

ABSTRACT

Debating Nature: Revising Pastoral in Hawthorne's America

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In 1849, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave Nathaniel Hawthorne a presentation copy of his second edition of the famous essay *Nature*. Hawthorne's three American romances composed over the next three years – *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) – employ some of the same terminology Emerson uses in his essay. More importantly, Hawthorne's romances offer differing ways of reimagining the kind of “original relation with the universe” that Emerson advocates while at the same time critiquing Emerson's blithe comments about unmediated relations between humans, nature, and the divine. Hawthorne shares with Emerson a conviction that nature and spirit are somehow related, but he registers his disagreement with Emerson by incorporating into his romances diverse ways of understanding nature – Puritan allegory, Gothic romance, Native American views of land ownership, and Renaissance pastoral, in addition to Transcendentalist idealism. Thus, the Transcendentalist view of nature functions, for Hawthorne, as one of a variety of ways of knowing nature rather than being the one “true” way, as Emerson implies.

In his investigation of nature, Hawthorne turns from Emerson's Transcendentalist claims to Renaissance pastoral as the most adequate way of understanding the relations between humans, nature, and the divine. Yet Hawthorne revises the pastoral as well by bringing together diverse views of nature to comprise a syncretic view of nature that he finds closer to the truth than any one of these views by itself. In Renaissance pastoral, the primary approach he adopts even as he revises it, Hawthorne finds a form that breaks down the apparent dichotomies between art and nature, nature and humans, nature and the divine, and humans and the divine so as to indicate that such dichotomies are founded upon a misconstrual of the human condition. By adopting Renaissance pastoral as a critique of more strictly American views of Nature, Hawthorne suggests that older literary forms may yet hold wisdom for the contemporary world – even if those older forms must be modified to respond to a new situation.

Debating Nature: Revising Pastoral In Hawthorne's America

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AYLI* Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. Ed. Michael Hattaway. Cambridge UP, 2009.
- CE* Hawthorne, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Ed. William Charvat et al. 23 vols. Ohio State UP, 1962-2004.
- Com.* Milton, *Comus*, or *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634. &c.* In *The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 123-71.
- CW* Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*. Ed. Alfred Ferguson et al. 9 vols. Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1971-.
- Cym.* Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*. Ed. Martin Butler. Cambridge UP, 2005.
- FQ* Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. Albert Charles Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki. Longman, 2001.
- JMN* Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. William Gilman et al. 16 vols. Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1960-1982.
- L'All.* Milton, *L'Allegro*. In *The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 66-71.
- Mem.* Rose Hawthorne Lathrop. *Memories of Hawthorne*.
- MND* Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. R. Foakes. Cambridge UP, 2003.
- NHHW* Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*.
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford UP, December 2011.
- MW* Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*. Ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer. Princeton UP, 2004.
- Pens.* Milton, *Il Penseroso*. In *The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 71-77.
- PL* Milton, *Paradise Lost*. In *The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 352-710.
- Tmp.* Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Oxford UP, 1998.
- Wa.* Thoreau, *Walden*. Ed. John Updike. Princeton UP, 2004.

WHM Melville, *The Northwestern-Newberry Edition of the Writings of Herman Melville*. Ed. Harrison Hayford et al. 15 vols. Northwestern UP, 1968-.

WT Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Oxford UP, 1996.

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and the movement toward reconciliation that intrigued Renaissance writers as well as Hawthorne. Finally, I am grateful to David Lyle Jeffrey, whose expertise on literature and the Bible informed my pursuit of the convoluted but important question of Hawthorne's sense of religious inheritance – a question that has worked its way into my dissertation. Many other professors, including Daniel Walden and Michael Parrish, have given me helpful support and feedback at various stages of this project.

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to my beloved Elizabeth

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Nature “Seen at Unawares” in Hawthorne’s America

For Nathaniel Hawthorne, Nature is a reality that is often veiled, often disguised, only occasionally actually seen by humans. In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), he cautions that assumptions about Nature are often based not so much on Nature as upon “long hereditary habit, which has become like nature” (*CE* 1: 165). Likewise, in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), he suggests that “custom, so immemorial, that it looks like nature” often passes for nature (*CE* 2: 23). Arguments based on Nature are often actually arguments for socially constructed versions of Nature which unthinkingly shape Nature into the image of the beholder. But even when observers do not impose such socially constructed ideas upon Nature, Hawthorne suggests *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Nature is rarely truly seen. Miles Coverdale (in spite of himself) for several moments recognizes the reality of Nature while “gazing casually around” the fields of Blithedale Farm: “There was, at such moments, a novelty, an unwonted aspect on the face of Nature, as if she had been taken by surprise and seen at unawares, with no opportunity to put off her real look, and assume the mask with which she mysteriously hides herself from mortals” (*CE* 3: 66). But living in Nature is not the only way to catch such glimpses. Coverdale catches glimpses of Nature in the city as well:

Bewitching to my fancy are all those nooks and crannies, where Nature, like a stray partridge, hides her head among the long-established haunts of men! It is likewise to be remarked, as a general rule, that there is far more of the picturesque, more truth to native and characteristic tendencies, and vastly greater suggestiveness, in the back view of a residence, whether in town or country, than in its front... Realities keep in the rear... (*CE* 3: 149)

Nature, then, is a “stray partridge” that can sometimes be “seen at unawares,” whether in the woods or fields of Blithedale or in the townhouse where Nature thrusts its way through the “nooks and crannies” and shows itself with in its true form “in the back view of a residence.” Hawthorne intimates that even though Nature is only rarely and partially seen even by those who make a study of it, Nature is indeed a reality with which humans must grapple in coming to terms with the human condition. Rather than writing treatises on Nature in the manner of influential contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson, however, Hawthorne represents Nature in artistic forms – most obviously by grounding his romances in the mode of Renaissance pastoral.

Pastoral denotes a country setting, but pastoral literature is not simply literature set in the country; deriving from the Latin *pastoralis*, the term has to do with the “tending of livestock” and poetic creativity as much as with the country setting itself (OED “pastoral”). Typically, the pastoral setting inspires the poet to consider relations between humans and nature, nature and civilization, city and country, and most importantly - nature and art. Virgil's *Eclogues* (37 BCE) are often considered the first developed pastoral, but pastoral makes its debut in English with the publication of Edmund Spenser's *Shepheardes Calendar* (1579); both works contribute to Hawthorne's conception of the pastoral. Later adaptations of the pastoral in diverse works of fiction, including Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), give Hawthorne examples of literary forms that reshape the pastoral into works of satire and prose fiction but retain at least some of the pastoral's focus on the relations between humans and nature. While Hawthorne read all of these works and many later literary treatments of Nature, such as Gothic romance and the romantic poetry of Wordsworth

and Coleridge, it is to the fairylands of Renaissance pastoral that he most consistently turns for his own literary inspiration.

As a form with room for a less simplistic and self-confident view of the world than the other literary forms he used in his romances, Renaissance pastoral provided Hawthorne the artistic sphere in which to develop a fresh and yet culturally informed understanding of human relations to the world. And in the pastoral, which he treats as a mutable form that allows room for new understandings that can also incorporate other literary forms, Hawthorne finds a form that enables a humble seeking for the truth of the human condition. Pastoral offered Hawthorne a way of thinking about Nature that was not deterministic and yet insisted that the human relation with Nature was indeed meaningful. Following Hawthorne's lead, I will treat Renaissance pastoral as a mutable form, one that remains alive to the influence of Nature and yet does not impose a certain reading of the world upon Nature.

In his study of the pastoral's emergence in English literature, Patrick Cullen mentions the pastoral juxtaposition of country and city as an incidental matter that gives way to the actual significance of pastoral as it was developed in the Renaissance: "pastoral manifests an ambivalence, a tension between opposing values. This ambivalence is perhaps even more obvious in Renaissance pastoral than in classical pastoral; for the issues involved in pastoral – art and nature, the active life and the contemplative life, complexity and simplicity – were perhaps even more acute than in classical times" (12). This kind of pastoral vision strongly informs Hawthorne's American romances. Under Hawthorne's pen, Renaissance pastoral is treated as the literary lens most suited for viewing Nature in the light of historical and then-current

questions being asked about American identity. Since America had come to think of itself as “Nature’s Nation,” in a phrase later made famous by Perry Miller, it is no surprise that Hawthorne connected nature and nation in this way. But such an American vision must be authenticated, Hawthorne implies, by viewing Americans’ relations to Nature through a variety of lenses.

In 1849, as Hawthorne was writing his first major American romance, Ralph Waldo Emerson sent him a presentation copy of the second edition of his famous Transcendentalist essay *Nature* (Emerson, *JMN* 156). Hawthorne’s three major American romances, composed and published over the course of the next three years, represent a response to Emerson’s query in the opening paragraph: “Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” Emerson is here comparing the situation of nineteenth-century Americans to past generations who “beheld God and nature face to face” (*CW* 1: 7). Hawthorne was one of many who found Emerson’s question inspiring, but his responses register a degree of mixed fascination and skepticism seen in few other responses of the period.¹ In his examination of Emerson’s Transcendentalist views of Nature, Hawthorne employs a variety of views of Nature rather than simply engaging Emerson on his own terms. By bringing together various present and past perspectives on Nature, Hawthorne develops a syncretic view of Nature that interpolates Puritan allegory, Gothic romance, and Transcendentalist idealism with Renaissance pastoral to insist upon an interrelation between Nature, human nature, and the divine. Each of these

¹ Don Scheese likewise suggests that Emerson’s call for an “original relation to the universe” contributed directly to Thoreau’s *Walden* and other works of the period (59). And Hawthorne’s friend Herman Melville offers perhaps the only close parallel to Hawthorne’s own literary work, grappling with Transcendentalist ideas – especially in *Moby Dick*, which he dedicated to Hawthorne – even while clearly delineating some of his differences from them.

views of Nature are helpful but insufficient without the insights of Renaissance pastoral. Thus, pastoral serves as his center even as he revises and Americanizes it by adding components of these later viewpoints to his writing.

The kind of relationship to Nature that Hawthorne pioneers in American literature is not “original” in the unmediated way that Emerson imagines, but it is original in the sense of creating a reshaped Renaissance pastoral that may assist with the mediation of Nature even in nineteenth-century America. For Hawthorne, the kind of direct unmediated response to nature that Emerson aspires to is simply not possible. Nature is rarely truly seen and even more rarely understood. Nature can be rendered intelligible, however, by art; and Renaissance pastoral provides Hawthorne with an established artistic mode that shares his conception of humans’ place in the universe. Understanding Hawthorne’s attitude toward Transcendentalism is key to understanding his treatment of Nature. Although he does not wholeheartedly embrace Transcendentalism, neither does he wholly reject it. While he considered Transcendentalists in general to be too enamored with the beauty of Nature to account for all of Nature’s realities, Hawthorne valued the Transcendentalists’ treatment of Nature as Spirit. With a tone more cautious than that of a committed idealist, Hawthorne continued to pursue the beauty and harmony of Nature through his literary art. The intrusion of Death in Hawthorne’s pastoral scenes, however, as well as his emphasis on the subjectivity of individual viewpoints, highlights Hawthorne’s difference from those Transcendentalists who would either dismiss or ignore all that is not harmonious and beautiful.

Hawthorne’s interest in revising the pastoral to address nineteenth-century America’s formulations of the questions of how one might begin to have an “original

relation to the universe” are most evident in his manner of revising the pastoral. And for that revision, he uses several lenses from the past and present to view Nature, including the Puritan allegory inherited by nineteenth-century New Englanders, Gothic romance of a particularly American type that considers Native American relations to the land, and Transcendentalist attempts to idealize Nature. Hawthorne finds each form – despite its susceptibility to mechanistic or solipsistic sight – a viable lens that focuses Renaissance pastoral in a specific way. Using Puritan allegorical views of Nature, Hawthorne depicts a world in which the divine is written into Nature, though not as unambiguously as most of the Puritans would have it. Gothic Romance provides Hawthorne with a view that investigates how the supernatural may be implicated in Nature. Though British Gothic writers of the late eighteenth century diverged on the question of whether the supernatural is *over* Nature, *apart from* Nature, *a part of* Nature, or some combination of these relationships, Hawthorne mostly leaves such distinctions to the reader and contents himself with simply suggesting that a correlation of some sort exists. From Transcendentalist idealism, Hawthorne adopts the idea of Nature as Spirit, though he doubts that observing Nature always yields the depth of insight that Transcendentalists such as Emerson claim for it. In these traditional and contemporary artistic approaches to Nature, Hawthorne searches for the means to draw together a syncretic view of Nature that provides a corrective, as Renaissance pastoral typically does for the traveler (and ostensibly for the reader), for those in pursuit of a “relation to the universe” that is in some way “original.”² By drawing upon components of these other literary forms,

² It should be noted that Emerson himself was not as opposed to old world literature as is sometimes supposed. Emerson’s *Representative Men* and Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* were both published at the beginning of 1850. In his text, Emerson has collected lectures on Plato, Swedenborg, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Goethe as examples of men alive to the influence of Nature. His “use” of

Hawthorne reshapes the pastoral to apply the insights of earlier views of the world to the situation of the nineteenth-century New-Englander. Thus, rather than presenting only some romanticized view of Nature, Hawthorne's artistic work represents an attempt to catch glimpses of Nature in its actual form.

Hawthorne's Revision of Pastoral

Recent critical discussions of the pastoral typically consider Renaissance pastoral a dynamic form of art superior to the more limpid pastorals of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hawthorne seems to have reached a similar conclusion himself, developing his artistic prowess by returning most insistently to the texts of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, all of whom he had read repeatedly since childhood.³ Hawthorne was intimately familiar with much of Milton's poetry, Shakespeare's dramas, and Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, buying an impressive new copy of Spenser that he read aloud to his family while they lived in England.⁴ According to his sister Elizabeth, Hawthorne "studied" the work of Shakespeare and Milton and others and bought his first copy of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* "[a]s soon as he was old enough to buy books for himself" (Stewart, "Recollections" 319). Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, published in the last decade of the sixteenth century, employs pastoral as a mode of cultural commentary.

these "great men," however, is not to reinvestigate their forms or their visions of Nature so much as to find himself in their writings: "Other men are lenses through which we read our own mind" (*CW* 4: 4). Such self-seeing is one of the problems Hawthorne has with Transcendentalist views of Nature; rather than seeing Nature, they may read in Nature nothing other than themselves, thereby obscuring the reality of Nature under their own subjectivity.

³ See the Appendix for a full discussion of Hawthorne's reading of pastoral throughout his life.

⁴ According to Hawthorne's son Julian's report to the Rowfant Club in 1902, "in England he got a handsome illustrated copy of 'The Faerie Queene,' and at evening, for many weeks, he read it to us aloud: the first of the series of great readings that we had from him, though long before he had thus roamed through the English classics with his wife" (*Reading* 65).

Milton's *Comus* and *Paradise Lost* do the same, the latter coming on the heels of the failed Puritan commonwealth. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, on the other hand, are companion poems that present human life as a balance between the active and the contemplative, in another pastoral contrast Hawthorne finds constructive. And in Shakespeare's fairylands – most significantly in *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but that also enter into romances such as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* – Hawthorne found repeated interpolations of political and cultural critique that take residents of the court into the country to learn about the human condition away from the accretions of a society in which people have too much forgotten “natural law.” Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, more consistently than any other writers, contributed to the pastoral vision of Hawthorne's American romances.

Most critics considering the pastoral today are responding at least in part to William Empson's reconsideration of the pastoral in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935). Empson effectively divides pastoral into two categories: “old” pastoral and “realistic” pastoral. “The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor,” Empson claims, “was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way)” (11). The conservative impulse of Empson's so-called “old” pastoral is sometimes offset by what he calls “the realistic sort of pastoral (the sort touched by mock-pastoral),” a mode that “gives a natural expression for a sense of social injustice” (16). Thus the apparent conventionalities of pastoral can actually be used as a form of cultural critique, though Empson, along with numerous other critics who follow him –

assumes that pastoral literature more typically takes on an attitude of political quietism. Such an understanding of pastoral is at odds, however, with the political critique inherent in much Renaissance pastoral – from Virgil’s critique of Roman powers to Shakespeare’s sometimes cutting, sometimes cautious critique of Renaissance culture and monarchs. Empson’s groundbreaking work, with its use of broad descriptive terms rather than definitive ones, has prompted one critic to characterize his approach as simultaneously “the most important and the least helpful” (Ettin 189). While Empson primarily discusses the relation of the pastoral to “proletarian” literature, his exploration of “versions” of pastoral draws attention to the varying levels of complexity that can be found in pastoral literatures.

Some critics have followed Empson’s theory of pastoral with descriptions that circumvent strict definition, usually by focusing upon the “functions” or effects of pastoral rather than delineating its formal characteristics. Humphrey Tonkin’s study of Spenser’s sixth book of *The Faerie Queene*, which Tonkin calls a “courteous pastoral,” for example, describes literary pastoral as operating according to two functions:

Its first function is satiric: it serves as a device for criticism. It distances the writer from his own milieu and forms a base from which to attack its standards or lack of standards. The eclogue is its special vehicle. Its second function is a means of articulating moral or spiritual aspirations. It creates a world where the conflicts and pettinesses of ordinary life are eliminated, where all investments have returns, and where actions have the desired results. Love is untrammelled, and belief suffers no contradiction. Neither of these functions is peculiar to pastoral. The first shades into satire, the second into romance. (282–83)

Hawthorne’s pastoral is both satiric and romantic. Since Spenser and other pastoral writers use the mode to satirize their social milieus and sometimes to challenge the reigning authorities at a safe distance from society, their treatments of reconciliation

often fall within the bounds delineated by Tonkin. Even when reconciliation is described in the terms above, however, many such scenes contain undercurrents of perpetual conflict that have troubled readers and critics alike. Reconciliation that appears forced especially leaves an open question at the end of many pastoral works.⁵

While bucolic literature can be characterized simply as being set in the country, the pastoral is usually understood to be a more complex mode of literary and cultural critique especially by critics writing after Empson. Noting the wide range of definitions that have been given to pastoral writing, Annabel Patterson avoids defining the pastoral by simply positioning it as ideology:

It is not what pastoral *is* that should matter to us. On that, agreement is impossible, and its discussion inevitably leads to the narrowing strictures of normative criticism, statements of what constitutes the ‘genuine’ or ‘true’ to the exclusion of exemplars that the critic regards as perverse. What can be described and, at least in terms of coverage, with some neutrality, is what pastoral since Virgil can do and has always done; or rather, to put the agency back where it belongs – how writers, artists, and intellectuals of all persuasions have *used* pastoral for a range of functions and intentions that the *Eclogues* first articulated. (7)

By focusing on what pastoral literature *does* rather than on what it *is*, Patterson incidentally draws attention to the dynamic nature of the pastoral, which generic definitions sometimes obscure. As Richard Chamberlain points out, such a description acknowledges the futility of attempting to attach a master definition to the pastoral, but Patterson “attributes the impossibility of this task to the sheer historical variety of pastoral works from different contexts, rather than the pastoral mode’s inherent difficulty as an object” (19). Such “inherent difficulty” does indeed describe many pastoral works

⁵ Calidore at the end of Book Six of *The Faerie Queene*, for example, must tie the Blatant Beast in order to secure peace for the land, but the knowledge that the Blatant Beast will again ravage the land blunts the effect of the “reconciliation” being achieved.

themselves and indicates competing ideas that face at least some degree of instability rather than conforming to a state of easy tranquility.

In his book-length consideration of the question *What is Pastoral?*, Paul Alpers draws attention both to the artistic quality and to the “real life” applicability of the pastoral by emphasizing the role of the writer within pastoral works, noting that “poetic representations of nature or of landscape are not all of a piece; they answer to and express various human needs and concerns; *pastoral* landscapes are those of which the human centers are herdsmen or their equivalents” (28). Focusing on the role of the shepherd figures or “their equivalents,” such as gardeners and simple artisans, Alpers aptly draws attention to the practice of many Renaissance pastoral writers who insert figures of themselves into their writing. This practice tends to break down sharp distinctions between life and literature, indicating again the complexity of Renaissance pastoral which cannot well be described simply as static descriptions of natural settings. The shepherd-piper Colin Clout serves as a figure for Spenser in *Colin Clout Comes Home Againe* and *The Faerie Queene*, and Phillisides (another shepherd-piper) serves as a figure for Sir Philip Sidney in *Arcadia*. Much scholarly speculation has focused on the figure of “showman” Prospero in *The Tempest* and the ballad-seller Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale* as possible analogues for Shakespeare himself.⁶ Hawthorne also takes up this practice in some of his writings, most notably by inserting himself into some of his

⁶ Although these ideas of Shakespearean figures has been contested, G. Wilson Knight leads a host of critics in suggesting that Prospero’s farewell speech is Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage since *The Tempest* is one of Shakespeare’s very last plays (256-57). Stephen Orgel and other Shakespeare scholars have more recently pointed to “the trickster and charlatan Autolycus, the essential entertainer” in *The Winter’s Tale* as an alternate figure for Shakespeare, paralleling the playwright’s ability to pilfer his audience’s pockets while entertaining them (Introduction 52).

stories as “Oberon.”⁷ Various figures in Hawthorne’s romances have likewise been explicitly given as “artists,” sometimes more than one in the same romance. Many of these have been suggested as figures of Hawthorne, including Holgrave – which I find likely – and Coverdale – which I find less likely, given Coverdale’s status as an unreliable narrator.

Although some scholars have suggested that pastoral is no longer a viable form, others have made arguments for the continuing relevance of pastoral as a mode rather than a genre.⁸ It is in this vein that Hawthorne’s method of adaptation takes shape. Emphasizing the tensions that build rather than destroy the pastoral form, Andrew Ettin claims,

What makes a work pastoral are its attitudes toward the natural world and human experience. In pastoral literature, experiences and emotions are contained within finite limits. Those limits are implied by the patterns revealed within the natural world and within the pastoral way of life, consonant with the patterns of the natural world. The containment is necessitated by the fragility or delicacy of the experiences and emotions, or by tension between pastoral and nonpastoral experience. (22)

The limits of an individual human life suggest that no individual can expect to experience the full range of human relations to the natural world which pastoral works enable. The tensions of the pastoral, as Ettin implies, allow the reader to explore such relations in the attempt to come to terms vicariously with the human condition as fully as possible.

⁷ Oberon, a name drawn from Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where he is “King of the Fairies” (*MND* 44) was one of Hawthorne’s nicknames in college. Two of Hawthorne’s tales featuring Oberon are “The Devil in Manuscript” (1834?) and “Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man” (1837), both of which feature an Oberon who shares some autobiographical details with the young Hawthorne.

⁸ Chief among critics of the pastoral is Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. It should be noted, however, that Williams excoriates the “simple” pastoral popularized in the eighteenth century rather than the more complex type of pastoral noted by Empson and others after him. Williams describes this weak form of pastoral as a “conversion of conventional pastoral into a localised dream” and then “into what can be offered as a description and thence into an idealisation of actual English country life and its social and economic relations” (26). Hawthorne took his search back to Renaissance pastoral rather than the eighteenth-century (and late seventeenth-century) texts Williams here analyzes.

Drawing attention to the “levels” of pastoral, Harold Tolliver also notes the tensions that inhere in pastoral: “Whether the scene is an explicit Arcadian society or some place of enclosed death, it is likely to be exposed to such things as industrialism, death, unrequited love, unjust property division, or merely an opposing idea of perfection” (1). The tensions that adhere to more complex pastorals pose a challenge to entrenched class systems, excesses of society, and ignorance of the human community at large and allow for an evolving sense of pastoral that is alive to changing situations.

Helen Cooper perhaps most directly describes the dynamic relations in Renaissance pastoral literature, and this description especially applies to Hawthorne’s use of the pastoral:

In the Renaissance, *pastoral* as a literary term meant the use of the shepherd world as a metaphor or analogue for the real world. The countryside setting was a poetic fiction that often implied some contrast with the court or city. The metaphoric nature of pastoral allowed poets to use the mode for social, political, and religious comment while the model of Virgil’s *Eclogues* lent authority to its use as a symbolic pattern for poetic activity itself. Pastoral was thus a mode of almost limitless implication, but it had at its heart a close association with the very nature of poetry and the poet. (529)

By noting the “almost limitless implication” alongside the deliberate artistry of the mode, Cooper aptly presents pastoral conventions without forcing them into a stagnant, merely mechanical role. Pastoral is dynamic, and pastoral literature is a metaphor for human reality. Although Hawthorne’s use of pastoral touches on many of the areas outlined by the various critics above, Cooper’s definition is perhaps the most helpful for understanding his open-ended use of it as “a mode of almost limitless implication.” Hawthorne’s very openness, however, has led some critics to emphasize his ambiguity almost to the exclusion of what he *does* suggest through his literature. Hawthorne’s use

of the pastoral suggests a real relation between world and text, art and humanity, art and nature, nature and humanity. For Hawthorne, the pastoral functions not only as a realm of possibility but as a realm of critique and a place in which to debate visions of the good – or, in Cooper’s terms, a means of “social, political, and religious comment” that gains artistic authority from its grounding in long-standing exemplars of imaginative literature.

Like the best of his predecessors, Hawthorne employed pastoral as a mode of social critique that allowed him to comment on society from a distance. Like them, he reshaped the dichotomies of art and nature, nature and grace, idealism and realism to challenge his own society’s cultural norms. Writers and poets continue to approach the natural world as a place in which the cultured individual transplanted into Nature for a time can discover wholeness, a situation in which the outsider interacting with a bucolic setting finds fertile grounds for mapping out essential truths about humanity. While Hawthorne positions humans as artist figures in the natural world, he draws back from too blithe expectations of achieving perfect harmony either with the natural world or within human society. And yet, he does not suppose an essential antagonism between nature and society. Instead, the tensions created by humans coming to terms with their environment allow for self-critique and alternate ways of viewing the world.

When treated as a mutable form, as exemplified by Hawthorne in his American romances, Renaissance pastoral can be readily adapted to the American situation. In his adoption of Renaissance pastoral for his own literary art, Hawthorne does not simply imitate the writers of the Renaissance. Instead, he adapts past versions of the pastoral to his own shaping and subverting of the American idyll while grappling with American Transcendentalist notions of Nature, inherited Puritan understandings of the world, and

nineteenth-century fiction which was often either Gothic or sentimental. As a literary form that can incorporate a multiplicity of viewpoints, pastoral is specially suited for the diversity of American experience and allows for an exploration of the world rather than simply an imposition of preconceived ideas onto nature. While some pastorals simply obsess on the apparent dichotomies between art and nature, country and city, nature and civilization, Hawthorne treats such contrasts as parts of a whole that are ultimately not opposed but instead create the kind of “productive tension” that critics have noticed in Hawthorne’s work.⁹ For Hawthorne, the pastoral provides a literary mode that opens one’s mind toward the human condition, which can best be understood by probing its relation with Nature and the divine.

Hawthorne Criticism: Literary Forms and Nature

Even a cursory survey of the cultural landscape of nineteenth-century America reveals that the concept of Nature was strongly debated, bearing upon pressing national and social issues that included expanding national borders, Indian removals, slavery, and religious movements often framed in terms of Manifest Destiny and related political doctrines. In the New England literary circles of which Hawthorne was a part, these issues played an important role for the Transcendentalists and others of a more traditional Christian perspective, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and her husband Calvin Stowe, a seminary student and professor who had graduated from Bowdoin College where Hawthorne had first met him while a student (Bridge 25–31). As many of his

⁹ Claudia D. Johnson uses the term primarily to investigate the interplay of psychological drama and artistic technique in Hawthorne’s work (8), but “productive tension” is also a helpful way to characterize his treatment of apparent oppositions between humans and the natural world of which we are a part.

contemporaries did, Hawthorne interpreted and reshaped inherited religious, political, and social traditions through his writings.¹⁰ Hawthorne's attention to traditional forms particularly shaped his treatment of Nature in his three major American romances, where he investigates nineteenth-century views of Nature under the scope of Renaissance pastoral.

Numerous critics have touched on Hawthorne's treatment of Nature, but he is typically only mentioned in passing if at all in recent literary studies of Nature, many of which are restricted to studies of the natural environment rather than the interplay of Nature and human nature. Those who make a study of the natural environment – most notably ecocritics – tend to thrust Hawthorne's texts aside and emphasize instead the works of the Transcendentalists. No doubt one reason for this is the form Hawthorne uses. Buell, for example, excludes Hawthorne's fiction without careful examination in his book on "the environmental imagination," where he valorizes Thoreau's writing and non-fiction nature writing in general as having the kind of "variegated character" needed for responding to Nature (*Environmental Imagination* 397). Hawthorne's use of "variegated" forms of fiction, however, suggests that non-fiction is perhaps not the only form suited to the study of Nature, even if Buell's terms are accepted. Hawthorne developed a "variegated" view of Nature that was immediate and transcendent,

¹⁰ John Gatta has traced Harriet Beecher Stowe's role, for example, in domesticating American Calvinism, particularly noting her interest in paintings of the Madonna as ways of furthering the idea of "divine matriarchy" (*American Madonna* 53). Gatta also points out that Hawthorne's own interest in the Madonna figure is quite evident in his romances, where he is consciously engaging a search for the "sacred woman" (*American Madonna* 10). Hawthorne's distaste for the contentious sectarian religious conversations of his day has led some to discount his interest in religion; Margaret Moore, however, carefully analyzes letters and other writings of Hawthorne and his family in Salem to suggest, using Hawthorne's own words, that "an instinct of faith" guides his writings even when sectarian language is clearly avoided: "he inhaled a great many doctrines, but found little meaning in such precise formulations... But Hawthorne also absorbed the conviction that religion was significant. Secular Hawthorne's writings are not; they exude an 'instinct of faith' that may be fractured, but that retains the vitality reacting to or drawn from the very air of Salem" (122).

experiential and mediated, by interspersing Renaissance pastoral with later literary forms and lived experiences. Rather than recording strict observations of Nature, Hawthorne adapts the forms of imaginative literature for his treatment of Nature.

Hawthorne critics who *have* noted Hawthorne's treatment of Nature are by no means united in their observations of the import of Hawthorne's work. While Melissa Pennell simply assumes that Hawthorne shares the deep suspicion toward Nature espoused by some of the most outspoken Puritans in his fiction, Nina Baym offers a more incisive analysis of Hawthorne's treatment of nature, noting in her analysis of *The Scarlet Letter* that the forest and the town are both good and evil rather than being simplistically aligned in a strict one-on-one relationship (*A Reading* 44). The most thorough study of Hawthorne's treatment of Nature is Darrell Abel's *The Moral Picturesque*. Although Abel pays attention to the mixed threads of Puritan and Transcendentalist thought in Hawthorne's romance and examines Hawthorne's treatment of Nature in broadly general terms of "romance," Abel pays little attention to Renaissance pastoral as a significant component of Hawthorne's view of Nature. While countless critics have considered Hawthorne's use of allegory, surprisingly few have explicitly brought Nature and allegory together in their consideration of Hawthorne's work. F. O. Mattheissen does so, of course, in his consideration of Spenser's influence on Hawthorne since Spenser mixes allegory and pastoral much in the way that marks Hawthorne's literary technique. Michael Colacurcio's *The Province of Piety* and Yvor Winters' essay on Hawthorne in *In Defense of Reason* provide two other examples, but they offer almost contradictory accounts with Winters assuming a mechanical use of allegory (much in the manner of Mattheissen) and Colacurcio carefully analyzing literary elements of Hawthorne's tales

that trouble such an assumption. Their accounts are so widely divergent that the only thing they seem to share is the persuasion that Hawthorne did indeed use some form of allegory in his treatment of Nature (and almost every other topic he considered). These studies join countless others commenting on Hawthorne's relationship with his Puritan ancestors. Perry Miller addresses Hawthorne's mixed attitude of emulation and disapproval for Puritan convictions most succinctly, noting that Hawthorne's "[r]espect for them is not the same thing as believing in them" (*Errand ix*). How much Hawthorne disapproved, how much he respected, and how much he believed are a matter of debate, but he seems at least to have appreciated and perhaps shared their belief that the divine is inscribed upon Nature. According to Abel, what is clear is that for Hawthorne, Nature "did bear the ambiguous imprints of its divine origin" (42). In my discussion of Hawthorne's views of Nature, I expand upon these earlier views by noting how allegory becomes a more subtle form when intertwined with pastoral. Hawthorne uses both forms together, but critics generally do not pay attention to such interpolation of forms.

Hawthorne's use of the Gothic remains a largely understudied area, at least with regard to his treatment of Gothic Nature. The Gothic romance influenced the kind of pastoral that Hawthorne created by drawing explicit attention to the question of connections between the natural and the supernatural. Ever since the first publication of Frederick Crews' influential *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (1966), most studies of Hawthorne's use of the Gothic have focused on the psychological almost to the exclusion of the supernatural.¹¹ Teresa Goddu, for example, has recently

¹¹ In an afterword to his republication of *Sins of the Fathers* in 1989, Crews has retracted some of his earlier statements about the extent of the psychological underpinnings of Hawthorne's work, but his analysis of the psychology of Hawthorne's writing remains an important statement of the modernization of Hawthorne scholarship. "If I were to rewrite *Sins* today, I would still insist on Hawthorne's diffidence,

discussed the psychological trappings of Hawthorne's Gothic and the marketplace into which Hawthorne released *The House of the Seven Gables*. Jane Lundblad and Frank Doubleday, however, both offer early preliminary studies on Hawthorne's use of the Gothic, in which they mention Nature as a component of his work. While Lundblad is interested in tracing out specific allusions as well as structural similarities between Hawthorne and the writers of British Gothic, Doubleday argues that Hawthorne was "preoccupied with Gothic patterns" throughout his life, and that at the end of his life he could not finish his last romances as the result of "a failure to find a meaning for his Gothic symbols" (52). In *The House of the Seven Gables*, however, Hawthorne's Gothic form clearly had to do with the relation between humans and their habitations. Few critics have followed in the more formal study of Hawthorne's Gothic, but Donald Ringe does offer some analysis of Hawthorne's formal use of the Gothic. Ringe mentions a threefold structure between Nature, the supernatural, and the human, but he emphasizes the supernatural element to the extent that Nature becomes occluded in his study. Although these three elements cannot be wholly disentangled without greatly misconstruing Hawthorne's works, I consider these three elements in tension with each other to see what may be gained in our understanding of Hawthorne's view of Nature.

Many of the critics who pay attention to Hawthorne's relation to Transcendentalism trace biographical or linguistic similarities between Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists without analyzing their formal contrasts.¹² Thus, Renaissance

slyness, and suggestiveness, but I would not presume to explain his inhibitions by reference to a core of 'the repressed'" (281).

¹² Larry Reynolds, for example, notes in passing that the "subtext" created by the "male rivalry between the figure of Emerson and the figure of Hawthorne as 'author'" plays a role in the later romances, especially in *The Scarlet Letter* where the rivalry between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth forms a significant part of the dramatic focus of the text ("Hawthorne and Emerson" 76). Philip McFarland, Samuel

pastoral and the other forms Hawthorne used as part of his critique of Transcendentalism are systematically ignored or downplayed in such approaches. An early succinct and acute comment on Hawthorne's relation to Transcendentalism and to the Transcendentalists is Arlin Turner's claim that upon close analysis, "[i]t becomes clear that Hawthorne was at home with both Transcendentalist thought and language, but he can by no means be called a Transcendentalist" (*NH Introduction* 87). Hawthorne found common ground with Emerson, in his poetic insights and in their shared enjoyment of rambling through the countryside of Concord, but he remained no more than a skeptical adherent. Although Hawthorne's treatment of Transcendentalist themes, particularly those in Emerson's *Nature*, suggests that he shares similar interests, he often satirizes their philosophical idealism through the forms of imaginative literature he adopts.

Many other critics analyze Hawthorne's views of Nature both autobiographically and in literary terms by considering his relationship with the Transcendentalists. Such studies often become so focused on Hawthorne's relations to the Transcendentalists, however, that they obscure the importance of other views – including Renaissance pastoral – which heavily inform his thought and writing and mitigate the influence of the Transcendentalists. In one of the first extensive studies on Hawthorne's literary relation to Transcendentalism, Marjorie Elder presents him enigmatically as a “transcendental

Schreiner, and Susan Cheever offer in-depth but sometimes rashly speculative analyses of the significance of their overlapping autobiographical stories. Lawrence Buell, on the other hand, in *New England Literary Culture* calls both writers “masters of the controlled irony that stems from questioning orthodoxies of their own making or invoking” (*New England* 74). David Van Leer notes a number of identical uses of vocabulary in Emerson's *Nature* and Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, including words such as “labyrinth,” “hieroglyphic,” “vanishing,” and “infinite space,” which both writers use these terms in much the same context (58–62). Despite their differences, these critics rightly emphasize the attention of these two writers to each other, sometimes showing their affinity for one another and sometimes demonstrating their differences.

symbolist” who derives his aesthetics from the Transcendentalists.¹³ Despite her acknowledgement that Hawthorne is not fully a Transcendentalist, Elder does not take into consideration how many alternative viewpoints Hawthorne takes up in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Transcendentalism. John S. Martin swings perhaps too far in the other direction by supposing that in “The Old Manse” Hawthorne satirizes Transcendentalism as nothing more than a “pantheist comedy” in a demonstration that “this kind of idealism is all too easy and automatic” (“Other Side” 457). More convincingly, Alfred F. Rosa pinpoints Hawthorne’s main difference from the Transcendentalists as a contrast between their “pervasive optimism” and “the emphasis on sin and evil that characterized Puritan theology, an emphasis that lingered in the thinking and writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne.”¹⁴ This dark streak in Hawthorne seems not to be wholly exorcised even in *The Blithedale Romance*, the least Puritan of his romances, which nonetheless includes the most tragic death scene in Hawthorne’s three American romances. Darrell Abel gives one of the most convincing if brief considerations of Hawthorne’s relation to Transcendentalism, calling Hawthorne’s outlook “qualified Transcendentalism” (37). While this is a likely way of discussing Hawthorne, it should be noted that Hawthorne’s qualifications all too often are decidedly non-Transcendentalist. Even within Hawthorne’s sometimes satiric treatments of

¹³ Although she tends to overstate the similarities between Hawthorne and his Transcendentalist acquaintances, Elder draws attention to “the many opportunities [Hawthorne] had of conversing with and reading from his Transcendentalist friends.” Further, she claims that “the Transcendental aesthetic [that Hawthorne presumably adopted in part] must be understood as defined by these friends, showing the permeating influence both by reference to the aesthetics of non-Transcendentalists and to Hawthorne’s acknowledgement of the influence upon himself” (4). Elder’s emphasis, while not taking the facile position of placing Hawthorne wholly inside of or outside of Transcendentalism, tends to obscure his conception of the Transcendentalist position as somehow flawed at its core.

¹⁴ See also Rosa’s extended discussion of changing conceptions of Hawthorne’s relationship to the Transcendentalists, a discussion he claims became more accurate with the publication of F.O. Matthiessen’s study on the writers of the American Renaissance (13–17).

Emerson and the Transcendentalists, however, he continues to express occasional notes of admiration for Emerson.

Hawthorne's turn to Renaissance pastoral over Transcendentalist idealism for his consideration of Nature has much to do with his relationship with Emerson, a relationship which continued evolving throughout their lives but usually included some measure of distance even in its warmer moments. In the last sketch he wrote before leaving Concord for Salem in 1845, Hawthorne writes that he "admired Emerson as a poet of deep beauty and austere tenderness but sought nothing from him as a philosopher" (CE 10: 31). It is easy to overlook the context of Hawthorne's remarks above. Still in the glow of his newlywed life, Hawthorne had prefaced his remarks with an interesting qualifier: "For myself, there had been epochs of my life, when I, too, might have asked of this prophet the master-word, that should solve me the riddle of the universe; but now, being happy, I felt as if there were no question to be put" (CE 10: 31). The move to Salem, the added pressures of adding two children to his family, and the caring for his mother who died in his house just prior to his writing of *The Scarlet Letter* most likely dulled the first glow of his self-proclaimed "happy" marriage and made him more curious again about "the riddle of the universe." Hawthorne's attention to Emersonian thought in his romances suggests that, despite Hawthorne's claims to the contrary in 1845, Emerson's philosophizing as well as his poetic impulse had a long-lasting impact on Hawthorne.¹⁵ Joel Myerson offers a helpful comment on the relationship between Hawthorne and Emerson in his *Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*:

¹⁵ Emerson, for his part, mentions Hawthorne as one example to show that he found "precious signs... that in democratic America, [nature] will not be democratized. How cloistered and constitutionally sequestered from the market and gossips" (389).

Generations of college students have been taught that American literature was founded on a great rift between the irrepressible, self-reliant optimism of Emerson and the brooding, haunted, neo-Calvinist meditations of Hawthorne and Melville on the impenetrability of nature and the inevitable corruption of the human psyche. We tend to forget that their fictional ‘quarrel’ with Emerson is grounded in large part on their respect for his integrity. Hawthorne gently satirized the devotees who flocked to be near Emerson... but he admitted on the personal appeal of one “so quiet, so simple, so without pretension.”

Their major difference, Myerson claims, lies in Emerson’s habit of “characteristically see[ing] evil as limitation or as social injustice rather than as a literal cosmic fact” (89).

Doubtless Emerson was more optimistic than Hawthorne, and that optimism extended to his treatment of nature’s capacity, but it did not preclude any grasp of the darkness of human nature.

As toward Emerson, Hawthorne’s attitude toward the Transcendentalists is often admiring even if skeptical. Like the Transcendentalists, Hawthorne considered non-human nature an important part of reality. Unlike those who expected that “nature” could correct the egotistic bent of humans, Hawthorne showed how even those open to the influence of nature can choose an ethic that is self-centered. Under the guise of establishing an “original relation to the universe,” Hawthorne seems to suggest, the Transcendentalists were likely to see nature according to their own idealized preconceptions of it rather than allowing nature to serve as a corrective that might lead to a better understanding of the world. Hawthorne’s satire of the Transcendentalists and their conception of nature is not usually given without some measure of respect. One example of Hawthorne’s continued attention to Transcendentalism can be found in David Van Leer’s observation that Hawthorne’s main characters in *The Scarlet Letter* “all evince both Puritan and Transcendentalist traits” (62). Indeed, the mixed quality of

Hawthorne's major characters argue against the assumption that Hawthorne's satire entails full-blown disagreement with the Transcendentalists.

The Renaissance pastoral, Hawthorne's chief resource, requires special attention when coming to terms with Hawthorne's view of Nature. Although Puritan, Gothic, and Native American views also contributed to Hawthorne's literary treatment of Nature, Hawthorne offered his strongest critique of Transcendentalist idealism through the form of Renaissance pastoral. As the oldest form of imaginative literature, the pastoral provided a time-honored literary mode more mutable than these other views that yet allowed room *for* these other views of Nature. Several scholars have emphasized Hawthorne's heavy reading of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, noting the impact of such reading on Hawthorne's literary creativity. Chief among these scholars is Randall Stewart, who in his introduction to an early edition of Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*, offers the most direct study of similarities between Renaissance pastoral writings and Hawthorne's work. As early as the mid-1930s, Austen Warren and Arlin Turner also highlighted Hawthorne's reading of these writers. Warren investigated Hawthorne's extensive reading to find that "[t]he English poets bulk large; and they come impartially from the ranks of neo-classicists and the romantics." Also important to realize is that Hawthorne read heavily in "the periodical literature of the day, even then voluminous" (486–87). "But in his leisure," Warren remarks further, "he read widely in both older literatures and contemporary publications. Never a collector of books, never a professional critic, possessed of no desire to judge the work of others or even to articulate his impressions except by the way and in brief, he was, however, always a bookman, eager and catholic" (497). Turner, in "Hawthorne's Literary Borrowings," likewise

comments, “Hawthorne’s literary indebtednesses are, however, as well as I can make out, chiefly to English writers. It was to Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Scott, and the Gothic romancers that he owed most of all, though he took definite hints from lesser writers” (553). Despite Warren’s and Turner’s coincident claims, most scholars have been satisfied with this knowledge of his reading of British authors without searching out its implications for Hawthorne’s own time, and the vast majority of them focus almost exclusively on his American reading or his Gothic reading, only mentioning the presence of the Renaissance British writers in passing, if at all. For the most part, even those few critics who offer more than the perfunctory remark about Hawthorne’s reading of these British writers typically adopt the tack of Frank Davidson, who, in 1946, wrote an article beginning with this explanation: “The purpose of this study is to suggest a few specific influences of Shakespeare and Milton on Nathaniel Hawthorne” (14). While such articles have been very helpful for tracing out Hawthorne’s heavy use of subject matter and perspective from the older authors – since Hawthorne himself rarely draws conspicuous attention to his allusions – Davidson and others have often done little more than to establish clear connections. But these clear connections have laid the groundwork for my own study of Hawthorne’s adaptations of the forms of the Renaissance writers whose forms influence him so strongly – much more so than the earlier American writers who tended to use the nonfiction forms now firmly associated with Hawthorne’s contemporaries Emerson and Thoreau.

In F. O. Matthiessen’s groundbreaking yet often overgeneralizing book entitled *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Milton* (1941), Edmund Spenser and John Bunyan appear as the sources of Hawthorne’s allegoric

method and Milton haunts Hawthorne's thematic matter. Obscuring Shakespeare's influence on Hawthorne, however, Mattheissen reads Melville's statement that "verily [n]ot a very great deal more, and Nathaniel were verily William" (*WHM* 9: 245) as Melville's way of positioning himself as a Shakespearean rather than serving as a valid comparison between Shakespeare and Hawthorne. Hawthorne's romances show deliberate attempts to reappropriate the literary art of the English Renaissance and seventeenth century and to claim these writers as part of the American inheritance from the "mother country."

While Hawthorne's immersion in old world pastoral literature suggests that his own pastoral writing represents a deliberate engagement with a literary tradition that he inherited from old England and Europe, his pastoral writing is anything but mere slavish imitation. In *The School of Hawthorne*, Richard Brodhead situates Hawthorne as an example of how literary tradition has been shaped in America, and though his work primarily investigates Hawthorne's influence on later writers, he does briefly mention Hawthorne's own appropriation and reshaping of literary traditions of the past. "[Hawthorne's] chief subject," Brodhead claims, "is the way the past invisibly invests itself in the present, and the way the present alternately struggles against the past's weight and seeks to renew its embrace" (*School* 8). Although Brodhead's primary consideration is earlier American authors, he does briefly mention that the work of Hawthorne and Melville "bears an authentic family resemblance to that of an earlier generation of reassessors and reconstituters of romance – to *The Faerie Queene*, to *Don Quixote*, to *As You Like It* and *King Lear* and *The Tempest*" (23). Although he emphasizes that Hawthorne and Melville have less developed sense of aesthetics than

their English predecessors, Brodhead rightly claims that these two American authors “reinvent” the forms of Renaissance romance rather than merely imitating them. Despite the groundwork provided by Brodhead, however, neither he nor other critics do much to investigate the particular ways that Hawthorne “reinvents” these English authors. It is nonetheless in the British Renaissance writers that Hawthorne finds his models for working with and against earlier literature. Like them, Hawthorne uses a dialectical interplay of forces that often resists the reconciliation toward which it strives. Expanding upon their insights, Hawthorne finds the pastoral a fertile mode for considering the diversity of voices and peoples that make up America.

In his helpful bibliographical outline of the large body of source studies on *The Scarlet Letter*, Richard Kopley writes, “The origins of *The Scarlet Letter* will inevitably continue to be discussed and clarified; the present bibliography offers a survey of a discipline’s work-in-progress. As arguments are added, rejected, accepted, refined, we can only come closer to a fuller understanding of the hue and texture of each thread in Hawthorne’s fabric, and of the ‘subtle interconnectedness’ of these myriad threads” (124). Hawthorne’s voracious reading habits make such studies necessary yet difficult as critics attempt to recognize and come to terms with the large variety of threads interwoven in what Kopley aptly styles the intricate fabric of Hawthorne’s literary art. In light of this view of a literary masterpiece like *The Scarlet Letter*, claiming one source as the most important for Hawthorne’s work is not only foolhardy but ridiculous. However, examining these various sources has proved instructive for understanding Hawthorne’s literary contributions. My study of Hawthorne’s text follows in this line of scholarship,

considering the impact of key British pastoral writers whose literary art Hawthorne reappropriated for his own purposes.

Writing American Pastorals: Hawthorne and Nature

Hawthorne's use of Renaissance pastoral as means to investigate Nature suggests that Renaissance pastoral serves as a center from which to critique America's attempted self-alignment with "Nature." Hawthorne's son Julian hinted at his father's interest in both the form and content of Renaissance pastoral in a 1902 lecture to the Rowfant Club in Cleveland on the topic of his father's reading materials and habits. According to Julian, his father has more in common with the Renaissance writers than with other writers, contemporary or past. Listing Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Spenser, Sidney, and others as writers whose works had been part of the now-burnt Hawthorne library, Julian offers this observation: "The great English writers [of the Renaissance] saw the phantasmagory of Creation more nearly from his own point of view than others did" (*Reading* 79). Further, discussing Hawthorne's writing methods and sources, Julian claims that "nature was always [Hawthorne's] groundwork and quarry" (100). Like the British Renaissance pastoralists who took their art of writing seriously, Hawthorne wrestled with his role as an artist and explored the art of depicting humans with regard to their relation to Nature and to the divine.

In 1964, Leo Marx drew attention to a distinctively American version of the pastoral with his groundbreaking *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. In his study, Marx traces in some detail the potential of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as new world pastoral, a potential Hawthorne makes use of especially in *The Blithedale Romance*, which begins in the midst of a snowstorm called a

“tempest.”¹⁶ As Marx and others have compellingly demonstrated, the apparently unadulterated landscape of young America invited the pastoral impulse in literature, but this was a pastoral yet to come and actually possible rather than one that was already past or simply imagined. Lawrence Buell pushes Marx’s implications even further to suggest that American pastoral is typically a realistic art in which “the mimetic level is earthier and a literal referent more specified than in, say, an eclogue by Virgil or Spenser” (“American Pastoral” 5). Buell finds this “earthier” kind of art conducive to ecocritical inquiries, but he does very little to analyze the imaginative literature of the mid-nineteenth century – Hawthorne’s included – that complements non-fiction writings that investigate the natural world in this way. Marx writes that the “virgin continent” offered the hope “that mankind actually might realize what had been thought a poetic fantasy. Soon the dream of a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy was removed from its traditional literary context. It was embodied in various utopian schemes for making America the site of a new beginning for Western society” (3). While Marx aptly points out that Hawthorne contributes to the writing of pastoral America, he does not analyze Hawthorne’s romances, noting only that, in his notebooks and the story of “Ethan Brand,” Hawthorne chose the more complex pastoral where utopian fantasies of nature are interrupted by the encroachments of civilization and the realities of human existence that militate against an idealized pastoral mode. Marx here is responding to Empson’s distinction between simplistic pastoral and a more complex “realistic sort of pastoral (the

¹⁶ Susan Manning has traced out numerous examples of the links between Hawthorne’s romance and Hawthorne’s, noting not only the similarities of image and situation but formal similarities as well: “In the self-projected worlds of *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Tempest* ... the boundaries between the private and public, the shareable and the inaccessible, blur until the realms are often disturbingly indistinguishable” (146).

sort touched by mock-pastoral) [which] also gives a natural expression for a sense of social injustice” (16). Such pastoral can – and in Hawthorne’s case, *does* – work to make pastoral a form of social critique. Analyzing the intrusion of a locomotive into a pastoral scene Hawthorne is describing, Marx notes that his reverie is interrupted by “the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream. What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world – a simple pleasure fantasy –” Marx claims, “is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind” (14-15). To Marx’s observations, we may add the intrusion of death on the natural landscape as a motif that contributed to his “complex” pastoral approach and that sharply differentiated his treatment of Nature from that of his more optimistic Transcendentalist contemporaries.

My study follows Marx in tracing Hawthorne’s use of pastoral in a distinctly American context in an attempt to come to develop a healthy view of Nature. While Julian Hawthorne, Randall Stewart, and F.O. Matthiessen all hint at the importance of Renaissance pastoral to Hawthorne’s view of Nature, no systematic study of the topic has been done. And while Abel’s comments on Nature in Hawthorne’s American romances have proven especially helpful to my study, he does not pay attention to the form of Renaissance pastoral. My study demonstrates that Hawthorne is very interested in contemporary debates about Nature and that his critique of Transcendentalism is not merely the critique of a skeptic who has nothing to offer in the place of his critique. What he offers is the conviction that past conversations and artistic forms that

investigated Nature – most significantly, Renaissance pastoral – bear upon present experiences, and both are necessary for coming to terms with the human condition.

Pastoral is rarely simplistic or totalizing in the writings of Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton. Hawthorne's reading of these Renaissance writers, as noted in the appendix of this study, contributed much more to his vision of the world than is sometimes recognized. "Soft pastoral" is a term given to the pleasant vision of life invoked by comedy, and "hard pastoral" often threatens, whether or not it produces, tragedy. Martin Butler distinguishes between hard pastoral and soft pastoral by in his depiction of the lives of the princes hidden in the woods in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*: "their life is far from savage, but their landscape is an austere life contrasting with court comforts, the 'hard pastoral' of the mountains rather than a 'soft pastoral' of the fields" (12). What is important to notice here is that the pastoral itself, even at the height of its usage in Renaissance literature, does not fall neatly into a single generic category. Most directly, the standard distinction between "good" country and "bad" court may be exposed as a false dichotomy since there is "good" and "bad" in nature and "good" and "bad" in civilization. The dark side of the natural world can be seen in bears or savages that eat (or threaten) people, and the good of human civilization can be seen in (restored) courts that protect the people from external threats. *Paradise Lost* provides another example of such mixture of forms, as Milton combines hard pastoral and soft pastoral in what Jeffrey Theis has called a "sylvan pastoral," which "provides a focal point for Adam and Eve as they learn the importance of interacting with and defining tangled, complex topographies in a way that renders seemingly profuse and unbounded spaces into known places" (232–33). Renaissance pastoral avoids the easy generalizations that mark its later development

in eighteenth-century pastoral poetry. Rather than offering a simplistic or an easily decoded view of life, it bears in its narrative structure the shape of human life with its comedy and tragedy both. Hawthorne's focusing of Renaissance pastoral with other more recent vies of Nature, along with his typical reticence to make his allusions glaringly obvious, demonstrates that his art is more than mere imitation.

Hawthorne finds in Renaissance pastoral the most convincing account of Nature available to him. While he privileges pastoral, he finds its account of the relation between humanity and Nature in need of revision for coming to terms with the diversity and particularity of the American situation. As a mode rather than a genre, pastoral works for Hawthorne as a highly adaptable form in which he can combine an authoritative form of imaginative literature of a broad scope with more recent human experience, particularly human experience in New England. And with its roots in Renaissance humanism, Hawthorne's pastoral seeks to find what it is that Nature can teach about what it means to be human. In large part, Hawthorne's romances suggest that the human condition must be examined with regard to its relation to Nature and the divine alike in order for any "true" view to be established. Drawing from Renaissance pastoral to shape his artistic investigations of Nature, then, Hawthorne puts Transcendentalist idealism under the scope – especially in *The Blithedale Romance*. Although Hawthorne registers his deep skepticism of the Transcendentalist belief in Nature's unmediated efficacy, he also shares several key convictions with the transcendentalists. First, he believes in a spiritualized nature, but he adopts a less dualistic mindset than Emerson does. Like Emerson, however, Hawthorne believes humans are members of the natural order and should find their place in that natural order.

Hawthorne resists, however, Emerson's Transcendentalist belief that humans can accurately perceive meaning in Nature, and make sense of the human condition simply by attending to the natural world. There is evil and sin in human nature, and there is death and violence in Nature. These convictions differentiate Hawthorne from the Transcendentalists even as he seeks with them a vision of "the better life."

Hawthorne's technique of exploring Nature involves a dialogic approach in which varying views of Nature, often given in different characters' voices, are placed side by side in the attempt to catch sight of Nature by means of a net of artistic forms as well as by the experience of living close enough to the natural world to discover some idea of "natural law" that is not merely a reflection of one's own solipsistic thinking. And such truth, Hawthorne indicates, is found in the dialogic – in the mixture of voices – rather than in any single voice. Rather than functioning as a synthesis of opposing forces, as in ordinary dialectic, then, dialogic structures like the ones Hawthorne uses in his texts indicate an ongoing dynamism of tensions that allows for what Bakhtin calls a "heteroglossia" of voices.¹⁷ Michael Dunne, in tracing out Hawthorne's complex "narrative strategies," notes the applicability of Mikhail Bakhtin's narratology to Hawthorne's work, especially giving attention to the "chronotope," "heteroglossia, and "dialogism." The latter two, he claims, "can help us think productively about unresolved tensions in Hawthorne's work" (18). I likewise find these terms significant to the narrative framing of Hawthorne's texts. Dialogic structures function especially well in a

¹⁷ Hawthorne's texts are particularly suited to Mikhail Bakhtin's commentary on dialogic tensions as well as upon a heteroglossia of speech types in the prose narratives of (primarily) nineteenth-century fiction: "Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorečie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)" (263).

text about nineteenth-century America, a democratic country struggling with a contradictory rhetoric that promoted freedom and equality and yet defended slavery and Native American removals. Other reform movements, such as the fight for women's suffrage, indicated that even apart from racial issues, America faced major obstacles deterring the realization of a government truly "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Given the mixed classes and races that become integral to American life by the nineteenth century, national identity – despite being a rallying call of many nineteenth-century reformers – was difficult to establish. As "Nature's Nation," however, Americans could all join the rhetoric of Nature as a way of shaping, evaluating, and critiquing America's ever-emerging social ideology. A democratic society that ostensibly hears the voices of people who are not members of an aristocratic class lends a distinctly heterogeneous quality to pastoral works set in America, and Hawthorne's romances and short stories often work as a heterogeneity of voices, including questions the narrator asks or pretends to answer, manuscripts within the texts, frame stories, prefaces that seem to be in the author's words at times and fictionalized at other times, unreliable narrators who tell the story in first person, and occasional speeches of minor characters unaccompanied by the narrator's interpretations of those speeches. Emphasizing the need to pay attention to more than one voice, Hawthorne's narratives themselves often undermine the narrator's voice when it is most adamant.

When Hawthorne turned his energies to writing *The Scarlet Letter*, this work became the first of three American romances that would represent, as I shall argue, an attempt to seek out "an original relation to the universe" in America, as represented in New England history from the seventeenth-century Puritans to the nineteenth-century

Transcendentalists. Michael Colacurcio positions Hawthorne's writing of his three major romances as part of his "third period of accelerated creativity," a period that follows his focus first on Puritanism, then on Transcendentalism, and finally, on the "mutual relation" between these concerns that exhibits itself as "philosophical interpenetration" (*Province of Piety* 31). This is an apt characterization of the three major works under consideration in this dissertation. Hawthorne's romances serve as artistic renditions of Nature that seek to clarify the world around us.

In the first chapter after my introduction, I will argue that Puritan allegory in *The Scarlet Letter* presents a way of reading nature as the handwriting of God in the earth and sky. In this romance, Hawthorne employs Puritan allegory to focus pastoral by emphasizing the divine imprint in Nature. While the divine is typically at least in the background of Renaissance pastoral, Hawthorne's use of Puritan allegory draws it more conspicuously into view, and at the same time Nature is emphasized as a place of divine as well as human action. Hawthorne questions Puritans' tendency toward formulaic interpretations of allegory, however, by offering alternative ways to read the meteor that appears in the central chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*. Such multiplicity of meaning suggests that while allegorical readings may rightly implicate the divine written into Nature, such implication does not lead to the unambiguous reading of Nature that both Puritans and Transcendentalists hoped for, despite their differing interpretations. In Puritan depictions of Nature that Hawthorne read, Samuel Danforth called the American landscape a "waste and howling Wilderness" (11), while John Winthrop presented America as a "good Lande" and a potential "soule's paradise" ("Modell" 44). Despite their disparate viewpoints, Danforth and Winthrop both situate Nature primarily as a

place in which humans live out their relation to the divine – whether in grateful or oppositional terms with Nature. Some Puritans read divine love and some read divine wrath, some view nature antagonistically, and some read it sympathetically. Hawthorne’s work privileges the middle position somewhere between these extremes, neither trusting wholly in “the sympathy of nature” nor yet consigning it to witches and devils. Rather than advocating the prominent doctrine of American exceptionalism that posited America’s situation as something wholly unlike any other time and place, Hawthorne adopts the “middle landscape” of pastoral motifs that can be found in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton.¹⁸ Such usage implies, among other things, that the American situation represents a new attempt to ask the questions that western civilization had repeatedly asked about its origins.¹⁹ The open-endedness of Hawthorne’s allegorical method emphasize the interpretive problems of humans in a world where competing views would make God and Nature both angry with or sympathetic to humanity.

In Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*, as I argue in the next chapter, Gothic romance focuses pastoral by insisting that humans bear a responsibility to nurture the land even as the land nurtures them. Although Renaissance pastorals might not dispute such a claim, they tended to depict the situation of humans passing through Nature for a time rather than developing an ongoing relation to the land. In Hawthorne’s Gothic, as in some of the Gothic works he read, human responsibility is enforced by natural law that

¹⁸ Leo Marx calls the landscapes of both Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and American pastoral as “a symbolic middle landscape created by mediation between art and nature” (71).

¹⁹ Robert Daly argues that Hawthorne’s work takes issue with American exceptionalism, that it recognizes that even on the frontier, “there is no pastoral idyll free of history, free of the generic demands of earlier fiction, free of characteristic modes of perception and discourse left over from earlier times” (76).

may in turn be upheld by supernatural forces. Humans are part of Nature, the Gothic insists, and so is the supernatural. Humans can impact the landscape for good or ill, but they bear the consequences of such actions. Hawthorne emphasizes the human connection to the land as is typical of Gothic romances, but he questions the Gothic by hesitating to represent the supernatural as mechanically as early versions of the Gothic were prone to do. Hawthorne's artistic technique in *The House of the Seven Gables* is shaped in part by the Gothic fascination with the connections between the natural and the supernatural and how those connections play into the question of land as property. *The House of the Seven Gables* represents two things at once with regard to views of nature: first, it offers an American Gothic in which the natural and the supernatural are intertwined in ways that make natural law and supernatural forces work hand in hand; second, it investigates the land claims of the nineteenth century in terms of the original inhabitants (Native Americans), the first settlers who lived on the land, and the opportunists whose greed and desire for self-advancement resulted in manipulations that did violence against the land and its inhabitants. Hawthorne's treatment of the Maules, I will argue, castigates New England's treatment of Native Americans and raises questions about humans' relation and responsibility to the land. By turning to Native American views of the land, however briefly, Hawthorne not only Americanizes his romance, but he emphasizes the significance of the relations between humans and their habitations on earth. Although Hawthorne is reticent to speak for the Native Americans and typically only does so from a careful distance (a distance he accomplishes in *The House of the Seven Gables* by paralleling Quakers with Native Americans), he does give some brief direct commentary on Native Americans. And this commentary generally suggests his

sense that Native Americans have some connection to the land that European settlers failed to understand.²⁰ Land and property ownership contributes to also to the intrigue of the Gothic romance, which often involves a haunted house, (notably in the Gothic romances of Anne Radcliffe, whom Hawthorne read) the house and Nature becoming inextricably linked and both acting with supernatural agency. Bringing together these two views of human relations to the land indicates that Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* is more concerned about the justice of land ownership – on natural and supernatural grounds – than about a haunted house.

In my chapter on *The Blithedale Romance*, I will argue that Hawthorne is deliberately testing Transcendentalist idealism in his depiction of a community attempting to live their lives according to natural law alone. In *Nature*, Emerson calls the woods the “plantation of God,” for there it is, he claims, that “we return to reason and faith.” While Hawthorne may well agree with this view of Nature, the rest of Emerson's statement does not bear up against Hawthorne's scrutiny in his romances. For Emerson claims further: “There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, —no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, —my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, —all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all” (*CW* 1: 10). Emerson's “blithe air” where he stands “on the bare ground” certainly shows up in Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* where Coverdale works the soil in a vain effort to “see all.” For

²⁰ In the sketch “Main Street,” composed while he was preparing to publish *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne offers a glimpse of his understanding of Native American views of human relations to the land: “the Indians, coming from their distant wigwams to view the white man's settlement, marvel at the deep track which he makes, and perhaps are saddened by a flitting presentiment, that this heavy tread will find its way all over the land; and that the wild woods, the wild wolf, and the wild Indian, will alike be trampled beneath it... The pavements of the Main-street must be laid over the red man's grave” (*CE* 11: 55). This speech, in the mouth of a traveling showman, expresses a sense of wrongdoing. The coming of whites signals tragedy for Native Americans, a tragedy that tramples on Nature and the people of Nature alike.

Hawthorne, Transcendentalism is too good to be true because it is in fact only partially true. In Renaissance pastoral is a view of “natural law” that Hawthorne finds more convincing than that of Transcendentalist idealism. The death of Zenobia, the “swinish” nature of those laboring in the soil of Blithedale Farm, and the “madness” of the revelers in the Blithedale woods militates against the idealist vision promoted by Emersonian idealism – even though there remains in *Blithedale* a note of admiration for the noble vision of life promoted by Transcendentalism.

Hawthorne questions Transcendentalist idealism and Emerson’s confidence in his ability to “see all” by troubling the Transcendentalist desire for “tranquility” with the intrusion of death, an intrusion the Renaissance authors often remembered with scenes of impending or actual deaths by wild animals, cannibals, or exposure to the elements. The ideal cannot be insisted upon – even “complex” pastoral is less ideal, including both “hard pastoral” and “soft” pastoral. Hawthorne’s skepticism is apparent throughout this chapter, but he does share several beliefs with the transcendentalists. One is that Nature is both material and spiritual, and another is that humans are part of the natural order and should find their place in that natural order. Hawthorne also resists several Transcendentalist perceptions about Nature. One is that Nature itself is sufficient for teaching all that pertains to the human condition, and another is that Nature shows us only the good and the beautiful. There is evil and sin in human nature, and there is death and violence in Nature (as is readily illustrated in Renaissance depictions of *Et Ego in Arcadia*). These convictions differentiated Hawthorne from the Transcendentalists.

Although I include pastoral insights in all my individual chapters on each of Hawthorne’s three American romances, my last chapter directly turns to Hawthorne’s

fascination with the Renaissance pastoral's focus on human nature as part of "nature." This humanist emphasis Hawthorne explores in terms of humans as natural artists who fully live their humanity by embracing the components of the *triplex vita* (the contemplative, the passionate, the active). Renaissance pastoral shares a conviction of art and nature, nature and grace, the natural world and divine providence working hand in hand in a world that includes human sin and error as well as the hope of reconciliation and redemption. Renaissance pastoral did not depend on Puritan allegory nor on a Gothic sense of retribution for wrongdoing against the land and its inhabitants nor on a Transcendentalist view of Nature as an unmediated good. Instead, pastoral literature at its best treated nature as a dynamic place in which humans could be reminded of their relation to all of life and thereby become better participants in both the natural world and in the human community.

Renaissance pastoral, modified by the literary forms and actual experiences Hawthorne read and lived, became a form adapted to American literature in Hawthorne's romances. Like Renaissance pastoral, Puritan allegory provides Hawthorne with an older form that yet provides insight into the relations between humans, nature, and the divine. In both Gothic romance and Native American views of land and property ownership, Hawthorne finds the vision with which to counter views of the landscape as something untouched by human action. Castigating prevalent views of nature as a mere commodity to be owned and bartered at will, Hawthorne indicates that when relations between humans and the land are violent, the land itself will act to curse those who violate it. Transcendentalism, while seeking out the very real beauty of the natural world, falls short

by not accounting for death and by assuming that learning from nature is an unmediated action fully and only subservient to the human will.

Drawing upon the pastoral literature of the British Renaissance as a corrective to more exclusivist American views of Nature, Hawthorne obliquely critiques American exceptionalism while at the same time investigating the questions about humans and nature raised by the American experience – questions that continued to haunt and fascinate him and his contemporaries. Hawthorne’s adaptation of traditional literary forms to enter nineteenth-century debates about Nature illustrates his interest in the perpetual question of what it means to be human in general and in one’s particular time and place. Nature, as viewed through a pastoral lens adapted to other literary forms, was a topic Hawthorne considered crucial to American identity. Hawthorne and his contemporaries were, of course, greatly influenced by the historical dialectic of America as a religiously, economically, socially, and politically superior nation that was simultaneously an ideal religious “city on a hill” and “Nature’s Nation.” While Hawthorne was strongly attuned to these narratives of America’s hallowed history, his romances indicate an increasing skepticism of such versions of history. Rather than demanding, with Emerson, “our own works and laws and worship,” Hawthorne referred to his home more often as “New England” than “America,” thereby signifying his interest in America’s old world inheritance in general and in his own biographical background in particular.²¹

²¹ In *Hawthorne’s Divided Loyalties*, Frederick Newberry has established and explored Hawthorne’s familiarity and interest not only in America but also in Britain as “our old home,” drawing attention to Hawthorne’s interest in the literary “recovery of English traditions” (134).

CHAPTER TWO

Nature “Illumined by Higher Truth”: Reading Puritan Allegory in *The Scarlet Letter*

Nothing was more common, in those days, than to interpret all meteoric appearances, and other natural phenomena, that occurred with less regularity than the rise and set of sun and moon, as so many revelations from a supernatural source.

—Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (CE 1: 154-55)

The great black forest – stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and troubles of the world into its bosom – became the playmate of the lonely infant.... The truth seems to be, however, that the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child.

—Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (CE 1: 204–05)

For Hawthorne’s Puritans, Nature can be alternately good or evil, but it is invariably a site on which the handwriting of God can be found. Whether appearing as “awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven” or conceived of as a space in some other way portentous of an individual’s or a nation’s destiny, nature is something to be read. Hawthorne’s Puritans all consider Nature an allegory for a religious life, but they disagree on what the allegory of Nature suggests or teaches. Some Puritans view the New World as a new Garden of Eden and the forest as a place of beauty and harmony between humans, Nature, and God. Others, however, consider the forest a place of evil, where witches and devils mix with Native Americans and wild animals to produce threats to the Puritan civilization. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne rewrites the nineteenth century’s understanding of the Puritan history of seventeenth-century America – a history in which the allegory of paradise is overthrown by the allegory of wilderness for all but a few outliers of the Puritan community. These outliers, however, become a focal point of

Hawthorne's narrative, indicating that Hawthorne values views of Nature that do not result in hostility toward Nature.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's Puritans typically read Nature as a site of divine mediation. In such a world, nature is the signifier, the divine message is the signified, and humans are the receivers and sometimes faulty translators. Such reading does not, however, result in the same conclusions for all of his Puritans. Even though he is not hesitant to expose and vilify the second generation of Puritans alternately as "the blackest shade of Puritanism" or "the most intolerant brood that ever lived" (*CE* 1: 94, 232), Hawthorne also features Puritans who do not fit such a pattern in *The Scarlet Letter*. Nature, according to these Puritans, may be sympathetic to human nature but is not to be trusted unless some divine sanction can be attached to its sympathy. This more romantic view of nature adheres to Hester and Dimmesdale most directly, while the darkest Puritan views of nature are held by the Puritan children and those who suspect Mistress Hibbins as a witch. Even though he does not wholly espouse Puritan allegory as an interpretive authority, Hawthorne posits it as one possible challenge to Transcendentalist views of Nature.

This first major romance of Hawthorne is a reappropriation of pastoral forms from old world literary history to analyze the new world experience of the early Puritans. Using traditional forms in nontraditional ways, Hawthorne calls upon the reader to remember the early days of New England. American history – official and unofficial, political and literary – undergoes the scrutiny of Hawthorne's pastoral scope in *The Scarlet Letter*. This text also represents a rewriting of the official versions of history inherited through Puritan writers like Cotton Mather. The major characters of his

romance represent official and unofficial voices within or alongside the Puritan community. While other presences are noted in the early world, Hawthorne's focus is clearly on the Puritans and their role in the founding of America. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden setting that Hawthorne invokes in his text, the Puritans in the new world are given an opportunity to live an ideal life. And like Adam and Eve, they fail to live up to their ideals. Such failure indicates loss, in this case, the loss of an idealized world. But the idealization serves to draw their minds to the relation of the human figure to the natural world and to the artistic world of the human community. And it is in this remembered idealization that Hawthorne locates the struggling human figure who must learn how to live in harmony with the natural world and human civilization. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's Adam and Eve figures are more or less successful in correlation to their adaptability to both worlds.

Although the form in its most rigid style is too prescriptive for Hawthorne, his use of allegory draws attention to Nature as a place of divine activity. Hawthorne employs Puritan allegory to reinvestigate the possibility that Nature may serve as a site of divine inscriptions. Puritans viewed Nature as an allegory of the Christian life – either as a wilderness (taking a harsh view of Nature) or as a paradise (adopting a grateful view of Nature). Hawthorne uses allegory in the manner of Spenser to focus pastoral as a mode with “shades of meaning” in which Nature plays a part in the divine order. He uses quasi-allegory in the manner of Melville to focus pastoral as a mode in which Nature can display “multiple meanings.” With its interpolation of allegorical and pastoral motifs, *The Scarlet Letter* turns to Nature to understand non-human reality as part of the human condition.

Given conceptions of allegory as a weakened, mechanical form of symbolism – a conception that continues into critical discussions today but which was advanced in the nineteenth-century by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in England and Edgar Allan Poe in America – Hawthorne’s decision to use a form of allegory seems surprising. An already old genre when John Bunyan defended it to a seventeenth-century English readership that included many Puritans, allegory has sometimes been considered an inferior literary form for unintelligent readers.¹ However, allegory (*ἄλλος* other + *ἄγορία* speaking [in the open square]) can signify any number of ways of speaking about something by referring to something other than itself and does not necessarily fall into the mode of didactic parallels. As David Berkeley points out, allegory or quasi-allegory can be categorized in at least three different ways: it may lead to “one of many possible interpretations” (e.g. Melville’s *Moby-Dick*), it may be “nuanced, [with] some shades of meaning being discerned by readers rather than being obtruded on their sensibilities” (e.g. Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Book II), or it may represent a “one-for-one allegory whose force perhaps gains from lack of such a polysemous texture” (e.g. Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*).² Using such an outmoded form allowed Hawthorne to evoke the Puritans of two centuries earlier, but Hawthorne himself contributed to the quasi-allegory that Berkeley associates with Melville’s work.³ Having read Bunyan and Spenser both since childhood, Hawthorne was well versed in the first two types of allegory. Through his

¹ Bunyan defends allegory as a kind of biblical analogue, comparing it to prophecies, “Types, Shadows, and Metaphors,” as well as “Parables” and “Pearls” of hidden treasure (5–7).

² Although Berkeley finds potential good in all three types of allegory, he clearly favors Spenser’s allegory, calling it “good allegory” (31).

³ Melville and Hawthorne were friends who shared a common love-hate relationship with the Transcendentalists, and Melville dedicated (what Berkeley calls his “quasi-allegorical”) *Moby-Dick* to his friend Hawthorne “[i]n Token of my Admiration for his Genius” (6: vii).

extensive life-long reading, he also obtained close familiarity with romance and other forms of imaginative writing – notably epics, myths, pastorals, satires, and drama.⁴

While presenting Puritan characters who typically read the new world allegorically as a “one-for-one” Bunyanesque analogy in which the new world is either a spiritual wilderness or a spiritual paradise, even some of Hawthorne’s seventeenth-century characters and certainly his nineteenth-century narrator read the world at least in Spenserian “shades of meaning” if not in the “multiple meanings” which Berkeley associates with Melvillean quasi-allegory.

Hawthorne’s use of allegory continues to be studied both for its likeness and unlikeness from traditional allegorical forms. Magnus Ullén considers the formal similarities between Hawthorne’s writing and the Puritan version of allegory to indicate a sophisticated use of allegory in Hawthorne’s romances. Against the grain of casual notions of the limited value of allegory, Ullén argues for a kind of allegory in Hawthorne’s romances that invites readers to interpret the world with an “eye of faith,” yet without forcing a particular interpretation upon them.⁵ In similar terms, Millicent Bell argues against overly-romanticized views of Hawthorne by noting that “[f]rom his

⁴ His description of the pantheon of the world’s greatest literary artists in “The Hall of Fantasy” lists Homer, Aesop, Dante, Ariosto, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and Bunyan. This is, Hawthorne’s narrator avers, the hall of “rulers and demi-gods in the realms of imagination, and its kindred regions” (*CE* 10: 173–74). Lesser but still important imaginative writers in the hall included English writers Fielding, Richardson, and Scott, as well as German writers Goethe and Swedenborg. The busts of many other unnamed writers are included, but even though their names are not given, it is clear that the narrator is familiar with them. Charles Brockden Brown is the lone American who appears in the hall – in the version published in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, although an earlier version of this sketch had included other American writers as well.

⁵ Ullén makes no claim about Hawthorne’s own faith here, as he explicitly points out. Instead, he claims, in a characterization that holds for *The Scarlet Letter* but less so for some of Hawthorne’s other writings, that Hawthorne’s mature writing exhibits the same formal structure as Puritan allegory: “Hawthorne’s writings are rooted in an allegorical conception of life which projects an imperative that is social as much as spiritual...” (16).

Puritan inheritance – the conduit of his essential religiousness – he drew a moral seriousness that dissolved the Romantic veil” (*Hawthorne’s View* 15). Although Hawthorne is reticent when it comes to matters of religious doctrine, a religious sensibility with Puritan undertones does inform his writing. While Hawthorne’s Puritans routinely treated Nature in allegorical terms, their analysis of Nature did not always result in shared views. For some, allegory opened up into a realm of interpretive possibility that was nonetheless grounded in the conviction of the interrelations between Nature, the divine, and the human. For others, however, allegorical reading closed down interpretive analysis and imposed a controlling, darker Puritan mindset on Nature as well as on civilization. In his allegorical considerations of Nature, Hawthorne emphasizes the interpretive possibilities of the Puritans in a new world by mixing allegory with romance. Romance provides the author with “a certain latitude,” Hawthorne claims, that assuages the need “relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod — or rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly — thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude” (*CE* 2: 1–2). Thus, Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* can indeed represent both an allegorical tour de force and an artistic tale that allows a surprising degree of interpretive freedom and profundity. As mentioned earlier, a part of this interpretive range is invoked by Hawthorne’s use of the pastoral as “a mode of almost limitless implication.”

Hawthorne’s Puritans were, in one sense, always outward looking as they checked the earth and sky for signs for reading the divine inscription on Nature. While Hawthorne seems to share with his Puritans the conviction that Nature and the divine are interrelated, he does not share the confidence of at least some of them that the

relationship is a “one-to-one” analogy. The Rousseauvian subjectivity that threatens the narrator does not bother his Puritans.⁶ While Hawthorne clearly expected most of his nineteenth-century readers to adopt a quasi-allegorical approach or at least a “nuanced” type of allegory, he presents characters and a narrator who are not sure which way to read Nature. Although they never question that they should read the world allegorically, they do question *how* to read allegorically. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne presents the reader with clear interpretive choices. Representative of Hawthorne’s approach is the narrator’s the final statement of his introductory exposition in which then narrator focuses on the rose-bush against the backdrop of the prison, the “black flower of civilization”: “[The rose-bush] may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow” (*CE* 1: 48). Nature, beauty, and a sense of morality are intrinsically linked in this image, suggesting that Puritans who eschew beauty and Nature cannot expect to be truly moral either. The story of *The Scarlet Letter* is in some sense the story of characters attempting to realize the possible meanings of the rose-bush in their own lives. As readers travel with the narrator “along the track” of this romance and the characters of the romance travel “along the track” of their lives, the beauty of art and nature brightens the darkness of a tale otherwise brimming with gloom and doom. Morality without beauty and passion is unnatural and farcical.

Several critics also draw attention to the polemic quality of Hawthorne’s presentation of the Puritans as an attempt to correct prevailing idealizations of the Puritans as predecessors whose cultural authority nineteenth-century New Englanders

⁶ That Hawthorne read Rousseau repeatedly is clear by the record of books he checked out of the Salem Athenaeum (Kesselring 60).

wished to claim as their own. John P. McWilliams, for example, asserts, “Contemporaries who would admit Puritan self-reliance without Puritan intolerance, who would praise Puritan independence while slighting Puritan persecution, were trying to breathe literary life into half a man” (46). While drawing attention to Hawthorne’s “paradoxical” treatment of the Puritans, McWilliams focuses on Governor Endicott as the representative Puritan and thus blurs Hawthorne’s presentation of different types of Puritans. In his eagerness to critique those who present the Puritans too lightheartedly, McWilliams paints the Puritans even more darkly than Hawthorne does. McWilliams’ attention to nineteenth-century attempts to recoup the Puritans is a useful reminder nonetheless, showing that Hawthorne is interested in bringing attention to the dark side of Puritanism rather than just romanticizing the Puritans as the nation’s founders. McWilliams’ inference that the Puritans almost uniformly saw the natural world as a religiously inscribed place is certainly a historically accurate claim, but McWilliams errs by characterizing all of Hawthorne’s Puritans as adopting harsh attitudes toward nature. Colacurcio’s description, derived from his intense historical study of the whole array of Hawthorne’s short stories and sketches, is much more incisive: Hawthorne, he claims, “often worked in the apparently credulous mode of the allegory” to craft fictional works that imagine possibilities rather than dogmatic works that circumscribe behaviors (*Province of Piety* 1). His example of Spenser’s pastoral allegorical method in *The Faerie Queene* no doubt gave Hawthorne some impetus for his own method in *The Scarlet Letter*. Indeed, as Hawthorne treats it, pastoral allegory allows for Puritan interpretations of the divine implications in Nature and yet does not insist upon such

interpretive moves. Instead, he critiques simplistic acceptance of such interpretation by the actions of his characters.

By using Puritan allegory as a lens for viewing Nature, Hawthorne modifies his pastoral depiction of America to suggest that the divine may very well be inscribed in Nature – both in tender and instructive tones. While Hawthorne’s John Endicott read an attitude of divine wrath into Nature, Winthrop and his followers treat the natural world as a potential paradise infused with divine love. Such reading of Nature, rather than the adopting the typical movement of Renaissance pastoral in which a figure from the city passes through the country for correction and instruction on how to live the good life, suggests that Nature should be treated as a place of divine as well as human action. This is not to say that such divine action is absent from Renaissance pastoral, but to say that Hawthorne’s particular interpolation of pastoral and allegorical emphasizes the Nature as the realm of divine action. Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, then, suggests an allegorical reading of the natural world that opens the reader of Nature to possibilities about the connections between humans, Nature, and the divine. The variations within the narrative voice itself as well as the varying views of his characters imply Hawthorne’s *limited* acceptance, however, of allegorical readings of Nature. Some of the Puritans in *The Scarlet Letter* exhibit a proto-Romantic conception of nature as a place to commune with the Maker of Nature while others exhibit hostility toward nature as wilderness or a place confiscated by the devil. After considering Hawthorne’s reading of Puritans who view nature as paradise versus Puritans who view nature as wilderness, I will examine his treatment of Puritans’ allegorical views of Nature with regard to their definitive belief in the divine as inscribed on Nature – both earth and sky. By juxtaposing romantic views

and hostile views of nature, Hawthorne indicates that an accurate view of Nature can only be had if Nature is “illuminated by higher truth” (*CE* 1: 203). In the end, Hawthorne’s characters demonstrate that a religiously-infused way of thinking about the natural world does not inevitably result in a specific attitude toward the natural world, but the quality of their relations with the natural world influences their capacity to read the world religiously yet charitably.

New World Nature: Paradise, Wilderness, or Both

Nature is a much contested term in *The Scarlet Letter*, which deliberately invokes a non-Emersonian tone by treating Puritan allegory as a potentially viable if partial way of knowing Nature. Puritan suspicions of the natural world as the devil’s territory are offset by the paradisiacal experiences of those who “participate” directly with the natural world. However, Hawthorne’s treatment of nature is neither merely reactive nor wholly romantic. The space distancing and connecting the human, the natural, and the divine is a space of possibility in *The Scarlet Letter*. And while Puritans may too quickly relegate the natural to the supernatural, most of them do pay attention to Nature as a reality, as something other than a mere reflection of human values. Hawthorne portrays rival Puritan conceptions of Nature to suggest that non-human nature, like human nature, can bear the marks of both good and evil. At least a few Puritans may have seen the pastoral tensions of their new world situation as a dynamic force rather than a dualistic binary.

In the “Custom-house” introductory sketch to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne draws his nineteenth-century contemporaries back to their seventeenth-century Puritan ancestors by ostensibly describing a strangely embroidered scarlet letter wrapped in a document in the nineteenth-century custom house where he works. Hawthorne’s

supposed authorization for his reading of Puritan views of the world comes from a fictional object.⁷ As numerous critics have pointed out, Hawthorne actually draws from his readings of Puritan history to recreate Puritan New England.⁸ However, in the fictitious scarlet letter “found” in the Custom House, he captures his readers’ imagination and leads them back into the past with him, thus drawing them into a deliberate consideration of the past as grist for the present. Conflicted about his own attitudes toward Puritan ancestry, Hawthorne employs a quasi-autobiographical voice to present his own first American ancestor as a figure who possessed “all the Puritan traits, both good and evil” and to visualize a ghostly procession of his scornful Puritan ancestors in America. “[Y]et, let them scorn me as they will,” he writes of his remembered Puritan ancestors, “strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine” (*CE* 1: 9–10). Accordingly, Perry Miller characterizes Hawthorne as the “preeminent” example that “[r]espect for [the Puritans’ ideas] is not the same thing as believing in them” (*Errand* ix). By portraying Puritans with varying attitudes toward Nature, Hawthorne finds the space for continued adulation of some Puritan traits even while condemning others.

⁷ Hawthorne’s son Julian assures us that there was no physical scarlet letter – that his father was gratified but surprised when individuals solicited him for the physical object: “he was amused and somewhat embarrassed when enquiries began to come in from an interested public, concerning that ‘affair of fine red cloth,’ and some earnest persons even wanted to know if it was for sale, and at how much” (“Making” 401).

⁸ See, for example, Charles Ryskamp’s classic work on Hawthorne’s heavy reading of New England history, including a number that play an important role to my consideration of *The Scarlet Letter*: Winthrop’s *Journal*, Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Felt’s *Annals of Salem*, and Caleb Snow’s *History of Boston* (257–58). Also important to any treatment of Puritan history in Hawthorne’s works is Michael Colacurcio’s more recent *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne’s Early Tales*, in which Colacurcio expands upon and qualifies Perry Miller’s assessment of Hawthorne to claim that while “Hawthorne carried on a life-long dialect with the historical ‘thesis’ of American Puritanism,” Miller fails to account for the fact that Hawthorne “wrote tales and romances, not monographs and treatises” (1).

Haunted by his own Puritan ancestors, Hawthorne explored in *The Scarlet Letter* the connections between the first Puritans who arrived in Boston and their progeny in the nineteenth-century. His entire text seems to be an exploration of

the deep and aged roots which my family has struck into the soil. It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement, which has since become a city. And here his descendants have been born and died, and have mingled their earthly substance with the soil. (*CE* 1: 8–9)

This description anticipates the events of the story that is to follow, emphasizing the “roots” and “soil” to which Hester finds herself attached as well as the “wild and forest-bordered settlement” as it appeared to many of the Puritans when they first arrived in the new world. In *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, Sacvan Bercovitch emphasizes the impact of seventeenth-century Puritan thought on nineteenth-century New Englanders as, in part, the result of “the recurrent crises of corporate self-definition in the nineteenth century: the demand for a pantheon of founding fathers that would satisfy absolute moral standards without inhibiting democratic progressivism” (185). While Hawthorne certainly was attuned to nineteenth-century anxieties about American identity, he is not always defensive of America but found its history much more troubled than Bercovitch allows. *The Scarlet Letter* questions and critiques, rather than simply adulating a narrative of America’s beginnings as a nation.

It is significant that Hawthorne’s interest in American history gestures not to the Pilgrim settlers with William Bradford but to the Puritan settlers with John Winthrop. In his famous “Modell of Christian Charity,” preached either prior to sailing to America or while aboard the ship en route to America, Winthrop presents the new world as the place where, by charitable actions, the Puritans could expect to find not only a “good Lande”

but “the soule’s paradise” (“Modell” 44). Unlike those who fully adopted Winthrop’s model, Bradford and the Pilgrims with him considered any goodness in the new land as the gift of Providence and expected nothing less than “a hidious and desolate wildernes” even before their arrival (Bradford 60). The Pilgrims saw the new world only as an escape from the corruptions of the old world to a place they could live in peace without following the dictates of the English church even as they continued to operate under the auspices of the British crown.⁹ Although the Puritans also wanted to stand against the impurities of society, they opted for reform from within the church, and the American Puritans with Winthrop envisioned setting up a model for the world to see and imitate.¹⁰ For the Puritans who came to the new world with Winthrop, a religious strain of the pastoral myth offered the promise of a new life in an idealized landscape away from the corruptions of English and European decadence. This idealized new world is immediately revealed in Hawthorne’s retelling as yet another postlapsarian setting in which the drama of humanity is played out: “The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project,” the narrator states in the opening scene of *The Scarlet Letter*, “have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison” (*CE* 1: 47). This new world is not, however, *just* another such setting for Hawthorne: it is a real place in which the relations between humans and

⁹ Although Bradford’s dismal assessment of the new world occurs before the Pilgrims travel to America, indicating that Alan Heimert goes too far in suggesting that neither the Pilgrims nor the Puritans foresaw the difficulties of living in the new world, Heimert does appropriately draw attention to the allure of the new world as a kind of promised land for the Pilgrims and Puritans alike (361).

¹⁰ “For we must consider,” Winthrop famously admonished his fellow Puritans who were joining him in the new world, “that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are upon us” (“Modell” 47).

Nature can be examined anew, a place where city-building is ostensibly less threatened by the corruptions of European civilization.

As Winthrop saw it, the “new world” setting of America invited a revitalization of the myths and hopes of harmonious relations between humans and their natural environment. The rhetoric of the new world as a land of opportunity whose borders had not yet been found, a promised land that provided the space for religious and political freedom from the constraints of European (and especially British) control, a place where humans could live in harmony with the natural world made way for the rebirth of the pastoral. Puritans, however, had a thorny relation with the new world, viewing it at first as a pristine place to build the kingdom of God away from a corrupt Europe, but their rhetoric soon became one of surviving in the wilderness where they found themselves and their neighbors being tempted by the devil. Hawthorne’s awareness of the undercurrents of his own Puritan lineage gave him a unique creative sensibility, leading him to examine early American conceptions of Nature even before writing about his association with the Transcendentalists.¹¹ In the first edition of *Twice-told Tales* (1837), Hawthorne, composed before he knew even the Salem Transcendentalists let alone the Brook-Farmers or the Concord Transcendentalists, Hawthorne included works such as “The May Pole of Merry Mount” and “The Great Carbuncle” and “The Hollow of the Three Hills,” all of which had been published before. These stories indicate Hawthorne’s attention to the attitudes toward nature embraced by the early Puritans, Anglicans, and Native Americans as well as his fascination with the relation between

¹¹ In “Young Goodman Brown,” for example, Hawthorne notes the assumed correlation between witches and the forest, and, in “The May Pole of Merry Mount,” he highlights the Puritans’ negative association of the Native Americans with an unredeemed forest.

nature and folk or magical tales and, finally, the presence of death in the natural world. These tales and others like them look at the particularly American situation, often drawing on Hawthorne's reading of early New England history.

In Hawthorne's literature, the harshest Puritan views toward nature and human nature both come not from original leaders like Winthrop but from his more intransigent successors in the leadership of Boston. In the games of the Puritan children, Hawthorne shows their similarity to John Endicott in terms that illustrate hostility toward the natural world and those in it who were not just like them. Hester watched these little Puritans "disporting themselves in such grim fashion as the Puritanic nurture would permit; playing at going to church, perchance; or at scourging Quakers; or taking scalps in a sham-fight with the Indians; or scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft" (*CE* 1: 94). These little Puritans' games would be their adult activities tomorrow. Hawthorne's treatment of Winthrop as a man of charity and Endicott as the representative of the harsher Puritan leaders bears the imprint of Caleb Snow's *History of Boston*.¹² Emphasizing Winthrop's contribution to the trajectory of Boston history, Snow recounts the leniency of Winthrop and his deathbed regret for even his own harsher actions, concluding, "We consider the death of Gov. Winthrop to have completed an epoch in the history of Boston" (104). Snow depicts Endicott as "the most rigid of any of the magistrates" and emphasizes the harsher direction he led the colony after Winthrop's death (141), most likely giving Hawthorne the impetus for his own contrast of Winthrop and Endicott.

¹² My observations here support Ryskamp's observation that Hawthorne used Snow's *History* "for authentication of the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*" (257–58).

Several earlier short stories give important background for Hawthorne's attitude toward the harshest new world Puritans, emphasizing again how their attitudes toward Nature, toward humans, and toward the divine are all interrelated. Most damned among these Puritans is the all-too-ready Indian-fighter and sometime governor John Endicott. In "The May Pole of Merry Mount," Hawthorne calls Endicott "the Puritan of Puritans" and displays him in the act of disrupting a May-day celebration in the forests of the new world (*CE* 9: 63). In "Endicott and the Red Cross," an early tale that also depicts the seventeenth-century Puritan world of *The Scarlet Letter*, Endicott thrusts aside Winthrop's Edenic vision of America, declaring,

Wherefore, I say, have we left the green and fertile fields, the cottages, or perchance, the old grey halls, where we were born and bred, the church-yards where our forefathers lay buried? Wherefore have we come hither to set up our own tombstones in a wilderness? A howling wilderness it is! The wolf and the bear meet us within the hallow of our own dwellings. The savage lieth in wait for us in the shadow of the woods. The stubborn roots of the trees break our ploughshares, when we would till the earth. Our children cry for bread, and we must dig in the sands of the seashore to satisfy them. Wherefore, I say again, have we sought out this country of a rugged soil, and wintry sky? Was it not for the enjoyment of our civil rights? Was it not for liberty to worship God according to our conscience? (*CE* 9: 438–39)

When Endicott is interrupted by Roger Williams, the "Wanton Gospeller" in stocks who declares that it is for lack of freedom of conscience that he is in the stocks, Endicott's rage against the Williams is placed alongside his slightly veiled criticism of Winthrop as too "meek and moderate," further underscoring the difference between these two men as well as illustrating Hawthorne's preference for Winthrop's more charitable view of human society and the natural world alike.¹³ Besides advocating "Christian charity" as a

¹³ In his sketch of "Mrs. Hutchinson," the antinomianist banished from Puritan New England who is briefly mentioned in the rosebush discussion in the opening scene of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne directly contrasts the charitable Winthrop with the stern Endicott. While Winthrop is described as "a man

model for living, Winthrop was taken to court by detractors who found his government too lenient (*Journal* 166–68). In his study of Winthrop, James Moseley observes:

[Winthrop] acquired a reputation for leniency of judgment that antagonized moralistic hard-liners... Despite the political troubles his leniency cost Winthrop as governor, people remembered his generosity and kindness to individuals within the Puritan community. But Winthrop had no sympathy as governor or historian for those whose individualism threatened the colony's cohesion, and he was personally offended by those whose self-interest led them to abandon the community during hard times. (173)

Such a balance between respect for the individual and dedication to the community is hard to achieve, and it characterizes Hawthorne's treatment of the Puritans in the new world as well as the approach of Snow's Winthrop.

Before writing his short stories, Hawthorne had checked out a book of Election Sermons that contributed to his fictional treatment of Puritan leaders in his short stories and romances alike.¹⁴ One of the most important of these sermons is Samuel Danforth's "Errand into the Wilderness," a sermon made famous by Perry Miller's use of the title for a book on the Puritans. In this sermon, Danforth suggests that the Puritans may well have "in a great measure forgotten our Errand into the Wilderness." He uses this suggestion as his basis for warning the Puritans:

You have solemnly professed before God, Angels and Men, that the cause of your leaving your Country, Kindred and Fathers Houses, and transporting your selves with your Wives, Little Ones and Substance, over the vast Ocean into this waste and howling Wilderness was *your Liberty*

by whom the guilty and innocent might alike desire to be judged, the first confiding in his integrity and wisdom, the latter hoping in his mildness," Endicott is unflatteringly depicted as a man who, if he could, "would stand with his drawn sword at the gate of Heaven, and resist to the death all pilgrims thither, except they travelled his own path" (*CE* 23: 71).

¹⁴ In a study of election sermons perused by Hawthorne, A. W. Plumstead identifies similar themes in Dimmesdale's election sermon in *The Scarlet Letter* and the recorded sermons of both Danforth and Prince (5). Marion Kesselring's record of Hawthorne's use of books from the Salem Athenaeum indicates that Hawthorne checked out the book of election sermons in September 1828 (23, 61).

to walk in the Faith of the Gospel with all good Conscience according to the Order of the Gospel, and your enjoyment of the pure Worship of God according to His Institution, without Humane mixtures and Impositions.
(10–11)

The similarities between Danforth's actual sermon and Endicott's speech in Hawthorne's short story are obvious: both speakers frame their discussion with a remembrance of the passage to the new world, both depict the new world as a "howling wilderness" and emphasize the fact that they have exposed their children to the wilds of America, both adopt the biblical trope of a prophet's voice crying in the wilderness, and both pose the question of what the Puritans have gone to the wilderness to see— only to answer *for* them, declaring that they came for freedom of conscience. The differences between these two public speeches are perhaps as striking as the similarities: while Endicott emphasizes "civil rights," Danforth wants primitive purity without "Humane mixtures and Impositions." Danforth's presentation is thus religiously inclined while Endicott's is more overtly political in nature. Endicott's rhetorical emphasis is not so much on the Puritans he wants to rule (a desire he seems intent on concealing from his auditors) as it is on the Native Americans and the natural world as a whole that he implies need to be ruled by the Puritans, headed, of course, by himself.

Besides Danforth's sermon, which presented the natural world as a wilderness rather than a paradise, Hawthorne was familiar with numerous other Puritan sermons with the same message. Hawthorne's familiarity with this repeated theme is apparent by his textual use of it and most likely gathered through his reading of Felt's *Annals of Salem*, and numerous books of early New England sermons that he checked out of the

Salem Athenaeum.¹⁵ In the *Annals*, Felt records a wilderness sermon by an earlier clergyman settler named Francis Higginson, who preached such a sermon to the newcomers who arrived with Winthrop. Higginson's text for this sermon was a passage using the words of John the Baptist, a passage often employed by new world Puritans: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" (Felt 46). As in other such sermons, this wilderness sermon typically inculcates a feeling of approaching doom, fueled by fears that self-interest will become a greater concern than religious freedom, a cause which is always featured with more or less seeming sincerity.¹⁶ Certainly, Hawthorne's depiction of Endicott's use of this trope indicates a deep distrust of his sincerity. His depiction of John Wilson, Dimmesdale's elder pastor, is more sympathetic. Wilson, Hawthorne writes, was not a hostile man at all:

The old clergyman, nurtured at the rich bosom of the English church, had a long established and legitimate taste for all good and comfortable things, and however stern he might show himself in the pulpit, or in his public reproof of such transgressions as that of Hester Prynne, still, the genial benevolence of this private life had won him warmer affection than was accorded to any of his professional contemporaries. (*CE* 1: 109)

The wilderness motif of Puritan sermons – a theme which Dimmesdale is later to take up – stands in stark contrast to "the rich bosom of the English church" that Wilson remembers. The Puritans were not Separatists like their neighbors at Plymouth, but

¹⁵ Hawthorne checked out Boston Lecture sermons, Fast sermons, Funeral sermons, occasional sermons, and other sermons between the years of 1828 and 1830. He checked out Felt's *Annals* repeatedly, in 1833, 1834, and again in 1849 just prior to writing *The Scarlet Letter* (Kesselring 50, 60–61).

¹⁶ Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, which Hawthorne read extensively, also features this trope prominently in several places, as Ursula Brumm shows. In Mather's text, Brumm finds commentary on Higginson's and Thomas Shephard's wilderness sermons, but even more importantly, she notes that Mather presents five Puritan pastors – John Cotton, John Norton, John Wilson, John Davenport, and Thomas Hooker – as *Johannes in Eremo* (John in the Wilderness) "as at least partial fulfillments of the Baptist as type, as one who came to prepare a way for the Lord in the desert" (10).

leaders such as Endicott agitated for separation from the English church and from the English nation.

No doubt Winthrop's own wilderness sermon would have caught Hawthorne's attention as he read through Winthrop's journals, especially since it seems to cave to the growing Puritan consensus that the new world is a wilderness rather than a paradise.

Winthrop's reluctance to take up this trope is apparent in this sermon, which focuses not so much on wilderness language as on Winthrop's fear that self-interest and material prosperity is about to replace the commitment to charity he had earlier envisioned as an integral part of experiencing the new world as a paradise. As settlers began to move away from the community to better their economic prospects, Winthrop addressed them in the form of a sermon. Though he uses the "wilderness" motif and language somewhat like Endicott's, the differences are striking:

Ask thy conscience, if thou wouldst have plucked up thy stakes, and brought thy family 3000 miles, if thou hadst expected that all, or most, would have forsaken thee here. Ask again, what liberty thou hast toward others, which thou likest not to allow others toward thyself; for if one may go, another may, and so the greater part, and so the church and commonwealth may be left destitute in a wilderness, exposed to misery and reproach, and all for thy ease and pleasure. (*Journal* 416).

These words signal Winthrop's regretful awareness of the decline from a model of Christian charity, an overwhelming of the new world paradise that he had envisioned.

He adopts the language of "wilderness" with the lingering hope that a new world paradise might not be wholly beyond their grasp, which he indicates by repeating the word "may" – one person "may" leave, another person "may" follow, the community "may be left destitute in a wilderness." Further, this "may" occur only "if" such choices are made. But when those choices are indeed made, Winthrop refuses to give up on his

model of charity and does not attempt to force the colonists to do as he pleases.¹⁷ This is a stark contrast from Endicott's use of the wilderness sermon as the ultimate jeremiad, in the sense used by Bercovitch: "to sustain process by imposing control, and to justify control by presenting a certain form of process as the only road to the future kingdom" (*American Jeremiad* 24). For Endicott, failure of the ideal gives a pretext for him to seize control and this movement, among others, is part of what makes Endicott the first-generation Puritan who best represents the second generation of Puritans that, in Hawthorne's eyes, "so darkened the national visage... that all the subsequent years have not sufficed to clear it up" (*CE* 1: 232).

When Hawthorne transforms these speeches and sermons into Endicott's speech, he replaces the charitable, regretful tone of Winthrop and the religious intonations of Danforth with a militant self-righteous attitude that is intent upon taking control of the land, as already noted above. Winthrop's journal laments divisions that arise in the following years as the Puritans enact a strict code of law contrary to his wishes and get caught up in a debate about the ownership of a pig. Hawthorne mentions this latter event in *The Scarlet Letter* as taking place within an "epoch of pristine simplicity" in which the pig debate "not only caused a fierce and bitter contest in the legislative body of the colony, but resulted in an important modification of the framework itself of the legislature" (*CE* 1: 101). The opening reference to a failed utopia makes much more sense when recognizing Winthrop's original projection of America as a paradise and a

¹⁷ Kristin Boudreau characterizes Winthrop's "wilderness speech" as a regretful statement that "[c]harity might have held the community together, but selfishness and love of liberty threatened the ruin of the colony.... [Winthrop] could take little joy in overall prosperity when it was merely the sum total of private gains" (69). Boudreau also emphasizes the importance of Winthrop to Hawthorne's more favorable view of the Puritans, noting that upon Winthrop's death in *The Scarlet Letter*, "charity seems to have evaporated among the political and religious leaders of New England; consequently, so have the real bonds of community" (71).

good land that reverts to wilderness only when people walk away from a model of charity.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Dimmesdale's election day sermon draws upon the wilderness motif of Puritan sermons but without the sense of impending doom that marked so many of these other sermons Hawthorne had read. In this sermon is the suggestion that the Puritans could yet experience ideal relations with each other and with the natural world, in the manner of Winthrop's sermon. Though the narrator declines to give the actual words of the sermon, he does give a description of the sermon, a sermon that conflated the earlier categories between land as paradise and land as wilderness to issue perhaps the most conflicted but, to the Puritans, the most convincing, jeremiad of them all:

His subject, it appeared, had been the relation between the Deity and the communities of mankind, with a special reference to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness. And, as he drew towards the close, a spirit of prophecy had come upon him, constraining him to its purpose as mightily as the old prophets of Israel were constrained; only with this difference, that, whereas the Jewish seers had denounced judgments and ruin on their country, it was his mission to foretell a high and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord. But, throughout it all, and through the whole discourse, there had been a certain deep, sad undertone of pathos, which could not be interpreted otherwise than as the natural regret of one soon to pass away. (*CE* 1: 249)

Gone are the questionings, the strivings to change their ways, here is sheer prophecy of goodness to come, paradise soon to be regained! But his prophecy must later appear as madness, for Winthrop's dream – parallel in many ways to what Dimmesdale here predicts – disintegrates, and both of them “pass away” and their visions with them.¹⁸

¹⁸ According to Snow's *History*, “Mr. Winthrop, before he left England, was of a more catholic spirit than some of his brethren. After he came to America he yielded somewhat to the reigning spirit of intolerance, but as he advanced in life he resumed his former moderation, and the time of his last sickness,

But, their vision is recaptured in the art of Hawthorne, and Hester seems at first to represent an individualist charity and rediscovery of the natural world as a paradise for lovers rather than for communities. The conclusion at the ending undoes her “discovery” as well but leaves her hoping and involved at the margins of the Puritan community, comfortable on both sides of the border between nature and civilization where she lives in her cottage by the seashore.

In addition to the sermons of the early Puritans, Hawthorne would have been familiar with Puritan rhetoric about Nature through his reading of Cotton Mather, the most prolific and perhaps the most controversial writer of Puritan history. Mather provides an important if qualified counter to the “wilderness” conception of nature held by some of the Puritans. Hawthorne’s treatment of Mather and his view of the natural world shows a mixture of censure and respect.¹⁹ Although Mather advocates the necessity of controlling the more “natural” world of Native Americans, Mather also presents Nature as a Book of God that can be read. Hawthorne’s allegorical treatment of the natural world is reminiscent of Mather’s method of studying Nature as one of the two “books” that Mather, citing earlier Christians as his authority, considered of divine origin:

Chrysostom, I remember, mentions a *Twofold Book* of GOD; the Book of the *Creatures*, and the Book of the *Scriptures*, GOD having taught first of all us *δια πραγματων*, by his *Works*, did it afterwards *γραμματα*, by

when Dudley pressed him to sign an order for the banishment of a person who was deemed heterodox, he refused, saying, that he had done too much of that work already” (103–04).

¹⁹ In *The School of Hawthorne*, Richard Brodhead situates Hawthorne as an example of how literary tradition is shaped and has been shaped in America, claiming that Hawthorne’s “chief subject” should be understood as “the way the past invisibly invests itself in the present, and the way the present alternately struggles against the past’s weight and seeks to renew its embrace” (8).

his *Words*. We will now for a while read the *Former* of these *Books*, ‘twill help us in reading the *Latter*: They will admirably assist one another. (*Christian Philosopher* 17–18)

Mather, like other Puritans, searched the book of Nature for signs of the divine. An allegorical reading of the Book of Nature in the manner of Mather is a challenging undertaking for Hawthorne and his Puritans, especially when humans are *part of* that Nature. Given Hawthorne’s attempt to display the reading of this Book, however, it is not wholly unfitting that an early reviewer would write of Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*: “Though severe, it is wholesome, and is a sounder bit of Puritan divinity than we have been of late accustomed to hear from the degenerate successors of Cotton Mather.... The spirit of his old Puritan ancestors, to whom he refers in the preface, lives in Nathaniel Hawthorne.”²⁰ Although there is some similarity between Mather and Hawthorne, there are – as always – important differences as well: perhaps the most obvious way that Hawthorne differs from Mather is in his depiction of the unheard voices of the Puritan community. While Mather presents the governors of colonial New England (especially Winthrop) as pious models of virtue in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Hawthorne focuses on imaginary personages like Hester Prynne, a young woman who thrives only on the margins of the Puritan community.²¹

²⁰ Evert A. Duyckinck, writing this review for the *Literary World* in March 1850 on the very heels of the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, contrasts “the Hawthorne of the present day in the sunshine” especially associated with his first published volume of *Twice-told Tales* with “another Hawthorne less companionable, of sterner Puritan aspect, with the shadow of the past over him...”; this second Hawthorne appears in stories like “The Minister’s Black Veil,” and it is this second Hawthorne that shows up in *The Scarlet Letter* (Duyckinck, qtd. in Idol and Jones 122)

²¹ An example of their differing focus can be seen in their treatment of John Winthrop. While Hawthorne mentions Winthrop’s leniency in passing, Mather studies Winthrop at length, portraying him as *Nehemias Americanus*, the American Nehemiah, “a Lawgiver, as patient as Lycurgus” (*Magnalia* 1: 118).

Mather, then, records the wilderness trope of some of his predecessors with only limited agreement, advocating a more receptive attitude toward Nature that is not exactly the “paradise” of Winthrop but is nonetheless expectant rather than hostile. And Mather is not without precedent, as his citation indicates. He might have quoted John Calvin on the same issue. One strong and well-known example of a Puritan view of Nature as a work of God and a delightful place is Anne Bradstreet’s Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet’s *Contemplations* (1678):

Under the cooling shadow of a stately Elm
Close sate I by a goodly Rivers side,
Where gliding streams the Rocks did overwhelm;
A lonely place, with pleasures dignifi’d.
I once that lov’d the shady woods so well,
Now thought the rivers did the trees excel,
And if the sun would ever shine, there would I dwell. (377)

Trees and the stream are featured prominently in her poem, much as they are in the forest scenes of *The Scarlet Letter*. Bradstreet finds solace, delight, even joy in the natural world, much in the way that Hawthorne’s main characters do. Puritan poets like Bradstreet offered Hawthorne actual examples of Puritan views of Nature that are more admirable than that of Endicott and perhaps more realistic than that of Winthrop.

Reading the Earth: Nature’s Sympathy and Heathen Nature

From Hawthorne’s harshest Puritan Endicott to the more amiable John Winthrop, Nature serves as a place of supernatural possibility. While the most intolerant Puritans in Hawthorne’s fiction attempt to coerce a specific allegorical meaning of Nature, much as they attempt to coerce external conformity, some Puritans are less imposing. The narrator’s personifications of Nature – whether the sunshine dancing through the trees, the trees gently groaning, the brook murmuring its secrets, the heart of nature offering its

sympathy to the humans in its bosom – are often offered through the eyes of Hester or as the narrator’s descriptions of the interactions between the main characters and the natural world.²² Hawthorne’s main characters, regardless of their status in society, adopt less hostile views toward the natural world than do most of their austere counterparts. The Nature of earth, human nature, and human charity all spring from a divine source – this much Hawthorne shares with his Puritans. And with them he also shares a sense that the goodness of these three things are threatened by a fallenness that inheres in the natural condition. But Hawthorne’s insistence on the good potential of Nature, nonetheless, sets him apart from the harsher Puritan views even as his conviction of fallenness sets him apart from his Transcendentalist contemporaries.

Even within a Puritan context and within an allegorical framework, Hawthorne’s text opens up questions about how to read nature. As Nina Baym noted, the harshest Puritan significations concerning nature and civilization do not hold in *The Scarlet Letter*: “Wildness and evil are not necessarily identical; the forest, where Indians and the Devil dwell, is also the abode of nature, which the community must destroy in order to erect its civilization. Is nature evil, or only untamed? Is everything that is untamed evil? Why does every heart have secrets, and if every heart does, might not the forest, where they can be shown, be more the abode of honesty than the town, where law and order require inhibition, suppression, and concealment?” (*A Reading* 44). For Hawthorne and

²² While I do not agree with Janice Daniel that nature itself is the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* (“Apples” 307), I do agree that Hawthorne distances himself from his narrator – in this work as well as his other romances. Further, I agree with Daniel’s basic contention that the narrator’s personifications of nature indicate more sympathy with nature than the antagonistic attitudes toward Nature espoused by harsher Puritans such as John Endicott.

for some of his characters, the natural world and human society are not at odds with each other, but are twin realities.

The simultaneous fallenness and goodness of the natural world is brought to the fore when the earth is considered in the contrasts between the forest and “civilization.” In *American Adam*, Lewis depicts the contrast between nature and civilization in *The Scarlet Letter* as “a decision about ethical reality” that “most of Hawthorne’s heroes and heroines eventually have to confront”:

That is why we have the frantic shuttling, in novel after novel, between the village and the forest, the city and the country; for these are the symbols between which the choice must be made and the means by which moral inference is converted into dramatic action.... And while [Hawthorne] was responsive to the attractions of the open air and to the appeal of the forest, he also understood the grounds for the Puritan distrust of the forest. He retained that distrust as a part of the symbol. In the forest, possibility was unbounded; but just because of that, evil inclination was unchecked, and witches could flourish there. For Hawthorne, the forest was neither the proper home of the admirable Adam, as with [James Fenimore] Cooper, nor was it the hideout of the malevolent adversary, as with [Robert Montgomery] Bird. It was the ambiguous setting of moral choice, the scene of reversal and discovery in his characteristic tragic drama. The forest was the pivot of Hawthorne’s grand recurring pattern of escape and return. (113–14)

Hester and Dimmesdale are faced with a choice in the forest, whether to flee into the heart of the forest or to escape to Europe: “Whither leads yonder forest-track? Backward to the settlement, thou sayest! Yes; but onward too! Deeper it goes, and deeper, into the wilderness, less plainly to be seen at every step, until some few miles hence, the yellow leaves will show no vestige of the white man’s tread. There thou art free!” (*CE* 1: 197). They decide instead to go together to Europe where Dimmesdale can continue to develop his studious nature, but Dimmesdale’s death precludes any such move by them together. When Hester does go to Europe, it is with her daughter Pearl, but she returns in the end

to take up residence once again between the forest and the Puritan community in her cottage which was earlier described with regard to its location “[o]n the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation...on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-covered hills, toward the west” (*CE* 1: 81). Hester, then is at home it seems both nowhere and everywhere. The forest, the seashore, the Puritan community, Europe, and America have all been her home and she keeps her connections to all these places.

Hawthorne’s reaction to Puritan ideas about nature reveals not a dichotomy of opposing relations as in *country versus city*, *nature versus civilization*, but rather a view of nature that possesses both a dark strain and redemptive qualities. In his study of the “historical romance of New England,” Michael Davitt Bell puts this in terms of nineteenth-century conceptions of nature as divided into “tame” and “wild” categories. As Bell claims, all of nature fits into one category for Hawthorne: “Nature with a capital N. Nature as meaning both universal human nature and natural landscape” (*Historical Romance* 166). Pearl’s “wild” character, like Hester’s “voluptuous” nature, and Dimmesdale’s “animal nature” find relief from Puritan grimness in the sanctity of “wild” nature. Bell studies the characteristics of the “Indian stories” of Hawthorne’s period and finds that “[a] special figure again and again emphasized in these noble savages is their ‘natural’ piety – a quality particularly well suited to expose by contrast the cruelty of the professedly ‘Christian’ Puritans.” Hawthorne, Bell suggests, is working against the typical romances of his time that depict a strong contrast between the “natural” religion of the Native Americans and the “unnatural” religion of the Puritans (94). Further, Bell claims that Hawthorne is indeed employing the standard motifs of Native American

romances of his time by presenting Hester as a “natural heroine”; however, by showing her flaws as well as her heroism, Hawthorne undermines “the cult of nature through the figure usually used to support it” (184). For Hawthorne, nature is not wholly pure, as many nineteenth-century writers of Native American tales implied, but neither is it wholly impure as many seventeenth-century Puritans assumed.²³

Hawthorne’s treatment of Hester and Pearl especially draws attention to these more congenial views toward Nature. In one scene where Pearl is skipping through the forest as Hester and Dimmesdale sit in a secluded nook, Hawthorne characterizes the natural world as a dynamic place:

The great black forest – stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and troubles of the world into its bosom – became the playmate of the lonely infant.... It offered her the partridge-berries... A pigeon, alone on a low branch, allowed Pearl to come beneath, and uttered a sound as much of greeting as alarm. A squirrel, from the lofty depths of his domestic tree, chattered either in anger or merriment... A fox, startled from his sleep by her light footsteps, looked inquisitively at Pearl... A wolf, it is said, – but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable, came up and smelt of Pearl’s robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand. The truth seems to be, however, that the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child. (*CE* 1: 204–05)

This description directly challenges darker Puritan views of nature as a threat to humans by showcasing the safety and beauty enjoyed by a “natural” child like Pearl. Through his transformation of the “great black forest” to the “mother-forest,” Hawthorne turns the

²³ James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827) are two of the more famous works of that genre that continue to be well-known today. Bell draws attention also to other works that were popular in Hawthorne’s time, including Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomock, A Tale of Early Times* (1824). These were published while Hawthorne was in college or shortly thereafter, and their vogue is probably what Hawthorne is reacting against when he says “I do abhor an Indian story.” Given Hawthorne’s comments on such stories, it is significant that even when including Native Americans – as in *The Scarlet Letter* – he does not attempt to put words in their mouths. Not until his *Septimius* manuscripts at the end of his life does he do so – and then he only gives words to those of mixed Native American and European ancestry.

wild forest into a place of beauty and invigorating vitality and suggests that some of the first Puritans in America may have done the same. Hawthorne's description of Nature in this passage transforms Puritan suspicions of the evil of the natural world into more romantic Puritan views of nature as a place of goodness and beauty.

Through her congenial visits to the forest, Hester ignores Puritan suspicions of the wilderness as the place of witches and devils and finds the wilderness amenable to her occasional need for space outside of the Puritan community. At the very beginning, however, Hester cannot catch the sunshine dancing in the forest as her daughter does. Pearl skips along the forest trail, and, "as Hester smiled to perceive, did actually catch the sunshine, and stood laughing in the midst of it, all brightened by its splendor, and scintillating with the vivacity excited by rapid motion" (*CE* 1: 183–84). When Hester approaches, the light moves away, but it returns when she finds Dimmesdale: "All at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf, transmuting the yellow fallen ones to gold... The course of the little brook might be traced by its merry gleam far into the wood's heart of mystery, which had become a mystery of joy" (*CE* 1: 202–03). Passages like these show Hawthorne's treatment of select individuals in and about the Puritan community who do not find Nature a hostile territory.

While not all of the Puritans in *The Scarlet Letter* embrace Endicott's abrasive view of nature, some of them do indeed see the forest as the abode of the devil and his minions.²⁴ When Hester and Pearl are walking through the woods, Pearl asks Hester to

²⁴ Hawthorne's greatest rebuke is not for the original settlers but for their descendants. Pearl stands in stark contrast with her peers, the second generation Puritans whom Hawthorne designates as part "of the most intolerant brood that ever lived" (*CE* 1: 94). The first generation of Puritans are depicted as being only in "the first stages of joyless deportment" and are "the offspring of sires who had known how to

tell her a story about the devil, who “haunts this forest” and “offers his book and an iron pen to every body that meets him here among these trees.” Hester asks her where she heard this story, which she recognizes as “a common superstition of the period” and Pearl tells her she heard it from an “old dame” who thought she was asleep in a chimney corner at a sickhouse they were visiting in Boston (*CE* 1: 184-85). This superstition may be “common” but has not yet resulted in the witch-hunting frenzy that does not occur until after the close of the events of Hawthorne’s romance. Mistress Hibbins, a suspected witch whom the narrator tells us will later be hanged, tells Hester that she has seen Dimmesdale “take an airing in the forest” where she claims she has often danced “when Somebody was fiddler, and, it might be, an Indian powwow or a Lapland wizard changing hands with us! That is but a trifle,” she adds, “when a woman knows the world.” Hester suspects Mistress Hibbins not of witchcraft but of having an “infirm mind” (*CE* 1: 241). Earlier, when she saw Dimmesdale returning from the forest, Mistress Hibbins teasingly asks him if he has been meeting with the devil there and promises him that they will have “other talk” when they meet “[a]t midnight, and in the forest” (*CE* 1: 222), thus hinting of unsanctioned passion as well as devil worship. Indeed, Dimmesdale knows from experience that he may lose control of his passions in the forest away from the strictures of Puritan society.

For some of Hawthorne’s Puritans, unrestrained passion and witchcraft are closely linked, and the forest is the site to which this connection can be traced. Hester’s less suspicious approach of involvement in the natural world and social world avoids the

be merry” while the second generation are associated with “the blackest shade of Puritanism.” It is they who have Hawthorne’s censure of this second generation as “the blackest shade of Puritanism” (*CE* 1: 232), suggests that they follow in the steps not of the best of their ancestors but in those of the harsh Endicott, whom elsewhere he calls the “Puritan of Puritans” (*CE* 9: 63).

cynical turn of Young Goodman Brown after his dream-like witch-meeting in the forest – “[a] stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become... [whose] dying hour was gloom” (CE 10: 89–90). Like the eponymous Young Goodman Brown of one of Hawthorne’s earlier short stories, however, Hester is threatened with disillusionment in the face of her suspicions that the apparent purity of the Puritan community may be a cover for licentious behavior. In “Young Goodman Brown,” a newlywed young man develops a distrust of the forest that corresponds strikingly with his growing distrust of his young bride and of his community.

Dimmesdale’s forest rambles sometimes lead him to secret meetings with Hester but more often down the path to the “Apostle Eliot.” John Eliot, a missionary to the Native Americans, is the one white man whom Hawthorne suggests tried to bridge the gap between the whites and Native Americans. In *Grandfather’s Chair*, a book of historical American tales for children which Hawthorne gives in the voice of “Grandfather,” Eliot’s attitude toward the Native Americans is portrayed as unusual but exemplary:

I have sometimes doubted whether there was more than a single man, among our forefathers, who realized that an Indian possesses a mind, and a heart, and an immortal soul. That single man was John Eliot. All the rest of the early settlers seemed to think that the Indians were an inferior race of beings, whom the Creator had merely allowed to keep possession of this beautiful country, till the white men should be in want of it. (CE 6: 43)

By associating Dimmesdale with Eliot, Hawthorne imagines at least one Puritan character who sees the people of the “wilderness” as fully human. Upon Dimmesdale’s return from the forest after one of his visits to Eliot, Chillingworth exclaims, “methinks, dear Sir, that you look pale; as if the travel through the wilderness had been too sore for

you” (*CE* 1: 223). Dimmesdale brushes him off, saying that the “free air” has been good for him in his frail state of health. And he proceeds to write the best sermon he has ever delivered, fresh from the woods where the beauty and passion he found in Hester, Pearl, and even Eliot has again given him the impetus to bring life to his own art – the art of eloquent rhetoric.

Other Puritan parishioners take a very different view of Dimmesdale’s forays into nature, viewing it as a place of divine sanctity. When Dimmesdale is described “coming forth [from the forest], when occasion was, with a freshness, and fragrance, and dewy purity of thought, which, as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel” (*CE* 1: 66). Thus, Dimmesdale and a number of other Puritans do not take the view espoused by Mistress Hibbins and the old dame from whom Pearl picks up a “common superstition.” Instead, they view the natural world as a delightful place in a manner reminiscent of Anne Bradstreet.

Puritans in Boston are joined on election day, the one “holiday” in the Puritan colony, by those from outside the township. On this carnivalesque day, Boston took on the character of a lively “little metropolis of the colony” as the “craftsmen and other plebian inhabitants of the town” are joined by “rough figures, whose attire of deer-skins makred them as belonging to some of the forest settlements” (*CE* 1: 226). These “rough figures” of Puritans who live in the countryside surrounding Boston but return for the annual gubernatorial election to cast their votes and partake of city life also exemplify varied attitudes toward Nature even in the Puritan community. By introducing these country Puritans into New England society alongside swarthy mariners, Native Americans, and others, Hawthorne suggests that although the relation of humans to the

natural world may be strained for the Puritans of early Boston, even they do not attempt to drive out nature entirely but find some ease in their relationships to those who take up a more “wild” existence than their own. Not the Native Americans, but the mariners are described as the wildest of the folks in the marketplace:

They were a rough-looking bunch of desperadoes, with sun-blackened faces, and an immensity of beard; their wide, short trousers were confined about the waist by belts, often clasped with a rough plate of gold, and sustaining always a long knife, and, in some instances, a sword. From beneath their broad-brimmed hats of palm-leaf, gleamed eyes which, even in good nature and merriment, had a kind of animal ferocity. (*CE* 1: 232).

More like pirates than simple sailors, these mariners exemplify the natural “animal ferocity” of man at his worst, when greed and murder are let loose at will.²⁵ This reduction of human to mere animal appears an outright rejection of the myth of the noble savage, and may be the result of Hawthorne’s repeated reading of Rousseau and Voltaire.²⁶

Hawthorne’s rejection of the myth of the noble savage does not entail a rejection of the “wild” men of the forest and the sea. Their “wild” nature finds a counterpart in Pearl’s “wild” affinity with nature. All those who see Pearl as they are milling about Boston on election day are entranced by her bird-like vivacity, but she has a special effect on the mariners and Native Americans:

She ran and looked the wild Indian in the face; and he grew conscious of a nature wilder than his own. Thence, with native audacity, but still with a

²⁵ In his depiction of the mariners, Hawthorne may have been drawing on family stories of his own seafaring ancestors. His father, a sea captain who traveled to far-off ports including Calcutta and the South Atlantic island of St. Helena, died of yellow fever in Suriname when Hawthorne was four years old. (The elder Hawthorne’s logbooks, which track this information, are kept in the Phillips Library in Salem, Massachusetts.)

²⁶ Between 1829 and 1848, Hawthorne checked out fifteen volumes of Rousseau’s *Oeuvres Complètes*, some volumes multiple times. Between 1829 and 1831, he checked out forty-nine volumes of Voltaire’s *Oeuvres Complètes*, some volumes multiple times (Kesselring 60, 63).

reserve as characteristic, she flew into the midst of a group of mariners, the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean, as the Indians were of the land; and they gazed wonderingly and admiringly at Pearl, as if a flake of the sea-foam had taken the shape of a little maid, and were gifted with a soul of the sea-fire, that flashes beneath the prow in the night-time. (*CE* 1: 244–45).

Pearl is a “natural” person whose likeness to the wild men of the earth, the wild men of the ocean emphasizes her affinity to Nature.

The Native Americans share a commonality of human nature not only with Pearl but also with the most Puritan of the Puritans. Even in their extraordinary attire, Hawthorne suggests that the Native Americans are able to out-Puritan the grave mien of the Puritans: “A party of Indians – in their savage finery of curiously embroidered deer-skin robes, wampum-belts, red and yellow ochre, and armed with the bow and arrow and stone-headed spear – stood apart, with countenances of inflexible gravity, beyond what even the Puritan aspect could attain” (*CE* 1: 232). The natures of Native Americans and Puritans were not so different after all, and their views of nature were perhaps not as different as might be supposed.

Reading the human body as part of Nature is a fearful thing, however, for most of the Puritans. Hester covers her body in drab gray much of the time but literally lets down her hair while in the forest with Dimmesdale. After casting off her stigma, as the narrator calls the scarlet letter, Hester frees some of the constraints on her body:

By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past. (*CE* 1: 202)

For Hawthorne, who is writing his own revisionist history of the Puritans, the past may not be quite revocable, but it certainly can be examined in a new light. Like Hester, Hawthorne is able to go back to what was before, to remember and to seek out the beauty and charm of a past that has been forgotten or misrepresented. And in that remembering, a closeness to nature may be found that is overlooked by those who remember only the “howling wilderness” proclaimed by Puritans like Endicott.

Like Hester’s body, so Dimmesdale’s body is a part of Nature that can be read. The portent of an A glows on Dimmesdale’s chest as he is dying, and those who witness this stigma offer a variety of explanations for it. Some say it is the result of self-inflicted tortures Dimmesdale undertook in penance, others suggest that Chillingworth is a magician as well as a physician and that he made it appear, and still others consider it the spiritually-created effect of Dimmesdale’s remorse. While there are some who – presumably like many of Hawthorne’s nineteenth-century readers – say there never was any actual stigma and that Dimmesdale chose his manner of death to be a parable, the narrator asserts: “The reader may choose among these theories. We have thrown all the light we could acquire upon the portent...” (*CE* 1: 259). Here, the narrator gives over the task of interpretation to the reader, but in so doing, he signifies that his earlier confident statements may not be trustworthy – they have, after all, been undermined repeatedly. Such a move seems not so much a sign of the narrator’s despair as a sign that the readers would do well to enter into the act of interpretation themselves.

Despite the analogical structure of allegory, the relation between signified and signifier becomes even more clouded when the nature of the signifier is called into question. Is there a physical stigma, imposed by natural means or supernatural means, on

Dimmesdale's chest? The characters variously report seeing or not seeing a stigma on his chest and attach differing meanings to that stigma and the manner of his death. His natural body represents a site of divine inscriptions, but his natural body was also the site of his adultery. Thus, nature becomes less clearly a message of God when Dimmesdale's body becomes the subject of consideration. The Puritan view of original sin involved a fallen natural world as well as a fallen human nature.

Hawthorne presents the Puritans' lack of compassion as unnatural, much as their lack of passion seems unnatural and even unreal. As Hawthorne presents them, the Puritan's rigid moral code leaves them ill-equipped to respond with the charity Winthrop had advocated. For a woman who has transgressed the supposed purity of the Puritans' new Eden, the Puritans knew only how to censure her sexual behavior. While seeming to understand the values they wish to characterize the Puritan community, the narrator nonetheless calls into question the humanity of their justice system which leaves too little room for practicing charity or compassion. Hester's scarlet letter is often made to throb with sympathy at the passing of grave men and women of the Puritan community, leaving her with the suspicion that "if truth were everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne's" (*CE* 1: 86). If this were revealed, the Puritan rhetoric of creating a better world, a city on a hill, could be seen as little more than an illusory dream. Through Hester, Hawthorne suggests that rather than ridding themselves of unsanctioned desires, many of the early Puritans simply sublimated or hid such desires. Through Hester's experience, Hawthorne exposes the hypocrisy of many of them by describing Hester's intimate knowledge of their similitude to herself.

Because of her eventual treatment of nature and human society as complementary rather than opposing forces, together with her growing charitable involvement in the world, Hester embodies not perfection itself but the most positive model of humanity presented in *The Scarlet Letter*. Her change from dualistic thinking to an understanding of nature and society as reciprocal and necessary parts of human life is usually demonstrated by her actions rather than reflected by her thought. As readers, we are given many of her confused thoughts at the beginning but fewer of her thoughts and more of her actions as time progresses. The only major exception at the end occurs as she thinks about the future and her role in it. In the woods with Dimmesdale, Hester mentions “yonder town, which only a little time ago was but a leaf-strewn desert, as lonely as this around us” (*CE* 1: 197). Although Hester at one point asks Dimmesdale to retreat to the wild with her and their daughter Pearl, she lives comfortable at the edge of society and in the woods. Although her return to Europe is only talked about in the text, we are told the details of her reentry into Boston life when she returns to America again to take up her residence in the cottage on the seashore at the margin between the “wild” and the Puritan community and establishes a home there, a home that she later transforms into a refuge for women alienated in various ways from the Puritan community.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the forest is the most frequent place where Hester and the other major characters contemplate their place within the natural order, and the Puritan community of Salem is the place given them to participate in human civilization. Although Hester considers leaving behind human civilization as she knows it, she ultimately returns to the Puritan community even after spending a number of years back in the old world with her daughter Pearl who stays there after her mother’s return to New

England. Hester's relation to society and to the natural world is not assured until the end, and it is only through charitable actions in society and intimacy with the natural world that she achieves such a balance. Despite what many critics claim about Hester as a static character, a definite change in character can be observed between the time she takes her first tremulous steps out of the prisonhouse to the time she serves as a counselor for young women who seek her out as a wiser, older person who has overcome her detractors through her charitable work for the Puritan community.

Reading the Sky: Natural Hieroglyphics and Hawthorne's "Blasted Allegories"

Like the earth and the things of earth, the sky in *The Scarlet Letter* is a realm of Nature that invites reading. His description of the sky, even more strongly than his descriptions of the earth, suggests the possibility of allegorical interpretation. The central scene of this romance, which features the second of three scaffold scenes, exemplifies Puritan ideas concerning the connection between non-human nature, human nature, and the divine. Responding to his daughter Pearl's queries while standing in the darkness with Hester and Pearl, Dimmesdale informs her that they will be able to meet together in the daylight on Judgment Day. As he finishes speaking, Judgment Day seems to arrive as a seemingly unearthly light transfigures the natural world:

[A] light gleamed far and wide over all the muffled sky. It was doubtless caused by one of those meteors, which the night-watchers may so often observe burning out to waste, in the vacant regions of the atmosphere. So powerful was its radiance, that it thoroughly illuminated the dense medium of cloud betwixt the sky and earth. The great vault brightened like the dome of an immense lamp.... [A]ll were visible, but with a singularity of aspect that seemed to give another moral interpretation to the things of this world than they had ever borne before... They stood in the noon of that strange and solemn splendor, as if it were the light that is to reveal all secrets, and the daybreak that shall unite all who belong to one another. (*CE* 1: 153–54)

Light becomes an interpretive source in this scene as the three huddle together on the scaffold under the gleaming meteor in the “muffled sky.” Other “night-watchers” and those attending to the deathbed of the just deceased John Winthrop are also alert to the night sky. The houses are interspersed with “black... earth” and “margined... green” as “early grass” and “garden-plots” are made visible in an unearthly light. The sky itself is the holder of mysteries, as the meteor is seen “burning out to waste, in the vacant regions of the atmosphere.” The sky appears to be both natural and supernatural even more certainly than the earth, in part because the celestial regions were so much less known than the terrestrial earth. And though the earth is scoured by the Puritans for signs of the divine, the signs in the sky are considered the unmistakable divine inscription – those “awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven” (*CE* 1: 155). How to discuss the reading of divine hieroglyphics becomes a thorny issue for the narrator despite his skepticism – or perhaps *because of* his skepticism of the Puritans’ belief in the divine cause of this natural event. Rather than discussing whether these meteor showers are or are not divine revelations, the narrator deflects the issue of supernatural involvement by asserting his skepticism of humans’ ability to read and interpret rightly any divine signs should they appear. Even though the narrator claims that appearance of such hieroglyphics to “multitudes” is “not seldom,” it is “oftener” the case that “its credibility rested on the faith of some lonely eyewitness, who beheld the wonder through the colored, magnifying, and distorting medium of his imagination, and shaped it more distinctly in his after-thought” (*CE* 1: 155) Thus, reading divine signs in nature seems so prone to individual misinterpretation that such ostensible signs seem at first blush to be emptied of any possible meaning.

The many repetitions of “earth” and “sky” together in the description above do not appear only in this passage but are strung throughout *The Scarlet Letter*, suggesting that the natural world is read in a cosmological sense as well as an ecological one – but such senses are always, for the Puritans, subsumed under a theological understanding of the world. Earth and sky together comprise physical nature, and though the meteor “kindled up the sky,” it also “disclosed the earth, with an awfulness that admonished Hester Prynne and the clergyman [Dimmesdale] of the day of judgment” (*CE* 1: 156). The Puritan view of nature includes both earth and sky, not one to the exclusion of the other. In the sky, natural and supernatural are blended in an “awful” sense. There the Puritans expect to read the handwriting of God – whether under the meteor at midnight or the blazing midday sunshine when Dimmesdale makes his public confession, both times on an open platform beneath a watching sky. The narrator points out that the Puritans – romantic and allegoric alike – were especially likely to interpret the natural world in terms of the supernatural in the case of meteors: “We doubt whether any marked event, for good or evil, ever befell New England, from its settlement down to Revolutionary times, of which the inhabitants had not been previously warned by some spectacle of nature.” The narrator’s skeptical tone notwithstanding, the Puritans’ allegorical reading of the “spectacle[s] of nature” considers nature not as an intrinsic evil – far from it – but as the site of “so many revelations from a supernatural source” (*CE* 1: 154–55).

Emphasizing the subjectivity of individual observation, the narrator suggests that collective observation is less prone to faulty preconceptions: this too is undercut, however, by the narrator’s delineation of a “belief [that] was a favorite one with our

forefathers... that their infant commonwealth was under a celestial guardianship of peculiar intimacy and strictness.” Seeming to recognize the suspect nature of such a claim to “collective truth” as any less subjective than individual truth, the narrator reverts quickly to his critique of individual interpretation and declares that any perceived messages to an individual “could only be the symptom of a highly disordered mental state” and goes on to “impute it therefore, solely to the disease in his own eye and heart, that the minister, looking upward do the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter, – the letter A, – marked out in lines of dull red light.” The narrator’s over-explanation here – so different from the rest of *The Scarlet Letter* – suggests that he may not be as convinced of his thoroughgoing modern viewpoint as he is trying to make it sound. He clarifies one last time by saying that a meteor may have appeared but certainly not in the shape Dimmesdale thought he saw: “Not but the meteor may have shown itself at that point, burning duskily through a veil of cloud; but with no such shape as his guilty imagination gave it; or, at least, with so little definiteness, that another’s guilt might have seen another symbol in it” (CE 1: 155). Whether or not there is any connection to natural phenomena becomes clouded in the mind of the narrator as he describes the subjectivity and the “psychological state” of Dimmesdale looking on the meteor.

The sexton’s words to Dimmesdale the next day after Dimmesdale delivers a moving sermon further complicate the matter of viewing the natural world as a place of supernatural signs. The sexton returns a glove found on the scaffold that he says the devil must have dropped there as a joke, then asks, “But did your reverence hear of the portent that was seen last night? A great red letter in the sky, – the letter A – which we

interpret to stand for Angel. For, as our good Governor Winthrop was made an angel this past night, it was doubtless held fit that there should be some notice thereof!” (CE 1: 158). The narrator’s earlier disavowal of the shape Dimmesdale perceived is now undercut since this same shape is seen elsewhere by others, leading to additional possible interpretations that further question the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, problematizing the Puritan method of reading of the natural world as divine inscriptions and yet highlighting the apparent need to do so. As in the semi-autobiographical “Sunday at Home,” the narrator listens to the arguments of his Mind and Heart as he tries to interpret what he hears and sees: “both, like several other preachers, spend their strength to very little purpose. I, their sole auditor, cannot always understand them” (CE 9: 24). Although there are religious undercurrents in this story as there are in *The Scarlet Letter*, the narrative voice in both texts does not know what to make of what he sees and hears, leaving him searching for the meaning of what lies before him. What does seem clear is the narrator’s opinion that more than one meaning should be considered when trying to interpret either human thoughts or divine hieroglyphs.

Like hieroglyphics, these signs in the heavens do not offer an easy understanding of their true nature. According to Richard Brodhead, Hawthorne “strives to make the celestial A not plausible but as spooky as possible; and at the same time, he uses it to worry us, to render the nature of reality problematic and to make us aware of our own assumptions about that nature” (*Hawthorne Melville* 9). Certainly, the meteor gives off a lurid light that is rather “spooky” in one sense, but “spooky” need not be opposed to “plausible,” given the actual appearance of a meteor. Nobody, not even the narrator, doubts that a meteor was actually visible. The A-shaped meteor is seen by various people

in various places who describe it as the same shape even though they have had no conversation about it. It really was there, the narrator implies, but how we should understand it is altogether another question that depends on one's assumptions about reality – does it include a supernatural component, do limited human perceptions contort its appearance, how exactly is its reality more than a mere extension of human reality?

Giving attention to hieroglyphics was not unusual for Puritans, as can be attested by the alchemical studies of John Winthrop's son, John Winthrop, Jr. The younger Winthrop was the first American member of the British Royal Society that had been formed for the advancement of science while the American colonies were still part of Great Britain.²⁷ Winthrop adopted his mentor John Dee's hieroglyph, the *monas hieroglyphica*, which was said to contain within it "the true cabala of nature." Nicolas Clulee reports that "[t]he *Monas Hieroglyphica* was a daring and inventive proposal for a symbolic language that had the power to reveal the divine plan of creation..." (qtd. in Woodward 33-35). While Hawthorne's familiarity with Winthrop the younger is uncertain, his attention to alchemy is clear in *The Scarlet Letter*, where Chillingworth mentions the alchemist Paracelsus (*CE* 1: 72). The hieroglyph then may have offered some of the Puritans the ambition of seeing nature as not just the handwriting but as the language of God.

Hieroglyphics garnered much public attention in the 1820s with the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the concomitant deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics. John Irwin traces the effect of this heightened attention to hieroglyphics on writers of the American Renaissance and concludes that for Hawthorne, as Pearl is the "living hieroglyphic" of

²⁷ Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin, both of whom Hawthorne read extensively, were perhaps even more high-profile members of the society.

Hester's passion, so Hawthorne hopes his book may "perpetuate him from generation to generation, will be a 'living hieroglyphic,' its meaning and destiny as vitally indeterminate as his own" (284). Irwin notes that Hawthorne's use of language is symbolic because it is self-conscious, which again implies the more sophisticated version of allegory that is at work in *The Scarlet Letter*. Sir John Gardner Wilkinson's 1843 book on *Modern Egypt and Thebes* also acquainted Hawthorne with the British Egyptologist's search for duplicates of the Rosetta Stone, which Wilkinson points out at the end of volume one gave instructions for it "to be placed 'in the temples of the first, second, and third orders'" (455). In this book, which Hawthorne checked out of the Salem Athenaeum in October 1848 (Kesselring 64), numerous hieroglyphics are depicted and their connection to the Egyptian and Greek cultures are noted – often with an emphasis on the tombs of the dead, the Sphinx, and the temples where they appear. The mixture of hints of human and divine activities of the past in the dusty remains being unearthed provides fertile territory for Hawthorne's considerations of the relation of humans to the divine and to the natural world.

Emerson also used the image of hieroglyphics to discuss nature. In his famous essay *Nature*, in which he ponders the situation of humans within the larger natural physical and spiritual universe, Emerson states,

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth. In like manner, nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design. Let us interrogate the great apparition, that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature? (*CW* 1: 7).

Emerson suggests that nature is, in a sense, a “great apparition” of God but that it nonetheless has an “end” that can be sought out by considering its condition as “a solution in hieroglyphic.” Although Emerson’s view of nature, as expressed here, is more anthropocentric and the Puritans’ view more theocentric, both Hawthorne and Emerson are responding to their own time period as well as to their own Puritan heritage. Unlike Emerson, Hawthorne is not optimistic about finding all the answers to the questions he would pose.

Hieroglyphics are amenable to allegorical readings as well, at least when approached in the manner of Hawthorne’s allegory in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne’s text indicates that questions of the connections between Nature and the divine continue to fascinate him: Poe’s change from the romantic triptych of self, Nature, and divine to the psychological triptych of self, body, and image – which Irwin compellingly demonstrates – is not the story of Hawthorne’s transformation. It is significant that Poe criticizes Hawthorne for using allegory in his 1847 review of his tales even though he had earlier praised Hawthorne for his originality. For Poe, the connection between signifier and signified is not too close in allegory – a claim made by some who prefer symbolism to allegory – but instead it is altogether too distant, “having never more of intelligible connection than has something with nothing, never half so much of effective affinity as has the substance for the shadow” (582). Indeed, Hawthorne’s use of allegory does typically leave final meaning open-ended and to the determinations and surmisings of the reader.

Like hieroglyphics, meteors and comets received much public attention during Hawthorne’s lifetime, most significantly with the loudly hailed discovery of a new comet

– alternately called Miss Mitchell’s Comet, Comet Mitchell, or Maria’s Comet – on October 1, 1847, a few years before *The Scarlet Letter* was published. Discovered by an American woman, Maria Mitchell, the comet was said to portend great things for women (Bergland 53–8). Perhaps this is one reason Hawthorne pairs such celestial imagery with Hester’s “recognition” in the last chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* that “[t]he angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end!” (CE 1: 263). This statement suggests some degree of sympathy in the women’s movement in the nineteenth-century as well as wishing for a renewed spiritual vision. A notice of the appearance of a “meteor” later in 1847 was printed in the November 6 edition of the *Salem Tri-Weekly Gazette*. In this brief announcement, the meteor is described in terms of light, much as the meteor in *The Scarlet Letter* is: “A very brilliant Meteor was seen last evening just before ten. Its course was from South to North, and passed very near the Pleiades. The light was so bright for the moment, as to light up the street. It left a bright train behind it” (qtd. in Kopley 98). Kopley points out that Hawthorne’s attention would have been drawn to this article because of its appearance alongside an article entitled “Intelligence Office,” the title of one of his own sketches, in a newspaper he likely read (98). Astronomy and cosmology were together subsumed under the Puritans’ theocentric rubric, and theories of the universe were theories of the relation between the earth, the physical heavens, and the supernatural – theories that place humans within a kind of terrestrial and celestial divine cosmology. Hiroko Washizu notes the early American Puritans’ interest in astronomy as attested to

by Samuel Danforth's *An Astronomical Description of the Late Comet*.²⁸ Hawthorne's attention to meteors, then, is not only appropriate but representative of his treatment of the Puritans and their view of the world.

The meteor that turns the midnight into an uncanny midday also fits the Providential structure Richard Kopley identifies in *The Scarlet Letter*: "a symmetrically framed Sun of Righteousness, Christ come in judgment, and a chiastic expression of that judgment" (97). Kopley is drawing here on a formal tradition with pagan and Christian roots that he traces from medieval sources to John Donne and John Milton in England and on to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, a favorite childhood book of Hawthorne's (101–02). Kopley concludes his analysis with this summation: "Though very different in myriad ways, the novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Scarlet Letter* – both of which do, in fact, concern Original Sin, Divine Providence, and spiritual redemption – may be considered as homologous texts, distinct instances of providential form" (103). Kopley's observations about the formal resonances of Hawthorne's work with regard to the seeming inscrutability of an ultimately righteous Providence finds its parallel in the seeming inscrutability of the hieroglyphic portents of that Providence upon the natural world – in this instance, upon the sky. Certainly, the Puritans are looking there for signs of the divine to give form to the world they see.

Retaining a shred of Puritan suspicion of the natural world, Hawthorne does not see the natural world as an unmediated purveyor of truth. Instead, Nature itself bears the

²⁸ Washizu mentions further depictions of meteors and comets in Hawthorne's fiction and life, then turns to the problem of interpreting such super/natural hieroglyphics in *The Scarlet Letter* to suggest that Hawthorne's "elaborate narrative strategy [in discussing the A-shaped meteor] shows that Hawthorne was well-aware of the transformations in the view of comets/meteors between the ages of 1650 and 1850: he could just as easily be both sympathetic and critical of decoding the celestial hieroglyphics" (Washizu).

same marks of fallenness that mark the human condition. For Hawthorne, human nature bears an organic resemblance to “Mother Nature” and losing that resemblance disfigures humans even more than they already are. Thus, Hawthorne’s view of Nature combines romantic and Puritan conceptions: Nature is not equivalent to good or evil, but it is a dynamic and actual place – formed by the same divine power that brought humans into the world – in which humans can better recognize their own condition.

Although the Puritans in *The Scarlet Letter* scrutinize celestial nature as divine hieroglyphics, the unresolved multiplicity of possible translations of these signs leaves the reader with the task of discerning meaning. Nature may or may not bear the handwriting of God, Hawthorne seems to suggest, but even if it does, interpreting the divine handwriting is not as simple as seeing it. In the end, the narrator gives no finality to the possibilities he presents since even the few conclusions he does assert are undercut by the events that follow. *The Scarlet Letter* represents Hawthorne’s most sustained imaginative attempt to recreate what the descendants of the Puritans have forgotten and to retrieve what has been obscured by their overconfidence in America’s uniqueness. By reframing his Puritan heritage, Hawthorne sometimes confronts, sometimes extends inherited accounts of American history. His reconstruction of official versions of history like those written by Cotton Mather often destabilizes the self-vindicating versions of American myth-making censured by such critics as Bercovitch.²⁹ But his implicit adherence to Mather’s metaphoric depiction of Nature as a book of divine origin suggests that Hawthorne does not dismiss Mather from the conversation either. And Hawthorne’s reframing of the historical Puritans also suggests that they had a much more dynamic

²⁹ In *The American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch depicts Mather as the representative voice of Puritan myth-making.

conception of non-human nature than simply embracing, eschewing, or conquering it. In Hawthorne's allegorical presentation of nature, the natural world and the human world are both fallen, and humans come alive by responding positively to the best of both worlds. In order to act upon their humanity, Hawthorne suggests, humans must negotiate between and find their place within these two worlds. Such a conception of Nature is not allegorical as much as it is pastoral. The allegorical is concerned with reading, but the pastoral is concerned with finding Nature as a corrective for humans who find themselves in Nature. Thus, the allegorical bends to the pastoral in Hawthorne's romance.

"Illumined" Nature: Under Earth and Sky

By framing his characters in this romance against earth and sky, Hawthorne directly investigates the relation of humans to Nature and the divine. Hester and Dimmesdale are described with regard to their position on the earth and under the sky when the meteor appears, and they are described in similar terms when they evoke the sympathy of "wild heathen Nature" when they meet in secret. The sun that shines in on them, dispels "the gloom of the earth and sky" that had seemed to come from their hearts rather than from the earth and the sky, showing again a close sympathetic relation between Nature, God, and humans. Somewhat surprisingly, the arch-villain Chillingworth is also described according to his relation to earth and sky. When he first appears, after his period of captivity with the Native Americans to the south, rumors circulate that his capacity as a physician was "hardly less than supernatural" even though he gathered herbs, flowers, roots, and twigs from the forest for his natural remedies. The narrator tells us that "few people could tell when" Chillingworth first arrived in the

colony “dropping down, as it were, out of the sky, or starting from the nether earth.” And while it is uncertain whether he is angelic or bestial, many of the Boston settlers believed the “absurd” idea “that Heaven had wrought an absolute miracle, by transporting an eminent Doctor of Physic, from a German university, bodily through the air, and setting him down at the door of Mr. Dimmesdale’s study!” The narrator contains his blustering disavowals by quickly asserting that “[i]ndividuals of wiser faith, indeed, who knew that Heaven promotes its purposes without aiming at the stage-effect of what is called miraculous interposition, were inclined to see a providential hand in Roger Chillingworth’s so opportune arrival” (*CE* 1: 121). The narrator, then, seems very predisposed to doubting the “stage-effect” of natural signs while still entertaining the notion of “providential” involvement. How much Hawthorne shared in his narrator’s belief and disbelief is a matter of speculation, especially given his determination to present the reader with a range of viable options. Nature may indeed bear the marks of the supernatural, Hawthorne seems to suggest, but those signs are always like hieroglyphics that can easily be misinterpreted by a “diseased mind.”

Representative of Hawthorne’s pastoral approach to interpreting Nature is the narrator’s final statement on the contrast between the prison and the rosebush in the opening scene. Concerning the latter, the narrator gestures toward a definite symbolic meaning: “It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow” (*CE* 1: 48). The subjunctive case of this description suggests a greater openness of possibility than his allegoric technique might lead one to expect. Nature, beauty, and a sense of morality are intrinsically linked in this image, suggesting that the Puritans who

eschew beauty and nature cannot expect to be truly moral either. Thus, rather than urging the Puritans to abandon morality, Hawthorne suggests that their sense of morality needs to be redirected. Further, his text shows two ways they might have done so – first, by appreciating the natural world and second by practicing the charity advocated by John Winthrop’s “Modell of Christian Charity.” Hawthorne’s narrative is accompanied by a strain of sympathy and respect for the pious desires of the first American Puritans and those humanizing tendencies within them that their descendents were to squelch. It is ingeniously ironic that the marginalized Hester is the one who lives most charitably in both the natural world and human society. As readers travel with the narrator “along the track” of this romance and the characters of the romance travel “along the track” of their lives, the beauty of Nature brightens the darkness of a tale otherwise brimming with gloom. Morality without beauty and passion, Hawthorne intimates, is unnatural and farcical.

Hawthorne emphasizes a pastoral vision by emphasizing the symbolic impact of Nature on the human passing through Nature not only in the seventeenth-century American romance but also in the nineteenth century preface. In the “Custom-House,” the narrator recounts his days as a custom-house agent and says that he was separated from his literary pursuits as well as from nature: “Nature, – except it were human nature, – the nature that is developed in earth and sky, was, in one sense, hidden from me; and all the imaginative delight, wherewith it had been spiritualized, passed away out of my mind” (*CE* 1: 26). Human nature, Nature, and the divine are presented here – as throughout *The Scarlet Letter* – as interlinked but self-existent realities rather than mere psychological abstractions. The nineteenth century continued to ask the questions of

these relations even if the deeply-held religious convictions of the seventeenth century had faded significantly. Hawthorne's interpolation of romance and allegory in his consideration of the human relation to the natural world creates a double treatment that indicates only limited commitment to strict allegory or pure romance – his use of each qualifying the other. Questioning dominant views, always an important aim for Hawthorne, disturbs both Puritan and Transcendentalist assumptions about nature. For Hawthorne, nature is a mixture of goodness and fallenness, and humans are left with the choice of whether to participate in the goodness or in the fallenness of the natural world.

Hawthorne's romantic impulse, then, softens the natural world in contrast to the harshness of Puritan society. As the rose-bush in the opening scene softens the ugliness of the black flower of civilization, the prison, so Nature itself offers its sympathy to Hester and Dimmesdale. When they meet again in the forest, the site of at least one earlier passionate encounter in which Pearl was conceived, their remembered passion is roused again, and "Nature" awakes them: "Such was the sympathy of Nature – that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth – with the bliss of these two spirits!" (*CE* 1: 203). While some of the Puritans might well applaud the first part of the narrator's description of nature, they would be likely to vociferously join their grimmer Puritan neighbors when considering the rest of this description. As Melissa Pennell notes, Hawthorne's use of the word "subjugated" is also highly significant here: "The word subjugated reflects the attitude of Puritans (and the later American culture that endorsed westward expansion) toward nature. Nature must be brought under human control, ordered, cultivated, and tamed. The Puritans feared unregulated human nature; they held the same views toward physical nature"

(82).³⁰ While Pennell does adequately convey the attitudes behind = the harshest Puritan views toward nature, she pays little attention to alternative views held by certain Puritan leaders and followers alike who illustrate Hawthorne's contention that Puritan attitudes toward Nature are more complex than either indiscriminate rejection or wholehearted embrace.

Interpreting *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of Freudian symbolism, Clay Daniel claims that "Nature's sympathy with the love between Hester and Dimmesdale... provides a profoundly bleak comment on nature. When the narrative states of the condemned criminal 'that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him,' it is not because the criminal is innocent, but because nature is guilty" (31). Although Daniel is probably technically correct in this surmise of Hawthorne's reprimand of their "illicit passion," his focus leads him to the same skewed perspective – even if not to the same conclusion –as the harsh Puritans. The rose-bush is not so much a representation of guilt or innocence so much as a means of chastising the Puritans for the heart they are missing. While Hawthorne's text does focus on guilt, the greatest guilt is often incurred by one's lack of compassion. Daniel's argument is a bit stronger when he notes Hawthorne's description of the sympathy of the "wild, heathen Nature of the forest," a sympathy that indicates that "nature is indeed in need of illumination by some higher truth... As the narrative clearly illustrates, men must learn to overcome nature, not succumb to it" (31–32). But it is the dark streak, the fallenness within nature, rather than nature as a whole, that must be overcome in this way. Although Daniel's heavy-handed Freudian reading leads him to make unwarranted extra-textual claims, he does compellingly demonstrate

³⁰ Pennell briefly outlines Pearl's very different attitude toward Nature, but she does not analyze the effects of other exceptions to such a view in *The Scarlet Letter* (82).

the mixed quality of Hawthorne's attitude toward Nature. Running through what appears at first glance a wholly romantic approach to Nature in *The Scarlet Letter* is a dark streak that seriously challenges the very romanticism of Hawthorne's treatment of Nature.³¹

Nature is charged with a negative energy as well as a positive one, much as the beauty of human nature nonetheless bears the marks of fallenness in the world as Hawthorne sees it. Hawthorne's dark streak was recognized earlier by his contemporary Herman Melville as a "great power of blackness in him [that] derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free" (9: 243). This "power of blackness" attaches itself to Hawthorne's representation of the world as a whole, Melville suggests further, but it does not preclude seeing the world as a beautiful place. Thus his complex use of pastoral allegory somewhat in the manner of Spenser.

By presenting characters who take a friendly attitude toward the forest, Hawthorne imagines a world in which some Puritans stand against the increasingly dominant dark views of Nature often associated with them. Darrel Abel's characterization of Pearl as both a "romantic child of nature" and a "Puritan child of nature" exemplifies Hawthorne's method of denigrating any homogenous view of the Puritans (190, 193). Young Pearl, so different from the Puritan community in most ways, was well acquainted with the Puritan conception of original sin and the story of the Garden of Eden. "In Adam's fall, we sinn'd all," declared the *New-England Primer* that routinely instructed young New Englanders into the nineteenth century. Hawthorne

³¹ In perhaps the most serious study of Hawthorne's "negative Romanticism," Millicent Bell, in her study of Hawthorne's view of art and of the human as artist, suggests that Hawthorne displays a dark irony that undercuts even his negative Romanticism to the degree that he sometimes becomes "anti-Romantic" (*Hawthorne's View* 67-68).

refers to this text while assuring the reader that, though the three-year-old Pearl refused to answer the clergyman's question about who made her, she had been instructed by her mother: "Pearl knew well enough who made her... [S]o large were the attainments of her three years' lifetime, [she] could have borne a fair examination in the New England Primer, or the first column of the Westminster Catechism, though unacquainted with the outward form of either of those celebrated works" (*CE* 1: 111–12). Pearl could not have been acquainted with the Primer since it was not developed until about fifty years after the first Puritans arrived (Ford 16–17). This text provides another old world connection since it is a revision of the *Royal Primer* of England, but Hawthorne's proleptic synthesis of Puritan thought here is a self-conscious move that emphasizes again the similarity and difference between Puritans before and after their ways were set in stone. Later when they are at the seashore, Pearl replies to Hester's question about whether she knows what the A stands for: "Yes, mother... It is the great letter A. Thou hast taught it me in the horn-book" (*CE* 1: 178). In these cases, Hawthorne emphasizes that the "A" of *The Scarlet Letter* represents original sin (associated with Adam), even though the "A" literally stands for adultery in this story of America. This conception of original sin suggests that Nature – whether human nature or non-human nature – is in need of redemption.

If Pearl is the child of Adam and Eve and Hester is Eve, who then is Adam? Indeed, that is the question the Puritan leaders interrogate so strenuously, first Dimmesdale himself (at the urging of those around him), then the older Reverend Wilson, both charging her on the public scaffold to "speak out the name" (*CE* 1: 67, 68). While no such mystery of identity surrounds the characters of *Paradise Lost*, the

dilemma of what to do after the entry of “original sin” is a central concern of both texts, and a change in the characters’ relations to their society and to the natural world seems the obvious result. While Milton’s epic is a dramatic expansion upon the Genesis account with parallels to the political situation in England after the Restoration, Hawthorne’s version of the fall exposes the vulnerability of Puritan New England as a reenactment of the fall in stark contrast to the “city on a hill” envisioned by the first Puritans. The fall itself is not the central focus: that crucial event has already transpired before the beginning of the story. Instead, the characters’ reactions to their fallen condition garner the narrator’s greatest attention.

The narrator’s half-believing, half-skeptical tones in *The Scarlet Letter* indicate a restlessness that is not wholly content either with or without the divine connections to Nature embraced by the Puritans. Perhaps Hawthorne’s words about Melville are equally applicable to the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter*, if not to himself: “He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other” (*CE* 22: 163). For the Puritans, as for their romantic successors, the three realms of humans, nature, and the divine are interconnected even though just how that interconnection works is not always clear. Hawthorne and Melville, in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* most strongly but also in other works, are compelled by their courage and honesty to try to grapple with and attempt to work through these same links that the Puritans were seeking. But an allegorical reading of the world, Hawthorne implies, may open up possibilities for some “readers” of the natural world.

Despite its clear indication that Puritans, like other people, fail to read well the divine implications found in Nature, Hawthorne’s narrative is accompanied by a strain of

sympathy and respect for the pious desires of the first American Puritans. It is ingeniously ironic to Hawthorne's writing of Puritan history in this romance that the marginalized Hester is the one who lives most charitably in both the natural world and human society. The failure of the Puritan vision, rather than urging the Puritans to abandon morality, suggests that their sense of morality needs to be redirected. Further, Hawthorne's text displays two ways they might have done so – first, by appreciating the natural world, and second, by practicing the charity advocated by John Winthrop's "Modell of Christian Charity."

In *The Scarlet Letter*, nature and beauty are brought together in human figures who adapt to the natural world in various ways. Much of Hawthorne's work is character-focused, and *The Scarlet Letter* is no exception. The characters in this romance are evaluated, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, according to their relation to nature and society, and their status as Puritans bears directly on this scrutiny. In each case, the artist figures are praised or damned by the text in accord to the quality of their interactions with the world around them. Hyatt Waggoner claims that "[a]s Chillingworth is associated with weeds, Pearl with flowers, and Dimmesdale with no natural growing thing at all, so Hester walks her ambiguous way between burdock and rose, neither of which is alone sufficient to define her nature and her position" (141). Waggoner correctly connects these characters to nature in that Chillingworth gathers herbs and such suspicious looking plants as "the deadly night-shade" for his medical remedies, Pearl gathers flowers as her attire, and Hester draws on the sympathy of the rosebush. However, Hester does not incline toward the burdocks, and both she and

Dimmesdale find the natural world a refreshing place that embraces them even when the Puritan community would not.

Thus, nature is good when “illuminated by higher truth,” as the narrator informs us in the scene where “heathen nature” sympathizes with Hester and Dimmesdale (*CE* 1: 203). And this “higher truth” may be the divine implications in Nature or the divine practice of charity being extended by human nature. Hawthorne points toward such a conclusion by offering the possibility of an allegorical reading of the interconnections between non-human nature, human nature, and the divine. The difficulties of reading the world continue, but “higher truth” must be part of any natural reading if it is to be accurate. Although Hawthorne’s personifications of nature typically serve to nurture a romantic impulse toward the natural world, his treatment of nature is neither merely reactive in a Puritan sense nor wholly romantic. The space distancing and connecting the human, the natural, and the divine is a space of possibility in *The Scarlet Letter*. The narrator’s voice alternately applauds, questions, and rejects the characters’ attitudes but generally intimates that healthy relations with the natural world are an important signifier of that character’s wholeness as a person. Hawthorne’s text is a reminder that humans are interlinked with Nature and the divine in some way worth searching out. Where that search ends is not entirely clear. However, Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, with its interpolation of allegorical and pastoral motifs, turns to Nature as a way of reaching for an understanding of non-human reality as a part of the human condition.

CHAPTER THREE

“The Wrongs Which Had Been Done Them”:

Native American Lands and the Gothic in *The House of the Seven Gables*

For, not only had [Colonel Pyncheon’s] son and heir come into immediate enjoyment of a rich estate, but there was a claim, through an Indian deed, confirmed by a subsequent grant of the General Court, to a vast and as yet unexplored tract of eastern lands... more extensive than many a dukedom, or even a reigning prince’s territory, on European soil.

—Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (CE 2: 18)

[M]any, if not most, of the successive proprietors of this estate, were troubled with doubts as to their moral right to hold it.... If so, we are left to dispose of the awful query, whether each inheritor of the property – conscious of wrong, and failing to rectify it – did not commit anew the great guilt of his ancestor, and incur all its original responsibilities.

—Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (CE 2: 20)

“A story to show how we are all wronged and wrongers, and avenge one another,” Hawthorne wrote in a notebook entry dated 1837 (CE 8: 167). More than a decade later, competing claims of land ownership in colonial America provided Hawthorne with a focal point for his theme of perpetual wrong-doing in his second major American romance, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Hawthorne implicitly links land ownership in America back to its roots in the often bloody disinheritance of Native Americans from the land and the abrupt imposition of human civilization upon a land that many of the new European inhabitants – particularly the Puritans – had not come to know but had simply carved out for their own economic gain. In so doing, Hawthorne registers his own skepticism of nineteenth-century rhetoric concerning rights of ownership. *The House of the Seven Gables*, studied in the light of nineteenth-century debates about expanding national territories, suggests that Hawthorne wrestled not only with his own

personal Puritan inheritance but also with the claims of land ownership which were lightly being granted by the American government as national borders were pushed further and further into the frontier. As he typically does, however, Hawthorne uses the distance of history from which to examine the issue, focusing on lands which nineteenth-century New England had inherited from the Puritan colonists as a new nation was being forged in uncharted territory in a land previously inhabited by tribes of Native Americans. Native Americans' attitude toward the land as a reality and a gift offered a challenge to money-grubbing opportunists who took ownership of the land and inaugurated a more mercantilistic way of relating to the American lands they claimed to own. By drawing attention to the Native Americans and Quaker squatters who were persecuted by the Puritan land barons of colonial America, Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* offers a subtle reminder of the dubious nature of land claims in America and the inherited wrongs that the nineteenth century must yet find a way to rectify rather than repeating their wrongs.

The often creaky Gothic form becomes a pastoral corrective in Hawthorne's use of it in *The House of the Seven Gables*, seeking to draw attention to national wrongdoing and to help those who seem to be most in control to recognize that they are not permanent dwellers in the land – if only because of their eventual death. Hawthorne's romance is thus both pastoral and Gothic: it is pastoral in its interest in the relation between humans and the land, and it is Gothic in its sense of apparent supernatural blessing or cursing as a result of human action. Land ownership in a land whose original inhabitants have been forcibly removed is a vexing question, and it is this question that Hawthorne addresses in his second major American romance, a self-consciously national work. Hawthorne's

treatment of land ownership in *The House of the Seven Gables* also represents an investigation into Emerson's comments on the natural landscape in his essay *Nature*: "Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape." Emerson characterizes this landscape variously as a "charming landscape" and a "tranquil landscape" in which "man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own soul" (*CW* 1: 9). Although Emerson further notes that the "rich landscape" has a "minuteness of details," these details are ultimately less important to him than achieving an overriding "tranquil sense of unity" (40). While Emerson vaguely troubles the notion of human ownership of the land only to assert the ultimate tranquility of the landscape that cannot be owned, Hawthorne highlights the violence that land ownership can entail and the effect that such violence still has upon future generations who live on that land. While Emerson does not mention the responsibility of landowners to the lands they inhabit, Hawthorne suggests that the landscape itself will be affected by what the individual landowners do with their land. When mutually nurturing relations are not developed, Nature becomes grotesque and horrifying rather than beautiful or sublime. Viewed in this light, *The House of the Seven Gables* becomes a commentary on the difficulties attendant upon the realization of a "tranquil landscape." While Emerson simply argues that though one man may own a plot of land, nobody can own the landscape, Hawthorne goes a step further by suggesting not only that the titles are of dubious authority but that the very idea of owning the land is suspect because it is too often based on wrongs rather than rights.

Hawthorne uses Gothic romance to examine human relations to Nature and to the supernatural, but with a particular focus on human responsibility to the land. The Gothic

focuses pastoral by depicting humans not only passing through Nature but developing mutually nurturing relations with Nature. Hawthorne finds the Gothic an apt way of emphasizing national wrongdoing while speaking about Nature, thus turning the pastoral corrective of Nature to emphasize national crimes against Nature. Nature empowered by the supernatural can effect such corrective force in a landed estate as well as in the forest itself, as is more typical of traditional pastoral. By alluding to Native American views of the land as a gift rather than a possession, Hawthorne further implies the reality of Nature as something more than a mere projection of the human mind: wrongdoing against Nature and its inhabitants is a real event, not just a trick of the mind. Some measure of reconciliation is achieved by “right relations” to the land – Nature and the supernatural work together to ensure this. In the manner of Renaissance pastoral, Hawthorne depicts Nature in *The House of the Seven Gables* as a corrective to human attitudes and behaviors which depart from an ordered world of which humans are a part.

In a two-part “moral” for his story, Hawthorne in the preface of *The House of the Seven Gables* urges his readers to be careful not to commit wrongs in the present, for “the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones” (*CE* 2: 2). The significance of this first part of Hawthorne’s stated moral has not been lost on critics. In *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne’s Psychological Themes*, for example, Frederick Crews draws attention to the sense of inherited guilt that motivates at least some of Hawthorne’s work.¹ In his comments on the “Gothic romance,” Jerrold Hogle notes the

¹ In the introduction of the 1989 reprint of this classic 1966 work, Crews has modified the extent of his methodology, suggesting that he overused psychoanalysis as a way of making sense of Hawthorne’s texts: “If I were to rewrite *Sins* today, I would still insist on Hawthorne’s diffidence, slyness, and suggestiveness, but I would not presume to explain his inhibitions by reference to a core of ‘the repressed.’... Since my book first appeared, students have emphasized that Hawthorne was an avid reader of sensational fiction and journalism...” (281).

explicit connections between Hawthorne and Walpole, noting that Hawthorne's "Walpolean preface" shares with Walpole identical themes as well as an expressed freedom to depict supernatural occurrences (though Hawthorne actually does so much more cautiously than Walpole). Walpole writes, speaking of the author (himself): "I wish he had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this: *that the sins of the fathers are visited to their children to the third and fourth generations*" (6-7). Professing a similar tone of regret about his theme, Hawthorne claims he has provided a moral only to satisfy readers' expectations, declaring, "[w]hen romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle [sic] process than the ostensible one" (CE 2: 2). Both Hawthorne and Walpole are fascinated with this theme, conspicuously taken in Walpole's work from a biblical text and directed toward the Israelite nation (cf. Exodus 20.5). The narrator's process of working out his moral in Hawthorne's intergenerational tale suggests that his focus is not so much on individual sin as on inherited national sin.

Although critics have given due attention to the first part of Hawthorne's stated moral, the second part has received much less critical attention. Hawthorne appends his stated moral with the declaration that "the Author... 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, thereby to maim and crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms" (CE 2: 2). Thus, the practices concerning "real estate" in America suggest that inheritance rights in America may in fact be built on faulty premises. In America, as in England, the Gothic romance draws attention to crime

or wrong-doing, often of a secretive or hidden nature and connected to a way of thinking that has generally been eclipsed by Enlightenment notions of progress. An avid reader, Hawthorne read the British Gothicists and the early American Gothic of Charles Brockden Brown voraciously during his college. Of the British writers, Ann Radcliffe and Sir Walter Scott contributed most directly to the young Hawthorne's appreciation of the Gothic. Even before attending college, Hawthorne wrote to his sister Louisa that he had read Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* and Scott's *Waverly* (CE 15: 114). The following year, in 1820, he wrote a note to his older sister Elizabeth, telling her that he had read many works by Scott and William Godwin, both important Gothic writers in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Britain (CE 15: 132). As the preface of *The House of the Seven Gables* indicates, Walpole's writings also captured his imagination, no doubt *The Castle of Otranto* among them (Mem. 65). And Edgar Allan Poe had added his own touch to the Gothic in America by this time, as Hawthorne had done in many of his earlier tales that had come to be known by the public. By the time Hawthorne wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*, the public was well-read in the Gothic genre, and Hawthorne had already experimented with its form in short stories and in his early retracted Gothic romance *Fanshawe* (1828).

Hawthorne's American Gothic follows many of these general patterns of the British Gothic, but with a stronger focus on national wrong-doing linked to issues of land ownership. Attempting to lay hold of Nature, Hawthorne implies, may have brought down upon the heads of Americans the guilt of "ill-gotten gold, or real estate," and the righting of such a wrong is not easily achieved. In the nineteenth-century, competing views of land ownership also contributed to the now infamous "Indian removals." The

legality of land ownership was often settled by the arbitration of the courts without much careful consideration of Native American rights, and Hawthorne's attention to the role of the courts can be seen in his comment that Colonel Pyncheon's land claims had been "confirmed by a subsequent grant of the General Court" (*CE* 2: 18). At a time when slavery was emerging in the national consciousness as the most obvious national wrong, Hawthorne promotes another vision of the "original" national wrong – that of Anglo-Americans' treatment of the land and its inhabitants upon their arrival. *The House of the Seven Gables*, written the year after the Fugitive Slave Act that was part of the Compromise of 1850, suggests that even before slavery was brought to British America, wrongdoing had been part of the story of America and that until "the accumulated mass" had been finally been once more "scattered abroad in its original atoms," that wrongdoing would never be made wholly right. Since land ownership by the Puritans often came through displacement of the Native Americans, Hawthorne's link between historical issues of land ownership and Native Americans is most fitting.² Although a complete restoration may not be easily attained, Hawthorne suggests that humans can begin restoring their relations to the land by treating it as a gift rather than as a commodity to be had for greedy and manipulative purposes.

Land ownership was a fraught issue in the British colonies from their beginnings, but most of the public discussion on these issues in the 1850s did not focus so much on the right of land ownership as on the kind of land being annexed — slave state or free

² Property ownership debates in nineteenth-century New England involved disagreement not only about the right to own certain lands but also about the right to own slaves. Although Hawthorne tended to see slavery as a Southern problem, supporting a policy of gradualism (as many critics have noted) at least until the Civil War began, his perception of slavery as a national rather than regional problem began a gradual shift with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. A couple months after *House* was published in 1851, the year after the passage of the infamous law, Hawthorne wrote his friend Longfellow that it "is the only thing that could have blown me into any respectable degree of warmth" (*CE* 16: 431).

state, slave territory or free territory.³ In 1850, just as he was finishing *The Scarlet Letter* and was about to turn to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne published one of his short stories in an abolitionist newspaper, *National Era*. In this issue, Hawthorne's contribution is one of several to mention Native Americans. Hawthorne's texts consistently suggest that even prior to the pressing issue of slave ownership in America was the haunting issue of land ownership. Several critics mention the significance of land ownership in *The House of the Seven Gables*, at least in passing. Chief among these is Walter Benn Michaels, who claims that *The House of the Seven Gables* is like other "haunted house stories" and thus "involve[s] some form of anxiety about ownership" (157). While Michaels uncovers evidence that Hawthorne was well attuned to laws concerning property rights, he pays little heed to Native American claims to the land as perhaps a chief reason for Hawthorne's interest in issues of land ownership.⁴ Robert K. Martin observes that "Hawthorne's text was written in the midst of a national – even international – debate over the right to property, the right to hold and sell slaves, and the connections between the enslavement of women and that of black Americans" ("Haunted" 132). Martin does also note the connection to Native Americans, but only as a very secondary issue. For him, Hawthorne "evades the issue of the Indian lands by staging a conflict between two white families in the absence of the dispersed and now

³ A life-long Democrat who deplored slavery – calling the arrival of the first African slave ship on the shores of New-England a "monstrous birth" (CE 23: 420) – but advocated a policy of gradualism rather than one of active abolition, Hawthorne did not live to see the end of the Civil War. This policy of gradualism is spelled out strategically in the campaign biography Hawthorne wrote to garner support for his old college friend Franklin Pierce, where he describes this view as one that "looks upon Slavery as one of those evils, which Divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream" (CE 23: 352).

⁴ Like many other critics including Gillian Brown and Teresa Goddu, he does aptly connect issues of land ownership with the subjugation of women and slaves in the nineteenth century.

dispossessed Indians” (“Haunted” 132). However, if the Native Americans have been “dispersed” as well as “dispossessed,” they cannot very readily be brought into a story of mid-nineteenth-century Salem. The fact that Native Americans are mentioned as frequently as they are in Hawthorne’s text, and so often in connection with a land deed held by an unscrupulous land-grabber like Colonel Pyncheon, suggests that they are more than mere background for Hawthorne’s stagework.

One important source that links the Maules and the Native Americans is the historical Thomas Maule, a Quaker who was accused of witchcraft but successfully defended himself against the Salem witch judges even while condemning their approach. Maule suggests that the Puritans had a bad impact on Quakers and Native Americans and other detractors.⁵ Maule castigates the Puritans for “how they have turned the Native Indians... in to the Grave, where there is no Repentance” and adds that such actions “by a People that pretended so much to Gods Truth” against “the poor Natives” is both hypocritical and inexcusable. And he goes further, suggesting that the Native Americans’ attacks are the work of God against the Puritans for “their unrighteous dealings towards the Native Indians, whom now the Lord hath suffered to reward the Inhabitants with a double measure of Blood, by Fire and Sword” (432–33). Hawthorne most likely first read about Thomas Maule in Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, where Mather discusses Maule as the writer of “a volume of *nonsensical* blasphemies and heresies, wherein he sets himself to defend the Indians in their bloody villanies, and revile the country for defending itself against them.” Mather warns them not to “own this

⁵ My thanks to Joe Fulton for bringing this connection to my attention. The Quaker Thomas Maule’s publication *Truth Held Forth and Maintained* (1695), followed by *New-England Pesecutors [sic] Mauled With their own Weapons* (1697), argues that the Puritans’ harshness against Quakers and Native Americans belied the Christianity they claimed to promote.

bloody stuff,” and suggests making a proverb of saying, “He is as very a liar as Tom Maule” (*Magnalia* 2: 644–45). Hawthorne, never one to agree quickly with Mather, apparently disagrees sharply enough to take the use the Maule name for the name of one wronged in early America.⁶ Hawthorne makes the same connections as Maule (against Mather) in *The Scarlet Letter* when the narrator remarks that in the very earliest days of the Puritan colony, the crowd gathered in front of the prison door would not have signaled a coming execution, not until later years when witches would die. Instead, the narrator suggests, “[i]t might be, that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle and vagrant Indian, whom the white man’s fire-water had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadows of the forest” (*CE* 1: 49). Like Thomas Maule then, Hawthorne groups together those peoples whom the Puritans have wronged through their harsh judgments.

In opposition to land-grabbers like Colonel Pyncheon, the Maule family in Hawthorne’s story occupies a position that parallels the Native Americans who have been pushed increasingly out of New England by the forced removals of the nineteenth-century. The narrator’s language about the Maules resembles the language used to describe the “vanishing Indian”:

As for Matthew Maule’s posterity, it was supposed now to be extinct. For a very long period after the witchcraft delusion, however, the Maules had continued to inhabit the town, where their progenitor had suffered so unjust a death. To all appearance, they were a quiet, honest, well-meaning race of people, cherishing no malice against individuals or the public, for the wrong which had been done them... Nor would it have been singular, had they ceased to remember that the House of the Seven Gables was

⁶ Here again, as in the Hannah Duston story related earlier, Hawthorne’s disagreement with Mather likely stems, in part at least, from his pacifist leanings. Certainly, if he read the Quaker’s original published pamphlet, he would have realized that the Quaker Maule’s castigation of the Puritan’s treatment of Native Americans is part of a broader polemic against war.

resting its heavy frame-work on a foundation that was rightfully their own... For thirty years past, neither town-record, nor grave-stone, nor the directory, nor the knowledge or memory of man, bore any trace of Matthew Maule's descendants. His blood might possibly exist elsewhere; here, where its lowly current could be traced so far back, it had ceased to keep an onward course" (*CE* 2: 25–26).

This lengthy quotation employs nineteenth-century rhetoric about the Native Americans to discuss the Maules.⁷ Like the Maules, the Native Americans appeared to be extinct in much of the eastern United States. After the catastrophe of King Philip's War and the death of that honored leader, the Native Americans who remained in the east lived in the manner of the Maules: Hawthorne notes that Maule's descendants was a "race of people" that, though wronged, remained for a time as before fading from the area of the Pyncheon's ill-gotten property. Likewise, the Native American connection to the land had been forgotten by many, and the houses of the European settlers were constructed atop what had once been Native American territory. For several decades, their traces had been slowly eradicated, following in their wake as they moved westward after Jackson's Indian Removal policy became increasingly aggressive. As for the Maules, so the Native Americans' "blood might possibly exist elsewhere" though their blood had been largely eradicated in their earlier location in the Eastern United States. The "onward course" of the Manifest Destiny was not enjoyed by the Maules or by the Native Americans, at least not for awhile.

Thomas Maule was one of the few – perhaps the only, and certainly the most well-known and published – to criticize the Salem judges for their handling of the witchcraft trials and live to tell about it. That he would come back to haunt New England

⁷ See Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny*, for example, for the significance of terms such as "race," "extinct," "blood," and "onward."

through Hawthorne's story is a stroke of literary art that calls into question the integrity of the founding of New England rather than promoting it through support of doctrines like "manifest destiny." While Hawthorne uses the name Matthew Maule for the condemned and executed Maule from whom Colonel Pyncheon filches the land at the beginning, Matthew's son Thomas is the carpenter employed to build the house of the seven gables. And it is Thomas who outwits the stern Puritan colonel by hiding the Indian deed in the house he is building. As Holgrave reveals at the end: "The son of the executed Matthew Maule, while building this house, took an opportunity to... hide away the Indian deed, on which depended the immense land-claim of the Pyncheons. Thus, they bartered their eastern-territory for Maule's garden-ground" (*CE* 2: 316).

In a study directly examining the Gothic quality of some of Hawthorne's texts, Jane Lundblad connects Hawthorne's writing to Gothic conventions with all the features of British Gothic romances. Most prominent are the manuscript, the castle, and the crime, followed by nine additional features: three of these fall into the category of the supernatural (religion, ghosts, magic), three in the category of the natural (deformity, nature, blood), and three in the category of the human (Italians, armored knights, and works of art). Even these categories overlap: for example, humans themselves are natural beings, and religion is a human understanding of the supernatural rather than the supernatural itself. Other critics have also noted Native Americans, the Gothic, and Hawthorne, but almost always without bringing these three strands together. In his classic study of American literature, Leslie Fiedler pointed out years ago that "the ambiguity of our relationship with Indian and Negro" and "the ambiguity of our encounter with nature" have contributed to "gothic images [which] projected certain

obsessive concerns of our national life” (xxii). Fiedler himself, however, greatly underestimated the position of Native Americans to Hawthorne’s work, and many critics following him have done the same – in large part, most likely, because Hawthorne’s method of distancing himself from the text he is writing often disguises the contemporary issue he is addressing.

Several scholars have recently combined the weight of Puritan history in Hawthorne’s texts with the Gothic shadows that surround them.⁸ Charles Crow, for example, treats American Gothic in particular as a “counter-narrative” to the myth of progress in which “Nature was tamed, the frontier pushed far to the west” (17). Crow calls *The House of the Seven Gables* “at once the most and least Gothic of Hawthorne’s four romances” and notes the crimes of the Pyncheons as “specific local crimes” that are built on “the larger crimes of slavery and dispossession of Native Americans, as represented by the claims on the eastern (that is, Maine) lands” (49–50). This essay returns to the conventions Lundblad identifies in the British Gothic novels that Hawthorne read incessantly to suggest that Hawthorne reshapes traditional Gothic fiction into a specifically American form by focusing on the complex issue of inherited lands that have at least sometimes been ill-gotten. Focusing on the nineteenth-century reasons for employing Gothic has a mode, Donald Ringe does not abandon Lundblad for the new

⁸ Wesley Britton, for example, combines these two threads in a comparative study with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, outlining the dark past of Puritan misdeeds and the dark past of slavery in America to suggest that forgetting would be yet another example of national malfeasance (21–22). Richard Gray recalls the Hawthorne family history that contributes to the tale’s legal trappings, noting the similarity in the words of the curse of Matthew Maule in Hawthorne’s story and one condemned of witchcraft in the court where Hawthorne’s ancestor served as a judge (89). While Teresa A. Goddu’s recent claim that Hawthorne’s use of the Gothic was a bow to the demands of the marketplace is tenuous at best (especially given Hawthorne’s retraction of his most apparently Gothic novel *Fanshawe*), Goddu does make a compelling argument about the impact of nineteenth-century patriarchal attempts to confine and control other humans in terms of race and gender. Nina Baym’s article on “Alice Doane” and *Fanshawe* provides a more compelling analysis of Hawthorne’s motivations for choosing the Gothic as his mode of expression.

directions in Gothic scholarship in the last few decades but instead combines these approaches to offer a welcome analysis of these often obscured connections while seeking out the particular ways Hawthorne employs the Gothic mode. While Ringe focuses largely on the overlooked and misunderstood component of the supernatural, I will focus primarily on the overlooked component of “Nature,” in part by noting the Native American connections to the landscape itself.

In addition to an inherited sense of national guilt, Hawthorne’s heavy reading of British writers of Gothic romance contributed to his use of Gothic conventions. However, Hawthorne adapts the Gothic mode considerably in *The House of the Seven Gables* to suggest an American setting and theme. In place of the standard Gothic castle, the peaked gables of the House serves as the medieval edifice that whispers of a time long-gone with secrets and antique beliefs that lead people to live a different mode of life. As in *The Scarlet Letter*, this remembered past serves as a reminder that a commonplace nineteenth-century perception of the world would have appeared as ludicrous or delusionary to earlier eras as some beliefs of these earlier eras may appear to Hawthorne’s nineteenth-century readers. Hawthorne ends his preface with the assertion that the titular house was composed “of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air” and that the tale had “a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex” (CE 2: 3). His allusion to “castles in the air” invokes the Gothic by its focus on the physical structure and imaginative framework that serves as the site of many Gothic romances in the British literature Hawthorne read. With regard to the Gothic texture of this story, what Hawthorne’s prefatory statement does is twofold: it invokes the architectural framework of the Gothic,

with its mention of castles, hinting at the same time of an ethereal atmosphere by having it be a “castle of the air.” Hawthorne picked up this metaphoric phrase, of course, from his wide range of readings. Although this phrase was widely used to mean “visionary project or scheme, day-dream, idle fancy” since the seventeenth century (OED), the phrase’s appearance in Lewis’s Gothic novel *The Monk* may have added a specially Gothic twist to it for Hawthorne, giving him the impetus to project “castles” into his vision of America. Which parts of his book constitute a “visionary project” and which parts are “idle fancy” could be debated, but there is too much of a project being obviously shaped before the reader’s eyes for *The House of the Seven Gables* to be wholly “idle fancy.” At least in Hawthorne’s own eyes, this was not the case.

In keeping with the Gothic genre, the nebulous boundaries between nature and the supernatural, as well as between nature and humans, contribute to the complexity of Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*.⁹ And while the centrality of land ownership is constantly emphasized, Nature and the supernatural can both be implicated in the course of events as vermin inhabit the dark shadows of the House, the well dries up, the chickens refuse to lay many eggs, and the earth only grudgingly produces fruit and flowers. Even the aggressive Pyncheons’ inherited cause of death seems both natural – the result of apoplexy – and supernatural – a gurgling of “miraculous blood” in their throats as the result of Matthew Maule’s curse: “God will give him blood to drink!” (*CE* 2: 8, 124). The old Indian deed which Judge Pyncheon is seeking reminds readers that the land was first taken from the Native Americans, and the squatting rights of the Maules are overturned by the legal rights (or manipulations) of the Pyncheons. The

⁹ According to Jack G. Voller, the American Gothic of Hawthorne may be less eerily supernatural than its British predecessors but include more disturbing topography (218).

surviving Pyncheons at the time of the events of the story are struggling over ownership of the plot of land that is diseased by the presence of the usurping Pyncheons, darkened by the presence of a wronged Maule whose identity is hidden, and brightened by the work of a young Pyncheon woman who has been distanced from this land until the present moment. The cursed land seems to curse those who have brought curses upon it. This view of nature as an entity that can be wronged or restored by human action provides Hawthorne with the material of a Gothic romance that highlights the workings of nature as well as supernatural and human contrivances.

After considering the Gothic thrust of Hawthorne's text in relation to his reading of the troubled history of land acquisition in colonial America, I will contrast the Pyncheons' unnatural claims based on exploitation of the land with the Maules' more "natural" claims based on an intimacy with the land. The Maules in fact represent not only settlers in their own right but also the missing Native Americans. The surprising redemption at the end forces a return again to the Gothic structure and a reassessment of the question of how to move forward in the face of national wrong-doing. Hawthorne's suggestion, with regard to human relations with the land, is that Nature and the Supernatural work together to protect those who have been wronged and that they also work in concert to renew those who work toward reconciliation rather than away from it.

Gothic Architectures: Constructing the House of America

At first glance, Hawthorne's creaky Gothic tale in *The House of the Seven Gables* may seem no more than a dreamy romance with little connection to reality. Hawthorne does himself much to create this sense with the anticipatory protest that "[t]he Reader" will probably be tempted to fixate on the locale of the event, but that "the Author" is

trying to avoid any such fixation: “He would be glad, therefore,” Hawthorne writes of the Author, “if – especially in the quarter to which he alludes – the book may be read strictly as a Romance” (CE 2: 3). The implication is not that Salem, the site of the novel, is immaterial to Hawthorne’s tale – far from it, as the events come to show – but that it serves as a synecdoche for New England, and more generally for the young nation of America, and even more generally for condition of humans on the earth as a whole. The house of the seven gables, like the House of America, stands as a framework whose interiors may be inspected for crumbling supports. And in America, one such crumbling support that Hawthorne finds is in governmentally-sanctioned treatments of Native Americans. Writing in the mode of Romance allows Hawthorne to stretch his readers’ imaginative capacity to find connections between the House and the Nation, and his description of romance in the preface of *The House of the Seven Gables* indicates that he is approaching this work in terms of Gothic romance. In this description, Hawthorne emphasizes the role of the imagination in considering all species of “possibility” in a way that realist novels could not do as well.

Hawthorne indicates his concern about land ownership, especially as it pertains to the European colonizers who are interlopers on foreign territory, demarcating his own project of romance immediately in the preface of *The House of Seven Gables* as a way of avoiding the kind of imposition practiced by writers of novels. Novels, he claims, are presumed to “aim at a very minute fidelity,” and are even more susceptible than the romance “to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing [their] fancy-pictures into positive contact with the realities of the moment” that comes from the attempts “to describe local manners” and “to meddle with the characteristics of

a community” (CE 2: 1–3). Such statements may initially seem to indicate that Hawthorne is simply demarcating an apolitical space in order to write an inoffensive text, but such an assumption belies the actual content of the tale itself – a tale which castigates the Salem witch trial judges and castigates the actions of Judge Pyncheon who is too much like the Colonel, who “with all the show of liberal expenditure, was said to be as close-fisted as if his gripe were of iron” and “most people” of the town were fooled into thinking him to have “genuine warmth of nature” (CE 1: 122). Such statements indicate a desire not merely to write something inoffensive but to write something that may in fact make readers rethink too hasty assumptions about the social and political issues of the day – particularly when such issues involved the possibility of monetary gain.

Remembering the days of the house’s first construction also yields important insight into the time required for a relationship to develop between the land and what it makes part of itself. The Colonel’s actions upon acquiring the land also indicate the kind of avaricious attitude that Hawthorne deplors. His first action, of course, is to build the House: “He... dug his cellar, and laid the deep foundations of his mansion, on the square of earth whence Matthew Maule, forty years before, had first swept away the fallen leaves” (CE 2: 10). Matthew Maule had simply “swept” the land before building his hut whereas the Colonel cut into the earth to lay a deep foundation for his imposing house. The description of the Colonel’s house contains Hawthorne’s only use of the word *Gothic* and is given as the reader is thrust along to the Colonel’s house along with the invited guests of the whole town who are invited for an open house celebration of the Colonel’s new residence. This house is cut into the landscape and juts up against the sky:

All, as they approached, looked upward at the imposing edifice, which was henceforth to assume its rank among the habitations of mankind.

There it rose, a little withdrawn from the line of the street, but in pride, not modesty. Its whole visible exterior was ornamented with quaint figures, conceived in the grotesqueness of a Gothic fancy, and drawn or stamped in the glittering plaster, composed of lime, pebbles, and bits of glass, with which the wood-work of the walls was overspread. On every side, the seven gables pointed sharply towards the sky, and presented the aspect of a whole sisterhood of edifices, breathing through the spiracles of one great chimney.... All around were scattered shavings, chips, shingles, and broken halves of bricks; these – together with the lately turned earth, on which the grass had not begun to grow – contributed to the impression of strangeness and novelty, proper to a house that had yet its place to make among men's daily interests. (CE 2: 11)

The imposing edifice which scars the face of the earth presents a strong contrast to the hut which required little more than the sweeping of leaves from the floor of the forest. The house does not look natural in its position against the earth, the grass has not yet grown over it, and it is in this state of things that the Colonel Pyncheon dies his purportedly apoplectic death.

Hawthorne gives many indications that the house participates in a real history, but this text is clearly talking about more than just one house and one greedy land baron. Instead, Hawthorne's text and the house in that text both bear the marks of synecdoche. The individual Pyncheon history is analogous to the history of the nation. The house is not merely a random haunted house but the dwelling place of a family much as the House of America is the dwelling place of a people. Both Stuart Borrows and Robert K. Martin recognize Hawthorne's use of synecdoche in *The House of the Seven Gables*, with Borrows pointing out that the text of *The House of the Seven Gables* is a synecdoche for the Pyncheon history associated with the house from which *The House of the Seven Gables* obtains its name (50–51). In addition, it is fairly obvious that in some ways, the house of Pyncheon serves as a synecdoche for the House of America. The wrongs committed on a small scale in removing the Maules from the land the Pyncheons wanted,

a removal enabled by accusing Matthew Maule of witchcraft and executing him henceforth, may be remembered on a national scale if one remembers the removal of Native Americans from the lands the Anglo-Americans wanted. Similarly, Robert K. Martin argues that the text represents more than “a grotesque landscape of the imagination. Among the secrets [the house] conceals is a racial history of slavery which at least in part shifts the novel’s theme away from family guilt to national guilt or uses the family as a synecdoche of the nation” (“Haunted” 130). While there is a rough equivalence between the national wrong of slavery and the Pyncheon wrong of ill-gotten property (not to mention the presence of a slave named Scipio in the House’s history), the more direct connection given in Hawthorne’s text is between the wrongs of the land-grabbing Pyncheons and land-grabbing opportunists who disinherited Native Americans from the lands they had inhabited.

By viewing the House as a synecdoche not only of Salem but of America – and particularly of New England – we can productively assess the national guilt that Hawthorne is displaying in his text. Three primary historical wrongs have been committed – all having to do with land claims and individual views of human relations to the land. The first view is that of Colonel Pyncheon, who asserts his control over everything around him and desires to own as much “real estate” as possible. The second view is that of squatters like Matthew Maule who come to know the land through their personal relations with it, and the final view is that of the Native Americans who have been displaced by the squabbling white Europeans. The most glaring wrong here is the forced displacement of Native Americans.

The Native American “presence” in *The House of the Seven Gables* gives to Hawthorne’s Gothic a distinctly American quality. Although no Native Americans actually appear in this text as they do in *The Scarlet Letter*, their very absence is made glaringly apparent by the repeated references to an allusive Indian deed being sought by the ever-greedy Pyncheons. The memory of the Native Americans is preserved alongside the judge’s as anterior to it by the pictures of Native Americans on the map of the supposed Pyncheon territories of “Eastern Lands” that hung alongside the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon:

One was a map of the Pyncheon territory at the eastward, not engraved, but the handiwork of some skilful old draftsman, and grotesquely illuminated with pictures of Indians and wild beasts, among which was seen a lion; the natural history of the region being as little known as its geography, which was put down most fantastically awry. The other adornment was the portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon, at two thirds length, representing the stern features of a Puritanic-looking personage, in a scull-cap, with a laced band and a grizzly beard; holding a Bible with one hand, and in the other uplifting an iron sword-hilt. (*CE* 2: 33)

“Indians and wild beasts” are mentioned in one breath as are “a Bible” and “an iron sword-hilt” in another. The Native Americans seem little more than wild animals to Colonel Pyncheon – barely human inhabitants. The Puritan is depicted in his portrait as a figure of religious intolerance, but for his war-like attitude toward those who opposed his ownership of the land is made apparent in the pairing of this picture with the etchings on the map next to it. The sword is next to the map of the territories coveted by the Pyncheons from the colonial Colonel to the nineteenth-century Judge. The etchings on the map show the Native Americans’ relation to the land. The map itself – with its demarcations of Pyncheon “property” – indicates the more possessive characteristics of

the Pyncheon's coveted ownership, indicating not a mutuality but a master/slave kind of relationship between landowner and land.

Some of Hawthorne's knowledge about Native American stories came through the writings of Cotton Mather, although Hawthorne clearly differentiates himself from Mather in some instances. While a young magazine editor in 1836, Hawthorne critiqued Mather's famous justification of Hannah Duston's massacre of her Native American captors and their children.¹⁰ Mather had justified Duston's actions on various grounds, including their Catholicism, to which Hawthorne retorts: "Mather, like an old hard-hearted, pedantic bigot, as he was, seems trebly to exult in the destruction of those poor wretches, on account of their Popish superstitions" ("Duston" 396). Hawthorne's retelling registers his disapproval of Hannah's massacre rather than justifying her "Christian" actions as Mather had done.¹¹ Hawthorne's pacifist leanings very likely enter into his treatment of this story, as they typically do with any situation in which violence plays a part.¹² Hawthorne's later view of Mather in *Grandfather's Chair*, a book of historical American tales for children which Hawthorne gives in the voice of "Grandfather," reveals a more nuanced opinion of Mather: "It is difficult, my children,"

¹⁰ The family name is spelled differently by different authors; I use Hawthorne's spelling "Duston" throughout my discussion.

¹¹ The Hannah Duston tale is one of eight works from the *American Magazine* that Hawthorne's son Julian specifically ascribes to his father, though Julian adds that his father "wrote and prepared" not only these eight but "pretty much all of the contents of [the editions he edited]" (NHHW 1: 176). In his collection of Hawthorne's entries in the *American Magazine*, Arlin Turner suggests that Hawthorne actually wrote this work awhile prior to its publication, and though he does not discuss Hawthorne's attitude toward Mather, Turner notes that "[i]n this sketch Hawthorne leaned heavily on the account in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*" (8, 131).

¹² The subtitle of Hawthorne's Civil War Essay, "Chiefly About War-Matters," is more than a convenient title. "By a Peaceable Man" represents a political statement (CE 23: 403). In *Devils and Rebels: The Making of Hawthorne's Damned Politics*, Larry Reynolds compellingly advances his thesis that Hawthorne's pacificism and his resistance to binary thinking inform his political stances as well as his way of handling disagreement.

observed Grandfather, ‘to make you understand such a character as Cotton Mather’s, in whom there was so much good, and yet so many failings and frailties. Undoubtedly, he was a pious man’” (CE 6: 94). Such a depiction of Mather places him, surprisingly, in stark contrast with the hypocritical Puritans for whom Hawthorne reserved his greatest censure. Even if Mather was misguided, Hawthorne implies, at least he actually believed what he proclaimed and acted accordingly. While Hawthorne’s censure and praise of Mather do not allow us to dismiss his influence on Hawthorne, it is clear that Hawthorne sympathizes with the Native Americans much more than Mather does. And it is likewise clear in *The Scarlet Letter* that he is not averse to exposing the dark underbelly of America’s founders as well as their most admirable dreams.

Hawthorne professes to have needed others to show him “any romance, or poetry, or grandeur, or beauty, in the Indian character” even as he laments the popularity of the theme of the vanishing Indian in nineteenth-century American literature, claiming that “no writer can be more secure of a permanent place in our literature, than the biographer of the Indian chiefs” (CE 10: 429). Despite these apparent declamations, Hawthorne does not completely occlude Native Americans in his fiction, but depicts them with some degree of sympathy in short stories and romances from “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1836) to his *Septimius* manuscripts, left uncompleted at the end of his life (1864), in which the title character comes of Native American ancestry and lives with his old Aunt Keziah, “a mixture of an Indian squaw and herb-doctress” (CE 13: 72). There is an unmistakable tone of endearment to Aunt Keziah, old and crusty though she be.

Despite recent reconsiderations of Hawthorne’s treatment of Native Americans, their importance in *The House of the Seven Gables* has gone largely unnoticed. Anna

Brickhouse rightly detects a prominent note of regret in Hawthorne's somewhat facetious statement that "I do abhor an Indian story," but she only mentions *The House of the Seven Gables* in passing: "The ancestral secrets of identity in *The House of the Seven Gables* include, ultimately, a long-hidden but useless deed to Indian lands" (235). In this single, tantalizing comment, Brickhouse points – however briefly – toward the focus of my own study of Native American presence and absence in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne's proclaimed abhorrence for an "Indian story," as Brickhouse and others point out, does not square with his own writing, and his proclamation functions as an invective against the ease of national acclaim offered by writing these kinds of "Indian stories" rather than a justification for displacing Native Americans from their lands.¹³

While contemporaries and predecessors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Lydia Maria Child eagerly wrote such stories for the public, Hawthorne resisted writing the kind of "Indian story" that served other authors with claims to American originality.¹⁴ Another important commentary on Hawthorne's treatment of Native Americans is Margaret Moore's comment that "His fiercest comments [about Native Americans] are reserved for what the white man has done to the Indian" (130). While Moore does not explore Hawthorne's treatment of Native

¹³ Michael Colacurcio suggests, on the other hand, that Hawthorne's "Main Street" represents an attempt to take into consideration a pressing national issue without disturbing his focus on the Puritans and the Revolution: "The effect is not to tip the balance of his cultural criticism away from the matter of the Puritans or of the Revolution but, in partially redressing a crucial omission, to remind his audience that certain issue may matter out of all proportion to the power of fiction satisfactorily to represent them. Art has indeed its limits" ("Red Man's Grave" 14).

¹⁴ Richard Kopley traces the strong structural parallels between Child's *Hobomok* and Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* to suggest that Child's text may well have influenced Hawthorne's; in Kopley's brief reading of Hawthorne's first romance in light of *Hobomok*, he adopts the same distancing technique that I not in *The House of the Seven Gables* by positioning the Maules as parallels for Native Americans (123)

Americans in *The House of the Seven Gables*, this attitude is even more developed in this romance than in the short stories and sketches to which Moore alludes.

More recently, Yael Ben-zvi has argued that “native born settlers” in Hawthorne’s texts have a right to the land that is superior to that of those who were not born on the land they have come to inhabit. While Ben-Zvi uncovers an important difference between those who know the land and those who merely own it, he rather too quickly concludes that this differentiation serves as a justification for “Hawthorne’s antebellum cultural milieu, [in which] the native status of white citizens was perceived as a cultural birthright, which marginalized presumably disappearing Native Americans while naturalizing native-born settlers” (19). However, as I will maintain in this essay, Hawthorne’s notebooks (and often his letters as well) registered his skepticism of land-grabbing rhetoric employed by Puritans and their descendants; furthermore, as his preface indicates, he is more concerned about the “wrongs” committed than he is about the “rights” of anyone to own the land. Approaching Hawthorne’s text with similar assumptions (that Hawthorne is seeking to justify a white America), Derek Pacheco nonetheless notes that Hawthorne’s children’s history of early America treats “Indian removal as a peculiarly national phenomenon worthy of consideration” (187). However, given Hawthorne’s careful emphasis on the obvious absence of Native Americans in *The House of the Seven Gables*, he did in fact participate – however obliquely – in the national myth of the “vanishing Indian” if not by taking the side of the Native Americans at least by troubling assumptions about white settlers’ claims to land ownership. While he joins others of his era in regretting what he and they could have been in fact working to prevent, he does not join those who would see the blessing of Providence in the

disinheritance of the Native Americans. Instead, *The House of the Seven Gables* serves to emphasize the problems inherent in land ownership in America. His political aversion to violence of any kind no doubt contributed to Hawthorne's sense of national guilt for the wrongs committed against the Native Americans.¹⁵

Land ownership did not mean the same thing to Native Americans as to most whites, as Hawthorne's reading would have told him. What did the concept of land ownership mean to them? When they signed the deed for Colonel Pyncheon, what did they think they were signing? Native Americans viewed the land not as a commodity and not only as a home but as a gift to be enjoyed and treated with respect. All too often, Hawthorne's text suggests, the secrets of the text are not only the secret passages that Holgrave – and perhaps Clifford – may be using to move about the house. Nor are they the only the hidden things like the old Indian deed locked away behind the Colonel's dreadful portrait. Instead, the most hideous secrets are dark ones that hide behind pious or nationalistic pretences that mask the exploitation and greed of the land-grabbers of America from its earliest European settlers in the seventeenth century to its position as a young republic in the early nineteenth century. Colonel Pyncheon and men of his ilk were determined to get as large a portion of land as possible in the unfolding of the problematic expansionist belief that came to be known as Manifest Destiny: "When the pathless forest, that still covered this wild principality, should give place – as it inevitably must, though perhaps not till ages hence – to the golden fertility of human culture, it

¹⁵ In *Devils and Rebels: The Making of Hawthorne's Damned Politics* (2008), Larry Reynolds offers the most probing and convincing account to date of Hawthorne's political positions, situating Hawthorne as a man whose political persuasions made him deeply uneasy about nationalist rhetoric. Most compellingly, Reynolds outlines Hawthorne's version of Christian pacificism, which he characterizes as a profound suspicion of "the notion of righteous violence." This, as Reynolds notes, put Hawthorne vastly at odds with nationalist rhetoric of a nation headed toward civil war (*Devils and Rebels* 203).

would be the source of incalculable wealth to the Pyncheon blood” (CE 2: 18). The Colonel is an advocate of “progress,” and he wants to benefit from “progress” by being situated in the vanguard of such “progress.”

The notion of “manifest destiny,” a term coined by the famous newspaper editor John O’Sullivan in the decade before Hawthorne wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*, was much discussed in Hawthorne’s time. Since O’Sullivan had printed some of Hawthorne’s short stories, Hawthorne knew the man who claimed, in perhaps the clearest and most famous statement of “manifest destiny,” that the Anglo-Americans claimed “the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.”¹⁶ Hawthorne was privy to debates about such notions, given his brother-in-law Horace Mann’s outspoken resistance to slavery and “manifest destiny” alike.¹⁷ The Compromise of 1850 placed much emphasis on race relations, again ignoring the Native American situation and focusing almost exclusively on the African American situation. Perhaps misguided loyalty to his college friend kept Hawthorne from speaking out against more strongly against this “evil” of slavery that he elsewhere called “a monstrous birth” on America’s shores (CE 23: 420), but he did not speak in of the eventual disappearance of Native Americans in the same hopeful terms. Instead, he spoke of their removal from the East with regret. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave criticizes the “model-conservative” of Colonel Pyncheon, “who, in that

¹⁶ O’Sullivan’s statement was first published in the December 27, 1845 edition of *The New York Morning News* (Pratt 796).

¹⁷ In February 1850, just after *The Scarlet Letter* was being published, Mann delivered a speech to the House of Representatives against extending slavery into the territory of New Mexico, suggesting that notions of “manifest destiny” that supported slavery were as bad as the idea of providential favor on an

very character, rendered himself so long the Evil Destiny of his race” (CE 2: 315). Far from supporting the Pyncheon declaration of right to the land, Hawthorne critiqued this right and suggests here that this is not a “Manifest Destiny” with the favor of Providence so much as an “Evil Destiny” that depends on a race’s treacherous claims of superiority.

Hawthorne’s reading during the years immediately preceding the publication of his first major romances most likely influenced his treatment of the limits of legality in determining land issues between Native Americans and whites. Included in Hawthorne’s reading during this time are numerous works about the early states and territories – from Pennsylvania, where William Penn established congenial relations with the Native Americans to Massachusetts, where the relations between whites and Native Americans alternated between periods of friendship and periods of hostility to Virginia, where Native Americans greeted early explorers to the New World. Between 1848 and 1850, Hawthorne checked out several volumes from the Salem Atheneum which included significant commentary on relations between Native Americans and white settlers: Sherman Day’s *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania* (1843), in which Day emphasizes the good relations between Penn and the Native Americans; an unidentified volume on the state of Virginia, possibly John Smith’s *General Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* or Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, both famous works in the Atheneum’s collections), Volume 3 of the *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1794), a volume he had checked out before and which contains myriad references to the settlement of the whites and the voluntary and involuntary expulsion of many of the original inhabitants; George Gibbs’ *Memoirs of the*

ever-expanding nation that included people whose ethnic groups had practiced infanticide (China) or cannibalism (the South Seas) (7).

Administrations of Washington and John Adams (1846), which details early United States policy on many issues, including relations with Native Americans (Kesselring 41–42).

Perhaps most significant of Hawthorne's reading on this topic is Jacob Burnet's 1847 work about ongoing struggles in the relations between whites and Native Americans; Hawthorne read this work shortly before writing his three American romances. Burnet's work was entitled *Notes on the Early Settlement of the North-Western Territory* (Kesselring 46). This work records negotiations for a treaty between the tribes in the Northwestern Territory and the United States. While there are many claims presented, the Native Americans appear to want peaceful resolution and to find the white man's way of partitioning land incomprehensible. One of them asks for the whites to divide the territory for the Native Americans since they don't know how, and another speaks of land ownership in light of the competing claims of the French, the British, and the United States: "*Elder brother!* You asked who were the true owners of the lands now ceded to the United States. In answer, I tell you, that if any nations should call themselves the owners of it, they would be guilty of a falsehood; our claim to it is equal; our elder brother has conquered it" (251). This work shows the violence committed on both sides as the whites move in to take over the land, and it also shows the differing conceptions of land ownership – rather than possessing the land as a property, the Native Americans find their identities rooted in the land. Uprooting that identity appears as the greatest wrong, and the whites often instigate this wrong through documents that are clearly alien to Native American conceptions of the human relation to the land – even if they give their assent to the document. Burnet remarks on their relation to the land, writing, "They claimed the entire country, alledging [sic] that it had been made by the

Great Spirit for them and their children forever” (385). Further, their relations with the whites were originally friendly and open-handed:

Being unconscious of danger, they met and greeted the pioneers as friends, when they first crossed the river and entered their territory; and they continued to treat them as such, till they began to apprehend hostile designs against themselves and their country... That unfortunate race, who seem to have been destined by Providence to utter extinction, have been misrepresented and slandered, no doubt to palliate the guilt of the outrages which have been perpetuated against them. (385)

Without the least consciousness of the irony of suggesting that the Native Americans are fated to disappear and that whites are guilty of making them disappear, Burnet nonetheless draws attention to the wrongs committed against Native Americans in this book. And Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* represents, in part, a response to the wrong-doing implied by issues of land ownership that reach so far back into American history in the east as well as in the Northwest Territory.

Although Hawthorne’s view of America is less bombastically self-confident than George Bancroft’s, Hawthorne’s repeated reading of Bancroft’s *History of the United States* also likely contributed to his focus on issues of land ownership as the “original sin” of America.¹⁸ Like Bancroft, he suggests that land ownership issues predated issues of African American slavery and the disinheritance of Native Americans may have constituted “the original sin” of America – being prior to the slavery of Africans. Bancroft excoriates slavery’s stronghold in Virginia as “one of the strange contradictions in human affairs,” noting that it makes no sense that a place that “constituted the asylum

¹⁸ Hawthorne read Bancroft’s history at least in April 1837 (Kesselring 39); his difference in tone from Bancroft was likely influenced by his wide range of reading about the context of the founding of the United States. In her extensive record of Hawthorne’s reading lists from the Salem Athenaeum, Marion Kesselring points out that these varied sources include writings by Cotton Mather, Caleb Hopkins Snow, Joseph Barlow Felt, and many others of early national and pre-national times such as Captain John Smith (9-10).

of liberty” in the sense of having a representative government should also become “the abode of hereditary bondsmen” (177). But he also mentions that the first kind of slavery associated with America consisted of slaves of Spanish travelers and captured Native Americans who were sold abroad. Bancroft seems especially troubled to find that Columbus himself took part in such exploitation of the Native Americans. Reading Bancroft’s *History* makes it easy to see why Hawthorne may have been inclined to consider the wrongs committed against the Native Americans as the “original” wrong of the United States, or at least, of New England. Although his treatment of wrongdoing against Native Americans bears some similarities with the earlier writers he was reading, Hawthorne’s tone is much more skeptical of the idea of Manifest Destiny apparent in Bancroft’s (and Burnet’s) writing.

In 1837, Hawthorne checked out another book from the Salem Athenaeum that seems less inclined to accept the regrettable disappearance of Native Americans from their eastern lands. The lengthy title of the book, written by Samuel Gardner Drake, describes well its trajectory: *Indian Biography, Containing the Lives of More than Two Hundred Indian Chiefs: Also Such Others of that Race as Have Rendered their Names Conspicuous in the History of North America From Its First Being Known to Europeans to the Present Period. Giving at large Their Most Celebrated Speeches, Memorable Sayings, Numerous Anecdotes, and a History of their Wars* (1832). Hawthorne’s text indicates that the ideas in this book also played an important role in his developing conceptions of Native Americans. The author begins with a brief “advertisement,” in which he states that this book is not a book of apologies, but a book that represents “the first general attempt to embody Indian history in the only proper manner” (iv). There is

an apparent parallel between Hawthorne's focus on national wrongdoing and the snippet of a poem that begins this book:

“We call them Savage — O be just!
Their outraged feelings scan!
A voice comes forth, 'tis from the dust —
The savage was a man!
* * * * * *
I venerate the Pilgrim's cause,
Yet for the red man dare to plead;
We bow to Heaven's recorded laws,
He turned to nature for a creed!”*Sprague*. (Drake 1)

Despite the seemingly noble and religious goals of the first-comers, then, this book suggests that at least a part of their success was accompanied by the Native Americans' loss. This passage is taken from Charles' Sprague's full-length work *An Ode: Pronounced Before the Inhabitants of Boston, September the Seventeenth, 1830, at the Bicentennial Celebration of the Settlement of the City* (1830). Hawthorne's text responds to two of Drake's statements in this poem: 1) “the doomed Indian leaves behind no trace,” 2) “His heraldry is but a broken bow, His history but a tale of wrong and wo” (83). Were the pages of American history stained by Native American blood, which cried out “from the dust”? To address this question without antagonizing an audience already divided on issues of land ownership – for Native Americans – and slavery of Africans in America, Hawthorne raises questions of land ownership that do not involve Native Americans – perhaps to guard against people's predetermined stance on the issue of land ownership with regard to Native American claims. One likely reason for Hawthorne's attention to the issue of land ownership in the nineteenth century was the Indian Removal Act two decades earlier in 1830, which codified the United States

governmental policies toward Native Americans. This Act led to voluntary and forced removals for many tribes east of the Mississippi.

Hawthorne's writings upon leaving Concord show an increasing though often indirect attention to the plight of the Native Americans. In "The Old Manse," which Hawthorne composed just before moving back to Salem from Concord, he imagines the life of a Native American village that once may well have existed in Concord. Recalling the arrowheads he finds while roaming the fields of Concord with Henry David Thoreau, Hawthorne reflects on the departed Native American nations:

Such an incident builds up again the Indian village, amid its encircling forest, and recalls to life the painted chiefs and warriors, the squaws at their household toil, and the children sporting among the wigwams; while the little wind-rocked papoose swings from the branch of a tree. It can hardly be told whether it is a joy or a pain, after such a momentary vision, to gaze around in the broad daylight of reality, and see stone-fences, white houses, potatoe-fields, and men doggedly hoeing, in their shirt-sleeves and homespun panataloons. (*CE* 10: 11)

Although he undercuts this romantic memory by stating that "this is nonsense. The old Manse is better than a thousand wigwams," the almost belligerent tone of these latter words belies the tenderness with which the memory is given. Whatever his motive may have been in raising the tale of memory, the fact that he does raise this image suggests that the myth of the vanishing Indian is on his mind and elicits some reflection on their absence from the lands they once held.

This kind of reflection is further developed in other short stories written between "The Old Manse" and *The House of the Seven Gables*. Perhaps most tellingly, the few short stories he published after 1845 were not published in the *Democratic Review*, a paper that was embroiled more and more in party politics as the Civil War approached. In one of these short stories, "Main-street," published in his strongly abolitionist sister-in-

law's journal *Aesthetic Papers* in 1849, Hawthorne most starkly paints the picture of the "wrong" done to Native Americans by means of a traveling showman who presents United States history by means of a moving diorama. Upon the appearance the Squaw Sachem and Wappacowet, the narrator imagines the dismay that would happen if they should be able to look forward in time to "catch a prophetic glimpse of the noon-day marvels which the white man is destined to achieve; if he could see, as in a dream, the stone-front of the stately hall, which will cast its shadow over this very spot; if he should be aware that the future edifice will contain a noble Museum, where, among countless curiosities of earth and sea, a few Indian arrow-heads shall be treasured up as memorials of a vanished race!" (CE 11: 51). After good number of additional scenes of history have passed by, the narrator notes the myth of the vanishing Indian in more definite terms:

And the Indians, coming from their distant wigwams to view the white man's settlement, marvel at the deep track which he makes, and perhaps are saddened by a flitting presentiment, that this heavy tread will find its way all over the land; and that the wild woods, the wild wolf, and the wild Indian, will alike be trampled beneath it. Even so shall it be. The pavements of the Main-street must be laid over the red man's grave" (CE 11: 55).

The tone of these comments is by no means certain, but seems at least nostalgic and somewhat critical of "the critic" who at the end of the show asks for his quarter to be returned since the show was "a humbug" (CE 11: 82). The critic wants only to be entertained, and some of these scenes have made him uncomfortable. Hawthorne's treatment of American history and the wrongs committed as part of that history suggest that this show is something that must be viewed whether one wishes it or not, if one is to have any true sense of American history, with its wrongs as well as its opportunities.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, written the year before *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne had noted the Native American presence alongside the growing Boston community prior to the death of John Winthrop, whose lenient presence had mitigated the severity of the Puritans in the New World. As he finished *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne published two new stories – one of them was entitled “The Great Stone Face.” This work was based on a Native American legend that came finally came to pass in the life of a man named Ernest. As a boy his mother told him the legend, a story “so very old, that even the Indians, who formerly inhabited this valley, had heard it from their forefathers, to whom, as they affirmed, it had been murmured by the mountain streams, and whispered by the wind among the tree-tops” (CE 11: 28). Hawthorne’s story here demonstrates his interest in indigenous stories about America as well as his attention to Native American conceptions of their relation to nature. Nature was for them a living force, and Hawthorne’s characters in *The House of the Seven Gables* would do well to take a similar view of nature.

Legal Claims versus Claims “Too Vaguely Founded to be Put on Paper”

Although Native Americans are not visibly lurking in the corners of *The House of the Seven Gables* as they are in the streets of colonial Boston in *The Scarlet Letter*, their very absence is made glaringly apparent by repeated references to land deeds gotten through Native American sagamores and the similarities the disinherited Maules share with them. Many years after the Pyncheons had displaced the previous inhabitants of the land, a Pyncheon heir who was an antiquarian, became convinced that the Maules had been unjustly deprived of their living quarters. The narrator’s comments here come close to the expression of the book as a whole: “To a man living so much in the past, and so

little in the present, as the secluded and antiquarian old bachelor, a century and a half seemed not so vast a period as to obviate the propriety of substituting right for wrong” (CE 2: 23). In like manner, *The House of the Seven Gables* is a reminder that no amount of time of lost opportunity is too “vast a period” for a romancer like Hawthorne to participate in righting the wrongs of his nation. *The House of the Seven Gables* serves as a national caution: land gotten by unjust and greedy means is sure to bring a curse rather than a blessing upon the heads of those who have participated directly or indirectly in the original wrongdoing, and lack of care for that land only compounds the problem. The Pyncheons attempt to *own* the land while the Maules, like the Native Americans, attempt to *know* the land.

The ghostly narrator’s repeated references to an allusive Indian deed being sought by the greedy Pyncheons sounds a note of obvious absence. The memory of the Native Americans is preserved alongside Colonel Pyncheon’s portrait by the sketches of Native Americans on the map of the supposed Pyncheon territories of “Eastern Lands” that hung beside the Colonel’s portrait. The Pyncheons have prominently displayed these two framed pieces in the seven-gabled house:

One was a map of the Pyncheon territory at the eastward, not engraved, but the handiwork of some skilful old draftsman, and grotesquely illuminated with pictures of Indians and wild beasts, among which was seen a lion; the natural history of the region being as little known as its geography, which was put down most fantastically awry. The other adornment was the portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon, at two thirds length, representing the stern features of a Puritanic-looking personage, in a scull-cap, with a laced band and a grizzly beard; holding a Bible with one hand, and in the other uplifting an iron sword-hilt”(CE 2: 33)

“Indians and wild beasts” are mentioned in one breath and “a Bible” and “an iron sword-hilt” in another. The Native Americans seem little more than wild animals to Colonel

Pyncheon – barely human inhabitants. As he attempted to establish legal claims to Maule’s land, so his ancestor had laid legal claim to Native American lands in Maine but most likely against their will. The Puritan is depicted in his portrait as a figure of religious intolerance, but for his war-like attitude toward those who opposed his ownership of the land is made apparent in the pairing of this picture with the etchings on the map next to it. The sword is next to the map of the territories coveted by the Pyncheons from the colonial Colonel to the nineteenth-century Judge. The etchings on the map, however, show the Native Americans’ relation to the land, in stark contrast to the Puritan colonel’s. The map itself – with its demarcations of Pyncheon “property” – indicates the possessive characteristics of the Pyncheon’s coveted ownership, indicating not a mutuality between land and inhabitant but an imposing and destructive master/slave kind of relationship between landowner and land.

As Hawthorne’s text intimates, Colonel Pyncheon and Native Americans have radically opposed conceptions of humans’ relation to the land. In addition to his “rich estate” in Salem, the Colonel wanted to extend his holdings in Maine; the narrator draws attention to the Colonel’s attempt to establish

a claim, through an Indian deed, confirmed by a subsequent grant of the General Court, to a vast, and as yet unexplored and unmeasured tract of lands. These possessions – for as such they might almost certainly be reckoned – comprised the greater part of what is now known as Waldo County, in the State of Maine, and were more extensive than many a dukedom, or even a reigning prince’s territory, on European soil. When the pathless forest, that still covered this wild principality – as it inevitably must, though perhaps not till ages hence – to the golden fertility of human culture, it would be the source of incalculable wealth to the Pyncheon blood. (*CE* 2: 18)

Here Hawthorne notes the movement from Native American territory to Pyncheon possession, hinting of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny to which Colonel Pyncheon

obviously ascribes.¹⁹ The description of the grant brings Native Americans firmly into focus. The Colonel's claim is found at last in the "sheet of parchment" found in the recess in the wall of the House behind the portrait. Inside lies "an ancient deed, signed with the hieroglyphics of several Indian sagamores, and conveying to Colonel Pyncheon and his heirs, forever, a vast extent of territory at the eastward" (*CE* 2: 316). The "several Indian sagamores" are reminiscent of the remonstrances against treaties and grants enacted on the power of only a few rather than on the power of the unified chiefs and kings of the tribes who lay claim to specific lands.

By making a dubious deal with the sagamores, Colonel Pyncheon's ancestor had made a deal that he would condemn in others as a kind of deal with the devil. Drawing on a historical connection between one of Hawthorne's ancestors, the Judge John Hathorne, Walter Michaels relates the connection between the Salem witch trials and land ownership in detail, drawing numerous obvious parallels with the Colonel's actions against Matthew Maule, whom he accused of witchcraft. "Hawthorne," Michaels points out, "revives the connection between witchcraft and quarrels over property by beginning his narrative with a title dispute" (159). This historical connection between land claims and stern Puritans seeking to extend their holdings finds a corollary in some of the more harsh Puritan responses to Native Americans.

In the introduction to the *Centenary Edition* of Hawthorne's works, William Charvat points out several parallels between the historical Hawthornes and Pyncheons: "There are analogies between the Pyncheon and Hawthorne ancestors as persecutors of witches. The Hawthornes, like the Pyncheons, had once laid claim to extensive lands in

¹⁹ The word "inevitably" in this context is a sure marker of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and it is significant that Hawthorne ascribes this attitude to the villain Colonel Pyncheon.

Maine, but for this theme Hawthorne also drew upon the well-known story of General Knox's land patent in that state. There are parallels between Clifford's supposed murder of his uncle and the sensational murder in Salem in 1830 of Captain Joseph White by hirelings of a person who wanted to destroy White's will" (*CE* 2: xxiii). Several recent studies have considered the Maine land claims, and one of them has focused especially on the relations between the Salem residents and Maine claims. Bancroft notes this in detail, pointing out the discrepancies between what the whites stated and what the Native Americans understood. Thus, the "legal" claims may well have represented little more than subterfuge in the eyes of many Native Americans.

By focusing on the "eastern" lands of Maine rather than the western territories into which American expansionist policies were extending, Hawthorne draws attention to the "wrongs" done already in the east by the original settlers who took over Native American lands. Thus, rather than commenting directly on the current situation, Hawthorne suggests that past wrongs have already contributed inextricably to the current situation with regard to land ownership in the America east. Hawthorne's language suggests his displeasure with the land-grabbing self-justification of Pyncheon-like settlers: the General Court has "confirmed" the Indian deed, which suggests that such "Indian deeds" were not always authentic or valid documents. Some may have been forged, and others may have been gotten by tricking the Native Americans who typically could not read the documents for themselves. Further troubling the validity of this particular deed, the narrator notes the powerful influence of the Colonel in making people see things as he wanted to see them, and his influence may well have extended to the General Court that had "confirmed" the validity of the deed: "Had the Colonel survived

only a few weeks longer, it is probable that his great political influence, at home and abroad, would have consummated all that was necessary to render the claim available.”

But the narrator’s skeptical attitude toward Colonel Pyncheon comes most clearly into his focus in his comparison of the Colonel’s force of persuasion with that of his surviving son: “His son lacked not merely his father’s eminent position, but the talent and force of character to achieve it; he could therefore effect nothing by dint of political interest; and the bare justice or legality of the claim was not so apparent after the Colonel’s decease, as it had been pronounced in his lifetime” (*CE* 2: 18).

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, then, Hawthorne indicates that he is not satisfied with trying to settle the question of whose claims to the land are the most valid in a court of law even though the courts have commonly been used for such settlement ever since land disputes had broken out between Native Americans and white settlers. That question, he suggests, is itself the cause of much wrongdoing and legal manipulation that treats the land merely as an object to be owned and used. The kind of relationship established between land and tenant and the means of living on the land are more important than the legal documents that establish such claims. Since the claims of nature are stronger than the claims of the law, a relationship with nature is essential. Knowledge of the land, intimacy with the land, and participation with the land are crucial parts of “natural” relations to the land. Native Americans may have had such a relationship, but their removal – unjust though it was – suggests that their way of life may be gone forever in the Eastern lands of nineteenth-century New England. Squatters like old Matthew Maule may have had a somewhat “natural” relationship with the land as well, but land-grabbers like the old Colonel Pyncheon serves as a representative of wealthy land

speculators who have no relationship to the land and only wish to exploit it for economic gain.²⁰ These latter landowners – those in the mold of Colonel Pyncheon – receive Hawthorne’s strongest censure. Hawthorne’s Gothic text, with all of its groaning structures and characters, forcefully advocates the belief that exploitation of the land and its congenial inhabitants is a crime against nature.

Focusing on the wrongs endured by the Maules allows Hawthorne to create a situation analogous to that of the Native Americans in some ways, goading his readers to see the wrongs they are participating in without beating them over the head with his words. A squatter may not be a Native American, but his relation to the land is more congenial than that of a legal thief like Colonel Pyncheon. Numerous Quakers like the Maules were squatters who “swept away the fallen leaves” from the forest floor rather than killing Native Americans to inhabit the lands (*CE* 2: 10). The land, as well as Matthew Maule, seems to curse the Pyncheons. With Matthew Maule, whom the narrator calls “the original occupant of the soil,” the street known to the nineteenth-century narrator as Pyncheon-street had been called instead “Maule’s Lane” and consisted of little more than “a cow-path” that ran along the front of Maule’s cottage. Here also was “a natural spring of soft and pleasant water – a rare treasure on the sea-girt peninsula,” which had attracted Matthew Maule to this plot of land in the first place (2: 6). When the Pyncheons seized the land, the spring water became “hard and brackish” (*CE* 2: 10).

²⁰ Ronald Curran aptly takes note of the difference between the relations to the land held by Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon but pushes his point perhaps too far by asserting that the Maules held a “natural claim” to the land in contrast to “aristocratic” pretensions (76). This statement too blithely overlooks both Hawthorne’s conviction that we are all wrongers as well as being wronged and obscures the Native Americans who lived in the vicinity of Maule’s cottage.

These and other indicates that nature is turning against the Pyncheons continue to grow until Hepzibah is forced to take action.

While Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon both want the same piece of land, their reasons for wanting it are very different Matthew Maule considers this plot of land his home and Colonel Pyncheon considers it a bit of real estate, a commodity to be bought and sold at will. Their two very different views of the land can be seen in their relationship with it. Matthew Maule's dwelling, "a hut, shaggy with thatch" that resembled the "bird's-nest" description Clifford had assigned to Native American homes, was the first dwelling on the site where the House of the Seven Gables was eventually built. Rather than basing their relation to the land on legal ownership, Matthew Maule and other squatters based their relation to the land on their cultivation of the land and their close living proximity to the earth. This land is not the Maine territory that the Pyncheons allegedly "bought" from the Native Americans but a plot of uninhabited Salem land.

The actual reason for the competing claims of Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon is made obvious in the narrator's observation that "after some thirty or forty years, the site covered by this rude hovel had become exceedingly desirable in the eyes of a prominent and powerful personage, who asserted plausible claims to the proprietorship of this, and a large adjacent tract of land, on the strength of a grant from the legislature." But the narrator intimates that these "plausible claims" are not wholly convincing, especially to those given the distance of two centuries:

it appears to have been at least a matter of doubt, whether Colonel Pyncheon's claim were not unduly stretched, in order to make it cover the small metes and bounds of Matthew Maule. What greatly strengthens such a suspicion is the fact, that this controversy between two ill-matched

antagonists – at a period, moreover, laud it as we may, when personal influence had far more weight than now – remained for years undecided, and came to a close only with the death of the party occupying the disputed soil. The mode of his death, too, affects the mind differently, in our day, from what it did a century and a half ago. It was a death that blasted with strange horror the humble name of the dweller in the cottage, and made it seem almost a religious act to drive the plough over the little area of his habitation, and obliterate his place and memory from among men. . . . Old Matthew Maule, in a word, was executed for the crime of witchcraft. (*CE* 2: 7)

Colonel Pyncheon's "invidious acrimony" in the case of Matthew Maule was noted by observers even in "the frenzy of that hideous epoch," and they afterwards also "remembered how loudly Colonel Pyncheon had joined in the general cry, to purge the land from witchcraft." When Maule was executed, "his humble homestead had fallen an easy spoil into the Colonel Pyncheon's grasp" (*CE* 2: 8). Thus, the Maules were wronged by the Pyncheons, and the "humble homestead" which indicated a place of intimate relations began being treated as a possession, or "spoil," to be used and abused at will. The difference between land as homestead and land as possession indicate a radical difference of attitude and conception of the land and humans' place on it. While the Colonel considers the land as a commodity to add to his wealth, Matthew Maule considers it his home.

The Pyncheons' claim to the land where they had built their house, like their claim to the Maine lands they were trying to obtain, was a legal claim recorded on paper. But the author draws attention to other types of claims. Based on "impressions often too vaguely founded to be put on paper," the narrator expresses his confidence that guilt has hounded generations of Pyncheons because of their ill-gotten lands and wonders whether the later inheritors were not in fact just as culpable as the harsh Colonel Pyncheon who had committed the deed (*CE* 2: 20). Based on their close relationship to the land,

squatters like Maule in Salem and Native Americans in the “Eastern Lands” of Maine saw the land open to them rather than shut off from them because of a legal “paper” claims. The paper on which the deed is inscribed means little to the narrator; human relations to the land is experience rather than coerced. While the narrator has no problem making claims based on “impressions” that are not “put on paper,” the Pyncheons in his story are only too happy to create impressions *on* paper – deeds for the Native American lands in Maine and deeds for the Maule land. Because of these deeds, the papers that stipulate that the land is theirs, most of the Pyncheons have no problem claiming it as their own regardless of the guilt the narrator suggests they should feel. The Maules and the Native Americans both face the curse of the Pyncheon papers, papers that create legal claims opposed to the natural relations the Maules and the Native Americans have heretofore enjoyed.

By contrasting the Pyncheons’ legal claims against the “natural” squatting rights of the Maules, Hawthorne highlights the problematics of land ownership in America. The first notion of land ownership relies upon official sanctions demanded by the imposing figure of the first Pyncheon who enjoyed no real knowledge of the land, and the second relies on first-hand knowledge of “the lands which they or their fathers had wrested from the wild hand of Nature, by their own sturdy toil” (*CE* 2: 19). The Maules’ actions toward the land indicates a kind of lived relationship with and attendant cultivation of the land, but the original Pyncheons evince instead a greedy manipulation of land rights. Indeed, issues of land ownership haunt the Maules and the Pyncheons in their fight over property rights in a country that has been taken – often violently – from the Native Americans. Likewise, Colonel Pyncheon enacts violence against Maule – a “natural”

squatter who at least is coming to know the land – by lodging legal charges to displace him, thereby bringing Maule’s curse on the Pyncheon patriarch. The violence against the land and its occupants brings about a curse not only from the Maules but from Nature itself as the land becomes diseased, the well becomes polluted, the animals living there become less productive, and violent death becomes hereditary – passed on by nature from one generation to the next. The cursed land effectively curses those who have brought curses upon it. By presenting Nature as an entity that can be wronged (or restored, as Phoebe demonstrates) by human action, Hawthorne highlights the role and significance of Nature as an actuality in a “new” world version of Gothic romance.

Commenting on the manner in which the Pyncheon House was passed on to other Pyncheons, the narrator remarks that property inheritance is a “custom, so immemorial, that it looks like nature. In all the Pyncheons, this feeling had the energy of disease” (*CE* 2: 23). Land inheritance is not as straightforward thing as it seems. Nature itself is wronged by those who, like Colonel Pyncheon, attempt to own the land without developing any intimate knowledge of the land. Nature participates in the punishment of wrongdoing at the House –in fact plays a role in righting wrongs. Finally, as Holgrave comes to realize and Phoebe exemplifies, it takes a mutually sustaining relationship between the land and its inhabitants to restore the relations between humans and the non-human world. The House, the garden, the fountain, the chickens all take part in Nature because Nature has laid claim to them all. When Clifford expostulates about human edifices during his trip on the train, he exclaims, “ In the early epochs of our race, men dwelt in temporary huts, or bowers of branches, as easily constructed as a bird’s nest, and which they built – if it should be called building, when such sweet homes of a summer-

solstice rather grew, than were made with hands – which Nature, we will say, assisted them to rear, where fruit abounded, where fish and game were plentiful, or, most especially, where the sense of beauty was to be gratified by a lovelier shade than elsewhere, and a more exquisite arrangement of lake, wood, and hill. This life possessed a charm, which, ever since man quitted it, has vanished from existence” (*CE 2: 260*). This “vanishing” in such close conjunction to an “early epoch” with simple dwellings resounds with the myth of the vanishing Indian.

The fact that the Pyncheons continue to be one of the inheritors of the land, even when the land is apparently restored at the end of *The House of the Seven Gables*, suggests that the question of “rightful” ownership is not simply a question of *who* owns it. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Pyncheon family has itself become divided, and Clifford is sent to prison on a dubious conviction of murdering a relative who has died an apoplectic death that is coming to seem hereditary but only for harsh Pyncheons. The eighteenth century saw the rise of a new dominant view of land – land as property to be claimed as one’s own. As such, it could easily fall into the various categories of land as commodity, land as home (the domestic space), or land as gift. While the predominant view of land as commodity ceded some ground the view of land as home, Hawthorne seems to emphasize that the view of land as gift is more admirable. Rather than advocating for property rights of any particular groups, Hawthorne suggests that land should be accepted as a gift, much in the same tenor suggested by the words of the Native Americans in the books Hawthorne had read.

Thus, Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* invites an exploration of the inhabitants of the land and, seemingly, a question of who the “real” owners of the land

are. However, the “real” owners are, in the end, less significant to Hawthorne than the kind of ownership that is practiced. The land reacts against greedy, violent owners but responds graciously to those who cultivate and nourish it. More importantly, this house becomes linked with the land so much that it seems itself a part of nature. Likewise, the crime is specific to America – abuse of the land and its inhabitants in the hope of economic self-improvement exposes the greed of some of the land speculators who roamed the territories in colonial America. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, it is not land as commodity or even land as home but instead the concept of land as gift that is most praised.

Phoebe, whose name associates with Nature, plays the most important part in redeeming the land, the house, and the family.²¹ The soil becomes less fruitful, the chickens become anemic, and the house itself falls into decay, at least until the appearance of a later generation, particularly in the person of Phoebe – a character associated with sunshine throughout the novel. Despite her appearance as a naïvely eager advocate of goodness and beauty, an appearance which has been disparaged repeatedly by critics as damnably over-sweet, Phoebe is successful in bringing transformation to the house, the land, and the Pyncheon family by her nurturing relationship with all the elements of her environment. Phoebe’s prefiguration in the person of Alice Pyncheon

²¹ The mythological roots of Phoebe suggest Nature in a variety of ways. Phoebe is another name for the Greek Artemis or the Roman Diana, the goddess of the hunt who is also associated with the moon. Phoebe is also the feminine form of Phoebus, which is another name for Apollo, the god of the sun. This latter connection is especially pertinent, given the way sunshine is spilled into the story and associated directly with Phoebe. The narrator remarks, for example, that the sun brightens the garden where Phoebe works so joyfully: “The eye of Heaven seemed to look down into it, pleasantly, and with a peculiar smile; as if glad to perceive that Nature, elsewhere overwhelmed, and driven out of the dusty town, had here been able to retain a breathing-place” (*CE* 2: 87). When Phoebe leaves for a weekend visit, the day gets dark, and the sun comes back out when she returns. She also insists on letting the sunlight into the room where the dead Judge is sitting.

plays a part in restoring the land through the presence of the rosebush Alice planted and from which Phoebe gathers roses to brighten the house:

[The rose-bush] had been planted by Alice Pyncheon – she was Phoebe’s great-great-grand-aunt – in soil which, reckoning only its cultivation as a garden-plot, was now unctuous with nearly two hundred years of vegetable decay. Growing as they did, however, out of the old earth, the flowers still sent a fresh and sweet incense up to their Creator; nor could it have been the less pure and acceptable, because Phoebe’s young breath mingled with it, as the fragrance floated past the window. (*CE* 2: 71)

Nature is not something to be captured or overthrown at will, Hawthorne suggests in his presentation of Phoebe and Alice, but a reality to be nurtured and that can nurture in return. Gillian Brown calls *The House of the Seven Gables* a “narrative of the democratization of property,” and calls attention to Hawthorne’s emphasis on woman as the means to work redemption of property rights: “Hawthorne’s reversal of the horrific plot of inheritance through the beneficial plot of domesticity attributes to woman the symbolic function of redeeming property, removing its affiliations with the past so that property can be safely heritable, and so that women as well as men can securely inherit it” (110). While the figure of woman does initiate such redemption, a part of the land cannot be redeemed. The blood that has been spilled cannot be revived, the Native Americans that have been pushed out of their lands cannot, in the pages of the romance at least, be reinstated. Thus, the redemption is only partial, but that may be Hawthorne’s point. Right relations between the land and humans and humans amongst themselves can facilitate redemption and work back toward justice, but such redemption can never fully undo the evils that were committed.

The earth, it seems, rewards the movement toward reconciliation and renews all who turn to it. Both Hepzibah and Phoebe are associated, however briefly, with Native

Americans through their use of “Indian meal” and their making of “Indian cakes.”²² Phoebe and Hepzibah, opposed as they are to Judge Pyncheon, are also far enough removed from their dreadful original Pyncheon ancestor to dissociate themselves from his coveted Native American land claims, and they welcome Holgrave’s insider’s story of how the Maules tricked the Pyncheons by hiding the deed in the Pyncheons’ own house – Hepzibah pitying her cousin Jaffrey who was as covetous to own the Native American territories as Colonel Pyncheon had been to obtain the Maule’s land. Holgrave gives the last word with his declaration that “[t]hus, they bartered their eastern-territory for Maule’s garden-ground” (*CE* 2: 316). Land-grabbing had led to the rise and the fall of the Pyncheons, and the name of Maule (through Holgrave, the secret Maule descendant) became associated not only with their earlier plot of land but with all that the Pyncheons had taken hold of in Salem. Thus, the squatter’s “natural rights” seem superior to the land baron’s “legal rights.” Such a conclusion, however, seems a wilful forgetting of what Hawthorne has so carefully shown earlier – that the land was inhabited by Native Americans before the arrival of any European settlers. And so it is perhaps not surprising that they are separated from the land at the end as well – the surviving characters leave it behind for the Judge’s house in the city. No Native Americans are present anymore, and the land is thus, fittingly, deserted. The curse against the Pyncheons seem lifted as the land is again treated as gift, and the garden grows abundantly again, the fountain bubbles up again, the chickens lay eggs again. Although aggression and greed upset the balance

²² Their position in the romance leads Teresa Goddu to call it “a novel that anxiously polices the market’s intrusion into the domestic sphere of middle-class culture” and notes that “Phoebe’s ‘homely magic’ is able to cleanse the house of market intrusion” (105). Although the home is certainly important in Hawthorne’s text, I think an even greater emphasis lies on the way to respond to the land in the face of inherited wrongdoing.

with nature, Hawthorne's text suggests in the end that it may not be as much a sin to own the land as to abuse the land. While the land may not easily be "scattered to its original atoms" (*CE* 2: 2), Hawthorne suggests that until the day when that does happen, mutually caring relationship with the land is not mere fancy but may actually be achieved, at least to a degree.

Clifford – who, like Hawthorne, is an artist and lover of the beautiful – frames the very idea of land ownership as a pernicious influence on human life: "What we call real estate – the solid ground to build a house on – is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests. A man will commit almost any wrong – he will heap up an immense pile of wickedness, as hard as granite, and which will weigh as heavily upon his soul, to eternal ages – only to build a great, gloomy, dark-chambered mansion, for himself to die in, and for his posterity to be miserable in" (*CE* 2: 263). When Clifford, with Hepzibah, is fleeing the House after the Judge's death, he waxes almost poetic as he tells a passenger on the train they have taken about the gloomy old house and the part of the landscape that it holds. He declares, "it were a relief to me, if that house could be torn down, or burnt up, and so the earth be rid of it, and grass be sown abundantly over its foundation" (*CE* 2: 262). Other than the narrator's remarks, Holgrave – a Maule descendant – is given the final word, calling the entire episode of Pyncheon ownership of the land as "this whole long drama of wrong and retribution" (*CE* 2: 316). Again, the idea of wronging and being wronged is presented in terms of the cyclical and inescapable history of human progress that marks Hawthorne's romance.

Even Holgrave, despite the fact that he is tempted to exploit and control nature, plays a part in restoring nature. After all, it is he who started reviving the garden prior to

Phoebe's arrival. As he tells her, "I dig, and hoe, and weed, in this black old earth, for the sake of refreshing myself with what little nature and simplicity may be left in it, after men have so long sown and reaped here" (*CE* 2: 91). The garden is restored more and more, first by Holgrave, then by Phoebe. With the garden and with the chickens, Phoebe has more success than Holgrave – in large part because she does not attempt to control them so much as to develop an affinity with them. Holgrave points out the difference quite astutely: "Those venerable personages in the coop, too, seem very affably disposed. You are lucky to be in their good graces so soon! They have known me much longer, but never honor me with nay familiarity, though hardly a day passes without my bringing them food." While Holgrave supposes that it is because the chickens are rather aristocratic and that they recognize in Phoebe the blood of a Pyncheon, Phoebe demurs: "The secret is... that I have learned how to talk with hens and chickens" (*CE* 2: 90). While Holgrave claims some knowledge of the chickens, Phoebe claims greater intimacy and sympathy with them. When in the process of being restored, the garden itself began to offer its own restoration. The "paltry rivulet of life that flowed through the garden" refreshed the resurrected Clifford who had been imprisoned for so many years away from nature on dubious charges of murder. These delights of nature "proved so greatly to Clifford's benefit. They had the earth-smell in them, and contributed to give him health and substance" (*CE* 2: 153).

The marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave, Pyncheon and Maule, suggests that issues of legal inheritance may best be resolved by a natural union between competing parties who have learned to appreciate and cultivate Nature rather than manipulating and controlling Nature. Their shared declarations of love resulted in a transfiguration of the

earth itself: “The bliss, which makes all things true, beautiful, and holy, shone around this youth and maiden.... They transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again, and themselves the first two dwellers in it... But how soon the heavy earth-dream settled down again!” (*CE* 2: 307). The house of Pyncheon and the house of Maule have joined in a classic resolution that resembles the reconciliatory ending of Shakespearean comedy. And this is possible because humans have drawn near to each other and to Nature.

By taking note of the interconnectedness of Nature and humans in Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, we may productively reassess the Gothic rationale of his text. The centrality of land ownership is repeatedly emphasized through the history of the plot of earth on which the House is built. The old Indian deed which Judge Pyncheon is seeking reminds readers that the land was first taken from the Native Americans, and the squatting rights of the Maules are overturned by the legal manipulations of the Pyncheons. The surviving Pyncheons at the time of the events of the story are struggling over ownership of the plot of land that is diseased by the presence of the usurping Pyncheons, darkened by the presence of a wronged Maule descendant whose identity is hidden behind the name Holgrave, and unexpectedly brightened by the work of a young woman named Phoebe who has been distanced from this land until the present moment. The cursed land seems to curse those who have brought curses upon it. This view of nature as an entity that can be wronged or restored by human action provides Hawthorne with the material of a Gothic romance that intermingles the workings of Nature and humans to investigate rightful human relations to the land.

Gothic Imprints: Humans, Nature, and the Supernatural

The happy ending of *The House of the Seven Gables* has left many critics dissatisfied. How could Hawthorne write a complex Gothic romance only to end it with a comic resolution and hints of mysterious processes of Nature and Providence, if not a full-blown mechanical *deus ex machina*? Ringe offers a helpful observation by comparing the resolution to that of other Gothic works: “The curse afflicts the Pyncheon family until, in a *dénouement* that recalls the oldest Gothic romances, the property is at last restored to its proper owner, the descendant of Matthew Maule, when he marries the last of the Pyncheon girls” (153). Houses and money join together in this sunny ending. Upon the death of Jaffrey Pyncheon’s son in foreign lands, “Clifford became rich; so did Hepzibah; so did our little village-maiden, and through her, that sworn foe of wealth and all manner of conservatism – the wild reformer – Holgrave!” (*CE* 2: 313). And two men observing them riding off away from the house to Judge’s mansion in the city watch in disbelief at what has just occurred. One of them remarks that “Old Maid Pyncheon... rides off in her carriage with a couple of hundred thousand [dollars] – reckoning her share, and Clifford’s, and Phoebe’s – and some say twice as much! If you choose to call it luck, it is all very well; but if we are to take it as the will of Providence, why, I can’t exactly fathom it!” (*CE* 2: 318). Nature, humans, and the supernatural are mysteriously intertwined, it seems, in the turn of events at the end. And while the processes of Nature and Providence are very important to the resolution of this story, what is often overlooked is the role of humans in resisting or embracing the redemptive movement of either Nature or Providence.

Since his youth, Hawthorne had read Sir Walter Scott's romances as well as his critical commentaries on literature. According to Scott, the Gothic novel typically ended in one of two ways. Distinguishing the work of Horace Walpole from that of his followers, Scott spelled it out in terms of beliefs about the supernatural:

Romantic narrative is of two kinds, – that which, being in itself possible, may be the matter of belief at any period; and that which, though held impossible by more enlightened ages, was yet consonant with the faith of earlier times. The subject of *The Castle of Otranto* is of the latter class. Mrs. Radcliffe, a name not to be mentioned without the high respect due to her genius, has endeavoured to effect a compromise between these two different styles of narrative, by referring her prodigies to an explanation founded on natural causes, in the latter chapters of her romances. To this improvement upon the Gothic romance there are so many objections, that we own ourselves inclined to prefer, as more simple and impressive, the narrative of Walpole, which details supernatural incidents as they would have been readily believed and received in the eleventh or twelfth century... These substitutes for supernatural agency are frequently to the full as improbable as the machinery which they are introduced to explain away and to supplant. (234–35)

The first type of Gothic described here by Scott is a stronger sort of work that requires the reader to enter sympathetically into the medieval world or mindset that characterized Gothic works. The second simply gave natural explanations for what seemed like overdrawn supernatural machinery, thereby making the work little more than a puerile exercise in fanciful writing. Scott places Horace Walpole firmly in the former category and Anne Radcliffe somewhere between these two approaches, a middle ground that Hawthorne chose for this aspect of his Gothic writing as well as for many others. In the preface of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne notes that he will “mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor” in this romance (1). Indeed, his focus seems not to be on the supernatural so much as the natural, which results in a very different kind of romance than most of the British Gothic romances.

While the supernatural could readily be implicated with the natural events that transpire in *The House of the Seven Gables*, it could just as easily be entirely missing.

This interstitial region is the space occupied by Hawthorne, which may help to explain why he gives the kind of resolution that has left many critics dissatisfied – especially critics in the twentieth century and later. By the time he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne had experimented with the Gothic form many times; many of his readers would doubtless have recognized the marks of the Gothic genre in Hawthorne's text. A beautiful woman, purer than her surroundings, would withstand evil through her purity rather than her intellect. But in nineteenth-century New England, at least prior to the Civil War, Gothic works were read with much less incredulity than they are today. They represented serious engagement with the question of boundaries between the human, "Nature," and the supernatural. Donald Ringe argues in his penetrating study of American Gothic that "Hawthorne's skill in walking 'that difficult and narrow line between the Natural and the Supernatural' was recognized in his own day and suggested to at least one reader of *Mosses from an Old Manse* his relation to writers such as Sir Walter Scott... More important, however, is Hawthorne's belief that this neutral territory provided the basis for much of his work" (156). Hawthorne's neutral territory lay not only within the regions bordering the Natural and the Supernatural but within the borders shared by each of them and humans. Like Emerson, he advocated the idea that humans participate in divinity, although he never made bold statements such as "I am part and which parcel of God." And his study of human nature often implies that humans are intricately related to the world of non-human nature as well but that the non-human world

is more than a projection of the human mind. His attitudes toward land ownership show this amorphous relation between humans and nature.

Earlier versions of British and American Gothic romances play a part in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, and the American version he creates, which relies heavily on the liminal spaces between the natural landscape, the human imagination, the human body, and the supernatural implication in natural processes and spaces. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne claimed the artistic license to cross boundaries as he pleased, but he also claimed – dubiously – only to “mingle the Marvellous” with Nature in *The House of the Seven Gables* “as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor” (CE 2: 1). Most of these supposed boundaries, however, do not appear impenetrable even in *The House of the Seven Gables*. It is clear that Nature, like the cultural landscape, is a real place for Hawthorne – not simply existing in his mind but actually there. Concerning Hawthorne's sense of the actual existence of a world external to the human mind, Donald Ringe notes the influence of Scottish Common Sense philosophy that reacted against Humean ideas of the pure subjectivity of the individual to posit the primacy of external reality on the one hand and, on the other, the influence of conceptions of the imagination and of the supernatural that the Gothic provided.²³ “Hawthorne,” observes Ringe, “established a middle ground between the real and the imaginary where most of his fictions take place” (9). Hawthorne gives a different definition of romance in the preface of each of his romances, and in *The House of the Seven Gables*, he identifies the “atmospheric medium” of this type of romance as one that

²³ Similarly, Alison Easton discusses Hawthorne's chosen narrative modes as a chosen position between the “two theories of the human subject that were his cultural inheritance: Scottish Common Sense psychology and the Romantic ideas of the individual.” She concludes that “[n]either proved adequate for him, but both affected the way he conceived the dilemma” (ix).

allows the author “to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows” as he will. “The point of view in which this Tale comes under the Romantic definition,” he continues, “lies in the attempt to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us” (*CE* 2: 2). Rather than going back to the medieval era as in the British Gothic works he read, however, Hawthorne goes back to what could be considered the “medieval” era of New England history – the time of its first settlement by Europeans, most particularly that of the British who eventually took over the new world.

In a standard Gothic stroke of Hawthorne’s brush, the house becomes linked with the land so much that it seems itself a part of Nature. Lundblad takes note of “Colonel Pyncheon’s acquisition of poor Maule’s soil part of the “mysterious crime” that contributes to the Gothic texture of *The House of the Seven Gables*, and she alludes to the “lost Indian contract” that was said to prove that Colonel Pyncheon had “acquired a large and fertile piece of land from an Indian tribe,” but she does not draw any connections between these events or recognize them as crimes against nature, as they are presented in Hawthorne’s text (62–65). The land reacts against greedy, violent owners but responds graciously to those who cultivate and nourish it. Likewise, the crime is specific to America – abuse of the land and its inhabitants in the hope of economic self-improvement has perpetuated great wrongs, whether through slavery, Native American removals, or simply the destruction of the Natural world through careless industrialization or greedy use of the land.

Like his ancestor the Colonel, Jaffrey Pyncheon is a miser and a gross materialist. Although the Judge is hailed as a great man, Hepzibah distrusts her cousin. And the narrator hastens to take her side, stating, “Hidden from mankind – forgotten by himself,

or buried so deeply under a sculptured and ornamented pile of ostentatious deeds, that his daily life could take no note of it – there may have lurked some evil and unsightly thing.” Further, the narrator asserts, “Men of strong minds, great force of character, and a hard texture of the sensibilities, are very capable of falling into mistakes of this kind... They possess vast ability in grasping, and arranging, and appropriating to themselves, the big, heavy, solid unrealities, such as gold, landed estate, offices of trust and emolument, and public honors” (*CE* 2: 229). And Judge Pyncheon has no lack of confidence in his own ability to effect what he wills, even to the point of calling himself the “all-powerful friend” of Clifford. When he threatens his cousin Hepzibah, telling her it is only because of him that Clifford has been freed from prison, Hepzibah retorts almost viciously: “‘You!’ answered Hepzibah. I never will believe it! He owed his dungeon to you; his freedom, to God’s providence!’” Judge Pyncheon, churchgoer that he is – unlike old Hepzibah, repeats his claim that Clifford’s freedom is all owing to the Judge’s actions, adds, “And I come hither now to decide whether he shall retain his freedom” (*CE* 2: 233). Although Hepzibah finally bends to her cousin’s threats, the Judge’s opportune death effects what she cannot effect on her own – the continued freedom of her brother, who had been falsely accused of murder so many years before.

For all its contrived and seemingly sinister structures, then, the Gothic romance functions for Hawthorne as a mode of serious work – the work of awaking the national conscience to the wrongs committed against and sometimes by those outside the dominant voices of Euro-American identity. The worst Puritans in Hawthorne’s writing are land-grabbing, money-grubbing patriarchs whose intransigent arrogance is wrapped in a cloak of religiosity that shows little actual respect for divine, human, or natural

realities outside of themselves. Colonel Pyncheon's religious activities seem motivated chiefly by his desire to expand his land holdings, and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon serves in the church and as a member of the Bible Society but uses that public identity to mask his greed. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, then, Hawthorne suggests a reality of overlapping relations between the natural landscape, man-made buildings, and possibly supernatural involvement in those houses and lands.

Ultimately, *The House of the Seven Gables* suggests, the fraught issue of land ownership in America may not ever be resolved entirely, but the operations of the natural world play a part in any resolution and so does a supernatural realm vaguely alluded to through apparently active curses and repeated reference to "Providence." The Judge's intension of getting the House for himself is undone by his timely death – timely from the viewpoint of almost any of the characters other than the Judge himself. And his death, followed closely by the death of his son in foreign lands, recapitulates the issue of land ownership, and those who were about to be wronged by the Judge actually inherit his lands. The narrator stands over the body of the dead Judge, gloating to such a degree that his own personal involvement in the Judge's death seems a possibility. One wonders if the narrator is to be taken seriously as a hidden character in the story who really has walked the streets of the town as he intimates.²⁴ Whether the Judge's death came about as a natural event, through human agency, or by supernatural means is not clear; neither is the purport of the book as a whole, leaving unanswered questions about the connections between nature, humans, and the divine. Hawthorne plants neighbors in the

²⁴ In the first paragraph of the first chapter, for example, the narrator states: "On my occasional visits to the town aforesaid, I seldom fail to turn down Pyncheon-street, for the sake of passing through the shadow of these two antiquities; the great elm-tree, and the weather-beaten edifice" (*CE* 2: 5). The narrator is obviously not Hawthorne since he lived in this town rather than going there for "occasional visits."

last scene to emphasize these unanswered questions: “If you choose to call it luck, it is all very well,” says one neighbor to the other as they observe those who have inherited the Judge’s property ride off to town in peace and plenty, “but if we are to take it as the will of Providence, why, I can’t exactly fathom it!” (*CE* 2: 318). This comment comes in spite of Holgrave’s strenuous efforts to prove that things have happened “naturally” and not as the result of crimes committed by Clifford, Hepzibah, or anyone else – including himself. Holgrave’s accumulation of “facts” to exonerate them suggests can be read as a genuine effort to keep them from wrongful defamation – especially since Clifford went through such defamation once already. On the other hand, this agglomeration may instead be intended to create an explanation that satisfies only those who do not realize that even his “cold hard facts” involve an interpretive agenda and may conceal as much as they reveal. Several distinct possibilities exist – the Judge’s death is the result of nature’s work, the result of human interference, the result of supernatural interference, or a combination of these possibilities. Human actions result in “natural events,” perhaps as the result of supernatural interference, perhaps as a matter of fitting coincidence. But, as Sir Walter Scott points out, such fitting coincidence may be just as “incredible” as reliance on overdone supernatural machinery.

As in other Gothic romances, Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* investigates the connections between humans, the land, and the supernatural. While the supernatural is taken sometimes as a force working *above* Nature, in Hawthorne’s text (as in Radcliffe’s), the supernatural is presented primarily as a force somehow woven *inside* Nature. The connection between nature and the supernatural is a matter of debate at crucial moments in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Has Nature simply run its course, or

has it been energized by a supernatural power to bring about death at this opportune moment? The Colonel thinks he's above any curse – nature cannot touch him – he is lord of all that his eyes can see. Death shows him that nature can indeed touch him – whether through the actions of a supernatural agency invoked by Maule or through the inevitable process whereby death comes to all living beings. However, the cause of his death is a matter of debate as is Judge Jaffrey's similar death years later. In the case of the Colonel in the seventeenth century, three opinions are formed: one, that his death was caused a natural event (death by apoplexy); secondly, that his death was caused by supernatural means as a result of the curse pronounced by Matthew Maule – “God will give him blood to drink!” (*CE* 2: 8) – or, finally, that his death was actually a murder caused by human action. The narrator hastily tries to discount the third supposition as mere gossip, and he professes skepticism that the second opinion. This leaves him with the idea that nature has killed the Colonel; it was a “natural” event, not an act of God or man. But these same questions arise when the Judge is found dead in the chair in the House in the nineteenth century. Was his death caused by nature, by humans, or by an act of Providence? Holgrave constructs an answer to this question that says that nature alone caused it without any human or divine agency. However, hidden actions – whether human or supernatural – may well have triggered the “natural” occurrence at just such the opportune moment.

In the manner of Renaissance pastoral, Hawthorne depicts Nature as a corrective to human attitudes and behaviors which depart from an ordered world of which humans are a part. By interpolating features of British Gothic romances with the American landscape in ways that engage questions of land ownership raised by Emerson's *Nature*,

Hawthorne creates an American Gothic that translates older concerns of the natural, the supernatural, and the human with the already old “new world” situation of America. The particularly problematic issue of land ownership in America depicted in Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* traces its roots back to the often bloody disinheritance of Native Americans and the abrupt imposition of human civilization upon a land that many of the new European inhabitants – particularly the Puritans – had not come to know but had simply carved out for their own economic gain. Only when there is a mutually nurturing relationship between Nature and humans can curses be overthrown and prosperity enjoyed.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Periodical Infusion of the Primal Spirit”:
From Seeing Nature to Seeking “Nature’s God” in *The Blithedale Romance*

Thank Providence for spring! The earth—and man himself, by sympathy with his birthplace—would be far other than we find them if life toiled wearily onward without this periodical infusion of the primal spirit.... Alas for the worn and heavy soul, if whether in youth or age, it have outlived its privilege of spring-time sprightliness. From such a soul, the world must hope no reformation of its evil.

—Hawthorne, “Buds and Bird-Voices” (1843)

In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne had depicted contrasting views of nature as benign or malignant but both views dependent upon Puritan allegory as a way of “reading” Nature. In *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Hawthorne linked questions of property rights to Gothic and Native American views of a supernaturally-infused Nature with the power to transfigure even curses into movements toward reconciliation and redemption. In *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), these earlier views of Nature still hover in the background of Hawthorne’s imaginative consciousness as he critiques Transcendentalist views of Nature and reform. Although their vision of cultural reformation does not become a reality, the Transcendental reformers of Hawthorne’s romance – even the skeptical Miles Coverdale – are themselves reformed by Nature. While Hawthorne’s first two major romances of America relied upon centuries of New England history, exhuming Puritan ghosts and finding Hawthorne’s “connection with the long past” (*CE* 2: 6), *The Blithedale Romance* turns to his own personal experience at Brook Farm, a Transcendentalist community whose members had planted themselves in Nature in order to live according to natural law. Their newfound accord with the natural

order, they expected, would serve as an example of natural reform for the broader society of nineteenth-century New England.

In the preface of *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne calls his experience with the Transcendentalist community at Brook Farm “certainly, the most romantic episode of [my] own life – essentially a daydream, and yet a fact” (CE 3: 2). That *The Blithedale Romance* resembles an “episode” of Hawthorne’s own life marks its difference from his two previous romances that lived and moved and had their being within a consciousness of New England history. The episode at Brook Farm, although in a different context from his lone walks through the country or his rambles with Emerson or other Transcendentalists in Concord, resembles one of the “periodical” excursions into Nature that Hawthorne describes in “Buds and Bird Voices,” and that excursion – like the Brook Farm “episode” – is not without its effects even if widespread societal reform does not occur in its wake. The project at Blithedale, in the end, Coverdale avers, represented little more than an “exploded scheme for beginning the life of Paradise anew” (CE 3: 9).

Ever since his turn to writing these longer romances, Hawthorne’s experiences with the Transcendentalists have been on his mind. In Concord, Hawthorne and his bride Sophia had developed relationships not only with the Emersons but with Henry David Thoreau, Elizabeth Hoar, Bronson Alcott, Ellery Channing, and as has already been noted, Margaret Fuller. In the introductory preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne remembers his time with the Transcendentalist community first at the Transcendentalist community at Brook Farm and then in the Transcendentalist neighborhood of Concord where he had daily interactions with other Transcendentalists. His recollection, he writes, occurs

[a]fter my fellowship of toil and impracticable schemes, with the dreamy brethren of Brook Farm; after living for three years within the subtle influence of an intellect like Emerson's; after those wild, free days on the Assabeth, indulging fantastic speculations beside our fire of fallen boughs, with Ellery Channing; after talking with Thoreau about pine-trees and Indian relics, in his hermitage at Walden... (CE 1: 25)

Although this passage seems to depreciate the Transcendentalists, indicating as it does Hawthorne's conviction that the Transcendentalists were dreamers and full of "impracticable schemes," Hawthorne is himself a dreamer. Further, his writings reveal neither whole-hearted acceptance nor outright rejection of Transcendentalist views; instead, he values the Transcendentalists as one group of his interlocutors.

And while *The Scarlet Letter* does offer a kind of proleptic response to Transcendentalism under the cover of fiction, *The Blithedale Romance* provides a more direct response that again employs pastoral as a mode of engagement and critique of Transcendentalism. In the preface of this later work, Hawthorne admits that "the Author has ventured to make free with his old, and affectionately remembered home, at Brook Farm, as being, certainly, the most romantic episode of his own life – essentially a daydream, and yet a fact – and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality" (CE 3: 2). This romance, the last one written before leaving for his consulship in Liverpool, England, fittingly represents his most direct resistance of the Transcendentalists and their views of nature. While his work is imaginative literature – taking the form of romances – yet it is connected to his actual life.

Hawthorne uses Transcendentalist idealism to create a vision of the ideal society living according to "natural law" in a world where Nature is infused with spirituality. Finding consistent patterns in Nature to which humans can conform in order to experience a life in tune with Nature is the project of the Blithedalers. Such goals are

pastoral in the sense that the search for “natural law” frames human life in terms of its relation to Nature. However, the kind of seeing necessary to such a project is problematized in Hawthorne’s treatment: a blithe view of Nature ends up being a largely blind view of Nature that sees only “self, self, self” (in the manner of Hollingsworth) or sees everything with “too much sympathy” for humans (in the manner of Coverdale) instead of truly *seeing* Nature. The intrusion of Death into “the New Arcady” represents Hawthorne’s most dramatic statement against the capacity of Nature alone to effect a “tranquil” life. The disillusionment that follows in the wake of this project shows the dire need for guides of some sort to mediate Nature to disillusioned humans. Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance* suggests that literary forms that have sought the vitality of Nature before – like the pastoral – as well as “Nature’s God,” may help to discover Nature in its true form. Otherwise, the Blithedalers and those who adulate them will be left with “a mock system” or a “counterfeit Arcadia” rather than a truer view of the world in which “reason and faith” are joined in the way that Emerson and Hawthorne both advocate.

While living in Concord with Ralph Waldo Emerson and other Transcendentalists as neighbors, Hawthorne wrote what is perhaps his most direct Nature writing, a brief sketch entitled “Buds and Bird-Voices” (1843). He ends this sketch with an invigorated flourish that emphasizes the parallels between the seasons of Nature and the cycles of human life:

Thank Providence for spring! The earth—and man himself, by sympathy with his birth-place—would be far other than we find them, if life toiled wearily onward, without this periodical infusion of the primal spirit. Will the world ever be so decayed, that spring may not renew its greenness? Can man be so dismally age-stricken, that no faintest sunshine of his youth may revisit him once a year? It is impossible. . . . Alas for the worn and heavy soul, if, whether in youth or age, it have outlived its privilege of springtime sprightliness! From such a soul, the world must hope no

reformation of its evil—no sympathy with the lofty faith and gallant struggles of those who contend in its behalf. Summer works in the present, and thinks not of the future; Autumn is a rich conservative; Winter has utterly lost its faith, and clings tremulously to the remembrance of what has been; but Spring, with its outgushing life, is the true type of the Movement!” (CE 10: 157–58)

Rather than beginning with spring and ending with winter, Hawthorne begins with summer and ends with spring, drawing attention to the natural cycles of life that bring about not only decay but also rejuvenation. While springtime characterizes the first excitement of “the movement” of Transcendentalism in *The Blithedale Romance* as well as in this sketch, a new spring is desperately needed at the end of *The Blithedale Romance*. Speaking of the revitalizing power of springtime, he emphasizes physical rejuvenation around him not just in terms of a mental change but of a spiritual one. Thus, Hawthorne shares with Transcendentalist such as Emerson an interest in matter *and* spirit. In *Nature*, an essay that has come to characterize Transcendentalism, Emerson exults, “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture” (CW 1: 18). While such a belief in the correspondence between Nature and Spirit characterizes both Emerson and Hawthorne, the direction of influence is different for these two men. For Hawthorne, spring happens not because of “some state of the mind,” but instead spring brings about a rejuvenated “state of the mind.” In this sketch, as in many of his other nature writings, Hawthorne depicts Nature as a non-human reality from which humans can receive a “periodic infusion of the primal spirit.”

Comparing Hawthorne’s earlier and later Salem writings to winter and his Concord writings to spring, Robert Milder suggests that Hawthorne’s hope of a spring of

the soul was always overtaken in his later romances by the sense of a spiritual winter: “The richness and tension of the mature romances derive from the collision of figurative ‘Concord’ and ‘Salem,’ ‘summer’ and ‘winter,’ – the naturalist’s prospect of a life of the unfettered senses and the skeptic’s fear... that nature, however alluring, meant moral anarchy and spiritual oblivion.” Further, Milder claims that Hawthorne invokes “a sensibility powerfully attracted by the vision of a ‘natural’ life – wild, sensuous, and imaginatively free – yet obliged by guilt and fear to record in the end a stern, self-suppressing ‘No’” (170). Milder draws attention to the mixture of “summer” and “winter” that appears in Hawthorne’s romances, arguing that this is the tension felt by a naturalist and a skeptic. While Milder acknowledges within Hawthorne’s treatment of nature “gestures toward a supernaturalism,” he dismisses such gestures as little more than an attempt to “defend the self against the moral uncleanness of the body and [to] resist the obliteration of time” (197). For numerous critics like Milder, Hawthorne is a naturalist whose skepticism overwhelms his impulse to search for goodness in the natural world; the natural world, like the human world, is hopelessly blighted and subject to eventual annihilation.⁷⁷

The “darkness” of Hawthorne first identified by Melville and often repeated since the turn to modernist irony is not the whole story of Hawthorne, however, and we may hope along with Hawthorne that it is not the end of the story. This is apparent not only in

⁷⁷ Roberta Weldon makes this claim most directly in her largely psychoanalytical reading of Hawthorne’s treatment of gender and death. This is made evident in the introduction, where Weldon declares that she approached Hawthorne’s texts as a “test case” of a theory of death denial, “wanting to understand how this discourse of death denial and its compensatory consolations can be translated into literary narratives and how these narratives reflect cultural positions and values” (10–11). Although she uncovers some intriguing biographical details that no doubt influenced Hawthorne’s textual treatment of death, Weldon’s predetermined thesis does not allow space to imagine as actual possibilities the hopes expressed by a sometimes hopeful, sometimes skeptical Hawthorne.

“Buds and Bird Voices” but in the introductory sketch of the collection of short stories in which this sketch appears – *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846). Exulting in his memories of the late summer segment of life at “The Old Manse,” Hawthorne writes,

I recline upon the unwithered grass, and whisper to myself: — ‘Oh, perfect day!—Oh, beautiful world!—Oh, beneficent God!’ And it is the promise of a blissful Eternity; for our Creator would never have made such lovely days, and given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal. This sunshine is the golden pledge thereof. (*CE* 10: 27–28)

Describing Nature as a “pledge” from a “beneficent God” implies Hawthorne’s sense of the natural world as a gift which speaks of spiritual as well as material reality.

Admittedly, Hawthorne’s evident reveling in nature as a sign of spiritual grace appears in what Milder identifies as the “spring” of Hawthorne’s writing and needs to be considered alongside his other writings.

Against claims that insist, as Milder does, that Hawthorne finds himself caught in a dilemma in which the trust of summer and the skepticism of winter counterbalance each other to such an extent that no conclusions are possible, John Gatta proposes that Hawthorne’s sense of nature is informed not only by Emersonian idealism but also by an incarnational if not sacramental view of the natural world. Commenting on Hawthorne’s essay “The Old Manse” in which Hawthorne describes the gifts of the fruits of his garden and the trees planted by a clergyman who had earlier lived in the old Manse where he lived, Gatta suggests, “I think it fair to say that Hawthorne, adapting familiar Christian vocabulary to express his own semiorthodox faith, understands the vegetative abundance that delights him to be a physical incarnation of divine grace” (*Making Nature Sacred* 103). Gatta claims, in effect, that Hawthorne’s religious sensibility involves a less dualistic conception of spiritual and material reality than that of many of his

contemporaries in nineteenth-century New England: “[Hawthorne’s] insistence on the ‘real presence’ of the physical world, which Hawthorne saw challenged by several forms of philosophic idealism and apocalyptic fantasy, surfaces repeatedly in writings collected for *Mosses from an Old Manse*” (104). While Milder promotes Hawthorne’s cynicism as the definitive tone of his writing, Gatta emphasizes Hawthorne’s confidence in the reality of the natural and the supernatural both. Hawthorne and his characters vacillate between these two types of statements, but most likely as an indication of struggles with faith and doubt, so ignoring either side of the issue immediately obscures part of Hawthorne’s creative thrust.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne’s dubious narrator-character Coverdale – who shares some of Hawthorne’s own traits but, unlike Hawthorne, is a “frosty bachelor” – struggles with the moments of cynicism but ultimately continues to hold to his faith in the intermingling of the natural and the spiritual. Transcendentalist idealism focuses Renaissance pastoral in this romance by its determination to find consistent patterns in Nature, patterns humans can follow to experience harmony with the natural world. Hawthorne questions such idealism in his text, however, by troubling that harmony with the intrusion of death in a classic pastoral move made famous by Renaissance paintings of *Et in Arcadia Ego*. In the course of events that make up this romance, the Blithedalers move from confidence in their ability to see Nature and the world around them adequately to recognizing their own short-sightedness and proceeding less presumptuously in their search for “a better life” (*CE* 3: 10). After considering the Blithedalers’ attempts to achieve natural reform by living in correspondence with Nature, I will consider their increasing disillusionment with the Blithedale experience alongside

their loss of purpose by comparing it with Hawthorne's own disillusionment with the Transcendentalist movement as a whole. In the final section of this chapter, I will note the impact of Death's intrusion into Nature as the source of Hawthorne's most significant reason for thinking Transcendentalism inadequate for the challenge of understanding Nature and the human condition. Blithedale Farm (and *The Blithedale Romance*, despite Coverdale's sometimes clumsy commentary) illustrates Nature's transformative effects on those who periodically immerse themselves in the natural world and are prodded to come to terms not only with Nature but with "Nature's God."

Seeing Nature: Natural Reform and Correspondence

Using the unsteady voice of the unsteady narrator-character Miles Coverdale, Hawthorne analyzes the Transcendentalist purposes of the Blithedalers who are attempting to live by natural laws rather than by the constructs of human society. Even as Coverdale recounts how he has come to disown the Blithedale community, he commends the noble aspirations that led to its founding:

We had left the rusty iron frame-work of society behind us. We had broken through many hindrances that are powerful enough to keep most people on the weary tread-mill of the established system, even while they feel its irksomeness almost as intolerable as we did.... It was our purpose – a generous one, certainly, and absurd, no doubt, in full proportion with its generosity – to give up whatever we had heretofore attained, for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles, on which human society has all along been based. (*CE* 3: 19)

Natural law, rather than unnatural human convention, was to be the code of the new community. Earlier, discussing domestic labor, Coverdale had delineated the "artificial life" as "the life of degenerated mortals" as that opposed to "the life of Paradise" (*CE* 3: 16). Coverdale's habit of thinking in starkly oppositional dichotomies about the relation

between civilization and nature is challenged by the narrative as a whole, but at first, his erroneous binary way of thinking appears to be correct – and it seems to characterize the community’s thinking, not just Coverdale’s. But such thinking – together with the harsh realities of a nature that is not a mere reflection of the human will – contributes to the failure of the Blithedale project.

In the opening scene of his narrative, Hawthorne’s narrator-character Miles Coverdale most clearly identifies his own personal reasons for joining the Blithedalers and initially embracing their vision of reform. “[P]uffing out a final whiff of cigar-smoke,” he remembers,

I quitted my cosey [*sic*] pair of bachelor-rooms—with a good fire burning in the grate, and a closet right at hand, where there was still a bottle or two in the champagne-basket, and a residuum of claret in a box, and somewhat of proof in the concavity of a big demijohn—quitted, I say, these comfortable quarters, and plunged into the heart of the pitiless snow-storm, in quest of a better life. (*CE* 3: 10)

Immediately getting literally immersed in the elements of Nature in a snowstorm, Coverdale creates a fitting picture of the human in nature. Reformation of the world by living according to nature is a noble goal that Coverdale initially appreciates. When she asks him why he has come to Blithedale Farm, Coverdale declares to Zenobia that his purpose in joining the Transcendentalists is to learn how to write poetry that is “true, strong, natural, and sweet, as is the life which we are going to lead – something that shall have the notes of wild-birds twittering through it, or a strain like the wind-anthems in the woods, as the case may be!” (*CE* 3: 14). Such a unity with nature that allows one to live a natural life from which may flow natural poetry is Coverdale’s goal, and Blithedale Farm is the means to that end. Recounting the story of his involvement at Blithedale, he

looks back with pride at his effort to contribute to societal reform by establishing a life outside of the artificial constraints of the city:

Whatever else I may repent of, therefore, let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor my follies, that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny – yes! – and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment; even to the extent of quitting a warm fireside, flinging away a freshly lighted cigar, and travelling far beyond the strike of city-clocks, through a drifting snow storm. (*CE* 3: 11)

That he still claims such affinity with the idea if not the practice, even after seeing it fail, suggests that Coverdale may sense some value in the experiment – a value that he cannot put into words. In *The Blithedale Romance*, the Transcendentalist community takes on the project of reforming the world by living according to natural laws informed by a kind of spiritual connections between humans and Nature. It was a spiritual undertaking, as Coverdale explains: “as the basis of our institution, we purposed to offer up the earnest toil of our bodies, as a prayer no less than an effort, for the advancement of our race” (*CE* 3: 19). At first, they throw themselves enthusiastically into this combined exercise of body, mind, and soul.

In his most direct comment on Nature's lessons to himself, Coverdale remarks about the change of lifestyle required to be able to work in the fields. As he recovers from an illness contracted through his lack of readiness for the demands of laboring in the soil and rejoins his fellow Blithedalers who are seeking an “enlightened culture of the soil,” Coverdale exclaims:

In my new enthusiasm, man looked strong and stately! – and woman, oh, how beautiful! – and the earth, a green garden, blossoming with many-colored delights! Thus Nature, whose laws I had broken in various artificial ways, comported herself to me as a strict, but loving mother, who uses the rod upon her little boy for his naughtiness, and then gives him a smile, a kiss, and some pretty playthings, to console the urchin for her severity. (*CE* 3: 61–62)

Nature must be respected, and humans have a place within the natural world that they must recognize rather than arrogantly assuming a position of superiority. With such a conclusion, Hawthorne strikes perhaps his most conciliatory note to a correspondence theory of Nature. Transcendentalists generally and Emerson in particular adopted such a theory of correspondence, the idea that outward and inward forms – like nature and human nature – are parallel structures. For Emerson, mind, matter, and spirit correspond fully: “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind” (*CW* 1: 18). The correspondence theory of nature, as espoused by American Transcendentalists, is expressed most poetically in the words of Transcendentalist writer and painter Christopher Pearse Cranch’s poem “Correspondences”:

All things in nature are beautiful types to the soul that can read them;
Nothing exists upon earth, but for unspeakable ends,
Every object that speaks to the senses was meant for the spirit;
Nature is but a scroll; God’s handwriting thereon.

...

Now with infinite pains we here and there spell out a letter,
Here and there will the sense feebly shine through the dark.
When we perceive the light that breaks through the visible symbol,
What exultation is ours! *We* the discovery have made!
Yet is the meaning the same as when Adam lived sinless in Eden,
Only long hidden it slept, and now again is revealed. (1–4, 11–16)

While Hawthorne comes close to such a position himself, he does not assume that understanding such correspondences will inevitably resolve the dilemmas of humans who act accordingly. For the most part, Hawthorne seems to agree with the Transcendentalists that attending to Nature should effect a “reformation of the world” by bringing it back to its natural patterns. For Hawthorne as for the Transcendentalists,

Nature and humanity, Nature and Spirit, correspond; however, correspondence by itself *may* not – and for Hawthorne, *does* not – fully account for the reality of Nature.

Besides Brook Farm, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Pantisocracy – the idea of planting a natural society in American Nature – played a role in Hawthorne's conception of *The Blithedale Romance*. In an 1851 entry in his American notebooks, Hawthorne indicated his reading of Pantisocracy as a partial inspiration for the story that would show up in *The Blithedale Romance* the following year;: "Coleridge's 'Pantisocracy' – in connection with the subject of communities" (CE 8: 310). At the very end of the eighteenth century, Coleridge and his fellow poet Robert Southey planned to begin a kind of utopian community in America. In his study of "romantic Indians," Tim Fulford outlines Coleridge's project thus:

Pantisocracy, as Coleridge named it, would be a realization of the just society and natural life about which the philosophers William Godwin and Jean Jacques Rousseau had written. Dedicated to agriculture and literature, the Pantisocrats would live in equality, peace, and harmony, like the Indians among whom they would settle (or, at least, like the Indians portrayed by Rousseau and Raynal). (120)

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Native Americans show up with characters from old world literature in a masque that occurs in the midst of the woods. But Blithedale Farm is most like Coleridge's projected Pantisocracy by being "dedicated to agriculture and literature." Hawthorne emphasizes the effect of literature on the aspirations of the natural community which spends part of its time working the soil and another part of its time engaged in intellectual pursuits in the attempt to merge the two. While he is sick, Coverdale "read[s] interminably in Mr. Emerson's Essays, The Dial, Carlyle's works, George Sand's romances, (lent me by Zenobia,) and other books which one or another of the brethren or sisterhood had brought with them" (CE 3: 52). As the literary organ of the Concord

Transcendentalists, *The Dial* was edited by Fuller, Emerson, and George Ripley, the first two only visitors rather than residents of Brook Farm but the latter the chief mastermind of that Transcendentalist project.

In addition to correspondence, the idea of the universe as an “infinite space” appears in the writing of both Hawthorne and Emerson, as David Van Leer has pointed out. Van Leer suggests that this term may be “specifically Transcendental” (62), and it is certainly the case that Romantic and transcendentalist writers in America and abroad do show a liking for the term, but others such as the philosopher John Locke also used the term. The idea of “infinite space” was current in nineteenth-century intellectual circles both within and outside of America. German writers such as Immanuel Kant and English writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge – both highly influential on the American Transcendentalists – give attention to these ideas in some of their most famous works, Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason* and Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*.⁷⁸ Although these ideas of “infinite space” as a modern philosophic field of sorts may have influenced both Emerson and Hawthorne, they both draw on the term primarily as a descriptor of the universe as a vast space in which humans find themselves and in which they must search for human (or any) significance within a larger reality.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale meditates on “infinite space” in his hermitage and again when he is about to leave the Transcendentalist community and return to the city. From his treetop perch, which he alternately calls his “hermitage” and

⁷⁸ Kant discusses the idea of infinite space as “the first conflict of transcendental ideas” (458). Coleridge discusses infinite space in connection with the nature of “outward existence” as distinct from “phaenomenon” or “perception” (200). Perhaps the most direct overview of the relation between the American Transcendentalists and their German and English counterparts is Frederic Henry Hedge’s 1833 article “Coleridge’s Literary Character.” Coleridge, Hedge claims, understands the thought of Kant and his followers and “is eminently fitted” to translate Kant’s works (118).

his “observatory,” Coverdale looks out “not for starry investigations, but for those sublunary matters in which lay a lore as infinite as that of the planets”(CE 3: 98–99).

Thus, the local scene serves as a microcosm of the universe. As he prepares to leave Blithedale, Coverdale reflects further on the position of humans in the universe, marking out his skepticism of common Transcendentalist views of this topic:

It was impossible, situated as we were, not to imbibe the idea that everything in nature and human existence was fluid, or fast becoming so; that the crust of the Earth, in many places, was broken, and its whole surface portentously upheaving; that it was a day of crisis, and that we ourselves were in the critical vortex. Our great globe floated in the atmosphere of infinite space like an unsubstantial bubble. No sagacious man will long retain his sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old stand-point. (CE 3: 140–41)

The “infinite space” seems about to engulf Coverdale, but he suspects this engulfment is merely a trick of the mind rather than reality. Ironically, it is while he is in a community surrounded by nature that Coverdale feels he must get away so that he can grasp reality again. Perhaps like the philosophies of Kant and Coleridge – both of whom had a great influence on the Transcendentalists – the Transcendentalist community seemed unreal to Coverdale. Even though he may have understood the “infinite space” in which humans find themselves in the universe, Coverdale’s pensive desire to establish an “original relation” to that world is not matched with actions and passions that matched that desire. The very idea of “infinite space,” it may be, is not well suited to action; its vastness is too overwhelming.⁷⁹ The universe must be considered in relation to something, and Emerson

⁷⁹ Hawthorne’s Transcendentalist friend Thoreau experienced a similar moment on Mt. Ktaadn, as looked out into the vastness of space from atop the mountain: “Talk of mysteries! – Think of our life in nature... the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*! *Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we?” (MW 71).

advocated humanity as the center of the relationship. Hawthorne, however, treats humanity – primarily in the person of Coverdale – as too fickle and too short-sighted to be a reliable source for ascertaining the reality of nature and being.

Disillusionment: “A Counterfeit Arcadia”

How to see nature, how to see human society, how to reenvision human society when placed alongside a vision of nature – these and other questions in *The Blithedale Romance* have to do with eyesight. Transcendentalism involves “seeing” nature in a way that is expected to change one’s way of living, but Hawthorne questions the accuracy of such sight by calling attention to the blindness of characters who profess to see. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Transcendentalist creed famously exalted eyesight with his image of himself as a “transparent eye-ball”: “Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed in the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of Universal Being circulate through me: I am part or particle of God” (*CW* 1: 10). *The Blithedale Romance* represents an affront to the certainty of Emerson’s interpretive gaze. The idealist kind of seeing Emerson advocates here is complicated by the egotism of the various seers of Hawthorne’s text.⁸⁰ Transcendence, for Hawthorne, if it is to be transcendence, exists as something beyond the human mind itself but that the human mind can nonetheless grasp in a limited fashion. To depend upon the human mind alone, Hawthorne implies, is little

⁸⁰ Analyzing Emerson’s words primarily in linguistic terms, Kenneth Burke has connected the image of an “eye” with the “I” of the text who says “ay” to the transcendence of the beyond to suggest not only that there is an inherent egotism in such idealist seeing but also that the linguistic connections that results in a “transcendental dialectic” one step short of the “out-and out pragmatism” of Henry James. Emerson’s essay, Burke claims “treats of Society in terms of Nature – and it treats of Nature in terms of the Supernatural. Thereby even the discussion of Society in its most realistic aspects becomes transcendently tinged...” (882–83). While Burke’s essay is largely dismissive of such a view, he does not take time to consider the import of such beliefs to nineteenth-century texts.

more than an egotistic imposition of mind over matter. While Hawthorne considers Emersonian transcendence suspect, he nonetheless entertains the possibility of some kind of actual transcendence occurring within the natural world as within human society.

Hawthorne's treatment of Transcendentalist idealism in *The Blithedale Romance* is complicated by the fact that he uses the problematic, unreliable voice of Miles Coverdale to tell the story. It becomes increasingly clear that Coverdale's nervous voice is not to be wholly trusted. Like one of Edgar Allan Poe's unreliable narrators, Coverdale continually defends his actions to readers with the dubious object of persuading us to take his side, for example, when he relates watching Zenobia through the window of his house and hers. He argues that Zenobia should have recognized his highly artistic and therefore noble reasons for observing her. Of all people, Coverdale exclaims, she ought to have appreciated his "endeavor—by generous sympathies, by delicate intuitions, by taking note of things too slight for record, and by bringing my human spirit into manifold accordance with the companions whom God assigned me—to learn the secret which was hidden even from themselves" (*CE* 3: 160). Earlier, while still at Blithedale, he looks upon Zenobia's pleasing form and imagines her wearing nothing but fig leaves, she playfully assures him she will not don such meager apparel until the days are much warmer. Coverdale suggests that they have come to Blithedale to be rid of the "artificial life – the life of degenerated mortals" and conduct themselves as if they are living "the life of Paradise," but Zenobia tells him, pointing out the snowdrift outside the window, "we shall find some difficulty in adopting the Paradisiacal system, for at least a month to come... As for the garb of Eden,' added she, shivering playfully, 'I shall not assume it till after May-day!'" (*CE* 3: 16–17). This, of course, sets Coverdale's voyeuristic blood astir,

and he imagines her in the place of Eve being brought to Adam. In the closing chapter, Coverdale's nervous nature is especially highlighted, fitting him more firmly in the character of a Poesque unreliable narrator. When he remembers Hollingsworth's charge that he "lack[s] a purpose," Coverdale at first lackadaisically agrees and proceeds to mock himself. But then he hastily adds, speaking directly to the reader: "I exaggerate my own defects. The reader must not take my own word for it..." To explain the reason for his lingering interest and growing disenchantment, Coverdale claims to reveal to the reader a "foolish little secret" he had been concealing all along, of which he says he "never meant to let the least whisper of it escape" (*CE* 3: 247). This "secret" – that he had been in love with Priscilla, which he stammers and exclaims about at the close of the book – appears to be little more than subterfuge tossed up to make him appear to have the purpose he knows he lacks.⁸¹

After attempting to live according to nature for awhile, Coverdale and later his companions become increasingly disenchanting. Coverdale's repeated protests that Robert Burns, his hero, was no poet while a farmer and no farmer while a poet, may represent Hawthorne's own perception of the incompatibility of hard physical labor and hard mental labor. Laboring in the earth produces resentment rather than spiritual refreshment in Coverdale:

The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast become cloddish. Our labor symbolized nothing, and left us mentally sluggish in the dusk of the evening. Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise. The yeoman and the scholar – the yeoman and the man of finest moral culture, though not

⁸¹ On the other hand, it may represent his attempt to cover up another secret—that he in fact murdered Zenobia. See DeSalvo for a full consideration of this possibility (118–20).

the man of sturdiest sense and integrity – are two distinct individuals, and can never be melted or welded into one substance (*CE* 3: 66)

This despair of living a natural life, of the ability to fuse a life of thought, passion, and action, suggests that Coverdale lacks the faith or the stamina either to follow through his earlier stated intentions or to join wholeheartedly with his fellow Blithedalers. On the first day of their life in the country, Coverdale had remarked, upon hearing the others stirring before rising for the day, that they were quickly rising in “their haste to begin the reformation of the world” (*CE* 3: 39). And it is only when he is in the “predicament” of being sick in bed that he first admits to wishing, “selfish as it may appear—that the reformation of society had been postponed about half-a-century, or at all events, to such a date that would have put my intermeddling with it entirely out of the question” (*CE* 3: 40). Such thinking shows how quickly Coverdale’s vision of “the better life” had faded, and it is the pattern eventually followed by his fellow Blithedalers.

The “atmosphere of strange enchantment” that Hawthorne designates as important to romance was no longer active within Coverdale at this point.⁸² At first, he says, there were moments when he would “discern a richer picturesqueness in the visible scene of earth and sky,” times when he could observe “an unwonted aspect on the face of Nature, as if she had been taken by surprise and seen at unawares, with no opportunity to put off her real look, and assume the mask with which she mysteriously hides herself from mortals” (*CE* 3: 66). Here, as usual, Coverdale reveals more than he realizes. If Nature usually hides behind a mask, then simply looking may not be productive. However, more frequent observation in a life close to Nature may produce at least moments when Nature

⁸² In the preface, Hawthorne promulgates the need for “an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own” in order for romance to retain any vitality in the present world of the reader and writer (*CE* 3: 2)

reveals itself. If Coverdale's observations are correct – and it appears that they are, in this case – then the community's distance from nature is the only thing that is assured. They may end up learning very little from Nature.

From his natural “hermitage” in the boughs of a large white pine, Coverdale watched the community in action, Hollingsworth plowing in the field, Priscilla sewing in a window seat of the farmhouse, and a bird carrying an imaginary message about Zenobia: “Our especial scheme of reform, which, from my observatory, I could take in with the bodily eye, looked so ridiculous that it was impossible not to laugh aloud” (*CE* 3: 101). By spying on the land rather than entering into the land and eventually refusing to see himself as part of that natural world, Coverdale regresses from optimism to discomfort to disavowal of the community's goals. Coverdale's disillusionment often keeps him from seeing the things that Nature would teach. As Coverdale withdraws from any involvement with the natural world, it becomes more and more brutal, climaxing in an awful death by drowning. Kelly Flynn concludes that Coverdale's withdrawal from his natural environment, like Hawthorne's own withdrawal from the Brook Farm community, indicates that “[t]he land can never be appropriated by manual labor; it can only be rendered comprehensible by the intellectual labor of the author” (153). The suggestion is that the landscape is simply a background for the imagination to play upon, and this is how Coverdale comes to treat it, for the most part. However, such a changed perception of the world is one of the contributing factors to his downfall. While Hawthorne does not offer a way out of the conundrum of how to “see” the natural world correctly, he does use Coverdale to show that simply looking does not always mean “seeing” or understanding the world and the relation of humans to that world.

While Emerson depicts a farm as a beautiful and moral thing, Hawthorne emphasizes that it is also an external reality in which and with which the farmer must work. In *Nature*, Emerson claims that “every natural process is a version of a moral sentence. The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference. It is the pith and marrow of every substance, every relation, and every process. All things with which we deal, preach to us. What is a farm but a mute gospel?” (*CW* 1: 26). Blithedale Farm, however, proves to be not only “mute” but it also lacks the “good news” necessary to any gospel. It is a place of disappointment and death that lacks both resurrection and redemption, at least in the scope of Coverdale’s narrative. When Coverdale first arrives at the farm, Silas Foster, the farmer in residence, tells them they must get pigs at the market to sustain their project. Coverdale, faced with the demands of nature, responds in disbelief: “Pigs! Good heavens, had we come out from among the swinish multitude, for this?” When Silas adds that they must get a head start on the vegetables for the market and that it would take three “city-folks” to do the work of “one common field-hand,” the relation of humans to the natural world takes on a new meaning. Their noble enterprise of leaving human constructs behind become further complicated when Silas tells them they will have “to compete with the market-gardeners round Boston” to make their living. Coverdale reflects,

It struck me as rather odd, that one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, should relate to the possibility of getting the advantage over the outside barbarians, in their own field of labor. But, to own the truth, I very soon became sensible, that, as regarded society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood. (*CE* 3: 20)

A farm seems little better than the city after all, despite their closeness to nature away from the artificial constraints of city life.

Coverdale's scoffing is not the last word on the matter. Some reform does take place. For Hawthorne, unlike for Transcendentalists, humans must recognize their connection to the natural world though such recognition is not sufficient for moral action. But perhaps the strongest indication that Nature of itself is not adequate to the task of morality is Coverdale's comment (echoed in other Hawthorne texts) that men – unlike women – are incomplete creations:

Nature thrust some of us into the world miserably incomplete, on the emotional side, with hardly any sensibilities except what pertain to us as animals. No passion, save of the senses; no holy tenderness, nor the delicacy that results from this. Externally, they bear a close resemblance to other men, and have perhaps all save the finest grace; but when a woman wrecks herself on such a being, she ultimately finds that the real womanhood, within her, has no corresponding part in him.... [T]he moral deterioration attendant on a false and shallow life, without strength enough to keep itself sweet, are among the most pitiable wrongs that mortals suffer. (*CE* 3: 103)

Here, Hawthorne identifies a complete human as one having “passion” beyond the merely sensual, “holy tenderness,” and “the finest grace.” This passage suggests that Nature by itself cannot form a complete human who is moral, ethical, and spiritual, but it should in-form human thought, feeling, and action.

While Coverdale supposes that he identifies the illusions of Blithedale Farm quite well enough, he does not know what to make of them. He thinks, however, that he recognizes these illusions as he imagines Zenobia as a foil for the Blithedale society: “the presence of Zenobia caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia, in which we grown-up men and women were making a play-day of the years that were given us to live in. I tried to analyze this impression, but now with much success” (*CE* 3: 21). Coverdale is increasingly anxious to draw attention to the madness of their venture, turning his pen first against Hollingsworth. Coverdale

ventures his opinion that “Hollingsworth was fast going mad” almost at the very beginning of the Blithedale experiment (*CE* 3: 56). When Coverdale returns to Blithedale for a visit after having reestablishing his abode in town, the Blithedalers at a costume party in the woods rush after him when they hear him in the bushes: “the whole fantastic rabble,” he writes, “streamed off in pursuit of me, so that I was like a mad poet hunted by chimaeras” (*CE* 3: 211). Coverdale’s disenchantment has not kept him from returning; something about life at Blithedale Farm still fascinates him.

But Zenobia rather than Coverdale makes explicit the disillusionment eventually experience by each of the Blithedalers. For her, this disillusionment occurs because of Hollingsworth’s egotism – even in this place where “natural law” is espoused by all. Chastising Hollingsworth for his secret project of raising disciples – and obtaining her as his wife – to support his scheme for building a reformatory at the farm, she exclaims that his “purpose” is little more than egotism: “It is all self!... Nothing else but self, self, self!” She depreciates his seven-year cultivation of this plan, noting that it has culminated in “the mad summer” at Blithedale Farm. And it is in this moment that she claims her disillusionment: “I see it now! I am awake, disenchanted, disenthralled! Self, self, self! You have embodied yourself in a project. You are a better masquerader than the witches and gipsies yonder; for your disguise is a self-deception” (*CE* 3: 218). Against Hollingsworth’s attempted defense, she declares, “You have done with me, and I with you. Farewell!” (*CE* 3: 219). This scene is the last time Hollingsworth sees Zenobia before her death which brings about his own disillusionment. For it is not only Coverdale and Zenobia, but also Hollingsworth, who becomes disillusioned upon Zenobia’s death.⁸³

⁸³ The first title Hawthorne had suggested to his publisher for *The Blithedale Romance* was simply *Hollingsworth*, but he wrote to the publisher, this title was “not irrevocable; although, I think, the best that

Seeing that depends on the human body, like seeing that depends upon the mind, can result in misinterpretation without an effective mediation with which to interpret such seeing. Old Moodie appears in the first chapter with a “patch over one eye” (*CE* 3: 6), first hinting of the importance of physical seeing in this text. When Zenobia is first introduced, she invites Coverdale and others into the farmhouse and engages them in conversation “with mirth gleaming out of her eyes” (*CE* 3: 16–17). Soon after Priscilla’s appearance, Coverdale notices her “large, brown, melancholy eyes” are fixed on Zenobia (*CE* 3: 27). When Hollingsworth, who has entered the farmhouse with Priscilla, looks sternly at Zenobia, “it was with that inauspicious meaning in his glance,” Coverdale declares, “that Hollingsworth first met Zenobia’s eyes, and began his influence upon her life” (*CE* 3: 28–29). But the effect of his eyes on Coverdale is also emphasized: “There never was any blaze of a fireside that warmed and cheered me, in the down-sinkings and shiverings of my spirit, so effectually as did the light out of those eyes, which lay so deep and dark under his shaggy brows” (*CE* 3: 42). But it is Zenobia who most holds Coverdale’s sometimes voyeuristic gaze. Coverdale tends to see the women he desires as sexual objects rather than as people. Even Zenobia’s letting down of the curtain in response to his intrusive spying on the residents and guests in her next-door apartment in the city is too late for his relations with Zenobia and Priscilla; whether his slow-incoming recognition that parasitic observation is not the same thing as active engagement helps him to interact with others more meaningfully in the future is a matter of speculation, but he does at least exhibit an awareness that voyeuristic behavior does not

has occurred to me—as presenting the original figure about which the rest of the book clustered itself” (*CE* 16: 536). That Hollingsworth continued to be important so important to Hawthorne even after he had written the book suggests that Hollingsworth’s disillusionment may be even more significant than Coverdale’s.

result in truly sympathetic understanding and ethical interaction. When around Zenobia, Coverdale tries (but fails, in the end) to look at her with “temperate eyes,” but he fails to do so – in his sickness calling her “preternatural” (*CE* 3: 45) and upon his return to the city justifying his intemperate looking with the thought of his “indefatigable human sympathy” (*CE* 3: 163).

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne also undermines Emerson’s conceptions of seeing as something that gives the viewer full knowledge of the natural or the spiritual. The characters, including Old Silas, the lifelong farmer who is in charge of training the Transcendentalists who have come from their city homes to the country, do not see all. They are far from Emerson’s confident statement that “Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy” (*CW* 1: 7). In Henry David Thoreau, Hawthorne finds a Transcendentalist whose views garner more of Hawthorne’s sympathy than do Emerson’s.⁸⁴ In a notebook entry reflecting on his neighbors in Concord, Hawthorne praises Thoreau as “a keen and delicate observer – a genuine observer, which, I suspect, is almost as rare a character as even an original poet; and Nature, in return for his love, seems to adopt him as her especial child, and shows him secrets which few other people are allowed to witness” (*CE* 8: 354). Hawthorne admires Thoreau for really observing nature, for not just projecting himself upon nature and thus being able to see nature as

⁸⁴ Robert Milder, for example, positions “not the philosophical Emerson but the peripatetic Thoreau” as Hawthorne’s “Transcendental counterpart.” Noting the parallels between Hawthorne’s notebooks and Thoreau’s *Walden*, Milder suggests that the two men’s conversations in Concord may have been based on the philosophical similarities of these two men with such different personalities (186).

few people do.⁸⁵ His treatment of Thoreau's love of nature and his "genuine" though "rare" gift of observation suggests that Thoreau's view of nature is the kind of Transcendentalist view Hawthorne finds most tenable. By emphasizing the darker characteristics of the natural world and the human psyche much more than Thoreau does, however, Hawthorne intimates his conviction there is more than brightness and light in the natural world and in human nature alike. F. O. Matthiessen makes an important distinction: "He did not share Thoreau's unswerving confidence that man could find himself by studying nature; indeed, in no respect is his difference from the Transcendentalists more fundamental than in this. Hawthorne visited nature in order to return, refreshed, to the world of men" (238). Hawthorne's belief in nature's rejuvenating power is not accompanied by the more Transcendentalist belief in nature as the comprehensive rubric for human behavior. Hawthorne does, however, treat non-human nature as a corrective to egotistical conceptions of human nature while pushing back against Emerson's optimistic conception of nature. Hawthorne appears to suspect that the philosophy of Emerson, when pushed to its extreme, will reduce nature to a projection of the human mind.

In his introduction to Thoreau's *Walden*, John Updike credits not only *Nature* but Emerson's essays generally as "an indispensable preparation for the ground" of Hawthorne's (and Thoreau's) work, describing *Walden* specifically as "a live particularized demonstration of Emerson's hopeful boast [in *Nature*]... that Nature is at

⁸⁵ But even when discussing Thoreau, Hawthorne draws back from full endorsement to suggest that his view is not comprehensive enough. Hawthorne condemns even Thoreau for having a focus that is "more exclusive than is desirable, like all other Transcendentalists, so far as I am acquainted with them." Although this critique of Thoreau is mentioned in connection with his selective reading of "the elder poets," the context suggests that his critique involves Thoreau's overarching paradigms of thought rather than just his reading of literature. Hawthorne's critique extends to "all other Transcendentalists," further underscoring the extent of his critique and indicating his dissatisfaction with the movement as a whole.

bottom Spirit” (ix, xiii). While Hawthorne and Thoreau typically discuss Nature in narrative form, which may explain some of their affinity for each other’s work, Emerson writes essays instead. With Thoreau, Hawthorne prefers particularization to what Updike has called “the outward sweep of Emerson’s pithy, exhortative sentences” (xii), though Thoreau chooses autobiographical narratives and Hawthorne fictional narratives as their respective modes of engagement with Nature. Updike explicitly mentions *The Scarlet Letter* as an example of such particularized writing that so contrasts with Emerson’s style.⁸⁶ While Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* does indeed represent a response to Emerson’s call for “an original relation to the universe” or at least to a part of it, *The Blithedale Romance* represents an even more direct engagement with Transcendentalists in its deliberation over their experiment in the natural world at Brook Farm.

Although his acquaintance with Emerson’s writings was certainly not new during the time he was writing *The Scarlet Letter*, his attention to Emerson was heightened at this time by his association with the Transcendentalist community in Concord and his reception of Emerson’s second edition of *Nature* during the time he was writing his first major romance.⁸⁷ Upon publication of *Twice-Told Tales* (1838), his first collection of short stories and sketches, Hawthorne immediately found a devoted admirer in his Salem

⁸⁶ In one of his more autobiographical sketches, Hawthorne self-deprecatingly calls himself as a “writer of idle stories” as opposed to the philosophical and theological sages who had penned great works before him in that same room (*CE* 10: 4). Here Hawthorne may well be responding to Emerson’s perception of the value of Hawthorne’s writing: “Hawthorne’s reputation as a writer is a very pleasing fact, because his writing is not good for anything, and this is a tribute to the man” (7: 465). Emerson’s writing, of course, was primarily sermons (in his earlier years), essays, speeches, and poetry. Like Hawthorne’s Puritan ancestors, Emerson saw Hawthorne’s imaginative fiction as idle work. Thus, Hawthorne’s argument with his Puritan ancestors represents also an argument with his contemporaries.

⁸⁷ Hawthorne’s comments on the writing of Sophia’s thoroughgoing Transcendentalist sister Elizabeth (who first introduced Hawthorne to his future wife) to the editor of the *Democratic Review* in April 1838 indicate some familiarity with Emerson’s first edition of *Nature* (*CE* 15: 272).

neighbor Elizabeth Peabody. The Peabody sisters, like their mother – also Elizabeth Palmer Peabody – were part of the Transcendentalist movement, and Elizabeth’s discovery of Hawthorne’s writing led her to introduce him to the Salem Transcendentalists. In the second edition of *Twice-Told Tales*, published the year of his arrival in Concord, Hawthorne added stories such as “Endicott and the Red Cross” and “The Lily’s Quest” and “The Threefold Destiny.” These stories again show his attention to Puritan views of the natural world – this time in contrast to those of Roger Williams, the founder of Baptists in America – as well as his interest in beautiful landscapes that make pleasant places to live and the similarities and differences between New England and the “Faery Londe.” Many of these themes were to follow Hawthorne all his life. His second collection of tales, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, composed as he lived with Sophia in the Old Manse in Concord, included numerous writings about Nature. Prominent among these are “Buds and Bird Voices,” “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” and “The New Adam and Eve.” Hawthorne composed this last set of stories in the Transcendentalist neighborhood of Concord. In the first sketch, he investigates the “newness” of the Transcendentalist movement and the effect of Nature on humans. In the second and third, he invites Dante and Milton onto the American scene to investigate the realities and possibilities of a human nature that is both natural and spiritual.

Besides writing Nature into the short stories he composed in Salem and Concord before writing his major romances, Hawthorne also took part in unrecorded conversations with his Transcendentalist neighbors in Concord during the first half of the 1840s. Hawthorne’s young wife wrote from their newlywed “Paradise” at the Old Manse, the old Emerson home in Concord where they moved after their marriage in 1842, “Mr. Emerson

delights in him. He talks to him all the time, and Mr. Hawthorne looks answers. He seems to fascinate Mr. Emerson. Whenever he comes to see him, he takes him away, so that no one may interrupt him in his close and dead-set attack upon his ear. Miss Hoar says that persons about Mr. Emerson so generally echo him, that it is refreshing to him to find this perfect individual, all himself and nobody else” (*NHWW* 274). Although Sophia’s enraptured approval reflects her new position as the adoring young bride that she was, Emerson’s remarks in his journal following Hawthorne’s funeral many years later suggest much the same attitude: “I thought him a greater man than any of his works betray... It was easy to talk with him, – there were no barriers, – only, he said so little, that I talked too much, and stopped only because, as he gave no indications, I feared to exceed” (15: 59–60). Hawthorne’s time with Emerson, the chief spokesman of the Transcendentalist movement, developed his thought sometimes sympathetically and sometimes antagonistically.

In “The Celestial Railroad,” Hawthorne’s updated version of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the Giant Transcendentalist has replaced Bunyan’s two giants Pope and Pagan. Hawthorne’s traveling narrator, in the position of Bunyan’s pilgrim, describes the Giant in enigmatic terms:

[He] makes it his business to seize upon honest travelers, and fatten them for his table with plentiful meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes and sawdust. He is a German by birth... [b]ut as to his form, his features, his substance, and his nature generally, it is the chief peculiarity of this huge miscreant, that neither he for himself, nor anybody for him, has ever been able to describe them. As we rushed by the cavern’s mouth, we caught a hasty glimpse of him, looking somewhat like an ill-proportioned figure, but considerably more like a heap of fog and duskiness. He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted. (*CE* 10: 197)

Such an assessment of Transcendentalism as “a heap of fog and duskiness,” though not explicitly opposed to Transcendentalism, is certainly highly skeptical of it. Larry Reynolds and Tibbie E. Lynch connect this short story to Emerson’s *Nature*, noting that for Emerson, “sight was primarily a mode of thought rather than sensation. Nature as symbol fascinated him far more than nature as fact, and as a result, his Transcendentalism is often characterized by the ‘fog and duskiness’ that Hawthorne attributed to the Giant Transcendentalist” (149). His attempt to fuse thought and sight in perfect harmony appears to be little more than wish-fulfillment to Hawthorne. Like “The Celestial Railroad,” *The Blithedale Romance* appropriates and critiques Emersonian Transcendentalism. *The Blithedale Romance* directly takes up many of Emerson’s themes and subjects them to scrutiny in an imaginative community that finds many of its images in his own remembered experience at Brook Farm. Under Hawthorne’s pen, the inchoate Transcendentalist project is satirized even as its love of beauty and tenor of hope are appreciated.

The New England Transcendentalists especially adapted the ideas of German idealism for much of their thought, and so it is not surprising that Hawthorne associates German thinkers with transcendentalism. The Giant Transcendentalist in “The Celestial Railroad” eats “plentiful meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes, and saw-dust” and is described as “a German by birth... looking somewhat like an ill-proportioned figure, but considerably more like a heap of fog and duskiness. He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted” (*CE* 10: 197). This modernization of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* satirizes Transcendentalism as well as other ideas of progress using the technological

innovation of a railroad, an innovation that changed the American landscape and people's relationship to that natural landscape. Immanuel Kant, an important founder of German transcendentalist thought, also greatly influenced the development of nineteenth-century American Transcendentalism.⁸⁸ In participating in Nature and society, sympathy is not enough: something more than the intrusive "sympathy" of Coverdale is needed, Hawthorne implies, and that something more is found in a life in accord with the divine as well as with Nature. Even Coverdale, who obsessively pursues sympathy, is forced to admit, "It now impresses me, that, if I erred at all, in regard to Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, it was through too much sympathy, rather than too little" (*CE* 3: 154). John Winthrop raised charity as a model for reconciliation between humans and the divine in the new world. The Puritans and Transcendentalists alike would have done well to follow Winthrop's call to charity.

Hawthorne's strained yet cordial relationship with Emerson continued throughout his lifetime, and both men treated each other with respect even as they criticized each other's literary methods and perspectives on the nineteenth-century obsession with the human condition. This is evident for example, in Hawthorne's description of Emerson as a "mystic, stretching his hand out of cloud-land, in vain search for something real... Mr. Emerson is a great searcher for facts, but they seem to melt away and become unsubstantial in his grasp" (*CE* 8: 336). In a similar vein, he designates Emerson "that everlasting rejecter of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what" (*CE* 8: 357). Like

⁸⁸ In an 1833 article in *The Christian Examiner*, Frederic Henry Hedge, himself an early proponent of American Transcendentalism, mentions "Kant and his followers" as the source of the transcendental philosophies of "German metaphysics" (119). Hedge's language in this article finds close parallels in Emerson's 1836 essay "Nature," showing a pattern of influence that the "self-reliant" Emerson does not openly acknowledge in his essay.

the Giant Transcendentalist, Emerson's philosophy is apparently too misty and vague for Hawthorne to form a definite opinion about it. In narrative, not in philosophical theorizing, Hawthorne explored concepts about Nature and human life. Not "newness" but rejuvenation was Hawthorne's aim for his withdrawals into nature, and his time in Concord is no exception – whether out on a stroll with Sophia, out walking with Emerson, lazing in the breeze with Margaret Fuller, sitting by a campfire with Channing, or visiting Thoreau at Walden.

Even as Hawthorne critiques Transcendentalist views of nature and spirituality in *The Blithedale Romance*, his treatment of Coverdale and his companions indicates an admiration of the hopeful attitude behind such views – even if some of them are destined to fall short. And they fall short in *The Blithedale Romance* because they are based on humans as the center of reality rather than upon the mystery of the divine. Nature and God illuminate each other in Hawthorne's romances. Coverdale's lack of commitment to the cause, Hollingsworth's subversive manipulation of the Transcendentalist cause for his own purpose of building a reformatory for criminals, and the transience of Zenobia and Priscilla – his other two major characters at Blithedale – suggest that most people, through self-interest and short-sightedness, do not respond adequately to nature even when given the opportunity. These two men give up on the Transcendentalist project, one for lack of commitment to its goals and the other for over-rigidity in his own private goals, or, as Hollingsworth himself puts it, "an inflexible severity of purpose" (*CE* 3: 43). Although Zenobia tells Coverdale that Priscilla "has probably no more transcendental purpose than to do my miscellaneous sewing" (*CE* 3: 33), her Transcendentalist purpose is far from certain. Likewise, Coverdale's lack of purpose contributes to his

disenchantment with the community. “I have long recognized you as a sort of transcendental Yankee, with all the native propensity of your countrymen to investigate matters that come within their range, but rendered almost poetical, in your case, by the refined methods which you adopt for its gratification” (*CE* 3: 162). His participation in the Transcendentalist community is not to make money, as might obtain to other Yankees, but to make a poetic narrative.

The community’s eventual disintegration seems to stem from a lack of commitment as well as their widely varying and shifting purposes. Hollingsworth, according to Coverdale, “was never really interested in our socialist scheme, but was forever busy with his strange, and, as most people thought it, impracticable plan for the reformation of criminals, through an appeal to their higher instincts” (*CE* 3: 36). While Coverdale here is careful to show his own special knowledge of Hollingsworth’s plans, he also attempts to persuade the reader to agree with him by noting that “most people” considered Hollingsworth’s plans impracticable. Coverdale may not be the only one who lacked commitment to the cause, despite appearances to the contrary. Zenobia, in her legend of the Veiled Lady, depicts Priscilla as a pale maiden who sought refuge with a “knot of visionary transcendentalists, who were still seeking for the better life” (*CE* 3: 115).

Coverdale is the first to leave Blithedale behind, invoking Silas Foster’s comment: “Here ends the reformation of the world, so far as Miles Coverdale has a hand in it!” (*CE* 3: 138). Coverdale’s lack of commitment is also more than evident to the reader, despite his protestations to the contrary. Hollingsworth charges him with not being “in earnest, either as a poet or a laborer” (*CE* 3: 68). Coverdale protests and

Zenobia adds her own observation: “I cannot conceive of being, so continually as Mr. Coverdale is, within the sphere of a strong and noble nature [as Hollingsworth’s], without being strengthened and ennobled by its influence!” (CE 3: 68). Although Zenobia suggests that Coverdale must bend to this influence, Coverdale sees instead – and again, he is surprisingly correct – that “Hollingsworth, like many other illustrious prophets, reformers, and philanthropists, was likely to make at least two proselytes, among the women, to one among the men. Zenobia and Priscilla! These, I believe, (unless my unworthy self might be reckoned for a third,) were the only disciples of his mission...” (CE 3: 68). This language is similar to the words Hawthorne used to describe Emerson in “The Old Manse,” the introduction to the book of short stories published as he was leaving Concord to return to Salem. In this autobiographical sketch, Hawthorne describes “the wide-spreading influence of a great original Thinker” whose “mind acted upon other minds, of a certain constitution, with wonderful magnetism, and drew many men upon long pilgrimages, to speak with him face to face” (CE 10: 30). Those gathering hopefully around Emerson, seeking his blessing and direction, seem as proselytes in much the same sense as Zenobia and Priscilla around Hollingsworth. Larry Reynolds suggests that Emerson calls *The Blithedale Romance* “ghastly and untrue,” ostensibly because of “its treatment of Brook Farm and Zenobia/Fuller, but one wonders if he saw himself in Hollingsworth” (“Hawthorne’s Labors” 27). Given the similarities in language that Hawthorne uses to discuss Emerson and Hollingsworth, it seems likely that the figure of Hollingsworth was partially inspired by Emerson, but also more than likely partly by Hawthorne himself as well. Hawthorne’s disavowal of using any of his acquaintances as exact models for the characters of *The Blithedale Romance* as well as

the fact that Emerson only a visitor rather than a resident at Brook Farm guard against making too conclusive statements.⁸⁹ Further, Hawthorne's unlikeness to Coverdale suggests that another figure may serve as his proxy, at least in part.

Coverdale's wavering faith in Nature, humans, and God alike leads Hollingsworth to condemn him as an "infidel" and is mirrored by his wavering faith and commitment to learning from the natural world. At least part of Coverdale's disillusionment is caused by his own obvious lack of commitment to the cause that he has advocated blusteringly at times. A "frosty bachelor" in the autumn of his life, Miles Coverdale records a story from the spring of his life. From the present Coverdale, and from Hollingsworth who despairs of building his reformatory for criminals near the end of the romance, no great vision of mass social change is forthcoming. They may well be part of the unhappy thought that casts its shadow over Hawthorne's exultation in spring: "Alas for the worn and heavy soul, if, whether in youth or age, it have outlived its privilege of springtime sprightliness! From such a soul, the world must hope no reformation of its evil" (*CE* 10: 157). Although they do not bring about wide-spread reformation, Coverdale and Hollingsworth are reformed in the process albeit not in the ways they had imagined.

Emerson's presentation of the Edenic promise of the world is joined with the injunction "Build, therefore, your own world" and the declaration in Emerson's last sentence: "The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation, – a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God, – he shall enter without more wonder

⁸⁹ Despite Hawthorne's protestations to the contrary in the preface of *Blithedale*, the characters of the novel have persistently been associated with Hawthorne's own Transcendentalist friends both at Brook Farm and in Concord. Zenobia has most often been taken as a figure of Margaret Fuller, and Coverdale is often taken to be a figure for Hawthorne himself although this latter reading is especially problematic. Despite their similarities, Coverdale and Hawthorne have some striking differences, not the least of which is Coverdale's status as "a frosty old bachelor" in direct contrast to Hawthorne's fully consummated and enjoyed marriage.

than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight” (*CW* 1: 45). The dream of the Puritans was not enough, Hawthorne suggests, and neither is the dream of the Transcendentalists enough. Both visions of the “kingdom of man over nature,” despite their apparent differences, entail an egotistic anthropocentric view of the world. When he comments in the “Custom House” introduction that “[n]either the front nor the back entrance of the Custom-House opens on the road to Paradise” (*CE* 1: 13). Hawthorne indicates his belief that the nineteenth century is in a place little if at all better than the seventeenth century. Similarly, before her death in *The Blithedale Romance*, Zenobia tells Coverdale that she has lost faith in the Transcendentalist community: “Of all varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery, in our effort to establish the one true system. I have done with it; and Blithedale must find another... It was, indeed, a foolish dream! Yet it gave us some pleasant summer days, and bright hopes, while they lasted” (*CE* 3: 227). While his last completed American romance shows the disintegration of the pastoral ideal even amidst the “pleasant summer days and bright hopes” which temporarily sustained nineteenth-century New England idealists, his first major American romance had recalled a pastoral vision that has been lost in the vagaries of time. In *The Scarlet Letter*, he admired the romanticism within Puritans like Winthrop who had the imaginative capacity to dream of a new world paradise and not to give up on that dream even as it was passing, such admiration is dimmed in *The Blithedale Romance*. Although Coverdale declares that he did once hope for reformation, he fails to take the action required to even begin to reshape the world in fundamental ways.

While “seeing Nature” is an admirable goal, Hawthorne intimates, such seeing is often inflected by the viewer’s attitudes and preconceived ideas, most often ending in solipsism. People’s incapacitating idiosyncrasies, and not Nature itself, are often to blame for their lack of change. Although Coverdale confidently proclaims that “our posterity will really be far stronger than ourselves, after several generations of a simple, natural, and active life!” (CE 3: 129), within a very brief space of time, such an exhilarating prospect vanishes. The disintegration of the Blithedale community happens not because of a singular difficulty but because of varied responses to nature that do not operate from logic or reason alone. Emerson’s poetic sense of nature is great, Hawthorne intimates, but his philosophy falls short. Nature can effect change, but nature can not be depended upon to effect the particular changes that are expected – not even by a spiritual community attempting live by the laws of nature. Thus idiosyncrasies of sight militate against social reform in Nature. Rather than becoming a “transparent eyeball” in the famous Emersonian injunction about seeing Nature, such sight – whether internal or external – becomes a reflection of the ego rather than an insight into Nature. Indeed, seeing becomes diseased by overfocus on one goal, as in Hollingsworth’s “overplus” of purpose or Coverdale’s “too much sympathy” which led him to become a spectator and even a voyeur whose eyes Zenobia stopped at one point by dropping a curtain. Despite all their excesses, however, there seems to be one thing the Blithedalers do not have enough – a sincere desire to learn from the natural order rather than implanting their own ideas onto Nature.

Coverdale’s tone of disillusionment also clouds the import of Hawthorne’s narrative. What is clear in *The Blithedale Romance* is Nature’s ability to show humans

their limitations; although Transcendentalists' attempts to know the world are limited in scope by their own shortsightedness, these attempts are not without value. The occasional glimpses of Nature the Blithedaleers experience work to counterbalance their more solipsistic impositions on Nature. Even if Coverdale's interpretations are sometimes self-defensive and sometimes self-contradictory, *The Blithedale Romance* does illustrate the lessons of the natural order. Even Coverdale learns from Nature to be less presumptuous – a lesson his companion Hollingsworth learns to an even greater degree as his goals are transformed by Nature's rebuke of his monomaniacal obsession to build a "natural" reformatory for criminals. Nature, for Hawthorne, has the power of restoring one's natural vitality. Whether it be a spark of divinity he catches in nature, a sign of God he sees in the natural world, or a sense of organic connection with the natural world, Hawthorne embraces the effects of Nature on himself.

Coverdale's pessimism suggests Hawthorne's own growing conviction that romance had seen its day in America. Almost prophetically in the face of the coming Civil War, *The Blithedale Romance* predicts that the Transcendentalists' reliance on "natural law" to reform society would fail, in part, because "seeing" nature is often merely a narcissistic reflection of one's own impure gaze. The selfishness of human nature often leads observers in *The Blithedale Romance* to develop tunnel vision rather than accurate sight. For Hawthorne, humans in nature discover more fully the inextricable nature of material and spiritual being. In *The Blithedale Romance*, mere observance results in solipsistic sight that keeps people from actually seeing the natural order. The failure of sight even in Nature demonstrates Hawthorne's disagreement with Emersonian optimism about the prospects of Americans' ability to live according to a

natural order. Reform must begin not with mere observation but with an active, long-term commitment to finding the human place in the natural order by returning periodically to Nature. Without such commitment, even the most focused seeing may become diseased and counter to reality. The reformation experienced by the Blithedaleers is much more limited than they expect, but most of those seeking natural reform are themselves reformed by Nature. Hawthorne intimates that, even if learning from Nature does not immediately reform society, periodic returns to the natural order may point humans toward a better life – but more likely on a small scale than a grandiose one.

The Blithedale Romance represents Hawthorne's last American romance that engages with Emerson's *Nature* in such a direct way and suggests that Emersonian idealism was not sustainable in the long term and offered only a temporary reprieve from the questions of life rather than the comprehensive answer it seemed to promise.

Although Emerson did not write romances or fiction of any kind, his vision of nature shared perhaps more with the optimistic views of nature promulgated by Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper than he did with Hawthorne's and Melville's treatments of nature within the long shadows of Romanticism.⁹⁰ Hawthorne and Melville so depict the dark side of nature that they pose a challenge not only the Transcendentalists whose heyday had been in the 1830s and 1840s but the realists who were soon to displace them:

Before the advancing legions of realism, before the serried ranks of the obsequious copyists of civilization, they fling their sacrificial victims, the unrepentant children of Nature, dark Hester and still darker Zenobia, and most furiously Pierre... In either case, how far had these two Americans traveled since the time Sir Walter Scott had genially explained that the

⁹⁰ Hawthorne's almost successful attempt to destroy all copies of his first romance, *Fanshawe*, over two decades earlier in 1828, has often been characterized as a reaction against having tried to write in the style of Sir Walter Scott and the sentimentalist writers popular in the early nineteenth-century (Baym, "Gothic Discards"). Cooper's status as "the American Scott" no doubt plays into this situation as well.

Romance was drawn from the great book of Nature, ever the wholesome and sanitive same through a thousand editions. (*Nature's Nation* 256–57)

The darkness of such a vision is quite something to thrust into the bright vision that hovered for a time over Blithedale Farm. In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne transforms a utopian Transcendentalist community in which “the many tongues of Nature whispered mysteries, and seemed to ask only a little stronger puff of wind, to speak out the solution of its riddle” (*CE* 3: 99) into a place where “death by water” can occur alongside such idyllic scenes. For Hawthorne, Nature can destroy as well as inspire.

Et in Arcadia Ego: *Seeking “Nature’s God”*

The shocking scene of Zenobia’s death by drowning in the manner of Shakespeare’s Ophelia provides the most striking depiction of death in Hawthorne’s three major American romances in this study.⁹¹ In *The Blithedale Romance*, this scene elicits contradictory responses in the edgy Coverdale and effectively silences Hollingsworth who only grunts a few responses in the entire remainder of the romance. Coverdale, on the other hand, becomes excessively loquacious in the scenes that follow, despite his initial comment that to describe Zenobia’s death well would be “a sin and shame” since it is “the ugliest” death imaginable. But he gives a description nonetheless: “Her wet garments swathed limbs of terrible inflexibility. She was the marble image of a death-agony. Her arms had grown rigid in the act of struggling, and were bent before her, with

⁹¹ Joel Pfister notes the similarities and differences between Zenobia and Ophelia in some detail, commenting also on the differences in the messages being communicated by Hawthorne and his nervous narrator-character Coverdale (89–90). Certainly, since Zenobia was “fond of giving us readings from Shakespeare” (*CE* 3: 106), it is appropriate that she would bear some resemblance to one of Shakespeare’s characters. Like most critics, Pfister sees Coverdale’s unreliability as reason enough to discount his words, but I treat Coverdale as a mouthpiece for some of Hawthorne’s questions even if Coverdale’s answers verge on overstatement and are motivated by fear. Of particular interest in this case is Coverdale’s handling of the question of divine justice in the face of death within the world of a good God who ought to be and yet appears not to be in control of the world he made.

clenched hands; her knees, too, were bent, and –” here Coverdale interjects with an obvious note of relief, “thank God for it! – in the attitude of prayer.” But then he continues his incantation of terror, “Ah, that rigidity! It is impossible to bear the terror of it. It seemed... as if her body must keep the same position in the coffin, and that her skeleton would keep it in the grave; and that when Zenobia rose, at the Day of Judgment, it would be in just the same attitude as now!” Coverdale’s awful sense of divine judgment is ameliorated by “[o]ne hope” which he professes in the face of this awful sight: “She knelt, as if in prayer. With the last, choking consciousness, her soul, bubbling out through her lips, it may be, had given itself up to the Father, reconciled and penitent. But her arms!” he cannot help adding, “They were bent before her, as if she struggled against Providence in never-ending hostility. Her hands! They were clenched in immitigable defiance.” Determined to the end to put on a good face, Coverdale proclaims, “Away with the hideous thought! The flitting moment after Zenobia sank into the dark pool – when her breath was gone, and her soul at her lips – was as long, in its capacity of God’s infinite forgiveness, as the lifetime of the world!” (*CE* 3: 235). In this lengthy reflection on Zenobia’s death, Coverdale draws attention to the intrusion of death in this seemingly idyllic scene. Even here in a beautiful world where a community gathered to work with the grain of Nature, the ugliness of death has set its stamp and disallowed the kind of blissful ignorance of the hard realities of Nature as well as her more pleasant ones.

Coverdale’s comments about Zenobia’s death are telling. When he stands at the mound that marks Zenobia’s grave, Coverdale remarks, “I have never since beheld it, but make no question that the grass grew all the better, on that little parallelogram of pasture-

land, for the decay of the beautiful woman who slept beneath. How much Nature seems to love us! And how readily, nevertheless, without a sigh or a complaint, she converts us to a meaner purpose, when her highest one—that of conscious, intellectual life, and sensibility—has been untimely balked!” Coverdale draws back from his skepticism with a quick assertion that “[i]t is because the spirit is inestimable that the lifeless body is so little valued” (*CE* 3: 243–44). Coverdale, in his usual blustery overconfident manner, tries to conclude the story of his own experience at Blithedale farm, an experience he clearly does not know how to understand. But he places his finger on an unresolved tension of the story, a tension that has to do with Hawthorne’s investigation of differing views of nature. Why does Nature seem to be on our side while we live but ready to erase us at the moment of our death? If it weren’t for death, Coverdale might be more willing to accept the Transcendentalist community’s emphasis on living by the law of nature. But death disrupts such an easy idealism of nature – since nature too participates in death and the erasure of human life from the earth.

Whether or not Hawthorne is using Coverdale’s voice to speak some of his own hopes and doubts, he is clearly presenting Coverdale as an unreliable narrator for whom life has become an enigma – someone we cannot trust as the moral center of the tale though it is told in his voice. While Judy Schaaf Anhorn is correct to point out that Hawthorne is writing according to the pastoral convention in which “[t]he author... figures as a character in his own Arcadia, a poet seeking spiritual recovery in the green world” (137), it would be a mistake to associate him too exclusively with Coverdale. For one thing, Coverdale is unreliable as a narrator. For another, where we can trace correlations to events from Hawthorne’s own life, the correlations between him and his

characters do not always point to Coverdale. In a notebook entry, Hawthorne recorded helping retrieve the body of a drowned girl. In this entry, he is in the place of Hollingsworth and Ellery Channing, the Transcendentalist poet, is in the place of Coverdale. Hawthorne remarks: “certainly, she did not look as if she had gotten grace in the world whither she had precipitated herself; but rather, her stiffened death-agony was an emblem of inflexible judgment pronounced upon her” (*CE* 8: 264). This striking description brings attention to the loss of illusions of a world that only includes beauty and goodness. The presence of Death changes Coverdale’s otherwise blithe narrative into something utterly different from the light comedy it seemed at first to be.

By juxtaposing pleasant pastoral scenes with the awful image of Zenobia’s death, Hawthorne belies the Transcendentalist idealism of the community with a note of grim realism.⁹² At Blithedale Farm, Transcendentalist illusions are no longer possible when faced with Zenobia’s awful death. And the fact that Hawthorne may be considering this scene from more than one set of eyes – both Coverdale’s in the narrative and his own in the place of Hollingsworth in the notebook entry – suggests that the problems of seeing ugliness and seeing with one’s own eyes may compound the problem of seeing Nature rightly. Zenobia’s horrific death by drowning also highlights the disillusionment with Transcendentalist claims about Nature’s self-efficacy. Like Hawthorne’s friend Margaret Fuller, Zenobia believed that “natural laws” were different than the assumptions of the patriarchal structure of nineteenth-century American society and that attention to these

⁹² As Bernard Cohen points out, critics and reviewers since the first publication of *The Blithedale Romance* have mulled this scene with mixed reactions: “Whereas one reviewer saw the scene depicting the recovery of Zenobia’s body as repulsive violation of the beautiful and the ideals, another singled it out for praise because of its realism” (xi). In another study of the early reception of Hawthorne’s works, Cady finds Hawthorne’s work a touchstone in early critical debates between idealists and realists who studied Hawthorne’s works with attention to “the still current problem of the nature of reality” and to the “central” question of “the literary or the philosophical battles over ideality” (324).

“natural laws” would lead to greater freedom and opportunity for women.⁹³ But she meets death in Nature and seems to find all of life a “counterfeit Arcadia.” Zenobia’s death lends an air of seriousness to this socialist experiment. Coverdale attempts to excuse Nature for “loving” then disintegrating our bodies by claiming that our reality is comprised of more than our natural bodies. Although Mother Nature has cast off Zenobia, Coverdale seeks for hope nonetheless:

One hope I had, and that, too, was mingled half with fear. She knelt, as if in prayer. With the last, choking consciousness, her soul, bubbling out through her lips, it may be, had given itself up to the Father, reconciled and penitent. But her arms! They were bent before her, as if she struggled against Providence in never-ending hostility. Her hands! They were clenched in immitigable defiance. Away with the hideous thought! The flitting moment, after Zenobia sank into the dark pool—when her breath was gone, and her soul at her lips—was as long, in its capacity of God's infinite forgiveness, as the lifetime of the world. (*CE* 3: 235)

For a troubled character like Coverdale, this mystery of what lies beyond death is inscrutable, but he does entertain various possibilities. Rather than consigning Zenobia to annihilation, as he had done for the malign almost inhuman Westervelt, Coverdale retains hope for an afterlife for her. And though Coverdale may easily be dismissed because of his indecisiveness and lack of clear thought, his questions are questions that his age was asking.

In all three of his American romances, Hawthorne adopts the theme of death in a pastoral setting, or *Et in Arcadia Ego*, a phrase made familiar by Renaissance painter Nicolas Poussin, whose painting was famous in the nineteenth century as and whose

⁹³ For Hawthorne, the new definition of heroism will involve a woman: “The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end!” (*CE* 1: 263). With such a conception of woman, it is not surprising that the Eve-like Hester should receive as much attention as the Adam figures in Hawthorne’s work.

paintings by that name were well-known to the eighteenth and nineteenth century literati. Erwin Panofsky traces the changing meanings associated with *Et in Arcadia Ego*, pointing out that the difference of meaning suggested by Poussin's first painting and his second one (both called by the same name). While "the modern reader" of the mid-twentieth century had interpreted the words to mean something like "I, too, was born, or lived, with the shepherds in Arcady," the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds corrected Samuel Johnson's mistake when Johnson arrived at such a conclusion by observing that another interpretation is more accurate: "there is a tombstone in the background: Ay, ay, death is even in Arcadia" (Panofsky 295). While Panofsky goes on to trace the reasons the text has been so doubly interpreted, it is fairly apparent that Hawthorne offers both interpretations in *The Blithedale Romance*.⁹⁴ Coverdale exults sentimentally but ineffectually in the knowledge that he has been part of this great pastoral experiment at Blithedale: "let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor my follies, that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny" by joining the Blithedalers in their pastoral venture (*CE* 3: 11). Yet the story Coverdale relates is ultimately the story of death's entrance into the pastoral landscape.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker likewise place Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* in contrast with the message it gave when placed on Rousseau's tomb. As Baggerman and Rudolf put it, Rousseau's emphasis on a lost youth is a new treatment of Arcadia and reflects his sense of being "as uprooted as Adam after the Fall, and while writing his memoirs he became homesick for the lost paradise of his youth" (210). Such treatment of Arcadian and Edenic legends as restoration to youth referred to them as "an ideal state of nature that had been lost to them as adults" (212). In Rousseau's *Confessions*, which Hawthorne read repeatedly (Volume 23 of Rousseau's 1788- *Oeuvres Complètes* [Kesselring 60]), Rousseau recorded the sense of loss that characterizes Hawthorne's treatment of a lost paradise. According to Baggerman and Dekker, it was common by the end of the eighteenth century to associate country estates and the period of youth with Arcadia. No doubt such contrasts would have caught the attention of Hawthorne, who had read Virgil's *Bucolics* (now often called his *Eclogues*), Sir Philip Sidney's *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, and many other works that discussed the idea of Arcadia (see Appendix).

⁹⁵ Tony Tanner makes the same point, explicitly linking *Blithedale* to this theme by noting the way a "green mound" suggests a grave: "And it is this [suggested grave] and all that it implies – call it mortality,

The death scenes of his earlier romances – Governor Winthrop’s death in his bed, Dimmesdale’s death on the scaffold, Colonel Pyncheon’s death in his just-completed House, and Jaffrey Pyncheon’s on the Pyncheon chair – serve by the seeming justice or injustice in their occurrences as reminders that the world contains ugliness and wrong as well as beauty and hope. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne mentions Hester’s words to Chillingworth – “I thought of death” in an apparent suicidal parody of the *memento mori* of medieval times. In both *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*, the phrase “Death’s garden-ground” conspicuously draws attention to death within a pastoral setting. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, however, “Death’s garden-ground” is a memory of an ancestor’s death (CE 2: 148), whereas in *The Blithedale Romance*, death rudely is seen in both the present and the future. Prior to Zenoba’s death, Coverdale muses:

Would it not be well, even before we have absolute need of it, to fix upon a spot for a cemetery? Let us choose the rudest, roughest, most uncultivable spot, for Death's garden-ground; and Death shall teach us to beautify it, grave by grave. By our sweet, calm way of dying, and the airy elegance out of which we will shape our funeral rites, and the cheerful allegories which we will model into tombstones, the final scene shall lose its terrors; so that, hereafter, it may be happiness to live, and bliss to die. None of us must die young. Yet, should Providence ordain it so, the event shall not be sorrowful, but affect us with a tender, delicious, only half-melancholy, and almost smiling pathos! (CE 3: 130)

To Coverdale’s suggestion that death itself can be smoothed over into a beautiful part of the idealized pastoral life of bliss without heartache, love without sorrow, pleasantries without pains, Hollingsworth retorts, “That is to say... you will die like a Heathen, as you certainly live like one!” (CE 3: 130). Indeed, death cannot very easily be reasoned away

call it mutability – which Coverdale has to face, and his text, if it can, absorb. ET IN ARCADIA EGO” (xii).

into beauty and goodness, and death also brings up questions about the possibility of an afterlife and the God who would establish such an afterlife. Coverdale's attempts to make light of the situation belie the gravity of what happens – Zenobia's death.

Hawthorne's difference from Emerson becomes apparent when studied against Emerson's proclamation of the incontrovertible power of the spirit over the material world: "As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit. So fast will disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons, enemies, vanish; they are temporary and shall be no more seen" (*CW* 1: 45). In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne rejects this scheme of mind and spirit over matter by planting a prison as the central focus of the first scene of a new world Utopia. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, he indulges Emerson's ideas about the erasure of "disagreeable appearances" by having Phoebe drive out the spiders and pests that have begun to infest the Pyncheon house and by removing the enemy Judge Jaffrey through a death that nobody mourns. But in *The Blithedale Romance*, such appearances return with a vengeance: swine, toil, and a kind of madness create disillusionment in Coverdale, whom Hawthorne presents as an unreliable narrator like many of Poe's nervous narrators. And like Poe's narrators, particularly in "The Tell-Tale Heart," Coverdale may be covering his own complicity in Zenobia's death.⁹⁶ Coverdale's guilt may be caused by a direct murder—a possibility advanced by Louise De Salvo (118–20) and others—or

⁹⁶ Hawthorne was familiar with the works of Poe by this time. Kopley traces a likely connection between Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, both of which feature an old man with an "Evil Eye" and a younger man with a heart that palpitates with the weight of guilt upon it.

indirectly in the way that Hollingsworth is blamed and calls himself a “murderer” for his part in Zenobia’s disillusionment with life.

Not surprisingly, Hawthorne was reading about current views of Nature from sources other than Emerson while he wrote his American romances. On the first page of Volume 14 of the London *Retrospective Review* (1826), which Hawthorne checked out of the Salem Athenaeum in November 1849 (Kesselring 59), a discussion of Newtonian science is found on the first pages of the *Review*:

The deep mysteries of philosophy into which the mind of a Newton could penetrate, are, to the greater part of mankind, as inaccessible as the very heavens of which they treat; but in natural history, and all that vast field of subordinate science which leads to the contemplation of Deity, in his works in this his lower world, we find an ample space to which all may retire for their moment of leisure, and, without any overwhelming demand on their intellect, discover wherewithal to expand its powers and lead it from Nature up to Nature’s God. There is another advantage, too, upon which we would willingly expatiate beyond the fair limits by which we are confined; we allude to that tranquillising spirit. (Southern 1–2)

Beginning with its focus on the connection between Nature, humans, and the divine, this article allows for a view of nature that places the divine not just alongside Nature but makes the divine intimately involved within Nature. Although not wholly representative of the theory of Nature espoused in Hawthorne’s romances, the view of Nature espoused by Newtonian science resonates strongly with Hawthorne’s own treatment of Nature.⁹⁷

The attentive human in Nature may be led “from Nature up to Nature’s God.”

While the religious beginnings of the Transcendentalists are sometimes overlooked, many of them saw themselves as modern-day reformers like John Calvin and

⁹⁷ Hawthorne shows enough interest in Newton to devote one of his biographical sketches for children to Newton; in this sketch, Newton is described – in terms similar to the passage from *The Retrospective Review* – as a person with “reverential curiosity” about the universe, a person who sought out in the physical world “the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Creator,” and as one who discovered in the physical world “way[s] of enlightening his mind and of elevating his soul” (CE 6: 235-38).

Martin Luther before them. Some of their leaders – Emerson and Ripley among them – were ex-clergyman who had led or encouraged the transition from Congregationalism to Unitarianism in prominent New England churches before abandoning organized religion altogether. As the self-identifying Transcendentalist historian Octavius Brooks Frothingham makes explicit: “Transcendentalism simply claimed for all men what Protestant Christianity had claimed for its own elect” (108). Even when abandoning organized religion, many Transcendentalists saw their work as a spiritual work that followed in the path of the sixteenth-century European reformers.⁹⁸ Given their extensive religious background, it is not surprising that the Transcendentalists’ view of nature and British romanticism is inflected with a sense of spirituality that remains in spite of the tottering of organized religion. While Hawthorne’s own views tended away from the sectarianism that marked theological conversations in Salem and other New England towns, he retained what he called an “instinct of faith,” an instinct that Margaret B. Moore aptly uses to investigate his relations with the churches in Salem and their influence on his view of the world.⁹⁹ Hawthorne’s writing indicates such religious influence in his treatment of the both human and non-human nature.

⁹⁸ Joe B. Fulton also draws attention to the religious tenor of transcendentalism in his essay on the “reason for a renaissance,” stating, “If we move back into the century in which the transcendentalists were active, we can observe that commentators were more carefully establishing connections between discourses of art and religion, aesthetic and theological rebirth, as well as invoking Puritanism’s determinative influence” (388).

⁹⁹ Moore claims that Hawthorne’s life-long membership in Salem’s First Church needs to be considered in the context of the arguments of the time period rather than in the subsequent designations of Unitarian, Congregationalist, and (for a time) Presbyterianism that marked the most prominent churches in early nineteenth-century Salem. Pointing out the diverse opinions of scholars on Hawthorne’s own religious leanings, Moore concludes her study with this compelling observation: “What seems to me to be clear is that in the Salem he knew he inhaled a great many doctrines, but found little meanings in such precise formulations.... But Hawthorne also absorbed the conviction that religion was significant. Secular Hawthorne’s writings are not; they exude an ‘instinct of faith’ that may be fractured, but that retains a vitality reacting to or drawn from the very air of Salem” (122).

In a later sketch collected in *Our Old Home* (a collection of travel sketches through British cities and the countryside), Hawthorne describes a stone fence as the combined efforts of human, divine, and natural forces: “Finally, a great deal of shrubbery clusters along the base of the stone wall, and takes away the hardness of its outline and in due time, as the upshot of these apparently aimless or sportive touches, we recognize that the beneficent Creator of all things, working through his handmaiden whom we call Nature, has deigned to mingle a charm of divine gracefulness even with so earthly an institution as a boundary fence. The clown who wrought at it little dreamed what fellow-laborer he had” (*CE* 5: 93). Thus, the hints about the connections between the human, the natural, and the supernatural tentatively explored in Blithedale find further expression in his later works. The divine is found in “the beneficent Creator” to whom Nature is related as “his handmaiden.” The human who built the stone fence is a “clown” who nonetheless is important when considering his invisible divine “fellow-laborer.” Similarly, even a clown like Coverdale may do things of lasting value if he becomes a “fellow-laborer” in a Natural world where the Divine is at work – work manifest in Nature.

Although the Blithedalers’ vague sense of spirituality does not sustain the community, the reformation of individuals takes place nonetheless, though on a much smaller scale and to a much smaller degree than the Blithedalers first envisioned. As problems of sight are individual, so reform may be individual. This does not mean, however, that there is no collective reform. Hollingsworth and Priscilla, for example, experience in their marriage a kind of collective reform at the end in their cottage in the woods, though not of the kind envisioned by the community. Unlike Coverdale,

Hollingsworth had a purpose: “he purposed to devote himself and a few disciples to the reform and mental culture of our criminal brethren” (CE 3: 56). This projected asylum reared its head against Emerson’s dictum that “madhouses” would also disappear in a world where spirit ruled over the material world. Hollingsworth, however, becomes disillusioned in the face of Zenobia’s death and subsequently lives a life in seclusion rather than building his large reformatory for criminals. When Coverdale comes to visit him some years after Zenobia’s death, Hollingsworth tells him that rather than the reformatory, a “very small” building “answers all my purposes” since, as he says, “[e]ver since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer” (CE 3: 243).. During this entire exchange, Hollingsworth refuses to look at Coverdale but keeps his failed “eyes fixed on the ground.” Rather than trying to reform others, Hollingsworth recognizes the difficulty of reforming even himself, whom he blames for Zenobia’s apparent suicide. Like Coverdale who decides that reform is an individual rather than communal undertaking, Hollingsworth decides that true reform involves a transformation effected by Nature and Nature’s God.

By returning to Nature periodically, Coverdale demonstrates – even if he does not himself learn –simultaneously that *simply looking* is not enough and that the disintegration of the Blithedale community does not mean Nature has nothing to offer humanity. As Zenobia tells him, he must be “in earnest” if he expects to be at home in Nature – or in the city, for that matter. Hollingsworth’s implantation of his own vision keeps him from learning from Nature as well—he desires a reformatory more than he desires to learn from Nature. The wispiess of Priscilla, much like her father Old Moodie in whom “the throb of the soul’s life [was] too faint”(CE 3: 180) is remedied in part by

her time in Nature, where she regains her health and grows more naturally than she had in her heretofore cooped-up life: “So unformed, vague, and without substance, as she had come to us, it seemed as if we could see Nature shaping out a woman before our very eyes, and yet had only a more reverential sense of the mystery of a woman’s soul and frame. Yesterday, her cheek was pale; to-day, it had a bloom” (*CE* 3: 72–73).

Correspondence theory is a good start but it is not enough by itself to effect the best reformation possible, Hawthorne suggests in *The Blithedale Romance*, because attempts to “see” nature often devolve into a solipsistic activity rather than actual seeing. The individual idiosyncrasies of humans who have fallen from their natural patterns ultimately construct barriers in the way of seeing accurately. The spiritual seeing advocated by Emerson, then, is not without value but must be guided by something more than Nature if it is to sustain vitality. Neither a conviction of “infinite space” nor the theory of correspondence offers enough to reform society. In the name of Miles Coverdale, however, Hawthorne gives us a clue even though Coverdale – unreliable as he is – never comments upon it. The sixteenth-century bishop of Exeter whose name he bears was famous primarily for producing an early translation of the Bible in English. John Eliot, the “Apostle” to the Indians, who shows up in numerous texts by Hawthorne, provides a prophetic interpreter who is the corollary of the historical Coverdale. In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth delivers speeches and almost homilies at the legendary rock pulpit of Eliot. Eliot, whom Hawthorne champions in his biographical tales for children as the one man who treated the Native Americans as if they were human, had an outdoor pulpit and church.¹⁰⁰ As Eliot interpreted Christianity for the

¹⁰⁰ See my comments on Eliot in Chapter 2.

Native Americans who lived close to the Natural world and the historical Coverdale interpreted the Bible for his society, so Hawthorne's Coverdale is given the task of interpreting the world and communicating spiritual truths in that world. His unreliability as a character, however, suggests that he is not up to the task.

Although Hawthorne adopts the Transcendentalist correspondence view of Nature, he does so only as a beginning move. He insists, in a manner uncharacteristic of most Transcendentalists (with Thoreau as perhaps the primary exception), that the human relation to the natural world should be understood as an ecological interrelation rather than a mere backdrop for human action. Although Coverdale is obsessed with the theatrics of the situation surrounding Blithedale Farm, the tragic death of Zenobia suggests that the subject matter of *The Blithedale Romance* aspires toward a more gravity than it initially appears to do. *The Blithedale Romance* indicates that Hawthorne, however, was much more skeptical than the Transcendentalists about the realization of the Transcendentalists' goal to live strictly according to natural law. His characters are transformed, not simply reformed, as their goals are thrown askew when they actually come in contact with Nature and are driven to ask questions about Nature and "Nature's God" once again.

In *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), as in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne gives us a pastoral vision that ultimately fails to deliver on its promises. While his first romance occurs in colonial seventeenth-century Boston and *The Blithedale Romance* in nineteenth-century New England, another romance is sandwiched between these two historically as well as artistically. This romance, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), is a tragicomedy of America, which ends with the marriage typical of Shakespearean

pastorals. In all three romances, Hawthorne investigates the place of humans in the universe by considering the possibilities of nature and the divine as sites of reality in which humans are participants. Hawthorne indicates his interest the question of what Nature may show humans about what it means to find harmony with the rest of a divinely ordered world, a question that intrigued pastoralists before him – especially John Milton, whose explicit project it was in *Paradise Lost* to “justify the wayes of God to men” (355). The American situation, Hawthorne suggests, offers a new place not only in space and time but also in the philosophical tradition of Western civilization in which to ask age-old questions. How can humans live in harmony with the world around them, and what does the Natural world reveal – if anything – about a divinely ordered world where all parts work together in harmony. While Hawthorne’s texts announce that such a vision is fraying, that paradise has again been lost in American history, he also finds the space within America’s history for exemplars who have at least reached toward such harmony.

In Hawthorne’s artistic vision of America, the promise of pastoral bliss is a dream lost almost as soon as it is conceived. The much desired equipoise between nature and civilization, nature and art, seems disrupted by sin and death and, of course, by the prison-house and the public stocks featured so prominently in the opening scene of *The Scarlet Letter*. The shadows cast over the American scene almost at the very beginning of that “original” Puritan world are dramatically emphasized by the narrator’s cryptic remark in the first chapter: “The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison” (*CE* 1: 47). This pragmatic and far from ideal use

of the “virgin soil” in a primitive wilderness away from supposed European refinements and corruptions suggests a fallen world in place of the idealized one that at least some of the Puritans had projected. Hawthorne presents the reader with a vision of a new world Eden, but it is Eden remembered, not Eden realized.¹⁰¹ The blight of the new world is further developed by the narrator’s anti-pastoral catalogue not of beautiful flowers but of “burdock, pig-weed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early born the black flower of civilized society, a prison” (1: 48). By parodying pastoral convention in this way, Hawthorne suggests that rather than finding a new Eden, the Puritans have discovered a second “paradise lost.”

¹⁰¹ R. W. B. Lewis calls the opening scene of *The Scarlet Letter* “the paradigm dramatic image in American literature. With that scene and that novel, New World fiction arrived at its first fulfillment, and Hawthorne at his. And with that scene, all that was dark and treacherous in the American situation became exposed” (111).

CHAPTER FIVE

“To Bear a Part in the Great Scheme of Nature”: Pastoral Humanity in Hawthorne’s American Fairyland

Moonlight, in a familiar room... is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer... [Thereby] the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.

—Hawthorne, “Custom-house” Introduction, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

In the old countries, with which fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded the romancer : his work is not put exactly side by side with nature, and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day probability in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Faery Land...

—Hawthorne, Preface, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)

“I do not agree with you that poetry ought not to be brought into common life,”

Hawthorne wrote to his friend George Hillard on March 24, 1844. “If flowers of Eden can be made to grow among my cabbages and squashes, it will please me so much the better; those excellent vegetables will be just as good to eat, and the flowers no less delightful to see and smell” (*CE* 16: 22). Hawthorne was responding to Hillard’s objections to naming his first child Una after Edmund Spenser’s heroine in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. For Hawthorne, life and literature, nature and art, are not separate but conjoined realities that can and should grow together. In the American fairylands of Hawthorne’s major American romances, nature and art are fused into a harmonious vision of human life as contingent with a greater whole that includes Nature and the divine. Given Hawthorne’s longtime reading and admiration of the fairylands of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, it is not surprising that Hawthorne would create his own

fairylands in which to examine the human condition.¹ In Hawthorne's fairylands, as in Renaissance pastorals, the artistic distance from the immediate social and political scene provide humans with the creative space in which to reach toward the good life of those who experience harmony with the natural and divine order of the world.²

Hawthorne registers his opinion of the tediousness of his friend "Hillard's culture" in the preface of *The Scarlet Letter*, complaining that its air of "classic refinement" had made him "fastidious by sympathy" and – surprisingly for one with Hawthorne's artistic propensities – it had induced him to embrace the custom house job as a relief (*CE* 1: 25).³ Hawthorne claims that his job at the Salem Custom House also provided him with a welcome contrast to the lethargic idealism of his Transcendentalist friends in Concord, from which he had just removed. He suspects that in his new job, he should have "attempted a different order of composition" while in the Custom House since his variegated companions there provided all he needed for the study of human nature: "Nature, – except it were human nature, – the nature that is developed in earth and sky, was, in one sense, hidden from me; and all the imaginative delight wherewith it had been spiritualized, passed away out of my mind" (*CE* 1: 26). Thus, he comes to regret his removal from the Transcendentalists after all, experiencing another kind of lethargy in his Custom House office:

¹ See the Appendix for a discussion of this reading.

² Although I find Edgar Dryden's approach too dialectical to account for the complexity of Hawthorne's work, his discussion of "the enchantment of distance" that contributes to Hawthorne's literary art is a helpful way of understanding Hawthorne's work (19).

³ In *Social Life and Literature Fifty Years Ago*, Horace Cleveland in 1888 recalls the formation of the "Five of Clubs" literary association that included Hillard and Longfellow. "The intimate affectionate companionship and interchange of thought and feeling in regard to the literary labors in which these young men were so fully and sympathetically engaged," writes Cleveland, "caused no small amount of good-natured chaffing, and led to their being designated as 'The Mutual Admiration Society'" (42–43).

It was not merely during the three hours and a half which Uncle Sam claimed as his share of my daily life, that this wretched numbness held possession of me. It went with me on my sea-shore walks and rambles in the country, whenever – which was seldom and reluctantly – I bestirred myself to seek that invigorating charm of Nature, which used to give me such freshness and activity of thought, the moment that I stepped across the threshold of the Old Manse. (*CE* 1: 35)

Nature was a reality that sometimes pervaded his senses and sometimes simply lay external to him and asked for a response, whether or not he actively responded.

Hawthorne uses Renaissance pastoral as a fertile field in which to continue – in America – previous investigations into what it means to be human. As a combination of nature and art, the “fairyland” is amenable to Hawthorne’s project of examining humans as natural artists, as participants in the triplex vita (the contemplative, the active, the passionate), as experiencing wholeness only as they embrace nature and grace as inextricably linked to the condition of being human. By using Renaissance pastoral as his primary lens for viewing Nature – even with the interpolations of these other views of Nature – Hawthorne shapes his romances as searches for timeless truths of the human condition even as he adapts the pastoral form to the American scene in the three romances of this study.

Pastoral writing involves the transposition of nature into art and is often depicted as a fairyland the interposes between nature and art. Hawthorne’s use of a middle ground between art and nature for his romances coincides with one of the chief pastoral motifs that can be found in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton.⁴ Hawthorne found this connection between America’s origins and national origins in generally especially germane to the British Renaissance, with the “natural” fairylands of Spenser,

⁴ Marx popularizes the idea of pastoral as “a symbolic middle landscape” between nature and art as well as between nature and civilization (71).

Shakespeare, and Milton being framed within and against religious accounts of origins. New England was an off-shoot of Old England, as Hawthorne emphasized with the title *Our Old Home* (1863), the last book he published during his lifetime, and new world pastoral asked the old questions of pastoral albeit in a new context and alongside new questions of democracy and myths of progress.⁵

Like Milton, Hawthorne goes back to origins to investigate the place of humans in the world at large and to investigate his own sense of a world at odds with itself, a fallen world. This place of origins is both religious and pastoral – Milton’s Eden and the American forest where Hawthorne’s first-generation Puritans succumbed to their passions, if only for a moment. *The Scarlet Letter* represents Hawthorne’s most sustained imaginative attempt to recreate what the descendants of the Puritans have forgotten, to retrieve what has been obscured by their overconfidence in America’s uniqueness, and to reinvigorate the Puritan heritage as a rich cultural item rather than a shameful historical moment that must be discarded or hidden. Although all four of the authors of this study contribute in their own ways to Hawthorne’s work, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* provides Hawthorne with the clearest thematic model for *The Scarlet Letter*. Jeffrey Theis has called *Paradise Lost* a “sylvan pastoral,” the “garden” being more like a forest than a garden in many ways.⁶ Likewise, *The Scarlet Letter* depicts early America as a sylvan pastoral setting with Edenic parallels and it is the first American work that takes the tone

⁵ Since European civilization had already developed, the newness of an undeveloped world was “new to you” for Americans in a turnabout from the European civilization that Prospero told Miranda was “new to thee” in *The Tempest*. (5.1.184).

⁶ Theis positions the “sylvan pastorals” of Milton and Shakespeare as an apt means “to construct competing and contested individual and communal identities as they are forged in woodland environments” (8). These same issues of self-identity and societal identity play a significant in *The Scarlet Letter* as Hawthorne’s characters attempt to adapt to the “woodland environments” and to the human community beyond the edges of the forest.

of an epic of national origins.⁷ During Milton's lifetime, the Puritan Revolution led by Cromwell had been overturned by the Restoration of the Monarchy, and Milton's epic is in part a response to that event. The Cromwellians had envisioned a perfect society patterned after Edenic relations with God and his world. The early American Puritans had envisioned much the same and had likewise failed to achieve their ambitious goals. Much of what Margaret Kean writes about *Paradise Lost* could be applied to *The Scarlet Letter* as well: "it is rooted in political disillusionment rather than the celebration of national supremacy.... In effect, it interrogates the authority of the epic tradition and amounts to a radical manifesto for a revised identification of true heroism. The story is primarily one of failure to live up to an ideal. Adam and Eve will fall and be expelled from Paradise..." (7). The sense of falling from an imagined perfect state marks both Milton's work and Hawthorne's, though in Hawthorne's work, the original fall into sin takes place before the events he narrates rather than during those events. Both Milton and Hawthorne used their pastoral forms to investigate a failed Puritan attempt to establish a political center that would withstand the sins of society. This political failure is also portrayed in both works as a kind of religious failure and a sense, as Kean claims, that "true heroism" needs to be redefined. For Hawthorne, the new definition of heroism will involve a woman: "The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end!" (*CE* 1: 263). With such a conception of

⁷ Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, which is itself often considered America's national epic, was published the year after *The Scarlet Letter* and is dedicated to Hawthorne, "in token," Melville writes, "of my admiration for his genius" (6: vii)

woman, it is not surprising that the Eve-like Hester should receive as much attention as the Adam figures in Hawthorne's work. Like Milton, Hawthorne goes back to origins to investigate the place of humans in the world at large and to investigate his own sense of a world at odds with itself, a fallen world. This place of origins is both religious and pastoral – Milton's Eden and the American forest.

For Hawthorne, romance provides the mode of writing that best allows one to imagine the good life – or as the Blithedaleers phrase it, “[t]he better life!” (CE 3: 10) – where disturbed relations between humans, nature, and the divine can turn one toward ultimate reconciliation. During his reveries in a “familiar room” of the custom house, the narrator's imagination in the “Custom House” introduction” of *The Scarlet Letter* transforms the dusky light into a productive medium of writing: “a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (CE 1: 35–36). Although this famous description of romance is often cited for its differentiation from the kind of sentimentalist fiction current in the early and mid-nineteenth century or from the type of postbellum realist literature that followed him, Hawthorne's description also reveals Hawthorne's attention to the “fairy-land” which features so prominently in the pastoral literature of the British Renaissance. In the imaginative visions of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, Hawthorne found an idealized realm in which humans find their place in the natural world. Whether represented by the Garden of Eden, Arcadia, Utopia, or Fairyland, each pastoral setting – whether lost entirely or remembered again – is connected with the promise of a golden age where harmony with the world can be achieved. For Hawthorne as for his literary predecessors of the Renaissance, characters'

reactions to Nature and interactions with Nature are strong indicators of whether they will find their natural place in the world.

Even though the fairyland of Renaissance pastoral most captured Hawthorne's imagination, it is certain that Hawthorne also drew upon fairy-lands besides those of the English Renaissance. Although most of these fairylands are imaginary places, Hawthorne is also thinking of some actual places (perhaps named after these imaginary places). Walden Woods in Concord is one of these places. In an 1852 journal entry, Hawthorne's wife Sophia writes, "Mr. Emerson and Ellery Channing passed along; and Mr. Emerson asked Julian [the Hawthornes' son] to go with the children to Fairy Land (in Walden Woods). He went, in a state of ecstatic bliss. He brought me home, in a basket, cowslips, anemones and violets" (*Mem.* 211–212). Such a description elicits reminders of the flowers in the forest where Pearl played in *The Scarlet Letter*. But Hawthorne's work draws on the imaginative fairy-lands of other places, including the Orient, Virgil's Rome, Germany, and England, as well as the "homegrown" fairyland of Walden Woods and a recapitulation of ancient Greece – the latter most notably in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Hawthorne read Virgil for his college entrance exams, and from his childhood had read the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, and Sidney.⁸ Poe and others sometimes associated Hawthorne with the German Tieck, whose fairy tales Hawthorne had tried to translate in the effort to teach himself German.⁹ In Luther Luedtke's study of the presence of Eastern writings – particularly *The Arabian Nights* – in Hawthorne's work, Luedtke points out that, at least in some cases, Hawthorne's fairy-

⁸ See the Appendix.

⁹ Kent Ljungquist characterizes Poe's attempt to paint Hawthorne as a "Puritan Tieck" as a likely effort "to deflect attention from his own perceived borrowings from Hawthorne" (15).

land bears the marks of “a ready-made *fairy-land* in the East” (143). While Luedtke’s work on Hawthorne’s “romance of the Orient” is largely persuasive, these Eastern fairy-lands seem a secondary presence, the primary ones always being the fairy-lands of the British Renaissance. In the preface of *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne mentions “the old countries, with which Fiction has long been conversant” as places of imaginative potency for writers in a land that has “as yet no such Faery Land, so like the real world that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own” (CE 3: 2). While this plurality of countries suggests that it is a mistake to assign Hawthorne’s fairylands to only one spring of creativity, it is to the fairylands of Renaissance England that Hawthorne most consistently turns to create his American romances. Hawthorne’s childhood reading began with Bunyan, Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser, and these writers continued to inspire Hawthorne, who a few months before his death referred to them as the “grand old strains that have been sounding all through my life” (CE 18:626).

In a short story entitled “The Hall of Fantasy,” Hawthorne depicts his pantheon of great writers “who, in every age, have been rulers and demi-gods in the realms of imagination, and its kindred regions” (CE 10:173). Describing the sculptures of “those that chiefly attracted my eye,” he begins with Homer and continues on to writers of the English Renaissance as his penultimate focus: “the all-glorious Shakespeare; Spenser, meet guest for an allegoric structure; the severe divinity of Milton” (174). These authors provide Hawthorne with a robust conception of artistic engagement with the natural world that enables him to transplant the pastoral mode into American soil. Through his

recontextualized pastoral treatment of Nature, Hawthorne insinuates that the search for human meaning is an ongoing historical event that encompasses times and places that include and yet extend beyond nineteenth-century America. From the pastoral writings of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and others, Hawthorne develops a dialogical perspective that enables Americans – even those in nineteenth-century progressive society – to grapple with their place in the human and natural worlds in which they find themselves. Hawthorne’s life-long reading of Renaissance pastoral contributed to his artistic treatment of the interrelations between humans, nature, and the divine in his three major American romances – agreeing with the Transcendentalists on the spiritual vitality of Nature but seeing the ugliness as well as the beauty of the world and therefore seeking justice, or, as Milton put it, seeing to see if it be possible “to justify the ways of God to men.” The Renaissance writers offered ways of thinking about pastoral relations that Hawthorne apparently thought could correct and enhance nineteenth-century discussions about Nature. Such discussions sometimes agreed with and sometimes (often, in the case of Hawthorne) contested the Enlightenment’s emphasis on empirical studies of Nature rather than a focus on finding “truth” – more particularly, the truth of the human condition.¹⁰

Besides “The Hall of Fantasy,” several of Hawthorne’s other short stories show his interest in investigating the relation between country and city, nature and civilization, and art and nature in a new world context. In Hawthorne’s copy of Addison’s *Spectator*,

¹⁰ In “The Intelligence Office,” Hawthorne emphasizes the entrance of one last seeker into an imaginary intelligence office. Unlike earlier seekers who had sought concrete things, this seeker declares, “I seek for the truth” (CE 10: 335). Hawthorne indicates a similar search in much of his literature, even if it seems an outdated interest in the progressive nineteenth century. Hawthorne’s turn toward history and inherited literary forms like the pastoral as a source of truth certainly marks a difference from Emerson in his essay *Nature*.

a copy where his markings are intermingled with those of the previous owner of the book, several marked sections especially show the influence of *The Spectator* on Hawthorne's artistic development.¹¹ One of those is an article that attributes to the artist figure a kind of sixth sense "when compared to such as have no relish for those arts. The florist, the painter, the gardener, the husbandman... are great reliefs to a country life" (78). Another briefly marked article in *The Spectator* also bears relevance to this discussion of pastoral. The article begins by declaring, "If we consider the works of *nature* and *art*, as they are qualified to entertain the imagination, we shall find the last very defective, in comparison of the former... There is something more bold and masterly in the rough careless strokes of nature, than in the nice touches and embellishments of art" (233-34). This article unquestioningly lifts nature above art.

Hawthorne apparently had the ideas of this article in mind when composing "The New Adam and Eve," a short story about a post-apocalyptic world in which a new Adam and Eve awake in the midst of the ruins of a city. Here, the narrator seems at first to agree with the writer of the *Spectator* article, noting that such an undefiled couple "would at once distinguish between art and nature." The narrator is mistaken, however, for as the new Adam and Eve explore an abandoned city in the ruins of a post-apocalyptic earth, his expectation is continuously parodied by the events of the story, leaving the narrator desperately struggling to achieve the elevation of nature over art, an elevation which he

¹¹ My thanks to the gracious assistance of the librarians at the Phillips Library in Salem, Massachusetts, where this volume is housed. This is an 1804 Paris edition of *The Beauties of the Spectator*, and it bears a number of different signatures of Hawthorne, who was apparently experimenting with the look of his name. Beside his name, he has written "1827." A few other names appear in the cover, making it appear that he was the second owner of this book. While some of the marking are obviously those of Francis C. Gilbert, the previous owner (whose signature appears above Hawthorne's), Hawthorne would of course have seen these earlier markings as well as adding some of his own. According to a note on the inside cover, this volume was acquired as part of the estate of John Pike.

had earlier so confidently proclaimed. The new Adam and Eve's reaction to a marble statue of an "exquisitely idealized" child, for example, radically undercut the narrator's assumptions. Contradicting earlier assertions of art as human perversions of nature, the narrator hastens to explain that "[s]culpture, in its highest excellence, is more genuine than painting, and might seem to be evolved from a natural germ, by the same law as a leaf or flower" (257). Although the narrator excuses their interest in the statue by noting that it is a type of art most similar to nature, even the "pure" Adam and Eve show they are not immune to art's appeal. Eve questions whether the statue once breathed with life or if it is "only the shadow of something real, like the pictures in the mirror," and Adam calls it "strange" and associates it with the "mysteries all around," exclaiming in response to its evocative power that "[a]n idea flits continually before me, – would that I could seize it!" (257). As they gaze at the white marble statue of a sleeping child, Adam suggests that they sleep "somewhere beneath the smile of God" in the same trusting pose as this innocent child (267). While drawing upon the art versus nature dichotomy of pastoral literature, this short story challenges too facile distinctions between art and nature. It is perhaps his fascination with this inextricable relationship that causes Hawthorne to turn toward Renaissance pastoral more than any other form to explore Nature.

In his adaptations of the pastorals of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, Hawthorne turns to writers who would have been recognized as literary authorities to critique his contemporaries' conceptions of nature, yet he does so without the markedly unoriginal approach that arguably marked the work of the Fireside Poets and other more

imitative writers of the nineteenth century.¹² In old world pastorals, the “neutral territory” of the natural world constitutes a place removed from the immediacy of aristocratic courts. Also in this “neutral” place, the principal actors of human society away from “the real world” of the court typically discover the natural “fairy-land” as a corrective for the unnatural corruptions of the court. These natural fairy-lands and court societies provide Hawthorne with an imaginative space in which to reexamine the juxtaposition of nature and society that faced the early Puritans in the new world.

Although Hawthorne’s chief characters in *The Scarlet Letter* are not aristocrats as in Old World pastorals, they pass through the “fairy-land” as well for correction and insight into the human situation within and alongside the natural world – and always while addressing questions of Providence which Hawthorne and his three predecessors emphasized in their pastorals. As in Spenser and Shakespeare, participation in “the real world” can be revived by entrance and passage through the fairy-land. Further, these three writers of Renaissance pastoral gave Hawthorne the tools to investigate human nature across time and place, a concern of Hawthorne’s ever since his childhood reading of Shakespeare and others.¹³

Hawthorne’s pastoral vision is clarified neither simply by thinking about contrasts between country life and city life nor by a lazy idyllic lifestyle – the simple pastoral does

¹² In an 1819 letter to his Louisa, Hawthorne the teenager writes a few lines of poetry but complains that “though these are my rhymes, they are not exactly my thoughts. I am full of scraps of poetry can’t keep it out of my brain.” (*CE* 15: 114). Later, in a review of a poem by Lowell, he suggested that the poem was quite good but the obviously derivative quality was less than admirable.

¹³ In his biography of Hawthorne, Randall Stewart considers the impact of nineteenth-century literary expectations on the shaping of Hawthorne’s text: “Shakespearean criticism in the early nineteenth century had often pointed out the advantage of mingling the comic with the tragic... ‘The Custom House,’ as well as many other writings, showed that he did not lack the comic spirit, but *The Scarlet Letter* was wholly tragic. If, some critics complained, he could only combine the two attitudes into one work – like Shakespeare!” (*Biography* 96–97).

not define Hawthorne's pastoral vision at all. Instead the dynamism that characterized Renaissance pastoral is what Hawthorne seeks to bring to the American situation. The tensions of human relations with Nature and the divine captured Hawthorne's attention, all three of Hawthorne's major American romances illustrate the problems besetting characters who attempt to live harmoniously with the world in which they find themselves. The Fairyland constitutes a space that allows Hawthorne to enter into the search for harmonious relations between humans, Nature, and the divine. Occurring within the region of an *allos topos*, an "other place," in which to examine the peculiarities of a particular political or social situation, pastoral addresses the contrastive realities of the world that Renaissance scholar Humphrey Tonkin claims "bewildered and inspired Elizabeth's subjects" (300). Tonkin identifies these relationships as that between "Nature and Grace, Art and Nature, Imagination and Politics, Microcosm and Macrocosm" and the *triplex vita* (action, contemplation, pleasure). These contrasts move sometimes abruptly and sometimes uneasily toward reconciliation in Hawthorne's romances as he adopts and adapts the patterns of pastoral literature to his treatment of America.

As he does with other issues debated in nineteenth-century New England, Hawthorne engages his era's debates about nature by revisiting previous considerations of Nature to determine the relevance of these considerations in his own era, testing earlier conclusions about Nature in the context of the American situation. After surveying Hawthorne's treatment of the chief characters in his three major American romances to examine whether and how they succeed or fail as artist figures in nature, I will consider how his characters take up the tripartite nature of human existence and thereby become better participants in the world in which they find themselves. Finally, I will consider

how Hawthorne suggests that not only do nature and art need to coincide in human perceptions of the world but that the relation between nature and grace must be sought out if one is to make sense of this world. To fully experience what it means to be human, Hawthorne suggests, humans must seek their place within the natural and divine orders. Otherwise, they are destined to wander endlessly without a home or a *raison d'être*. Like the Renaissance writers before him, Hawthorne depicted nature and art, the contemplative and the passionately active, nature and grace, as components needed to make good sense of the human condition.

Hawthorne's Natural Artists

Art and Nature are both parts of the human condition in Hawthorne's romances. Without taking up their role as natural artists, Hawthorne's characters have no possibility of achieving wholeness and balance in their attempts to live harmoniously with the world around them. The pastoral involves a search for a "natural" relation between the human – always an artist figure who creates or re-creates his world – and the natural environment in which the human is found. Such an understanding asserts the human as an artist figure and assumes the ubiquity of art in human society since society is itself the product of human action. Hawthorne's reshaping of the romance genre draws upon the relation between art and nature that marks Renaissance pastoral as well as the conversations of his contemporaries while construing the individual as an artist figure in a temporal world, thus blending the artistic visions of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton and transplanting them into a new world setting. The history of the rise and fall of the Puritans in England contributed largely to the vision of Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, and two centuries later, the history of the rise and fall of the Puritans in America inspired Hawthorne to write his

magnum opus *The Scarlet Letter*. As Hawthorne's most historically sensitive American romance, *The Scarlet Letter* deals with the problem of how to define a nation's sense of identity in the face of failed ideals. These two works bear striking thematic parallels, reinvestigating the theological premises of the fallen nature of humanity and focusing on the Adam and Eve characters grappling with their sense of fallenness. For an English Puritan like Milton, the restoration of the British monarchy marked the failure of Cromwell's Puritan vision for a better society in England. Likewise, Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* dealt with the failed vision of the Puritans in America to establish the kind of better society they had envisioned. Even in their distance from a decadent old world, the Puritans found their envisioned utopia almost immediately transformed into a fallen world.

The four major characters of *The Scarlet Letter* – Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth – together with the minor characters, represent a wide range of attitudes toward art and nature. For the Puritans, a good society is inherently religious, so it is not surprising that Hawthorne presents the major characters of this Puritan romance of America in terms of a new world Eden that draws from Milton *Paradise Lost* even as it diverges from that earlier work. Hawthorne's description of Pearl invokes Milton's Eden: "By its perfect shape, its vigor, and its natural dexterity in the use of all its untried limbs, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world's first parents were driven out" (*CE* 1: 90). At the same time as he invokes Milton, Hawthorne reshapes the Miltonic world, first by framing America rather than England as Eden, then by presenting the offspring of Adam and Eve in the garden. Despite her explicit invocation of the Garden

of Eden, Pearl stands outside of Milton's garden since no human characters except Adam and Eve are present in it.

Pearl exemplifies Hawthorne's method of dealing with the relation between art and nature in a Puritan context. Like the Puritan John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, Hawthorne interpolates garden and forest imagery in a re-creation of Eden. Pearl is described as a child of Eden and a child of nature: "By its perfect shape, its vigor, and its natural dexterity in the use of all its untried limb, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world's first parents were driven out" (*CE* 1: 90). Hawthorne's creation of Pearl as a fusion of art and nature also finds its corollary in the literary works of Shakespeare and Spenser as well as in Hawthorne's own immediate world. F. O. Matthiessen gives passing attention to the character of Pearl, whom he says is "worth dissecting as the purest type of Spenserian characterization" (278). While such an assessment of Pearl's character seems simply to verify Hawthorne's self-chiding of himself as a writer with "an inveterate love of allegory" (*CE* 10: 91), it obscures her attunement to nature in a way that draws upon Shakespeare as well as Spenser.¹⁴ Pearl finds a likeness in the princess-turned-shepherdess Perdita in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Like Perdita, Pearl is an enchanting person seemingly from another world even while she lives in a primitive society. For Perdita, that primitive world is the old shepherd's home in Bohemia away from her father's court in Sicilia; for Pearl, the primitive world is her mother's cottage and the surrounding area away from her mother's birthplace in old England. According to

¹⁴ Spenser's Pastorella, aligned with Shakespeare's Perdita and Hawthorne's Pearl through the flowers all three of them string about themselves, is not *simply* a type (although she definitely functions as a type, as her name indicates). Like Shakespeare and Hawthorne's pastoral females, Pastorella wears flowers in her hair; for her, it is a "flowry girlond" (6.9.42.6).

Hawthorne's publisher James Fields, Hawthorne was entranced by the character of Perdita:

She danced like a fairy, she sang exquisitely, so that every one who knew her seemed amazed at her perfect way of doing everything she attempted. Who was it that thus summoned all this witchery, making such a tumult in young Hawthorne's bosom? ... Perdita! It was Shakespeare who introduced Hawthorne to his first real love, and the lover never forgot his first mistress. (67)

Given this characterization, Perdita appears to represent for Hawthorne a figure of pastoral perfection and beauty. And in Pearl, we find a younger version of Perdita. When they are in the woods away from the society of the Puritans, Pearl's natural beauty is most apparent. Hester turns to Dimmesdale to exclaim, "how strangely beautiful she looks, with those wild flowers in her hair. It is as if one of the fairies, whom we left in dear old England, had decked her out to meet us" (*CE* 1: 206).

Hawthorne emphasizes Pearl's natural affinity with the woods by describing her repeatedly in terms of flowers and of birds. In the woods, she seems a prelapsarian being in full harmony with the natural world, unlike even her parents who take to the woods more than most of the Puritans do:

The great black forest – stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and troubles of the world into its bosom – became the playmate of the lonely infant... A wolf, it is said, – but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable, came up and smelt of Pearl's robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand. The truth seems to be, however, that the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child. (*CE* 1: 204–05)

From the "great black forest" to the "mother-forest," Hawthorne changes the Puritans' dark conception of the wild forest into the beautiful "fairylane." Like Spenser's Una, who walks through the forest in the company of a wild lion, Pearl here experiences intimacy with the "denizens of the forest." Hawthorne's own daughter Una, named for

Spenser's heroine, serves as a model for Pearl, as Hawthorne's son Julian has pointed out.¹⁵ Such interlinking threads of real and imaginary characters illustrates the fertile space between "the Actual and the Imaginary" that Hawthorne associates with romance.¹⁶

The flowers that Pearl gathers to decorate her hair also illustrate her unity with Nature:

The flowers . . . whispered, as she passed, 'Adorn thyself with me, thou beautiful child, adorn thyself with me!' – and, to please them, Pearl gathered the violets, and anemones, and columbines, and some twigs of the freshest green, which the old trees held down before her eyes. With these she decorated her hair, and her young waist, and became a nymph-child or an infant dryad, or whatever else was in closest sympathy with the antique wood. (*CE* 1: 205)

Like Perdita, Pearl fuses art and nature together in one figure by becoming a mythical "nymph" or "dryad" or some other creature in "closest sympathy with the antique wood." In much the same way, flowers attach themselves to Perdita when she is "[m]ost goddess-like pranked up" as Flora for the sheep-shearing festival and her lover exclaims, "These your unusual weeds to each part of you, / Do give a life" (*WT* 4.4.1–2, 10). Like Perdita who is naturally suited to the natural attire of the goddess of flowers, Pearl wears flowers as a simultaneously natural and artistic extension of her beauty. For both of them, art is the extension of nature rather than the opposition of nature.¹⁷

On the seashore too, Pearl's affinity with the natural world is obvious. Creating her own artistic display out of sea-weed, she effectively transforms herself into a

¹⁵ Julian points out that his father's descriptions of Una in the notebooks depict a spirited child much like Pearl. Hawthorne's own anxieties as a parent of such a spirited child are sometimes described in words very similar to those he ascribes to Hester ("Making" 404–06).

¹⁶ Hawthorne's famous definition of romance (*CE* 1: 36) exhibits other pastoral qualities that will be discussed below.

¹⁷ Such an intertwining relation between art and nature is perhaps captured most directly in *The Winter's Tale*, where Polixenes and Perdita are discussing the art of grafting, agreeing that "the art itself is nature." (*WT* 4.4.97). Hawthorne seems to indicate that for a young girl like Pearl, this kind of art as natural extension seems possible, but the adults in *The Scarlet Letter* find this relation more troubling.

mermaid; her final touch is especially poignant to her mother: “She inherited her mother’s gift for devising drapery and costume. As the last touch to her mermaid’s garb, Pearl took some eel-grass, and imitated, as best she could, on her own bosom, the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother’s. A letter, – the letter A, – but freshly green, instead of scarlet!” (*CE* 1: 178). Pearl is a little artist, but her art is nature. The “wild” nature of the mariners and the Native Americans on the margins of Puritan society finds a counterpart in Pearl’s “wild” affinity with nature. On election day, as much a holiday as any in the colony, mariners and Native Americans joined the Puritans of Boston and those from the surrounding countryside who came. All of them are entranced by Pearl’s bird-like vivacity, but she has a special effect on the mariners and Native Americans:

She ran and looked the wild Indian in the face; and he grew conscious of a nature wilder than his own. Thence, with native audacity, but still with a reserve as characteristic, she flew into the midst of a group of mariners, the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean, as the Indians were of the land; and they gazed wonderingly and admiringly at Pearl, as if a flake of the sea-foam had taken the shape of a little maid, and were gifted with a soul of the sea-fire, that flashes beneath the prow in the night-time. (*CE* 1: 244–45)

Pearl is a “natural” person, whose likeness to the wild men of the earth, the wild men of the ocean and her fiery appearance (elsewhere emphasized by her red dress) associates her with earth, water, and fire – three of the four classic “elements.”

Pearl is also associated closely with air, the fourth element, through her flitting bird-like movements and a Shakespearean and biblical reference. To the mariner who calls her a “witch-baby,” Pearl replies, “Mistress Hibbins says my father is the Prince of the Air!... If thou callest me that ill name, I shall tell him of thee; and he will chase thy ship with a tempest!” (*CE* 1: 245). The constant intimations of the Puritans that Pearl

was begotten of the devil, along with Hester's fears that such may have been the case even though she well knows that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father, is again invoked by the phrase "the Prince of the Air" since Satan is referred to in the biblical book of Ephesians as "the prince of the power of the air" (cf Eph. 2.2). In Shakespeare's *Tempest*, however, the one causing the tempest is the magician Prospero – who, with the help of the airy sprite Ariel, exerts his power over the air. Hawthorne's allusion to *The Tempest* places Pearl not so much in the position of Prospero's daughter Miranda as in the position of Ariel, a likeness made more definite by Ariel's flitting movements.¹⁸

Even stolid members of the Puritan community, which views Pearl as a constant enigma of dubious origins, do not entirely overlook her likeness to Old World figures. When Governor Bellingham sees Pearl decked out in a beautiful scarlet dress Hester has made for her, he stops in surprise, exclaiming, "What have we here? ... I have never seen the like, since my days of vanity in old King James' time, when I was wont to esteem it a high favor to be admitted to a court mask!" (*CE* 1: 109). And his companion of the moment, the Reverend Mr. Wilson, chimes in, directing a series of questions to Pearl, one of which identifies her with old world pastoral literature: "art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies, whom we thought to have left behind us... in merry old England?" (*CE* 110). Some of these first-generation Puritans had served in English courts and were well-acquainted with the dramatic and literary fare of those courts.

While F.O. Matthiessen claims that Pearl seems an idealization, little more than a mere abstraction (278), an early reviewer in the *North American Review*, Anne W.

¹⁸ When Prospero bids Ariel to go, Ariel claims an intimacy with the air and assures Prospero that this will be quickly accomplished, "I drink the air before me, and return / Or ere your pulse twice beat" (*Tmp.* 5.1.102–03).

Abbott, presents a very different view of Pearl. She criticizes Hester and Dimmesdale for not being Christian enough but rather surprisingly admires little Pearl – given that Pearl is less Puritan than either the Reverend Dimmesdale or even her mother Hester. Abbott claims that Pearl must be more than an abstraction because she breathes with the life of a real child:

When he would have us call her elvish and imp-like, we persist in seeing only a capricious, roguish, untamed child, such as many a mother has looked upon with awe, and a feeling of helpless incapacity to rule.... We feel at once that the author must have a 'Little Pearl' of his own, whose portrait, consciously or unconsciously, his pen sketches out. Not that we would deny to Mr. Hawthorne the power to call up any shape, angel or goblin, and present it before his readers in a striking and vivid light. But there is something more than imagination in the picture of 'Little Pearl.' The heart takes a part in it, and puts in certain inimitable touches of nature here and there, such as fancy never dreamed of, and only a long and loving observation of the ways of children could suggest" (142).

Hawthorne's son Julian verifies such an assessment: "It chanced, singularly," Julian writes, noting the circumstances of his father's life during the time he was writing *The Scarlet Letter*, "that the child of his imagination and she of reality were side by side before him at the same time, and the latter supplied substance to the other..." ("Making" 404). Thus, it appears that Hawthorne's daughter Una was at least one of the models for the character of Pearl. It is this combination of real persons and imaginative creations that contributes to Hawthorne's literary creativity.¹⁹ Pearl is nature itself, and in her can be

¹⁹ Critics have examined possible historical models for Hester in much greater detail even than Pearl. Michael Colacurcio discusses Hester Prynne as loosely correlative to Ann Hutchinson, the famous antinomianist who was banished from Boston and who is mentioned by Hawthorne as being put in the same prison that holds Hester at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter*. Colacurcio adds that calling Hutchinson "sainted" is an obvious bit of irony, "for Hawthorne will have nearly as many reservations about Hester's sainthood as John Winthrop had about Mrs. Hutchinson's" ("Footsteps" 460). While I do not read Hawthorne's statement with as much irony as Colacurcio here intimates, it is clear that Hester's "charity" is not quite the type idealized by Winthrop but while Hester is by no means presented as a perfect model, Hawthorne does present her as extraordinary for her time. Nina Baym argues instead that George Sand provides a more likely parallel for Hester than does Ann Hutchinson ("George Sand" 14). More recently, Thomas Mitchell has made a compelling case for Margaret Fuller as a model for Hester in large part by

observed real life, ideal life, and natural life all at once: “Pearl is the most complex figure in the romance, with a character compounded of Romantic and Calvinistic conceptions of childhood blended with Hawthorne’s observations of his daughter Una...” (Abel 204).

Pearl, like her mother Hester, stands as an important representation of art and nature.

Critics have long noted Hester’s Eve-like status and the correspondent motion of the fall being reenacted in *The Scarlet Letter*. As he does even more explicitly in his last major romance *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne investigates the doctrine of “the fortunate fall” in this earlier romance – whether or not “fallenness” in some way contributes to one’s wholeness as a person.²⁰ His treatment of “wildness” and passion are perhaps the most evident examples of such questioning. Darrel Abel compares Hester with Milton’s Eve and calls her a “charmingly real woman whose abundant sexuality, ‘whatever hypocrites austere talk,’ was the characteristic and valuable endowment of her sex” (186). Sexual desire underlies the major conflict in the story, with adultery and the image of the cuckolded husband playing a prominent part. The cuckold Chillingworth mentions that he, an old man, should not have expected his young beautiful wife to bear her loneliness when he was parted with her. Whether Hawthorne himself believed this or not is a topic that has engaged many critics.²¹ While Adam is not exactly presented as a

noting the similarity in their language: “Hester’s words in the seventeenth century are Fuller’s words in the nineteenth century” (131). Rather than seeing these various historical resemblances as opposing notions of “who is Hester,” I consider Hester as a woman who bore the traits of many of these historical women and yet *is* not any one of them. Hawthorne’s project seems to be to create a fictional personage that could well have lived in the seventeenth-century world of New England Puritans.

²⁰ In this later text, the skeptical Kenyon inquires, “Is Sin then – which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the Universe – is it, like Sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could have otherwise obtained? Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier Paradise than his?” (*CE* 4: 460). Though he is shushed by Hilda, Kenyon’s question haunts much of the text of Hawthorne’s last completed romance.

²¹ Thomas Mitchell, for example, suggests that Hawthorne’s “ambivalent admiration” for Margaret Fuller may have led to a kind of warring attitude in his mind between Fuller and his more genteel

cuckold in *Paradise Lost*, Eve is seduced by Satan while she is alone in the garden. To ignore the sexual desire underlying the major conflict in the story is to ignore the importance of passion to human nature.

Hester learns to be comfortable in the woods, even asking Dimmesdale to retreat to the wild with her and their daughter Pearl. In her congenial visits to the forest, Hester ignores Puritan suspicions of the wilderness as the place of witches and devils and finds the wilderness amenable to her occasional need for space outside of the Puritan community.²² At home in the woods, Hester at one point takes Pearl into the woods on “a footpath. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest . . . to Hester's mind, it imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering”(CE 1: 183). The fairyland represents, for both Spenser and Hawthorne, Nature set slightly apart from the constructs of human society – in Hawthorne’s case, away from the Puritan community – where the leading citizens can find their release from society. Matthiessen draws attention to Spenser’s “Woods of Error” as a likely source for Hawthorne’s depiction of Hester’s frame of mind. In Book One of *The Faerie Queene*,

wife Sophia (46). Mitchell does cast some doubt on this thesis, however, by noting that Sophia’s character remained largely hidden in literary circles but that she was not always the patient little “Dove,” as Hawthorne sometimes called her (53). Though Mitchell mostly reasons this away, I think it not unlikely that Sophia played the greater role in Hawthorne’s contention that passion is a good part of being human. Hawthorne’s alternate titles for her as a “naughty Sophie” and his “tenderest” dove in his letters gives considerable support for Sophia a woman who had a wild spirit as well as her well-known loving demeanor toward her husband (CE 15: 397–400).

²² Although the forest does not play the same role in *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes suspects the passionate Paulina of witchcraft. While he later hopes only that her seemingly magical power of bringing his wife Hermione back to life is “an art / Lawful as eating” (WT 5.3.110–11) – a natural art – he earlier threatens to have her burnt, to which Paulina replies: “It is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in’t” (WT 2.3.114–15). While Paulina’s faithful service to Hermione finally changes Leontes’ attitude, Hester’s faithful service in spite of maltreatment finally changes the Puritan community’s attitude toward her.

Una and the Redcrosse Knight seek cover in a forest glade which turns out to be a “Wandering Wood” or a “Wood of Error:”

When weening to returne, whence they did stray,
They cannot find that path, which first was showne,
But wander too and fro in waies vnknowne,
Furthest from end then, when they nearest weene,
That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:
So many pathes, so many turnings seene,
That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been. (*FQ* 1.1.10.3-9)

A few lines down, when they try to escape, the woods are described as a “labyrinth” (1.1.11.4). When they finally do leave the woods, they meet Archimago, an “aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad” who “by his belt his booke he hanging had” (1.1.29.2,4). Archimago, with his rustic dress and association with books provides a model for the self-proclaimed bookworm Chillingworth who plots the ruin of the two lovers and comes from the forest where he has been in captivity with the American Indians after crossing the ocean.²³ Chillingworth, like Archimago, is well-versed in books, well-versed enough to take up the role of a doctor. When he treats Dimmesdale with his natural remedies, Chillingworth also works his ill much like Archimago at his hermitage who “to his study goes, and there amidst / His magick books and artes of sundrie kindes, / He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy minds” (1.1.36.7-9). In Book IV, when Sir Scudamour recounts his approach to the temple of Venus where his “love was lodged” (4.10.29.4), one of the distractions along the way is the wood itself:

Fresh shadowes, fit to shroud from sunny ray;
Faire lawnds, to take the sunne in season dew;
Sweet springs, in which a thousand Nymphs did play;
Soft rombling brookes, that gentle slomber drew;

²³ I am indebted to Randall Stewart for pointing out Chillingworth’s similarities to Archimago and for drawing numerous other parallels between Renaissance characters and the characters of Hawthorne’s romances. Because of his thorough treatment of these matters, I spend more time on analyzing the texts in terms of the implications Stewart draws than in reiterating all the connections.

High reared mounts, the lands about to view;
Low looking dales, disloignd from common gaze;
Delightful bowres, to solace louers trew;
False Labyrinthes, fond runners eyes to daze;
All which by nature made did nature selfe amaze. (4.10.24)

The bowers of bliss, the “False Labyrinthes,” the “rombling brookes,” the “Fresh shadowes” that dance in play and sometimes “shroud from sunny ray” appear in the forest scenes and the relationship between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale as well. Like the Redcrosse Knight, Dimmesdale is dressed as a representative of Holiness who wants holy love with Una but is threatened by his own labyrinthine nature as well as that of the physical environment.

Milton’s depiction of a labyrinth of mind may also bear on Hester’s situation. Satan enters the garden of Eden in a mist. Milton also describes Satan desiring revenge, much like Archimago, and sneaking into the Garden of Eden as a “black mist low creeping” to find the serpent asleep, coiled “[i]n Labyrinth of many a round self-rowld, / His head the midst, well stor’d with suttile wiles: / Not yet in horrid Shape or dismal Den” (*PL* 9.180, 183-85). Nature and the mind are again placed side by side in a reflective way that suggests correspondence, but the “self-rowld” Serpent with his head “the midst” is compared to a labyrinth that is harder to decipher than simple correspondence. The serpent is “suttle” even though not yet fallen in Milton’s world. In the masque *Comus*, Milton’s Lady replies to the scheming Comus that she has been “bereft” in the woods and become diverted by “[d]im darkness and this leafy labyrinth” (*Com.* 277–78). The natural world has become a labyrinth and the Lady lacks any clue to help her find her way, much as Hester Prynne does.

Hester's artistic vitality is not first revealed in the wild; instead, her elaborate needlework gives her the means to support herself and her daughter and brings her into contact with the Puritan community who sought out her needlework for elaborate robes of state, fancy funeral dresses, and decorative baby clothes – all of which somehow escaped the stern Puritan injunction against “these and similar extravagances” that were denied “to the plebian order.” The narrator indicates that this art is not unnatural after all but that it is an extension of nature, an outworking of human nature: “She had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic, – a taste for the gorgeously beautiful, which, save in the exquisite productions of her needle, found nothing else, in all the possibilities of her life, to exercise itself upon” (CE 1: 83). Thus her art was an expression of her nature. Here, as in the character of Pearl whose art is nature, Hawthorne again evokes the conversation of Polixenes and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* as they discuss the relationship between human art and the natural world – the shared creativity in which art is the extension of nature since humans are themselves part of nature. The narrator's comments suggest that her art is an old world art “of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves, to add the richer and more spiritual adornment of human ingenuity to their fabrics of silk and gold” (CE 1: 81–82). Fairly rapidly even in this sterner new world, the narrator tells us, “her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion” (CE 1: 82). Ironically, even the harsher Puritans responded favorably to her natural art.

In his repeated depictions of Pearl and Hester side by side, Hawthorne invites us to examine different models of womanhood – particularly, of strong women. It is not insignificant, in light of such positioning, to consider the figure of “the sweet, chaste,

faithful, and courageous Imogen” in Shakespeare’s pastoral *Cymbeline*, the character whom Hawthorne calls “the tenderest and womanliest woman that Shakspeare ever made immortal in the world” (*CE* 5: 80). Like Imogen, Hester faced harsh treatment by those who accused her of infidelity. Unlike Imogen, Hester was not innocent of such charges. Like Imogen, Hester was comfortable in the woods and continued on in the face of difficulty. Hester’s lover is a man who, like Imogen’s lover Posthumus, suffers the wiles of a “friend” whose so-called help does him much harm. In both cases, though the character’s relations do not represent a one-to-one correspondence, sexual jealousy plays an important role. Both Posthumus and Dimmesdale seem to be pushed away from the ones they love by unnatural human laws that deny their natural connection – the first by the king’s decree, the second by the construct of an arranged marriage that does not include love and passion. Pearl, on the other hand, is also a young innocent and is attracted to the flowers that are associated with Shakespeare’s strong female characters like Imogen and Perdita.

The subtle but pressing conflict between the two Adam figures – who also interpolate Nature and Art in a variety of ways – contributes significantly to the drama of this work. Hester’s old world husband is known in the new world as the learned physician Roger Chillingworth, and her new world lover is respected as the young Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. By remaining in England when his wife Hester came to America, Chillingworth resembles Milton’s Adam who does not immediately accompany his betrothed into the garden of the New World and is not present when she falls. Dimmesdale, on the other hand, partakes of the forbidden fruit with Hester in the garden. Thus, even the pious Puritans reenact the fall in a new world supposedly isolated from

old world decadence. While both men have pursued Hester, an adherence to social convention keeps both of them from living with her in the New World. Chillingworth does not want to be known as a cuckold, and Dimmesdale does not want to lose his ministerial position in the community. Both of them also find a special intimacy with the natural world that sets them apart from the Puritan community at large and places them closer to Pearl and Hester. Both men gained extensive training outside the forests and towns of the New World. The Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is described as “a young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning into our wild forest-land”; he is noted for his eloquence, “his high native gifts and scholar-like attainments” (*CE* 1: 66). Chillingworth describes himself as “a man of thought, – the book-worm of great libraries” (*CE* 1: 74). Their arts have gained them high ranking. Dimmesdale’s art of eloquent preaching makes him an object almost of devotion in the community and many of his human flock resort to him for spiritual guidance. Chillingworth’s medical arts have gained him standing in the community.

Like the works of his predecessors, Hawthorne’s pastoral involves marital relations and the question of the “natural” status of those relations. Chillingworth laments to Hester that he should have known that he would be cuckolded, remarking that when he met Hester in the old world, he was “a man of thought, – the book-worm of great libraries, – a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge, – what had I to do with beauty and youth like thine own!” (*CE* 1: 74). After claiming or acknowledging that their marriage was an unnatural thing, an attempt to merge youth and beauty with age and deformity, Chillingworth adds that he should have known better. If he was a bookworm who read the works of his time that

Hawthorne was to read, he would be most familiar with the old man January and young woman May stories of Chaucer and others, in which an old man gets cuckolded by his young wife. In Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, a similar context is invoked when old Camillo tells the enchanting Perdita, "I should leave grazing were I of your flock, / And only live by gazing," to which Perdita replies, "Out alas! / You'd be so lean that blasts of January / Would blow you through and through" (*WT* 4.4.109–12). Had he read the books at his disposal, Chillingworth would have expected nothing less than Hester's infidelity, and his comments underscore his regretful awareness of such knowledge. Not surprisingly, then, Hester claims that the passion she shared with Dimmesdale "had a consecration of its own" (*CE* 1: 195). Such conceptions of natural passion are largely squelched in a Puritan new world.

Both Hester's husband and her lover possess some degree of familiarity with Nature and Art both; both men find the natural world a panacea of sorts. For Chillingworth, it is a physical panacea, and for Dimmesdale, a spiritual panacea. Upon Dimmesdale's return from the forest after one of his visits to Eliot that was followed up by a meeting with Hester and Pearl in the seclusion of the forest, Chillingworth exclaims, "methinks, dear Sir, that you look pale; as if the travel through the wilderness had been too sore for you" (*CE* 1: 223). Dimmesdale brushes him off, saying that the "free air" has been good for him in his frail state of health. And he proceeds to write the best sermon he has ever delivered, fresh from the woods where the beauty and vitality he found in Hester, Pearl, and even Eliot has again given him the impetus to bring life to his own art of eloquent rhetoric. In addition to his extensive earlier book studies, Chillingworth had just been released from his captivity in a Native American tribe and

had learned “the propensities of native herbs and roots; nor did he conceal from his patients that these simple medicines, Nature’s boon to the untutored savage, had quite as large a share of his own confidence as the European pharmacopoeia, which so many learned doctors had spent centuries in elaborating” (*CE* 1: 120). Thus, Chillingworth learns the intricacies of the American forest as well as of the European pharmacopoeia. Like Spenser’s hermit, his knowledge of nature becomes the means by which he can offer to help those around him. Although the Puritans distrust the woods, seeing it as the abode of dangerous Native Americans and witch meetings, Chillingworth’s knowledge of the wood does not corrupt him; his corruption stems from his motive for revenge. The figure of Chillingworth combines European book-learning with the experiential knowledge of nature he learns from the Native Americans in much the way Cooper’s idealized hero Natty Bumppo character does. Hawthorne diverges strongly from Cooper, however, in that this character is the villain rather than the hero. Such a change intimates that the combination of knowledge of nature and of human society by itself will not automatically produce a good life, even if such a combination is necessary to a fully developed human life.

In Hawthorne’s other romances, as in *The Scarlet Letter*, his major characters have models in old world pastorals, and his reshaping of old world models becomes clearly evident when his characters are examined against a pastoral background. Hawthorne’s characters consistently appear as artist figures who struggle to come to terms with their place in human society and in the natural world. Hawthorne’s romances consistently include as his main characters Adam and Eve figures who are more or less satisfactory in that role. Often, at least one character is called an “artist” and at least one

character is closely associated with the land; but all of them, nonetheless, are presented as artist figures within the natural world.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave is called “the artist” and digs in the black soil of the garden, but others also are depicted as natural artists. Clifford, lover of the beautiful, is one type of natural artist, and even Hepzibah, with her garden parties, is another. Phoebe has the art of arranging flowers, and the spirit of Alice keeps her flowers blooming on one of the gables of the house while the music of her harpsichord is heard at the end of this romance. Richard Brodhead points out that “[t]he characters have remarkable freedom to discuss the book’s central concerns, a freedom like that which enables Perdita and Polixenes to debate the relation of art to nature in *The Winter’s Tale*” (*Hawthorne Melville* 81). Though Brodhead does not pay close attention to the interplay between art and nature in his analysis, Phoebe may indeed function as a Perdita character as well; the narrator describes Phoebe as one “whose fresh and maidenly figure was both sunshine and flowers” (*CE* 2: 108–09). For all her apparent naiveté, her actions bring fresh life to her older relatives as well as drawing the interest of Holgrave. Holgrave demonstrates a Shakespearean tragicomic variety of ethical action by forgiving wrongs and seeking reconciliation with his ancestral enemies in the manner of Prospero in *The Tempest* or Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale*.

Holgrave’s attempts to manipulate nature and his temptation to enchant Phoebe – as Milton’s Comus enchants the Lady – are offset by Phoebe’s attempts to become one with nature.²⁴ Both types of interaction with nature involve some kind of artistic response that either masks or corresponds to their interaction with human society.

²⁴ Interestingly, *Comus* is directly referenced in the scene of the dead Judge Jaffrey sitting as if enchanted in the chair of the Pyncheon parlor.

Phoebe's open-handed celebration of life as it presents itself to her results in a naïveté that, in the end, surprisingly stands side by side with Holgrave's artistic and scientific manipulations of his world. Their shared declarations of love resulted in a transfiguration of the earth itself: "The bliss, which makes all things true, beautiful, and holy, shone around this youth and maiden. . . . They transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again, and themselves the first two dwellers in it" (CE 2: 307). The house of Pyncheon and the house of Maule have joined in a classic resolution that resembles the ending of a Shakespearean comedy or the beginning of *Paradise Lost* before Paradise is lost.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, characters like Westervelt on the one hand and Silas on the other fail to participate wholly in both art and nature. Westervelt does public performances but merely passes through Nature without responding to it, while Silas works the fields but does not have much time for things like Coverdale's poetry or any other kind of art. Coverdale struggles in a very personal way with the art and nature dichotomy, calling himself a poet and yet being forced to work the farm for his sustenance. Initially Coverdale views his new relation to nature in constructive terms: "Nature, whose laws I had broken in various artificial ways, comported herself towards me as a strict, but loving mother, who uses the rod upon her little boy for his naughtiness, and then gives him a smile, a kiss, and some pretty playthings, to console the urchin for her severity" (CE 3:62). Such enthusiasm is short-lived, however, as Coverdale experiences the demands of physical labor and disclaims any unity between an artist's life and a "natural" life. The limits of nature become more and more irksome to Coverdale who claims that his hero, the poet-farmer Robert Burns, "was no poet while a farmer, and no farmer while a poet" (66). Nonetheless, Hollingsworth declares that

Coverdale's difficulty lies in the fact that he "is not in earnest, either as a poet or a laborer" (*CE* 3: 68). Coverdale resents Hollingsworth's insinuation that his half-hearted espousal of poetry, like his half-hearted espousal of the natural world, is more to blame than his situation and asks the reader to remember "that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny" (*CE* 3: 11). Coverdale's life in a more natural setting has not accomplished what he had hoped, but it has corrected some of his excesses nonetheless and, at the least, taught him that some methods of human connection were more parasitic than sympathetic.

While the major characters of *The Scarlet Letter* depict a wide range of relations to art and nature, the characters in his next two romances provide contrasting views. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, most of his characters eventually learn to bring together art and nature by practicing the charity that only Hester seems to have obtained in the earlier romance, but in *The Blithedale Romance*, the characters almost uniformly fail to find ways of bringing together art and nature. Hawthorne's hope of redeeming society depends in part upon artist-figures in tune with nature who may thus begin to transform their societies. Thus, Hawthorne is not so much advocating a new idea as he is transplanting an old idea in a new context. New England was an off-shoot of Old England, as Hawthorne emphasized with the title *Our Old Home* (1863), the last book he published during his lifetime, and new world pastoral asked the old questions of pastoral albeit in a new context and alongside new questions of democracy and progress. Since European civilization had already developed, the newness of an undeveloped world was "new to you" for Americans in a turnabout from the European civilization that Prospero in *The Tempest* tells Miranda is "new to you."

The successful artist-figures in Hawthorne's three major romances display one part of what must be done to redeem an otherwise hopeless society – find reconciliation between humans and nature. That much at least Hawthorne shares with his Transcendentalist friends. For Hawthorne, most reform movements fail because they focus on external change while obscuring the necessity of transforming the heart.²⁵ In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne locates his most adequate model of artistic and harmonious relations with the natural world in the Pearl and her mother Hester, a Puritan on the margins who learns to live within that “middle landscape” symbolized in pastoral literature itself.²⁶ Of the major characters presented in this work, Hester cultivates her art for the good of the community and develops a closer relation to the natural world than most of her contemporaries. Thus, her relation to the natural world on the one hand and to human society on the other represents a more successful model of the good life than that provided by any of the other characters in Hawthorne's work. For Hester, as for other characters of Hawthorne's literature, this good life takes place on the margins of society rather than at its center.²⁷ In *The House of the Seven Gables*, most of the major characters

²⁵ Hawthorne's writings indicate a continuous dilemma – how to join the heart and mind. This is expressed most cogently in a short story called “Sunday Morning,” in which the narrator hears a sermon floating out of the church next door. He finds himself wishing for resolution but finding it elusive: “The broken and scattered fragments of this one discourse will be the texts of many sermons, preached by those colleague pastors – colleagues, but often disputants – my Mind and Heart. The former pretends to be a scholar, and perplexes me with doctrinal points; the latter takes me on the score of feeling...” There is, however, no real resolution given in the text, perhaps in part because no action accompanies the contemplative head or the desiring heart. Indeed, the narrator ends by claiming that the Mind and the Heart “both, like several other preachers, spend their strength to very little purpose. I, their sole auditor, cannot always understand them” (*CE* 9: 24). Although there are religious undercurrents in this short story as there are in *The Scarlet Letter*, the larger focus in both texts seems to be on the lack of efficacy in a self-divided person who has not achieved the ideal balance that Hawthorne reached toward.

²⁶ Leo Marx calls the landscapes of pastoral as “a symbolic middle landscape created by mediation between art and nature” (71).

²⁷ Numerous feminist and gender studies critics, though offering diverse opinions on Hawthorne, have drawn attention to Hawthorne's interest in marginalized figures. Emily Budick, for example, claims

learn to reconcile art and nature within a new world paradise, moving them toward the ultimate reconciliation in the final chapter. In *The Blithedale Romance*, on the other hand, none of his major characters find that reconciliation – indicating, as Hawthorne had only hinted before, that the mass of nineteenth-century society has failed to adequately combine art and nature, nature and society.

Humans and the Triplex Vita: Passion, Action, Contemplation

Close behind his conception of humans as natural artists who need to incorporate nature and art in order to experience wholeness as humans, Hawthorne develops his characters in terms of the Renaissance conception of *triplex vita* – contemplation, passion, action (sometimes divided into Melancholy as the contemplative and Mirth as a combination of passion and action). The contemplative must be balanced by the active and both must incorporate passion. Put another way, this combination might be seen as the soul, the body, and the heart. Sometimes, however, Hawthorne’s characters are marked by their lack rather than their fulfillment of human vitality. Many of Hawthorne’s characters who fail in their efforts to live well fail because they do not develop the tripartite personhood represented by the *triplex vita*. And the necessity of these three components of being is often revealed in Hawthorne’s characters when they are in Nature – Nature itself seems to speak these needs and to aid in their fulfillment.

In his American romances, Hawthorne appears in search of a balanced human who is contemplative, passionate, and active. The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* mentions

that *The Scarlet Letter* represents “more than a nod in the direction of the marginalized victim of patriarchal society” (73). Although they differ on whether Hawthorne identified with or against the “damned mob of scribbling women” who were so popular in the nineteenth century, James Wallace and Nina Baym both argue that Hawthorne’s reaction to women writer indicates his perception of himself as a marginalized writer (Baym, “Again” 32; Wallace 206).

that the viewer or reader of Nature with “a highly disordered mental state...rendered morbidly self-contemplative” tended to see in Nature “a fitting page for his soul’s history and fate” (CE 1: 155). In *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale complains that his loss of passion – “an intolerable discontent and irksomeness” – has “blighted” even his “innermost and shadiest... contemplative recesses” (CE 3: 138). Phoebe, despite her cheery temperament, did play soulful tunes for her aged relatives, combining mirth and melancholy:

The deepest pathos of Phoebe's voice and song, moreover, came sifted through the golden texture of a cheery spirit, and was somehow so interfused with the quality thence acquired, that one's heart felt all the lighter for having wept at it. Broad mirth, in the sacred presence of dark misfortune, would have jarred harshly and irreverently with the solemn symphony that rolled its undertone through Hepzibah's and her brother's life. Therefore, it was well that Phoebe so often chose sad themes, and not amiss that they ceased to be so sad while she was singing them. (CE 2: 138–39)

Alice Pyncheon before her had also played “sweet and melancholy music” that touched the soul (CE 2: 192). Clifford, on the other hand was known for his “gusty mirth,” which came and went (CE 2: 250). Even Hepzibah’s melancholy was occasionally disturbed by visions of a glorious life, which “kindled a strange festal glory in the poor, bare, melancholy chambers of her brain, as if that inner world were suddenly lighted up with gas” (CE 2: 65). *The House of the Seven Gables* as a whole moves away from the darkest melancholy of its characters and toward the festal celebration of mirth.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, the failure of Hawthorne’s characters to take up the three components of the *triplex vita* leads to an imbalance that hinders these characters’ involvement in Nature and society both. Coverdale, for example, avoids strenuous action but remains caught in a web of melancholic passion. Westervelt perhaps too incisively

puts his finger on Coverdale's problem by comparing him to "the melancholy Jacques" in the Forest of Arden (*CE* 3: 91). Coverdale resists this designation but gives no better answer. Given Coverdale's status as an unreliable narrator, Hawthorne's use of this designation for Coverdale bears scrutiny.²⁸ Rosalind's words to the "melancholy Jacques" in Shakespeare's Forest of Arden sheds light on the narrative tone toward Coverdale in Hawthorne's text:

ROSALIND: They say you are a melancholy fellow.

JAQUES: I am so; I do love it better than laughing.

ROSALIND: Those that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards.

JAQUES: Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing.

ROSALIND: Why then, 'tis good to be a post.

JAQUES: I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical, nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these; but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects; and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels; in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

ROSALIND: A traveler! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad: I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's; then to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

JAQUES: Yes, I have gained my experience.

ROSALIND: And your experience makes you sad: I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad; and to travel for it too. (*AYLI* 4.1.1-27)

²⁸ Although both Peter Bellis (58–59) and Roberta Weldon (84–85) analyze some formal similarities and contrasts between Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Hawthorne's *Blithedale*, neither of them consider the attitude toward Coverdale that Hawthorne implies with this allusion. If Coverdale is indeed in the position of "the melancholy Jaques" (something neither critic doubts, and which does seem consonant with Hawthorne's narrative), the presentation of Jaques gives an important interpretive lens through which to view Hawthorne's presentation of Coverdale. The fact that Jaques receives a strong rebuke in Shakespeare's text suggests that Hawthorne may be less identical to Coverdale than these Bellis and Weldon (and numerous other critics) have allowed.

Like Shakespeare's Jacques, Coverdale is a sentimentalist who feels and mopes but does little. As Rosalind warns, humans who "are in extremity of either" mirth or melancholy are "abominable" folk. A balance of melancholy and mirth is necessary if one is to fully engage one's humanity.

Coverdale is explicitly compared to "the melancholy Jacques," who in Shakespeare's work is continuously trying to find a happy world and stumbling upon sad situations instead. As Shakespeare's Jacques in *As You Like It*, Coverdale might say, "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players" (*AYLI* 2.7.139–40). The text is a retelling, or a theatrical restaging, of Coverdale's experience at Blithedale Farm. Beginning in a tempest (albeit a wintry one rather than a tempest at sea), this New World pastoral romance separates the utopian aspirers from society in physical ways that invoke Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Miles Coverdale's damnation comes from a lack of ability to enjoy the kind of reciprocal relationship with nature and with others that is enjoyed even by the innocent Phoebe in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Coverdale decides that, like utopian visions of an idealized relation between humans and the natural world, utopian visions of the human heart ultimately fail. Despite these assumptions, however, he continues to harbor in his own heart a "love" for Priscilla – a love that he does not act upon for fear of losing it. Even Zenobia's "letting down of the curtain" in response to his intrusive spying on the residents and guests in her next-door apartment in the city is too late for his relations with Zenobia and Priscilla; whether his slow in coming recognition that parasitic observation that may pass for "sympathy" is not the same thing as charitable action.

Although Coverdale is not as much a traveler as Jacques, he announces his plans to travel the world before settling down in a place like Blithedale Farm. After returning to Blithedale Farm for a visit, Coverdale hears a band of revelers in the forest and is reminded of the “jollity” of Milton’s *Comus*: “The wood, in this portion of it, seemed as full of jollity as if Comus and his crew were holding their revels, in one of its usually lonesome glades.” The “usually lonesome” forest is here being changed by the human community, infused by a “jollity” that can be found in human exertions into a natural world. When he sees “the whole fantastic rabble,” Coverdale is startled to see New World and Old World characters mixed together, Native Americans with Greek goddesses, black Americans and Shakers with “[s]hepherds of Arcadia, and allegoric figures from the Faerie Queen” (*CE* 3: 209). The literary figures of Spenser and Milton are mixed together with the American landscape to create this scene of mirth in the forest. When Coverdale, who has remained “covered” in a “dale,” cannot restrain a laugh, they hear him and rush after him through the woods. Through this experience, Coverdale gains a sense of Nature as a place for the celebration of life, but it also becomes a place of death when Zenobia’s body is found in the river. Like Ophelia in *Hamlet*, she has been passed over by a man who might have been her lover and is found after she has drowned. Thus, tragedy occurs even in Arcadia.

The Blithedale Romance, like Hawthorne’s earlier “May-Pole of Merry Mount,” draws directly not only upon Milton’s *Comus* but also upon *Paradise Lost*, with its frequent allusions to Adam and Eve and their bower. However, just as tellingly, it draws upon Milton’s twin poems, *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, as David Joplin and others have pointed out concerning “May-Pole,” which – like *The Blithedale Romance* – contains a

direct reference to *Comus*.²⁹ Hawthorne's attention to these two poems is evident in quotations from them in his notebooks and earlier drawn into his stories, first in "The Seven Vagabonds" (1833), where the young picaresque traveler (who is also the narrator, similar to Coverdale as character-narrator of *The Blithedale Romance*) addresses a beautiful young woman in a traveling show wagon: "'Mirth,' cried I, most aptly appropriating the words of L'Allegro, 'to thee I sue! Mirth, admit me of thy crew!'" (*CE* 9: 366). In an 1836 entry in the *American Magazine*, Hawthorne quotes lines directly from Milton's *Il Penseroso*, noting that "the music of a bell" is one of Milton's "pensive pleasures" ("Bells" 387).³⁰ And those "pensive pleasures" drive much of Hawthorne's own mixture of melancholy and mirth in his romances. Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* and Coverdale in *The Blithedale Romance* not only share the last part of a name associated with the woods – a "dale" – but they also share a melancholy personality. Coverdale is associated not only with Milton's melancholy but with Shakespeare's, being compared to "a melancholy Jacques." Phoebe in *The House of the Seven Gables* and Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance* provide much of the mirth of *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Phoebe sings and brings flowers and sunshine into the house and garden while Zenobia regales her fellow Blithedalers with "readings from Shakespeare."

²⁹ Joplin agrees with John F. Birk's assertion that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* constitute a "more fertile taproot for Hawthorne's story" than Hawthorne's direct reference to Milton's *Comus* (Birk 352). Joplin argues further, however, that "Birk does not acknowledge – and this is critical to grasp fully just how Hawthorne has used Milton's material – the different kinds of melancholy and mirth operating in the respective works" (185). As Joplin argues, the "constructive" and "destructive" types of mirth and melancholy are inverted in Hawthorne's story, suggesting that the shared goal of Hawthorne and Milton – "higher consciousness through unity and harmony" – is more difficult to achieve in Hawthorne's text than in Milton's.

³⁰ Like the story of Hannah Duston, "Bells" is one of eight works from the *American Magazine* that Hawthorne's son Julian specifically ascribes to his father" (*NHWW* 1: 176). In his collection of Hawthorne's entries in the *American Magazine*, Arlin Turner notes that this essay becomes the basis of Hawthorne's later short story, "A Bell's Biography" in 1837, one year later (185).

The contemplative taken to extremes can be seen most clearly in the melancholy Dimmesdale and Coverdale. The passionate taken to extremes can be seen perhaps in the Custom House Inspector who celebrates food and at first in Hester, though she eventually becomes the most exemplary character in these three romances as a character who develops all three areas of her personhood. The active, on the other hand, may be well represented by the overbearing Pyncheon men – most notably Colonel Pyncheon and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon – though Westervelt also exemplifies exterior action with little interior activity. Mirth and Melancholy must be had together it seems, but lack of passion can zap even the most careful balance of mirth and melancholy. Hawthorne credits Shakespeare with inducing contemplation with passion, having, as he puts it, “surface beneath surface, to an immeasurable depth, adapted to the plummet-line of every reader; his works present many phrases of truth, with scope enough to fill a contemplative mind. Whatever you seek in him you will find, provided you seek the truth” (CE 5:106). While Hawthorne finds in Shakespeare the passion behind contemplation that must be in “truth,” he draws heavily from Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, which may be translated as Mirth and Melancholy, but also as the active and the contemplative, in Renaissance terms widely used. Like the young woman in “The Seven Vagabonds,” Zenobia, with “mirth gleaming out of her eyes” (CE 3: 16) is associated with “mirth” in a way that suggests a combination of action and passion rather than the “contagion of ... strange mirth” associated with Westervelt (CE 3: 95). But it is in Priscilla that mirth finds its strongest expression, from Coverdale’s perspective: He describes Priscilla’s “simple, careless, childish flow of spirits... like a butterfly at play”

as she ran refreshed about the meadows of Blithedale. The melancholy Coverdale then reflects,

We sometimes hold mirth to a stricter accountability than sorrow; it must show good cause, or the echo of its laughter comes back drearily. Priscilla's gayety, moreover, was of a nature that showed me how delicate an instrument she was, and what fragile harp-strings were her nerves... Absurd as it might be, I tried to reason with her, and persuade her not to be so joyous, thinking that, if she would draw less lavishly upon her fund of happiness, it would last the longer. (*CE* 3: 74–75)

Coverdale is often passionately contemplative but does not know what to make of Priscilla's passionate activity, but Priscilla prefers not to be challenged by thoughts other than the present and flings away Coverdale's suggestion in spite of the fact that she may well be overtaken by the dark power of the clairvoyant Westervelt.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, however, the movement is from mirth to melancholy rather than the other way around. The “mirth gleaming out of [Zenobia's] eyes” is transformed first into “a half-melancholy smile” and then into “the marble image of a death-agony” when she dies. All of the major characters move away from the “cheerful society” which marked their early days to the melancholy of their latter. Coverdale sees “in Hollingsworth's face a depressed and melancholy look, that seemed habitual” and even Priscilla is left with a “veiled happiness” that Coverdale does not well know how to analyze, though he tries. All of his characters, then, would do well to heed the warning that Rosalind gives to “the melancholy Jaques” in the play Hawthorne here invokes – that they may end up seeing much and having nothing.

For Hawthorne's Puritans, passion and witchcraft are closely linked, and the forest is the site to which this connection can be traced. Although the forest does not play the same role in *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes suspects the passionate Paulina of witchcraft.

While he later hopes only that her seemingly magical power of bringing his wife Hermione back to life is “an art / Lawful as eating” (*WT* 5.3.110-11) – a natural art – he earlier threatens to have her burnt, to which Paulina replies: “It is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in’t” (2.3.114-15). In a similar fashion, Hawthorne suggests in *The Scarlet Letter* that seeing the forest as a place of illicit affairs is more damning to those who consider it in that light rather than to those who enjoy the forest. Mistress Hibbins – a suspected witch who is hanged after the events of the story – plays on these implications. After Hester accosts Dimmesdale in the private space of the woods, and Mistress Hibbins teasingly asks him if he has been meeting with the devil in the woods and promises him that they will have “other talk” when they meet “[a]t midnight, and in the forest” (*CE* 1: 222). *The Scarlet Letter* here sounds like a revision of “Young Goodman Brown” although Dimmesdale’s early death precludes both his planned escape from Puritan New England as well as the cynical turn of Young Goodman Brown after his dream-like witch-meeting in the forest – “[a] stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become... [whose] dying hour was gloom” (*CE* 10: 89–90). But the fact that all of the main characters in the novel take a different view of the forest imagines a world in which not all of the Puritans took such views. The forest is ironically the most frequent place where Hester and the other major characters contemplate their place within the natural order, and the Puritan community of Salem is the most readily available place of participating in human civilization. Although Hester considers leaving behind human civilization as she knows it, she ultimately returns to the Puritan community even after spending a number of years back in the old world.

Human passion is also integral with Nature, Hawthorne intimates, and it is here that Dimmesdale is most clearly presented in a better light than Chillingworth. Hester, who is described as having “in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic,” attracts both men (*CE* 1: 83). The narrator refers to both men’s relations to Hester is described in terms of nature. After claiming or acknowledging that their marriage was an unnatural thing, an attempt to merge youth and beauty with age and deformity, Chillingworth exclaims, “what had I to do with beauty and youth like thine own!” He then deflects Hester’s murmured apology by saying that his was the “first wrong” for encouraging her “budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay” (*CE* 1: 74–75). Sexual passion, then, is natural, and an arranged marriage without such passion unnatural. Nonetheless, the lingering sense of guilt is never exterminated until Dimmesdale’s death. Hester’s scarlet letter of passion often throbs with sympathy at the passing of grave men and women of the Puritan community, leaving her with the suspicion that “if truth were everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne’s” (*CE* 1: 86). If this were revealed, the Puritan rhetoric of creating a better world, a city on a hill, could be seen as little more than an illusory dream. Through Hester, Hawthorne suggests that rather than ridding themselves of unsanctioned desires, many of the early Puritans simply sublimated or hid such desires.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, mirth is only experienced briefly on the one holiday of the Puritan colony – on election day. On that day, Hawthorne writes, an “unwonted jollity... brightened the faces of the people. Into this festal season of the year--as it already was, and continued to be during the greater part of two centuries--the Puritans compressed

whatever mirth and public joy they deemed allowable to human infirmity” (CE 1: 230). Since they saw mirth as a problem rather than a part of being human, the stern Puritans who ruled in New England generally stifled mirth, passion, and any action that was not part of their stern outlook on life. In general, however, Hawthorne’s characters in *The Scarlet Letter*, all tended toward melancholy – all except the vivacious Pearl. But sometimes at least, their melancholy was mixed with passion. This occurs, for example, as Hester and Dimmesdale “mingled their sad and passionate talk with the melancholy murmur of the brook”(CE 1: 239). And Hester rises above their distinctions by joining melancholy and passion in her actions.

Unlike the Puritans and their “unnatural” relations to human nature, Hester practices the compassion that allows her to live naturally in human society. In an act the narrator remarks may include a sense of penance, she “bestowed all her superfluous means in charity, on wretches less miserable than herself, and who not unfrequently insulted the hand that fed them” (CE 1: 83). In time, however, she became known alternately as a “Sister of Charity” and a “Sister of Mercy” who through her charitable action changed the signification of her letter: “Such helpfulness was found in her, – so much power to do, and power to sympathize, – that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (CE 1: 161, 215). Like the hieroglyphic in the sky, the letter A is again open for interpretation. Through “natural” interactions with society, then, Hester appears to have overturned the Puritan community’s hasty judgment of her. This is verified when Hester returns from England at the end only to resume wearing the scarlet letter – “of her own free will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period

would have imposed it” (*CE* 1: 263). Hester uses the art of embroidery to transform the letter A from the signification of “adultery” to the double signification of “art” and “action.” As a work of fiction, *The Scarlet Letter* extends Hawthorne’s creative treatment of the past as he overturns the Edenic myth of American origins even while mourning the loss of the best aspects of Puritanism.³¹ This is Hawthorne’s second treatment of the scarlet letter as a subtext for his writing. In the earlier version, the short story “Endicott and the Red Cross,” Hawthorne describes the letter as a “fatal token... with golden thread, and the nicest art of needle-work; so that the capital A might have been thought to mean Admirable, or any thing rather than Adulteress” (*CE* 9: 435). Likewise, at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester has converted the letter’s meaning by her charitable action which often involved artistic needlework, and “many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (*CE* 1: 161). Hawthorne’s own teasing use of the letter’s signification has invited critics to try to decipher the letter’s purport in a manner not dissimilar to that of the curious onlookers in colonial Puritan Boston.

Hester, in fact, can be seen as combining action, contemplation, and pleasure in the tripartite triplex vita that defines a well-balanced humanity for many Renaissance thinkers.³² For the Renaissance world of the pastoral, the active life entails more than mere activity, focusing more precisely on virtuous or “courteous” action. F.O. Matthiessen suggests that Hawthorne may have been depicting Hester Prynne in terms of

³¹ As numerous scholars have found, however, Hawthorne’s description of the scarlet letter was no doubt influenced by his reading of American history. See Ryskamp, for example.

³² In *Spenser’s Courteous Pastoral*, Humphrey Tonkin points out that the active is to be favored over the other two modes of being if there is conflict between them (273–74).

Spenser's "Wood of Error" but gives this idea only passing mention, without considering the full implications of such a suggestion: such a position for Hester puts her in the place of Una, the chaste maiden of the Redcrosse Knight, or the Knight of Holiness.³³ As a reverend in the Puritan community, Hester's companion Arthur Dimmesdale is indeed associated with holiness but knows he does not deserve such a title. Dimmesdale's first name, Arthur, puts him on an even higher plane, not as the Redcrosse Knight of Spenser's work but as Prince Arthur, who is the Redcrosse Knight's superior. Dimmesdale, however, fails to adapt to or benefit from nature in the way that Spenser's Arthur does. To fail in the duty of courtesy, as Dimmesdale does by failing to share in Hester's punishment, is in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the ultimate failure; discourteous knights are "corrected" by Sir Calidore or by Prince Arthur himself. Arthur and Hester's rendezvous in the woods is also reminiscent of the romantic trysts under trees in Spenser's text. Dimmesdale's first name, Arthur, links him to Prince Arthur, the foremost knight of Spenser's work. As a knight of holiness, Arthur is an appropriate model for the young clergyman Dimmesdale who aspires to holiness despite his illicit relationship with Hester. Arthur Dimmesdale is indeed associated with holiness but knows he does not deserve such a title, and Hester implores him to give up this name in the same breath as she begs him to do something, to throw off his ever-present melancholy and to act: "Do any thing, save to lie down and die! Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale, and make thyself another..." (CE 1: 198). Though she is literally asking him to put on a name that he can be proud of, the focus on his name suggests that

³³ Like Una, Hester is wandering through "a labyrinth," as the narrator comments when Hester takes Pearl into the woods on "a footpath. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest . . . to Hester's mind, it imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering" (CE 1: 183). Hester may be inspired by Spenser's Una, who wanders through the wood of Error, as Mattheissen has pointed out. Like Spenser's Una, who is caught in a labyrinth in the wandering wood of error.

it is not an appropriate one for him – that it masks him, much as Dimmesdale’s true nature was masked from the Puritan community. Hester’s plea here finds an eerie corollary in Dimmesdale’s own public pleas for her to name her fellow adulterer. Her refusal to do so only underscores Dimmesdale’s failure of virtuous action. The knowledge that Arthur Dimmesdale has failed to act virtuously on his own is part of the cry in Hester’s plea to Arthur. Dimmesdale is no Prince Arthur, finding it difficult to live courageously either in human society or in Nature, where his tremulousness incites Pearl’s antagonism. Hester as she appears at the very end of the romance (after returning from England) may well be the only character in Hawthorne’s three American romances who successfully combines passion, contemplation, and action.

Nature and Grace: Seeking Justice and Providence in Hawthorne’s America

In a brief essay entitled “On Solitude,” composed for his first volume of *The Spectator*, a little magazine circulated primarily among family members, the teenage Hawthorne shows his early interest in what the natural order reveals and how humans can participate in that order:

Man is naturally a sociable being; not formed for himself alone, but destined to bear a part in the great scheme of nature. All his pleasures are heightened [in Society], and all his griefs are lessened, by participation. It is only in Society that the full energy of his mind is aroused, and all its powers drawn forth.... The heart may be more pure and uncorrupted in Solitude, than when exposed to the influence of the depravity of the world; but the benefit of virtuous examples is equal to the detriment of vicious ones, & both are equally lost. (23: 46-47)

For Hawthorne, humans are participants in nature and in human society, and their involvement in the one enhances rather than detracts from their involvement in the other. Unlike the Transcendentalists, Hawthorne infers that it is not Nature alone but Nature

brought alongside the “virtuous examples” found in human society that may yield the most truthful insight about the human condition. The religious undertones of Hawthorne’s language in this entry are unmistakable, with the “depravity” of human society echoing Calvinistic theological terms and his emphasis on “virtuous examples” giving evidence of his inclination toward the religiously-inflected literary tradition advanced by Edmund Spenser and John Milton, among others.³⁴ Many of Hawthorne’s “virtuous examples” are drawn from Renaissance pastoral, which typically engages questions of divine justice, but without the trenchant moralization of the Puritan ruling class in *The Scarlet Letter*, and questions of human spirituality, but without the Transcendentalist variety of sheer optimism that usually marked Emerson and many of his cohorts. Despite the romanticized image of Hawthorne as a reclusive writer, his early and late writings, like his life as a young man in college and his life as a married man eventually with a family of his own, suggest that his seclusion from society was an occasional rather than a wholly definitive instinct. As his romances show, Hawthorne’s interest in the relation between nature and human society is an interest that begins early and remains with him all his life. Like his early writings, Hawthorne’s mature works strive toward a pastoral relationship between art and nature in which one informs and extends upon the other; such a mutual relationship is best realized in Hawthorne’s later works when informed by a charitable religious sensibility.

Despite its desirability and necessity in Hawthorne’s American romances, then, participation in nature and art is not enough. A natural artist must still take hold of the

³⁴ Spenser presents charity as the chief virtue, a virtue taught by Nature itself. Milton returns to the Garden of Eden and it is in Nature that he attempts to find the means to “justify the wayes of God to men” (*PL* 1.26).

“virtuous examples” in order to be a good natural artist. Nature and grace coincide in acts of charity that involve an assent to the natural and divine orders. In Hawthorne’s three major American romances, humans flourish as they become participants in the natural world and in human society but only as they practice the virtue of charity with grace. As Prospero’s practice of charity effects reconciliation among humans and between humans and nature, so the characters of Hawthorne’s romances are successful or unsuccessful as they become reconciled to nature and to the human community.

Northrop Frye’s explication of the ending of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* is applicable to Hawthorne’s *House of Seven Gables*: “nature is associated, not with the credible, but with the incredible: nature as an order is subordinated to the nature that yearly confronts us with the impossible miracle of renewed life.... [T]here is no magician, no Prospero, only the sense of participation in the redeeming and revivifying power of a nature identified with art, grace, and love” (126). Likewise, A. S. P. Woodhouse, in his classic essay on “Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*,” notes that “[i]n Spenser’s day, as still in Milton’s, the two orders of nature and of grace were universally accepted as a frame of reference, whether they were specifically named or not” (195). If Woodhouse is right that Milton’s *Comus* and Book One of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* are those authors’ most explicit treatments of Christian grace and nature – then it is not surprising that Hawthorne, who refers directly to *Comus* in all three of the American romances and obliquely to *The Faerie Queene* in all of them as well, would also include a consideration of the relation between nature and grace in his works that draw so clearly from the Fairy-lands of these Renaissance writers.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Phoebe extends grace and embodies charity, winning over all those around her except for the duplicitous judge Jaffrey Pyncheon. Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* practices charity and learns grace, returning to serve those around her even after she is no longer under legal obligation to them. Her relation to society and to the natural world is not assured until the end, and it is only through charitable actions in society and intimacy with the natural world that she achieves such a balance. Hester grows in the grace of charity between the time she decides to take her first bold steps out of the prisonhouse to the time she serves as a counselor for young women who seek her out as a wiser, older person who has overcome her detractors through her charitable work for the Puritan community. Coverdale in *The Blithedale Romance*, fails to understand charity or grace very deeply, and his narration largely occludes knowledge of other characters' success in doing so. All three of these characters are more or less in tune with the natural world around them, but Coverdale fails to know the natural world much as he fails in charity by substituting attempted sympathy in its place. Coverdale, who does not practice charity or grace, also fails to live harmoniously with either the community or the natural world in which the Blithedale community is situated.

While *The Scarlet Letter* depicts characters who alternately do or do not have good relations with the natural and human worlds around them, *The House of the Seven Gables* shows all the remaining humans reconciled to nature and each other in the end and *The Blithedale Romance* displays only characters whose relations to nature and to others are suspect. These contrasts become even clearer when a third element is added – when it is about humans, nature, *and* the divine, characters who earlier seemed failures

are found sometimes to succeed and vice versa. Phoebe's surprising success makes sense if she is fighting neither art, nature, nor Providence, and Zenobia's surprising demise makes sense if her variance with Providence undoes the delicate balance of art and nature that she has achieved. Humans must order their lives not only in tune with nature and art, Hawthorne implies, but also with the divine.

That grace is important to Hawthorne and that he was thinking of the relation between grace and nature is evident especially in *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Phoebe, "[b]y way of contributing what grace she could, gathered some roses and a few other flowers" into an arrangement to place inside the house, and the "sunshine – as fresh as that which peeped into Eve's bower, while she and Adam sat at breakfast there – came twinkling through the branches of the pear-tree, and fell quite across the table" (*CE* 2: 101). Not only is she "as graceful as a bird," but her work about the house is described in terms of the kind of sweat-less labor that characterized Milton's unfallen Adam and Eve:

There was a spiritual quality in Phoebe's activity. The life of the long and busy day – spent in occupations that might so easily have taken a squalid and ugly aspect – had been made pleasant, and even lovely, by the spontaneous grace with which these homely duties seemed to bloom out of her character; so that labor, while she dealt with it, had the easy and flexible charm of play. Angels do not toil, but let their good works grow out of them; and so did Phoebe. (*CE* 2: 82)

On her first day in the Pyncheon house away from her parents' rural home, upon discovering the garden with its vegetables and a few scraggly flowers, she "found an unexpected charm" in them: "The eye of Heaven seemed to look down into it, pleasantly, and with a peculiar smile; as if glad to perceive that Nature, elsewhere overwhelmed, and driven out of the dusty town, had there been able to retain a breathing-place. The spot

acquired somewhat wilder grace, and yet a very gentle one, from the fact that a pair of robins had built their nest in the pear-tree” (*CE* 2: 87–88).

Several generations before Phoebe’s arrival at the Pyncheon place, there had been Alice Pyncheon, who played beautiful music and planted beautiful flowers: “Her presence imparted an indescribable grace and faint witchery to the whole edifice” (*CE* 2: 191). In Clifford’s bedraggled artist spirit was “some outline of the marvellous grace that was abortive in it” (*CE* 2: 314). His very gestures “conveyed an idea, or, at least, gave a hint, of indescribable grace, such as no practised art of external manners could have attained. It was too slight to seize upon, at the instant, yet, as recollected afterwards, seemed to transfigure the whole man” (*CE* 2: 104). Even old Hepzibah exhibits “a kind of grace” when she smiles at Holgrave after giving him what he meant to buy and forestalling her entry into the plebian world by refusing for a few hours longer to be a shopkeeper (*CE* 2: 46). The “oddly-composed little social party [that] used to assemble under the ruinous arbor” of the Pyncheon garden on Sunday afternoons with old Hepzibah – her wispy brother Clifford, her beautiful young niece Phoebe who had returned by that time from church, the reform-minded “vagrant artist” Holgrave, and “the venerable Uncle Venner” who trundled about with his wheelbarrow and threatened to go to “the farm,” which was his way of saying he would be put into a poorhouse one of these days – received grace from old Hepzibah: “Hepzibah – stately as ever, at heart, and yielding not an inch of her old gentility, but resting upon it so much the more, as justifying a princesslike condescension – exhibited a not ungraceful hospitality” (*CE* 2: 155). Even the Judge, greedy though he was with false heart and smile, attempted to put on a “display of every grace and virtue... befitting the christian, the good citizen, the

horticulturist, and the gentleman!” (CE 2: 24). Despite being a horticulturalist, the epitome of a natural artist in Shakespearean pastoral, the Judge lacked even an iota of the grace he attempted to “put on.”

Although *The House of the Seven Gables* involves tragedy, it does not end in tragedy. Besides the death of the Judge, which at least some of the characters celebrated rather than mourned, another possible tragedy is averted. Like the Capulets and Montagues in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Maules and the Pyncheons have been divided by bitter strife. In Hawthorne’s tale, however, this family feud ends not in the death but in the marriage of the lovers. Indeed, many critics protest that too much sunshine is poured artificially into the end of the tale by an unprepared-for resolution. Since Hawthorne was a close reader of Shakespeare’s romances, however, it is perhaps not surprising that he would end with reconciliation between the divided houses of Pyncheon and Maule and between earth and heaven: the two young lovers and the two old people drive off together in a carriage while two neighbors watch their departure and discuss the inscrutable “will of Providence,” the old Pyncheon well transmits “kaleidoscopic pictures,” we are left with the heavenward departure of Alice Pyncheon’s spirit now at rest (CE 2:318-19). The promise of renewal and continuity enlivens the end of this text in a way that is not seen in his other romances. And as in Shakespeare’s romances, the credibility of such a seemingly forced ending with its still unanswered questions about past and future demands the reader’s or audience’s willingness to believe if it is to succeed.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne’s attention to divine justice as revealed in Nature is apparent in the narrator’s comments:

Life is made up of marble and mud. And, without all the deeper trust in a comprehensive sympathy above us, we might hence be led to suspect the

insult of a sneer, as well as an immitigable frown, on the iron countenance of fate. What is called poetic insight is the gift of discerning, in this sphere of strangely mingled elements, the beauty and the majesty which are compelled to assume a garb so sordid. (*CE* 2: 41)³⁵

Here, the question of the “comprehensive sympathy” of the divine will becomes interlaced with the “strangely mingled elements” that constitute the world. This “gift of discerning” is intimately connected to the question of the interplay between humans and nature, and Holgrave is faced with a choice of fighting against his “fate” or trusting in “comprehensive sympathy above” as he decides whether to take his revenge on the Pyncheon family, whose ancestors cheated him out of their land by legal maneuverings. Much as in Shakespearean tragicomedy, an artistic genre itself of “strangely mingled elements,” *The House of the Seven Gables* includes and yet transcends tragedy by ending in a surprising reconciliation. Like Shakespeare’s Prospero, Holgrave chooses reconciliation rather than revenge and gives up some of his powers over the natural world in his determination to act charitably.

When she is stranded with her brother on a train station platform under the open sky as they are fleeing the dead Judge’s body, Hepzibah implores divine favor as she raises “clasped hands to the sky” hidden behind a “dull, gray weight of clouds,” provoking the narrator’s insistent comment that “it was no hour for disbelief; —no juncture this, to question that there was a sky above, and an Almighty Father looking down from it!” (*CE* 2: 266–67). When Phoebe and Holgrave get married, bringing together the feuding families of the Maules and the Pyncheons and contributing to the penultimate scene of reconciliation – not unlike the quick reconciliation of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* – a neighbor remarks, “if we are to take it as the will of Providence, why, I can’t

³⁵ Hawthorne’s insistence upon “the sordid” as a part of life, of reality, militates against Emerson’s claims that such sordidity will disappear with an influx of the spirit.

exactly fathom it!” (CE 2: 318). The only scene that follows involves “kaleidoscopic pictures” from the fountain, “unintelligible prophecies” in the whispering leaves of the elm tree, and the spirit of Alice Pyncheon – who had been haunting the Pyncheon house, much like Hamlet’s father haunted the heath – “float[ing] heavenward from the House of the Seven Gables!” (CE 2: 319). Here nature and divine Providence work together to effect reconciliation. Jonathan Arac claims that “[t]he key to redemption in *The House of the Seven Gables* is the replacing of all human action... with the beneficent process of nature – in particular, a nature that has been domesticated, in keeping with the book’s intense household focus.” However, Arac overlooks the influence of divine Providence, continually invoked throughout the text, as well as the influence of human action – even though he goes on to point out (without any apparent irony) that “[t]he dreadful pattern of stasis in the house and repetition in the crimes of its inhabitants is undone by the natural development of Phoebe at her moment of transition from girl to woman” (714). What Arac rightly alludes to, though he misconstrues the import of what he is saying, is that Phoebe’s actions demonstrate that human action can coincide with or contradict the processes of nature. Further, such alignment with or against nature brings about blessing or cursing, comprising a crucial component of alignment with fate or Providence, two terms which Hawthorne is fond of using interchangeably in seeking out the question of the divine will.

All of the major characters in *The House of the Seven Gables* find grace in the conjunction of art and nature. In *The Blithedale Romance*, even characters like Zenobia who is at home in art and nature both, fail to find grace in the conjunction. In Priscilla, we have a faint character who may combine all these things but whose wispieness severely

limits her adequacy. And this occurs not by ignoring ugliness and death, but by accepting them such realities as the part of life that points us toward the divine.

Reflecting upon the natural world in “The Old Manse,” Hawthorne writes,

I recline upon the unwithered grass and whisper to myself, ‘O perfect day! O beautiful world! O beneficent God!’ And it is the promise of a blessed eternity; for our Creator would never have made such lovely days and given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal. This sunshine is the golden pledge thereof. (*CE* 10: 27–28)

Here we see a glimpse of Hawthorne’s view of the relation between grace and nature. In his analysis of one of Hawthorne’s “The Gentle Boy,” an early short story in which Puritans and Quakers alike fall short, Michael Colacurcio claims that Hawthorne took issue with the Puritan dichotomy between nature and grace, the tendency to see the natural and the supernatural ultimately opposed to each other: “Something fundamental seemed missing [to Hawthorne], some guarantee that mutual respect for our common life according to nature is in itself a religious value of the highest significance” (*Province of Piety* 198). While Colacurcio, with his strenuous emphasis on the moral tone of Hawthorne’s work, goes into much greater detail about religious doctrine than Hawthorne was inclined to do, his point here is well-put. Hawthorne does indeed take issue with the kind of Puritan who finds the natural world an evil place and who tries to stamp out his own human nature. But that is not the only kind of Puritan who shows up in Hawthorne’s texts. And such a view of Puritanism misrepresents the attempt of Hawthorne to show the dark side of the Puritan fathers who were being invoked in the nineteenth century as the proud founders of America. Hyatt Waggoner claims that “Hawthorne was too much of a Protestant to share the Catholic attitude toward ‘natural law’: the imagery here suggests that moral law and nature’s ways do not perfectly coincide, or run parallel on

different levels; they cross, perhaps at something less than a right angle” (141). While this seems to be the case, Hawthorne may be closer to such a concept of “natural law” than Waggoner suspects.

Movements toward such reconciliation occur in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* as well in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Coverdale “forgives” Hollingsworth when he sees him penitent at the end, and Hester forgives the Puritans by returning to serve them even after being free to leave the community. Since they are written as comedies or tragicomedies rather than tragedies, Shakespeare’s pastorals especially strive toward reconciliation even when death occurs. The famous scenes of reconciliation at the end of *As You Like It*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest* are especially significant since they all take place within a type of fairyland. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser organizes each book around a virtue; in the first one, organized around holiness, he brings the Redcrosse Knight finally to Charissa, the allegorical personage of Charity in the house of Caelia (Heaven) with her sisters Fidelia (faith) and Sperana (hope). When Una asks her to provide instruction and healing for the Redcrosse Knight, Charissa is “right joyous of her just request”:

And, taking by the hand that Faeries sonne [the Redcrosse Knight],
Gan him instruct in everie good behest,
Of Love; and Righteousnes; and Well to donne;
And Wrath and Hatred warily to shone,
That drew on men Gods hatred and his wrath. (*FQ* 1.33.1–6)

Charissa taught the way of holiness that Dimmesdale tried to attain in *The Scarlet Letter*. In the sixth book of *The Faerie Queene*, a measure of reconciliation is achieved but at the cost of binding the Blatant Beast and with the acknowledgement that such “reconciliation” is only temporary. Benevolent participation in the world of Spenser can

only be had through the virtue of charity – not through severe proclamations of truth, not through the miserly actions of land-grabbers, not not through the project of philanthropy, and not through mere human sympathy. Charity could make better human relations with each other. Charity could make better human relations with the world in which they are found. And charity could help humans reclaim human nature with its spiritual purity rather than its malicious or merely animalistic motivations.

The Blithedale community seems to offer permanent solutions to the world’s problems, an offering Coverdale is not quick to take up, however, suggesting a trip West or abroad first and then “coming back on the other side of the world. Then, should the colonists of Blithedale have established their enterprise on a permanent basis, I might fling aside my pilgrim-staff and dusty shoon, and rest as peacefully here as anywhere” (*CE* 3:140). To find a permanent home in a utopian society after traveling the world and finding nothing better there would allow him to shake off the dust of his feet against the old cultural systems entirely. In the Blithedale community, however, Coverdale found it “impossible, situated as we were, not to imbibe the idea that everything in nature and human existence was fluid, or fast becoming so... that it was a day of crisis, and that we ourselves were in the critical vortex. Our great globe floated in the atmosphere of infinite space like an insubstantial bubble” (140). This reference to the globe is more than a reference to the earth, again seeing the world as a stage, like the Globe Theater, from which Shakespeare’s Prospero had proclaimed a similar sentiment:

the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. (*Tmp.* 4.1.153–56)

All the great visions of life conceived of at Blithedale farm, like those considered on Prospero's island and the world beyond, are destined to fade into the past. Coverdale struggles with the "insubstantial" appearance of things that will pass, and until he can be convinced of permanence, he plans to keep his "pilgrim-staff and dusty shoon."

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Westervelt is the prime example of a human not in harmony with both nature and the divine, much like the old Inspector but without any redeeming qualities whatsoever: "Nature thrusts some of us into the world miserably incomplete, on the emotional side, with hardly any sensibilities except what pertain to us as animals. No passion, save of the senses; no holy tenderness, nor the delicacy that results from this. Externally they bear a close resemblance to other men, and have perhaps all but the finest grace" (*CE* 3: 103). In Priscilla, however, there is at least a shred of "impalpable grace... singularly between disease and beauty" (*CE* 3: 101). Before he gives up on the community, Coverdale imagines their glorious future, placing Zenobia and Priscilla side by side: "What legends of Zenobia's beauty, and Priscilla's slender and shadowy grace, and those mysterious qualities which make her seem diaphanous with spiritual light!" (*CE* 3: 129).

The human as an entity shares in Nature as an animal or biological being and in the divine as a spiritual being, Hawthorne intimates in his description of the old Inspector in the Custom House. He supposes the old Inspector to be "a kind of new contrivance of Mother Nature in the shape of man," is especially pertinent to the consideration of the human relation to nature and to the divine. This man may be seen, the narrator remarks, "merely as an animal" who had nonetheless in "[o]ne point... vastly the advantage over his four-footed brethren" in that he could "recollect the good dinners which it had made

no small portion of the happiness of his life to eat” (*CE* 1: 17–18). Commenting on this octogenarian’s seeming perpetual youth, Hawthorne notes “the rare perfection of his animal nature, the moderate proportion of intellect, and the very trifling admixture of moral and spiritual ingredients; these latter qualities, indeed, being in barely enough measure to keep the old gentleman from walking on all-fours” (*CE* 1: 17). For Hawthorne, this old gentleman offers almost – but not quite – an exception to his conception of the human as both an animalistic and a spiritual being, and that the human relation to the natural and to the divine both play a role in what it means to be human.

Despite sharing with Milton the question of the relation between humans and the divine, Hawthorne is not quick to join Milton’s project of theodicy since he is questioning rather than defending divine justice. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne first considers deeply the question of divine justice as hinted at or revealed in Nature.³⁶

Placed in the same position associated with Zenobia in Hawthorne’s later text, Hester contemplates suicide, wondering if, given the “wild and ghastly scenery around her” in the woods away from the Puritan community, “it were not better to send Pearl at once to Heaven, and go to such futurity as Eternal Justice should provide.” But at this time, the narrator remarks, “The scarlet letter had not done its office” (*CE* 1: 166). After Dimmesdale makes his confession on the platform, with the sun him silhouetting him “as he stood out from all the earth to put in his pleas of guilty at the bar of Eternal Justice,” he dies (*CE* 1: 254). Later, when she returns to the Puritan community after helping Pearl

³⁶ Richard Kopley has also noted the significance especially of divine justice but also of nature in this text. Tracing Christian and pre-Christian development of the image of the “Sun of Righteousness” that appears as a chiasmic and thematic center in *The Scarlet Letter*, Kopley discusses two components of divine justice – judgment and righteousness – with regard to the falling meteor and the hot noon-day sun that appear in the central and penultimate chapters of this text (100-06).

find a place in the old world, Hester returns to a place where she takes up the act of charity voluntarily, serving a community that had yet to learn “how sacred love should make us happy” (*CE* 1: 263).

Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale all exemplify or aspire toward some combination of nature and grace. Hester is at first fallen from grace, at least such is the import of the scarlet letter: “All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline” (*CE* 1: 163). When Dimmesdale finally acts, he cries out to Hester “in the name of Him, so terrible and so merciful, who gives me grace, at this last moment, to do what – for my own heavy sin and miserable agony – I withheld myself from doing seven years ago, come hither now, and twine thy strength about me!” (*CE* 1: 253). Dimmesdale’s hopes lie somehow intertwined in Hester’s nature and God’s grace, though Dimmesdale’s mind is clouded by such a combination. Pearl, on the other hand, has “a native grace which does not invariably co-exist with faultless beauty,” but she is not, the narrator thinks seems to fit her, “in rustic weeds,” but instead in her mother’s artistically decorated dresses. The narrator goes on to make her the figure of “many children, comprehending in one the full scope between the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp, in little of an infant princess” (*CE* 1: 90).. She is, the narrator tells us elsewhere, as “fair and pure as a lily that had bloomed in Paradise” (*CE* 1: 219).

Because of her treatment of art and nature as complementary rather than opposing forces, together with her charitable participation in the world, Hester embodies a more positive model of humanity and exemplification of American identity than her counterparts in *The Scarlet Letter*. Like her counterpart Phoebe, she eventually

incorporates a harmonious sense of nature and art, nature and grace, and the triplex vita into her life. While Dimmesdale is constantly torn between world, Hester engages the world artistically and is at the same time at home in the natural world. Chillingworth is much like Hester in this respect, but he mixes his art with malice rather than charity. Hester's attempts to be at peace with the natural world, with human society, and with her artistic creativity coincide to make her the moral voice at the end of the novel. None of the other major characters are left to speak. Hers is the last word.

Rather than accepting either the self-reliant nineteenth-century Transcendentalist rhetoric or the sentimentalist approach that marked much of the fiction of his day, Hawthorne reconceived the literary approaches of his literary predecessors from beyond the shores of America to develop a credible critique of what he considered America's most pressing issues. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given current debates about the conventional thrust of pastoral, the pastoral works of Hawthorne's British predecessors provide him with the necessary tools to critique an emerging democracy rife with contradictions, some of which are threatening to split the country in two. With his imaginative approach to the world, Hawthorne implies that his contemporaries need to learn how to think creatively again, but with a healthy caution against overly optimistic attitudes concerning the salvific extent of their imaginative visions and with a defensive regard for the human heart as well as the mind.

Hawthorne's three American romances show several types of progression, one being a progression from dusky romanticism in *The Scarlet Letter* to dark realism in *The Blithedale Romance*, though the change may be as much in narrative voice as anything since these three romances move from an omniscient narrator in *The Scarlet Letter* to a

first-person point of view that is pointedly limited in places while telling the story of *The House of the Seven Gables* to a narrator who is also the character Miles Coverdale in *The Blithedale Romance*. And Coverdale's perspective is not only limited; it is sometimes suspect since he changes his story several times in more than one place – even though he is telling the story in retrospect. Another progression is the progression from seventeenth-century colonial America to nineteenth-century New England, and a third the journey from illicit relations to marriage to bachelorhood. The vision that struggled toward consummation seemed to fade away into a lost dream – particularly since the bachelor Coverdale does not experience the love of either Zenobia or Priscilla, both of whom he wished to pursue. In this emphasis on marriage, Hawthorne picks up on a trope which marks Renaissance comedies and tragedies: epithalamions play a large role in the poetry of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton and often signify the blessing of Providence on those who have undergone suffering and practiced forgiveness rather than vindictiveness and Nature plays a part in effecting such forgiveness. Several Hawthorne scholars have seen this as a negative characteristic of his work without considering its roots in old world pastoral.

Hawthorne's interpolations of old and new forms and ideas create a new kind of American pastoral. Nature inscribed by the divine (as in allegory) produces a particular cosmological understanding. Nature and the supernatural working hand in hand (as in the Gothic) reinforces human responsibility to the land. Nature and spirituality working hand in hand to reform society (as in Transcendentalism) emphasizes humans as part of a natural and spiritual world that operates according to "natural law." Hawthorne's pastoral incorporates these views even as his use of the pastoral form suggests that

historical and artistic lenses should not be discarded in the wake of “newness,” but that the distance of history and art together can help to make good sense of “newness” in a way that is lost to those who turn away from history and (literary) art. As artistic and literary forms continue to be adapted to a changing world, works such as Hawthorne’s American romances stand as exemplars of such adaptation that is interested in truths that extend across time and place and yet treat one’s own time and place with particularity.

APPENDIX

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Hawthorne's Reading of Renaissance Pastoral

As a child and young man, Hawthorne read the pastoral writers repeatedly and even lived something of a pastoral life during his years in rural Maine, first at the family property in Raymond and then at Bowdoin College in Brunswick. In Raymond and Salem both, Hawthorne and his sisters read much during their childhood. "We always had books, perhaps full enough," recalls his sister Elizabeth. "As soon as we could read with ease, we began to read Shakspeare..." She notes that her brother "studied" the work of Shakespeare and Milton and a few others during their childhood, adding, "As soon as he was old enough to buy books for himself, he purchased Spenser's Fairy Queen" (in Stewart 319). Hawthorne seems to have shared much in common with his sister Elizabeth, who wrote after Hawthorne's death to his daughter Una, "Ever since I first read Shakspeare's *As You Like It*, when I was nine years old, I have longed for an out of door life. It has always seemed to me that there must be agreeable people in the woods like those in the Forest of Arden" (Stewart 316). Elizabeth remembers that hunted and fished at Sebago Lake, adding that "[h]is imagination was stimulated, too, but the scenery and by the strangeness of the people, and by absolute freedom he enjoyed" (Stewart 319). When Hawthorne returned to Salem to continue his schooling, he wrote to his younger sister Louisa, telling her, "How often do I long for my gun, and wish that I could again savagize with you. But I shall never again run wild in Raymond, and I shall never be so happy as when I did" (*CE* 15: 119). In a letter to his mother in a few months before entering Bowdoin College in Brunswick, he implores her to keep the family residence in

Raymond: “If you remove to Salem, I shall have no Mother to return to during the College Vacations... If you remain where you are, think how delightfully the time will pass with all your children round you, shut out from the world, and nothing to disturb us. It will be a second Garden of Eden (*CE* 15: 150). During this time, Hawthorne also attended and was deeply affected by Nahum Tate’s version of *King Lear*: “I have been to Boston and seen Mr Kean in *King Lear*. It was enough to have drawn tears from millstones. I could have cried myself, if I had been in a convenient place for such an exploit. I almost forgot that I did not live ‘in Regis Learis speculum,’ ‘in the age of *King Lear*’” (*CE* 15: 136). In this stage production of *King Lear*, Hawthorne would have seen pastoral literature being brought to life.

While enrolled as a student at Bowdoin College in Maine, Hawthorne was also privy to a wide variety of texts. Bowdoin, like other colleges of young America, included classical texts in the curriculum and provided extensive reading opportunities through its literary societies. Being accepted at Bowdoin College in the 1820s when Hawthorne was enrolled was contingent upon being well-versed in various works, including the pastoral writings of Virgil.¹ The aspiring college entrant was tested for his ability “to read, construe, and parse... the *Bucolics*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid* of Virgil... and to write Latin grammatically” (*Laws of Bowdoin* 3). Virgil’s *Eclogues* (as the *Bucolics* from the list above are generally called today) provide a basic pastoral account of shepherds watching their sheep, piping to their loves, staging poetry contests, and responding to the political turmoil of their day at a distance from the political centers of power.

¹ Hawthorne’s letters suggest that he did become very familiar with the pastoral verse of Virgil during this time of preparing for entrance exams; he cut short a letter to his uncle by mentioning that “I must beg leave to represent that I have from ten to fourteen pages of Latin to parse and translate” (*CE* 15: 122).

His letters prior to his entrance into Bowdoin College suggest that Hawthorne was very familiar with pastoral literature before entering college. Hawthorne writes to his mother in March 1820 that he has “begun to fit for College under Benj^m L. Oliver, Lawyer.”² In August of 1821, Hawthorne wrote that he felt quite prepared for his entrance exams: “Mr. Oliver says I will get into College, therefore Uncle Robert need be under no apprehensions” (*CE* 15: 153). His only comment about the exams when he does pass them is “I passed through my examination as well as most of the Candidates” (15: 155). Nehemiah Cleaveland, a surrogate son of his uncle professor at Bowdoin as well as a student and later a tutor at Bowdoin, remembers Hawthorne’s excellence in the subjects he enjoyed: “he was a great reader and gave indications of the facility and felicity so marked in subsequent years. His Latin and English exercises were specially commended by his teachers; one of them certainly, Prof. Newman, being a competent judge” (303). Horatio Bridge, one of Hawthorne’s college friends, corroborates this, noting that Hawthorne could be found engaged in “miscellaneous reading” and study of the humanities and supposing that “his facility for acquiring knowledge would, with little labor, have placed him in the front rank of his class” had he not disliked other subjects such as mathematics and metaphysics. But, Bridge notes further, “especially did he like the Latin, which he wrote with great ease and purity” (33). Hawthorne also remembered his time at Bowdoin with fondness. In his dedication to Horatio Bridge, in the preface of

² He also relates a disagreement between his Uncle Robert Manning and his tutor about when he should enter college, his tutor convinced that he could enter college that year, but his uncle insisting that another year be given to study. Hawthorne ends his letter with a statement that “[a]fter I have got through college I will come down and learn Ebe [his sister]. Latin and Greek. I rove from one subject to another at a great rate” (*CE* 15.117-18).

his last collection of short stories, *The Snow Image and Other Stories*, Hawthorne describes their college days at Bowdoin in these terms:

while we were lads together at a country college, –gathering blue-berries, in study-hours, under those tall academic pines; or watching the great logs, as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin; or shooting pigeons and gray squirrels in the woods; or bat-fowling in the summer twilight; or catching trouts in that shadowy little stream which, I suppose, is still wandering riverward through the forest, – though you and I will never cast a line in it again, – two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things that the Faculty never heard of, or else it had been the worse for us, – still it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny, that he was to be a writer of fiction. (*CE* 11: 4–5)

Cyrus Hamlin, a student at Bowdoin nine years after Hawthorne, outlines the rivalry of the two literary societies at Bowdoin, the Peucinian (of which he was a member) and the Athenaeon (of which Hawthorne was a member), emphasizing the social and academic prominence of these societies: “I should leave out a long slice of life if I should not notice more fully our society life. It was something far more literary and scientific than college societies are at the present day.... Each had its library and the loyalty of each student was measured by his gifts to the library.... The fortnightly meetings were for debate and the reading of essays. Our debates were sometimes very earnest and called forth talent and research. They constituted an important part of the literary incitement of the college course” (121–22). Hawthorne was a member of the Athenaeon Society and was able to obtain books from it. According to Roger Michener’s study of two literary societies at Bowdoin during the nineteenth-century, both societies prized their handsome copies of the works of Shakespeare (225). Although one of several fires completely destroyed the Athenaeon Society’s early records and all but two hundred volumes in 1822, the Athenaeon Society’s library was quickly rebuilt and by 1838, they housed 2000 volumes (225-26). Hawthorne alludes to the importance of this

collection in a letter to his sister the next month, writing, “I beleive [*sic*] our loss by fire is or will be nearly made up.... The repairs on the building are begun, and will probably be finished by next commencement” (*CE* 15: 168). In a letter to his mother, Hawthorne describes the pastoral qualities of his college life, to which the libraries of the societies contribute: “The College is a much more civilized place than one would expect to find in this wilderness. There are two Societies composed of the Students, one containing 1200 and the other 600 volumes. The Books are generally well chosen, and they have many of the best English authors” (*CE* 15: 159–60). Later, in a letter to his sister Elizabeth, he writes, “I can procure Books of all sorts, form the library of the Athenean Society, of which I am a Member. The Library consists of about 800 Volumes” (*CE* 15: 175). Hawthorne also noted the importance of this society in 1832 in a congratulatory letter to Franklin Pierce, his college roommate who had become speaker of the New Hampshire legislature, writing, “You cannot imagine how proud I feel, when I recollect that I myself was once in office with you, on the standing committee of the Athenean Society. That was my first and last appearance in public life” (*CE* 15: 223). And a few years later in 1839, when asked by a later Bowdoin graduate to contribute to a literary journal named after his alma mater, Hawthorne writes, “I have revived many old and happy recollections, by looking over the Catalogue of the Athenaeon Society” (*CE* 15: 307). The headnote of this catalogue indicates an attempt to rebuild the original lists, and Hawthorne’s response indicates that there was plenty in the current catalogue that resembled the list of books available while he was a Bowdoin student.³

³ In the lists of the catalogue Hawthorne refers to here are many authors and works he that may have contributed to his conception of nature generally or of the pastoral more specifically, including Shakespeare and Milton but also pastoral writers such as Theocritus, Virgil, Cervantes, Wordsworth, and many others.

One of the required texts in the Bowdoin College curriculum, “Blair’s Rhetoric,” may also have contributed to Hawthorne’s sense of the pastoral (*Laws* 29). Following a lecture entitled “The Nature of Poetry, Its Origin and Progress, Versification,” is a lecture on pastoral poetry. In lecture thirty-nine, Blair lambasts the “insipidity” of most current versions of pastoral but says that the writers’ lack of innovation rather than any constraints coming from the form itself may be to blame:

I much question, however, whether this insipidity be not owing to the fault of the Poets, and to their barren and slavish imitation of the ancient pastoral topics, rather than to the confined nature of the subject. For why may not Pastoral Poetry take a wider range? Human nature, and human passions, are much the same in every rank of life; and wherever these passions operate on objects that are within the rural sphere, there may be a proper subject for pastoral. (136–37)

Always a student of “human nature, and human passions,” Hawthorne may well have been inspired to take up the challenge of “taking a wider range” than most pastoral poetry of his day did. It is significant that Hawthorne wrote pastoral prose rather than pastoral poetry, allowing him to avoid the trite expressions about nature that marked too much of the poetry of his time.

When Hawthorne returned to Salem after graduation, he made use of the books from the Salem Athenaeum. Marion Kesselring, in her study of the records of the Salem Athenaeum, notes that Hawthorne’s Uncle William owned a share in the Athenaeum since 1820, which is when Hawthorne would have been back in Salem to prepare for college entrance exams while his mother and sisters remained in Maine, and though Kesselring claims that “there is no record that he or anyone in the family used his borrowing privileges during this time,” a letter to Hawthorne’s Uncle Robert on May 2, 1820, suggests otherwise. “The reason I did not send last Tuesday’s Palladium was that I

staid at our Reading room till it was too late” (*CE* 15: 122). After his college days, Hawthorne had access to the Salem Atheneum collection first through his Aunt Mary’s share and then his own.⁴ In his biographical sketch of Hawthorne, Hawthorne’s publisher James Fields writes that according to a Salem friend, “it was said in those days that he had read every book in the Athenaeum” (47). In the Athenaeum, Hawthorne had access to many of the works that would come to inflect his own writing, including Renaissance pastoral writings.

Along with the books he checked out from the Atheneum, the books he read in his childhood and college days comprised no small list. Seven decades after Hawthorne’s death, critics began to challenge Henry James’s long-accepted critique of the insularity of Hawthorne’s works. “General belief,” writes Austen Warren in 1935, “would have Hawthorne little of a bookman” (480). Warren, however, investigates Hawthorne’s extensive reading and finds that “[t]he English poets bulk large; and they come impartially from the ranks of neo-classicists and the romantics.” Also important to realize is that Hawthorne read heavily in “the periodical literature of the day, even then voluminous,” as Warren points out (486-87). “But in his leisure,” Warren remarks, “he read widely in both older literatures and contemporary publications. Never a collector of books, never a professional critic, possessed of no desire to judge the work of others or even to articulate his impressions except by the way and in brief, he was, however, always a bookman, eager and catholic” (497). Arlin Turner, in “Hawthorne’s Literary Borrowings,” suggests, “It is perhaps because of Hawthorne’s reticence as to his [stories’] origins that we have as yet learned very little about his literary borrowings; but

⁴ “Hawthorne bought the share,” Kesselring surmises, “as soon as the sale of a story or two enabled him to do so” (6).

from time to time articles have appeared touching the specific sources on which Hawthorne relied” (543). Turner has also considered Hawthorne’s interest in reshaping American writers who preceded him, noting, “Hawthorne’s literary indebtednesses are, however, as well as I can make out, chiefly to English writers. It was to Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Scott, and the Gothic romancers that he owed most of all, though he took definite hints from lesser writers” (“Hawthorne’s Literary Borrowings” 553). Despite Warren’s and Turner’s coincident claims, most scholars have been satisfied with this knowledge of his reading of British authors without searching out its implications for Hawthorne’s own time and focus almost exclusively on his American reading or his Gothic reading, only mentioning the presence of the other British writers in passing, if at all.

Despite writing bits of poetry to his sisters and mother in his early letters, Hawthorne largely leaves the actual writing of poetry to others, preferring to read poetry and write prose fiction. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton’s poetry especially captures his attention and that of his bride Sophia. Sophia writes of their readings of Milton and Shakespeare in various letters, and Hawthorne writes about falling asleep while reading Spenser’s *The Faery Queene* and dreaming of his future marriage with his fiancé Sophia.⁵ Hawthorne’s son Julian comments that that he and his sisters “were taught Shakespeare’s songs, and knew by heart many passages from the plays” (*Reading* 122). Julian mentions that many of Hawthorne’s books were burned or otherwise lost; of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, he writes, “His copy of Spenser had also vanished; but in England he got a

⁵ In June of 1840, engaged to Sophia, Hawthorne writes that he fell asleep reading *The Faery Queen* (CE 15: 473, 477). On February 4, 1844, Sophia wrote in a letter to Louisa, Hawthorne’s younger sister, that “Nathaniel has finished reading Shakspere [sic] to me...” (CE 16:13).

handsome illustrated copy of 'The Faerie Queene,' and at evening, for many weeks, he read it to us aloud: the first of the series of great readings that we had from him, though long before this he had roamed through the English classics with his wife" (65). In a letter to his old college classmate Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hawthorne writes a few months before his death in 1864, "I take vast satisfaction in your poetry, and take very little in most other men's, except it be the grand old strains that have been sounding all thorough my life" (CE 27: 626). These exceptions, as Turner and other critics have already pointed out, include Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton among others.

Adapting the works of Milton, Shakespeare, and Spenser, Hawthorne develops a sense of historical continuity which draws together the human community across time and space in a world where attaining adequate relations with art and nature presents continuing challenges – in part, because of the Fall that plays such a prominent part in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and in the doctrinal background of nineteenth-century New England. Although Hawthorne sees these authors as exemplary for his own artistic conception of the world and humans' place in it, his praise is not without some degree of criticism. In a letter to Margaret Fuller, Hawthorne writes that he and Sophia "have read through Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and other famous books" (CE 16: 671). Sophia records her perception of their shared experience of reading Hawthorne, most likely by sharing Hawthorne's thoughts since she gives very little literary analysis elsewhere: "At present we can only get along with the old English writers, and we find that they are the hive from which all modern honey is stolen. They are thick-set with thought, rather than one thought serving for a whole book. Shakespeare is preeminent. Spenser [sic] is music. We dare to dislike Milton when he goes to heaven. We do not recognize God in his picture of

Him” (*Mem.* 54). Such appreciation of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton can be found throughout Hawthorne’s notebooks and letters. In a letter to his college friend and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow a few months before he died, for example, Hawthorne praised little poetry but “the grand old strains that have been sounding all through my life” (CE 18:626). Hawthorne’s reappropriations of the art and thought of these authors tacitly acknowledges their influence even while revising and re-envisioning the pastoral mode employed by these Renaissance writers. What they do with the writings of their Greek and Italian predecessors, Hawthorne does with their writings, reshaping a productive artistic mode for the tensions of a different time and place. Given Hawthorne’s critical approbation of these Renaissance writers, their versions of pastoral are especially important to understanding Hawthorne’s pastoral literature.

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