception of the order of the world — a delirium — often accompanied by a feeling of universal cataclysm,[7] as the subject experiences "a period of confusion and panic" (Lacan, *Séminaire* 217).

Now, let us observe what occurs to Peter Rugg. An interestingly detailed anamnestic description is provided by the anonymous patron of the Marlborough Hotel:

> He was a man in comfortable circumstances, had a wife and one daughter, and was generally esteemed for his sober life and manners. But unhappily, his temper, at times, was altogether ungovernable, and

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[7] In his study of Schreber's case, Freud remarks that "a world-catastrophe of this kind is not infrequent during agitated stages in other cases of paranoia" (Freud 208).

> then, his language was terrible. In these fits of passion, if a door stood in his way, he would never do less than kick a pannel through. He would sometimes throw his heels over his head, and come down on his feet, uttering oaths in a circle; and thus in a rage, he was the first who performed a summersett, and did what others have since learnt to do for merriment and money. Once Rugg was seen to bite a ten-penny nail in halves. In those days, every body, both men and boys, wore wigs; and Peter, at these moments of violent passion, would become so profane that his wig would rise up from his head. Some said, it was on account of his terrible language; others accounted for it in a more philosophical way, and said it was caused by the expansion of his scalp; as violent passion, we know, will swell the veins and expand the head. While these fits were on him Rugg had no respect for heaven or earth. Except this infirmity, all agreed that Rugg was a good sort of a man; for when his fits were over, no-body was so ready to commend a placid temper as Peter (26).

Peter Rugg is depicted here as a very ordinary man, living an apparently very ordinary life. However, our attention is attracted by his uneven temper, which manifests itself by quite unusual "fits of passion." During these crises, he would become the mere shadow of his former self, as he appears to be unable to control himself any longer, yielding to compulsive violent acting-outs and pronouncing words that overstep the mark of normal speech. One notices also, when he is undergoing these fits, that his language becomes "profane" and he has "no respect for heaven or earth." It is no wonder then if he is led to brave and defy the supreme laws of the world, in just the same way he does in Menotomy at Mr. Cutter's. But what exactly happens there, which triggers off his collapse into a psychotic-like condition? Let us examine the precise circumstances which irremediably turn his life upside down.

> On his return, a violent storm overtook him. At dark, he stopped in Menotomy (now West-Cambridge), at the door of a Mr. Cutter, a friend of his, who urged him to tarry the night. On Rugg's declining to stop, Mr. Cutter urged him vehemently. "Why, Mr. Rugg," said Cutter, "the storm is overwhelming you; the night is exceeding dark; your little daughter will perish; you are in an open chair and the tempest is increasing." "Let the storm increase," said Rugg, with a fearful oath, "I will see home to-night, in spite of the last tempest! or may I never see home!" At these words he gave his whip to his high spirited horse and disappeared in a moment (27).

What brings Peter Rugg to pronounce his "fatal oath" (24), is Mr. Cutter's "vehement" injunction not to try to reach Boston that night, *for it may imperil his daughter's life*. No doubt the very argument is precisely what makes Peter Rugg take up the challenge. When his friend appeals to his role *as a father*, Rugg responds by defying the elements, asserting foolishly that he would accept no superior authority — "the father function and the fear of God are close to each other" (Lacan, *Séminaire*, 304). Accordingly, nature lets loose its fury upon him, and Rugg is expelled from the ordinary world. It is interesting to notice here that the angry storm harasses him, *and him only*, a characteristic trait of persecutive delirium. The reshuffling of the world experienced by Rugg is now perfectly clear as "the lack of a signifier brings necessarily the subject to question the order of the signifier at large" (Lacan, *Séminaire* 229). As Young pertinently suggested, the black horse is the embodiment of Rugg's unleashed drives, which carry him away along unknown roadways — "delirium," from the Latin phrase "*de lira*," meaning "out of the furrow" —, far from his native province, whose inhabitants seem logically to him "a strange generation of men" (42). Moreover, the whole world has lost its stability, as the recurring allusions to earthquakes (28, 51) indicate — "some tremendous convulsion of nature has thrown London or Amsterdam on the shores of New-England" (45). As a consequence of his loss of the sense of the reality, his home is now limited to his chair over which he has no control, and from which he cannot escape, symbolizing his confinement within the limits of his delirium. Cut off from the father function, Rugg dismisses the mother function as well, by accusing Mrs. Rugg of having abandoned her daughter, for if he cannot be a father, what a mother actually is remains alien to him. This is convincing evidence that the Bostonian auctioneer is right when he asserts that Rugg's estate has been abandoned "for want of heirs" (47) since Rugg's incapacity to shoulder the responsibility for the father function makes him unable to participate in any genealogy. To put it in a nutshell, Rugg, in Menotomy, in the dual signification of the word — "angry" and "insane" —, becomes literally *mad*.

However consistent it may appear, this interpretation alone cannot account for the entire narrative and it must be considered, at this point of our analysis, as nothing more than a temporary result and a step toward further understanding of the psychological dimension of Austin's tale. Indeed, despite the accumulation of clues that testify to Rugg's apparent madness, it must be remembered that, given the circumstances, Rugg's experience is not that of a man who has lost his wits. The unordinary situation he experiences — which constitutes the *pathos* of the story, not its *pathology* — is what radically separates him from insanity. In other words, though Rugg's behavior evokes that of a paranoiac, it appears to be largely justified by the nature of the ordeal he has to confront. Moreover, one must not forget the literary genre Austin's short story belongs to: an interpretation in terms of mental pathology would overlook its supernatural features, by reducing it to a mere clinical case. Obviously, Dunwell's account does not boil down to a fictionalized case of paranoia.

One salient feature of Dunwell's descriptions of Rugg's apparitions is their dream-like quality, essentially resting on the preeminence of visual elements and the absence of personal reactions of the witnesses. We have selected three episodes during which Dunwell *himself* has the opportunity to behold Peter Rugg in his carriage. The first one takes place on the Virginia race ground.

> It was now nearly 12 o'clock, the hour of expectation, doubt and anxiety. The riders mounted their horses; and so trim, light and airy, they sat on the animals, they seem a part of them. The spectators, many deep, in a solid column, had taken their places; and as many thousand breathing statues were there, as spectators. All eyes were turned to Dart and Lightning, and their two fairy riders (34).

A comparable situation occurs when Dunwell discovers Rugg on board the Hudson ferry. Again, the witnesses are perfectly silent and they do not take their eyes off the strange team for a second.

> As I entered the ferry boat, I was struck at the spectacle before me; there, indeed, sat Peter Rugg and Jenny Rugg in the chair, and there stood the black horse, all as quiet as lambs, surrounded by more than fifty men and women, who seemed to have lost all their senses but one. Not a motion, not a breath, not a nestle. They were all eye (41).

A third example is equally emblematic of this peculiar situation. When Rugg eventually managed to reach his Middle Street house, he was struck by the absence of reaction and the insistent stare of the assembly gathered for the auction sale:

> "Will none of you speak to me? Or is this all a delusion? I see, indeed, many forms of men, and no want of eyes, but of motion, speech, and hearing you seem to be destitute" (51).

The insistence of the narrator on eyesight is confirmed by the abundance of correlated terms he uses in his account of Peter Rugg's incredible story — 48 "see;" 12 "eye;" 4 "beheld;" 3 "watch;" 2 "sight;" 1 "stare," almost all of them closely connected with Peter Rugg. This is significant of the voyeuristic dimension of Dunwell's narrative. But what is the object of this particular drive? What fascinates the spectators — and Dunwell as well — in the first episode is unquestionably the couple of powerful horses who look so uncannily alike:

> . . . as two new horses of great promise were run, the race ground was never better attended, nor was expectation ever more deeply excited. The partisans of Dart and Lightning, the two race horses were equally anxious, and equally dubious of the result. To an indifferent spectator it was impossible to perceive any difference. They were equally beautiful to behold, alike in colour and height, and as they stood side by side they measured from heel to fore feet within half an inch of each other. The eyes of each were full, prominent, and resolute, and when at times they regarded each other, they assumed a lofty demeanour, seemed to shorten their necks, project their eyes and rest their bodies equally on their four hoofs. They certainly discovered signs of intelligence, and displayed a courtesy to each other, unusual even with statesmen (33).

This amazing "double" effect even overcame their spellbound supporters, who were "equally anxious, and equally dubious of the result." No doubt that the personification of the animals who are endowed with flattering human qualities — intelligence, courtesy — contributes highly to their powers of fascination, together with their physical features, and, last but not least, their very unusual resemblance. This deserves special attention, for the narrator insists largely on the similarities of the two steeds. Not only do they resemble each other, but they are so identical that they could be mistaken one for the other, to the point where it is "impossible to perceive any difference." The ambiguity of the description suggests that the two horses are, in fact, two versions of the same animal, split into two mirroring images. What seems to differentiate them, at any rate, is their names, but one may nevertheless argue that, put together, they do make sense as the two components of one phrase, emblematic of Peter Rugg's daily lot, for being struck by a "dart of lightning" is a threat terribly familiar to him, which he could never outrun.[8] However, things turned out differently in this very episode since Lightfoot easily overtook "the racers, who, on perceiving this new competitor pass them, threw back their ears, and suddenly stopped in their course. Thus neither Dart nor Lightning carried away the purse" (34). It is a remarkable coincidence that no rain nor thunderstorm spoiled the meeting, and apparently, Peter Rugg has eventually succeeded — not only symbolically — in outrunning his pursuer. Moreover, from this moment on, Rugg is never again directly menaced by the storm. Though the Virginian toll-gatherer signals the ominous black speck "doubling and trebling itself, and rolling up the turnpike steadily" (37), Rugg is no longer really threatened by the deluge and, as Dunwell relates, "before he arrived at the toll gate, the thunder cloud had spent itself, and not even a sprinkle fell near us" (38). This is corroborated by the Hudson Ferry episode and the final denouement in Boston, during which not a drop of rain fell, neither on Rugg nor on those who surrounded him. Apparently, a part of the curse has been exorcised and Rugg has no more reason to fear the wrath of the skies.

This leads us to question more closely the exact value of what actually happened on the Virginian race ground. What makes the horse race so remarkable is the fact that it opposes two competitors which are so identical that the spectators are "equally dubious of the result" (33). Another source of confusion is the physical assimilation of the riders to their mounts: they literally form one body with their horses, "so trim, light and airy, they sat on the animals, they seem a part of them" (34) Considering Peter Rugg's paranoia-like anathema, these competitors look like minor versions of himself and his horse, paralleling Schreber's delirium as analyzed by Jacques Lacan:

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[8] We owe this remark to Joseph Zimbalatti (114).

> . . . the imaginary identity of the other is intimately connected with the possibility of a fragmentation, a division of the self. . . . One finds, on the one hand, the multiple identities of one character, and on the other, these small enigmatic identities, diversely piercing the self and noxious to it, within himself, which [Schreber] calls "small men" (Lacan, *Séminaire* 113).

What corroborates this interpretation is the questioning of Peter Rugg's presence in the chair, as if he had delegated his representation to his two competitors: "With many it was the opinion that nobody was in the vehicle. Indeed, this began to be the prevalent opinion, for those at a short distance, so fleet was the black horse, could not easily discern, who, if any body, was in the carriage" (34). Significantly, the only ones who can assert that there was somebody in the carriage are precisely the two riders: "But both the riders, whom the black horse passed very nearly, agreed in this particular, that a sad-looking man with a little girl, was in the chair" (34). If the two riders are Peter Rugg's "small men" — *i.e.* imaginary versions of himself — they are indeed the only ones who can reliably testify to his presence on the race ground.

We have now enough elements to provide a psychoanalytical definition of what a race actually consists in, and, to be more specific, what mechanism is at work in a race that makes it so attracting for human beings. First, let us summarize what the indispensable prerequisites of a race are. What makes it an interestingly valuable activity, is the imperative fact that all competitors must be considered on an equal footing by those who attend the race. Otherwise, a predictable outcome of the competition would spoil much of its interest. In other words, the limited world of the race is based on a consensus according to which the hierarchy of the competitors cannot be organized in advance, failing which the contest has no raison d'être. So, a disturbing restricted part of the universe must appear as unorganized — which does not fail to be a source of psychic perturbation — until the race provides a classification that converts the unorganized into the organized, thus canceling the source of anxiety that generally accompanies confusion — for disorder generates the unexpected, which is a constant source of sorrow and fear for humankind. We can thus suggest the following definition of a race: it is an *unnatural* activity — nature does not provide the prerequisites of a race, only human beings sometimes do — in which disorder is simulated — and anxiety stimulated —, in the sole aim to enjoy the pleasure of a restored security when the world appears organized again. This is why the winner of a competition is so praised, for he restores a stable condition of the world and symbolizes the enjoyment of the symbolic recovered safety in the order of the human world and confirms human ability to organize it, *i. e.* to master it.

On the Virginian race ground, the necessary conditions for a race are ideal ones: nobody could prophesy the final result, and "[t]he partisans of Dart and Lightning, the two race horses were equally anxious, and equally dubious of the result" (33). As only two competitors are mentioned, the situation is somewhat simplified, which makes it all the more salient and emblematic. During the race episode, the situation moves from a dual mirror-like system to a ternary combination which overcomes confusion and dissipates the unpredictable. In psychoanalytical terms, the plot goes from the imaginary to the symbolic through the introduction of a third party. What Lacan calls "the mediating function of the symbolic" (Lacan, *Seminaire*, 168) intervenes to undo the imaginary trap in which the spectators — including Dunwell — are caught — the image of a circular track is particularly pertinent here — and to institute a "certain prescribed order" (Lacan, 169) necessary to break the vicious circle. The award of the actor of such a rescue is relevantly "the purse" which "neither Dart nor Lightning carried away" (34), and whose symbolic value is unquestionable. Money is indeed an emblematic symbolic object, as its circulation parallels that of the signifiers in language, ruling human society.[9] Noticeably, Dunwell acknowledges the passage from confused images to the symbolic order by *naming* the winner as he was "satisfied it was *Peter Rugg*" (35, emphasis added). This taught him a lesson which he applied advisedly when he meets him again on board the Hudson ferry.

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[9] Austin's detachment as regards money and criticism of his society are here implicitly embedded in his narrative.

Peter Rugg's promotion from a "natural" condition, in which language is absent, to that of the humans is ironically evoked by the ferry-man of Powles's Hook: "it is a man, who looks as if he had lain hid in the ark,[10] and had just now ventured out" (41). As a matter of fact, Peter Rugg has changed a lot, and he now looks less affected by his ordeal, as "[h]e had lost his sad and anxious look, was quite composed, and seemed happy" (42). However, he is still haunted by his obsession to reach Boston, and "appeared to them to be a man not of this world" (42) — a feeling which apparently Dunwell no longer shares — but after all, he knows more about Rugg than the others do. Despite its different location and staging, this episode is tightly connected with that of the race ground, for both share significant components. As the horses on the track "proceed on a slow trot, then they quicken to a canter, and then a gallop" (34), the horses which tow the boat "from a smart trot, soon pressed, into a gallop" (43), reproducing the introductory sequence which led to Rugg's progress into the symbolic field. Moreover, the outcome of the first episode — money — is now explicitly at the core of the plot. In full accordance with our interpretation, Rugg's attitude toward money has completely changed, and this time, "[t]hough Rugg refused to pay toll at turnpikes, when Mr. Hardy reached his hand for the ferriage, Rugg readily put his hand into one of his many pockets, and took out a piece of silver, and handed it to Hardy" (43). Unfortunately, the coin does not fit: "'What is this?' said Mr. Hardy. 'It is thirty shillings,' said Rugg. 'It might have once been thirty shillings, old tenor,' said Mr. Hardy, 'but it is not at present'" (43). However, thanks to Dunwell's stratagem, Rugg can settle his debt to the new world, inaugurating his reinsertion into a new system of symbolic exchanges, which enables him, "in the course of two months" (47), to find eventually his way to Boston.[11]

The last section of Austin's story confirms the undeniable resolution of Rugg's malediction, and visibly, "[t]he tempest which [he] profanely defied at Menotomy has at length subsided" (52). His wild peregrinations are now over, and he has finally reached his destination

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[10] Hidden among animals...

[11] This interpretation was suggested by Bernard Terramorsi (1994).

— as well as the nadir of his destiny. The storm is no longer after him, for in Middle Street, he is under the worldwide acknowledged aegis of Benjamin Franklin, the man who "fixed the thunder, and guided the lightning" (49).[12] His name and identity are no longer questioned, and can be confirmed by the "thousand men [who] had surrounded Rugg, and his horse and chair" (51): "The confident look and searching eyes of Rugg, to every one present, carried more conviction, that the estate was his, than could any parchment or paper with signature and seal" (51). Moreover, everything has apparently found its former place again, and Middle Street is no longer affected by the spatial inversion which puzzled Rugg and Jenny so much when they met Mrs. Croft many years before:

> "though the painting is rather faded, this looks like my house." "Yes," said the child, "that is the stone before the door that I used to sit on to eat my bread and milk." "But," said the stranger, "it seems to be on the wrong side of the street. Indeed, everything here seems to be misplaced." (24).

This oddity in the narrative — it was by no means imposed by the surface logic of the plot — confirms our hypothesis according to which Rugg lived his wanderings *through the looking-glass*, in that illusory world which originates in the primeval process of construction of the imaginary by the infant, as described by Jacques Lacan in his theory of the "mirror stage," during which the imaginary manifests itself to the subject for the first time in his existence "with an inverted symmetry," inaugurating the long series of specular images "nourishing hallucinations and dreams" (Lacan, *Ecrits* 95). The reinsertion of Rugg in the symbolic puts logically an end to the specular inversion.

Strikingly enough, the major topic of the last section is not only money, but what can be done with it in this world. Indeed, the argumentation of the auctioneer is largely based on the notion of speculation — *i. e.* the circulation of money, a highly symbolic activity:

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[12] Let us notice here that if the auctioneer is wrong to pretend that Franklin's native house is situated in Middle Street — he was born in Milk Street —, his assertion does make sense as far as the unconscious functioning of the narrative is concerned.

> "Men of speculation! Ye who are deaf to every thing except the sound of money, you, I know, will give me both of your ears when I tell you the city of Boston must have a piece of this estate in order to widen Ann-street. Do you hear me; do you all hear me? I say the city must have a large piece of this land in order to widen Ann-street. What a chance! The city scorns to take a man's land for nothing. If they seize your property, they are generous beyond the dreams of avarice. The only oppression is, you are in danger of being smothered under a load of wealth. Witness the old lady who lately died of a broken heart, when the Mayór paid her for a piece of her kitchen garden. All the Faculty agreed that the sight of the treasure, which the Mayor incautiously paid her in dazzling dollars, warm from the mint, sped joyfully all the blood of her body into her heart, and rent it in raptures. Therefore, let him who purchases this estate, fear his good fortune, and not Peter Rugg. Bid then liberally, and do not let the name of Rugg damp your ardor. How much will you give per foot for this estate?" (50)

The auctioneer clearly opposes the perspective of making profit to Peter Rugg's divine curse — "let him who purchases this estate, fear his good fortune, and not Peter Rugg." By so doing, the town civil servant asserts the preeminence of the symbolic order over nebulous[13] — imaginary — rumors born "from the incredible story of one Jonathan Dunwell" (48). This change in the tone of the narrative makes the story move *from specularity to speculation*, which adequately parallels Rugg's symbolic change of situation.

One may still wonder what the anonymous voice at the end of the story actually means — on the psychoanalytical level — by warning Rugg that he "can never have another home in this world" (52). The word "home" appears as a leitmotiv throughout the narrative (18 occurrences), and thus, its symbolic value cannot be underestimated. The discrimination the voice makes between Rugg's home and his estate — "Your estate, indeed, remains, but no home" (52) — confirms that the distinction between their respective psychic values is of prime importance to the understanding of the denouement. The financial context in the last section indicates clearly that the "estate" now amounts to its mere pecuniary value, *i. e.* a symbolic one. As to the "home," it is obviously of a different nature, as the lengthy presentation of the auctioneer suggests. In his introductory speech, Peter Rugg's home is first associated with images referring to a mythical couple: "on this spot, Neptune shall marry Ceres, and Pomona from Roxbury, and Flora from Cambridge, shall dance at the wedding" (49). The logical outcome of a wedding is the birth of children, and on this point, the auctioneer's eloquence is amazingly insistent:

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[13] The insistence on the word "cloud" (18 occurrences) in Rugg's story echoes this "etymological" assessment ("nebulous," from *nebula*, "cloud" in Latin)...

> "[O]f what price is the birth place of one, who, all the world knows, was born in Middle-street, directly opposite to this lot; and who, if his birth place was not well known, would now be claimed by more than seven cities. . . . Here was the birth place of Freedom; here Liberty was born, and nursed, and grew to manhood. Here man was new created. Here is the nursery of American Independence Here is the cradle of Independence. . . who lent a hand to rock the cradle of Independence?" (49, 50, 50, emphasis added).

In this long series of recurrent *images*, the auctioneer presents Middle Street as an allegory of the birthplace of American independence. Yet, his argumentation rests on the imaginary, as obviously nothing such can seriously be said of Peter Rugg's home. This is undoubtedly the seducing side of his speech, and seduction is a well-known imaginary function, often based on appearances. If one takes into account the classic psychoanalytical value of "home" — houses are mother symbols —, it becomes clear that what Rugg has definitely lost is *the imaginary mother on which he thought he had an undisputed power*. The extreme self-confidence he displayed when he pronounced his oath and his blind obstinacy to reach Middle Street prove that he had not renounced the illusory feeling of omnipotence that the father dissipates when he introduces the child to the symbolic world. Psychoanalysis has shown that by doing so, the father draws the child out of the dual, specular relationship he has developed with his mother, to insert the subject into a ternary, symbolic structure, that of the Oedipus complex, foreshadowing social relations. It seems thus that Peter Rugg should now be ready to be reinserted into the symbolic network which gives humankind its humanity.

Unfortunately, the ominous sentence pronounced by the anonymous voice reveals the limits of Rugg's psychic progress: "you can never be fitted to the present" (52). *Vox populi, vox dei*:[14] it seems that Peter Rugg was hopelessly condemned by God the Father, once embodied by Mr. Cutter — the one who cuts, separates —, for nothing in Austin's tale indicates that Rugg goes through the socializing process induced by the Oedipus complex. On the contrary, Rugg embodies the transgression of the very prohibition of incest:

> The hero of the story did not leave an empty home: everything goes on as if he had abandoned his wife. Moreover, he did not go away alone... On second thought, the eternity he found may not be that of our fears; it could even be that of our wishes (Goimard and Stragliati 182, our translation).

Moreover, his wild flight with his daughter and the exclusion of the mother suggest a relationship based on a lack of differentiation: "He has a little girl with him, the counterpart of himself" (41). The oedipal trio is indeed totally absent from Rugg's story, since the mother and child are nothing more than mere imaginary doubles of the father: when Dunwell discovers Rugg's former home in Middle Street — a mother symbol, as previously suggested —, he can only notice that "[t]his is Rugg's estate . . . it is a counterpart of Peter Rugg" (47). In fact, this place of ruins condenses and symbolizes Rugg's ordeal: "The premises, indeed, looked as if they had accomplished a sad prophecy" (47). Rugg's ruined "house lot" (47) has become *his* lot — "'I am ruined; our house has been burnt, and here are all our neighbours around the ruins'" (51). If Rugg has indeed overcome the malediction itself, he must still face the irremediable — fatal — consequences of it, for he is never offered any opportunity to achieve complete redemption.

It is time now to focus on the ineradicably irrational side of Dunwell's narrative. Despite the commendable efforts of the auctioneer to rationalize this "incredible story" (48), Rugg in person appears at the auction sale, just in time to prevent his estate from being sold. Rugg's unexpected appearance contradicts the auctioneer's rationale, as the latter's spectacular reaction confirms:

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[14] We borrow this interpretation from Terramorsi (1994).

> . . . although the latter words of the auctioneer were, "fear not Peter Rugg," the moment the auctioneer met the eye of Rugg, his occupation was gone, his arm fell down to his hips, his late lively hammer hung heavy in his hand, and the auction was forgotten (51).

Actually, the entire story never ceases to oscillate between fictional devices that sometimes make it rather matter of fact and rational, sometimes weird and beyond common sense. The only protagonist who seems both to take the rumors circulating on the wanderer at face value and to find some logic in them is the narrator. Significantly, Dunwell *alone* was able to help Rugg efficiently, which established a kind of complicity between them: "you are the only honest man I have seen since I left Boston" (44), Rugg said to him, before he offered him a seat in his chair for a brief, wild ride through the streets of New York. In fact, Dunwell is not only the occasional columnist who makes the story public: he literally shapes it into a consistent account, in which he stages himself as a prominent, indispensable actor. This ambivalent relationship to his own account, together with the recurrence of oneiric episodes and the unconscious themes structuring them, makes the whole story look like a convincing collection of features typical of dreams. Consequently, it can be asserted now that the account goes on as if *Dunwell dreamed the whole story,* which logically comes to an end when the scenario of the dream reaches a deadlock. Indeed, Peter Rugg and his horse appear at least once as Dunwell's bad dream: when the horse is compared to "[a] more beautiful horse I . . . [with] his hide . . . as fair, and rotund and glossy as the skin of a Congo beauty" (36), it is literally turned into the narrator's *night-mare.*[15] The ominous ending of the story corresponds fully to that interpretation: the dream cannot continue for want of a possible way out. The abrupt ending of Dunwell's narrative parallels the failure of Freud's well-known dream function, according to which "*dreams are the* GUARDIANS *of sleep* " (Freud, *Interpretation* 330). It is no wonder then if we found so many pathological unconscious elements in the story, as "the indisputable analogy between dreams and insanity [extends] . . . down to their characteristic details" (Freud 165).

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[15] For further details, see Terramorsi (1994).

However, the impact of the story on the reader, though it conveys an undeniable dream-like atmosphere, is definitely not that of the mere narrative of a fantasy. The naive reaction of some of Austin's early readers, who mistook Dunwell's account for a *real* story, confirms that the text is of a different nature. What is striking, in the course of events described in it, is the fact that the reader can be led to hesitate between taking Peter Rugg's existence for granted and considering it as pure fiction. However outstanding the reported facts may be, the publication of the account among other miscellaneous non-fictitious notes or announcements gave them a varnish of veracity that could mislead the readers. This "real effect" induced by this particular mode of publication in the *Galaxy* was unfortunately lost in further editions, all the more so as all allusions to the magazine, present in the original version, have been deliberately discarded in what could be called un*authori*zed revised versions. But our theory, according to which Dunwell dreamed the whole story, reveals an internal mechanism of the real effect induced by the text, which owes nothing to the "exterior" paratext. If we admit that Peter Rugg is the produce of Dunwell's imagination, one may indeed be surprised to see him appear repeatedly in a context which looks very close to reality — all the toponyms of the narrative are real ones, and the wanderer literally bursts into the "normal" order of things. It looks like the irruption of the supernatural into the ordinary, *like a dream come true*. This is the very essence of Dunwell's account, not that of an "incredible story," but that of a fiction which unabashedly *pretends to be real*. This tour-de-force, added to the ambiguousness of its status,[16] makes Austin's tale pertain to the literary genre of the supernatural.

In the 19 January 1827 issue of the *Galaxy*, one can read a few lines, largely separated from the rest of Dunwell's report, which have never been commented upon, nor even noticed since the original publication, and which are undoubtedly part of the original text.

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[16] On the role of "hesitation" as a token of the supernatural as a genre, see Todorov (1970).

> PETER RUGG. A further account of this wonderful personage is given in our paper to-day, though we are not without suspicion that the intelligence is not from the real Mr. Jonathan Dunwell (53).

Paradoxically, this short note seems to invalidate the veracity of the last section by questioning the reliability of its presumed author. Yet, the overall effect is to reinforce the credibility of the other two sections, as they are not followed by similar warnings. In fact, this *addendum* is probably the only *true* information given on Peter Rugg's story, since the tale is certainly not the work of "the *real* Mr. Jonathan Dunwell" but, of course, that of the *real* William Austin. In fact, the effect of the note is that of a structural device, and it gives the whole tale its genuine status. By eventually telling the truth about the story of Peter Rugg, the author defines a structural frame to his writing, promoting it to authentic literature of the supernatural, whose essence it is to make the impossible *look* real. The psychoanalytical approach of the text makes the following reformulation of the role of the note possible: the real author, William Austin, imagined — dreamed — a story, which he wanted the readers to believe in, but he finally tried to make them believe that it was only fiction — dream. In his work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud explains that "a dream within a dream" is a token of the presence of the real:

> . . . if a particular event is inserted into a dream as a dream by the dream-work itself, this implies the most decided confirmation of the reality of the event — the strongest *affirmation* of it (Freud, *Interpretation* 453).

If one takes into account that fictions and dreams follow common rules, as far as the symbolization process is concerned, one can easily deduce that Austin's last note provides his tale with a supplementary subtle amount of veracity, and very cleverly adds credits to the existence of Peter Rugg.

As a conclusion, one may try to suggest a model of the psychoanalytical interpretation of this short story. Peter Rugg was cut off from a symbolic order — that of pre-Revolutionary times — and precipitated into a new one, based on a different set of symbols and values. As he *missed* the Revolution, he "can never be fitted to the present" (52), nor to the new symbolic network for he *missed* — and still misses — the appropriate symbols. Thus, the moral of Austin's tale could be the following: "human progress is of a symbolic nature, and the process is irreversible," which foreshadows Lacan's theory of the irreversibility of the symbolic order's evolution. By neglecting the storm — the political turmoil of the brewing Revolution[17] — Rugg put himself out of the symbolic revolution brought by Independence, and consequently cannot be fitted to the new order, *i. e.* independent America. This interpretation corroborates Austin's own "political" position, that of a convinced and committed patriot who "through his social and business affairs was actively involved in improving the world he lived in, and who through his writings sought neither financial advancement nor fame, but the propagation of humanistic ideals and moral virtues" (Zimbalatti, xiv). Rugg thus incarnates the vanity of resisting social and political progress, and demonstrates through his ordeal that refusing the new order is not only condemned by God, but amounts, for the one who missed it, to remain forever cut off from the rest of mankind. The fable of "Peter Rugg" confirms the universal validity of the Revolution and makes it an irrevocable landmark in the progress of humanity.

On the unconscious level, Rugg *misses* the opportunity to enter a symbolic order from which omnipotence and incest are excluded — that of the father function. In accordance with modern psychoanalytical theories, the absence of the corresponding signifier in the subject precipitates him into a delirious vision of the world, which is precisely the case with Peter Rugg. Interestingly, the writing of the whole story is made possible by this lack in the plot, by this hole in Rugg's life which dramatically triggers off his long series of wanderings in a country in which he has no longer a place. This is precisely the content of Dunwell's dream — or rather nightmare — which is also the very stuff the narrative is made of, coiling around the *missing* signifier: the vortex structure already unearthed from the historical interpretation of the story[18] appears here to be rooted in the same "absence" — that of the American Revolution and its aftermath, the new political order instituted by the Founding *Fathers.* Rugg travels around his *missing* home — actually destroyed — in Boston, never reaching it, even at the end of the story, until Dunwell's unconscious, having done its best to rescue Rugg, is no longer able to feed the dream and, stuck in a stalemate, wakes him up as nightmares sometimes do. Logically, the story comes then to its end, as Austin holds the reins again by trying to convince his readers — through the trick of the short note questioning Dunwell's existence — that the whole thing is true. By misleading his audience and making them mistake dream for reality, the author moves his work from the fable into the literary genre of the supernatural.

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[17] Rugg disappeared in 1770, the year of the Boston Massacre. For a detailed analysis of the Revolutionary structure of the plot, see *supra* Geoffroy "From Peter Rugg to Paul Revere."

Alain Geoffroy, February 1996.[19]

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[18] See *supra* Geoffroy "From Peter Rugg to Paul Revere."

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