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Hawthorne's Transcendental Ambivalence in Mosses from an Old Manse

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HAWTHORNE'S TRANSCENDENTAL AMBIVALENCE IN *MOSES FROM AN OLD*

MANSE

by

MATTHEW S. EISENMAN

Under the Direction of Mark Noble

ABSTRACT

Nathaniel Hawthorne's collection of short stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, serves as his contribution to the philosophical discussions on Transcendentalism in Concord, MA in the early 1840s. While Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and the other individuals involved in the Transcendental club often seem to readily accept the positions presented in Emerson's work, it is never so simple for Hawthorne. Repeatedly, Hawthorne's stories demonstrate his difficulty in trying to identify his own opinion on the subject. Though Hawthorne seems to want to believe in the optimistic potential of the spiritual and intellectual ideal presented in Emersonian Transcendentalism, he consistently dwells on the evil and blackness that may be contained in the human heart. The collection of short stories written while Hawthorne lived in Concord and surrounded himself with those dominant literary figures represents the clearest articulation of his ambivalent position on Transcendentalism.

INDEX WORDS: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, *Earth's Holocaust*, *The Old Manse*, *The Artist of the Beautiful*

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of my students who have inspired me to love learning and to continue pursuing my own academic interests. It is my sincerest hope that each of them finds that which they are intellectually passionate about.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank The Walker School for helping me continue my own education while trying to inspire young minds to love literature in the way that I do. I would like to thank the wonderful Dana Paulson for her unyielding support. I would like to thank Dr. Noble for taking me under his wing when he was new to the department and being willing to work with me when it was convenient for me, as my timeline and outside of graduate school workload often made that a challenge. I would like to thank Dr. Goodman and Dr. Elliott for helping me in this final step of my graduate program; I have learned so much from you both. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support throughout my entire academic career.

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Introduction

In his introduction to *Salem, Hawthorne, and Transcendentalism*, Alfred Rosa notes that there has been a significant body of scholarship attempting to determine Nathaniel Hawthorne's relationship to Transcendentalism. There is no doubt that Hawthorne had close personal ties to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Peabody, and Henry David Thoreau. The question that preoccupies readers concerns the influence that these thinkers and writers had on Hawthorne and his work. Because of the enigmatic nature of his work, which is often full of allegory that cannot be clearly distilled to one coherent meaning, many have attempted to make an argument about the content of Hawthorne's own ideals. These arguments run the gamut from Hawthorne as full-fledged Transcendentalist, to assertions that Transcendentalism had no impact on Hawthorne at all.

Rosa, for instance, considers "the personal and artistic effect Transcendentalism had on Nathaniel Hawthorne" and claims that "no investigation of this nature has yet been attempted."¹ He then conducts a broad survey of Hawthorne's works, indicating the ways in which each connects to Transcendentalism. He mentions moments which bring the transcendental conversation to the forefront, but does not limit his work to these moments. Instead, Rosa discusses each of Hawthorne's major romances in order to demonstrate that Transcendentalism did indeed influence Hawthorne's fiction. Harvey Gable addresses these influences similarly in *Liquid Fire: Transcendental Mysticism in the Romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, arguing that the Emersonian discourse on the Self is fundamental to Hawthorne's work in his four major romances. Marjorie Elder, not wanting to discuss the nature of Hawthorne's Transcendentalism, refers to him as a "Transcendental Symbolist" in her work by the same name. She indicates that

¹ Alfred F. Rosa, *Salem, Transcendentalism, and Hawthorne* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1980) 9.

Hawthorne uses transcendental symbols in his romances without actually indicating his own personal opinions. While these critics begin to explore Hawthorne's connection to Transcendentalism, the broad range of the corpus of scholarly work may represent Hawthorne's own ambivalence towards the philosophy of his friends. Unlike the previous scholars who seek to determine where Hawthorne falls on the spectrum of Transcendentalism, I propose that Hawthorne uses the stories collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse* to define his opinion and present that opinion publically, making *Mosses* Hawthorne's critical commentary on Transcendentalism.

Hawthorne's fiction often indicates his philosophical difficulty finding his place among his friends, the Transcendentalists. Two moments from tales published in *Mosses* make explicit reference to his confusion surrounding Transcendentalism and his own position in the current literary and philosophical world. When describing the "Giant Transcendentalist" in "The Celestial Railroad" Hawthorne's narrator says:

He is German by birth, and is called Giant Transcendentalist, but 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.²

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse* Ed. Gretchen Kay Short (New York: Modern Library, 2003) "The Celestial Railroad" 152-153.

Hawthorne illustrates that the movement in which he engages socially is impossible to define. Instead, he sees a confounding mix of Emerson's ideas about the potential for perfection and his own fear in the potential impossibility of actually discovering the good in humanity. In an introduction to "Rappaccini's Daughter," for instance, he directly addresses his own position as a writer, in regards to his contemporaries. In a thinly veiled self-portrait, the narrator describes M. de l'Aubépine (literally, the French translation of Hawthorne):

As a writer, he seems to occupy an unfortunate position between the Transcendentalists (who, under one name or another, have their share in all the current literature of the world) and the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude. If not too refined, at all events too remote, too shadowy, and unsubstantial in his modes of development to suit the taste of the latter class, and yet too popular to satisfy the spiritual or metaphysical requisitions of the former, he must necessarily find himself without an audience, except here and there individually or possibly an isolated clique.³

Hawthorne ironically suggests that his work does not appeal to the common reader; it is too vague and too distant, but it also does not reach the spiritual and metaphysical level required by the writings of the Transcendentalists. I will suggest that this artistic and intellectual struggle for Hawthorne may hold the key to understanding *Mosses from an Old Manse* as a unified text.

³ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 71.

There is no argument to be made about Hawthorne's social interactions with the dominant members of the Transcendental Club. Two noted works, Philip McFarland's *Hawthorne in Concord* and Susan Cheever's *American Bloomsbury*, document the social lives of many of the Concord literary elite. Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and Fuller, together with Hawthorne, his wife Sophia and sister-in-law Elizabeth Peabody form an influential circle of friends, thinkers, and writers. The others publish their thoughts on Transcendentalism: Fuller and Alcott in *The Dial*; Emerson, along with his work on *The Dial*, in his essays and lectures; Thoreau in *Walden*; Peabody through her work with *The Dial* and her published observations on Alcott's school. Curiously absent from the published record is Hawthorne's own written opinion the subject. Unlike the texts that attempt to make claims to Hawthorne's personal feelings towards Transcendentalism, or those which simply point to places that seem to discuss where the influence of Transcendentalism can be seen throughout Hawthorne's literary career, I propose a more focused exploration of Hawthorne's intellectual relationship to the Transcendentalists and his manipulations of Transcendentalist theory grounded in a reading of the tales in *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

With the exception of "Roger Malvin's Burial," "Monsieur du Miroir," and "Young Goodman Brown," all of the stories collected in the 1846 edition of *Mosses from an Old Manse* were written during Hawthorne's stay at the Old Manse in Concord. Three other stories are added later to his 1854 publication of *Mosses*. In addition, the only sketch not published separately from the collection is "The Old Manse," where "the author makes the reader acquainted with his abode."⁴ Hawthorne uses this collection, published after he leaves Concord, as a venue for his own intellectual and artistic debate on the potential for spiritual perfection presented by Emerson. Unlike so many of his peers, Hawthorne never settles easily on a moral,

⁴ Hawthorne, "The Old Manse" 3.

religious, or philosophical position. As so many critics have noted, Hawthorne's tales are enigmatic, refusing to simply be aligned with one mode of interpretation. If these tales reflect Hawthorne's contemplation on the subject, they represent the internal conflict which stirs in Hawthorne even as he spends hours with Emerson and Thoreau. Hawthorne seems to want to believe in the potential of the individual soul and the "perfection of this world,"⁵ for which Emerson so fervently argues. However, in the stories that reflect this desire, he repeatedly returns to account of the evil which befalls humanity. According to Emerson, "Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute; it is like cold, which is the privation of heat."⁶ In the tales collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Hawthorne repeatedly responds to this assertion, in which evil is not an institution of its own, but simply the lack of good. This collection is laced with the potential successes and failures of Transcendentalism; it comprises Hawthorne's literary response to the movement that dominated the lives and works of many of his closest friends.

1. The Intellectual and Religious Origins of Nathaniel Hawthorne

In order to undertake an account of how Hawthorne responds to Transcendentalism, it is essential to first understand the familial and religious background that helps shape the opinions Hawthorne offers in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Though Nathaniel Hawthorne is born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, his work is steeped in a family and religious tradition dating back nearly 200 years prior to his birth to William Hathorne's arrival in the new world, and ultimately Salem, between 1630 and 1633.⁷ William Hathorne (1607-1681) and his son, John (1641-1717),

⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001) 69.

⁶ Emerson 71.

⁷ Edgar Wagenknecht, *Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Man, His Tales, and His Romances* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1989) 1. In his biographical account, Wagenknecht suggests referencing Vernon Loggins *The Hawthornes* as the authoritative biography.

were both adherents to a relatively strict form of Puritan Calvinism. William has been associated with the persecution and execution of two Quakers in 1659⁸, an idea which inspires *The Gentle Boy*, a tale documenting the abuse and its repercussions in the community, specifically on the family of the executed. Similarly important to the development of Hawthorne's thinking, John Hathorne, Hawthorne's great-great-grandfather, presided as a judge over the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.⁹ In "The Custom House," the chapter preceding the text of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne describes William Hathorne as "the earliest emigrant of my name."¹⁰ His treatment of great-great-grandfather John Hathorne is far less flattering: "He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor."¹¹ Hawthorne continues describing the shame he feels for the horrors enacted on others by his ancestors. These ancestors and events, in addition to the experiences in Hawthorne's own life, are central to the creation of the moral, literary, and symbolic difficulties present in his works.

Hawthorne's early life is marred with difficulties. His father, Nathaniel Hathorne, a sea captain like his father before him, dies of complications from yellow fever while away on a voyage to Surinam.¹² The young Hawthorne, just a few months shy of four, was deeply affected by the loss of his father. A number of Hawthorne's works, including *The Gentle Boy*, present young children orphaned or abandoned by their fathers, potentially indicating the impact of this critical event on young Nathaniel's writing. Later in his childhood, an injury to his foot leaves Nathaniel an invalid for nearly two years. Many scholars attribute Hawthorne's intellectual curiosity and love for reading to this period, which required him to stay mainly indoors and

⁸ Footnote in Norton Hawthorne's Tales.

⁹ Edwin H Miller, *Salem is My Dwelling Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) 19.

¹⁰ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* 6.

¹¹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* 6.

¹² Miller 25.

isolated from the activities of the common nine-year-old. In the fall of 1818, Hawthorne, his mother, and his two sisters, moved into a house on land by Lake Sebago, near Raymond, Maine.¹³ This time in Maine helped to cultivate not only Hawthorne's academic prowess, but also a reverence for the wonders of the natural world. With regularity, young Nathaniel Hawthorne would venture out alone into the Maine night, build a fire for himself, and proceed to read, write, or simply think in the silence of the woods.

At the urging, and financial support, of his uncle Raymond Manning, Nathaniel Hawthorne, at the age of 17, enrolls in Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. While at Bowdoin, Hawthorne solidifies his desire to be an author as well as his distaste for the strict Calvinist sermons he was forced to attend, both during his childhood in Salem and his education at Bowdoin. In a discussion of Hawthorne's personal religious beliefs, Agnes Donohue explains that "no evidence indicates that he ever attended church after leaving Bowdoin until, as a tourist, he freely visited churches in England France, and Italy."¹⁴ Because biographical data suggests no continued practice in religion of any kind after Bowdoin, labeling Hawthorne a "Calvinist" proves difficult. While distancing himself from the Calvinist theology of his childhood home of Salem, Hawthorne also begins lifelong friendships with poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and President Franklin Pierce.

Though Hawthorne's intellectual development and close friendships in college seem "normal," the twelve years following Hawthorne's graduation are anything but. Hawthorne moves back home to his mother's house and spends the better part of the next twelve years, from 1825-1837, as a shut in. Rarely leaving the house, Hawthorne reads the books his sister borrows from the library voraciously, and has meals delivered outside of his bedroom door. Referring to

¹³ Vernon Loggins, *The Hawthornes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951) 231.

¹⁴ Agnes M Donohue, *Hawthorne Calvin's Ironic Stepchild* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1985) 8.

these years as “solitary,” “lonely,” and “chilly,”¹⁵ it is in this period that Hawthorne produces the stories and sketches, some previously published anonymously, which would become his 1837 *Twice-Told Tales*. These tales reflect Hawthorne’s struggle for self-awareness and his connection to his Calvinist past. This publication and Hawthorne’s subsequent return to a more public life lead to his introduction to the Peabody sisters who lived around the corner. Hawthorne takes a post at the Salem Custom House, which he documents in the opening chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*. While in Salem, Hawthorne likely first hears of Transcendentalism, and already working on the nature of Christianity and morality in his work, Hawthorne is also likely intrigued by what he hears. Salem, like many other towns in New England, has a particularly active lyceum. Emerson was a regular speaker in Salem, and after the publication of *Nature* in 1836, he became relatively famous as the dominant figure in Transcendentalism, and soon after would become a close friend and neighbor of Hawthorne’s.

In 1841, with the money saved from his work at the Custom House and an interest piqued by his exposure to Emerson, Hawthorne purchases membership at the Transcendentalist experiment in communal living, Brook Farm. Seemingly intrigued by both the philosophy of Transcendentalism and the Peabody sisters, he spends seven or eight months at Brook Farm “milking cows, piling manure, seeding the fields, cutting hay, and living in the closest contact with his visionary fellow colonists.”¹⁶ It may be that Hawthorne left Brook Farm because his scholarly disposition did not mesh satisfactorily with the physical work required to live in that type of communal environment. However, it may also be that the Transcendentalist ideals that formed the basis for Brook Farm’s establishment proved impractical and impossible in the real

¹⁵ Donohue 9.

¹⁶ Loggins 266.

world. Either way, Hawthorne's stay is short lived. He returns to Salem, and in the summer of 1842 marries Sophia Peabody.

By the time he marries, the 38-year-old Hawthorne has become disenchanted with both the dominant religious philosophy of New England, Calvinism, and the new, cutting edge religious and philosophical movement, Transcendentalism. He feels the burden of his family's participation in the atrocities of early colonial life, and he feels unfulfilled by the "fire and brimstone" sermons preached in his native Salem and at the required weekly church services at Bowdoin. While the discussion of the inherently wicked person may not have been moving to Hawthorne, his experience at Brook Farm certainly did not sway his religious and philosophical leanings to Transcendentalism. Though those in residence at Brook Farm were the ones most intrigued with trying to execute these new ideas, Hawthorne must have seen things that troubled him. Could people actually resist the desire to accumulate material possession, increase their social standing, and commit actions harmful to the others in the community for the sake of personal pleasure all for the benefit of the community? Brook Farm remained a viable community for several more years, but as noted in his portrayal of the failings of the Utopian community in *The Blithedale Romance*, it is likely that Hawthorne had seen enough to make him skeptical of the idealist foundations of the community.

Soon after their wedding, Hawthorne and his new bride, Sophia Peabody, move to Concord, MA, the hotbed of Transcendental thought. Sophia's sister, Elizabeth, along with the Hawthorne's friends and neighbors, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and Margaret Fuller form the base of the movement. When the Hawthornes arrive in Concord in 1842, Transcendentalism is in full swing. Emerson has been a regular on the lyceum movement; Thoreau has been working for Emerson, teaching his children and exploring the

natural surroundings in Concord; Alcott has already made an attempt at the development of an unconventional school and has been working heavily on *The Dial*. Published in Concord beginning in 1840, *The Dial* becomes to voice of the movement, the written expression of the meetings of the Transcendental Club. Though the topic of whether or not Hawthorne should be considered a Transcendentalist is debated by critics,¹⁷ it is certain that Hawthorne lived in The Old Manse, a house built by Emerson's grandfather, and that he and his wife Sophia interacted socially with many of the members of the Transcendental Club.

The house itself, named Old Manse by Hawthorne, was the first dwelling place of Reverend William Emerson and it remained the home that the village provided for its minister. Hawthorne became the first secular tenant of the Old Manse, moving in a few months after the death of Reverend Ezra Ripley, who had lived there on and off for the 60 years previous to the Hawthornes arrival and died in his 90's in the fall of 1841.¹⁸ While living in the house, Hawthorne completes the stories which will be published separately and then compiled and republished as *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Hawthorne felt so passionate about the influence of the physical structure that the only new work written solely for publication in *Mosses from an Old Manse* was a sketch of the actual dwelling, titled "The Old Manse."¹⁹ The subtitle of this work "The Author makes the Reader acquainted with his Abode" indicates that Hawthorne feels it necessary to introduce the reader to the place the works were written, in order for the reader to fully understand the following texts. He implies in this sketch that the following texts set past and present, in both real and imagined places, are held together by the physical place in which they are conceived in the imagination of the writer.

¹⁷ See Rosa, *Salem, Transcendentalism and Hawthorne* for an account of critical commentary on this particular issue (13).

¹⁸ Phillip McFarland, *Hawthorne in Concord* (New York: Grove Press, 2004) 9.

¹⁹ This appears in Mary Oliver's introduction to the Modern Library publication of *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

In “The Old Manse,” Hawthorne notes the confluence of the fact that the house was the location where Ripley (unnamed in Hawthorne’s text) had “penned nearly three thousand discourses”²⁰ and that Emerson himself lived in the house for a brief time, and during that residency wrote *Nature*. He claims to feel shame for having simply been a “writer of idle stories,” not worthy of the major religious and philosophical texts realized and recounted in the study he now claims as his own. Like the combination of his Calvinist upbringing with his experimental experience at Brook Farm, Hawthorne’s study itself, with all that has been written there previously, brings the Calvinist-Transcendentalist conflict to the space where he will conceive the stories that continue this debate into Hawthorne’s fictional world.

Unlike his solitary nature in Salem, Hawthorne allowed human interaction to play a more significant role in his life. Perhaps due to his wife’s desire to socialize, the Hawthornes entertained visitors at the Old Manse, and Nathaniel was social with the other literary minds in the community. After a visit where Margaret Fuller left a book at the Hawthornes’ house, he met her in the woods on his way to where she was staying at Emerson’s. Philip McFarland recounts the conversation:

Joining her, Hawthorne lingered to talk with his friend once more, “about Autumn,” she reclining on the grass, he seated beside her, “and about the pleasures of getting lost in the woods...and about other matters of high and low philosophy.” Freely they chatted together until a rustling among the trees interrupted them, and a voice called out Fuller’s name. Emerson emerged, having stumbled in his own rambles upon this secluded spot.²¹

²⁰ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 4.

²¹ McFarland 43.

These musings contribute to the new work being done in Transcendentalism. Much of the work published in *The Dial* develops from Emerson's "ramblings" and Fuller's "musings." Just ten days later, and exactly three years after setting off with his brother into the Concord River, Henry David Thoreau arrives at the Hawthornes for dinner.²² Though Hawthorne may not have agreed philosophically with Emerson and the other transcendentalists, having passed at the opportunity to see Emerson in the Salem Lyceum, there is no doubt that he maintained a very social relationship with the Concord intellectuals. McFarland cites an entry from Sophia Hawthorne's journal recounting the comical scene of Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne ice skating together on a frozen marsh. Hawthorne's social interaction, long walks and equally lengthy conversations are well documented. In these conversations, Fuller, Thoreau, and Emerson must have talked to Hawthorne about the ideas vital to their burgeoning intellectual movement. Likewise, the uncertainties expressed in Hawthorne's tales must have been recounted in the conversations Hawthorne had with his closest peers.

The trajectory of the Hawthornes' experience in their three years in Concord also reflects his struggle between the desire for pure intellectual exploration and the practical need to pay the rent. While the Hawthornes repeatedly discuss the happiness of their new marriage and house in Concord, likening it to a social and intellectual Eden, their time in their proverbial Eden ends similarly to that of Adam and Eve. Expelled from the garden, the Hawthorne's return to Salem with little to show for the stories published and the happy times that once signified their experiences in Concord. When the Hawthornes leave Concord in the fall of 1845, another of their social group has just begun one of the most significant periods in his life. On July 4, 1845,

²² McFarland 43.

Henry David Thoreau took up permanent residence in a one room cabin he built by hand on the shores of Walden Pond. While Thoreau is attempting to prove, by experiment, that one does not need the abundance of material wealth and possessions to live an intellectually and spiritually fulfilling life, Hawthorne has the opposite demonstrated to him. Having had the space to write freely, pondering questions on the nature of human existence, Hawthorne is forced to leave his Eden due to a lack of the necessary material wealth to maintain his residency in the Old Manse.

Understanding the critical weight of the works written by the previous residents of the Old Manse, he is conscious of the necessity to attempt to produce work with a similar intellectual and literary value. Hawthorne permanently links the tales and the place, publishing them together in 1846 as *Mosses from an Old Manse*. The implication in the title of the collection, and in the first sketch, “The Old Manse,” is that the physical dwelling-place, the house, the town, and his colleagues, had a significant impact on the texts themselves. Unable to fully accept the views of the Transcendentalists with whom he engages socially, and unwilling to return to a his Calvinist beginnings, Hawthorne struggles with the convergence of his past and present, and writes the tales collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. These tales reflect not only the personal and familial influences on Hawthorne in Salem, present in the *Twice-Told Tales*, but the addition of Emersonian Transcendentalism present in Concord at the time of he writes these stories.

2. American Transcendentalism: Emerson’s literary and intellectual mentorship of Thoreau and Hawthorne

One of the dominant external influences on Hawthorne during his work on *Mosses from an Old Manse* was his relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson’s 1836 publication of *Nature* effectively launches Transcendentalism as an American religious and intellectual

movement. Influenced by the German higher criticism, and in conversation with his peers, Emerson helps to create Transcendentalism as an alternative to the Calvinist theology which dominated nineteenth century New England. This German higher criticism attempted to historically document biblical events in hopes of shedding some new light on the study of the sacred text.²³ Though Emerson is ordained as a minister in the Unitarian Church, his reading consisted of a number of texts, including religious works of Eastern philosophies and the works of the German critics along with the Christian bible lead him towards a relatively unique philosophical perspective. While Emerson is certainly not the only noted Transcendentalist, his work forms the foundation of the movement. Emerson's hometown of Concord, MA becomes the epicenter, the meeting place for the Transcendental Club. Emerson also contributes to *The Dial*, the publication of the Transcendental Club, which included Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, and Henry David Thoreau. While the other Transcendentalists are instrumental in developing and sustaining the movement, Emerson's early work—including *Nature* (1836), *The American Scholar*(1837), *An Address* [commonly referred to as "The Divinity School Address] (1838), and *Essays* (1841)—present the basic ideas which will serve as the underpinnings of the broader movement.

Though the subjects of his sermons, speeches, and essays vary in the specifics of their content, the opening lines of *Nature* contain the single idea which will dominate the majority of Emerson's early work. He opens the essay with the assertion that:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld

²³ For a succinct and complete discussion of the events leading to American Transcendentalism, see Barbara Packer's section on the subject in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*.

God and nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy out of insight and not tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?²⁴

Emerson, in this first passage of his first major published work, establishes the idea that will dominate his philosophy. In order for man to understand the world in which he lives, he must live through his own experience and interaction with the world. It is not simply enough to take the word of those who have come before. In the religious sense, Emerson will indicate that one must discover, through his own soul, the presence of God in the world. Sermons insisting upon the divinity of Christ, without acknowledging the divinity and the potential to interact with the divine that resides in each individual, are incomplete. Like the biblical prophets who experienced a relationship with God through their interaction with the natural world, Emerson demonstrates the current presence of the divine in the natural world. Through individual experience with the natural world, each person has the possibility to elevate the soul to the level of divine interaction, to have an “original relation” to God.

The American Scholar, which Emerson delivered to the Harvard’s Phi Beta Kappa society in 1837, continues to develop this idea of the necessity of an “original relation to the universe.” In these address, he offers a three part approach to achieving the ideal, “the American scholar.” Emerson states that the intellect of the true American scholar must consist of three key influences: Nature, Books, and Action. Echoing the work of *Nature*, Emerson begins *The American Scholar* by addressing the divinity that man has the potential to experience while interacting with the natural world. “He shall see,” Emerson argues, “that nature is the opposite

²⁴ Emerson 27.

of the soul, answering to it part for part....Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind.”²⁵ Nature is reflective of the soul and when we truly understand ourselves, we also truly understand nature. Upon obtaining this self-realization, one is then ready to undertake the next critical influence on the scholar.

Emerson next addresses the value of books to *Man Thinking*.²⁶ He argues, in a similar fashion to his introduction to *Nature* that “the mind of the Past – in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions”²⁷ is a critical influence to the “spirit” of the scholar. Emerson is quick to point out that while books have great potential to influence the new and divine scholarship to be done, they also have the potential to be a stopping point. If one reads as if the words of a previous thinker are the end point, rather than a beginning, the reader is missing a critical service of the art. In order to be the American scholar Emerson describes, one must build on the ideas previously presented, to create new and different ideas, to further develop the collective intellectual world. This passage also seems to be a pointed criticism of the way in which the Bible is used. If the Bible were understood solely a text for enabling a unique interaction with the divine, it would satisfy Emerson’s ideal. Unfortunately, the Bible becomes a stopping point, a definitive word from which nothing can develop. Of course in Emerson’s view this failing belongs to a reader, not to the text itself.

While stressing the importance of nature and literature on the mind and spirit of the scholar, Emerson argues that these inspirations are meaningless without subsequent action. “Without [action],” he insists, “thought can never ripen into truth.”²⁸ In order for the scholar to leave a profound impact on the world, to arrive at the truth towards which all aspire, he must take

²⁵ Emerson 57.

²⁶ This is the way in which Emerson references the ideal of the scholar 58.

²⁷ Emerson 58.

²⁸ Emerson 61.

action. The scholar must create new work: new poetry, new art and philosophy and religious theories. Emerson's scholar must take the next step and actually work to inspire change through action and experience in the world.

Following his address to the Harvard Divinity School graduating class of 1838, Emerson, one of the school's best known graduates, was not asked to speak at his alma mater for a more than thirty years. While speaking to those pupils about to begin careers in the world of the church, Emerson describes the failings of the modern church. He argues a number of points that contradict or undermine contemporary church standards, including the nature of evil and the importance of participation in the communal church worship, and he effectively dismantles much of what his audience had been taught.

One of the most compelling arguments Emerson makes in *The Divinity School Address* is that against "evil" as an entity of its own. Emerson argues that "good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute; it is like cold, which is the privation of heat."²⁹ Unlike the traditional Christian theology, with good and evil as two entities in opposition, Emerson presents "good" as the only entity that exists tangibly. The theological idea that good and evil are opposing forces is firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian teachings. In the Adam and Eve story, early in Genesis, the serpent is an embodiment of the evil forces that tempt Eve, and subsequently Adam, to disobey the commandments of God, the "good" force. In this discussion, Emerson also dismisses a longstanding Calvinist idea of predestination. He claims that it undermines the individual soul's volition to assert that good and vile souls proceed to Heaven and Hell respectively. Emerson is also careful to refer to those going to Hell as "vile" and not "evil." This idea contributes to the generally optimistic feeling of Emersonian Transcendentalism. If evil does not exist as an entity of its own, the things in the world that would ordinarily be classified as evil are simply lacking

²⁹ Emerson 71.

good. For instance, a dark room is not dark by nature, but it merely lacks light. When a single ray of light is introduced to the room, things in the room begin to become visible, and with more light, more can be seen. It is in this way that Emerson views “good” and evil. He can classify all existence on a scale of how good it is, but even at the lowest point, it still would not be labeled as evil.

The second major discussion in *The Divinity School Address* is that of the failings of the current established church. Because the church does not seek to have each person seek to find their own relationship to God, relying instead on the discussions of their predecessors. He makes the argument that in place of truth, which should be the ultimate goal of one’s spiritual search, the church substitutes language and rhetoric. “Historical Christianity has fallen,” according to Emerson, “into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion.”³⁰ Because religion relies on ritual, repetition and revelation from others, and not on the individual search for truth, organized religion always invites this corruption. The decay of the church and its teaching has led to a community in which the soul itself is no longer preached.³¹ Emerson’s culminating argument is that we should “dare to love God without mediator or veil,”³² effectively eliminating the need for the very profession those graduates of the Divinity School had just begun. A religion does not need to be a group that submits to the will or thinking of its leader, based in a collective memory, rather a religion has the potential to exist where each individual is divine, and where each soul has its original connection to the divine.

In the spring of 1841, Emerson publishes a collection of essays, now known as *Essays: First Series*,³³ which contained “Circles” and, the essay that became his most well-known, “Self-

³⁰ Emerson 73.

³¹ Emerson 75.

³² Emerson 79.

³³ Simply known as *Essays* until the second series is published in October of 1844.

Reliance.” In these two essays, Emerson formalizes the version of Transcendentalism that he will ultimately disseminate to Thoreau and Hawthorne. In both of these pieces, Emerson elaborates on the necessity of individual work and ideals in all aspects of life. Unlike *The American Scholar*, which discusses scholarship, and *The Divinity School Address*, which focuses on religion, these texts address the complete individual and society. The key idea in both “Self-Reliance” and “Circles” is that man must move forward, and build on that which has been done before in order to find and create those things that are new and unique in the world.

“Self-Reliance” discusses the importance of the individuals understanding that he himself is divine and has the potential to make his own impact on the world. It is critical for Emerson that the ideas presented in “Self-Reliance” are most important for the potential the individual has to impact society. He argues that “[i]t is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”³⁴ Using a number of different metaphors, Emerson makes clear his mantra in “Self-Reliance” that it is critical to listen to those things that reside in the individual and not rely on the influence of those in the community. Nonconformity becomes the concept most often picked up by modern readers of Emerson, but it is also a critical idea for Emerson’s contemporaries. Both Hawthorne and Thoreau take up the idea of nonconformity as a critical part of one’s experience in the world. Thoreau actively lives a nonconformist lifestyle, which he documents in *Walden*. Hawthorne creates a number of characters that purposefully live on the fringe of “normal” society and, like Owen Warland in *The Artist of the Beautiful*, resist the urge to conform. Hawthorne himself can be seen as a nonconformist in 1840’s Concord. Among Hawthorne’s peers, the popular intellectual position was as part of the Transcendental club; however, Hawthorne resists becoming a full-fledged

³⁴ Emerson 124.

member in an effort to preserve his own intellectual and creative opinions. In a way, this act is in itself an act of Emersonian nonconformity, and certainly presents a complication in the discussion of Hawthorne's own adherence to the driving principals of Transcendentalism. Does his act of nonconformity represent a departure from or an adherence to Emersonian Transcendentalism? In many ways, this complication is reflective of Hawthorne's literary ambivalence towards Transcendentalism.

Similarly, in Emerson's "Circles," the dominant idea is that the world consists of concentric circles, and "progress" is defined by the larger circles being born of the knowledge and inventions of the previous, smaller circles. "The new statement," as Emerson puts it, "is always hated by the old, and, to those dwelling in the old, comes like an abyss of skepticism."³⁵ In a way, "Circles" represents Emerson's response to those in the church that criticize his seemingly heretical statements about the nature of man's relation to God. New ideas will always seem to challenge the previously held beliefs, particularly in, but not limited to, religious arenas. Emerson also opens the possibility for reading Hawthorne's fiction as the development of a new circle, commenting on those that have been previously created, claiming that "the use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it."³⁶ Read this way, Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* might be understood to provide a perspective on the new ideas, and through it Hawthorne may be attempting to shift the intellectual world of Concord through the study of both Transcendentalism and his interactions with the world.

As Emerson continues to develop his definitions of Transcendentalism, the movement spreads throughout New England, introducing a greater number of people to his ideas. One of

³⁵ Emerson 176.

³⁶ Emerson 178.

the vehicles Emerson uses to expand his intellectual following is the lyceum movement. Hawthorne first encounters Emerson in this venue, during a speaking engagement at the Salem Lyceum.³⁷ When Hawthorne arrives in Concord, he is met by Emerson and Thoreau. Thoreau's exposure to Emerson is significant. The two become good friends and Thoreau spends a significant amount of time helping at the Emerson house, teaching Emerson's children and helping with maintenance around the house. In some ways, Hawthorne and Thoreau can be imagined diverging from a similar point of intellectual origin. Both Hawthorne and Thoreau spend a large amount of social and intellectual time walking, talking, even ice skating with Emerson, and they have similar foundations in Emersonian Transcendentalism. Thoreau begins his stay at Walden Pond just a few months before Hawthorne is forced to leave the Old Manse. Armed with similar intellectual arsenals, Thoreau lives for just over two years in relative solitude, conducting an experiment in what it means to truly live; Hawthorne moves back to Salem, takes a job in the Custom House, and publishes *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Though *Walden* is published much later (1854), it reflects Thoreau's responses to the works of Emerson and the other Transcendentalists leading to his move to Walden Pond, as well as his experience on the pond from 1845-1847. When Thoreau moves to the pond, he endeavors to complete an individual experiment in Transcendentalism. Unlike Emerson, who writes and thinks on the importance of self-reliance and the natural world, Thoreau attempts to actually live and practice the ideals presented in Emerson's work. On the pond, Thoreau has the opportunity to actually practice self-reliance, to discover what it means to provide food and shelter on his own while exploring the beauty and divinity in the natural world. If Emerson's work is representative of the intellectual underpinnings of Transcendentalism, then Thoreau's actions are the practical

³⁷ For a comprehensive discussion of Salem and Hawthorne's involvement in the lyceum movement, see Alfred Rosa's *Salem, Transcendentalism, and Hawthorne*.

attempt, to test, in the real world, the possibility of actually living a Transcendent life. In many ways, *Walden* describes a response to Emersonian idealism distinct from but also analogous to Hawthorne's literary struggle with Transcendentalism in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. While Thoreau uses actual personal experience to test Emerson's theoretical work, Hawthorne's fiction becomes a similar laboratory for the study of human response to Transcendentalism. Repeatedly, Hawthorne presents characters that seem to reflect the ideas presented in Emersonian Transcendentalism and tests their ability to function in the "real" worlds of Hawthorne's fiction.

3. Textual Analysis of selections in *Mosses from an Old Manse*

A. "The Old Manse"

When Hawthorne begins work on "The Old Manse" as an introductory tale to his soon to be published collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, he evidently struggles for some time to find the right words to convey his thoughts on his dwelling place in Concord. Larry J. Reynolds suggests that the fact that it took Hawthorne more than a year to write is defining features in the work.³⁸ Hawthorne struggles to reflect upon the Manse, having been forced to return to Salem as a result of the poverty he experiences while in Concord. While the piece is written after Hawthorne's departure from Concord and the Old Manse, its position in *Mosses* allows it to serve as an introduction to the place in which the stories that follow were written, and by implication, to document the impact that the specific place has on those stories. One problem with the sketch is that while it reads like a first person narrative from Hawthorne himself, the reader should still allow for the potential that the narrator is a fictionalized version of Hawthorne, rather than an autobiographical account of himself. There is the distinct possibility that, in

³⁸ Larry J. Reynolds, *Hawthorne and Emerson in "The Old Manse"* 60.

framing the sketch this way, Hawthorne may fictionalize parts of the description in order allow “The Old Manse” to act as more than a solely informative piece in relation to the stories that follow in the text. In “The Old Manse,” Hawthorne’s narrator indicates in his descriptions of both the inside of the house and the surrounding areas of Concord that the influence of the environment is significant. Outside of the house, he describes in pleasant sounding detail the natural world that, by implication, has influenced his work. In the house, he reflects on the influence of the prior residents, noting that all prior to his arrival had been clergymen.

In the sections of “The Old Manse” that speak to the surrounding areas, Hawthorne’s narrator sounds surprisingly Thoreauvian. He notes with great detail the “the beautiful and varied forms” of summer squashes and remarks that “Art has never invented any thing more graceful.”³⁹ Hawthorne’s narrator, like Thoreau, also seems deeply interested in the societies of the past, whose fragments can be found in the areas surround the Manse. The narrator describes the previous residence of local Indian tribes and the likelihood of their habitation as near to the banks of the Concord River as Hawthorne’s own house. In deference to the previous inhabitants, the narrator claims:

You see a splinter of stone, half hidden beneath a sod; it looks like nothing worthy of not; but if you have faith enough to pick it up, behold a relic! Thoreau, who has a strange faculty of finding what the Indians have left behind them, first set me on the search; and I afterwards enriched myself with some very perfect specimens, so rudely wrought that it seemed almost as if chance had fashioned them.⁴⁰

³⁹ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 11.

⁴⁰ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 9.

By including this passage, Hawthorne seems to simultaneously be paying homage to Thoreau and his connection to not only the natural world, while casually criticizing one of the core tenets of Emersonian thought. In contrast to Emerson's opening of *Nature* where he asks why the reader should not have their own original relation to the universe, Hawthorne seems to sense the value in not exclusively prioritizing the new over the old.

While Hawthorne's descriptions of the surrounding lands seem to follow the same beautiful and idyllic path that Thoreau describes in *Walden*, it is not without a tone anticipatory of what will follow in the fiction collected in *Mosses*. Hawthorne's narrator describes the apple orchard that resides on the property. On one hand, the narrator describes the planting clergyman's "pure and unselfish hope of benefiting his successor – an end so seldom achieved by more ambitious efforts."⁴¹ The narrator discusses the possibility of the orchard connecting itself with "matters of the heart" and the benefits of the windfall of finding branches weight down with soon to be falling fruit.⁴² On the other hand, Hawthorne's narrator also discusses the potentially grotesque nature of the apple tree. He describes the twisted branches and tree that is "churlish and illiberal, evidently grudging the few apples that it bears," yet in contrast "another exhausts itself in freehearted benevolence."⁴³ Hawthorne seems to see in the apple tree a natural representation of the same conflict he sees in the potential of the human heart. In one moment, a person may be innocently benevolent, while another may be twisted and grotesque. Even more complicated in his view of the apple tree is the one who is simultaneously benevolent, giving freely of its apples, while appearing twisted and grotesque. The narrator also discusses the melancholy feeling of seeing an old apple tree as the sole remnant of a previous homestead. The

⁴¹ Hawthorne, "The Old Manse" 9.

⁴² Hawthorne, "The Old Manse" 10.

⁴³ Hawthorne, "The Old Manse" 10.

lonely remaining tree then offers “apples that are bitter sweet with the moral of Time’s vicissitude.”⁴⁴

As John S. Martin indicates in his essay “The Other Side of Concord: A Critique of Emerson in Hawthorne’s ‘The Old Manse,’” Hawthorne’s description of the perfect flower also includes the significance of the black mud that lies beneath it.⁴⁵ Hawthorne’s narrator notes “it is a marvel whence this perfect flower derives its loveliness and perfume, springing as it does from the black mud over which the river sleeps, and where lurk the slimy eel, and speckled frog, and the mud turtle, whom continual washing cannot cleanse.”⁴⁶ Hawthorne’s narrator also makes this image a representation of the moral conditions of the world: “Thus we see, too, in the world that some persons assimilate only what is ugly and evil from the same moral circumstances which supply good and beautiful results – the fragrance of the celestial flowers – to the daily life of others.”⁴⁷ On the surface, the flower can seem pure and beautiful, yet if it grows out of the blackness of the mud below, is there validity and truth in the visible beauty? Hawthorne seems to pose this question not only in relation to the flower in “The Old Manse,” but repeatedly in relation to the characters presented in the tales that follow.

The structure and interior of the house seems as important to the narrator of “The Old Manse” as the surrounding area. The first and probably most significant feeling Hawthorne expresses about the manse is the fact that all of the previous residents had been clergy, with relationship to the Emerson family. Emerson himself even dwelt briefly in the house, and it was there he penned his first tract on Transcendentalism, *Nature*.⁴⁸ Hawthorne, given the house’s

⁴⁴ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 10.

⁴⁵ John S. Martin, “The Other Side of Concord: A Critique of Emerson in Hawthorne’s ‘The Old Manse.’” 456.

⁴⁶ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 6.

⁴⁷ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 6.

⁴⁸ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 4.

history, feels the pressure of being merely “a writer of idle stories.”⁴⁹ While he does not by any means feel compelled to change his ways, and write religious sermons, he indicates an understanding of the weight of those which had been written in the study he occupies.

Hawthorne’s narrator also describes the religious books which line the walls of his study. He describes books both large and small containing passage after passage of relatively useless information. Fittingly, he notes the gray and gloomy weather as he recounts his explorations in the library of his predecessors. Hawthorne’s narrator explains how he

burrowed among these venerable books in search of any living thought which should burn like a coal or a fire or glow like an inextinguishable gem beneath the dead trumpery that had long hidden it. But I found no such treasure; all was dead alike; and I could not but muse deeply and wonderingly upon the humiliating fact that the works of man’s intellect decay like those of his hands. Thought grows mouldy. Books of religion, however, cannot be considered a fair test of the enduring and vivacious properties of human thought, because such books so seldom really touch upon their ostensible subject, and have, therefore, so little business to be written at all.⁵⁰

In this description of the books found in the library of the manse, Hawthorne simultaneously criticizes the works read and written by his predecessors in the house, including Emerson’s current work. While Emerson also feels the decay of religious tracts written in previous ages, he

⁴⁹ Hawthorne, “The Old Manse” 4.

⁵⁰ Hawthorne “The Old Manse” 15.

continues to attempt to write commentary on religion, a discourse Hawthorne dismisses in this passage.

Hawthorne's narrator is also critical of Emerson directly, stating he "admired Emerson as a poet of deep beauty and austere tenderness, but sought nothing from him as a philosopher."⁵¹ While it appears that Hawthorne clearly understands the reverence for the natural world found in Emerson's philosophy and has admiration for both Thoreau and Emerson, he is all too aware of the underlying black mud of the human condition. In these pages, Hawthorne not only introduces the reader to the surroundings in which he wrote the short stories contained in the collection, but also his philosophical struggle with the religious sentiments in Concord, both those reflective of the established Puritan history and those belonging to the new religious writings his of contemporary and Concord neighbor. In this way, "The Old Manse" serves as a useful and meaningful introduction to the stories contained in *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

B. "Earth's Holocaust"

While Hawthorne's response to his dwelling place is compelling, it is the fiction contained in the collection that makes the most significant headway in his exploration of Transcendentalism. On the surface, "Earth's Holocaust" has the potential to be a work outwardly in support of Emerson's philosophy. The plot of the tale is relatively simple, particularly in comparison to a number of Hawthorne's other works. The story opens with the fairy tale-esque, "Once upon a time"⁵² and then indicates that it makes little difference as to whether the story is set in the past or the present. The narrator, who remains anonymous in his first person presentation of the story, arrives at the decided-upon location to witness the spectacle

⁵¹ Hawthorne, "The Old Manse" 24.

⁵² Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust" 302.

and with the hope that “the illumination of the bonfire might reveal some profundity of moral truth, heretofore hidden in mist or darkness.”⁵³ The bonfire the narrator speaks of is an enormous conflagration, at a central point on the earth, where earth’s inhabitants will cast into the fire all of the superficial trappings of their earthly existence. As the story progresses, the narrator recalls each significant, manmade contrivance as it is cast into the fire.

Certain moments seem to point to the possibility that Hawthorne himself, or a character with whom he closely identifies, serves as narrator of the story. There are two notable moments where the narrator makes references towards this conclusion, which would help make the case for this story being one avenue for Hawthorne to express his own opinion of the ideas expressed in the text. James McIntosh, the editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Tales*, cites the reference to “an American author” contributing to the fire as suggestive of Hawthorne himself burning a number of his early, unwanted texts. The second reference to the works of American authors comes as all of the books of the world are being consumed. The narrator explains that “[i]f it be no lack of modesty to mention my own works, it must here be confessed, that I looked for them with fatherly interest, but in vain. Too probably, they were changed to vapor by the first action of the heat; at best, I can only hope, that, in their quiet way, they contributed a glimmering spark or two to the splendor of the evening.”⁵⁴ This may point to Hawthorne’s desire to have his works, if not as lofty as those of his peers, contribute to the cannon of literary progress, and in this case, the conflagration to which he bears witness.

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the “leaders” of the “reform” being carried out are the Transcendentalists themselves. At times, the narrator seems to align himself closely with them; at other points in the story, the narrator seems confused and agrees with some of the

⁵³ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 302.

⁵⁴ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 315.

dissenting voices in the crowd. The narrator describes the reformers casting the dry and superficial newspapers and magazines into the inferno. These written works are dispensed of immediately, as they are deemed to have almost no import to society at all. The insignificant nature of these ephemeral works is reflected in the opening lines of *Nature*. Emerson states that, “Our age...writes biographies, histories, and criticism,”⁵⁵ describing the ease of simply being told what has happened, or of inheriting the experiences of others, instead of the work required in having a unique interaction with the world. To simply take the documentation of the past as a guide for the future is often an easy position to fall into, and the burning of these temporary documents frees the world of that temptation.

Next to meet their doom are the items that define social class: coats of arms, military uniforms, the clothing of royalty and the throne itself. The narrator remarks upon the uproar from the lower class at now being made equal with those who had for so long claimed to be superior to them, but now are simply “creatures of the same clay and same spiritual infirmities.”⁵⁶ Thoreau mentions in his discussions of the railroad in *Walden* the struggles of the immigrant classes and the shared humanity between the laborers and those benefiting from the labor.⁵⁷ Hawthorne here presents the possibility that the voice of the “multitude of plebian spectators”⁵⁸ contains in it the same power and humanity as that of the dominant social classes. While Thoreau makes an observation to this practical struggle of the working class, Hawthorne fictionalizes their potential triumph.

The narrator then watches as all of the liquor in the world is cast into the fire, followed by the tea and coffee. Thoreau directly addresses these things as harmful in *Walden* as well.

⁵⁵ See earlier notes on Emerson.

⁵⁶ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 304.

⁵⁷ Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (New York: Signet Classics 1942) 67.

⁵⁸ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 304.

Though not published until after *Earth's Holocaust*, the similarity between Thoreau's commentary on these specific items and Hawthorne's description of their consumption indicates that this opinion on the use of alcohol and natural stimulants, like caffeine, were issues that Thoreau may have freely discussed, even before the publication of *Walden*. Thoreau indicates in the chapter entitled *Higher Laws*:

I am glad to have drunk water so long, for the same reason that I prefer the natural sky to an opium-eater's heaven. I would fain keep sober always; and there are infinite degrees of drunkenness. I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not so noble a liquor; and think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea! Ah, how low I fall when I am tempted by them.⁵⁹

Thoreau uses the language of a spiritual fall, and like the leaders of reform who instruct the population on the items to be cast into the fire, he expects that their absence will help to raise the level of human interaction to more spiritual one.

At this point, the narrator encounters one of a number of dissenters to the work being done. Named the "last toper," this dissenter argues against the fire's consumption of the world's alcohol. His argument is rooted in the assumption that without alcohol, one might never be jolly again. He asks what will comfort the sorrowful man and what would old friends do by a fire without "a cheerful glass between them?"⁶⁰ Fortunately for the last toper, he manages to swipe a bottle from the edge of the fire, so not *all* of the world's alcohol is actually destroyed. In this

⁵⁹ Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. See *Higher Laws* 147.

⁶⁰ Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust" 306.

action, the possible redemptive force of the great fire is nearly eliminated by the individual action of one selfish onlooker. Though the alcohol would presumably be consumed soon enough, the idea that it may be so easy simply to swipe an item from the fire calls into question the potential of the action altogether. Even with the seemingly noble intention to rid the world of alcohol, the selfish nature of man prevents its total destruction.

Next burned are the material items that individual members of society have worked to obtain. Items like the child's playthings, the college graduate's diploma, and the parson's old sermons find their way into the fire. The burning of the parson's sermon may be reflective of both Emerson's ideas that one should have a direct connection to the divine, instead of encountering God through the words of others, as well as Hawthorne's suggestion in "The Old Manse" that we replace ministers' words with fiction. In this same moment, the narrator describes a number of ladies, "highly respectable in appearance, proposing to fling their gowns and petticoats into the flames, and assume the garb, together with the manners, duties, offices, and responsibilities, of the opposite sex."⁶¹ In this passage, Hawthorne suggests that the Transcendentalists in effect dismantle normative conventions that define "respectable" roles for women. Not only does this fit with the Emerson's notions that the transcendence of the individual and the development of self need not be limited to one gender, but other major figures within the Transcendentalist movement demonstrate that belief as well. Along with Emerson and Thoreau, the Peabody sisters and Margaret Fuller are significant contributors to Transcendentalism. Fuller edits *The Dial* and, shortly before Hawthorne's publication of *Mosses*, publishes *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, which is generally regarded as one of the first major works in American feminist theory. Just as Hawthorne is influenced by Emerson, his social interactions with his wife, sister in law, and Fuller likely raised questions about the nature

⁶¹ Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust" 308.

and treatment of women in society. He explores this in characters presented *Mosses*, like Beatrice Rappaccini, as well as through characters, like Hester Prynne, in much of his later work. In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson discusses the importance of the individual and the lack of importance in the way society perceives the individual. This moment at the fire is a casting off of the societal confines of education, religion, and gender in an effort to find the truth in one's self, an idea echoed myriad times throughout Transcendentalist work.

Subsequently, the narrator directs the reader's attention to a moment in which a young girl tries to fling herself into the fire, claiming that she was "the most worthless thing alive or dead."⁶² The good man who saves her instructs her that there is potential redemption for the goodness of her soul and that though the "things of matter" are suitable to cast into the fire, her soul is eternal. After making this distinction between the frailty of man-made artifacts and the virtue of divine artifacts, Hawthorne returns to another oft-discussed topic amongst the Transcendentalist. In this moment, the Emersonian sentiment towards the universal and eternal soul "saves" the Hawthornian character, who believes, like Ethan Brand, that the blackness or worthlessness in her soul means it must necessarily be burned.

The weapons of war are the next set of material possessions cast into the fire. As the narrator argues that without weaponry there may be peace and that there simply will not be a need for more to be made, the naysayers in the group argue that all the burning has done is increased the workload for the armories and that Cain did not need a manufactured weapon for the slaughter of his brother. Not only will this biblical allusion be significant later in the text, but it also indicates the nature of man in the fallen world. In the biblical myth, Cain and Abel are the first two people to exist totally outside of the Garden of Eden, and already they demonstrate the horrible realities of the fallen world. The old warrior grudgingly accepts the narrator's suggested

⁶² Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust" 308.

possibility that instead of the battle-field “Reason and Philanthropy combined will constitute just such a tribunal as requisite.”⁶³ The naysayer points out that ridding the world of weaponry will not rid the world of the innately human characteristics that lead to war.

As the fire continues to build, each element consumed represents a significant idea expressed in Transcendentalist work. Next into the fire are the symbols of earthly law. Devices for execution, money, and legal contracts all make their way to the fire in this section. Emerson and Thoreau spend significant time discussing each of these ideas. Emerson indicates in *The Divinity School Address* that the “doctrine of divine nature”⁶⁴ cannot be found in the earthly institutions of the government and the church. As a result, Hawthorne’s reformers cast these items into the fire. Before Hawthorne tackles the religious reformation, he makes a significant and lengthy reference to the section on books in Emerson’s essay *The American Scholar*. After the books filled with legal doctrines are consumed, the crowd begins to throw in the books filled with literature. In a direct reference to Emerson, a “modern philosopher” interjects, “Now we shall get rid of the weight of dead men’s thought, which has hitherto pressed so heavily on the living intellect, that it has been incompetent to any effectual self-exertion.”⁶⁵ The voice of this philosopher echoes Emerson’s argument in *The American Scholar* that “the book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, - let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward.”⁶⁶ One of the objectors to the book burning is the bookseller, who wants to know what will become of the “trade.” The simple answer to his query is that the financial constraints to which he has become accustomed will not be necessary, particularly since

⁶³ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 310.

⁶⁴ Emerson 72.

⁶⁵ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 313.

⁶⁶ Emerson 59.

all of the money in the world has already been cast into the fire. However, the bookseller may also be indicating through the use of the word “trade” that the exchange of ideas and inspiration, which Emerson also positively endorses, will no longer exist.

Hawthorne then uses the discussion of the book burning to judge which works of literature shed the most light on humanity. As the narrator describes each book entering the fire, he also describes the way each burns and the amount of light produced in their consumption. This appears to be Hawthorne’s way of ranking the important literary works, as Shakespeare’s “gushed a flame of marvellous splendor”⁶⁷ while others burn immediately. The duration and brightness of the flame seem to indicate each work’s ability to shed intellectual light on humanity. Before the work of book burning is done, the narrator indicates to the bookworm that the pages of nature may indeed be better than being engrossed in a book for all time. For the narrator, the book burning appears to be the last earthly thing left to be consumed, and so the work may be done. His fellow observer corrects his assumption and indicates that there may still be more to be consumed by the fire.

The last set of items thrown to the towering inferno consists of all religious paraphernalia in the world. While everything was consumed, it was only the Holy Scripture that remained intact in the fire. This may be reflective of the church’s response to Emersonian Transcendentalism. While Emerson’s work still indicates a strong belief in the divinity of God, he removes the need for the early confines that limit man’s ability access the divine. In this case, while the word of God remains unburned, all manmade connections to it are consumed by the fire. The narrator notes that fingerprints and pencil markings burned away from the pages, but the word of God remained steadfast and unburned in the fire. The observer who has been talking to the narrator tells him that everything important will remain in the ash the following day. The

⁶⁷ Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” 313.

reader here can assume that since the Bible did not burn initially, it will remain as the one significant thing left in the world. Though the material possessions of the world have vanished, the word of the Lord will remain and that will move the people forward, without the evil things that previously existed. The narrator is left to presume that if the evil objects were all consumed in the fire, then it must have been a benefit to humanity and that good will now triumph in the world.

If this story were to end at this moment, with all the material objects that had previously hindered man's connection to a spiritual, higher intuition destroyed, it could potentially be an endorsement of Emerson, Thoreau, and the Transcendentalist ideal. But the story continues. The observer directs the narrator's attention to a group standing near the fire. The group consists of the hangman, the last thief, the last murderer, and the last toper. As they pass the bottle, the last toper salvaged and discuss their possible and seemingly impending deaths in a world cleansed of evil things, they are approached by "a dark-complexioned personage" whose "eyes glowed with a redder light than that of the bonfire."⁶⁸ The dark stranger indicates to the group that they will indeed see "good" days again because one important thing has not been consumed in the conflagration. When asked by the last murderer about the one thing, the "dark-visaged" stranger replies that it is "the human heart itself."⁶⁹ Because evil resides in the heart of each person in the fallen world, the cleansing of the evil material possessions will make no real improvement to the condition of the world. By concluding the story this way, Hawthorne suggests that while Emerson's ideas about the perfectibility of the human present an appealing possibility, they are impossible to achieve. Until there is a change to the inherent sinful condition of the human heart, there will be no positive change in the world. Even with the

⁶⁸ Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust" 319.

⁶⁹ Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust" 319.

elimination of the material artifacts that confine humanity in the temporal and mundane, the Transcendental discussion of a pure spirituality may not actually be plausible, given the post-lapsarian condition of the world. Hawthorne's ambivalence is reflected in the possibility that while the Transcendentalists can suggest even the most drastic changes in the world to lead it to good, the selfishness present in humanity may make such an achievement difficult.

C. "Rappaccini's Daughter"

Another stunning moment of Hawthorne's Transcendental ambivalence comes to light in "Rappaccini's Daughter." While this story is read as a religious allegory in the fallen world by some scholars and as a discussion of feminism and the roles of women by others, the story may also be read as Hawthorne's personal struggle with his position on Transcendentalism and his ultimate rejection of the philosophy. In "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hawthorne presents a complex set of characters that represent the scope of what he may believe possible in humanity. Neither altogether good nor wholly evil, Hawthorne's characters represent the intermixture of the two. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson indicates that there is the potential to the divine in every individual, a penchant for goodness, and a desire for the ideal which simply needs to be discovered and employed in their daily life. Conversely, Hawthorne presents characters in "Rappaccini's Daughter" that demonstrate the potential for the divine while exposing the malignant characteristics which seem to dominate their inclination towards good.

Giovanni Guasconti, the protagonist, is characterized by Hawthorne's narrator as a naïve, young intellectual, on his own in the city for the first time. He is infinitely trusting and simultaneously willing to give in to temptation, a combination which ultimately leads to his fall from the Transcendentalist ideal. The idealistic young scholar, setting out on his own for

intellectual gain, fits the description of the self-reliant individual Emerson articulated.

Unfortunately, Giovanni is almost immediately swayed from his academic pursuits and becomes entirely consumed in his pursuit of Dr. Rappaccini's daughter, Beatrice. Giovanni's physical attraction is complicated by Beatrice's outwardly poisonous nature, and as a result Giovanni is unable to consummate the physical relationship he desires.

With the lack of a physical relationship, Hawthorne's narrator describes the intense spiritual and intellectual relationship shared between Giovanni and Beatrice. Because Beatrice is physically poisoned, Giovanni is forced into Thoreau's ideal of spirituality. When they first talk, "a fervor glowed in her whole aspect and beamed upon Giovanni's consciousness like the light of truth itself."⁷⁰ Unlike the Emersonian ideal of arriving at truth through individual intellectual pursuits, Giovanni's soul is made aware of the truth through his spiritual, but romantic, connection to Beatrice. During their interaction, Beatrice's "spirit gushed out before him like a fresh rill that was just catching its first glimpse of the sunlight and wondering at the reflections of earth and sky which were flung into its bosom."⁷¹ In this initial meeting in the garden, it is not the Giovanni's physical attraction which develops, but rather the purely spiritual one. It seems for a fleeting moment that Giovanni may be able to achieve Thoreau's higher intuition. After numerous meetings between Beatrice and Giovanni, the narrator of the tale describes their love:

By all appreciable signs, they loved; they had looked love with eyes that conveyed the holy secret from the depths of one soul into the depths of the other, as if it were too sacred to be whispered by the way; they had even spoken love in those gushes of passion when their spirits darted forth in articulated breath like

⁷⁰ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 87.

⁷¹ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 87.

tongues of long hidden flame; and yet there had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slightest caress such as love claims and hallows.⁷²

The narrator continues that at the moments that Giovanni seemed tempted to touch Beatrice, she only needed to look at him and the expressive sadness apparent in her face was enough to dispel his desire to connect physically. In the act of pursuing his physical attraction, Giovanni falls into an entirely spiritual relationship with the poisonous Beatrice.

The nature of Beatrice's poison must be the next point to be considered in regards to her relationship with Giovanni. Unlike Giovanni, who appears safe and innocent on the outside, Beatrice is imbued with a poisonous exterior. Giovanni witnesses the awesome power of the poison with the deaths of the lizard, the flies, and the fresh flowers Giovanni throws from his window to Beatrice in the garden. It is not until Giovanni becomes familiar with her malignant power that we learn the truth about Beatrice. Her poison is only skin deep, and as she explains, "though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food."⁷³ Unlike much of humanity, which hides the poisonous heart in the guise of a pure and clean body, Beatrice actually possesses a clean and Godly spirit, yet is poisonous to the touch. Giovanni fails to accept that Beatrice's spirit is the Transcendental spirit and should be revered. Instead, he sees her superficial nature and reacts based on his most basic instinct to rid himself of the poison. While it seems possible to rid Beatrice of her poison with the antidote provided by Baglioni, the solution requires ridding her of her temporary earthly body and, in an almost Emersonian moment, returning her pure spirit to the over-soul. Though Baglioni's intention may simply be to kill her, because of the purity of her spirit, the potential for her

⁷² Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 90.

⁷³ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 97.

transcendence exists as well. Unfortunately, it is not as simple for Giovanni. While his body is only recently poisoned, Beatrice identifies the typical Hawthornian problem, that Giovanni's heart was poisoned. In her parting words Beatrice asks, "Was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?"⁷⁴ At this moment, Beatrice, no longer human, identifies the more fatal potential of the evils inherent in Giovanni, and presumably all humanity.

Though neither Beatrice nor Giovanni are able to obtain the Emersonian ideal and survive, Signor Pietro Baglioni, a professor and friend of Giovanni's father, presents a possibility of obtaining that ideal. Warning Giovanni against the perceived evils of Dr. Rappaccini, Baglioni also falls short of the possibility of being a representation of the ideal Transcendentalist. While Baglioni finds himself in honest pursuit of intellectual work, he also positions himself in competition with Rappaccini. If he were an Emersonian scholar, self-reliant in his academic pursuits, his position in relation to Rappaccini would make no difference to him. Baglioni even worries about the possibility of Beatrice threatening his academic standing. Baglioni describes her in the following way: "I know little of the Signora Beatrice save that Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science, and that, young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified for a professor's chair. Perchance he destines her for mine!"⁷⁵ Like Giovanni, who fails in his pursuit of the Transcendental ideal, Baglioni's desire to be academically superior and his fear about the potential challenge to his social and professional standing indicate that particular character flaw which makes the Transcendental nearly impossible and reflects Hawthorne's ambivalence to the movement. The truly self-reliant individual has no need to worry about something so insignificant as professional standing.

⁷⁴ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 99.

⁷⁵ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 79.

Dr. Rappaccini also presents the possibility that one could achieve transcendence. When describe with his plants by Giovanni for the first time, Dr. Rappaccini seems to look “into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape and another in that, and wherefore such and such flowers differed among themselves in hue and perfume.”⁷⁶ While this description would seem to indicate that it is Dr. Rappaccini who has the divine connection to the natural world that Emerson discusses in *Nature*, his connection is significantly more sinister. Though it appears that Rappaccini’s connection to the plants is a spiritual one, he wears a mask and gloves and does not actually have any physical connection with his “natural” world. The reader learns later in the text that the beautiful, seemingly natural garden he has cultivated is actually composed of a combination of extremely poisonous plants. In contrast to the pure and innocent Garden of Eden (before Eve’s partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil), Rappaccini has created a deadly incarnation of the garden. In Emersonian terms, Rappaccini does feel as if he contains the divine in himself, but he uses his power of creation for an evil purpose. Hawthorne uses this set of characters to suggest that no one can elevate themselves above Eve’s original sin and the inherently sinful nature of her offspring to live a Transcendent life. Though it seems as if each character makes an attempt, those attempts are in vain. In contrast to the Transcendental ideal, where everyone has the potential to lead a divine life, Hawthorne presents a world in which no one reaches that potential.

Another critical element of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” that requires attention in the Transcendentalist conversation is the discussion of the convergence of science and nature. Both Emerson, in *Nature*, and Thoreau, in *Walden*, provide lengthy discussions of the divinity and purity of the natural world. Emerson argues that, “in the woods, we return to reason and faith.

⁷⁶ Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” 74.

There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, - no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair.”⁷⁷ It is in the natural world where Emerson is able to find his connection to the divine. Likewise, shortly after the first publication of “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Thoreau begins his experiment in natural living at Walden Pond. In both of these works, the presence of divinity in nature dominates the discussion. In “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Giovanni beholds a beautiful garden, described in a way the reader would expect from Emerson, similar even to Hawthorne’s own description of the natural beauty around the Old Manse. However, upon further investigation, Giovanni learns that the garden is not a creation of the divine, but instead an earthly man’s scientific experiment. The question of scientific advance present in both Rappaccini’s garden and the desire for personal gain by Baglioni indicate an opposition to the standard Transcendentalist vision of the natural. Where Emerson believes in the divinity of the natural world, Hawthorne here presents a world in which man has the ability to produce and create like the divine. In Hawthorne’s world, a world which originates in a fallen condition, man can create *like* the divine, but the sinful and fallen nature of man is always present in his creations. Dr. Rappaccini’s creation of the beautiful garden is not the “nature” of the Transcendentalists, but rather the only nature that can truly spring forth from his hands, the hands of the fallen world. Just as Hawthorne suggests in the introduction to “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Aubépine finds himself between the Transcendentalists and the “pen-and-ink” men. Similarly, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” indicates Hawthorne’s struggle to envision a path between the divinity of nature and the possibilities of scientific progress. In this story, Hawthorne presents a world where neither the divinity of nature nor the prospect for scientific advance seems to be tolerable.

⁷⁷ Emerson 29.

D. "The Artist of the Beautiful"

Like "Rappaccini's Daughter," "The Artist of the Beautiful" presents characters with the potential to lead a spiritual or divine existence. At the outset of "The Artist of the Beautiful," the narrator allows Peter Hovenden, the retired watchmaker, to introduce his former apprentice, the tinkerer Owen Warland. While the reader is first presented Hovenden's perspective on Warland, it is immediately followed by comments from Hovenden's daughter Annie. In this first introduction, Hovenden mentions the watchmaker tinkering to "seek for the perpetual motion."⁷⁸ Immediately, the reader understands the young watchmaker Warland's desire to create that which seems logically impossible. In their initial conversation, Annie Hovenden imbues Owen Warland with one of the most significant descriptions he will receive in the story. Upon seeing him at work, she says, "Owen is inventing a new kind of timekeeper. I am sure he has ingenuity enough."⁷⁹ Her father curtly replies that "he has not the sort of ingenuity to invent any thing better than a Dutch toy."⁸⁰ This allows the narrator to pursue the discussion of Owen's attributes of ingenuity, and becomes one of the defining features of Owen Warland as the ideal Emersonian Transcendentalist.

Emerson discusses the importance of genius in *The American Scholar*, discussing of the progress of the arts. Like watch making, the arts have a tendency to "stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, - let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward." Emerson's figure for genius, on the other hand, always "looks forward." Accordingly, "the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates."⁸¹ In this capacity, Owen becomes the ideal embodiment of the Emersonian

⁷⁸ Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful" 354.

⁷⁹ Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful" 354.

⁸⁰ Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful" 354-355.

⁸¹ Emerson 59.

Transcendentalist. Instead of being tied to the confines of his current profession, the ticking rigidity of the watchmaker, Owen dreams of converting that skill into the creation of a machine imbued with spirit and a perpetual motion. The old watchmaker, Hovenden, cannot see the potential for the creation of genius by the artist. Hovenden is tied to the most practical functions of the watchmaker. Though Hovenden creates beauty, his creation serves the specific purpose of keeping society within the confines of a rigid order. Conversely, a number of times through the course of the story, Owen is overcome with the desire to create beauty, not for the timekeeping rigidity, but simply for the sake of the beautiful. The narrator even refers to moments in his childhood:

From the time that his little fingers could grasp a penknife, Owen had been remarkable for a delicate ingenuity, which sometimes produced pretty shapes in wood, principally figures of flowers and birds, and sometimes seemed to aim at the hidden mysteries of mechanism. But it was always for purposes of grace, and never with any mockery of the useful.⁸²

Even from his earliest creations, Owen's genius leads him to creating for the sake of beauty and not, in contrast to his peers, for the practicality.

Owen's character contains other significant elements of the Emersonian Transcendentalist ideal. While Owen repeatedly has his creation destroyed, four times through the course of the story in fact, he is continually able to resume his position as artist in an attempt to create the perpetual motion machine. After each failure, he spins hopelessly out of control, once slipping into a submission to practicality and once into a dependence on wine. But he

⁸² Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful" 356.

continues to return to his struggle to create beauty in the machine. At his lowest, after breaking the machine himself, his failure leaves “the Artist of the Beautiful in darkness.”⁸³ Owen slowly recovers from this moment only to have his creation ruined at the hands of Annie Hovenden. This time he resorts to drinking and it is the beauty of the natural world that is able to snap him back to his previous aims. All it seems to take is seeing “a splendid butterfly” that “flew in at the open window and fluttered about his head.”⁸⁴ He then exclaims, “are you alive again, child of the sun and playmate of the summer breeze, after your dismal winter’s nap? Then it is time for me to be at work.”⁸⁵ Like Thoreau, Owen gives up alcohol in exchange for the freshness of the air.⁸⁶ Leaving the table with a half full glass, he resumes “his wanderings in the woods and fields” and the narrator remarks that the butterfly may have been a “spirit commissioned to recall him to the pure, ideal life that had so etherealized him among men.”⁸⁷ Owen seems to be at his best when he is portrayed in the same vein that one could see Emerson or Thoreau, out in the woods, called to a higher, ethereal state by some beautiful creature of the natural world.

In a departure from what the reader may expect from Hawthorne, Owen Warland actually does accomplish his goal of creating a perpetual motion machine. In the final climactic scene, Owen presents his butterfly to Annie, now married to the town blacksmith, Robert Danforth, as a gift to commemorate her wedding, though he is a number of years late on the gift. As indicated by the other texts in the collection, the expected ending would be the impossibility of actually creating the intended beauty and the utter failure of the Transcendentalist character in Owen Warland. If Hawthorne is making a case in *Mosses* that Transcendentalism is impossible in the world, the easiest solution would be for Owen’s repeated failures to never materialize into the

⁸³ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 359.

⁸⁴ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 365.

⁸⁵ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 365.

⁸⁶ See *Walden* “Higher Laws”.

⁸⁷ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 365.

creation of the beautiful perpetual motion machine. However, this is not the choice Hawthorne makes in “The Artist of the Beautiful.” While, Owen’s machine is finally destroyed at the hands of the child, the natural product of Annie and Robert Danforth, Owen ends the tale having witnessed the success of his life’s work, the creation of a machine filled with his spirit. For the Transcendentalist, this should represent the moment of absolute triumph. Even though it is crushed shortly after being given life, the mechanical butterfly represents Owen’s ability to create life from the combination of the material world and the power of the human spirit. Unfortunately, one cannot read “The Artist of the Beautiful” without considering the conditions of Owen’s reality. Even with his magnificent creation, two lingering questions about Owen still demand an answer: Does his creation, in the real world, actually matter? And can Owen’s dismissal of his love for his life’s work be considered a success?

Owen is built as the soft and fragile character, contrasted with the strong, brutish, and absolutely practical Robert Danforth. Even though Peter Hovenden was also a watchmaker, dependent on fine craftsmanship, he too identifies with Danforth’s ability to actually create something meaningful and real. Danforth “spends his labor upon a reality.”⁸⁸ There is a sharp contrast between the fine and delicate moving parts of the watches that Owen makes, even in his most spiritless periods and the horseshoes and iron rails produced by Danforth. A Transcendentalist reading of the tale may immediately dismiss Danforth as the harbinger of the newest technology, the loud and invasive locomotive. The narrator describes a moment in Owen’s childhood, where “being once carried to see a steam engine, in the expectation that his intuitive comprehension of mechanical principles would be gratified, he turned pale and grew sick, as if something monstrous and unnatural had been presented to him. This horror was partly

⁸⁸ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 355.

owing to the size and terrible energy of the iron laborer.”⁸⁹ While this conversation references the locomotive, the same locomotive Thoreau discusses in *Walden*,⁹⁰ a similar description can be applied to Danforth himself: a large, strong iron laborer. Owen also identifies the shortcomings of his life’s work in comparison to Danforth:

How strange it is, that all my musings, my purposes, my passion for the beautiful, my consciousness of power to create it – a finer, more ethereal power, of which this earthly giant can have no conception – all, all, look so vain and idle whenever my path is crossed by Robert Danforth!...His hard brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me; but I, too, will be strong in my own way. I will not yield to him.⁹¹

If Owen is representative of the ideal Emersonian Transcendentalist, then Danforth represents the progress and power of an industrialized, new American nation. While Owen is tinkering away to create beauty, Danforth is literally forging the future of America with his bare hands. However, at least in his reactions to Owen, Danforth is curious about the beauty which Owen creates.

After Owen’s reveal of the butterfly, Danforth is amused and amazed by the manmade object of perpetual motion. Unlike the moment in which it comes to rest on Hovenden’s finger and nearly dies, the instance in which the butterfly remains bright and vibrant as it lights upon Danforth’s rigid strength and large, clumsy fingers suggests that the machine seems to sense his curiosity about it. The narrator cites Danforth’s response:

⁸⁹ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 356.

⁹⁰ See “Where I Lived, and What I Lived for” and “Sounds” for Thoreau’s discussions of the railroad.

⁹¹ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 359.

“Well, that does beat all nature!” cried Robert Danforth, bestowing the heartiest praise that he could find expression for; and, indeed, had he paused there, a man of finer words and nicer perception could not easily have said more. “That goes beyond me, I confess. But what then? There is more real use in one downright blow of my sledge hammer than in the whole five years’ labor that our friend Owen has wasted on this butterfly.”⁹²

While Danforth clearly sees the beauty in the final product, he is still confused about the purpose of Owen’s task. Danforth here may be representative of one of Hawthorne’s key questions: even if there is the possibility of truth in Emerson’s words on Transcendentalism, what is the practical value of that truth in the real conditions of the world? Even though Owen is ultimately satisfied with his creation and condition in the world, the other characters stand and, even in his moment of greatest success, question his definition of value.

Peter Hovenden, the former watchmaker, represents the most practical opposition to the Artist, failing to even see the beauty in the craftsmanship. At an early visit to the shop, Hovenden offers “with one pinch of my finger and thumb I am going to deliver you from all future peril” and warns that “in this small piece of mechanism lives your evil spirit.” Owen retorts, “You are my evil spirit, you and the hard, coarse world!”⁹³ Here lies another central question in the Transcendentalist reading of “The Artist of the Beautiful:” does evil actually exist in the world and if it does, what form does it take?⁹⁴ While it appears that Hovenden is simply torturing Owen, their interchange may actually indicate Hawthorne’s reading of the

⁹² Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 373.

⁹³ Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” 3.

⁹⁴ See notes on Emerson, *Divinity School Address*.

Transcendentalism present in the text. For Hovenden, he would be “saving” Owen from his own pride, the longings of his own heart, if he destroys the creation once and for all. However, Owen’s own statement of the perceived evil also demonstrates that part of his own prideful desire to prove to the rest of the community that what they perceive as his meaningless tinkering actually does have some value to society. In either case, the Hawthornian sin of an excessive pride that resides in the human heart remains prominent, and even though Owen seems to complete his task at the conclusion of the story, the ultimate rejection of his ideas by society in the face of his own pride for what he has created shows a failing in his perceived reasons for existence. If his reason for living is not just to create the beautiful, but to prove to others that he in fact can create beauty *and* that his creation has value, then he fails because the others cannot understand the value in what he has made. In this tale, Hawthorne shows that even a “successful Transcendentalist” is still a failure in the practical, tangible outcome driven society.

Conclusion

In *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Hawthorne repeatedly explores many of the key ideas presented in Emersonian Transcendentalism and repeatedly finds a way to locate the limitations of Emerson’s theories. Hawthorne’s story “The Birthmark” offers another example about a character’s desire for physical perfection in his wife which leads him to ultimately destroy that life because of his own superficial, earthly desires. Though published later, “Ethan Brand” presents a character that goes in search of the unpardonable sin, only to find it at the very core of his own heart. While not collected in *Mosses*, “Ethan Brand” does offer a compelling prospect. If Hawthorne was trying to discover the core fundamental principal that continually caused him to be swayed from the potentials of Transcendentalism throughout his work on *Mosses*, “Ethan Brand” may just be that discovery. Each time Hawthorne’s characters seem to arrive near the

potential of the Emersonian ideal, the human longings of the heart tug them back to the harsh realities of the real world.

One aspect of human existence which Emerson only seems to dwell on slightly, yet Hawthorne covers in more depth in many of the tales, including “The Artist of the Beautiful” and “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” and which presents an interesting reference point for the longings of the human heart and spirituality is romantic love. Though Emerson’s essay “Love” seems to approach the topic, he evades the realities of the complicated nature of the relationships between individuals, instead focusing on the prospects of a spiritual union. According to Emerson, “we are put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality, but which seeketh virtue and wisdom everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom.”⁹⁵ By acknowledging that the emotional and physical relationships that we take to be called love are simply training for some greater existence, Emerson oversimplifies the dynamic nature of earthly interpersonal relationships.

Hawthorne, as a writer of fiction, finds these moments the most interesting and compelling, and the nature of human interaction itself becomes the factor that precludes his characters from achieving the Emersonian ideal. When Owen Warland does actually achieve his intellectual and spiritual goal of creating the perpetual motion machine, a man-made machine that acts like one of God’s creatures, it is only after he has been denied the love of Annie Hovenden. In the time leading to his discovery of her engagement, Owen makes numerous attempts at the device, but fails each time with the prospect of a romantic relationship overpowering his intellectual work. It is only once an external source frees him from the bounds of the possibilities of a romantic existence that he can set himself entirely to the work. Even at

⁹⁵ Emerson, “Love” 93, from the J.M. Dent published edition.

its completion, the reader still questions whether or not Owen's motivation is solely the work as a gift, or he if still has a desire to posture himself in the face of his unrequited love.

Similarly, the relationship between Beatrice and Giovanni in "Rappaccini's Daughter" has potential in the way Emerson imagines love. When the lovers "conveyed the holy secret from the depths of one soul into the depths of the other,"⁹⁶ they seem to be free of the physical relationship that seems altogether insignificant in comparison to the spiritual one in Emerson's conception of love. However, this holy union alone proves unsatisfactory for Giovanni, and even when he too becomes physically poisoned, able to have a physical union with Beatrice, his newfound inability to interact with the rest of humanity proves more than he can bear. This forced withdrawal from humanity, even with the potential for a love that does achieve the free, gushing exchange of virtue and wisdom, is not enough. Humanity requires social interactions to progress prosperously and happily. Unfortunately, as the narrator points out, Giovanni's relationship with Beatrice is not as simple as Giovanni may have desired. The narrator explains, "Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions."⁹⁷ From Giovanni's perspective, it is this mixture, Beatrice's "bright" soul and her "dark" exterior that complicate the relationship and ultimately doom their holy interactions to the "infernal regions." Beatrice, however, would likely argue it the opposite, as Giovanni is the intermixture of a "bright" appearance and a darkened soul. Though Emersonian Transcendentalism posits evil as simply the absence of good, Hawthorne's narrator acknowledges that it is not even the existence of evil that complicates the Emersonian ideal, but the combination of the potential for spiritual brightness

⁹⁶ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 90.

⁹⁷ Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" 82.

and the darkness inherent in the human heart that make Hawthorne's whole-hearted acceptance of Emerson's philosophy untenable.

By reading these specific moments in Hawthorne's tales as responses to the ideas with which he was engaged socially, it becomes clear that Hawthorne did indeed publically present his perspective on Transcendentalism. He was neither a Transcendentalist nor was he an anti-Transcendentalist, but as the tales indicate, his opinion resembles a constantly shifting mark, never fixed to one dogmatic belief. Hawthorne is inspired by the immense potential of the Transcendental ideal, and he shares with it a reverence for the natural world and the individual connection to God. But he is simultaneously terrified in the potential evil in the world. Each tale seems to build to a moment of Transcendental revelation: all of the earthly constraints holding humanity back from a true spiritual connection destroyed in a fire; Giovanni and Beatrice living happily, innocently, together in the garden; Owen Warland in "The Artist of the Beautiful" inventing a mechanical butterfly that comes so close to mimicking natural beauty until it is destroyed by the human hands of his adversary; and so on. Yet each of these moments comes crashing back to earth. Hawthorne seems to want to describe a situation in which the idealism of the Transcendentalists can succeed, yet he seems to be constantly visited by the "dark-visaged stranger" who perpetually reminds him of the "foul cavern" of the human heart.

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