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Spectral Evidence of the Invisible World: Gender and the Puritan Supernatural in American  
Fiction, 1798-1856

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

Alice Marie Hampton Henton

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Spectral Evidence of the Invisible World: Gender and the Puritan Supernatural in  
American Fiction, 1798-1856

by

Alice Marie Hampton Henton

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Michael J. Colacurcio, Chair

In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction, Puritans serve as source material for a distinctly “American” identity and as allegories for the experiences of later generations. Many texts draw upon the legacy of the Puritan supernatural, most recognizably the 1692 Salem “witch” trials. Salem is only a fragment, however, of a belief system deeply rooted in what Puritans called the invisible world, an omnipresent geography that linked material and immaterial dimensions via an intricate system of signs and portents. *Spectral Evidence* considers the entire invisible world in order to trace the Puritan supernatural's extensive impact on early American fiction.

Against the backdrop of a wilderness filled with wonders and witches, numerous American genres took shape: protofeminist gothic dramas, female-driven national romances couched in subversive supernatural agency, and antebellum allegories and anti-reform satires

framed as supernatural cautionary tales for women, all haunted, as were the Puritans themselves, by issues of female agency. Historical female witches and heretics became fictional reincarnations, onto which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers mapped their own innovations and anxieties.

Chapter one shows how Brown's *Wieland* combines prodigies, wonders, and apparitions in an exploration of invisible world manifestations that simultaneously explores female agency and lays the groundwork for an American gothic. Chapter two turns to the national romances of the 1820s to explore how female writers like Sedgwick, Cheney, and Child radically re-imagine the Puritan supernatural as a navigable realm best traversed by women. Chapter three considers Hawthorne's transformation of the invisible world from a subversive space that enfranchises women into a conservative realm characterized by social and spiritual restrictions, in which heroines are punished rather than empowered by their supernatural experiences. Chapter four turns to antireform satire in order to trace the intensification of the Puritan supernatural's new incarnation as a "negative example" in antebellum literature. The central example, Brownson's *The Spirit-Rapper*, mimics the inclusive mechanics and materials of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wonder tales and draws on Puritan archival materials to prove that spiritualist spirits and Puritan demons are identical, ungodly sources of destructive female agency.

The dissertation of Alice Marie Hampton Henton is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2014

For Dawn, Greg, and Elizabeth.

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### Presentations

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"Mass Affect: Character Creation and Overlapping Identity." Paper presented at the Midwest Conference on Literature, Language and Media at Northern Illinois University, March 2009.

## Introduction

In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction, Puritans provide the source material for the formation of a distinctly “American” identity and serve as allegories for the experience of later generations. Many, if not most, of these fictions are deeply rooted in the legacy of the Puritan supernatural, and an extensive body of criticism has considered the legacy of Salem and the “witch” trials of 1692. This familiar narrative is only a fragment, however, of what I am calling the “Puritan supernatural,” a belief system deeply rooted in what Puritans called the invisible world, an omnipresent geography which linked material and immaterial dimensions via an intricate system of signs, ranging from quasi-natural phenomena such as floods and eclipses to dramatic perversions of natural laws through witchcraft and demonic possession. Only by looking at the larger picture, or the entire invisible world, can we get an accurate idea of how pervasive and influential the Puritan supernatural was in the development of American fiction. Against the backdrop of a wilderness filled with wonders and witches, a number of core American genres took shape: protofeminist gothic dramas, female-driven national romances couched in subversive supernatural agency, dour and frequently misogynistic antebellum allegories, and anti-reform satires framed as supernatural cautionary tales.

Questions of modern experience and identity consistently haunted the fictional Puritan supernatural, particularly issues of female agency. Women were an integral part of the Puritan supernatural legacy. Puritan society’s anxieties about gender identity were reflected in texts ranging from the conversion narratives that celebrated female piety to the trial transcripts that excoriated female sinners. Accused witches and heretics were disproportionately female. The most famous of Puritan apostates, Anne Hutchinson, was a woman. These historical examples offered excellent material for fictional reincarnations, onto which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers could map their own innovations and anxieties.

This project does not embrace the usual critical emphasis on the Salem trials in general nor even “witchcraft” in particular, nor does it begin or end with an analysis of Hawthorne’s canonical “Puritan” tales. Hawthorne wrote great supernatural novels, but he wasn’t the only, the earliest, or even the most innovative author to take on the Puritan supernatural. Rather, the invisible world plays a formative role in a succession of core American genres, evolving to meet the needs of each. In order to trace this evolution, each chapter focuses on exemplars of a particular genre in order to demonstrate the richness of each new reincarnation, as well as its debts to preceding genres.

My first chapter shows how a distinctly American gothic develops from a unique supernatural geography rooted in late eighteenth-century re-imaginings of the Puritan invisible world. Early gothic novelists replaced Europe’s ancestral castles with the specter-filled wilderness documented in Puritan sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wonder tales, spiritual histories, and the records of supernatural criminal proceedings like the Salem trials of 1692. Encapsulating this phenomenon, Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (1798) combines prodigies and wonders with suspect spectral evidences, like vocal apparitions, in an exploration of the invisible world manifestations that is simultaneously an exploration of female agency. Brown juxtaposes his heroine’s success in overcoming supernatural trials with the failure of numerous male characters to navigate the same spectral landscape, creating a template for the independent and adaptive female archetype. The protagonist’s supernaturally-charged agency, I argue, not only helps to define the American gothic but also influences the national romances that dominate the early decades of the nineteenth-century.

My second chapter turns to the national romances of the 1820s in order to show how Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Vaughn Cheney, and Lydia Maria Child allot the supernatural a central role in creating female agency. In order to form an alternative to the intensely conservative and frequently misogynistic versions of American history and colonial pre-history in the fictions of authors like James Fenimore Cooper, Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick

give their female protagonists the unique ability to manipulate both visible and invisible forces and to traverse spiritual and physical wildernesses. These fictional women live among pagan Indians, practice witchcraft, and repeatedly abandon their seemingly natural realm of hearth and home, but they are nonetheless celebrated as Puritan heroines. These novels radically re-imagine the Puritan supernatural as a navigable realm best traversed by women; they posit an alternative historical legacy that enfranchises rather than excludes women, making them the archetypes and exemplars of the Puritan “character” in American literature and history.

Chapter three considers the transformation of the invisible world from a subversive space that enfranchises women into a more conservative realm characterized by social and spiritual restrictions and limited female agency. The Puritan supernatural becomes, in the hands of Nathaniel Hawthorne and his successors, a source of cautionary tales rather than subversive triumphs. In a series of narrative analogies that present the supernatural perils of the Puritan past as grim forecasts of the nineteenth-century future, Hawthorne’s Puritan heroines and their spiritual descendants are punished rather than empowered by their experiences with the invisible world. This negative exemplarity comes to a head in *The Blithedale Romance*, which links the nineteenth-century rise of spiritualism to witchcraft and demonic possession in a series of unfavorable examples designed to rewrite the female archetype to conform to antebellum gender ideology. Spiritualism, which relied heavily on female mediums to communicate and transmit the teachings of otherworldly spirits, allowed women an imperfect but still potent source of spiritual authority and public mobility, and Hawthorne works to denigrate this legacy.

Chapter four turns to antireform satire in order to trace the intensification of the Puritan supernatural’s new incarnation as a “negative example” in antebellum literature.<sup>1</sup> This chapter’s primary focus is Orestes Brownson’s novel *The Spirit-Rapper* (1854), which charts the protagonist’s realization that spiritualist spirits and Puritan demons are one and the same by

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<sup>1</sup> Adams identifies the “specter of Salem” as the historical metaphor responsible for cementing Puritans as a “negative example” in American history over the course of the nineteenth century.

exhaustively cataloging female characters who are compromised both spiritually and sexually by supernatural contact. I argue that Brownson's extensive use of Puritan archival materials and mimicry of conventional seduction tales and more famous "supernatural" stories, particularly *The Blithedale Romance*, mimics the inclusive mechanics and materials of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wonder tales even as it represents the apogee of "modern" supernatural conservatism. As such, *The Spirit-Rapper* radically differs ideologically from the proto-feminist efforts of earlier genres while remaining equally invested in the same Puritan framework of supernatural belief. *The Spirit-Rapper's* conservative misogyny amplifies the pessimism of Hawthorne's Puritan allegories but stands in stark contrast to the subversiveness of the invisible world as imagined by Brown, Sedgwick, and Child. Although the final pages of Brownson's novel posit an end to the sway of invisible world agency, they ultimately reinforce the Puritan supernatural's continuing appeal.

### **What is the Puritan Invisible World?**

In 1719, twenty-eight years after the ignominious conclusion of the Salem witchcraft trials, and in spite of the flowering of the eighteenth-century natural philosophy that insisted on a mechanistic universe governed solely by knowable natural phenomena, third-generation Puritan Cotton Mather felt compelled to insist that the appearance of an aurora borealis over New England provided evidence that the supernatural world was alive and well and that "the Invisible World has an astonishing share in the Government of Ours."<sup>2</sup> His pamphlet, entitled "A Voice from Heaven: An Account of the Late Uncommon Appearance in the Heavens," remains the "most complete account of this 1719 aurora," and provides a serious scientific as well as theological investigation of the phenomena (Eather 94). This overlap can seem somewhat

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<sup>2</sup> Cotton Mather, "A Voice from Heaven" (1719), 6.

jarring to modern eyes: one text published in 1980 memorably describes Mather with patronizing exasperation as a “Puritan minister of [the] Second Church of Boston and a great popularizer of the new scientific discoveries being made in Europe, [who] believed in witchcraft and gathered records of it as he did the aurora borealis, two-headed snakes, and the like,” as though interest in such disparate fields defied any kind of legitimate congruence (Eather 94). For Mather, however, and for the Puritan tradition from which he came, the study of the natural world and all manifestations within it were inexplicably linked to supernatural forces: aurorae borealis and two-headed snakes were physical manifestations of supernatural intercessions, part of the same spectrum as the witches who traded their souls for the chance to make such intercessions themselves.

Not just external nature, but also the body itself could and did act as a place of intercession between natural and supernatural influences. The Puritan experience of grace, or the knowledge of salvation, was a process not just of intellectual contemplation but also intense physical and emotional manipulation, including not just the occasional prophetic vision or dream but also infirmities, ailments, and seemingly inexplicable “emotional afflictions,” experiences of joy or despair so sudden and extreme they seemed to the Puritans to have been externally imposed by higher powers. Somewhat paradoxically, given the certainty implied by predestination, the final stage of the working of grace, commonly known as “sanctification,” was experienced not so much as a certainty that one was saved as an uncertainty that one might be reading the signs of what felt like salvation incorrectly, or even that one might not be feeling the telltale emotions and physical transports at all: “saving faith was thus distinguished by doubt and subjected to continual combat with despair, the Puritan was obliged to look sharp to recognize it” (Morgan 70-71). An essential part of the experience of faith then involved the search for supernatural evidences in physical experiences—the internal landscape was as much in need of interpretation as the external.



This dissertation begins with the premise that there is such a thing as a “Puritan Supernatural,” a complex and evolving system of theological certainties that recognized intricate connections between “visible” and “invisible” worlds as dimensions of a single, continuous existence and did its best, if not to mediate, then to understand a landscape that was both natural and supernatural at the same time. The rhetoric surrounding visible and invisible worlds often reflects a slippage that belies the implication of separation the two “worlds” would seem to imply—though the visible and invisible are figured as distinct entities, their interconnectivity is crucial, and so complete that the “world” in its entirety ultimately includes both the visible *and* invisible worlds, as distinct dimensions of the same space. These distinct dimensions had in turn distinct dimensions within dimensions: the forces of the invisible world, which had both external and internal expressions, were at once capable of breaching the mind and shaping the external world, leaving behind a variety of “spectral evidences,” from signs and portents to apparitions and possessions, supernatural artifacts and experiences that anyone could see and that the properly learned could attempt to interpret.<sup>3</sup> These evidences took the form of providential events and signifying objects—they were essential pieces in a hermeneutic system used to diagnose divine intent and classified as wonders, prodigies, and marvels according to an intricate hierarchy of origin and significance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of the “supernatural,” that which “is above nature; belonging to a higher realm or system than that of nature; transcending the powers or the ordinary course of nature,” is something that is, if at times confusing, inherently knowable or at least, always providentially designed, and thus different from the “occult,” which carries with it, in addition to the sense of otherworldliness, an implication of deliberate unknowability, as that which is “not apprehended, or not apprehensible, by the mind; beyond ordinary understanding or knowledge; abstruse, mysterious; inexplicable.” (OED) While Puritan thinkers often agreed that aspects of the supernatural should not make sense to those not provided with divine insight, it would always reflect God’s plan and, more often than not, to contain messages meant for human interpretation. The supernatural communicated, either providentially or diabolically, and the danger was less in not understanding and more in misunderstanding what was being communicated or who was doing the communicating.

<sup>4</sup> For help unpacking this complex hierarchy, as well as an overview of its evolutions alongside the changing discourses of theology and natural philosophy, see Daston’s and Park’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750*.

The proximity of the invisible world to the visible one, as well as its proclivity to deliver scrutable signs and to interact with human interests, were particularly Puritan constructs.<sup>5</sup> Their writings provide ample evidence of their invisible world agency: not only did they produce a remarkable number of sea deliverances, apparition stories, possession narratives, and providential histories, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they also “wrote the bulk of the treatises on witchcraft” (Winship 115). Invisible components comprised an essential part of the Puritan universe. As “worlds were framed by the words of God, so that things which are seen are not made of things which do appear,” the seen and the unseen, material and immaterial, existed as part of a continuum shaped and controlled by divine agency (Hebrews 11:13). In employing the vocabulary of geography, and insisting upon the significance of the *worlds* at the heart of much of the supernatural rhetoric employed by the Puritans themselves and reworked in the fictional afterlives that followed, I draw attention to the significance of this vision of the supernatural as something at once physical, metaphysical, and metaphorical, both intensely real and intensely symbolic, meant to be contextualized through and analyzed with the allegorical and typological tools laid forth in scripture.<sup>6</sup>

The invisible world thus conceived overlaid the visible, a not entirely separate and always permeable space from which immaterial forces could and did emanate. These forces

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<sup>5</sup> This project focuses on the legacy Puritans of New England, who, while undoubtedly connected culturally and ideologically to their allies and colleagues in England, developed a distinct history, and body of texts, that became, especially to the writers of the nascent United States, uniquely American. Without eliding the transatlantic aspects of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan culture and literature, then, this dissertation focuses on colonial Puritanism. Under the rubric of New England Puritans, I am including both the initial Pilgrim settlers who settled in Plymouth (separatists who arrived in 1620) and the later waves of non-separatist dissenters whose arrival in Massachusetts Bay commenced with the Great Migration beginning in 1630. Without collapsing any of the significant differences in political and theological practices between the groups, the details of which lie beyond this study, I contend that they belong under the same rubric, since, “by 1691, when a new charter subsumed Plymouth as an independent charter under Massachusetts Bay, the Pilgrims and Puritans had merged in all but memory” (Norton 14).

<sup>6</sup> In his *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692) Cotton Mather offers this interpretative process as the primary purpose of the invisible world, a source of comfort as well as duty: “I will venture to say thus much, that we are safe, when we make just as much use of all advice from the invisible World, as God sends it for. It is a safe Principle, that when God Almighty permits any Spirits from the unseen Regions, to visit us with surprizing Informations, then there is something to be enquired after; we are then to enquire of one Another, What Cause is there for such things? The Peculiar Government of God, over the unbodied Intelligences, is a sufficient Foundation for this Principle” (27-28).

allowed “strange things, beyond the known power of Art and ordinary Nature” (Glanvill 2:4). Because the invisible world had such persistent and pervasive visible consequences, it was important to Puritan theologians and scholars to underscore the invisible world’s existence as much through “proofs which come nearest to Sense,” particularly proofs offered by the physical senses, especially sights, sounds, and accounts of visible, tangible experiences of these supernatural forces, as by “thousands of subtile metaphysical arguments” (Sinclair lxxxii).

The preface to George Sinclair’s 1685 treatise, *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered*, lays out a series of proofs that provide a rationale for supernatural space. After establishing that “the world in its bulk is indefinite, but may be infinite,” a premise that insists upon both the idea of ignorance (the true shape of the world is not known) and the potential for interminability (the infinite transcends the material and leaves plenty of room for the incorporeal), the preface moves on to the overlap between material and spiritual. The invisible world and its potential invokes an internal duality that allows for the transcendence of natural laws on every level, including the internal divisions of the human soul:

That every man has two souls, one Rational, the other Animal. That the Rational Soul may be absent, and the bodie living, by vertue of the Animal Soul. This (by the way) is a brave invention to let see how Witches may be transported to Balls of Dancing, and far countries, and their Bodies tarry at home. For the Devil may put their Rational Soul into some Aerial Vehicle, or a Body made of condensed Air, and carry it withersoever he pleases, while the Animal Soul may keep life in the Body at Home. (lxxxii)

The “Aerial Vehicle” the Devil provides for the rational, or immaterial, soul allows the witch to make use of invisible forces to manipulate visible space, an example of the kind of invisible intercessions possible in the Puritan schema.

As one might suspect from the title of Sinclair's treatise, which emphasizes the diabolical presence in invisible dimensions, and the prevalent examples of witches capable of invisible world manipulations (Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*, and Glanvill’s

*Saducimus Triumphatus* are also about witches), too much agency, or even interaction, with invisible forces and spaces is potentially suspect. As one helpful spirit explains in *Wonders of the Invisible World*, “should there be a continual Intercourse between Visible and Invisible World it would breed Confusion” (242). In fact, too much interaction is a sign of impending catastrophe: in Salem in 1692, it seemed to Mather that, “the usual Walls of defence about mankind have such a Gap made in them, that the very Devils are broke in upon us, to seduce the Souls, torment the Bodies, sully the Credits and Consume the Estates of our Neighbours, with Impressions both as real and as furious, as if the Invisible World were becoming Incarnate on purpose for the vexing of us” (80). It is precisely because the invisible world is so open to manipulation, and amplification, by diabolical as well as divine forces that it cannot be ignored but must instead be mapped and monitored.

It is not my intention to contend that this mapping was in any way an easy process. In spite of the widespread awareness of its existence, the invisible world's potential to be manipulated by sinister as well as benevolent forces introduced an element of uncertainty into conceptions of the “supernatural” and necessitated constant interpretative vigilance. Joseph Glanvill’s *Saducimus Triumphatus* (1681) admits that much about the invisible world remains uncertain and concedes its relative opacity: “we are much in the Dark, as to the *Nature* and *Kinds of Spirits*, and *the particular* Condition of the other World. The Angels, Devils, and Souls Happiness and Misery we know, but what Kinds are under these Generals, and what Actions, Circumstances, and Ways of Life under those States, we little understand” (2:12). What could not be seen could not be comfortably or consistently defined, and yet it continued to make its presence felt.

As the earlier examples have shown, the invisible world was never a particularly quiet or unobtrusive presence, and the parameters of the supernatural were the subject of continuous debate and explication. While Calvinist Protestantism erased the possibility of purgatory and thus obviated the theological rationale for “ghosts,” or spirits of the dead trapped between the

mortal realm and heaven or hell, the pervasive belief in spirits was in no real way diminished. Instead, many Calvinists embraced and propagated the idea of spirits as utterly inhuman, either divine or diabolical, and envisioned them as supernatural forces that, devoid of humanity, were even more powerful and endemic to the supernatural landscape than Catholic ghosts. Spirits were everywhere and part of (whether supporting or actively working against) the divine plan that every good Puritan attempted to read from the events in the world around him. Even before the events of Salem Village, numerous sermons and tracts set out to codify the relationship between visible and invisible worlds. The propensity for typological readings inscribed divine plans and otherworldly significance onto everyday events; the ever popular and continuously evolving genre of the providence tale demonstrated God's supernatural machinations in the natural world. At the same time, accounts of witchcraft and demonic possession served to illustrate the darker side of the invisible's potential, as supernatural agents with diabolical agendas reshaped the natural world in accordance with their own whims.

Even in the old world, Puritan definitions of the supernatural required an intricate understanding of the invisible world, and contained significant anxiety that that world could, without warning, compromise the visible one. The new world, with its treacherous landscape, dangerous inhabitants, and myriad unforeseen perils, coupled with the colonists' heightened sense that theirs was a divine project sanctioned by God and thus extremely vexing to the ever-vigilant devil, evoked fears of the darker possibilities of the invisible world even more strongly.<sup>7</sup> While the journals, treatises, and letters of the first generations of Puritan settlers doubts coexist with and are often subsumed by chronicles of portents and providences that reified optimistic typological readings of everything from the Antinomian controversy to the Pequot Wars, this assurance faltered with succeeding generations. Second and third generation observers

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<sup>7</sup> As Bercovitch has pointed out, "it was New England's unique prerogative to make visible what elsewhere remained invisible" (*The American Jeremiad* 45). The special project of the Puritan colonists, which they felt was the constant object of otherworldly as well as worldly scrutiny, lent tremendous weight to any and all manifestations of divine approval or disapproval and/or demonic intervention.

romanticized their predecessors' providential certainty while expressing rising levels of doubt in their ability to mediate both visible and invisible wildernesses. Beginning in the 1670s, the developing jeremiad tradition drew attention to increased secularization and spiritual vulnerability, vulnerability that seemed to be realized with a vengeance in the events of Salem village in 1692.

Samuel Danforth's election sermon of 1670, organized around the exhortation, "To excite and stir us all up to attend and prosecute our Errand into the Wilderness" has become one of, if not the most, widely recognized metaphors for the Puritan project in New England.<sup>8</sup> In the sermon, Danforth's investment in wilderness unfolds as a complex intertwining of physical and metaphorical landscapes, in which the literal journey of the early colonists is symbolic of and subservient to the spiritual voyage it connotes:

We left our Country, Kindred and Fathers houses, and came into these wilde Woods and Deserts; where the Lord hath planted us, and made us dwell in a place of our own, that we might move no more, and that the children of wickedness might afflict not us any more, (2 Sam. 7. 10.) What is it that distinguisheth New-England from other Colonies and Plantations in America? Not our transportation over the Atlantick Ocean, but the Ministry of Gods faithful Prophets, and the fruition his holy Ordinances. (19-20)

It might fairly be said of his argument that the wilderness is subservient to the errand, and this is particularly true of the physical landscape, a visible plane that primarily serves to reflect divine intentions:

What should I make mention of Signes in the Heavens and in the Earth, Blazing- Stars, Earthquakes, dreadful Thunders and Lightnings, fearful Burnings? What meaneth the heat of his great Anger, in calling home so many of his Ambassadors? In plucking such

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<sup>8</sup> "Errand Into the Wilderness," 18. Danforth himself was no stranger to translating the invisible implications of natural events. His "An Astronomical Description of the Late Comet or Blazing Star as it Appeared in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and the Beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> Month, 1664: Together with a Brief Theological Application Thereof" (1665) offered the "theological application" of the "astronomical description" in the same kind of analytical continuum that Mather would implement in his account of the comet of 1719.

burning and shining Lights out of the Candlesticks; the principal Stakes out of our Hedges; the Cornerstones out of our Walls? In removing such faithful Shepherds from their Flocks, and breaking down our de-fenced Cities, Iron Pillars, and Brazen-Walls? Seemeth it a small thing unto us, that so many of Gods Prophets (whose Ministry we came into the Wilderness to enjoy) are taken from us in so short a time? Is it not a Signe?  
(20)

For Danforth and his listeners, the wilderness provided the perfect metaphor to address spiritual concerns precisely because of the overlap between physical and metaphysical landscapes. The “transportation over the Atlantick” conveys both literal and spiritual distance, and the natural disasters that afflict the colony are metaphysical communications in the form of physical events. His insistence upon the significance of “Signes” foregrounds not just the presence of the invisible world as a metaphorical space, but also the necessity of reading and interpreting that space. Because he can contextualize the portents he describes, this is ultimately a triumphant reading, even as it chronicles signs of impending ideological defeat. For Danforth, calamity conveys a clear map of divine displeasure, one that can be redressed, as the rest of the jeremiad suggests, by a renewed commitment to the Puritan project.

As Danforth’s sermon suggests, the invisible world could support the Puritans’ typological readings of the wilderness their errand had sent them to shape. At its best, the invisible world was the medium for the production of remarkable providences, demonstrations of God’s divine plan and messages for his faithful followers. In the early Puritan accounts in particular, these messages were often hopeful: when an assorted company witnessed a mouse successfully fight off an attacking snake in 1632, an event that today would “be just another gross but engrossing highlight on the Discovery Channel,” the governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony instead recorded the event in his diary as proof positive, “That the snake was the devil; the mouse was a poor contemptible people, which God had brought hither, which should overcome him hither, and dispossess him of his kingdom” (Vowell 140; Winthrop 83-4) William

Bradford chronicled an even more gruesome manifestation of divine favor, in which a non-believing sailor who tormented the Plymouth colonists on their voyage from England, receives the ultimate punishment:

There was a proud and very profane young man, one of the sea-men, of a lusty, able body, which made him the more haughty; he would always be contemning the poor people in their sickness, and cursing them daily with grievous execrations, and did not let to tell them, that he hoped to help to cast half of them over board before they came to their journeys end, and to make mercy with what they had; and if he were by any gently reproved, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he dyed in a desperate manner, and so was him self the first that was thrown overboard. Thus his curses light on his own head; and it was an astonishment to all his fellows, for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him. (66)

God smites the young sailor for his rude and callous behavior, and the irony of his death, in exactly the manner he had wished on his charges, becomes an invisible assurance of God's love for his saints. A plethora of providential accounts like this one, in which the chosen people receive divine redress for even the smallest of slights, underscore Puritan confidence in the worthiness of their project. This assurance allows for the reading of invisible manifestations with an optimism that, if it doesn't transcend any attendant doubts, at least elides them.

This confidence became part of the Puritan legacy, and emerges in second and third generation narratives as well. In 1668, John Allin wrote to his son about a tradition of providential protection from anti-colony correspondence: "letters written against the country to great ones in England, divers violent storms, to the apparent danger of ships and lives, forced the messenger to produce them (as Jonas once himself) which being viewed and thrown overboard they had after it an happy and prosperous voyage, which accident is the 6<sup>th</sup> time that



letters against the country hath from time to time miscarried.”<sup>9</sup> Allin’s satisfaction with this example of divine safekeeping comes not least from its repetition—he knows of six distinct instances in which supernatural forces have altered the same natural event in order to protect the Puritan project. In documenting these instances, he validates not only the New England colonists but also the process of providential analysis: God’s approval and protection is proven because he knows how to look.

This confidence was not the only response to supernatural phenomena, however, and invisible influences were by no means always so reassuring. Manifestations of divine displeasure, like the "Blazing- Stars, Earthquakes, dreadful Thunders and Lightnings, fearful Burnings" of Danforth's "Errand into the Wilderness," seem to increase over time (20). It is possible that the growing suspicion, amplified in each succeeding generation, that the errand was somehow faltering, the wilderness not quite being adapted according to plan, colored the lens through which the Puritans observed the available signs. Whatever the cause, by the time Cotton Mather reified providential narratives of the colonial project in his massive "spiritual history," the *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), the Lord's "mercies and judgments" had been joined by "manifold afflictions and disturbances" that at times threatened to overwhelm them.<sup>10</sup>

At its worst, the invisible world did not provide assurance or prevent disaster but instead superimposed all the terrors of hell onto the very fabric of natural existence, as when “the Devil *does hurt* unto us, he *comes down* unto us, for the Rendezvouze of the *Infernal Troops* is indeed the *supernatural parts* of our Air” (*Wonders* 48). Because of the close interconnectivity of visible and invisible worlds, manipulations were always possible, by divine providences but also by “*Devils...[whose] Interest, alas, in this World is very great, for the Accomplishment of their own Predictions*” and “*others, that have used the most wicked sorceries to gratifie their unlawful Curiosities*” (*Wonders* 48). It was possible, therefore, to know the invisible world too well, and

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 276. The “providential” event in question was first recorded in Edward Winslow’s *New England’s Salamander, Discovered by an Irreligious and scornful Pamphlet* (1647).

<sup>10</sup> Chapter descriptions from the frontispiece of the 1702 edition of the *Magnalia*.

to draw from it unnatural powers to deploy within the visible and “torment by Invisible Hands with Tortures altogether preternatural” (*Wonders* 39). This potential provided compelling reasons to fear and mistrust invisible influences, especially when coupled with the increasingly powerful suspicion that the true sources and intentions of any supernatural phenomenon could be easily misread, or worse, defy reading altogether.

The potential for misreading invisible influences, while always to some degree understood as a viable possibility, began to accrue a greater sense of *probability*, and this certainty of uncertainty, rather than undermining the project of careful reading and interpretation, actually underscored its importance. In the increasingly cataclysmic manifestations of the invisible, the necessity of learning to read, and respond, to the providential (and possibly diabolical) signs became even more of an essential part of successfully navigating both literal and metaphorical wildernesses.

Puritan experiences challenged their ability to confidently read the significance of invisible influences on both external and internal planes. The confident abundance of experienced faith as “the Spirit assisted recognition of Christ” supposedly enjoyed by the first generation dwindled into the anxious, jeremiad-fueled suspicions of their children and grandchildren that they had somehow become cut off from the landscape of salvation, or at least, from the recognizable signs of its presence.<sup>11</sup> Measures like the Halfway Covenant of 1662, which allowed for the baptism of the grandchildren of “full” members of the church, became necessary because fewer and fewer congregants felt confident enough in the experience of their faith to profess having experienced the transformative moment of recognizable salvation, an act necessary to obtain such membership. By the third generation, while some few exemplars like Cotton Mather professed to see and converse with angels and to weather the intense bouts of

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<sup>11</sup> For a description of the “experience” of salvation as it manifested itself in the psyches of such first generation divines as John Cotton, Thomas Shepard and Thomas Hooker, I am indebted to Colacurcio’s *Godly Letters*. It is worth pointing out that, as the first generation passed into memory, their descendants increasingly elided and eventually all but erased their progenitors’ very real spiritual (and supernatural) anxieties in the service of the more comforting mythology of assurance, an imagined perfection that seemed to their successors seemingly made more obtainable by the fiction of its earlier existence.

physical and intellectual trauma caused by “spiritual intercourse,” these visible and invisible evidences, while still desperately sought, seemed increasingly elusive.

If evidence of grace was on the decline, however, this decline coincided with something of a rise of evidence of the diabolical. In his *Remarkable Providences* (1684), Increase Mather provided numerous accounts of demonic possessions and diabolical manifestations that offered ample evidence that the devil’s supernatural agency was alive and well in its new world surroundings. Cotton Mather amplified these evidences in his own writings, asserting that they proved nothing less than that the devil was poised to succeed in his invisible campaign. Even before his infamous apologia for the Salem witchcraft trials, *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), Cotton Mather did much to substantiate the climate of invisible peril he felt the Puritan experience had become. His first major publication, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possession* (1689) chronicled his efforts to save a girl possessed by demons, as did *A Brand Pluck’d From the Burning* (1693). Despite the more or less confident assertions of divinely-enabled triumph in these cases, the preponderance of such events hinted at an invisible landscape even bleaker than the “wilderness” envisioned by his forbearers.

Furthermore, these disheartening evidences of invisible decline coincided with the emergence of a certain degree of skepticism. During the seventeenth century, belief in divine providences and the prodigies, physical artifacts of divine (or diabolical) purpose in the form of oddly shaped vegetables, faces appearing in the clouds or, as in the famous case of Mercy Dyer, a deformed fetus, began to seem more like superstitious than scriptural occurrences.<sup>12</sup> As the seventeenth century ended and the eighteenth began, belief in the invisible world and its

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<sup>12</sup> By the time he wrote the *Magnalia Christi Americana* in the early eighteenth century, Cotton Mather, formerly a staunch believer in providences and prodigies, felt the need to implore his readers not to think his description of an army in the clouds before King Philip’s War marked him as guilty of “superstition regarding *prodigies*, for which I have such incontestable assurance.” For a detailed interrogation of Mather’s relationship with prodigies and their evolving theological and philosophical context, see Winship’s “Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy: The Example of Cotton Mather,” in which he argues that in the transition from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, partially because of the development of natural philosophy’s insistence on scientific rules and partially as backlash against the fall of the Puritan powers of the English Restoration, who had employed a significant amount of “providential” exempla in their political discourse, prodigies came to serve as “the boundary between genuine knowledge and superstition, between the educated classes and the uneducated masses.” (100).

influences began to seem to some less like a legitimate metaphysical conception and more a set of superstitious concepts dangerously vulnerable to human manipulation.<sup>13</sup>

Under these pressures, the stability of the visible/invisible world matrix grew increasingly strained. For the American colonists, the events at Salem in particular delineated a significant rupture between visible and invisible worlds and foregrounded the possibility not just of misreading the spectral evidence provided by invisible workings but also of deliberately manipulating or falsifying it. Ultimately, Salem illustrated a serious break between the highly intellectualized conceptions of the supernatural and their real world functionality.

When young Abigail Parris, daughter of the Reverend Samuel Parris, mysteriously fell ill and the family doctor referred the case to the clergy as a spiritual rather than physical ailment, and when other young women began to demonstrate similar afflictions, all the signs pointed towards definitive proof of demonic influences at work. Armed with the teachings of their faith, civilian magistrates (guided by ministers) began a concentrated effort to reveal the workings of the invisible world in their own. They documented the sufferings of the girls “afflicted” by witches and scoured their visible landscape for invisible traces, collecting artifacts like poppets or charms that could be used to produce invisible effects on physical bodies, searching out familiars, and scouring the bodies of the accused for witches' marks to provide physical evidence of invisible powers. They even accepted, despite its acknowledged theological ambiguity, accounts of apparitions of an accused witch appearing outside and away from his or her physical body to commit mischief, known as spectral evidence.<sup>14</sup> In spite of their convictions, these proofs

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<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that the implications of "superstition" erased these ideas from popular or scholastic discourse, only that the tenor of the discourse changed. For one thing, believers like Cotton Mather and his source Joseph Glanvill regarded this skepticism as a true threat to faith, for failure to believe in the invisible world represented a failure to believe in the spiritual dimensions of God's creation, which is in essence a denial of faith itself: "And when they have once swallowed this Opinion, and are sure there are no Witches nor Apparitions, they are prepared for the Denial of Spirits, a life to come, and all other Principles of Religion (2:3).

<sup>14</sup> The question of spectral evidence, most particularly the debate over whether or not the devil could impersonate innocent people, served as a central dilemma for theologians and magistrates alike. The courts' decision, against the advice of the ministers they had consulted, to accept spectral evidence as proof positive of demonic complicity provided one of the earliest and strongest platforms for critics of the proceedings.

and their applications proved more ambiguous than anyone expected. After the trials, in which an exponential number of accused witches faced accusers relying on a range of evidence, from the “properly” scriptural to the probably superstitious, had been discredited, mention of witchcraft and possession virtually disappeared from Puritan discourse.<sup>15</sup> In the years following, spectators and former participants found the “spectral evidence” of the witches’ guilt less convincing than the more mundane motives of jealousy, greed, and various interpersonal tensions and family grudges. Those still inclined to look for diabolical influence began to see it in the “delusion” of belief in witchcraft at all. Nevertheless, a supernatural framework remained an entrenched part of the colonial consciousness. The invisible world's appeal, if shadowed, was never completely eclipsed.

In the early 1740s a series of revivals now known as “The Great Awakening” revived the possibility of the popular experience of supernatural agency. Waves of “religious excitement” seemed to foretell the mass experience of saving faith as an intensely physical process that included responses ranging from tears and fainting fits to physical transports bordering on seizures.<sup>16</sup> Many New England Protestants distrusted this “experiential” religion, the skeptical “Old Lights” who found suspect the swift intensity of the conversion experience, which seemed too easy and too overwhelming, a superabundance of “invisible evidence” that, while possibly supernatural in origin, was unlikely to reflect genuine divinity. The “New Lights,” on the other hand, defended the revivals as exactly the kind of supernatural intercession needed to rekindle an awareness of faith as the link between tangible and intangible realities. As the fervor died down and a relatively small portion of the converted remained secure in their faith, support for the movement evaporated, and what began as a potentially powerful case study of invisible

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<sup>15</sup> *The New England Mind*, 191. Miller discusses the significance of this moment at length.

<sup>16</sup> The physical and emotional intensity of this movement dominates our contemporary intellectual understanding of it. Miller’s famously evocative description of the effect of the revivalist meetings led by Anglican evangelist John Whitefield, credited with helping to touch off this movement, is “the lid blew off New England” (*Jonathan Edwards* 133). The less dramatic summation of the intensity of the experience for participants can be found in Brockway’s pithy assertion that: “many people were deeply moved...others became hysterical” (10).

influence was increasingly dismissed as a manifestation of the religious hysteria that, as the events of Salem showed, New Englanders seemed distressingly prone to. Even when its failures seemed obvious, the power (if not the allure) of this supernatural model remained intact.

Some theologians even managed to weather this skepticism and retain their investment in the invisible world. Jonathan Edwards, for example, attempted to combat the doubts raised by “supernatural rationalists” and to reinvest in the framework by expanding the range of the invisible world to encompass all of visible existence.<sup>17</sup> Even those who no longer believed in the credibility of the framework did not forget it, amplifying it into an object lesson or cautionary tale. The Puritan supernatural emerged from the Great Awakening as it had from Salem, suspect and disgraced, but far from erased.

By the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, anti-Puritan opposition had coalesced enough to attempt to redefine the visible/invisible world dynamic; instead of proximity, increasingly Anglican models postulated a highly distanced, highly contained model of supernatural space that rarely if ever interacted with the natural world or the individuals that inhabited it.<sup>18</sup> Events like Salem and the failure of the Great Awakening helped to collapse the Calvinist framework of the invisible world from lived theological practice to intellectual and cultural history, but on the whole they enhanced rather than eroded its residual imaginative appeal. As the Puritan supernatural made this transition, it carried with it an increasingly complicated legacy, one that married providential optimism with diabolical uncertainty.

Another very important aspect of the Puritan supernatural to make the transition was one that had been fraught with uncertainty all along—its close interconnection with constructions of femininity. From the beginning, the invisible world was subject to a gendered

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<sup>17</sup> Nineteenth-century thinkers would later embrace and invert this idea, arguing that all events were by definition “mundane” and natural, although perhaps beyond the range of current scientific understanding.

<sup>18</sup> For discussions of the reasons the Puritan perspective lost its sway, particularly the linked inroads made by Anglicans in theology, natural philosophy, and political agency, see Winship and Burns.

hierarchy of interpretation, one structured to monitor and police female participation. While Puritans envisioned the invisible world as overlaid over the visible sphere, and acknowledged the permeability between them, invisible manifestations were, ideally, relatively rare. When they weren't they often presaged disaster, as with the crisis of witchcraft and demonic possession that overtook Salem in 1692. Under the normal course of events, learned theologians and divines would diagnose and contextualize the wonders, providences, and prodigies produced by either divine or diabolical invisible influences. Their scholarship foregrounded both the security inherent in their knowledge of the providential agenda and the need for a specialized group of interpreters for that agenda.<sup>19</sup> That this interpretive capacity was a function of male privilege was made abundantly clear over years of guarding it against female challengers—Anne Hutchinson's claim to a theologian's status famously resulted in her prosecution and banishment for heresy. In Hutchinson, who argued that God communicated directly with her, Puritan divines confronted the threat of an individual saint who obviated the need for a clerical class. That the ministers and magistrates were highly aware that this threat came in female form is obvious in the records of Hutchinson's condemnation and fall from grace, which, as numerous critics have observed, occurred in pointedly gendered terms.<sup>20</sup> While Hutchinson's example showed that women were not fit to be invisible world interpreters, women nonetheless frequently occupied a special position in relation to invisible world phenomena: as men were *always* ministers, witches were *usually* women. It is likely that women were demographically more likely to be accused of witchcraft because their bodies, minds, and speech were perceived as particularly vulnerable to invisible world influences, particularly demonic ones.

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<sup>19</sup> Winship (*Seers of God*), Ruttenburg, and Ziff (*Puritanism in America*) have all commented on the necessity of the Puritan interpretive hierarchy. Ziff and Ruttenburg discuss in detail the threat Salem presented to that hierarchy, which saw a proliferation of laymen and, more pointedly, laywomen, experiencing and attempting to diagnose invisible world experiences. These efforts, Ziff and Ruttenburg argue, brought the invisible world too close, resulting in the system's collapse and a growing climate of communal hysteria.

<sup>20</sup> Gustafson argues that "in claiming her own privileged relation to the divine voice, Hutchinson refused to submit to the discipline of scriptural text and the associated linguistic and interpretive skills that bore with them the weight of social and gender hierarchies" (25).

Not only were female bodies the only ones capable of producing one major kind of wonder, the monstrous birth, in which an infant's birth defects almost always portended divine displeasure, the female minds located in those bodies were made vulnerable by their feminine physical shell.<sup>21</sup> Puritan rhetoric gendered the souls of both men and women as feminine, but feminine souls in female bodies possessed an extra layer of weakness.<sup>22</sup> According to Elizabeth Reis, the gendered metaphor for the Puritan soul and the tendency to understand women in terms of that metaphor, which emphasized the weak, yearning, and vulnerable qualities of the feminine soul, "led by circular reasoning to the conclusion that women were more likely than men to submit to Satan" (94). Female speech was under normal circumstances heavily policed. It was a debate of significant import, for example, whether or not they could be permitted to publicly testify in Puritan churches, even though the public performance for church membership was, in many cases, a prerequisite for church membership. One minister, after significant soul-searching, thought that they should indeed have this right, but only since such testimony "was designed to contribute to communal knowledge and supply evidence that could be approved by others, producing submission rather than empowerment."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For more on the phenomena of monstrous births, see Crawford's *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England*. Anne Hutchinson's heresy conviction was affiliated with not one but two such incidents—her own stillborn child and that of her cohort, Mary Dyer. For discussions of the significance of these "evidences" in Hutchinson's trial and eventual fate, see Schutte, "Such Monstrous Births: A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy," and Valerius, "So Manifest a Signe From Heaven: Monstrosity and Hersey in the Antinomian Controversy."

<sup>22</sup> Puritan rhetoric postulated the souls of both men and women as vulnerable, yearning brides awaiting the loving redemption of marriage with the spiritual husband, Christ but also in peril of succumbing to the seductive temptations of Satan. For a discussion on how this formulation cut doubly deeply for women, see Reis's chapter "Devil, Body, and Feminine Soul" in *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*.

<sup>23</sup> Kirk and Rivett, 70. In addition to making this claim their article documents the significant differences between the more confident conversion narratives of male congregants, whose membership in the church was rewarded with full political as well as spiritual communal belonging, and the more hesitant, doubtful, and incomplete conversion narratives of women, whose membership in the churches did not confer upon them the same benefits of citizenship. The gendered division in conversion narrative testimony is not universally accepted. Hall offers a different perspective, arguing that conversion narratives actually enfranchised both men and women, as laypeople of either gender "possessed the confidence to speak for themselves about the ways in which they had experienced the workings of the law and grace" (*Worlds of Wonder* 119). I however, find Kirk's and Rivett's argument, and evidence, compelling.



Only under one circumstance was female speech deemed beyond the purview of masculine control, and that was when it was uttered or evoked by a witch. As Joseph Klaitz points out, “A woman could not preach publicly in church, except when she was possessed” (125). As numerous critics and historians of the Salem witchcraft trials have pointed out, Puritan girls were repressed by a “highly restrictive domestic environment” and possession allowed them the freedom of not just unrestrained but extremely momentous speech: their words had weight, and through their accusations they effected real change in their communities.<sup>24</sup> On the other side of the coin, witches’ rhetoric was as powerful as it was transgressive. Witches, because of their demonic compacts, could utter curses and foretell dark futures: “witches, arguably the most despised and distrusted speakers in their communities, were at the same time the most literally credible. There was no escaping their pronouncements, for *what they said came true*” (Kamensky 154). Witches’ words were not only inordinately powerful, they were often transgressively female. As one anonymous pamphlet assured readers, “a Woman’s Tongue . . . is the devil’s seat.”

Furthermore, women’s speech was one of the most pervasive forms of evidence for witchcraft, which was frequently connected with angry and intemperate female speech. Puritan Margaret Jones was executed in part for allegations centered in her intemperate language, while one of Anne Hutchinson’s followers, Jane Hawkins, narrowly escaped hanging in 1638 after being accused of “having “Converse[d] with the Devill,” an allegiance she revealed through the oddity of her own speech.”<sup>25</sup> The accused witch was often a woman who argued with her husbands, her neighbors or the town tradespeople, who stood up for herself where social custom would have had her defer, or who demonstrated intemperate speech patterns of any kind. As

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<sup>24</sup> As Klaitz points out, Salem allowed “social tensions [to be] expressed in spiritual terms, a pattern completely appropriate in a society dominated by religious ideology” (125). Numerous critics have taken on the topic of gender in relation to Salem, particularly the use of supernatural agency by women otherwise rendered marginal by society. In addition to Klaitz, see Karlson, Demos, and Reis.

<sup>25</sup> Kamensky, 152. Kamensky discusses these and other examples of the connection between witchcraft, heresy, and female eloquence in her book *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England*, a fascinating and nuanced study and a formative influence on this dissertation project.

Kamensky points out, even chroniclers who doubted the supernatural agency of witchcraft still linked accused witches to transgressive speech, portraying the accused women as “Scolds” (156). For believers, there was no power more terrifying, or transformative, than a witch’s words, for they contained the power to curse and condemn, and witches did the devil’s bidding, working to transform the saintly project of the Puritan congregation into the devil’s vision of hellish anarchy. Women, then, with their special affinity for and vulnerability to witchcraft and possession, possessed a particularly fraught relationship with the invisible world, one that would remain an indelible part of the legacy of the Puritan supernatural.

### **What Happened to the Invisible World After the Puritans?**

American Calvinism’s decline began in the eighteenth century and picked up speed in the nineteenth, as generations of Puritan descendants moved away from the religion of their forefathers. The reasons for this shift away from Calvinist doctrine as lived theological practice are many and varied, but outside the scope of this study. What is relevant to this argument, however, is the creation and perception of the Puritan legacy during this time.

As Puritans became historical they also became heritage, an origin story and/or cautionary tale and a benchmark for religious, political, and cultural comparisons with contemporary American society.

The Puritan supernatural formed a substantial part of the Puritan legacy, one that grew, rather than diminished, over time. While dominant modes of religious thought and natural philosophy moved away from providential phenomena, and from easy crossover between visible and invisible, natural and supernatural realms, this abandonment left the invisible world, with its witches and wonders, offering a stark and appealing contrast. That is to say, Puritan supernatural beliefs were re-classified as outside mainstream discourses of religion and natural philosophy, as magical and superstitious “others,” but this reclassification failed to erase their

appeal. Instead, it simply emphasized the supernatural component of the Puritan legacy: Puritans became, in the American imagination, the special custodians of “magic.” Thus, while the decline of Puritanism and the decline of magic ostensibly coincided, I would add my voice to the growing critical consensus that magic never actually declined, and that its exclusion from some mainstream discourses merely reified its place in others, particularly in the imaginative spaces offered by fiction.<sup>26</sup>

For a time, particularly during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Puritan past offered a wealth of uniquely American material for a fledgling country looking to establish its own distinguished historical lineage.<sup>27</sup> New editions of Puritan texts circulated with the assurance that their pages contained fundamental truths of American identity: in the 1852 edition of Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* editor Thomas Robbins assured readers that “the demand for the work is now increasing. The History of New England cannot be written without this authority” (vi). He was equally confident, in his 1820 edition, in Puritan uniqueness, both in the design of their civilization and the caliber of their citizens: “The great object of the first Planters of New England was to form a CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH—a design without parallel in ancient or modern times. The judicious reader would expect to discover, in the annals of such a people, characters and events not be found in the histories of other communities” (v). Puritan luminaries like John Winthrop offered a seventeenth-century canon of “founding father” figures, touchstones to either celebrate or critique and providential

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<sup>26</sup> A number of critics have looked at the decline of providential narrative and wonderful phenomena and its connection to Puritan politics in England and America. Among these, Winship makes the argument for the coeval decline of American magic and Puritanism particularly cogently in his book *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment*, which explicates the political and theological catalysts for the linked declines of Puritans and belief in wonders, witches and providences. The “decline of magic,” is a premise cemented into the critical consciousness by Thomas’s *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Belief in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century England*. For arguments that problematize the decoupling of religion and magic, see Kareem *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder*; in the American tradition in particular, see Hall’s *World of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England* and Godbeer’s *The Devil’s Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England*, among others.

<sup>27</sup> For an overview of the Puritan element of American identity formation, particularly its overlaps with revolutionary ideology and national destiny, see Bercovitch’s essay “How the Puritans Won the American Revolution.” For a longer discourse on this subject, see his book, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*.

narratives and wonderful histories that came, in the early nineteenth-century at least, to be articulated as the precursors to American visions of Manifest Destiny.<sup>28</sup> While late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts tended to focus on the aspects of the Puritan supernatural they saw as sources of positive potential—narratives of providential progress, wonders that illustrated the chosen status of Puritan colonists, and, by extension, of the American nation that claimed them as progenitors—by the 1840s and 50s, this focus began to shift towards the negative, with the emphasis on a particular example, what Gretchen Adams has labeled the “specter of Salem.”<sup>29</sup>

The Puritan project and the attendant nobility of its progenitors, while enshrined in the historical novels of the first few decades of the nineteenth-century, had always been attended by darker, more critical implications. By the time of the antebellum arrival of spiritualism, the supernatural shadows seemed especially applicable. The proliferation of occult phenomena, accompanied by myriad reform movements and utopian projects that, yoked together, gave the 1840s and 1850s a decidedly millennial feel, made it seem safer to shift the project of American literature away from the foundational legacy of the Calvinist colonists as a narrative of intellectual and spiritual evolution and towards a condemnation of (and distancing from) the confusing immediacy of wonders, portents, and possessions emblemized by Salem. Salem, with its surge of dubious witchcraft accusations and trials, offered a case study in all the perils of believing in natural and supernatural realms that too-closely overlapped. In emphasizing Salem and thus discrediting the invisible world, critics of spiritualism and occult phenomena in

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<sup>28</sup> Discussions of the Puritan Errand itself are many, complex, and not without their own challengers. The seminal place to begin is Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956). For a discussion of the way nineteenth-century formulations of manifest destiny absorbed this logic, see Scott.

<sup>29</sup> According to Adams, “For whatever reason, Salem’s episode of witch hunting appeared so seldom in the 18th century . . . that it is difficult to find any all” (34). When emphasizing early American interest in the “positive” potential of the Puritan supernatural, I acknowledge that I am outlining a trend with numerous exceptions. It should also be acknowledged that, while many historians and novelists did indeed focus on the providential and wonderful aspects of the Puritan supernatural as useful and worthy of commendation, many did not hesitate along the way to condemn aspects of the invisible world they deemed backward or superstitious, most notably the Salem Trials. My goal is not to elide this line of commentary, but rather to argue that, up until to a certain point at least, the interest in wonderful, providential history trumped, at least in part, the negative example of Salem. This, of course, eventually changed.

particular could argue for the opposite of invisible world permeability: highly rationalized, neatly compartmentalized spheres of natural and supernatural space. This trajectory had ample support from nineteenth-century historians: Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Province of Massachusetts* (1760), a treatise heavily indebted for its negative treatment of Salem, and Puritan theology's projection of the supernatural in general to Calef's anti-Mather tract *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1702), made it into the Proceedings of Massachusetts historical society. It heavily influenced the accounts penned by influential historians like Thomas Bancroft and Charles Upham, who amplified Calef's distrust and implied disdain to explicit disapproval, imparting first criminally negligent ignorance and later malicious intent to the magistrates and theologians who insisted on the viability of the invisible world. The confusion, persecution, and needless death of the Salem "witches," these historians implied, was the obvious and only result that this kind of belief in the supernatural could produce, moreover, it was the Puritans' tragic flaw, and should be rigorously guarded against in order to preserve any narrative of American progress.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Puritan supernatural offered a familiar (if not always reassuring) template for understanding "new" supernatural phenomena. Swedenborgism, Mesmerism, Magnetism, Spiritualism, and many other antebellum "isms" were easiest to conceptualize when mediated by the ideas, language and experiences of Puritan predecessors. John Greenleaf Whittier, for example, pointed, with apparent approval, to several such movements as extensions and even evolutions of Puritan thought in "New England Supernaturalism": "Look at Magnetism, with its fearfully suggestive phenomena, enacting daily in our midst marvels which throw far into shadow the simple witchcraft of our ancestors" (280). The Puritan historical analog came to a head in the nineteenth-century treatment of spiritualism. Spiritualism promised contact with the "other" world through a variety of spiritual manifestations and phenomena that highlighted the close overlap between natural and supernatural realms and reinvigorated the geographical metaphor as a way of organizing

supernatural understanding. Some two hundred years after their colonial forbearers had inhabited a world filled with wonderful providences, spectral apparitions, and the works of invisible hands, the people of New England found themselves amidst “spiritual manifestations” once again. The mysterious noises, levitating furniture, inexplicable apparitions, and strange trance-states that offered seventeenth-century proofs of providential or (much more likely) diabolical interventions appeared again as nineteenth-century visitations from departed souls reaching back from the “other world.” Critics of spiritualism, then, could make use of the specter of Salem and its negative exemplarity, even as adherents sought to rehabilitate both modern phenomena and historical analog.

The Puritan supernatural’s interpretive episteme and its archive of wonder tales were particularly conducive to literary afterlives. In his introduction to *The American Puritan Imagination* (1974), Sacvan Bercovitch argues that “the Puritan legacy to subsequent American culture lies not in theology or logic or social institutions, but in the realm of the imagination,” a realm that sustains theological, logical, and social inheritance in fictional reincarnations (7). New editions of Puritan journals, sermons, wonder tales, and spiritual histories proliferated throughout the early nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Puritanism inheres in fiction even when it seems to have faded from other spheres of discourse, and many of these fictional treatments have received extensive critical treatment. In novels, poems, plays, and short stories, Puritans continue to exist as characters (and caricatures) that epitomize the Early American experience; the events of their history and trappings of their society frequently act as allegories for the experience of later generations. Even when not explicitly historicized, Puritan logic and rhetoric reappear in the continuous re-purposing and re-imaginings of ideas like Winthrop’s “city on the hill,” the “errand into the wilderness,” and the “providential project.”

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<sup>30</sup> A stellar example of this is Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), which went through seminal reprintings in 1820 and again in 1852. In addition, texts by Puritan Governors William Bradford and John Winthrop, famous dissidents like Roger Williams, and historians like Edward Johnson and William Hubbard, were widely available. In fact, as Kelley and Foster have shown, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s formative Puritan novel, *Hope Leslie*, makes use of and engages with all of these sources.

The invisible world is a vital piece of Puritan heritage that offered gothic novelists like Brown a system of wonder, and its attendant perils, to formulate a distinctly American gothic. An archive of wonder tales, providential narratives, and witchcraft and heresy trials gave early national romancers like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick source material to adapt into narratives of female supernatural agency. The prohibitive example of Salem and the codifying distrust for Puritan precedent gave later romancers like Hawthorne and anti-reform, anti-feminist novelists like Brownson material to adapt into cautionary tales that discredited modern supernatural phenomena. Across a vast range of genres and ideologies, the Puritan supernatural remained constant.

### **Why Gender?**

As we have seen, gender dichotomies and hierarchies were already entrenched in the Puritan supernatural in both theory and practice. Puritan women had, both symbolically and historically, a special place in invisible world relations—supposedly vulnerable to supernatural corruption, they were frequently perceived to have and persecuted for their affinity for witchcraft. Puritan formulations coded the invisible world and women’s place in the world as coeval, and since questions about women’s place and role were central to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American identity, it is unsurprising that the two topics remained intertwined.

In the late eighteenth century, when the new United States was coming into being, questions of female agency were inextricably linked to political authority. One popular formulation of this authority cited women’s spiritual (and by extension supernatural) agency as a justification for political influence and participation. The developing ideology of “republican motherhood” posited women’s moral and spiritual authority as a uniquely feminine superiority that would indirectly extend women’s influence into public, political realms through a strong

moral influence on their citizen-sons. Corresponding figurations like the idea of republican marriage saw the increasingly popular companionate “partnership” model of marriage, and the republican rhetoric surrounding that model, as a means of transforming women into political beings, as courtship and marriage were infused with political meanings.<sup>31</sup> Other conceptions of women’s agency attempted to leverage women’s participation directly into the political sphere à la the model provided by Mary Wollstonecraft. Many of them did this by asserting the providential necessity of female agency. In reminding her husband to “Remember the Ladies,” Abigail Adams pointed out to him that women were “Beings placed by providence under your protection” and that, should providence be thwarted, “we [ladies] are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation” (121). Reading and manipulating the will of providence became a central tool in the cause of female enfranchisement. As such, the representative women who emerged in the gothic fictions of Brown and the Puritan “founding mothers” of historical novelists like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick all drew upon supernatural agency in order to cement their place in American discourse.

As the nineteenth-century progressed, the country’s increasing industrialization changed the landscape of labor and, correspondingly, perceptions of public and private space.<sup>32</sup> Increasingly specialized labors, and sites for performing those labors, led to increasing stratifications of gender roles and divisions between laboring spaces. Correspondingly, the developing ideology of separate spheres postulated women’s regulation to domestic chores and

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<sup>31</sup> The limitations of this formulation in historical practice have been well documented. For an overview of the ways in which the ideology of republican motherhood was undermined (or at least under-realized) in actually revolutionary era America, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* and Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. For a discussion of republican marriage, see Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic.”

<sup>32</sup> Pfister’s *The Production of Personal Life: Class, Gender, and the Psychological in Hawthorne’s Fiction* does an excellent job of detailing the way changes to the marketplace restructured nineteenth-century formulations of gender.



realms as a cultural as well as an economic reality.<sup>33</sup> For proponents and detractors alike, the barriers imposed between visible and invisible worlds, and the means by which those barriers could be violated in the formulations of the Puritan supernatural, began to look like useful analogs for the barriers between home and outside, public and private, and masculine and feminine realms and abilities. It is no coincidence that the advent of a plethora of antebellum reform movements corresponded with a surge of occult phenomena, nor should the agency that women drew from these phenomena be understated.<sup>34</sup> In the rise of spiritualism, which collected under its umbrella the related fields and practices of mesmerism, magnetism, and clairvoyance, the Puritan witch seemed reborn in the form of the modern medium.

Touched off by the adolescent Fox sisters in the 1840s, who ostensibly discovered their affinity for supernatural congress when visited by the spirits inhabiting the family house, Spiritualism's reliance upon mediums, many of them female, offered women agency and mobility backed up by their unique spiritual authority. Channeling spirits, whether through possessed speech, spirit writing, or telekinesis, allowed mediums to cross otherwise immutable boundaries and embody a range of class, gender, and racial identities.<sup>35</sup> The role of medium was inherently transgressive. As Justine Murison points out, the clairvoyance at the heart of many mediumistic performances performed a kind of "mesmeric labor" which undermined assumptions about the private nature of women's work and domestic space. Many of the medium's feats involved using supernatural agency to breach formerly inviolate boundaries. Reading sealed letters, clairvoyant travel as spectral projections to other cities and homes, and opening the ultimate in closed communicative channels, that between the living and the dead,

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<sup>33</sup> That the doctrine of separate spheres was far more a construct than a reality is no longer really up for debate. For an overview of the ways in which the metaphor has been problematized by recent scholars, see Davidson's and Hatcher's introduction to *No More Separate Spheres!: A Next Wave American Studies Reader*.

<sup>34</sup> For an examination of the ways in which antebellum literature, particularly the works of Hawthorne, Brownson, and Melville, dealt with the overlaps between occultism and radical politics, see Karcher's chapter in *The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction 1820-1920*.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the female agency provided by spiritualism, see Braude and McGarry.

all boiled down, ultimately, to an “invasion of privacy, both domestic and corporeal” (77). Beginning the same year as the Seneca Falls Convention and touching off a wave of corresponding manifestations, many of which required the presence of previously parlor-bound young women now “consecrated as high priestesses of a new, female-dominated religion,” spiritualism threatened to upend domestic roles and domestic spaces (70). Numerous spiritualist organizations endorsed women’s rights and endorsed self-sovereignty over conventional models of marriage and family life. For these reasons, it is unsurprising that spiritualist manifestations were compared to Puritan possession narratives and spiritualist practitioners to Puritan witches. Antebellum Americans consciously returned to the Puritan example to explain modern phenomena.

### **Why Genre?**

This project works on the understanding that literary genres represent powerful indicators of not just formulations of literary style but also the larger sociocultural factors that shape and influence literary tastes. Popular genres tell us a lot about what interests a certain historical moment, and the rise and fall of different generic models shows the cultural evolution of a literary culture. Genres carry sediments of previous genres: what’s adapted and what’s resisted in each new formulation is always telling. Generic adaptations inevitably contend with not just the conventions of the previous versions but also with the ideologies and epistemes embedded within those conventions.<sup>36</sup> Genres, as Jameson points out, function as “contracts” between writer and reader: they signpost where a text belongs in relation to other texts and guide readers toward an implicit set of expectations and a corresponding trajectory of interpretation (135). Genres then represent an author’s attempt use the literary culture in which he writes to govern the readers response: “no small part of the art of writing is absorbed by this

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<sup>36</sup> For a seminal discussion of generic mechanics, see Jameson, “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre.”

(impossible) attempt to devise a foolproof mechanism for the automatic exclusion of undesirable responses to a given literary utterance” (Jameson 135-6). In addition, the Puritan supernatural’s persistence across such a wide array of generic models, from the late-eighteenth century gothic to the early nineteenth-century national romances to antebellum Puritan allegories and anti-reform satires demonstrates the ubiquity as well as the versatility of the invisible world model, underscoring its status as a cornerstone of the development of American fiction.

### **Why Fiction 1798-1856?**

This dissertation looks at fiction that spans a period full of historical milestones and sees the rise of numerous different literary genres. The trajectory of this time period is bookended, most significantly, with projects of formulation, or, more accurately, re-formulation. The late eighteenth century saw literature that reflected the concerns of a nascent nation trying to synthesize its colonial past into a new identity; a little more than fifty years later mid-nineteenth-century America, riven by reformist impulses and corresponding millennial anxieties, stood poised on the verge of a war that would strive once more to remake the national identity that had developed in that short time. Both formative moments are underscored by questions of female agency and participation: Clara Wieland’s Wollstonecraftian bid for full intellectual citizenship and personal autonomy is mirrored by Zenobia’s utopian queendom. In both gothic novels like Brown’s and spiritualist analogs like Hawthorne’s and Brownson’s we can see the invisible world heritage as the lens through which to mediate and process these bids for agency, albeit with a 180 degree turn in gendered agendas. This turn from the progressive Brown to the reactionary Brownson marks a fascinating and study-worthy progression, and the fact that the invisible world remains a key component in both extremes illustrates the versatility and ubiquity of the Puritan supernatural across this period.

## How Does This Project Engage Scholarly Debates?

The legacy of the Puritan supernatural, especially as it unfolded in the nineteenth century, is seen almost entirely through the lens of Salem and the “negative example” it provided.<sup>37</sup>

Literary treatments of the Puritan supernatural trend towards excoriations of superstition and delusion. In the nineteenth century, there is indeed a plethora of evidence that Salem forms, as Gretchen A. Adams and others have established, a compelling and pervasive cautionary tale that would seem to discredit the Puritan precedent. Dorothy Z. Baker’s *America’s Gothic Fiction: The Legacy of the Magnalia Christi Americana* (2007) builds on the project of Ann Douglas’s *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977) in offering compelling evidence for the ways in which authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe reconstructed the “failure” of male divines and “masculine” Calvinism represented in events like the Salem Witch Trials in order to make room for corrective female spiritual authority (and supernatural understanding). I would argue, however, that while numerous authors did indeed use Salem as a lens through which to vilify the Calvinist legacy, particularly its supernatural implications, others, pointedly, did not. This project argues that the legacy of the Puritan invisible world encompasses more than the specter of Salem, and that that specter developed and flourished alongside larger metaphors of supernatural geography and discourses of providences and wonders.

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<sup>37</sup> On the fascinating and still-contested topic of witchcraft and possession, particularly the events of Salem, the most represented (if not most representative) moment in Puritan history, there is a long tradition of excellent resources. These begin with the expository writings of contemporary Puritan ministers and the contemporaneous denunciations of their critics like Robert Calef, and extend into historical treatises, many of which absorbed and amplified these denunciations, like Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s *The Witchcraft Delusion of 1692* (c. 1767) and Charles Wentworth Upham’s germinal *Lectures on Witchcraft* (1831), later expanded into the lengthier *Salem Witchcraft; With an Account of Salem Village, and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (1867). There are also many seminal twentieth and twenty-first century histories, including: Hanson’s *Witchcraft at Salem* (1969), Starkey’s *The Devil in Massachusetts* (1949), Demos’s *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (1982) Karlsen’s *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (1987), Hall’s *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History 1638-1693* (1991), and Reis’s *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (1997), among others. Buell’s *New England Literary Culture from Revolution through Renaissance* (1986) and Gould’s “New England Witch Hunting and the Politics of Reason in the Early Republic” (1995) take on the legacy of Salem in nineteenth-century fiction. Adams’s *The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America* (2008) looks at the evolving legacy of Salem over the course of the nineteenth century and has been a formative influence on this project.

In broadening the scope through which we perceive the invisible world legacy, I am hoping also to complicate the well-known narrative of female victimhood which, helped by the overemphasis on Salem and the dark incarnations of Puritan characters and beliefs offered by male writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, charts a narrative of women's evolution from Puritan sinners to hapless nineteenth-century victims, the stereotypical wasted maiden or hapless crone universally disenfranchised by supernatural contact.<sup>38</sup>

However, as this project hopes to show, not all post-Puritan writers were interested in portraying women as hapless victims of Puritan superstition, and we need to look at the ways roles like "witch" and "heretic," and concepts like wilderness mobility or invisible world communication were adapted to provide female characters (and thus women) agency. To this end, this project joins up with the significant critical work done by scholars like Carolyn Karcher, Christopher Castiglia, and Judith Fetterley, who interrogate the ways female writers of the 1820s and 1830s attempted to refashion Puritan history into alternative narratives of female empowerment.<sup>39</sup> Feminist scholars have already done much to establish the ways in which characters like Child's Mary Conant and Sedgwick's Hope Leslie present subversive challenges to the trope of patriarchal authority as embodied by the Puritan forefathers by denying (or reformulating) theological dictates and domestic spaces, but more should be said regarding the ways in which both heroines manipulate the invisible world as well as the visible one to gain and exercise their agency. In foregrounding the supernatural components of these female authors' projects I hope to add to this project while emphasizing the Puritan invisible world's capacity for, and centrality in, enabling powerful transgressive feminine archetypes that would then go on to serve as representative American characters.

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<sup>38</sup> For a succinct and compelling overview of women's transition from powerful witches to hapless victims in early nineteenth-century fiction, and the gendered agenda behind this change, see Vetere's "The Malefic Unconscious: Gender, Genre, and History in Early Antebellum Witchcraft Narratives."

<sup>39</sup> Chapter Two of this dissertation deals extensively with the work of these scholars and others like them, to which this project owes a considerable debt of inspiration.

In suggesting that the representative Puritan heroine begins not with Hester Prynne but Clara Wieland and Hope Leslie, I am hoping to reposition the way we think about representations of the Puritans in nineteenth-century fiction. For too long critical scrutiny has hit a one-dimensional note: all Nathaniel Hawthorne, all the time. While undoubtedly a fascinating writer, Hawthorne inherited rather than created the archetype of the Puritan heroine, and the line between Hester Prynne and Anne Hutchinson is the result of a complicated lineage of fictional precursors. By detailing that lineage, I hope to make room for other authors and their formulations of gendered agency, which were subversive in ways that, I argue, provoked Hawthorne's own reactionarily conservative constructions.

This study is deeply invested in questions of gender and constructions of femininity. In performing "feminist" readings of a concept, the Puritan invisible world, rather than focusing on a canon of texts written by women, I am arguing both for the deep intertwining of gender and invisible world issues and for broadening the perspective the critical consensus to recognize this deeply important connection in both women's writing and non-female-authored texts. Since women's agency is at the heart of the Puritan supernatural, it becomes a powerful metaphor through which to discuss *and produce* women's agency in and through the fictions that draw upon it. Building on the infusion of invisible world phenomenology and Wollstonecraftian proto-feminism into the American gothic by authors like Brown, early national romancers like Cheney, Child, and Sedgwick adapted this supernatural agency into not only an enabling archetype of representative Puritan femininity but also an impetus for their own fiction, in a sense grounding their authorship in the supernatural eloquence and the invisible world tradition they attribute to their heroines. It is this authorial agency, and the female mobility it enables, that the next generation of male authors like Hawthorne and Brownson engage with, and attempt to contain, when they take up the invisible world in their own writing.

In looking at the Puritan supernatural and its attendant gendered dimension across a trajectory of literary genres, I am also suggesting alterations to some extant generic

classifications. The intense inter-linkage between external and internal supernatural spaces given to us by the Puritans makes room to reexamine some conventional critical understandings of the “gothic” tradition, particularly the more or less clearly delineated trajectory from external horror to internal madness described by Terry Castle and others. Castle’s assertion that “rationalists did not so much negate the traditional spirit world as displace it into the realm of psychology, relocating the world of ghosts in the enclosed space of the imagination . . . supernaturalizing the mind itself,” is compelling but perhaps overly simplistic in the American context, in which the permeability of the Puritan visible world (and its more personal incarnation, the physical body) and the prevalence of invisible influences capable of exerting external and internal influence alike (demons often rearranged furniture and inflicted raving fits simultaneously) allows for a simultaneity that problematizes the external/internal divide (52). At the very least, it is worth looking at how such a divide develops alongside the visible/invisible continuum bequeathed by the Puritans.

In arguing for the continuing relevance of the Puritan heroine created in the national romances of female novelists such as Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick, I am implying that the competition between female and male authors for ownership of the genre (and both the dominant interpretation of the historical past it described as well as the literary future it foretold) did not end, as Carolyn Karcher has suggested, with the victory of James Fennimore Cooper’s hyper-masculine “vision of race and gender relations . . . [which] coincided with the vision of America’s ruling elites and met their needs for a cultural mythology that could enlist broad support for white supremacist policies,” (Introduction to *Hobomok* xxxvii). Rather, it left a subversive legacy potent enough to require subsequent authors, like Hawthorne and Brownson, to reckon with it. Finally, in arguing that Brownson’s anti-reform satire makes use of the formulas and conventions of the ancient genre of the wonder tale, and that his text inspires other writers, including Herman Melville, to follow the wonder-tale formula, I am both positing

the continued relevance of the invisible world archive and making a case for the continued relevance of the wonder tale in the formulation of the modern novel.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, this project aims to establish that the Puritans provide much more than a single case study of supernatural belief gone awry, and that even as the framework of an omnipresent supernatural plane became less and less tenable with evolving theological or cultural ideologies, the imaginative appeal of that space continued to exist, and to permeate American fiction.

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<sup>40</sup> Numerous critics have made the argument for wonder tales as essential resources for the novel's formation. See Hunter's *The Cultural Context of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, which cites spiritual autobiographies, and wonder books as genres compelling enough to impact the novel's development. See also McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel*, which looks at apparition tales and sea deliverances amongst the catalog of formative novel sources. In addition, Hartman's *Providence Tales and the Birth of American Literature* and Baker's *America's Gothic Fiction: The Legacy of the Magnalia Christi Americana* have both developed and enhanced the legacy of the genre of wonder literature in establishing the framework for American fiction.



## Chapter One

### Female Prodigies and Invisible Trials: *Wieland* and the Gothic Invisible World

Towards the end of Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland, or The Transformation: An American Tale* (1798), its narrator and protagonist Clara Wieland contemplates a visit to her older brother, recently imprisoned for the brutal murders of his wife, young children, and adolescent ward. Although she has just read her brother's confession, a confident and unremorseful narrative in which he professes to having heard the voice of God and followed its murderous dictates, detailing a blood soaked saga that he paints as a triumph over "the stubbornness of human passions" and celebrates as the "fulfill[ment of] a divine command," Clara remains uncertain as to the true source of his motivations (195). Deliberating, she lays out a spectrum of possibilities for the reader, considering each in turn: "whether Wieland was a maniac, a faithful servant of his God, the victim of hellish illusions, or the dupe of human imposture, was by no means certain" (214). She has compelling evidence for several of these possibilities, particularly human imposture and mania.

After months of also hearing mysterious voices emanating from all corners of the rural estate she shared with her brother and his family, some coming from the depths of her own bedroom, she has recently discovered the source of at least some of these voices to be the enigmatic trespasser Carwin, a "biloquist" who can not only perfectly mimic human voices but also project them from various locations. In addition, her uncle, recently returned from Europe, has confided in her a family history of madness, which, conveniently enough, includes the hearing of mysterious voices. Yet in spite of these mundane proofs and her own earlier assertion that "the dreams of superstition are worthy of contempt," Clara still allows for two other distinctly supernatural possibilities: that the voice that commanded her brother to murder his family could be either divine or diabolical in origin (206). Divinely inspired or demonically possessed: these are, to Clara, equally legitimate rationales for her brother's behavior. Both

belong to a long tradition of inherited experience, a legacy of supernatural belief that forms the core of Brown's novel.

Brown uses the framework of the Puritan invisible world, a supernaturally charged landscape replete with demonic possessions and divine mandates, to underpin his narrative. His novel interweaves wonders, prodigies and spectral evidence, popularized and problematized for eighteenth-century audiences by the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692, to reformulate the conventional gothic narrative inherited from England and Europe to fit a particularly American mold. Focusing on the invisible world's internal dimensions and its effects on the psyches of each character, each possessed of their own inner supernatural landscape, Brown reshapes the historically disempowered (or corrupted) femininity associated with supernatural contact into both the source and heart of reason and resiliency. Clara, the female narrator of *Wieland*, named for and entrusted with the task of providing clarity to a monumentally twisted and shadowy tale, is the author, investigator, and survivor of its events, rather than simply their victim. Through her, Brown metamorphoses the darkest components of inherited supernatural beliefs and their troubling histories into a series of surmountable trials that test, and mostly exonerate, female virtue while simultaneously re-inscribing the invisible world on the American imaginative landscape. Although she must ultimately leave her American home and its invisible world influences behind and emigrate to Europe to survive, Clara sets the stage for even more independent and adaptive female archetypes in a tradition that will migrate and evolve within the national romances written by women such as Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick.

Brown's interest in feminism was strongly shaped by Mary Wollstonecraft. An early fan of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), his review for Philadelphia *Ladies Magazine* expounded on the power of its arguments. A truncated version of his own feminist dialog, *Alcuin*, appeared in the *Weekly Magazine* under the title "Rights of Women," a gesture towards

her influence.<sup>1</sup> This influence appears in many of his essays and novels: he was drawn in particular to Wollstonecraft's idea of persuading women "to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness" (Wollstonecraft 9). In place of sentimental weakness, Wollstonecraft urged a universal model of rational intellect, in which both genders strive for "discerning truth, . . . the power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations" (53–54). It is along these lines that Brown shapes Clara, an ideal American in the Wollstonecraftian mold.

*Wieland's* female narrator creates a version of the gothic centered in gendered questions of authority and authorship. Brown incorporates Puritan genres like the spiritual autobiography and juxtaposes Enlightened rationales with invisible world evidences to create a paradigm of female exemplarity that draws strength from, and reconfigures, the framework of supernatural belief and interpretation inherited from the Puritans into the outlines of a protofeminist tradition that belies the dominant idea of the American gothic as a "melodrama of beset manhood."<sup>2</sup>

## **An Incredibly Wonderful Gothic: Applications and Interpretations of Invisible Evidence**

*All is wildering conjecture (Clara Wieland, 202)*

*My opinions were the sport of eternal change. (Clara Wieland, 205).*

Brown's status as a creator of early proto-feminist literature is not nearly as well known

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<sup>1</sup> Numerous critics have discussed Wollstonecraft's influence on Brown's writing. See in particular Layson, Fleischmann, and Hare.

<sup>2</sup> See Baym's landmark essay, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors."

as his role as a notable forebear of “the gothic.” Critics most often cite Brown’s novels as a source of inspiration for authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James.<sup>3</sup> Many base Brown’s status as a progenitor of the American gothic tradition in the appropriation and adaptation of Puritan themes.<sup>4</sup> Following Leslie Fiedler’s canonical reading of the American gothic mode as distinctly Puritan in origin, rooted in a world that functions, per Puritan tradition, “not as an ultimate reality but a system of signs to be discovered,” these readings mark the symbolic structure of the American gothic as an appropriation of theological framework of the colonial past (29). For Fiedler, the American gothic tale functioned as an extension of the Puritan worldview, “a Calvinist expose of natural human corruption” (160). Others read the gothic as more an indictment than an endorsement of Puritanism; Lawrence Buell, for example, cites “the perception of Puritan culture as inherently grotesque” as “the most distinctive thematic ingredient” of the genre, and Dorothy Baker sees the gothic as a means of first providing an “expose” of the “flawed and unstable narratives” inherited from Puritan tradition, in order to “propose alternate versions of America, its history, its citizens, and its historians” (359; 10). This idea of alterity is, I argue, central to Brown’s project of creating a precedent of female agency compelling enough to be simultaneously quintessentially gothic and to transcend generic boundaries and appeal to the succeeding generation of national romancers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Waterman’s preface to the Norton edition of *Wieland* identifies it as a “cult novel” of the nineteenth century and numbers Hawthorne among its fans. Ringe’s *American Gothic* lists Brown as the inspiration for a genre that reaches its fullest development in Hawthorne and Poe. Norwood sees Brown’s novels as a prominent source for mixing legalistic themes, particularly ideas of “deeds and lawful ownership” with gothic conventions in ways that inspire the works of later authors including Hawthorne and Cooper, among others (107). Reynolds describes Brown as “the first American novelist in a school that would come to include Poe, Hawthorne, and Henry James, who connect reverie and supernatural visitation with psychology rather than doctrinal commentary or religious comfort” (45).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Ruttenburg links the moonlit room where Clara confronts her phantom tormenter with the moonlit attic of *The Scarlet Letter* (247-248). Ziff’s “A Reading of *Wieland*” cites Brown as the first link in a chain of authors, to be followed by Hawthorne and Melville, who confront questions of “the artist” and his quasi-supernatural powers of storytelling through “the confusion of sentiment and an optimistic psychology, both of which flowed through the chink in the Puritan dike, and to represent American progress away from a doctrine of depravity as a very mixed blessing indeed” (“A Reading of *Wieland*” 54).

<sup>5</sup> On many fronts, writers of national romances actively sought to create distance between their work and gothic conventions. More positive in outlook and more avowedly (in theory if not practice) realistic, national romances sought to present “history” without fantasy. This divide, however, was not so rigidly enforced as some have argued, and some authors, particularly female authors, were able to carry over many gothic tropes and techniques into their own work in compelling and distinctive ways. For more on this topic, see chapter 2 of this project.

While insisting upon American individuality and difference, since “the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe,” Brown nevertheless recognized American subject matter, or at least *his* American subject matter, as essentially gothic.<sup>6</sup> His novels discard castles and chimeras but are full of violence and peril, with murders, attempted murders, rapes, deadly epidemics and debilitating plagues, as well as signs, specters, mysterious voices, trances, sleepwalking, and madness. They unfold in secluded estates, depopulated cityscapes, and wilderness caves and grottos infused with all the haunted potential of the most dilapidated gothic castle and imbued with a particularly American supernatural heritage. According to Thomas Hillard, gothic tension in early American writing principally stems from “the resurgence of older, discarded worldviews that threaten the integrity of the author’s (or character’s) current belief system” (24). Again and again, Brown’s American gothic rests on the tension between the old Calvinist system of wonders and the rational, Enlightened need to explain every sensation, external or internal, as a knowable, definable, and natural event. He wanted, he claimed, “to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame” (*Edgar Huntly* 3). In focusing on “wonderful diseases or affections” that resulted from American identity Brown invoked both the “rational” and empirical language of eighteenth-century scientific discourse, which had begun to zealously investigate and to parse the internal, mental causes of disease and abnormality, and the “wonderful” vocabulary of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritan theology, in which “wonder” stemmed not from an internal, personal impulse but rather as a recognition of the external forces, either divine or diabolical, that could transcend their

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<sup>6</sup> *Edgar Huntly*, 3. Brown’s investment in the gothic rested in fostering the development of a uniquely American literature. He saw the gothic genre as a “highly desirable import,” one that would function even better when adapted to American themes (Tennenhouse 96). In his preface to *Edgar Huntly* (1799), published a year after *Wieland*, Brown explained the superiority of his American setting when compared with European models, “Puerile superstition and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed. . . . The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness, are far more suitable; and for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology” (3).

“invisible world” origins to reshape the visible world, transforming mundane reality in order to transmit a specific message. In one system, the disease (usually under the umbrella of madness) created the wonders. In the other, the wonders caused the disease. In *Wieland*, his “American Tale,” Brown explored the overlap.

*Wieland* begins with a clear emphasis on wonders and the Puritan tradition that supports them. In the brief advertisement before the narrative begins, Brown explains, “it will be necessary to add, that this narrative is addressed, in an epistolary form, by the Lady whose story it contains, to a small number of friends, whose curiosity, with regard to it, had been greatly awakened” (4). While most scholars agree the Great Awakening of the 1740s did not receive its appellation until minister-historian Joseph Tracy published his historical treatise *The Great Awakening* in 1842, the language is nevertheless evocative of the revivals, which drew upon immediate, powerful experiences of wondrous communion with the divine and briefly reinvigorated eighteenth-century Calvinism. Set “between the conclusion of the French [1763] and the beginning of the revolutionary war [1775],” *Wieland*’s main events follow the religious fervor. When Clara begins her own narration, she continues within the frame of this tradition, identifying her story “not as a claim upon your sympathy,” but rather a testament to a kind of predestination that easily fits within the Calvinist mold: “the decree that ascertained the condition of my life, admits of no recall. No doubt it squares with eternal equity. That is neither to be questioned nor denied by me” (5-6). Her introductory material highlights the narrative’s wondrous contents:

How will your wonder, and that of your companions, be excited by story! . . . If my testimony were without corroborations, you would reject it as incredible. The experience of no human being can furnish a parallel: That I, beyond the rest of mankind, should be reserved for a destiny without alleviation, and without example! Listen to my narrative, and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence, if, indeed every faculty be not suspended in wonder that I am still alive, and am able to

relate it. (6)

Clara's repeated insistence upon the 'wonderful' nature of her experiences, as well as her promise to provide corroboration lest her tale otherwise be deemed incredible, foreground the material and the problem of narrative, both of which are highly attuned to the perils of the invisible world.

At the beginning of Clara's narration, the Wieland descendants spend their time reading Cicero and staging intellectual debates and entertainments in what was formerly their father's temple. They seem to have winnowed "the God-charged universe of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards . . . to a common sense world that would have gladdened the heart of Benjamin Franklin," but the veneer of progress that ostensibly separates them from their supernatural inheritance is, at best, superficial (Gilmore 110). The framework of the novel, just like the framework of Clara's and Wieland's psyches, is always already underpinned by the Calvinist past. Just as Wieland Jr. cannot long refrain from interjecting his "calvinistic inspiration" into the cohort's lively discussions of Cicero, Clara cannot long imbue her family history with Enlightenment enthusiasm without lapsing into anxiety about their invisible world heritage, especially since evidences of that heritage are always close at hand (28).

Wondrous and mysterious phenomena abound in Mettingen, and while Clara tries to apply the lens of rational skepticism to the events she experiences, the possibility of supernatural influence never truly leaves her mind, nor does the evidence she collects truly discount it. At the beginning of her narrative, Clara Wieland describes her father's mysterious death: overcome by a presentiment of his own doom, the elder Wieland goes to the private temple he has constructed on a cliff at the estate, only to be enveloped in a mysterious explosion and a glowing cloud which dissipates the moment others arrive at the temple. While her father dies from the burns he receives, the temple itself emerges absolutely undamaged. Clara presents this history as a neatly summarized series of evidences all geared towards warding off mundane explanation: "Such was the end of my father . . . When we recollect his gloomy anticipations and

unconquerable anxiety; the security from human malice which his character, the place, and the condition of the times, might be supposed to confer; the purity and cloudlessness of the atmosphere, which rendered it impossible that lightning was the cause; what are the conclusions that we must form?" (20-21).

Having laid out her facts, Clara goes on to posit two alternative readings:

Was this the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand? Is it a fresh proof that the Divine Ruler interferes in human affairs, meditates an end, selects, and commissions his agents, and enforces, by unequivocal sanctions, submission to his will? Or, was it merely the irregular expansion of the fluid that imparts warmth to our heart and our blood, caused by the fatigue of the preceding day, or flowing, by established laws, from the condition of his thoughts? (21)

As with her analysis of her brother's motivations for murder, Clara does not settle on a definite reading, but rather focuses on a range of possibilities. The two alternatives she offers: a providential execution via supernatural means, or a natural phenomenon, spontaneous combustion, rare but not unknown in the annals of scientific discourse, represent the two dominant epistemes of the novel, which constantly overlaps the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discourse of wonders, prodigies and providences that ruled the destinies of the New England Puritans and provided for near constant supernatural influence on natural people, places, and things with the Enlightened empiricism of the eighteenth century and the need to test and validate all evidence of the senses as attributable to rational, natural, and fully explicable events. Enlightened analysis cannot successfully account for Clara's experiences, and the possibility of divinely or diabolically mandated wonders is relentlessly compelling but also incredibly problematic—it raises the specters of the "superstitious" past and transforms Mettingen, the representative American estate, from a parable of progress to a site of gothic tension.

Brown's version of the gothic collapsed two main pillars of the traditional gothic



inherited from English and European models— his novels elide historical and ideological distance to focus instead on the destabilizing persistence, and proximity, of old models of belief. “Traditional” gothic novels tended to be set in the distant past, which provided a kind of safe space wherein supernatural manifestations could be carefully managed, simultaneously portrayed as both true and false—false for the modern reader, whose world need not contain the spectres and spectacles that filled the novel’s pages, but true for the characters, and, even more essentially, true to history, or at least, to a historical system of belief which could be both familiar and recognizably obsolete.<sup>7</sup> The more distant the setting, both chronologically and geographically, the more comfortable the enlightened reader could feel in embracing a story both as simultaneously “fiction and historical document” (Clery 54). Brown, however, sought to destabilize the implied distance between rational readers and superstitious characters, collapsing both geographical and chronological divides. The main events of *Wieland*, published in 1798, take place a mere 30 or so years before, and its (surviving) characters are still alive, only barely at the threshold of old age. In addition, the novel’s structure, which chronicles the supernatural histories and encounters of three generations of the same family, insists upon a narrative of intensely personal heritage rather than generic distance.<sup>8</sup> Brown’s American gothic is not rooted in far-flung tales of distant ancestors, but rather in the very near inheritance of parents and siblings, many of whom, however reluctantly, subscribe to their progenitors’

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<sup>7</sup> For a succinct and insightful discussion of the role of historicity in gothic fiction, see Clery’s *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, in which she argues for a strict timeline of gothic plausibility: “The supernatural is admitted to representation on condition that exists *only* in representation, as fiction, myth, or superstition, without claims to external reality. . . . The fictionality of superstitious phenomena is taken for granted by the critic. . . . For the enlightened reader, ancient romances are at once fictions and historical documents. The same standard that allows for the depiction of irrational impossibilities in works from the distant past must therefore disallow it in modern fictions” (54). This distancing mechanism is among the reasons that Weber argued the gothic participates in the disenchantment of the world,” although numerous challenges to this perspective have since been levied.

<sup>8</sup> A number of critics have argued that Brown’s fiction in particular operates differently than the typical “disenchanted” mechanism of the European or English gothic. Fliegelman sees Brown as an exception to the mold of the traditional gothic writer because he was more interested in “remystifying” than “demystifying” the supernatural (x). Ringel argues that the supernatural is the “intellectual center” of *Wieland* rather than the more common “trickery or magic delusion” of traditional gothic fare (40). For readers like Tennenhouse, this is emblematic of a larger American gothic geared not toward disenchantment and alienation but rather toward an insistence upon supernatural history and a problematization of neat narratives of rational progression (96).

supernatural beliefs.

Brown not only destabilizes the comforting framework of gothic “distance,” he problematizes the logic upon which rational enjoyment of supernatural tales could rest. Clara’s refusal to abandon the supernatural as a legitimate explanation, coupled with her inability to define the parameters and sources of supernatural agency, not only indicates her investment in a framework of wonders, but also her willingness to follow that investment past the merely wonderful and into the bounds of the incredible. While the wonderful could be compelling for eighteenth-century audiences when tethered to the comforting certainty that a rational, or quasi-rational, explanation lurked somewhere behind the awe, it was less so when that quasi-rational explanation never appeared, or was ignored when it did.<sup>9</sup> Refusing a modern resolution undermined rather than underscored the narrative of progress from irrational (but exciting) superstition to rational (boring, comforting, explicable) enlightenment. Clara asserts that “the dreams of superstition are beyond contempt” but continues to dream them (206). She repeatedly refuses to accept the empirical evidence of Carwin’s bilquism as an abnormal but physiologically possible natural phenomenon, and instead insists on supernatural agency beyond natural biology, as, “I could not deny faith to the evidence of my religion . . . to persuade me that evil spirits existed, and their energy was frequently exerted in the system of the world” (205). She crosses from the wonderfully possible into the potentially incredible—she not only seeks explanations in systems based outside the standards of rational believability, she insists on constantly evaluating and presenting evidence in ways that resist compelling explication of any kind. At the end of the novel, when she has neither found concrete explanations nor renounced any possible interpretations, she ends up in a zone of ambiguous uncertainty that calls up the specters of both the Calvinist past and the Enlightened present without fully subscribing to

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<sup>9</sup> The logic of eighteenth-century investment in the wonderful depended upon a backstop of the potentially plausible. No matter how implausible the wonderful seemed, it was acceptable (and enjoyable) when it could be tethered to some kind of “rational” explanation. Without this tether, the wonderful ran the risk of being incredible, and therefore inexplicable and unverifiable. Without the legitimating force of some kind of credibility, only the potential of superstition and baseless, “backward” fantasy remained.

either. Into this incredible space, then, Brown's novel falls, and Clara's uncertainty threatens to become the reader's.<sup>10</sup>

To understand the perils of this uncertainty, it is worth looking more closely at exactly how the invisible world underpins the world of *Wieland*. The landscape of the estate provides the framework for a series of wonderful experiences with distinctly gothic dimensions. Not only do the grounds and enclosures of the estate blur the lines of external and internal space, acting as metonyms for and reflections of the various characters' minds in a way that closely mirrors the invisible/visible world overlap necessary for the appearance of wonders and prodigies, Mettingen's extreme emptiness ensures that the estate acts as what Nancy Ruttenburg describes as a "spectral space," removed from "purity, from history, and from community" and permeated instead only by the mysterious phenomena that invoke the remnants and revenants of the Wieland family's complicated legacy.<sup>11</sup>

The extreme isolation of the family is the most telling alteration Brown makes to what is otherwise a fairly faithful mirroring of Puritan history.<sup>12</sup> The Wieland family story, deeply

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<sup>10</sup> Numerous critics have situated *Wieland* on the precipice between America's Calvinist past and its rational, Enlightenment present. While some critics chart a positive progression in the generational transition between "Puritan narrowness to large minded Enlightenment views," most ultimately argue that Brown uses each as an implied critique of the other (Tompkins 53). Fliegelman, Gilmore, Ziff ("A Reading of *Wieland*") and Samuels ("*Wieland*, Alien and Infidel") have each pointed to the replacement in *Wieland* of ministerial authority and theologically based worldviews with the more comfortably rational and empirical eighteenth-century systems of medicine and law as indictments of the limitations of both systems, in which the circumscriptions of Puritan belief are limiting but offer protection from overly democratic systems of interpreting knowledge, which offer an ultimately unstable amount of freedom and open the doors for gothic chaos.

<sup>11</sup> There is an impressive body of scholarship available on the symbolic function of landscape and architecture in *Wieland*. Norwood deconstructs the significance of Clara's phrase "the grounds of your belief" and argues that the entire narrative "revolves around the capacity of the landscape to generate and retain meaning" (89-90). Ringel points out that the novel is full of signifying enclosures and identifies the temple, the summerhouse, and Clara's bedroom and closet, as particular reflection of each character's mind (55). According to Faherty, "the younger Wielands tenant their father's history as fully as they inhabit his structural productions," because Brown's architecture represents not merely buildings but the embodiment of the philosophies and even psyches of the builders. Faherty cites "the depth of Brown's absorption with houses as registers of the ways in which the past continues to inform the present" as evidence that Brown's concern with architecture was, as one contemporary reviewer had argued, his "defining strength as a novelist" (50).

<sup>12</sup> Ruttenburg, 223. Tompkins also highlights the "empty" social spaces of the isolated Wieland family as a telling example of their vulnerability. According to Emerson, "Critics have identified the seclusion of the Mettingen group as one source of its collective weakness in judgment. Without the moderating effects of varied social congress, such isolated groups as the Wielands would be viewed by eighteenth-century American readers as particularly vulnerable to fraud and deceit" (138).

steeped in religious and supernatural mores, follows a familiarly Puritan path—her father, Theodore Wieland Sr., discovers an obscure religious tract while working as an apprentice in London; his obsession with this tract reshapes his psyche to the extent that “the empire of religious duty” assumes control of every aspect of his life and sends him to America, where he can practice his religion in peace.<sup>13</sup> Performing the Puritan exodus in microcosm, he acquires a patch of wilderness and builds upon it a familial estate, the central feature of which is a “temple of his Deity,” a small edifice carved into the top of a rock formation that overlooks a sheer precipice and raging river on the other. On the rock upon which he has built his own personal church, Wieland Sr. holds his religious devotions, mirroring the Puritan narrative in everything except the creation of a spiritual community—rather than seeking to populate his city on the hill with a body of like-minded believers, the elder Wieland carefully holds himself aloof from any taint of “social worship” and avoids sharing any tenets of his own belief or accepting any challenges to his personal decree.

The particulars of the elder Wieland’s religious practice are immolated along with him, but his temple remains, and the two children are left to grow up isolated within their wilderness estate, subscribing to no set religion and without any real companions or friends besides Catharine and Henry Pleyel, a mirroring set of brother and sister who become permanent parts of the fixture of Mettingen when Catharine marries young Theodore Wieland. Wieland Jr. shares his father’s “moral necessity, and calvinistic inspiration,” his old fashioned-nature superficially glossed with eighteenth-century virtues, “enriched by science, and embellished with literature” (28, 26). Henry Pleyel is as emphatically rationalist as Wieland Jr. is essentially Calvinist, “the champion of intellectual liberty [who] rejected all guidance but that of his

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<sup>13</sup> Despite the novel’s Pennsylvania setting and its lack of directly Puritan characters, its Calvinist influences are well established, both Brown’s own “intellectual” investment in the theology and the larger eighteenth-century need to dissect and differentiate between colonial calvinism and American Enlightenment (Clark, “Brown and Robert Proud’s History” 244). The Wielands are frequently read as Calvinist characters. Clark designates Wieland Sr.’s life as “stereotypically Puritan,” while Monnet points out that [neither] Wieland is “fundamentally different in his religious beliefs from the original Puritan settlers. Mystic revelations, divine prophecies, and other private communications from God were not uncommon to early American religious practice” (27).

reason,” and Catharine seems devoid of convictions of any kind, dismissed by Clara as “clay, moulded by the circumstances in which she happened to be placed” (28,88). Clara, however, embodies the nightmare foretold in Puritan jeremiads; divorced from the faith of her forebear, she has remade her father’s temple into a music room and subscribes to the most nebulous of religious beliefs, “the product of lively feelings, excited by reflection on our own happiness, and by the grandeur of external nature,” a “mixed and casual sentiment” unconcerned with “the weighing of proofs and the dissection of creeds” (24). While these disparate perspectives make for lively debates about Cicero, they prove crippling upon the advent of the mysterious lights, bizarre dreams, and spectral voices that soon take over life on the estate.

Without either a cogent system of belief or a community of like-minded believers to mediate meaning, the four inhabitants of Mettingen have no stable platform of interpretation with which to process the wonders that begin to overrun their lives. Even as Clara believes she recognizes some kind of invisible agency in the mysterious voices, prophetic dreams, and bizarre manifestations, she constantly doubts the validity of her own analysis, and her circumscribed sphere of companions, locked into their extreme views, offer little in the way of assistance. To underline how the stripping away of intellectual and spiritual community in *Wieland* changes the parade of wonders its characters experience from a series of interpretable events to a source of inscrutably gothic terror, it is helpful to outline the way Puritans relied on communal knowledge, practice, and purpose to give wonders context and clarity, and to contrast examples of wonderful phenomena as they appear in seventeenth-century American texts with the ways Brown reimagines them in *Wieland*.

To the New England Puritans, wonders were far from incredible. Sixteenth- and seventeenth- century believers in the invisible world knew that it as an omnipresent and intrinsically mercurial system of supernatural geography through which God or the devil could reach at any time, through any combination of phenomena, from comets and apparitions to floods, fires, prophetic dreams and demonic possessions. They knew also that anyone willing to

sell his or her soul to the devil could exchange it for invisible agency, adding yet more phenomena and yet more uncertainty. In spite of its ubiquity and instability, Puritan comfort with the invisible world rested upon the presence of communal reassurance, in the common understanding that the signs the invisible world produced would be collectively monitored and endured, and that their ultimate significance could be judged by ministers, a class of capable interpreters trained in navigating the supernatural landscape.<sup>14</sup> Prodigies, portents, wonders, and prophecies recorded a providential plan and unfolded as a part of a larger narrative, chapters in the chronicle of a divinely-sanctioned project that, even if indecipherable now, would one day be made legible by God's revealing master script.

When John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, realized that among those daily signs he could identify and catalog as “show[ing] the power of God in his ordinances, and his blessings upon his people,” or the devil's plots to “disturb our peace and to raise up instruments one after another,” there were others that remained indecipherable, even to the most canny minister, he was nevertheless able to reconcile himself to the uncertainty (1:322, 1:285). He comforted himself with the knowledge that, “what these prodigies portended the Lord only knows, which in his due time he will manifest” (2:264). Winthrop could trust in his community and his project—he took comfort in the knowledge that even if the ultimate understanding was deferred until long after his lifetime, the record he created would remain and one day be deciphered by others further advanced in the providential narrative that was New England's glorious destiny. The gothic version of the invisible world that Brown creates, however, is utterly devoid of this communal assurance. In the absolute isolation of geography (the Wieland family drama unfolds on an isolated family estate) and history (Brown's exaggeratedly rigid portrayal of eighteenth century modernity leaves little intellectual or

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<sup>14</sup> See Winship's *Seers of God* and Hall's *Wonders* on the communal nature of invisible world experiences and analysis, plus the comforting hierarchy of ministerial analysis. See Ruttenburg and Ziff's *Puritanism and America* for discussions of the dangerous potential of removing or transcending this hierarchy, as in Salem or the Great Awakening.

spiritual space for the supernatural), Clara has neither the interpretive framework nor the social network to successfully weather and decipher her invisible world experiences.<sup>15</sup>

Clara's narrative mirrors John Winthrop's chronicle of the Puritan project in New England in key areas of structure and content, with the major difference that everything Winthrop describes as a communal endeavor, Clara records as an individual effort, one stunted and deformed by isolation. A commitment to a "community of saints" defines the Winthrop of historical record; he famously delivered a brief speech to his fellow colonists upon arriving in Massachusetts Bay that enjoined them to remember that "we must . . . make others conditions our own rejoice together, mourn together, labor, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body, so shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us."<sup>16</sup> If they stayed together and remembered their purpose, Winthrop promised, then they would be a shining "City upon a Hill," but if they turned away from their work or each other they would "surely perish" ("Model" 176). By Winthrop's measure, Wieland Sr.'s estate upon a hill, though conceived in the shape of divine standards, is almost certainly doomed by its exclusivity—one saint is not enough.

Winthrop's narrative overflows with invisible world experiences, unfolding a providential history that charts both natural and supernatural evidences of Puritan progress, in which wonders play a crucial role. "It is useful to observe, as we go along," Winthrop wrote in 1635, "such especial providences of God as were manifested for the good of these plantations."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In reality, the idea of the strict opposition of Enlightened reason and magical superstition has received numerous challenges. Walsham's "The Reformation and 'The Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed" provides a good overview of these. It is not my intention to endorse this logic, rather to argue that Brown insists upon and exaggerates this binary for effect in *Wieland*, using the chasm between the two epistemes as a means of heightening its gothic uncertainty.

<sup>16</sup> "Model," 176. For extended readings of Winthrop's journal as a document of communal unity, and the role of wonders in creating and reaffirming community, see McKeown and Hall's *Worlds of Wonder*.

<sup>17</sup> 1:163. The first two of the three notebooks that contain Winthrop's journals were initially published in 1790, affording Brown ample time and opportunity to familiarize himself with their content.

Winthrop's journals share a number of key similarities with *Wieland*: Winthrop, like Clara's father, came to colonial America to shape the wilderness in accord with the template of his holy book, and like Clara Winthrop documents the wonders that fill his life with empirical precision. Both Winthrop and Clara write retrospectively, in spurts of memory that retrospectively organize and contextualize momentous events from the past. The wonderful phenomena Winthrop collects as everyday parts of his project have discordant echoes in *Wieland*. Both texts contain numerous light apparitions.<sup>18</sup> Among the incidents Winthrop cannot immediately parse but trusts in God to one day decipher are why in 1638, "One James Everell, a sober and discreet man...saw a great light in the night at Muddy River." The light rose from the river, inexplicably assumed the shape of a swine, and moved through the sky "swift as an arrow" for several hours until Everell mysteriously found his boat dragged against the tide to another part of the river (284). In 1643, a group of lights "in form like a man . . . went a small distance to the town." and a week later "a light like the moon" appeared in the sky over Nottles Island and "a voice was heard upon the water between Boston and Dorchester, calling out in a most dreadful manner, boy, boy, come away, come away" (493-494).

In *Wieland*, light attends the death of Clara's father: "a cloud impregnated with light. It had the brightness of flame, but was without its upward motion. It did not occupy the whole area, and rose but a few feet above the floor. No part of the building was on fire . . . As he went forward the light retired, and, when he put his feet within the apartment, utterly vanished. . . . Fear and wonder rendered him powerless" (16). Mysterious lights appear alongside nearly every visitation from the uncanny voices. Lights lure Clara to the threshold where she beholds a glowing, terrifying face, which seems to her the very face of evil. When it disappears, she discovers the light that attended it was supernatural as well: "Neither lamp nor candle was to be

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<sup>18</sup> Light apparitions are a familiar genre of wonder: Winthrop was most likely conversant with light phenomena from texts like Thomas Hill's *Contemplations of Mysteries Contayning the Rare Effectes and Significations of Certain Comets*, which covers the topic fairly exhaustively. Nor did interest in the portentous possibilities of light phenomena begin in Early Modern England, with writing like Hill's—Pliny's *Natural History* contains numerous references that were of interest to students of wonderful phenomena.



found. Now, for the first time, suspicions were suggested as to the nature of the light which I had seen. Was it possible to have been the companion of that supernatural visage; a meteorous refulgence producible at the will of him to whom that visage belonged, and partaking of the nature of that which accompanied my father's death?" (69-170). Wieland Jr.'s confession also describes his moment of communion with his newly discovered deity as being enveloped in a cloud of light:

"How shall I describe the lustre, which, at that moment, burst upon my vision! I was dazzled. My organs were bereaved of their activity. My eye-lids were half-closed, and my hands withdrawn from the balustrade. A nameless fear chilled my veins, and I stood motionless. This irradiation did not retire or lessen. It seemed as if some powerful effulgence covered me like a mantle. I opened my eyes and found all about me luminous and glowing. It was the element of heaven that flowed around. Nothing but a fiery stream was at first visible; but, anon, a shrill voice from behind called upon me to attend." (190)

The voice that speaks from the light goes on to command Wieland to murder his family. In all of their appearances in the novel, lights presage uncertainty and invoke terror—they remind the Wieland children of the death of their father, and, as other critics have pointed out, embody a supernatural incarnation of "Enlightenment" that provides supernatural terror in the place of rational assurance.<sup>19</sup>

*Wieland's* lights, like Winthrop's, almost always attend other wonders. In *Wieland*, the appearance of wondrous lights universally foreshadows inexplicable and devastating disaster. This is not so much the case in Winthrop's journals. Tellingly, Winthrop's mysterious lights do not immolate anyone, nor does the unexplained voice that accompanies some of them successfully incite any of Winthrop's colonists to mass murder. Yet light apparitions perform a similar function in Winthrop's text, marking traumatic moments in the narrative. According to

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<sup>19</sup> For a sample of the many extant readings of *Wieland* as a critique of Enlightened systems of interpretation, see Fliegelman, Tompkins, Temple, and Samuels, "'Wieland': Alien and Infidel."

Adam McKeown, the light apparitions in Winthrop's *History of New England* appear at points in which the communal stability of the colonists faces some kind of external threat, adding a supernatural, spiritual analog to a moment of mundane distress. McKeown points out that the first light apparition Winthrop describes is "positioned amid a long and anxious passage about the Pascataquack settlement," in which Winthrop worries about land rightfully belonging to the colony being taken away by nefarious means (304). The lights accompanied by mysterious voices appear at the same time as a description of the colonists' reluctant decision to dismantle and abandon nearby fortifications at Castle Island, fortifications Winthrop worried were vital to communal defense. McKeown argues that, rather than incitements to terror or panic, Winthrop writes the wondrous lights as emblems for contemplation, reminders that real-world, visible decisions and traumas always have invisible, supernatural analogs. Emblems, as McKeown defines them, function as a common Puritan trope not intended to provoke rational, final explanations, but rather extensive meditation. Winthrop's insertion of light apparitions to mark moments of communal trauma reminds readers to contemplate both the physical and spiritual implications of events, but this contemplation is always located within the comforting framework of divinely sanctioned communal endeavor Winthrop, unlike Clara, is looking back on, and writing the account of, a successful project, for an audience he fully expects to share his interpretations and his comforts with the limits of human knowledge and analysis.<sup>20</sup>

So comfortable, in fact, is Winthrop in his project that he downplays and even glosses over what McKeown reads as the "conspicuously demonic nature of these light apparitions, which goes unidentified but which is substantiated by good evidence and credible testimony" (313). Looking back through the canon of wonder literature that preceded Winthrop's narrative,

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<sup>20</sup> While it may seem disingenuous to insist upon reading Winthrop's journals, ostensibly a private project, as inherently public and intended for a larger audience, there are a number of reasons to do so. First, as McKeown points out, the intense Puritan focus on community, and the ubiquity of communal endeavor would mean that "someone like Winthrop would be writing for the community even if he were writing only for himself" (302). Should that logic seem too pat, consider also that Winthrop's journals are not day-to-day musings or recordings, but rather written years after the fact in spurts of retrospective contemplation, a preservation of history as much as an outlet of individual reflection.

McKeown argues that light phenomena, particularly when paired with the exhortations of mysterious, dangerous, and persuasive voices, as with the lights over Nottles Island that enjoin the listener to “come away,” should almost certainly be read as Satanic in origin. That Winthrop does not explicitly make this connection, but instead leaves the phenomena unexplicated and open to interpretation, reflects his investment in “the importance of marshaling knowledge and exercising interpretive faculties” (McKeown 313). Secure in the framework of communal stability, Winthrop’s appraisal of light apparitions reflects little of the apocalyptic anxiety these apparitions provoke in *Wieland*, where there is no unifying larger project, but only a single representative family, a microcosmic community whose contemplation of the apparitions they encounter can never overlap into any kind of comforting certainty. Thus, what forms a subject of useful mystery in the *History of New England* can only bring about debilitating terror in *Wieland*.

Nor are light apparitions the only, or even the most intimidating, wonder in *Wieland*. The mysterious voice that appears once in Winthrop’s catalog of wonders multiplies and proliferates in *Wieland*. Voices attend the mysterious lights, the uncanny dreams, and almost every unsettling incident in the novel; they are the central source of wonder in *Wieland*. Voices had a long history of association with the possibility of being, in the words of St. Paul, “a lying wonder.”<sup>21</sup> Contemporary readers of Winthrop’s *History of New England* would most likely have associated the mysterious voice on the water as Satan’s because Satan’s desire to make himself heard was an often repeated wonder, not only in mysterious disembodied voices, but through the possession and manipulation of innocent victims.

Carwin’s bioquialism, which rests in Brown’s novel on some nebulous border between naturally possible ventriloquism and supernaturally enabled manipulation, describes what for subscribers to a wonderful universe would easily register as a diabolical wonder. In *Saducismus Triumphatus: Or Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (1681), Joseph

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<sup>21</sup> For an excellent overview of this history, see Schmidt.

Glanvill discussed this phenomenon at length: “For *Ventriloquy*, or speaking from the bottom of the Belly, ‘tis a thing I think as strange and difficult to be conceived as any thing in Witchcraft, nor can it, I believe, be performed in any distinctness of articulate sounds, without such assistance of the Spirits, that spoke of out of the *Daemoniacks*” (2:64). Both the rational, enlightened perspective of the nineteenth-century empiricist and the theologically structured viewpoint of the sixteenth and seventeenth century believer in wonders approached spectral voices as innately deceptive. What believers in wonders saw as almost certainly the voice of the duplicitous devil, eighteenth-century observers were inclined to view as the work of duplicitous humans counterfeiting supernatural speech. Whatever the origin, voices are always suspect. Both belief systems share an intrinsic skepticism that heightens the gothic uncertainty of Brown’s novel. The profusion of mysterious voices, however, is not just an intensification of uncertainty, but also an incarnation of the struggle for narrative agency at the heart of the novel.

### **Authorship and Agency**

*What but ambiguities, abruptnesses, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters? (Clara Wieland, 179)*  
*At length, I mentioned and deplored the ignorance in which I had been kept respecting my brother's destiny, and the circumstances of our misfortunes. I entreated him to tell me what was Wieland's condition, and what progress had been made in detecting or punishing the author of this unheard-of devastation.*

*"The author!" said he; "Do you know the author?" (Clara Wieland and her uncle, 182)*

Brown’s switch to auditory (words) rather than visual (images) spectral evidence underscores the importance of language and reflects the intense interconnection of speech and text in *Wieland*. The surfeit of spectral voices in the events of the novel mirrors the profusion of voices and would-be narrators who wish to tell the story itself. In *Wieland*, which ostensibly documents one woman’s experience, narratives and narrative voices proliferate, producing multiple contradictory texts that further confuse the already murky outlines of supernatural

experience. Many of these narratives utilize Puritan genres and frameworks in ways that draw out the novel's gendered anxieties about authorship and authority. Clara must struggle against the presumptions of an exegetical tradition freighted against female participation to preserve the integrity of her narrative. In spite of numerous challenges, however, she nonetheless manages and controls a proliferation of narrative voices.

Jay Fliegelman reads the plethora of narrative and spectral voices that torment Mettingen's inhabitants as illustrations of the dangerous influence of eighteenth-century rhetoric. His introduction to the 1991 edition of the novel stresses the late-eighteenth-century evolution of rhetorical tradition to emphasize how performance rather than content changed the purpose of language, producing "not voluntary assent but involuntary desire" (xxix). In an analogous model, the writer's job involved creating narratives as a kind of transformative domination that, in Godwin's words, "shall constitute such an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before."<sup>22</sup> Brown, Fliegelman argues, was highly aware of the moral ambiguity invoked by this paradigm, which "implicitly suggests [that] eloquence was a male equivalent to the power of female beauty to create desire, to solicit something akin to an involuntary sexual response" (xxix). Language's seductive, transformative power represented particular perils to a new nation grounded in an ideology of "free speech" and codified by the dictates of a master-text, the Constitution. These fears about the powers and uses of language, however, should not be read as solely the products of eighteenth-century rhetoric; they reflect an entrenched facet of New England heritage.

The perils of disembodied voices were a staple of invisible-world interpretation and an outgrowth of the awesome power of language in general. As "People of the Word," New England Puritans thought constantly about the importance and inherent power of *all* words,

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<sup>22</sup> Fliegelman argues that Godwin's "romantic and visionary" paradigm of authorship was instrumental in the formation of Brown's own understanding of the writing process, as well as key component of gothic writing in general, which aimed to overwhelm, and thrill readers through the careful deployment of formulaic shocks. While Fliegelman emphasizes Brown's ambivalence toward these mechanisms, he stresses the idea that Brown himself worried they would be nearly impossible to escape (xxi).

continuously striving to find the “Right” words and to avoid the perils of unrighteous language. Hearing and reading in colonial New England, done righteously, produced the same response, “a rush of feeling, a moment of sharp self-awareness, a new sense of obligation” (*Worlds of Wonder* 42). Unrighteous language was as dangerous as righteous language was affirming—the devil’s powers of persuasion were legendary, as were those of his minions and followers, and even the ill-considered words of the thoughtless could be intensely destructive when loosed upon the world. All words, read or heard, had to be weighed carefully, their origins and effects calculated. A culture “at the crossroads of speech and print,” Puritans made the Bible a constitutional text, “their script for living;” they perceived “speech and script as interdependent, overlapping, virtually contiguous.”<sup>23</sup> Countless New England texts occupied a fluid space of oral-textual interchangeability: the Bible offered the means to “make audible” the word of God and was frequently read aloud; sermons, exhortations, and other oral performances were constantly transcribed to be read and re-read at later times. Collapsing the distinction between the written and the spoken allowed language, like wonders, to exist as part of a flexible spectrum that was ubiquitous to intellectual, spiritual, and everyday life.

The proliferation of speakers, speeches, and texts in *Wieland* mirrors the profundity of language that defined the Puritan experience. Like the colonial New Englanders, Clara draws no real distinction between speech and text: her opening letter begs readers to “*Listen* to my narrative,” (6 italics mine). Because language in the novel is everywhere and means everything, narrative control is the key not just to authorship but authority. Clara’s task, to mediate countless narratives, many of them inherently deceptive, some explicitly hostile, under the aegis of her own, takes shape in a format that radically restructures the gendered hierarchy intrinsic to the Puritan tradition of self-writing that she draws upon. In comparing Clara’s narrative to the journals of John Winthrop, I have previously stressed similarities in content; yet the two

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<sup>23</sup> Kamensky, 34. For more on the importance and overlap of written and oral culture in Puritan New England, see Kamensky as well as Hall’s chapter on literacy in *Worlds of Wonder*.

texts also demonstrate significant formal overlap. *Wieland's* gothic structure depends not just on the wonders it documents but also upon reworking a tradition of spiritual autobiography designed to make sense of wondrous experiences, both internal and external. Much as the written and spoken word existed on a continuous spectrum, wonders were experienced as both events in the external world and in the inner realm of body and psyche. Noted minister John Norton explained, "what God hath done for the Soul of the least Saint of some few years continuance, were it digested into Order, would make a volume full of temptations, signs, and wonders: a wonderful History, because a History of such experiences, each one whereof is more than a Wonder."<sup>24</sup> Internally experienced wonders were often the most intense, as the "press of semiotic significance" was inescapable and deeply personal for a person unsure, for example, whether to attribute his insomnia to God, Satan, witchcraft, or "simple melancholy" (*Seers of God* 2). External wonders could be experienced and weathered as a community; internal ones necessitated individual engagement with all the "anxiety, instability, and danger" that such signs necessarily produced.<sup>25</sup> For countless Puritans wonder-tale-telling was self-writing.

Clara's gothic terror stems from her wondrous experiences, both internal and external, and her method for dealing with them taps into the Puritan project of spiritual autobiography.<sup>26</sup> Spiritual autobiographies foreground the necessity of creating and monitoring a spiritual self through writing—the events of an individual life, particularly those unlikely enough to meet the criteria of wonders, must be searched for signs of invisible influence and parsed according to their possible influence on the state of the individual soul as well as that soul's place in the wider community of saints. By setting up her narrative as at once divinely ordained and didactically

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Winship, *Seers of God*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> See Tredennick, Winship's *Seers of God*, and Hall's *Worlds of Wonder* for extended treatments of the internal dimensions of wonder experience.

<sup>26</sup> Fliegelman reads *Wieland* as a gothic re-envisioning of the rational tour de force was Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, but it is worth looking at the spiritual autobiographies that underlie Franklin's text. A number of critics have developed the connection between Puritan life writing and Franklin's text. See Schenider, Shea, Bercovitch, and Breitweiser for salient examples.

focused, Clara's narrative follows lines familiar to spiritual autobiography.

Clara's entrenched need to question every evidence and revisit every assumption and her proclivity to be "distressed by opposite conjectures" and to hold "opinions [that] were the sport of eternal change," lead critics like Nina Baym and Elizabeth Hinds to dismiss her as incapable of cogent analysis and label her a "failed" narrator and heroine, represents a faithful adherence to the tradition of spiritual autobiography.<sup>27</sup> While ultimately meant to be revelatory and instructive, its narrative power comes not from certainty but rather from anxiety. The impetus towards constant, restless exegesis of any and all evidence of divine communication that might point toward one's status as one of the elect, or, more likely, the damned, necessitates constant evaluation and re-evaluation. As Linda Tredennick puts it, "lack of closure . . . is a function of Puritan theology," and a necessary facet of successful life-writing, which relies upon constant vigilance toward both self and signs.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, then, Hinds's complaint that Clara's constant questioning demonstrates an essential inadequacy that "cannot or will not understand" the true significance of the events around her misses that Clara's endless questioning is, in the model of spiritual autobiography, really the ultimate answer. When Clara repeatedly confesses that, "Now was I stupefied with ten-fold wonder in contemplating myself," she is precisely where she should be (204).

Not all critics see *Wieland* as a failed narrative, or Clara as a failed narrator, particularly when viewed through the lens of the Puritan tradition. Michael Gilmore, for example, reads *Wieland* as a triumphant conversion narrative: "In Calvinist terms," he writes, at the end of the novel, "Clara has been reborn through the agency of Christ: she has bared her soul and given her assent to the doctrine of original sin" (116-117). The success of Clara's narrative on Puritan terms

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<sup>27</sup> *Wieland*, 95, 205. Baym's "A Minority Reading of *Wieland*" dismisses Clara as "simply . . . a register for melodramatic effects" (46). Hinds argues that Clara "displays an amazing lack of will" that makes her ultimately fail at narrative interpretation (109).

<sup>28</sup> Tredennick, 167. See also Stacheniewski's introduction to "*Grace Abounding*": *With Other Spiritual Autobiographies* for a discussion of Calvinism's central role in transmuting the Catholic focus behavior and works to internal analysis and "anguished introspection."



is inherently subversive. Clara is not, like Winthrop, a decorated governor and acknowledged patriarch; she is a single woman in both senses of the word, defined both by social isolation and her lack of husband, or, indeed, any kind of male authority figure. She regards her brother as an equal rather than an overseer, and, while arguably romantically interested in both Pleyel and Carwin, does not attach to that interest any sense of obligation or submission. An individual alone, without spiritual community to help shape and facilitate interpretation, is perilous enough by Puritan standards; Brown compounds this peril by making Clara a female subject who seeks to interpret her own evidences while rejecting any kind of (male) authorial or intellectual oversight.<sup>29</sup>

Ministerial superintendence was a key component in Puritan processing of wonders. The New England spiritual project depended upon a community of believers, but that community's interaction with the invisible world, like every other aspect of socio-theological practice, rested upon hierarchical structures of understanding, and not all interpreters were created equally. Everyone knew to look for and at wonders, everyone knew to monitor the effects of these wonders on landscape and psyche, but laymen and women especially knew they were expected to defer their interpretations to those of the special few who were uniquely qualified to interpret them.<sup>30</sup> These special few, the ministers and theologians whose training in God's works and words best fitted them to explicate invisible evidences, were always male. In contrast, the most

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<sup>29</sup> Critics tend to agree that Brown's decision to use a female narrator is significant. Some read Clara's femininity as a source of weakness: Fliegelman, for example, speculates "Brown's use of a female narrator in *Wieland* suggests a perverse coveting of the "status" of women as social and cultural victims" (xxiii). I am inclined to side with the numerous critics who take the other side of this argument, and to read Clara as a deliberately strong and subversive model of femininity. Several scholars have drawn attention to Clara as a manifestation of the influence of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, a paradigm of Enlightened female possibility. Paul Lewis argues that Clara should cement Brown's place among the canon of American protofeminists: "among the first novelists working in the United States, [Brown] was the most committed to probing and dramatizing the conflict between patriarchal practices and the challenges to them raised by early feminist critiques" (168).

<sup>30</sup> Ruttenburg, Gustafson, and Ziff (*Puritanism in America*), among others, stress the Puritan privileging of hierarchy of interpreters for the ubiquitous spectrum of invisible world phenomena. Wonders, prodigies, portents, and possessions were powerful signifiers, and "the rigorously educated theocracy, masters of this system of signs (to the extent that the system permitted human mastery) [raised] stringent objections" to too zealous interpretation by lay readers and common people, "motivated by their jealous regard for the sanctity of the invisible world as well as or their own exclusive, and exquisitely tentative, access to it" (Ruttenburg 39).

potent threats to the interpretive hierarchy were often female. Sandra Gustafson and Nancy Ruttenburg link Anne Hutchinson's antinomian eloquence, which allowed her to gather numerous followers to the cause of abolishing ministerial oversight and communing directly with God, to the similarly destabilizing threats later posed by the voices of the afflicted girls in Salem in 1692, who testified about their own personal experiences with the invisible world and swayed public opinion in spite of ministerial critiques.<sup>31</sup> Because of their dangerous affinity for rhetorical excess and their inherently subversive disinclination toward submitting to the proper oversight, women's writing often met with significant distrust and strict policing. The most acceptable role for a female speaker was that of the "Miriam-like penitent," confessing to her sins in formulas that demonstrated the "stabilizing, disciplinary functions that text performed on female voice" (Gustafson 32). Any text not explicitly testifying to female error required the legitimating presence of male introduction and permission.<sup>32</sup> Brown, however, is interested in problematizing rather than preserving this paradigm in *Wieland*. Clara, like Anne Hutchinson, has "stept out of [her] place" (*Controversy* 382). Through Clara, Brown distorts and dissolves the framework of male oversight and interpretive hierarchy as hubristic and unstable, emphasizing instead female proficiency.

Clara not only authors her own narrative, she incorporates and contextualizes the (error filled) narratives produced by male characters. Brown provides a plethora of these, beginning with the spiritual autobiography of Clara's father, a text that she retains custody of and reads on a regular basis. While she does not share any part of the text with her readers, Clara does categorize and critique the manuscript: "The narrative was by no means recommended by its eloquence; but neither did all its value flow from my relationship to the author. Its stile had an unaffected and picturesque simplicity" (95). Amanda Emerson reads Clara's gloss of her father's

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<sup>31</sup> 66-67. See also Ruttenburg for a discussion of the implication of the invisible world as a source of female rhetorical agency.

<sup>32</sup> See Kirk and Rivett, Gustafson, Ruttenburg and Reis for an overview of the gendered limitations put on female texts.

text as Brown's ultimate distinction between good and bad narration: "She cannot explain everything, but Clara exemplifies that she can do what her father could not—exercise judgment in selecting and relating observed phenomena. . . . Clara manages to weave the disconnected events of the family's past into reasonable patterns of significance for the present" (137). Narrative success, as Emerson observes, depends not on complete explanation, but upon the ability to recognize and produce "reasonable patterns of significance."

None of the male narratives Clara incorporates or alludes to succeed at producing these reasonable patterns. Each one—the long letters and speeches from Carwin, explicating but not clarifying his biolquial activities; her uncle's account of the family history of madness; Pleyel's extended condemnation of Clara's supposed indiscretions and allusions to his own secret chronicle of her as a feminine exemplar; and, of course, the trial transcript of Wieland Jr.—represents a diverse range of perspectives and styles, but they are alike in their active intent to override and redirect Clara's own analysis. Each contains at least the implicit, and very often the explicit, directive of altering Clara's perspective to fit its narrator's own agenda, even though the alternative narratives offered are vastly less complex, and less accurate, than Clara's own project. Pleyel insists upon a parable of fallen femininity that in no way resembles actual events, Clara's uncle's history of family madness can account for only a handful of the phenomena she has experienced, and Carwin's explanations offer nothing like narrative clarity, instead taking on the shape of elaborate and improbable fictions. The transcript of her brother's trial bears the closest resemblance to Clara's narrative in both form and project, but it represents only a distorted fragment in comparison to Clara's project.

Numerous critics read Theodore Wieland Jr.'s trial transcript as an emblematic intersection between colonial and eighteenth-century epistemology. A document that ostensibly reflects the rising power of the judicial system and the waning influence of religious authority—Wieland's crime falls to the purview of a jury, rather than a community of ministers—Wieland's complete refusal to recognize the court's authority undermines the outline of progress it

ostensibly offers.<sup>33</sup> Shirley Samuels identifies Wieland's confession, in which he narrates his conversations with the mysterious voices, describes being lost in the wilderness of Mettingen that mirrors the wilderness of his own soul, and finally recounts his communion with the unearthly light that fills him with assurance and gives him his murderous purpose, as a version of a classic Puritan conversion narrative, a testimonial of faith that explains how the believer came to be a believer, and eligible for church (and by extension community) membership. She points out, however, that Wieland's story of conversion, "instead of gaining him admittance into the "congregation," causes him to be cast out" (56). Samuels reads the "failure" of Wieland's narrative as a symptom of eighteenth-century progress toward rational culpability rather than divine inspiration. Without discounting the very real tension between these two models, I would like to suggest that Wieland's text fails even as a truly representative conversion narrative. To do this, it is necessary to look in more detail at what, exactly, a conversion narrative should entail.

Although the terms conversion narrative and spiritual autobiography are occasionally used interchangeably to designate the Puritan practice of "writing toward faith," a conversion narrative can more properly be thought of as a brief installment from the whole text of spiritual autobiography. Designed to be performed before the congregation in order to demonstrate the narrator's worthiness to join the flock, conversion narratives offered moments of spiritual affirmation that, taken alone, could be read as testimony reflecting permanent assurance of the narrator's election.<sup>34</sup> Conversion narratives were not synopses but rather excerpts from the longer project, which very rarely resolved on, or with, a moment of absolute election, but rather expressed "an intense desire for such a moment, coupled with equally intense uncertainty that such a moment has been had or ever will come" (Tredennick 163). Some spiritual autobiographies contain no moment of euphoric election, and those that do tend to see it not as definitive but rather endlessly questionable. The intensely personal wonder that was divine

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<sup>33</sup> See Fliegelman's introduction to the novel for a succinct but thorough overview of the progression from the rule of religion to law in the eighteenth century.

<sup>34</sup> For the mechanics of spiritual autobiography, see Tredennick, Caldwell, Payne, and Gold.

communication was, after all, still a wonder, inherently subject to suspicion and interpretation. In fact, the more intense the experience of election or salvation, the more good Puritans knew to distrust and question. A properly introspective Puritan could never truly know, only hope, that the moment of conversion was sincere, since the self and all its experiences and anxieties had to be monitored even more, not less, carefully after any sign of election.

Unlike complete spiritual autobiographies, conversion narratives performed the hopeful possibility of election, but elided the scrutiny and uncertainty necessary to truly parsing such a moment in the believer's life. A form of shorthand, they implied a larger, more complicated struggle. Wieland, however, demonstrates no awareness that his own project is missing this crucial context, and he does not question the source of his assurance—with horrific consequences. While he does initially follow the proper formula of questioning each ebb and flow of divine assurance, at the end he regards his doubts not as essential analytical tools, but rather as a “transient degeneracy,” permanently erased by a “new effulgence and a new mandate” (197). At the end of his confession, Wieland demonstrates not faith, but hubris, rejecting the judgment of his fellows for the certainty of his interpretation of his god's will: “Thy knowledge, as thy power, is unlimited. I have taken thee for my guide, and cannot err” (201). According to the tenets of Puritan faith, however, there is no error greater than the one Wieland has just committed. Real Puritans cannot know they don't err. By contrast, while Clara's project is true to the paradigm of spiritual autobiography, Wieland's conversion narrative represents a disastrous misconstruction of a genre that technically was not meant to stand alone in the first place. In these lights, it is a mistake to see Clara's spiritual autobiography and Wieland's conversion narrative as identical projects: Clara's has a scope and stability that her brother's does not, despite (in fact because of) his own assurance to the contrary.

It is also worth pointing out that conversion narratives are coded with a gendered inequity that spiritual autobiographies lack. Sandra Gustafson, Stephanie Kirk, and Sarah Rivett read the rise of conversion narratives as prerequisites for church membership as narrative

expressions of Puritan male privilege that arose as a specific rebuttal to the dangerous eloquence of Anne Hutchinson. Hutchinson's antinomian performance of her own faith as unmediated personal revelation threatened ministerial interpretive hegemony. Conversion narratives forced individual experiences of faith to be formulaically regulated and publicly performed under the watchful editorial eye of ministers, who could weed out the dangerous and subversive narratives in a way that maximized the shame and exclusion of the narrator. While spiritual autobiography need not have a gendered component, conversion narratives necessarily reinforced male entitlement: some congregations did not allow women to perform their own narratives, insisting that their husbands read transcripts for them. Others allowed female speech but still denied female congregants all of the political privileges church membership automatically conferred on men, such as voting. For identical demonstrations of potential election, women received only a fraction of the benefits of congregational acceptance.<sup>35</sup> Brown's choice to incorporate a failed conversion narrative within the larger project of female spiritual autobiography is, in this light, even more subversive, and the assurance that Wieland's narrative relies upon even more explicitly hostile and problematic.

Many of the narratives Clara incorporates into her own are distinguished by their near absolute assurance. Through them, Brown demonstrates that assurance should not be confused with accuracy. Clara's cycle of doubt and reinterpretation underpins the novel's gothic uncertainty and contributes to its aura of mystery, but it also provides the best model for processing the wondrous phenomena experienced at Mettingen and produces nowhere near the amount of destruction and chaos that falsely confident epistemes do. In this sense, Clara's resistance towards choosing a definitive interpretation of all the evidences before her, and her insistence upon constant examination, not only represents a faithful adherence to Puritan models, but also a key moment of resistance to male-dominated paradigms. This resistance ultimately reworks those models toward a very different objective. Clara might insist upon a

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<sup>35</sup> See Kirk and Rivett, 64.

Puritan-like project of questioning, but she also subversively insists upon her own capacity to examine the evidence she finds.

*Wieland* argues that women could (and probably should) be the new interpretive class. Clara, after all, is much better than all male would-be authority figures at navigating invisible world perils. In fact, Brown shows that misreading signs, portents, and wonders is what men do. Brown's use of Clara to refashion Puritan models of successful examination inverts the conventional gender hierarchy. Clara's repeated insistence upon her own centrality at the beginning of the novel is telling. When she stresses, "That I, beyond the rest of mankind, should be reserved for a destiny without alleviation, and without example," she exerts her own subjectivity as well as her exemplarity. In claiming for herself a singular "destiny" and putting herself ahead of "mankind," she emphasizes that she, while female, is nevertheless the chosen one whose trials are successfully surmounted and who, furthermore, is "able to relate it" according to the proper models (5).

For all her questions about content, Clara has confidence in the form of her project and her own powers of narration. In seeking out an audience for her tale, and in assigning them the task of examining her story through the interpretive framework she provides, Clara moves to create her own interpretive community, one controlled and directed through her perspective. "Listen to my narrative," the novel begins, "and *then say what it is* that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence" (6, italics mine). In opening her story for audience interpretation, Clara sacrifices none of her own authority. Instead, she anticipates and overrides the objections of her future readers just as she resists and subverts the expectations of the men whose narratives she incorporates. She acknowledges and even validates audience incredulity: "What I have related will, no doubt, appear to you a fable. You will believe that calamity has subverted my reason, and that I am amusing you with the chimeras of my brain, instead of facts that have really happened. I shall not be surprized or offended, if these be your suspicions" (74-75). However unoffended she might be, she still insists upon her narrative prerogative and her

own privileged interpretive position: “For, if to me, the immediate witness, [events] were fertile of perplexity and doubt, how must they affect another to whom they are recommended only by my testimony? It was only by subsequent events, that I was fully and incontestibly assured of the veracity of my senses” (75). As the immediate witness with incontestable assurance, Clara can remain confident in the primacy of her perspective and her right to author that perspective.

Tellingly, *Wieland*'s male characters constantly resist and undermine Clara's authorship as a means of depriving her of authority. Not only do their narratives challenge her own perspective, they often attempt to stop her from narrating entirely. Her speech is constantly questioned or curtailed. Sometimes, as in her confrontation with Pleyel, Clara's words are simply and inexplicably disregarded as if they had never been offered. Even more frequently, however, men attempt to stop her before she can even start. When she attempts to explain to her uncle the events that have preceded his arrival, he cuts her off “spare yourself the pain,” said he, “all that Wieland and Pleyel can communicate, I know already ” (183). Only when she intimates that she has her “own exclusive knowledge,” not available from male sources, does her uncle consent to listen to her (183). Attempts to curtail her reading and writing are even more frequent than those directed towards her speech. Following her collapse, her pen is taken away, and access to her brother's confession withheld until her uncle judges her “worthy” of the full truth. Even this is only granted when she makes clear that she doesn't believe the comforting lie she is first offered, that her family members are safe and well. Clara correctly links this infantilizing fiction to her gender, and responds accordingly: “Fear no effeminate weakness in me; I can bear to hear the truth” (178). She then proceeds to prove it, and to read and transcribe her brother's narrative. Nor does Clara's right to read and write come under attack only by ostensibly well-meaning strangers. Throughout the novel her writing space, her bedchamber, is constantly invaded and her private writing read by both Carwin and Pleyel, who unapologetically insist upon their right to read and police their language.

Carwin's tormenting of Clara relies on a telling series of textual violations. He seduces



and interrogates her servant Judith with the explicit purpose of cajoling her into producing long descriptions of Clara's character and habits. He also repeatedly sneaks into Clara's bedroom and avails himself of both her father's manuscript and Clara's own diary. He correctly identifies the text as the essence of Clara's agency when he gloats to her about accessing "this volume [in which] the key to your inmost soul was contained" (235). Carwin asserts that the knowledge thus gathered gives him proprietary access to Clara's subjectivity, access he paints in vividly sexual terms: "I was of a different sex: I was not your husband; I was not even your friend; yet my knowledge of you was of that kind, which conjugal intimacies can give, and, in some respects, more accurate" (234). Having availed himself of the body of Clara's words, he commits the ultimate violation, one that he acknowledges but displays no remorse for. Instead of apologizing, he tells her to be grateful he didn't use more of what her text revealed: "what plenteous materials were thus furnished me of stratagems and plots!" he exults (235).

Pleyel too asserts his privilege to transgress Clara's textual boundaries. His condemnation of Clara unfolds in explicitly textual terms. After reproaching her with the "irrefutable" evidence of the spectral voices he has overheard indicting her virtue, he cements his condemnation with his reading not only of her behaviors, for instance the way she reacts to Carwin's name in his presence, etc, but also of her private texts. Flush in his first suspicion that Clara might be attracted to Carwin, he goes to visit her house:

I spied a light in your chamber as I approached from the outside, and on inquiring of Judith, was informed that you were writing. As your kinsman and friend, and fellow lodger, I thought I had a right to be familiar. You were in your chamber, but your employment and the time were such as to make it no infraction of decorum to follow you thither. The spirit of mischievous gaiety possessed me. . . . You did not perceive my entrance; and I advanced softly till I was able to overlook your shoulder. I had gone thus far in error, and had no power to recede. How cautiously should we guard against the first inroads of temptation! I knew that to pry into your papers was criminal; but I

reflected that no sentiment of yours was of a nature which made it your interest to conceal it. You wrote much more than you permitted your friends to peruse. My curiosity was strong, and I had only to throw a glance upon the paper, to secure its gratification. I should never have deliberately committed an act like this. The slightest obstacle would have repelled me; but my eye glanced almost spontaneously upon the paper. I caught only parts of sentences; but my eyes comprehended more at a glance, because the characters were short-hand. I lighted on the words *summer-house*, *midnight*, and made out a passage which spoke of the propriety and of the effects to be expected from *another* interview. All this passed in less than a moment. (142-3)

Pleyel's rationalizations here are anything but rational—after asserting his “right to be familiar” with her private chamber (his first justification, “kinsman” puts explicit emphasis on the gendered privilege of the liberty he is taking) and attempting to recast his deliberately surreptitious intrusion as “mischievous gaiety,” he admits that the project of invading both Clara's physical and textual space is an “error,” only to deliberately shift the blame for that error from himself to her. “Prying into papers” might be criminal on his part, but not really, since Clara should have “no interest” in “concealment.” This elides Clara's right to privacy by giving any kind of desire for such privacy a gloss of frank suspicion—of course her life should be an open book, otherwise she must be concealing grave errors. After all, he implies, isn't there something inherently wrong about the fact that Clara writes more than she “permits her friends to peruse?” Clearly, Pleyel accords Clara no right to privacy or subjectivity of any kind—all texts she produces must of course be made available for him to pursue—anything less is concealment and deception. Pleyel never doubts for a moment his right to be the interpreter of Clara's evidences, which makes his subsequent blatant misreading of her text even more chilling than it already is. He reads for only a few moments and catches “only parts of sentences,” but then easily construes those few words into patterns that confirm his own suspicions. He has no idea what the text actually says, but he nevertheless presents his reading as incontrovertible evidence

of his own assumptions. As a reader, Pleyel is even more defective, and dangerous, than Clara's father, whose "narrow scale" and "hasty constructions" upon his own chosen text launch his personal religion, and the events of the novel in the first place. And yet, Pleyel claims his rights not just as reader, but also author.

After building his case upon specious readings, Pleyel couches his disenchantment with Clara as her failure to live up to his chronicle of her as a model of female virtue. He reveals that he has surreptitiously been watching and transcribing her every thought and behavior into a kind of conduct book for the woman he truly loves. Because Clara fails to meet the standards he sets for textbook femininity, a role he imposes upon her without any kind of consent from her, she is a failed text, a specious prodigy, and no longer worthy of any kind of engagement. Pleyel's insistence upon Clara not as an author but a text for him to read, write, edit (and ultimately abandon) represents the ultimate usurpation of narrative authority. It transforms her from subject to object and makes her the brunt of hostile and controlling analysis. Nor is Pleyel the only one to attack Clara's agency by reducing her to an object of exemplary femininity. Carwin too casts his interest in Clara, and his subsequent vocal machinations, as an examination of Clara's qualifications as a representative of female virtue. Both Carwin and Pleyel, of course, feel qualified to judge her worth.

### **Female Trials and Male Errors**

*A woman capable of recollection in danger, of warding off groundless panics, of discerning the true mode of proceeding, and profiting by her best resources, is a prodigy. I was desirous of ascertaining whether you were such an one (Carwin, 230).*

*"Man of errors! cease to cherish thy delusion: not heaven or hell, but thy senses have misled thee to commit these acts. Shake off thy phrenzy, and ascend into rational and human."(Carwin 262)*

Clara not only faces the challenge of navigating a supernaturally charged landscape and defending her right to interpret it, she must also fight for the right to be considered more than

just an object within it. The primary male characters view Clara not so much as a person but as an exemplar of femininity, and describe her in terms of her status as a “wonder” or a “prodigy,” a signifying object in need of examination and testing. Both Carwin and Pleyel misuse and misinterpret the invisible world with the aid of a rational, Enlightened perspective, illuminating the dangers of blending Enlightenment evidentiary standards and Puritan supernatural belief, as well as what Brown portrays as a male tendency to mismanage both. While both men attempt to control Clara by compromising her female exemplarity, her ability to survive and resist their machinations flips the paradigm of implicated femininity and emphasizes Clara’s own miraculous survival powers. By refusing their tests and defying attempts to force her into recognizable categories (virtuous woman turned disgraced sentimental heroine, afflicted girl in the style of the Salem trials, witch, etc.), Clara becomes an archetype of active female subjectivity, challenging the paradigm of male-centered supernatural authority and cementing her hold on narrative authority.

Carwin and Pleyel, Clara’s ostensible romantic interests, both violate the sanctity of her home to (mis)read her writings; both, when confronted by her, explain to her the meaning of her own words and their rights to them. Carwin’s and Pleyel’s need to control, explain, and contextualize Clara is very Puritan, particularly the obsession with her writing. Puritan women produced wildly influential texts, some celebrated by their community, but these texts came almost always packaged within a framework of male permission, and that permission was almost always predicated on the exemplarity (prodigy) of the narrator. The first book of poetry composed by an “American” author, for example, Puritan Anne Bradstreet’s *The Tenth Muse*, contained not one but dozens of prefatory verses assuring readers that the author was no ordinary woman, but rather a freak whose abilities were certainly atypical of her gender, and, many implied signified the new colony’s latent greatness. Similarly, Mary Rowlandson’s seminal narrative of her own captivity provides a complex example of the colonial psyche and a rather detailed ethnography of her Native American captors, but its publication was only possible

because arch-minister Increase Mather deigned to introduce it as an exemplary model of female piety.

Coding women's words as wonders made them representative not of all women's capacities but of some larger signification: either a prodigious example of God bestowing rare gifts on an unlikely (female) subject for the benefit of the larger community, or, more sinisterly, warning signs indicating the presence of witches and heretics with access to diabolical eloquence. Enclosing their speech and writing within a framework of male contextualization contained the dangerous possibilities inherent in unchecked female language.<sup>36</sup> Both Carwin and Pleyel describe Clara's extraordinary writing skills as preeminent reasons for their interest in her, and both are explicit about her writing as representative of her interiority but also her extraordinary exemplarity. Pleyel assures Clara that her "letters had previously taught me to consider [her] as the first of women" (138). Carwin describes Clara's writing both as the "key to [her] inmost soul" and as superhumanly dazzling: "The intellect which it unveiled, was brighter than my limited and feeble organs could bear" (233). That Clara does not volunteer her writing for their contextualization and approval—that they must wrest it from her, offers to both of them sufficient evidence that she has slipped from the model of approvable exemplarity into something darker and more dangerous.

For Pleyel and Carwin Clara's attitude toward her writing is symptomatic of the dangerous potential of her own prodigious qualities, which resist male oversight. Clara's insistence that she be able to write "much more than [she] allowed her friends to peruse" and her deliberate maintenance of an independent household in which to do so offers a manifestation of the fierce independence that fascinates both Carwin and Pleyel, even as they

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<sup>36</sup> These possibilities are almost always portrayed in terms of the heretical. See Gustafson's reading of the subversive power of Hutchinson's rhetoric, and Ruttenburg and Kamensky on the dangerous linguistics of witches. Kamensky's chapter, "The Tongue is a Witch," vividly contrasts the "promiscuous" speech of supposed witches, "bewitching, lying, railing, slandering, hectoring, threatening," with the "judicious, infrequent, and sober" speech of regular women: "Where Puritan matrons spoke softly with tongues of silver, witches, their victims, and the demonically possessed ranted with tongues of fire" (152). In contrast, virtuous women allowed themselves to be properly contextualized.

reject it.<sup>37</sup> Each of her evaluators is fascinated by her self-sufficiency and independent household, and each does his best to destroy both, along with her the virtuous reputation, doing their best to reclassify Clara from good to bad prodigy. Pleyel informs Clara that she brings their scrutiny and judgment upon herself: “As a woman, young, beautiful, and independent, it behooved you to have fortified your mind with just principles” (141). He then goes on to list all the ways in which he believes her principles to have failed—left to her own devices, she failed to exercise what he deems rational judgment (141).

Both Carwin and Pleyel justify their excessive (and obsessive) scrutiny of Clara by dwelling upon their need to parse her exemplary femininity. Pleyel attempts to decode Clara with scientific precision, spending many hours observing her and transcribing his observations, assuring her that, “you know not the accuracy of my observation. I was desirous that others should profit by an example so rare, I therefore noted down, in writing, every particular of your conduct” (139). Carwin sums up his interest in Clara by explaining to her that, “a woman capable of recollection in danger, of warding off groundless panics, of discerning the true mode of proceeding, and profiting by her best resources, is a prodigy. I was desirous of ascertaining whether you were such an one” (230). As a “prodigy,” Clara embodies atypicality in a way that draws upon both invisible world and enlightened models. By the late eighteenth century, the label of prodigy could imply an outstanding example or exemplar of a specified attribute or achievement, but the word also carried its legacy of a highly charged place within the lexicon of the Puritan invisible world, where prodigies were a species of wonder, extraordinary things that served as omens, signs, and portents.<sup>38</sup> Declaring Clara a prodigy places her in a liminal space between supernatural wonder and modern paragon, and thereby invites in both cases the testing scrutiny of the “qualified” hierarchy of male experts. Both Carwin and Pleyel treat Clara as evidence in need of cataloging and experimentation and both merge the theological discourse of

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<sup>37</sup> (142). Clara spends a considerable amount of time in her own home, when she is not sleeping, she is almost always either reading or writing.

<sup>38</sup> "prodigy, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web. 17 March 2014.

wonders with the eighteenth-century lexicon of empirical science in order to reify her objectification.

Carwin decides to “test” Clara after starting an affair with her servant Judith and after learning of Judith’s extreme admiration for her mistress:

According to my companion's report, your perfections were little less than divine. Her uncouth but copious narratives converted you into an object of worship. She chiefly dwelt upon your courage, because she herself was deficient in that quality. You held apparitions and goblins in contempt. You took no precautions against robbers. You were just as tranquil and secure in this lonely dwelling, as if you were in the midst of a crowd. Hence a vague project occurred to me, to put this courage to the test. (230)

Carwin perceives Judith’s veneration of Clara as hoax to be debunked and immediately applies himself to the task. His reaction and subsequent actions highlight the particularly gendered nature of the threat, as the approbation of one woman for another raises the dangerous specter of female community outside the framework of male regulation. Just such objections inflect the trial of the famous heretic (or visionary) Anne Hutchinson, who from a small community of female adherents was well on the way to creating an alternative ministry, in the process upending the entire framework of masculine interpretive privilege, a fact not lost on her persecutors. Hutchinson’s ability to redefine women’s roles became the reason for banishing and excommunicating her: “you have stept out of your place, you have rather bine a Husband than a wife and a Preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject.” After her exile, minister John Cotton wasted no time in ordering “the sisters of our owne . . .and . . . all the Sisters of other Congregations” to dissolve the community that Hutchinson had formed.<sup>39</sup> Judith’s “copious narratives” suggesting Clara as role model and exemplar, with near-divine perfections, provide yet another example of female speech without male context and work

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<sup>39</sup> *A Report of the Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson before the Church in Boston, March, 1638* in Hall, ed., *Controversy*. (382-3, 370).

against the male privilege to examine and define. Tellingly, Clara's virtues in Judith's eyes center on traditionally unfeminine attributes: courage, independence, a household of her own, making her even more of a threat to masculine purview. Carwin thus feels compelled to assert his own control over Judith's reading of Clara.

Testing Clara's courage entails a deliberate campaign of spectral voices that aim to destroy Clara's bravery, strip her sense of safety in her own space, and prove her ultimately unworthy of the autonomy she claims as her natural right. Carwin uses his bioquial abilities to create sinister narratives that pursue Clara around the grounds of her estate, threatening her life and virtue, finally ending up in her bedchamber, counterfeiting a dialog between murderers that wakes her in the middle of the night and sends her fleeing into the darkness. Unsurprisingly, Carwin reads this result as evidence that she is not worthy of either her household or her "prodigious" label. He communicates as much in his ostensible confession and apology, after which he upbraids her for failing to meet his expectations for his experiment: "the proof of cowardice or courage which I expected from you, would have been your remaining inactive in your bed, or your entering the closet with a view to assist the sufferer. Some instances which Judith related of your fearlessness and promptitude made me adopt the latter supposition with some degree of confidence. . . .I cannot express my confusion and surprize at your abrupt and precipitate flight . . . this unlooked-for consequence of my scheme" (231). Although he professes to regret tormenting Clara, he dwells at greater length on what his designs had been and how things would have worked had she not disrupted the framework of his project by behaving in a way he had not anticipated: "Long and bitterly did I repent of my scheme. I was somewhat consoled by reflecting that my purpose had not been evil, and renewed my fruitless vows never to attempt such dangerous experiments. For some time I adhered, with laudable forbearance, to this resolution" (231). As laudable as Carwin finds his own actions, he does not possess similar admiration for Clara's, and he blames the consequences of his actions on her failure as a test subject rather than on his own framework of analysis. In his eyes, it is not the *experiment* that



has failed, but its subject.

Carwin's dissatisfaction with Clara's behavior reveals more about his own failures as both an empirical examiner and a supernatural tormenter than hers as a prodigy. Never able to predict Clara's reactions, he is in fact caught hiding in her closet, some time after his first bedchamber biolquialism drives her from her house. Returning to her home, Clara does exactly what he professes to have expected her to do the first time he counterfeited voices in her bedchamber, and opens the closet door to confront her suspicions. Clara's narration of the moment leading up to their confrontation reflects all of the qualities of bravery and determination Carwin is supposedly testing for. Instead of fleeing from the spectral voice that threatened her with harm, and in spite of the lingering fear from Carwin's last performance in the closet, she gathers her courage, summons her innate curiosity, and opens the door: "Some divine voice warned me of danger, that at this moment awaited me. I had spurned the intimation, and challenged my adversary" (102). Clara's behavior confirms her exemplarity according to Carwin's own initial standards, but rather than acknowledging her success and ceasing his study, he instead fabricates a complicated narrative that involves yet more spectral plots and invisible assailants and protectors, unable, it seems, to help himself.

While encountering Carwin in her closet briefly overwhelms Clara, her subsequent behavior, notwithstanding her status as the experiment, is far more rational and empirical than that of Carwin, the professed experimenter. She listens carefully to all of his specious explanations, then begins the project of examining the evidences he has presented her with with empirical precision: "I reviewed every conversation in which Carwin had borne a part. I studied to discover the true inferences deducible from his deportment and words with regard to his former adventures and actual views. I pondered on the comments which he made on the relation which I had given of the closet dialogue" (109). Putting aside her terror, she attempts to parse the role of "invisible powers" in Carwin's narratives, to construct a timeline of her interactions with him, and to apply every possible evaluative criteria to his actions and her own reactions.

Indeed Clara does a far better job of reading Carwin as prodigy than he ever does of making her one. Nina Baym complains that Clara's fascination with Carwin distorts the novel, and it is certainly true that if her focus on his actions and implications does not distort her narrative, it often dominates it.<sup>40</sup> To Clara, Carwin is interminably wondrous, and she scrutinizes him as intently, if not as traumatically, as he attempts to scrutinize her, even before identifying him as her tormentor. After their first meeting, she feels compelled to draw his portrait, producing an image in a kind of spirit-writing trance; the "rare and prodigious" qualities of the image she produces mesmerize her for hour and even days after its completion (62). Later, she takes note of Carwin's "prodigious" physical strength, and expends considerable energy trying to find out what kind of male specimen he is. Ultimately, when he explains his bioquial abilities to her as a purely physical talent, possibly "an unusual flexibility or exertion of the bottom of the tongue and the uvula," she denies his explanation (226). Instead, she offers her final classification of Carwin and his narratives: "He attempts to give an human explanation of these phantasms; but it is enough that he owns himself to be the agent; his tale is a lie, and his nature devilish" (246). Not only does she strip Carwin's narrative authority, (his tale is a lie), she labels him diabolical, a classification that ruins his claims to purely natural ability and any kind of higher virtue. A demonic instrument, Carwin is reduced to the status of an evil object, at best a kind of witch, servant to his own dark powers, at worst a mere instrument of some unnameable calumny. Whether Carwin's devilish nature reflects a failure of enlightened self-control or the auspices of invisible supernatural possession, or both, it deprives him of any agency or authority over Clara. Clara's sincere desire to gloss Carwin's abilities and suss out his significance reflects a legitimate engagement with an invisible world artifact. Rather than conducting weighted trials, she meticulously observes and exhaustively contemplates his many mysterious properties. In this sense, she denies her own objectification and then turns around to successfully objectify Carwin, who remains a prodigy in her estimation throughout the course of

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<sup>40</sup> See Baym, "A Minority Reading of *Wieland*."

her narrative.

Carwin fails to successfully test Clara's prodigious femininity, instead spawning a gothic nightmare of spectral dialogues that quickly escape his control and demolishes his narrative authority, allowing Clara to retroactively codify him as the specious prodigy. He is not alone, however, in misidentifying and misapplying the evidences his experiment produces. Pleyel, like Carwin, regards Clara as an object of study. Shortly after rejecting her and defaming her virtue after hearing a romantic dialogue counterfeited by Carwin, Pleyel angrily assures Clara that he wants nothing more to do with her now that she no longer matches the perfect object he has made of her. He reveals that he has been keeping a journal of "every particular of [her] conduct" to serve as a model female behavior for his intended bride. In a cruel twist on what Clara had perceived as romantic interest, she discovers that he doesn't want her but rather desires to train another woman in her idealized image. When Carwin counterfeits Clara's voice, he creates another recognizable paradigm for Pleyel to apply to Clara: the fallen woman. Clara recognizes how drastic, and damaging, this alteration is: "The gulf that separates man from insects is not wider than that which severs the polluted from the chaste among women" (129). Yet even as she acknowledges the seriousness of the allegations, she blames the flawed interpretive framework that casts her into a mold she doesn't fit: "Yesterday and to-day I am the same.... There is a degree of depravity to which it is impossible for me to sink; yet, in the apprehension of another, my ancient and intimate associate, the perpetual witness of my actions, and partaker of my thoughts, I had ceased to be the same. . . . Alas! it is the fate of Clara Wieland to fall into the hands of a precipitate and inexorable judge" (129-130). Precipitate and inexorable indeed, Pleyel is not nearly the qualified interpreter he thinks he is.

Pleyel's adherence to his own image of himself as a hyper-rational interpreter, coupled with his belief in the superiority of his intellect and judgment to Clara's mere feminine wiles (or, he charitably allows, delusions) lead him to reject her pleas that he consider their long association, let alone his exhaustive catalog of her own virtues and virtuous behavior, before

rushing to judge her. Instead, he confidently cites his misreading of her journal and the evidences of his senses as more compelling than any other proof. Disembodied voices for Pleyel never lie, even though, at this point in the narrative, they already have, several times over, and been proven to do so—he himself has heard the disembodied voice of his sister and credibly established that she could not have produced it. Like Carwin, he treats Clara as an object for analysis; like Carwin, his analysis is flawed and he is unable to recognize his own error.

In fact, Pleyel is not the careful rational empiricist he believes himself to be but rather an indifferent and often erroneous observer who processes the world through generalization rather than specific analysis. His study of Clara as the ideal woman requires nothing more than simple transcription: “there was no other task incumbent on me but to copy . . . in order to produce a more unexceptionable pattern” (139). A diligent copyist, Pleyel takes down absolutely everything about Clara as evidence of her virtue, distinguishing not at all between the substantial and the inconsequential: “I have contemplated your principles, and been astonished at the solidity of their foundation, and the perfection of their structure. I have traced you to your home. I have viewed you in relation to your servants, to your family, to your neighbours, and to the world. I have seen by what skilful arrangements you facilitate the performance of the most arduous and complicated duties,” he tells her, before going on to assure her with equal solemnity that “even the colour of a shoe, the knot of a ribband, or your attitude in plucking a rose, were of moment to be recorded. Even the arrangements of your breakfast-table and your toilet have been amply displayed” (140). Pleyel does not know how to weight the evidence he has gathered, only the conclusion he wishes it to serve, and so it does, until Carwin provides him with an alternate model, and then previous proofs are immediately disregarded in favor of evidences that support his new reading. Gone is his own narrative, instead Pleyel draws upon his misreading of Clara’s journal and his overhearing of spectral voices, for they are the evidences most fitted to his new truth.

It is worth pointing out that Pleyel’s initial picture of Clara’s exemplary femininity

contains echoes of Carwin's own reading: he too notes the strength of her intellect and her easy ability to run her own household. Paul Lewis argues that these virtues closely mirror Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments about female capability. In stripping them from Clara, Pleyel maintains his own status as observer and arbiter, but takes from her any claim to similar status. Gale Temple reads Pleyel's perceived monopoly on identifying and classifying virtue as "Brown's most powerful point here, that enlightened rationality often serves the interests of the powerful, allowing them to maintain their position at the upper levels of the social hierarchy, and to justify behaviors that in other circumstances might very well qualify as frenzied, profoundly unethical, and overtly deviant" (16). Profoundly unethical and overtly deviant is exactly what Pleyel's behavior is; enlightened and rational it is not. For all his protestations to believe only the evidence of his senses and the tangible proofs they offer and to spurn all supernatural suspicions, Pleyel switches easily into the language of the supernatural when he condemns Clara and believing her to be a sexually promiscuous liar, he moves from thinking her a prodigy to calling her a witch.

Pleyel's accusation of Clara marks a dramatic shift in tone—never before has the urbane and irreligious character uttered anything like a biblical allusion, yet his condemnation of Clara is full of them. He chastises her repeatedly for her fall, upbraids her for not seeing "the pit to which thou art hastening" and bemoans her inability to deliver herself "from the jaws of the fiend" (118). When Clara justifiably reproaches him for his failure to uncover the delusion, "you were preceptate and prone to condemn. Instead of rushing on the imposters, and comparing the evidence of sight with that of hearing, you stood aloof, or you fled," he counters not with acknowledgement of his failure as an empiricist, but by assuring himself (he will not even speak directly to Clara) of her depravity: "Already I deem her the most abandoned and destable of human creatures" (134-5). Further on into his strange diatribe, he strips away even her humanity: "An inscrutable providence has fashioned thee for some end. Thou wilt live, no doubt, to fulfil the purposes of thy maker, if he repent not of his workmanship, and send not his

vengeance to exterminate thee, ere the measure of thy days be full. Surely nothing in the shape of man can vie with thee!” (135). Clara now is the worst kind of prodigy, an exemplar of fallen femininity that God himself will regret. Nothing she says is worth hearing, since she is not even her own person, but instead the familiar of Carwin, who has “bewitched” Clara. Carwin’s “eyes and voice had a witchcraft in them” Pleyel argues, and later on he even speculates that Carwin has purposes “such as no human intelligence is able to unravel: that his ends are pursued by means which leave it in doubt whether he be not in league with some infernal spirit” (142). All of these speculations should fall squarely within the bounds of the incredible for uber-rational Pleyel, and yet he accuses Carwin of deceit fueled by witchcraft without once questioning how far he has strayed from his own ideology. Nor is it possible in his schema for him to be the one deceived—only Clara is apportioned that role.

Nancy Ruttenburg points out that Pleyel never really interacts with the real Clara, preferring instead to deal with figments of his own imagination. She counts a number of “spectral Claras” of his creation, including the witch in thrall to a diabolical seducer, the idealized version of her stainless public reputation, and Pleyel’s own version of her as written, “more legitimate than the original upon which it was modeled.”<sup>41</sup> Pleyel’s preference for hypothetical Claras, like his willingness to admit without questioning the spectral evidence of phantom conversations, illustrates the depths of his gender bias and underscores the perils in his desire to apply empirical standards (or at least what he believes to be empirical standards) to invisible world evidences. It is no accident that Clara refers to Pleyel’s condemnation of her as a “trial,” and they both speak in terms of evidences, judges, and testimony. The trial Brown evokes, however, is not the rational examination Pleyel thinks he is conducting. Pleyel’s many references to spectral evidence, his biblically inflected rhetoric and accusations of witchcraft force Clara to endure the Salem Witch Trials in microcosm. Pleyel claims to be rational but uses

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<sup>41</sup> 241. Ruttenburg’s detailed reading of Clara’s “Salem experience” at Pleyel’s hands has deeply informed my own logic about this passage.

the rhetoric of Puritan ministers to persecute Clara for Carwin's false evidence.

Numerous critics draw comparisons between the dubious, potentially duplicitous origins of wonders in *Wieland* and the problem of “spectral evidence” in the Salem witchcraft trials.<sup>42</sup> The problem of spectral evidence in Salem hinged on the question as to whether the specters of supposed witches, frequently seen by their afflicted accusers, could be counterfeited by someone other than the person whose likeness appeared. The quandary was not whether the devil and his minions could create sensory apparitions, but whether those apparitions could falsify as well as simply reflect spectral realities. The judges at Salem proceeded (uneasily but inexorably) with the theory that the devil and his minions lacked the ability to produce the specters of innocent people, despite the assurance of numerous learned ministers and theologians that, in fact, the evil one could and did do just that. Despite the theologically-based cautions, the visceral power of the specters proved too sensational (literally) for the Salemites to ignore, and so the trials collapsed under the weight of sensory data.<sup>43</sup> *Wieland's* brand of spectral evidence is predominantly aural, but it operates upon the same uncertain relation to spectral evidences.

In *Wieland*, collapsing the divide between Enlightenment empiricism and Puritan supernatural belief strikingly illustrates the potential to mismanage both schemas. In Brown's version of Salem, Pleyel misdiagnoses witchcraft and misreads wonders because of an imperfect understanding of their status as empirical evidence. Through Pleyel, Brown problematizes the belief that wonders can be read empirically at all, endorsing instead the traditional invisible world logic, which insists just as much on uncertainty as observation. Good Puritan logic was wary of the numerous “awkward implications of combining an illusionistic devil with an empirically verifiable human crime” (Stuart 141). Assuming that sensory evidence lacks an

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<sup>42</sup> See in particular Ruttenburg and Gustafson.

<sup>43</sup> Winship points out that criticisms of the 1692 trials represented the first time “criticism of witchcraft and criticism of wonders merged together” in a sustained critique that used Enlightened principles to dismiss both witchcraft and wonders as mere superstition (*Seers of God* 125). Since rational evaluative principles and empirically interpreted sensory evidence were unable to account for all of the potential incarnations of invisible world evidences, particularly the duplicitous ones that reflected not raw data alone, but rather data manipulated by unknown agents with their own unknown agendas, the simplest and perhaps only solution was to disregard the invisible world and its wonders as relics of a less advanced era.

agenda or cannot be faked guarantees misreading.

Carwin, although he produces much of the spectral evidence in the novel, blatantly misreads his own handiwork, or at least, fails to anticipate how his handiwork will be read by others. He constantly assumes erroneous interpretations of the illusions he produces, categorically unable to anticipate any schema of interpretation outside of his own rationalizations. Even when he tries to use his biloquial powers to heroic ends, as when he produces a mysterious voice to keep Wieland Jr. from carrying out his plan to murder Clara, he fails to capture the kind of invisible world logic that could make the voice compelling to the decidedly unenlightened young Wieland. His spectral speech doesn't lack for drama or conviction: "Man of errors! cease to cherish thy delusion: not heaven or hell, but thy senses have misled thee to commit these acts. Shake off thy phrenzy, and ascend into rational and human" (262). The words temporarily halt Wieland Jr. in his tracks, momentarily transforming him into a "man of sorrows" who questions his own convictions. However, Wieland quickly shakes off not his frenzy, but the logic of the deterrent presented to him. Carwin has offered him a false dichotomy: either heaven and hell *or* his senses—but Wieland Jr., like Clara, knows that the two are by no means separate, and he chooses to dismiss Carwin's effort as a duplicitous effort to steer him away from his righteous path. Nor, as his conversion narrative indicates, does he possess the proper inclination to question anyway: his own internal bias, while not enlightened or rational, is just as strong, if not even stronger, than Carwin's or Pleyel's. By failing to allow for the possibility of deception, by external forces or internal biases, Pleyel, Wieland Jr., and Carwin fall prey to their own illusions. Clara's persistently skeptical narrative thus offers the only alternative to the tangled web of illusion and misreading created by men, whose own assurance, fueled by their privilege, undercuts the kind of inherent uncertainty fundamentally necessary to successfully navigate the supernatural landscape.

Carwin, Wieland Jr. and Pleyel never question their own judgment: they should. Together, they create ample proof that they lack the skills to recognize their own bias or how



that bias colors the way they interpret invisible world evidence. Clara, however, never submits to their interpretations or their authority. She insists upon perspective as the only one free of errors: "Listen then to my narrative. If there be any thing in his story inconsistent with mine, his story is false," she tells her brother after Pleyel condemns her (124). She rejects Pleyel's reading of her, just as she refuses Carwin's. Instead, she retreats to her own room (even when it is the literal embodiment of gothic terror) and continues to forge her own explanations.

### **Recreating the Archetype and Abandoning the Errand: A Complicated Narrative**

#### **Victory**

*here am I, a thousand leagues from my native soil, in full possession of life and of health, and not destitute of happiness. (Clara Wieland, 267)*

It is perhaps overly simplistic to divide the novel between female success and male error. It is tempting to imply that Clara is without error herself if only because she makes by far the fewest errors in the novel, and, when she does, makes, as she painstakingly informs us, the right *kind* of errors. Clara's relative infallibility is, however, an impression that Brown creates to serve a specific agenda. If the novel does lend itself to this kind of easy gendered binary, that exaggerated distinction should be read less as a reflection of Brown's actual perspective on gender (like Wollstonecraft, he seems to have thought both sexes equally capable of intelligent thoughts and behaviors), and more as a gothic inversion of extant stereotypes. Sentimental novels and gothic melodramas often turned on the heroics of clear-thinking men and the perils incurred by frail, emotional, and often almost idiotic women, bromides Wollstonecraft excoriated in the works of male authors who "consider females rather as women than human creatures," and exaggerate gender difference to privilege male intelligence and female

irrationality, excess, and an innate tendency toward submission.<sup>44</sup> Brown's insistence on Clara's narrative agency allows her to resist her male persecutors and to rewrite the sentimental trope of victimhood that defined earlier exemplary American femininity in contemporary novels like *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, wildly popular sentimental stories in which the heroines' trials end in death as the only (partial) redemption from disgrace. Clara's ultimate refusal to be a wonder or to die didactically, her ability to overcome and write through the battery of male assaults, makes *Wieland* truly her story, and her exaggeratedly perfect female triumph counterbalances the plethora of female failures that occupy space in the works of Brown's contemporaries.

Brown deliberately incorporates and reverses these familiar patterns. While Clara does occasionally resort to the sentimental language of her own imminent death and destruction and inherent feminine powerlessness, her rhetoric is undercut by her actions: she continues to live her single life, stands up for herself, and refuses to accept other people's characterizations of her or to let other people alter her interpretations of events. For every admission of weakness, Brown provides a much more sincere demonstration of strength. The essence of Clara's character is the bravery and competence even she cannot, ultimately deny: "I am not," she writes proudly near the middle of the novel, "destitute of courage. I have shewn myself deliberate and calm in the midst of peril. I have hazarded my own life, for the preservation of another"(75). Moreover, the only words she ever allows to define her are her own.

Rather than giving in to the conventional wisdom of gothic or sentimental models, Brown has Clara enact and discard each familiar trope in a protracted finale that ultimately ends with the triumph of Clara the author/narrator over not just her male competitors, but her own generic inclinations. While this model requires significant sacrifice, as Clara must abandon her home and consequently the unique independence Mettingen provided, her escape nonetheless

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<sup>44</sup> *A Vindication*, 7. For more on Brown's perspective on gender and its constructions, particularly in relation to archetypes of genre, see, DeLamotte, Paul Lewis, Emerson, and Baym's "A Minority Reading of *Wieland*."

lays the foundation for a new paradigm of supernaturally-grounded female agency.

In effect, *Wieland* has two endings: the first is the one Clara foreshadows with her memorable exhortation: “Listen to my narrative, and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence, if indeed, every faculty be not suspended in wonder that I am still alive, and am able to relate it” (6). Still alive, suspended in wonder herself, her life is congruent to her narrative—it will last, she frequently implies, only as long as it takes to transfer the evidences of her experience from memory to page: “Yet I will persist to the end. My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion; but if I live no longer, I will, at least, live to complete it” (167). Later, she reiterates this sentiment even more dramatically: “When I lay down the pen the taper of my life will expire: my existence will terminate with my tale” (252). But even as he seems to be scripting the grand finale, Brown refuses any kind of real resolution, instead turning the promised moment of closure into a protracted exploration of narrative obligation that ultimately renders this particular kind of closure deeply unsatisfactory. In the ruin of the house that so closely echoes the seeming ruin of her mind, Clara takes great pains to both announce the fulfillment of her purpose, “And now my repose is coming—my work is done!”, and to record her own disinterest in its meaning (266). After hundreds of pages spent agonizing over the nature and intent of Carwin’s actions, she banishes him mid-explanation: “I did not listen—I answered him not—I ceased to upbraid or excuse. His guilt was a point to which I was indifferent. Ruffian or devil, black as hell or bright as angels, thenceforth he was nothing to me” (264-265). She seems, at this moment, so deeply involved in generic narrative conventions that she forgets the unique cohesion of her own narrative. As the tale’s beset heroine Brown knows that formula dictates the death of her brother should properly be followed by Clara’s own death. But his agenda is to undermine rather than adhere to sentimental and gothic conventions, and so Clara’s protestations of overwrought indifference ring hollow.

Ultimately, Brown makes Clara’s commitments as the narrator overcome those of the conventional character. She delays her impending death to explain the suitability of her demise,

first to her relatives, summoned to the scene by Carwin, and then in an extended apostrophe to the reader. “Why,” she asks her would-be rescuers, “will ye torment me with your reasonings and reproofs? Can ye restore to me the hope of my better days? Can ye give me back Catherine and my babes?” (265). Clara pitches her argument on the premise that her death is a fitting response to the catastrophic events of her tale, but also, and more importantly, that her interlocutors lack the authorial agency to interfere with her decision. Because they cannot rewrite the preceding events, cannot give back her innocence or slain family members, she implies that they lack the right to alter the course of the story now. But even as she resists the usurpation of narrative control, she is haunted by the fear that she herself is abandoning her authorial duties. Even as she tries to divest herself of narrative authority, she clings to it. A paragraph after she declares her supreme indifference to Carwin’s significance and a single sentence after announcing her imminent demise, she engages in yet another indignant confrontation with an imaginary interlocutor:

Talk not to me, O my revered friend! of Carwin. He has told thee his tale, and thou exculpatest him from all direct concern in the fate of Wieland. Be it so: I care not from what source these disasters have flowed; it suffices that they have swallowed up our hopes and our existence. What his agency began, his agency conducted to a close. He intended, by the final effort of his power, to rescue me and to banish the illusions from my brother. Such is his tale, concerning the truth of which I care not. (265-266)

Despite the reflexive declarations of indifference, it’s clear that Clara cannot relinquish the narrative thread. Even as she tries to make the story Carwin’s responsibility, she undermines his credibility. Of course she cares about the truth of “his tale,” because it isn’t, in fact, his tale at all. It’s hers, and she has fought for it all along, and she isn’t letting go. Ultimately this means she can’t die. And so the second ending takes shape, three years later, and thousands of miles away, at Clara’s new home, an estate in France.

Brown makes Clara’s false ending almost pathologically insistent upon place. Again and

again she reiterates the centrality, and finality, of her chosen setting. It's a choice very much bound up in her own agency: as it has been from the beginning, Clara's insistence on a dwelling of her own forms the locus of both her independence and her torment. Her house is part of Mettingen, part of the marvellous estate-on-the-hill bequeathed by her father, an outgrowth of the strange experiment that makes her both a wonder and a target. It is where she writes, where she reads, it is the center of the narrative and the site of her prophetic dreams as well as many of Carwin's spectral torments. In the constant overlap of internal and external space that constitutes the invisible world and the gothic landscape, Clara's house overlaps physical dwelling and inner consciousness. So central, and so personal, is the sanctity of her home, that its violation is ultimately the highest and most lasting crime she lays at Carwin's feet. Even if he is innocent of everything else, he is still irredeemably tainted by his invasion, "if hitherto thy conscience be without stain, thy crime will be made more flagrant by thus violating my retreat" (266). Even as she is supposed to be surrendering everything, including her life itself, she refuses to let go of her house: "I will eat—I will drink—I will lie down and rise up at your bidding—all I ask is the choice of my abode. What is there unreasonable in this demand? Shortly will I be at peace. This is the spot which I have chosen in which to breathe my last. Deny me not, I beseech you, so slight a boon" (265). Although she couches her insistence on staying in her house as a request, a dying plea, Brown makes it clear that Clara will not be moved.

Her determination to stay in her home, despite acknowledging it as "a scene which supplied eternal food to my melancholy," coincides with her determination to finish her story (268). This is no easy feat, since she must overcome yet another authorial obstacle, her uncle's refusal to let her finish her chronicle for fear that she is too delicate for the task. "They would have withheld from me the implements of writing, but they quickly perceived that to withstand would be more injurious than to comply with my wishes," Clara reports grimly, so she continues to stay, and to write, regardless of her uncle's supposed authority (268). Only when the final page is written and she thinks her narrative has ended does she receive her true impetus to

leave, and it comes not from her family members but from her own subconscious. It takes another wonderful experience, a prophetic dream, in which “wild and phantastical incongruities,” including whirlpools, volcanoes, and visions of her uncle, Wieland, Pleyel, and Carwin appear before “gleams of light were shot into a dark abyss” that foretokens a devastating house fire, to remove Clara (269). With her home literally and metaphorically in ashes, Clara leaves, but she leaves on her own terms, with the blessing and even impetus of her own supernatural certainty. The gleams of light in the dark abyss of Clara’s consciousness and the conflagration that follows recall her father’s fatal encounter with the “prelusive gleam . . . fatal spark . . . [and] fiery cloud” in reverse—while her father burns and his temple remains untouched, she survives but her home burns to the ground around her (21). This then, is one ending in which Clara triumphs even over her own expectations.

This is not to say that her survival comes without cost. While her father’s temple survives his death to become the locus of his children’s future trials and a monument to his bizarre legacy, her own home, the site of her autonomy and the heart of both her agency and her authorship—all of Clara’s writing and reading take place in the bedchamber that later burns around her—does not survive the conflagration. A house of her own before most women could even dream of a room of their own, Clara early on identifies her own deep connection to the possibilities it symbolized: “My father’s property was equally divided between us. A neat dwelling, situated on the bank of a river . . . was now occupied by me. . . . I was, besides, desirous of administering a fund, and regulating an household, of my own. The short distance allowed us to exchange visits as often as we pleased . . . I was sometimes their visitant, and they, as frequently, were my guests” (24). Clara’s home reflects her carefully absolute equality with her brother: equal heirs, they exchange equal visits. In the model society that is the Mettingen estate, Clara insists upon the kind of psychological and social parity centuries away from the reality Brown inhabited. Carwin offers this equity as one of the primary reasons he feels compelled to, and justified in, his plan to “test” Clara’s prodigious potential: “you were just as

tranquil and secure in this lonely dwelling, as if you were in the middle of the crowd” he tells her peevishly, having done everything in his power to divest her space and psyche of this tranquility (230). Pleyel too cites Clara’s household as a justifying factor in his own decision to study and catalog her, and indeed he uses architectural images throughout his explication of his project: “I have contemplated your principles, and been astonished at the solidity of their foundation, and the perfection of their structure. I have traced you to your home” (139). Clara’s home is then not just an extension of herself but an irresistible marker of difference, one that challenges all of her male antagonists. Even her maddened brother escapes from prison and returns to Clara’s bedchamber in order to destroy her. When her house burns, Clara survives, and is free to leave, but her own legacy is lost. In Europe, under her uncle’s guardianship, a member of his household rather than the head of her own, she is not quite what she was. And yet, even without the room of her own, she continues to write, and to exercise the full brunt of her narrative agency.

When she reappears three years after her “final” trauma, it is not to dwell on her sufferings but rather to provide even more narrative closure. At the second ending, Clara speaks from a place that, while distant from her home’s previous potential, is nonetheless grounded in both moral authority and authorial agency. In her second ending, she chronicles her dream, makes a cursory apology for “the infatuation and injustice of her conduct,” and then goes on to describe the rewards that conduct has reaped. She synthesizes the threads of several narratives into one final, cohesive summation in which her own recovery and happy marriage, a brief description of Carwin’s search for redemption, and even a new spate of sensationalistic violence produced by reintroduced resolution of the truncated and all-but-forgotten seduction narrative from earlier in the book all coalesce into a single teachable moment. And if the lesson Brown chooses to have her impart, “that the evils of which Carwin and Maxwell [the seducer] were the authors, owed their existence to the errors of their sufferers,” seems a particularly pithy indictment of human gullibility given the circumstances of the novel, it is worth pointing out

that Clara's judgments fall hardest on those men who "authored" the evil, and that their authorship ultimately collapses before her own (278). In the final moments of her second ending, Clara can definitively sweep away all other authors and weave together all the disparate narrative threads.

By the time *Wieland* concludes, Clara has successfully overcome all challenges to her narrative authority and contained all competing accounts within the rubric of her own master text. Her father's bizarre teachings and the legacy of his wondrous death, Carwin's contrived supernatural hoax, Wieland's insane conversion narrative, and Pleyel's romantic rejection are all subsumed within her own account, in which she retains her virtue, survives and discredits her persecutors, and even marries her harshest judge. While Wieland follows in the footsteps of his father's faulty conversion and falls prey to antinomianism, false assurance, and insanity, Carwin takes on the role of the "witch" who apes and abuses supernatural authority, and Pleyel proves unable to sustain his rational analytical system in the face of invisible world evidence, Clara survives their scrutiny and ultimately her own. She alone manages to follow the prescribed Calvinistic model for navigating the invisible world: her spiritual autobiography contains not only "legitimate" wonders but also the proper dedication to constantly evaluating the evidences of her own interiority in conjunction with external phenomena.<sup>45</sup> Although her survival and her future ultimately hinge upon her removal from the invisible world environs of America, Clara nevertheless leaves an imprint of supernatural agency for subsequent heroines to inherit and expand.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> According to Gilmore, Clara's final chapter demonstrates her ultimate redemption along comfortably Puritan lines, as "in Calvinist terms, Clara has been reborn through the agency of Christ: she has bared her soul and given her assent to the doctrine of original sin" (117).

<sup>46</sup> Some critics read this removal as a condemnation of the American project. Gross argues that Clara's relocation represents a failure of the American mythology of America as new Eden and the American as Adam in the garden (15). While I do agree that *Wieland* chronicles numerous *male* failures, and that Wieland is a disastrous incarnation of Adam, in my opinion Clara's survival of her supernatural/sentimental trials, along with Brown's insistence on her own innocence (she is no witch, nor is she Eve) offsets to a significant degree the bleakness of Carwin's and Wieland's examples.



## Chapter Two

### “We Must Have Been Witches, Indeed”<sup>1</sup>: Wilderness, Witchcraft, Heretics, and Representative Women in the National Romance

Before Hester Prynne ever lingered on the jailhouse threshold smelling Anne Hutchinson’s roses, and before she ever stepped tentatively into the woods to await her erstwhile minister lover, Mary Conant and Faith Leslie lived in the wilderness with their Indian husbands. Before Hawthorne’s narrator ever rustled around in the archive and came away with his mysterious antique A, *Hobomok*’s first storyteller rattled through his family library, converting mysterious Puritan manuscripts into a narrative of witchcraft, miscegenation, and divorce that all ultimately produce the quintessential American identity, and before Young Goodman Brown saw his first potentially diabolical specter in the woods, Hope Leslie took on the role of spectral saint, commanding the obedience of a sailor at least as devout (and/or gullible) than Brown. And while Hester dies a solitary death, Mary Conant and Hope Leslie raise the future generations of Puritan children, children, their authors imply, who will grow up to be representative Americans like their mothers. All of this is to say that the Puritan heroine has a long history in American literature, and her place in the national imagination is a key component of the national canon. She has been with us since the 1820s, when the national romance took shape, and she has been written by women who imagine her as an embodiment of subversive agency, “turning the Puritan errand into a female quest” (Castiglia, “In Praise” 10). To do this she has been a master of both natural and supernatural space, moving easily between hearth and heath, between the howling wilderness and the city on a hill, forming alliances with Indians and communities of witches. The way Puritan heroines relate to the wilderness, particularly its spectral components, and the way they behave when they return from it, encapsulates their subversive potential and the centrality of the invisible world to the American

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<sup>1</sup> *Hope Leslie*, (vol.2, 206)

imagination.

Contemporary scholarship often pairs *Hobomok: A Tale of Early Times* (1824) and *Hope Leslie; or Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827). While less frequently discussed, one more novel deserves admission to this collection: Harriet Vaughan Cheney's *A Peep at the Pilgrims in Sixteen Thirty-Six: A Tale of Olden Times* (1824). Each text draws heavily upon the archival materials of the early Puritans and refashions these materials and their narratives in ways that foreground female agency.<sup>2</sup> Each novel involves the Puritans of "early times," and tells stories in which good Puritan girls might befriend and even marry Indians, commune with the invisible world, espouse heresies, practice witchcraft, and defy their patriarchs, in each case fictional incarnations of historical figures, including: Richard Conant, Miles Standish, and John Winthrop. Despite their numerous transgressions against Puritan moral and social standards, these heroines explore the wilderness, a place of both natural and supernatural otherness, at will and return triumphantly to their cities on the hill. Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick radically re-imagine the Puritan supernatural as a navigable realm best traversed by women: they reclaim the roles of witch and heretic as positive models of dissent and female community.

All three of the novels I focus on in this chapter participate in the project of feminized historical progress, even as their authors create a tradition of female authorship within the national romance genre. *A Peep at the Pilgrims* was the second novel of a second generation of a family of American women writers: penned by Hannah Webster Foster's daughter Harriet Vaughan Cheney and published anonymously, it offered the story of the bewitching young Puritan maiden who survives and thrives in Indian captivity, only to triumphantly return and overcome her overbearing patriarchal father in order to marry the man of her choice. Cheney's

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<sup>2</sup> *Hope Leslie* includes quotations from William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, William Hubbard's *The Present State of New England*, Edward Johnson's *Wonder-working Providence of Sions Savior in New England*, Roger Williams's *A Key into the Language of America*, John Winthrop's *History of New England* and Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, among others. Baker argues that this proliferation is itself a gesture toward a particularly Puritan textuality, "the dizzying array of source materials that resembles Mather's compendium of early and contemporary materials for *Magnalia*" (130). Similarly, Child wrote *Hobomok* after thoroughly researching the Puritan texts in her brother's ample library, and these sources are alluded to (and edited) frequently. For a compelling reading of Child's reworking of these sources, which she labels "antiquated and almost unintelligible," see Karcher's introduction.

novel sold respectably enough but failed to make the splash of *Hobomok*, also published in 1824, which documents the interracial marriage of witchcraft-working Puritan protagonist and her Indian lover, and offered a “succes de scandale” devoured even as it was condemned by critics for its “contemptuous” treatment of Puritan men and the “unfeminine” actions of the heroine.<sup>3</sup> *Hope Leslie*, published some three years later, contains multiple Indian captivity narratives, interracial romances, and spectacular witchcraft and heresy trials, and was an instant hit with both critics and general audiences.<sup>4</sup>

Female authors like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick used the Puritans as subject matter in order to write an archetypal American character who was a woman with agency, specifically supernatural agency. The representative Puritan isn't just a woman, she's a woman who encapsulates all of the subversive invisible world associations of the most feared archetypes of female Puritanism: a witch and a heretic. Previous critics have focused on the subversive aspects of these authors' creation of female characters with mobility and community building abilities. Here, I want to insist that these aspects have an essential supernatural edge. The wilderness is a spectral space, its inhabitants feared to be the devil's children, and the sisterhoods the female protagonists form are based in their defiance of a patriarchy made possible by their supernatural agency. This agency often boils down to eloquence, a crucial component of witchcraft as well as a defining characteristic of the representative archetype that the “representative Puritan” women in these novels originate from: arch-heretic Anne Hutchinson. By switching from iconic patriarchs (like Winthrop) to iconoclastic matriarch (like Hutchinson) authors like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick reconfigure the Puritan past to provide a archetype of female agency rooted in eloquent defiance, a powerful legacy for nineteenth-century audiences.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on critical reception of Child's novel, see Karcher's introduction and Bergland's chapter in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Sedgwick's place in this canon, and her elision and eventual erasure in the early twentieth century, see Kelley's introduction to the 1987 edition of *Hope Leslie*, which details her transition from “founder” to “footnote” and the gender discrimination that this demotion implies. Karcher also addresses this topic in her introduction to the 1998 edition, and speaks at length to Sedgwick's role in shaping historical fiction in “Reconceiving Nineteenth-Century American Literature: The Challenge of Women Writers.”

### **Women in the Wilderness: Invisible Agency and Visible Community.**

*Who in those days of poverty and gloom, could have possessed a wand mighty enough to remove the veil which hid the American empire from the sight? Who would have believed that in two hundred years from that dismal period, the matured, majestic, and unrivalled beauty of England, would be nearly equalled by a **daughter**, blushing into life with all the impetuosity of youthful vigor? (Hobomok, 125, my emphasis)*

Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick, like their contemporaries Cooper and Irving, deliberately wrote American fictions, with American characters and American themes, codifying a canon of national archetypes and adventures from the archives of the colonial and revolutionary past, and taking, with every successful book and memorable character, much of the sting from the cosmopolitan consensus, best memorialized in Sydney Edward Smith's jeer in the *Edinburgh Review*: "In the four quarters of the globe who reads an American book?" These novels are most often discussed by modern critics as examples of "national romance," but are also known as "frontier romances," "domestic frontier romances," "national frontier romances," "historical romances," and "national fictions."<sup>5</sup>

The first common thread in these descriptors illuminates what has been commonly read as the genre's ultimate agenda—"national" fiction in the service of glorifying American history and creating a uniquely American literature. The other dominant theme in these labels is geographical—the frontier as the generative locus of American identity and thus the proper setting for the fiction that celebrates it. Many of these historical fictions drew upon Puritan history precisely for its proximity to this geography. As the wealth of Puritan texts that painstakingly detailed the colonists' interactions with the "howling wilderness" of early Massachusetts demonstrated, the transformation of the first American frontier offered a plethora of metaphorical and literal dangers from which to synthesize a narrative of American peril and progress. The project of these fictions, then, seemed inarguably transparent—to

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<sup>5</sup> For a succinct and informative overview of each of these permutations, see Tawil.

document the evolution from inchoate Puritan potential to the solidity of modern American civilization. What was murkier was *who*, precisely deserved the credit for transforming the wilderness into the modern world, and *how* that transformation had occurred. For authors like Cooper, it was the hardy, manly forefathers who triumphed over the landscape and its indigenous inhabitants alike in a clear and shining odyssey of hypermasculine progress. In the works of authors like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick, in contrast, progress often emerged in spite of rather than because of these forefathers, as the legacy of foremothers who allied themselves with the wilderness and its denizens and reshaped the narrative of American progress and identity as a female one.<sup>6</sup>

In his 1825 review of her fiction, Bryant wrote approvingly of Sedgwick's skill but also lamented that the author:

has not availed herself of the more obvious and abundant sources of interest, which would naturally suggest themselves to the author of a fictitious history, the scene of which should be laid in the United States. She has not gone back to the infancy of our country, to set before us the fearless and hardy men, who made the first lodgment in the vast forests, men in whose characters is to be found the favorite material of the novelist, great virtues mingled with many errors, the strange land to which they had come, its unknown dangers, the savage tribes by whom they were surrounded, to whose kindness they owed so much, and from whose enmity they suffered so deeply.<sup>7</sup>

What Bryant proposes here is, as Maria Karafilis has pointed out, essentially the template for the plot of *Hope Leslie*, as well as the already extant *Hobomok*, and I would add, *A Peep at the Pilgrims* (114). It is worth noting, however, that while Sedgwick, like Child and Cheney before

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<sup>6</sup> Relatively recent attempts, spearheaded by feminist scholars, have shed light on the process of erasure and ellision that masked the centrality of female novelists to the national romance genre in particular and the literary scene of the 1820s and 30s in particular. Numerous critics have written compellingly about this topic. For those particularly influential to this chapter, see Bergland, Karcher (Introductions to *Hobomok* and *Hope Leslie*), Castiglia, Kelly, Karafilis, Sweet, Douglass, Gould, Fetterley, and Baym (*American Woman Writers*).

<sup>7</sup> *North American Review* 20 [April 1825] 245-246.

her, gives Bryant some of things he asks for: “the vast forests,” “strange land,” and “savage tribes,” she also refigures his emphasis. While she does address the “great virtues mingled with many errors” that Bryant attributes to the Puritans, it is not the “fearless and hardy men” that she focuses on. Instead, *Hope Leslie* has the eponymous fearless and hardy *female* protagonist, who virtuously confronts and overcomes the many errors of her patriarchal society, by capitalizing on the potential of the strange land and allying herself with the savage tribes.

In choosing heroines over heroes, Child, Cheney and Sedgwick set themselves in opposition to a decidedly anti-female strain in the works of some of their notable fellow national romancers. In his 1826 preface to his novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper pointedly warned female readers that the national romance as he wrote it was not for them, since it dealt not with an “imaginary and romantic picture of things which never had an existence,” but with the real “obscurities of historical allusions,” and thus spoke “to matters which may not be universally understood, especially by the more imaginative sex” (v). Cooper stood at one end of the gendered fault line that ran through the genre of the national romance. What writers like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick offered from the opposite end was not his shining thread of patriarchal progress but rather a transformation of the historical record that pushed patriarchy to the wayside to make room for a series of heroines whose heroics offered what Ann Douglas has labeled an “*ex post facto* protest against the masculine solidities of the past” (185). Combating these solidities required the creation of an equally dense female tradition, an alternative canon, the beginnings of which could be found in texts like Rowlandson’s captivity narrative, and the further augmentation of which required a careful consolidation of fictional precedents.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> To this end, Sedgwick’s novel, which came three years after Cheney’s and Child’s, contains numerous allusions, homages, and even explicit references to those penned by her female contemporaries. *Hope Leslie*’s narrator throughout remains mindful of the contributions of “sister labourers” (1:88). Sedgwick uses the same historical characters and sources as *A Peep at the Pilgrims* and gives one of her characters, Hope Leslie’s young sister who happily marries the Indian Oneco and integrates permanently into his society, the name Mary in an echo of Mary Conant. Just like the Puritan archival materials, *A Peep at the Pilgrims* and *Hobomok* function as source texts, and Sedgwick weaves them into her narrative in a way that privileges the alternate history they have created, one of “Puritan society moderating under women’s liberal influence,” and the heroines who made it so (Baym, *American Women Writers* 199).

These precedents had recourse to a wide range of female exemplars. Many of the Puritan women showcased by the historical archive that nineteenth-century authors drew upon for their fictions were deeply linked to the invisible world, and many embodied its subversive potential. If, in general, “well-behaved women seldom make history,” then well-behaved Puritan women almost never did.<sup>9</sup> Even Rowlandson, held up by Puritan divine Increase Mather as an exemplar of Puritan piety and virtue, wrote of her experiences with invisible world influences: her narrative details her sojourn in the heart of the wilderness and her time as a captive of the demonic natives who inhabited that wilderness. The depth of her (uneasy) integration into that wilderness and its community is a significant subtext to her supposedly simple parable, and one that surfaces in many other examples of the (largely female-authored) canon of captivity narratives that followed.<sup>10</sup> Other Puritan women became notable as the victims of demonic possession. While possessed, they literally embodied the invisible world, an experience that compelled them to break almost every boundary imposed on them. Their bodies and minds alike defied conventional restraint: they tore off their clothing, spoke in tongues, and defied not only biblical teachings but the ministers and magistrates who embodied the authority of those teachings.<sup>11</sup> Still other women were not victims but rather willing accomplices to the under side of invisible world potential. These women, the supposed witches who made compacts with the devil and the heretics who ostensibly worked to return the saints’ city on a hill to a wilderness of

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<sup>9</sup> Here I borrow Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s iconic phrase. Anne Bradstreet might be considered the most notable exception here; as America’s first published poet she was lauded by her peers. However, it could be argued that a good deal of her fame and significance accrued in the centuries after her death. The Puritan ministers and magistrates who tolerated and even applauded her poetry paid nowhere near as much attention to the “good” Anne as they did to the “bad,” her contemporary, the convicted heretic Anne Hutchinson. Anne Bradstreet, despite her substantial textual output and all her subsequent fame, did not merit her own place in Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia*, appearing only as a footnote to a male relation. Hutchinson, on the other hand, despite the fact that none of her writing or speech remains (beyond the transcript of her trials), permeated the Puritan canon, a specter not only in the *Magnalia* but across a range of sermons, pamphlets, tracts, and histories.

<sup>10</sup> For examples and an overview of the genre, see Derounian-Stodola.

<sup>11</sup> In *Memorable Providences*, Cotton Mather counts his adolescent subject’s lack of deference to his authority as significant evidence of her possession, as no normal maiden would show so little respect for a male minister. For an overview of the gendered aspects of possession’s effects, and the agency it provided, see Klaitz.

error, abound in Puritan accounts, and the legacy of their alternative agency was a desirable import for protofeminist national romancers like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick.

Critics of the early national romances have frequently noted the seemingly ahistorical qualities of the novels' Puritan heroines. Steven Carl Arch argues that they demonstrate "an anachronistic degree of self-sufficiency" (118). Adelheid Staehelin-Wackernagel complains that "most female characters are the least true figures in the novel . . . their surroundings are often drawn with more realism, with which they inevitably have no direct connection" (81). Staehelin-Wackernagel believes that the ultimate failure of these heroines is their betrayal of the historical standard: "They do not present a valuable characterization of the Puritan" (81). This perception, however, misreads the type of Puritan these nineteenth-century female authors were interested in characterizing. It was not the demure embodiment of Puritan feminine virtue but rather the self-sufficiency of female dissidence that they sought, a model not so much entirely anachronistic as grounded in alternative source of agency. These authors draw upon wilderness experiences and invisible world encounters of captives, heretics, and witches to synthesize the defiance of social and spiritual norms enacted by the women of the Puritan historical record into characters who exemplify the agency inherent in that defiance. In the eyes of Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick, their heroines' subversive potential is actually precisely and deliberately what makes them valuable characterizations of the Puritan—they lay the groundwork for what the representative Puritan woman and worthy forbear for the nineteenth-century woman *should* be.<sup>12</sup>

Sedgwick's narrator admits that: "it has been seen that Hope Leslie was superior to some of the prejudices of the age," but goes on to argue that this superiority "may be explained

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<sup>12</sup> This topic has been explored at length by numerous feminist critics, who are more or less consistent in seeing *Hope Leslie* and *Hobomok* as deliberately revisionist histories. Karcher's introduction calls *Hobomok* a "radical revision of patriarchal script (x). Mary Kelley's introduction labels it an "alternative history," a phrase Ross also adopts (xxx, 323). Garvey claims the text "revises the history of Puritan New England" (290). For Maddox it is a "self-consciously feminist revision of male-transmitted history" (103). For Zagarell, "the novel challenges the official history of original settlements" (235). Baym disputes the effectiveness of Sedgwick's revisionist impulse, arguing that she is ultimately conservative, and her revisionist spirit when tested "lukewarm" (*American Women Writers* 158). She does not, however, dispute the revisionist intent. Tawil argues that *Hope Leslie's* project is ultimately one of racist reification, but argues that this project is accomplished in revisionary ways.



without attributing too much to her natural sagacity” (1:179). Rather than a prodigy of unrealistically modern thought, Hope is simply the natural product of her own capacity for dissent (1:179).

The great lengths Sedgwick goes to to establish the possibility of a character like Hope developing in “real” colonial society underscores the necessity of the viable model of female alterity in her fiction: Hope, the self-described “pilgrim damsel,” like her cohorts Mary Conant and Miriam Grey, offers a fundamental counterweight to the rigidity and harshness of the Puritan forefathers (1:144). All three authors divide the colonial legacy into a balance of errors and virtues: affiliating the virtuous qualities to the heroines and the errors to their fathers, magistrates, and ministers. In *Hobomok* and *A Peep at the Pilgrims*, men wrangle endlessly over dogmatic minutiae, persecute women and Indians, and embody exactly the kind of narrow-minded canting ignorance that nineteenth-century audiences saw as the cause of witch trials and Indian massacres while their dissenting daughters offer another, liberal-minded way, one that speaks truth to patriarchy, defies theological myopathy, forms communal bonds between women, and women and Indians, and posits inclusive rather than exclusive social models.<sup>13</sup> These models reinvisioned the wilderness, and its supernatural potential, as an accessible space conducive to female agency, and filled it with the kind of women who could tap its potential.

Wilderness is much more than a physical space. In *Hobomok*, *A Peep at the Pilgrims*, and *Hope Leslie*, as in the captivity narratives, jeremiads, and histories they draw upon, navigating the wilderness is always a supernatural as well as natural journey. It is no accident

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<sup>13</sup> See Sweet as well as Karcher’s introduction for careful dissections of male Puritans in *Hobomok* in particular. The payoff for the effects of the “benign feminine anarchy” brought on by defiant young Puritan women like these heroines could be realized in concrete nineteenth-century terms—an alternative history creates an alternative precedent that might then be adapted to challenging nineteenth century standards and tropes (Douglas 185). As Maddox argues: “Working backward from their own circumstances in the early years of the nineteenth century, when women . . . are sufficiently liberated to debate ideas with men and publish novels that revise male-transmitted history, they can argue the changed status of women is the result of a process of reform begun nearly two-hundred years before by the small rebellions of a few spirited and intelligent women against the Puritan patriarchy” (96). To this end, Child, Cheney and Sedgwick aimed for “the female consciousness [to] become the American model,” and “nothing less than the deployment of biological woman as the representative American” (Maddox 7, Fetterley 86). This agenda flows as an undercurrent of intense power throughout the offerings of each of these authors, and they use the invisible world to accomplish it.

that Bryant's description of the ideal American novel defines its characters through their setting. Without the "strange land" composed of "vast forests" and "unknown dangers" he suggests to Sedgwick, he cannot conceptualize the Puritans. For Bryant and his contemporaries, it is the Puritans' struggle with this wilderness that defines them. This definition existed not just in the popular imagination of nineteenth-century literature, but in the minds of the Puritans themselves.

To the Puritans, the wilderness was treacherous not just for its terrifying natural phenomena, of which there were many, and each flood, fire, meteor, famine, etc. was carefully cataloged, but also for the supernatural powers capable of effecting those phenomena. It was the special habitat of the invisible world, the sphere of supernatural influence that overlaid and influenced the visible realities of everyday existence. The landscape reflected divine signs and portents, uplifting as well as terrifying, but it also showed makers of diabolical agency. The wilderness, they knew, was the devil's natural habitat, for, as Cotton Mather asks in *Wonders of the Invisible World*: "Where was it that the Devil fell upon our Lord? It was when he was Alone in the Wilderness" (*Wonders* 196). For Mather, the American wilderness extends and amplifies the troubles of its biblical precedents: "Alas I may sigh over this Wilderness, as Moses did over his, in Psalm 90.7.9 We are consumed by thine Anger and by thy Wrath we are troubled" (*Wonders* 75). Demonic specters, invisible agents, and possessed familiars were known to populate wilderness spaces, as potent, and more dangerous, than the scores of wolves that made the wilderness literally "howl." Everyone who spent time in the shadowy and weather-beaten forests exposed themselves to a diabolical realm. From this realm came "demonic" indigenous inhabitants vilified in journals, sermons, possession and captivity narratives alike, and to it retreated the witches who sought to covenant with the devil and thus to demolish both the literal and spiritual space of the Church. The wilderness offered a constant, vivid intersection of the natural and supernatural space that made up the contiguous Puritan universe.

Cheney, Child, and Sedgwick create Puritan women who traverse the wilderness freely

and successfully mold it into the lines of nineteenth-century success. Rather than subsuming the supernatural aspects of their heroines' wilderness projects, they celebrate them. While critics have discussed at length the role of wilderness as an alternative space for the formation of female agency, and the leverage to be gained from alliances with the wildernesses' indigenous inhabitants against a common patriarchal oppressor, the supernatural aspects of female wilderness mobility deserve more emphasis than they have often heretofore received.<sup>14</sup> For the Puritans, the wilderness was not just a non-domestic space, it was the sphere of witchcraft and enchantment. The Indians were not just non-Puritan others, they were the devil's children. And it is because, rather than despite, these associations, that Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick send their heroines into the wilderness for so long.

The affiliation of Indians and women had to do with their symbolic potential. Feminine weakness and Demonic Otherness were entrenched concepts with both literal incarnations (women and Indians) and metaphorical significance. All souls were feminine, and all souls were vulnerable to Satan's temptations, but a female body encased the weakness of the feminine soul in a physical form that mirrored (and intensified) the soul's vulnerability.<sup>15</sup> As visible denizens of the wilderness that clearly embodied not just mundane hazards but invisible, spiritual perils, "Swarthy Indians" as Cotton Mather explained, were easily recognizable as "Sooty Devils" (*Wonders* 71). While white (Puritan) male bodies were most recognizable as "figures for Christ," non-white, non-male bodies were more readily identifiable as non-normative, and thus, "figures

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<sup>14</sup> Castiglia sees novels like *Hope Leslie* and *A Peep at the Pilgrims* as reformulated captivity narratives that challenge the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres by showing heroines equally at home in domestic and extra-domestic spaces. Burnham's *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in Western Literature 1682-1861* explores the captivity narrative as a bestselling and representative genre in American literature precisely because of the ways in which it exposes mainstream ideologies and epistemologies (Puritanism, Republican Motherhood, Manifest Destiny) to situations that make protagonists (usually women) transgress the cultural or gender norms of these ideologies. Karcher's introductions to both texts articulate a complex but compelling critical consensus that argues that ultimately authors like Child and Sedgwick formed relationships between Indians and heroines in service of female agency, rather than an interest in the plight of the Native Americans. Critics like Tawil and Bergland have compellingly illustrated the ideologies of exploitation and racial hegemony that underlie many of these relationships. My intention is not to argue against this exploitation, but rather to add that a central desirable quality of the Indian "other" to writers like Cheney, Child, and Sedgwick was the affiliation with supernatural spaces and (supposedly) diabolical agency.

<sup>15</sup> For a succinct articulation and unpacking of this logic, see Reis.

for Satan.”<sup>16</sup> Not all women and Indians were, by Puritan reckoning, automatically damned, but they were easily recognizable as “figures for the damned” (Bergland 28).

The Puritan wilderness was primarily an Other space, the meeting place of witches and the natural home of primitive demons and devil worshippers, a realm filled with undesirable elements. Defining oneself in opposition to wilderness influences formed a central component of the stable Puritan self. This opposition survives intact in many of the national romances. In Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales, for example, men move easily through the perilous wilderness, ever on guard against a hostile environment survivable only through the constant vigilance made possible by masculine strengths and skills. The national romances of female authors like Cheney, Child, and Sedgwick, on the other hand, invert Cooper’s paradigm, making women the natural explorers of and emissaries to the wilderness.<sup>17</sup> Not only do their heroines survive the visible perils of wild landscapes and native peoples, they manage to elide or manipulate the attendant spiritual perils as well. For the women of these novels, the wilderness and its inhabitants offer only surmountable challenges, with demonstrable rewards. In the Indians their Puritan fathers and brothers have labeled “a race that are the children and heirs of the Evil One,” they find surrogate mothers or adopted sisters, friends, and even husbands who continue to embody Otherness, but of a kind dangerous only to a myopic patriarchalism (*Hope Leslie* 1:52). Their connections with these new allies do not shy away from but rather emphasize supernatural agency, which they carry home to a “civilized” Puritan space.

In recasting the wilderness’s indigenous inhabitants, the traditional foes of the Puritan patriarchs, as the natural allies of the Pilgrim damsels, female novelists created an alliance that

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<sup>16</sup> Bergland, 28. For more on the Puritan concept of feminine weakness and its relationship to supernatural agency, particularly accusations of witchcraft, see Karlsen and Reis. Kibbey argues that women and Indians provided “material shape” to undesirable concepts within Puritan cosmography; she links Puritan attacks on the Pequods to the persecution of Anne Hutchinson and her followers as similarly grounded efforts to excise exemplars of these concepts. Bergland’s chapter “Summoning the Invisible World” summarizes and builds upon Kibbey’s argument to explore the significance of the figure of the Indian in the Puritan mythos in more depth.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed contrast of the logic of gender and wilderness in Cooper’s novels versus Child’s and Sedgwick’s, see Karcher’s introductions to both texts.

exposed and codified what they figured as two distinct types of historical male error: the misidentification of “noble savages” as demonic minions and the misapprehension of virtuous women as diabolically motivated heretics and witches.<sup>18</sup> Mistreatment of one group naturally stemmed from the same errors that led to the misprision of the other. Sedgwick employs this logic at the beginning of her novel to offer as context for readers who might be perplexed by the errors of Puritan/Pequod relations, in which “the courage of the Pequods was distorted into ferocity,” a reminder of the same Puritan forefathers’ backwards conceptions of gender relations: “How far is the present age in advance of that which drove reformers to a dreary wilderness! which hanged Quakers! which condemned to death, as witches, innocent, unoffending old women!” (1:76. 16). In binding these two groups together, however, these authors did not mean to strip either of their supernatural agency: instead, they rebranded it as something misunderstood by mainstream (male) Puritan myopathy.

The trope of innocent and unoffending women becomes a shared bond between heroines of both races, as each novelist works to put a female face on Indian identity, one whose feminine nobility undermines the rhetoric of the horde of demonic savages that supposedly necessitate the Puritan patriarchs’ repressive severity. Sedgwick’s noble Magawisca, daughter of a woman known for her kindnesses to Puritan settlers and Mioma, Cheney’s own version of that noble woman, become the representatives of Indian nobility that define Indian identity in their respective novels. In a further reification of gender rather than race as the dominant determining factor of human behavior and experience, male and female characters tend to have wildly different wilderness experiences, experiences that highlight female strengths and illuminate male limitations. In *A Peep at the Pilgrims*, for example, the Puritan heroine Miriam becomes the captive of Mononotto and his wife Mioma, becoming in short order Mioma’s ward

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<sup>18</sup> Many critics have discussed the self-serving aspects of this linkage in the hands of white female writers, in which the valorization of Indians in these novels is “less about Indians versus whites than about white women versus white men, and especially about white women’s desire to be recognized and empowered within male-dominated society” (Republican Mothers and Indian Wives, 38). For insightful analyses of the way female national romance writers leveraged Indian subjects in the service of their own agency, see Baym, Bergland, Ross, Melissa Ryan, and Stadler.

and adopted daughter, freed, ultimately, through Mioma's diplomatic efforts on her behalf, despite rather than because of the rescue efforts of ostensible hero Major Atherton, who only manages to get himself captured and touches of a war between Pequods and Puritans in the process. So misplaced, aggressive, and clumsy are his heroics that even the fictionalized version of Miles Standish loses patience with him: "I cannot learn that she was in any danger, till you provoked the Indians to vengeance," he lectures (475). Atherton's captivity experience follows the textbook template for savage terror: he spends it tied to a stake, subjected to incessant threats of violence and constantly in fear for his life. This by no means an uncommon trope of the male wilderness experience in women's writing—Atherton's captors plan to kill him in a vengeance-fueled ritual sacrifice that mirrors the one Magawisca saves young Everell Fletcher from in *Hope Leslie*, and even *Hobomok's* young hero Brown is captured and tortured off-scene by barbaric pirates.<sup>19</sup>

While Cheney never explicitly identifies Miriam as anything other than a standard Puritan damsel, throughout the novel she possesses an eerie capacity to enchant her fellows. The first sound her future husband Atherton hears upon his evening arrival to the deserted streets of New Plymouth is her singing, a bewitching melody that seems to him to encapsulate all the wondrous potential of the bizarre night-time dreamscape through which he wanders in which "moonlight scenery float[ing] before their eyes like a vision of enchantment" makes strange the lineaments of ostensibly civilized space (6). Her voice penetrates his consciousness and "haunt[s] his dreams" afterwards (7). When he finally lays eyes on her, she is part of an even more fantastical nightscape, riding a bark "tossed on [the Atlantic's] foaming billows" and framed by "agitated waters" and "boundless deep," a fantastical and fascinating sight he gazes upon at length "insensible to personal inconvenience" (98). Miriam's affiliation with liminal spaces: the spectral otherworld of the Puritan settlement at night, a tempestuous sea voyage,

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<sup>19</sup> As Bergland points out, despite his lack of a stereotypical Indian captivity narrative per-se, the perils of the uncivilized wilderness are particularly perilous for Brown: "At times it seems as if the novelist has it in for Brown; as if she takes a certain vengeful glee in his discomfiture. Not only marginalized, Brown is also banished, silenced, shipwrecked, captured, enslaved, supplanted, presumed dead, and treated as a ghost" (80).

and the heart of a hostile Indian village mark her as as a decidedly weird figure—one not only comfortable in but representative of all of the “other” spaces that represent not the mundane everydayness of mainstream Puritanism but rather the more shadowy potential of its invisible world alternatives.

Miriam’s presence, in any form, is mesmerizing. She has a similarly bewitching effect on her Indian captors, who take to her despite their ostensibly deep and primitive hatred for Puritans. Would-be-cannibals possessed of “inhuman barbarity” and “vindictive enemies, whose disfigured countenances glared upon him like demons,” the Pequods make Atherton’s life in captivity a living hell, but these rough edges do not hinder Miriam from assimilating into their society seamlessly. This easy assimilation is helped by her protector and near doppelganger, Mioma, the wife of Mononotto. With personalities as nearly identical as their names, Miriam and Mioma blur the supposedly solid lines of racial identity in favor of a shared experience of gender with an ease so eerie as to be supernatural.

Miriam’s captivity, unlike Atherton’s, is a case study in interracial hospitality. Even before she arrives in the wigwam that will ostensibly be her prison, Mioma has rearranged it to be more in keeping with her tastes, for “though a wigwam seldom contains more than one room for the accommodation of a whole family, she knew it was not agreeable to the customs of the white people, and native delicacy taught her to consult the feelings of those who were cast on her hospitality” (406). Mioma’s “native delicacy,” an entrenched sense of domestic hospitality, marks feminine virtue as an indigenous (and Indigenous) trait and lays the groundwork for her own easy integration into the family unit, and domestic economy, of the tribe.

From the comfort of her modified wigwam Miriam participates in an idealized version of the kind of economic exchange that runs throughout Mary Rowlandson’s iconic ur-captivity narrative as a counterpoint to the main thread of unrelenting terror.<sup>20</sup> Throughout her twenty-

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<sup>20</sup> Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), achieved the status of a “colonial classic” by the early nineteenth century. It chronicles the author’s experience as a prisoner during King Philip’s War (Derounian-Stodola, 3). Rowlandson’s narrative quickly achieved and maintained “bestseller” status, going through four editions in its first

one removes, Rowlandson begins to incorporate herself into the Narraganset economy, trading the products of her sewing skills for sustenance and tools. Miriam too utilizes her sewing skills while captive, although not as a means for survival, but rather to “employ her many leisure moments,” as the adopted daughter of Mioma. Not only does Miriam make a genteel pastime from Rowlandson’s economy of survival, she, unlike Rowlandson, does not craft the familiar Puritan shirts, aprons and pockets but instead, “acquired the art of weaving small baskets, and embroidering moccasins with porcupines’ quills.”<sup>21</sup> Miriam’s willingness to learn Indian crafts, and her easy integration into Mioma’s household and her family, bifurcates and rewrites Rowlandson’s harrowing captivity narrative—Atherton experiences the perils of the savage wilderness while Miriam finds a new home and family—in her Indian mother, Mioma, Miriam finds a near perfect mirror of herself, a brave, resourceful and noble woman with an irrefragible sense of domestic duty. The similarity of the women’s dispositions, like the near interchangeability of their names, underscores women’s easy potential to be as at home in the wilderness as they are in their own parlors. It emphasizes the triumph of gendered similarity over racial difference. Child’s Mary Conant takes this facility even further, moving from the wigwam of her Indian mother-in-law to a wigwam of her own, where she lives a life “something more than enduring” with her Indian husband, half-Indian son, and regular visits from her friend, the respectable Puritan matron Sally Collier (*Hobomok* 169).

Child’s, Cheney’s, and Sedgwick’s willingness to transform the wilderness’s denizens from Others into other selves does not come at the expense of the supernatural elements of that

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year of publication and selling thousands of copies in England and America, with regular re-publications throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For an overview of the text’s importance and place within the captivity narrative genre, see Derounian-Stodola’s introduction in *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives*. For an in-depth discussion of these narratives as foundational texts in the development of the American novel, see Hartman’s *Providence Tales and the Birth of American Literature*.

<sup>21</sup> (410-11). Rowlandson’s sewing skills are in high demand, and the precursors to legitimate economic transactions. During the thirteenth remove, for example, an Indian woman “asked me to make a shirt for her Papoos, for which she gave me a mess of Broth, which was thickened with meal made of the Bark of a Tree, and to make it the better, she had put into it about a handfull of Pease, and a few roasted Ground- nuts” (29). The economy in which she operates, however, is much bleaker and more dire than Miriam’s, and unlike Miriam she never perceives her actions as any kind of social or cultural integration.



wilderness. Sedgwick, like Cheney, creates a heroine more than comfortable in the wilderness and pairs her with her own Indian double, the Pequod maiden Magawisca.<sup>22</sup> But while Cheney presents the eerie doubling of Miriam and Mioma, and Miriam's own facility with wilderness life, as a kind of implicitly supernatural potential, Sedgwick chooses to play up these supernatural implications, emphasizing the uncanny nature of their connection. From the start, Hope is defined by her comfort with the wilderness. She confidently explores and inhabits a space she describes as thrilling not solely for its natural beauty but rather for its supernatural potential: "He must have a torpid imagination and a cold heart, I think, who does not fancy these vast forests filled with invisible intelligences," she explains (1:146). Hope's "invisible intelligences" not only call to mind Cotton Mather's invisible world, they are also strongly reminiscent of Magawisca's own explanation for the wilderness's appeal to the Indians, "whose imagination breathed a living spirit into all the objects of Nature," and whose world, like the wonder-filled terrain of the Puritan landscape, is filled with invisible intelligences, as "the valley, the air, the trees, every little rivulet, had their present invisible spirit, and the good might hold discourse with them (1:121, 1:157).

Hope and Magawisca share more than simply an understanding of the invisible world: Sedgwick strongly affiliates them both with supernatural agency. Hope's adopted father, the staunch Puritan Mr. Fletcher, earnestly writes to his wife that his first sight of the child "reminded him of the heathen doctrine of metempsychosis," and that "he could almost believe the spirit of the mother was transferred to the bosom of the child" (1:37). Magawisca's father too sees in his daughter as a medium for his dead wife's spirit. He frequently reminds her that "thou lookest on me with thy mother's eye, and speakest with her voice" (1:123). To the novel's most staunchly Puritan characters, these traits point to a very specific identity. Jennet, the Fletcher's

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<sup>22</sup> Many critics have commented upon the relationship between Magawisca and Hope. Fetterley, Sweet, and Castiglia focus on the significance of their sisterly bond, while Ross makes a detailed comparison between Magawisca and Hope to foreground the "Indian" characteristics Hope learns from her adoptive sister/role model, particularly their active personality traits in contrast with more traditionally docile national romance heroines. Stadler reads Magawisca as a role model for Hope, one who provides a template for feminine defiance of the Puritan patriarchy.

rigidly orthodox servant, immediately labels Magawisca a failed “brand from the burning,” a biblical allusion that is also the title of one of Cotton Mather’s texts on demonic possession, and does not hesitate to label her and the old Indian woman Neleema witches (1:29). Her suspicions fall just as easily on Hope, and when the girl disappears mysteriously she assures her employers that such things are typical since Hope, “was always like a crazed body of moonlight nights; there was never any keeping her within the four walls of a house” (1:251). While Jennet stops just short of naming Hope a witch, she implicates her in exactly the kind of behavior that would cast suspicion upon any good Puritan maiden, and invokes exactly the kind of behavior that *did* begin the trials and tribulations of the afflicted and accused during the Salem trials of 1692.

Hope, indeed, skates perilously close to this kind of identification on numerous occasions, not least because of her extremely public affinity for Indian beliefs and even rituals. When her tutor Master Craddock is bitten by a rattlesnake, she wastes no time in summoning the elderly Indian woman Nelema and even participating in the “heathen hag’s” healing ritual before Jennet’s judgmental gaze, a ritual that contains not only herbal medicine but also an intricate performance of supernatural intervention in which Nelema uses a mysterious wand “as if she were writing hieroglyphics on the invisible air . . . [and] writhed her body into the most horrible contortions, and tossed her withered arms wildly about her,” in a performance so engrossing that even Hope “trembled lest she should assume the living form of the reptile whose image she bore” (1:153). Hope’s instigation of and participation in this ritual earns her the censure of the Puritan patriarchy, to whom Jennet delivers a full and damning report of the young girl’s role as “an aid and abetment of this emissary of Satan” (1:155). Despite Hope’s staunch defense of her own and Nelema’s actions, even her adoptive father sees clear evidence of witchcraft and backs it up with a deluge of biblical evidence, bombarding Hope with “every text where familiar spirits, necromancers, sorcerers, wizards, witches, and witchcraft are spoken of” (1:159). Thus overwhelmed with corrective evidence, an obedient Puritan maiden would show penitence for the error of her ways. Hope, however, continues to defend the “witch” Nelema and

to implicate herself alongside her, defying the magistrates and even secretly arranging Nelema's escape once she is convicted, since, as she assures the Puritan magistrates who oversee the trial, "Nelema was as innocent as myself." (1:159). That by Puritan lights Hope's actions and beliefs do not illuminate Nelema's innocence but rather her own guilt is a point Sedgwick drives home with numerous other supernatural exploits, of which none is perhaps more telling than Hope's own Indian captivity.

For an extremely brief interval, Sedgwick makes Hope the captive of Mononotto and his son Oneco, who drag her into the wilderness in hopes of exchanging her for family members, including Magawisca and Hope's sister Mary, Oneco's bride. Aided by a storm of providential proportions, Hope escapes her original Indian captors, fleeing into the wilderness. When her natural knowledge of the landscape is not enough she draws upon its supernatural potential, and falls on her knees in a heart-felt prayer for salvation, only to be subsequently mistaken for an apparition of a saint by a particularly pious ruffian, who worships at her feet and transports her to safety after she perpetuates his delusion. While she does not believe in the saint her rescuer invokes, and undergoes a brief moment of scruples over exploiting a "devotion [that] approached so near to worship," Hope is legitimately convinced of her right to invoke and embody that saint's power, and she sees her survival as a clear indication that this agency bears Providential endorsement (2:93). Hope's easy usurpation of otherworldly authority, however, causes intense anxiety for the Puritan household she returns to, and her actions touch off an intense debate as to the "scripture warrant" of spectral duplicity, with the ultimate consensus being that Hope's actions represented not an embodiment but a usurpation of the intemperate designs of Providence (2:140). Only witches, after all, gain the ability to project spectral selves and to use those more-than-human selves to further their own agendas: the cost of this agency is no less than allegiance with the devil.<sup>23</sup> Sedgwick defines both Hope and Magawisca through

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<sup>23</sup> Prophetic dreams and spectral visions (of both divine and diabolical origins) were staple elements of the Puritan supernatural. For example, Increase Mather's *Remarkable Providences* (1684) includes a full chapter "Concerning Apparitions," in addition to detailing a range of spectral dream phenomena as substantive evidence for the preceding

their supernatural agency—one explicitly condemned by Puritans but embraced by Indians. Yet despite her wilderness and witchcraft, Hope still remains firmly within the Puritan fold.

Child makes perhaps the most explicit connection between women, wilderness, and invisible world agency: her protagonist, Mary Conant, engages in actual witchcraft, performing the kind of ritual magic that would have easily earned her a place on Gallows Hill. Early in the novel, an act of “childish witchery” showcases her comfortable relationship with both the natural and supernatural wilderness, allowing her to cast a husband-finding spell in woods mere steps from her front door, behind which sleeps her strict Puritan father (10). The ritual she performs is far from innocent by Puritan lights. She not only casts a magic circle but also chants a summoning invocation and performs a blood sacrifice in the service of her own orectic interests: “taking a knife from her pocket, she opened a vein in her little arm, and dipping a feather in the blood, wrote something on a piece of white cloth, which was spread before her” (17). This writing, which creates tangible, textual evidence of traffic with invisible forces, recalls the ultimate damning proof that condemned the Salem witches: the alleged signing of the Devil’s black book, a written covenant that authorized invisible forces to act in the visible world.<sup>24</sup> In this one moment, Mary has done enough to assure that she be put to death. However, despite her shamefaced acknowledgment to a friend that she has “done a wicked thing,” and despite the fact that the tale’s good Puritan narrator (fortuitously hiding behind an available tree) observes her doing it, she is never punished for her witchcraft, or even exposed.

Instead, the spell truly forecasts her marriage to the Indian Hobomok, who appears within the magical circle she creates because it just happens to overlap with a pagan sacred site.

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chapters: “Concerning things Preternatural” and “That There are Demons and Possessed Persons.” Critics have discussed the intense and complex problem of apparitional selves, and spectral evidence of those apparitions, a key problem of the Salem Trials of 1692, at great lengths. For useful overviews of the phenomenon in Puritan literature and its later adaptations, see Miller and Colacurcio. For discussions of its gendered dimensions, see Ruttenburg and Gustafson.

<sup>24</sup> Bergland compares this ritual to the documented practices of young women in Salem, who used an improvised crystal ball in an attempt to discover, among other things, “what trade their sweet harts should be of.” Instead of a benevolent visitation from a future spouse, however, these girls saw “a specter in the likeness of a Coffin” and, as the record shows, quickly descended into the throes of affliction and possession (72). In rewriting this familiar scene, then, it Child is in a sense reworking the legacy of Salem.

He explains to the startled Mary that he “came through the hollow, that he might make the Manitto Asseinah green as the oak tree.’ As he spoke this he threw a large bough upon the heap of rocks to which he had pointed, and looking up to the moon, he uttered something in the Indian tongue, which seemed like a short incantation or prayer” (17). The overlap between his holy site and her magic circle, between her incantation and his, would, with less sympathetic treatment, substantiate the Puritan conviction that the Indians who inhabited the physical wilderness and the demons and witches who populated its metaphorical dimensions were indeed linked. Child, however, creates the connection in a way that implies that Mary’s witchcraft is as natural a part of the landscape as Hobomok’s own indigenous faith, and no mention of the ceremony, or its dark implications, ever follows her home to the Puritan fold.<sup>25</sup> And home to the Puritan fold she does go, with her half-Indian son and a new Anglican husband. Similarly, Miriam returns from her integration into Mioma’s tribe to resume her perfect Puritan status, even converting her husband to her own feminine brand of Puritanism. Hope Leslie too returns and marries the Puritan love interest she shares with Magawisca, after receiving Magawisca’s blessing.

As a husband, Hobomok represents a fascinating hybridity. On one hand, he represents the archetypal “noble Indian,” who communes with and embodies nature yet idealizes Puritan culture. On the other, he is the incarnation of dangerous supernatural otherness: he shares his name not just with an Indian historically friendly to the early settlers but also with the Indian spirit or “devil-god” Habbamock, who according to indigenous tradition “entered certain individuals and resided in their bodies as guardian and familiar” (Godbeer 192). The Puritan supernatural, however, held little space for spiritual guardians other than Christ, and Habbamock’s guardianship translated to Calvinist observers as demonic possession. So clear was this equivalence that at least one woman was executed as a witch for seeking Habbamock’s

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the significance of this indigenous/supernatural overlap, see Bergland, Karcher’s introductions to *Hobomok and Hope Leslie*, and Samuels, “Women, Blood, and Contract.”

possession.<sup>26</sup> Mary's marriage with Hobomok, then, gives her access to recognizably demonic agency packaged in the form of heroic rescuer and husband. Moreover, Hobomok's devotion to Mary, a "tender reverence" in which "all her looks were law" recasts her role in the demonic compact from possessed victim to possessor of authority, even as it restructures the entrenched gender hierarchy of conventional marriage (169). Hobomok offers a paradigm of spousal relations predicated in female agency; the historical allusion entrenched in his name renders this paradigm heavily freighted with the transgressive potential of the invisible world. Hobomok's generally noble behavior, however, divides the demonic agenda from its representative trappings, replacing the traditional degradation of possession with a template of companionate marriage and mutual respect. That this is the result of Mary's "spell" suggests that the kind of supernatural agency branded "evil" by Puritan patriarchs is evil only because it threatens that patriarchy's hierarchical structures and not, as conventional wisdom implied, those possessing (or possessed by) it.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, in *Hope Leslie* Sedgwick couches the supposedly demonic Indians' noblest gestures in demonstrations of invisible world agency. Nelema saves Hope's tutor in a healing ritual that is in every sense a *ritual*, one that invokes rattlesnake spirits and requires not just Nelema's chanting and gesturing but Hope's own willing participation in the ceremony. Demonic as it seems, however, it saves Craddock's life. In the wilderness, free from the pejorative lens of the Puritan perspective Indians' supernatural affinity emerges as a pure spiritual agency. Sedgwick portrays Magawisca's decision to sacrifice her arm to save Everell's life as a impetus brought on by spiritual inspiration. Magawisca is honored rather than excoriated by her people for giving herself over to this form of possession: "To all it seemed that his deliverance had been achieved by miraculous aid. All — the dullest and coldest — paid

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<sup>26</sup> In 1653, a woman was hanged for ostensibly taking Habbamock for her husband. See Goodbeer (192) and Slotkin (142).

<sup>27</sup> A number of critics have expressed interest in Hobomok as an expression of a substitute spiritual tradition, one that divorces theology from morality and thus encompasses an alternative to the strictures of Calvinist doctrine. See in particular Sederholm and Kelley.

involuntary homage to the heroic girl, as if she were a superior being, guided and upheld by supernatural power” (1:137). In this formulation, being guided and upheld by a supernatural power, even one *not* in the form of the Christian god, is heroic rather than degrading.

Mary Conant and Hope Leslie both have access to the positive and empowering aspects of the alternative supernatural as embodied by Indian characters. What looks like a demonic compact for Mary actually becomes a companionate marriage, and “witchcraft” saves Hope Leslie’s tutor while “possession” enables her fiancé’s deliverance. Sedgwick and Child both envision the wilderness as an Other space that offers an alternative tradition of Indian spiritual belief that provides its heroines a way to access supernatural agency without patriarchal oversight. Heroines like Mary and Hope bring this tradition back from the wilderness in the guise of “witchcraft,” allowing authors like Child and Sedgwick to co-opt the discourse of the demonic into not just a source of alternative agency but also of moral superiority.

### **Witchcraft, Eloquence, and Female Community**

*“I am sure, father, no one would liken a woman to an image, who was within the sound of her tongue.” (A Peep at the Pilgrims in 1636, 78)*

In the novels of Child, Cheney and Sedgwick, women don’t just behave like witches in the wilderness—they bring their heresies, supernatural eloquence, and defiance home with them. Their witches don’t just make deals with the devil and dance among the trees: they reform their communities with the power of their eloquence, tearing down old social structures and replacing them with new. For these novelists, female eloquence is at the heart of witchcraft, as it is at the heart of heresy. These protagonists’ abilities to make Indian women into sisters, mothers, and other selves broaden a female community already entrenched back home: Miriam, despite having lost her biological mother, is the darling surrogate daughter of her community. Hope has a Puritan “sister” Esther, a devoted aunt, and the well-meaning (if strict) matriarch Madame Winthrop. Mary has a mother who is her guiding light as well as the loyal friend Sally Conant,

who visits her even in the wilderness. Superior communal instincts fueled by an essentially female spiritual purity and empathy are bedrock qualities of the “feminized” Puritanism that critics since Ann Douglas have seen as fundamental to female authors’ project of revisionist history.<sup>28</sup>

All three novels present Puritan society as in need of revision: a patriarchal misogyny lies at the core of each community, and it requires very little prodding for women to expose. Many Puritan magistrates, fathers, and husbands feel the need to expound at length on the absolute necessity of feminine obedience, figured in the most strongly doctrinal terms. Sedgwick’s Governor Winthrop takes Hope to task for lacking the “passiveness that, next to goodness, is a woman’s best virtue,” while Child’s Richard Conant repeatedly bemoans that same lack of passivity in his own daughter (1:226). Cheney makes explicit the implicit logic behind this desired passivity when *A Peep at the Pilgrim’s* primary patriarch informs his daughter Miriam that, “women are born to submit . . . and as the weaker vessel, it is meet they should be guided by those who have rule over them,” (172). Cheney, like Sedgwick and Child, manifests this misogynistic logic only to thoroughly demolish it. Just as Governor Winthrop’s companion quickly informs him that “I should scarcely account . . . a property of soulless matter a virtue,” Miriam quickly counters her father’s case-study with her own biblical examples: “you will not, father, deny the influence of our sex. [and how] powerful must be the arguments of religion from the lips of a virtuous woman. Even the Apostle saith, ‘the believing wife shall sanctify the unbelieving husband’ ” (172). Puritan patriarchs talk a hierarchical game, but the very women they seem so invested in disenfranchising, are clearly working towards an authority of their own.

That authority often comes from supernatural sources. Since Ann Douglass’s foundational work, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), numerous critics have addressed nineteenth-century female authors careful re-gendering of spiritual authority in

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<sup>28</sup> For the operation of feminized Puritanism and alternatives to Puritan patriarchy in these texts in particular, see Foster, Zagarell, Fetterley and Sweet.



antebellum Puritan fictions. Female characters' creation of (and male characters' resistance to) a more inclusive, less dogmatic vision of religious inheritance plays a central role in all three of the novels discussed in this chapter. The strategy of adapting women's supposedly superior spiritual authority, a belief increasingly codified in developing nineteenth-century gender ideology, into a source of historical and communal agency is a fascinating and well-explored one.<sup>29</sup> To it I would only add the strategies for seizing this authority were not merely confined to creating unobjectionably saintly images of spiritual purity, but also to empowering the seemingly deviant—by making heroines of heretics and witches, women who use their Indian alliances and invisible world agency to fuel their dissent against patriarchal strictures, Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick offered another vital and coeval model of female agency.<sup>30</sup>

Female heroism and communal feeling in these novels are not so much fueled by exemplary women—in *Hope Leslie*, Esther Williams is a model Puritan and a secular saint but not a model sister—she is the only one who refuses to help in Magawisca's rescue because it violates scripture warrant—but rather by deviant ones. Puritans saw witchcraft as a kind of dark incarnation of a communal endeavor: witches worked together to radically reshape their societies, often by stripping away the very patriarchal hierarchies that maintained the prominence of ministers and magistrates. Confessed Salem witch William Barker in his testimony in 1692 told of the devil's promise of equality for all, regardless of gender: "all his

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<sup>29</sup> For an overview of the nineteenth-century strategy of imbuing religious authority with feminized, and female dimensions, see Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*. For discussions of this principle in the novels of Sedgwick, Child, and Cheney, see Karcher, Sweet, Karafilis, Fetterley, and Castiglia.

<sup>30</sup> While famous men from Puritan history fill the pages of all three novels, either as cameos (Sedgwick is particularly adept at these brief allusions: the historian William Hubbard is suggested as potential husband for Hope, and she is renamed and inducted into the Puritan church by no less a personage than John Cotton) or major players, they are never the central organizing figures offered by the historical record. Instead, they are figureheads and touchstones, a screen behind which women wield real moral, spiritual, and even political authority. In emphasizing women's roles as the truest spiritual authorities. It is to Mrs. Fletcher that young Everell refers problematic questions of doctrine and the young maiden Esther who is Sedgwick's truest template of Puritan piety; it is in Mrs. Conant and Lady Arabella Johnson and Miriam that the true saintly assurance resides, in contrast to the bloviating dogmatics of Cheney and Child's male Puritans. These novelists provide women with an agency that extends to the supernatural. In *Hobomok*, Mrs. Conant and the Lady Arabella Johnson share a martyr's dual deathbed, dying beautiful, holy deaths and passing into the realms of guardian spirits. In *Hope Leslie*, respectable Puritan matrons, including Mrs. Winthrop, have genuine prophetic dreams. Matrons and Puritans above reproach, they mirror and thus legitimize their more subversive sisters.

people should live bravely that all persons should be equal; that there should be no day of resurrection or of judgement, and neither punishment nor shame for sin.”<sup>31</sup> Witchcraft was not seen as a solitary endeavor, as those who made a pact with the devil supposedly formed their own, alternative communities: accusations and confessions are full of stories of satanic sabbaths and wild dances under the moon. Since the majority of accused and professed witches in Early New England were women, these were implicitly female communities.<sup>32</sup> These communities, and their reformist agendas, are repurposed in women’s national romances. Witchcraft creates and cements social bonds. It gains Mary Conant her Indian husband, and in *Hope Leslie*, it serves as the primary marker of communal commitment, particularly among women: the witch Neleema saves Craddock and promises to reunite the sisters, a promise the “witch” Magawisca makes come true. In *Hope Leslie*, women’s witchcraft is bravery in the service of sisters and eloquence in the form of morally-empowered anti-patriarchal dissent, a far cry from the stereotypical state and soul destroying witch, who was viewed as “a heretic allied with the devil in his desire to create an antisociety: a dark mirror of a godly community, a world governed by inverted institutions, rulers, and doctrines” (Kamensky 163-4).

Early in the novel, Hope adopts the guise of a “servant of Satan” in order to free accused witch Neleema from a Puritan jail. To do this, she co-opts the Puritan genre of wonder tales, relating her actions in a letter to a friend as a “prophetic dream” and confessing her actions in a parody of a providential vision, a “strange dream.”<sup>33</sup> In this “dream” she recounts stealing the key to the prisoner’s cell and freeing her in the middle of the night, an action she confidently

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<sup>31</sup> quoted in *The Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*.  
[http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/texts/tei/BoySal1R?div\\_id=n9](http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/texts/tei/BoySal1R?div_id=n9)

<sup>32</sup> Hall points out that in New England “the cry of ‘witch’ was raised against women far more often than against men” and puts the ratio about 4:1 (*Witch Hunting* 6). Twelve of the nineteen witches hanged at Gallows Hill were women, and at least three more died in prison. Karlsen’s account of the Salem trials offers a complex breakdown of the gendered ideologies at work.

<sup>33</sup> Both Mrs. Digby and Madame Winthrop experience and divulge what they believe to be prophetic dreams, a valid source of providential wonder within the Puritan experience, well represented in many of the source texts Sedgwick consulted in writing *Hope Leslie*. These dreams do foretoken actual events—Mrs. Digby correctly foresees an impending marriage, while Madame Winthrop’s dreams of potential perils the day before Hope’s abduction are also born out by the novels events. For an overview of the role of prophetic dreams in the New England Puritan experience, see Winship’s *Seers of God*.

commits because she knows that she can shape the narrative so that invisible world influences will take the blame for her mundane initiative. Indeed, when the old Indian woman's escape is discovered: "some could smell sulphur from the outer kitchen door to the door of the cell; and there were others who fancied that, at a few yards distance from the house, there were on the ground marks of a slight scorching—a plain indication of a visitation from the enemy of mankind" (1:164). Hope has no problem assuming the identity of "the enemy of mankind" in part because she seems to have absolutely no fear about interacting with and assuming supernatural agency. Despite constant exposure to her patriarchs' fear about and persecution of all those they perceive to be supernatural entities: Indians, witches, and Indian witches in particular.

Despite the persecution of not one but two such "witches," Hope still claims the title as a badge of pride: when sneaking Magawisca out of jail in disguise, she all but parades her friend before the well-meaning jailor, telling him, "we must have been witches, indeed, to have transformed Magawisca's slender person into that enormous bulk" (2:206). Since she has, in fact, effected exactly this transformation, she is ultimately claiming the title she seems to deny. She performs a similar act of self-identification during Nelema's trial, when she assures the magistrates that "I was sure Nelema was as innocent as myself," an open invitation to convict her alongside the old woman in whose defense she speaks (1:159). Hope's willingness to stand for and be counted among the "witches" she encounters stems from her basic understanding of what witches *are*: unlike the Puritans eager to convict Nelema of all of the ills of society ("imputed to her all the mischances that have happened for the last seven years") Hope sees in "poor Nelema" not a scourge but a savior (1:159). She enlists Nelema's aid to cure her tutor, the "crime" for which she is later convicted, and Nelema, despite their cultural divide and knowledge of the peril in which it places her, responds to her need. Hope is not wrong when she blames herself for Nelema's circumstances, intolerable enough even if Nelema was only a poor old woman. But Nelema, like the other witches Hope encounters, is a healer and a helper, a

woman who responds to other women's needs. Despite the Puritans' murder of her own children, Nelema uses her skills on Hope's behalf. Similarly, Magawisca undergoes great peril to reunite Hope with her biological sister, honoring Nelema's promise. Hope's claim to witchcraft, like her willingness to free her fellow witches, coincides with her understanding of witches as sisters in conscience, a kind of community that transcends cultural and historical divides.

Witchcraft creates community between minorities, like women and Indians; it also provides women with the kind of eloquence (and audacity) necessary to defy patriarchal standards and remake Puritan society in a more female-friendly image. Puritan traditions of witchcraft were already associated with the power and desire to transform cultural hierarchies and a strong tradition of eloquence in service to that transformation. Puritan witches embody a malefic eloquence strongly associated with female deviance.<sup>34</sup> Protofeminists like Child and Sedgwick, however, disregarded the original Puritans' negative associations with this eloquence. Instead, they embraced the agency it embodied, amplifying the female affinity for invisible world interaction and recasting it as a source of moral authority, social agency, and even civic responsibility. This repurposing preserved the framework of the invisible world, cementing it as a cornerstone of the Puritan legacy, while revising it to advance a distinctly modern agenda. Subsequent authors of Puritan fiction, including Hawthorne, inherited and responded to this vibrant intertwining of the invisible world legacy and protofeminist agenda.

The Puritan conception of witchcraft occupied and overlapped the same area of dangerous eloquence occupied by unchecked female speech. The powerful and potent image of the bewitched and bewitching tongue emerges in first in English propaganda. Anglican George Webb declared in 1619 that "the tongue is a witch," the same image offered by an anonymous pamphlet *The Anatomy of Woman's Tongue* which pointed out that: "a Woman's Tongue . . . is

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<sup>34</sup> Klaitz argues that the eloquence of witches and victims of demonic possession showcased "the theme of women as marginal and powerless members of society who must resort to spiritual methods to achieve status" (125). Ruttenburg, Gustafson, and Kamensky also discuss the connections between supernatural power and eloquence in the American Puritan tradition.

the devil's seat." Later, Puritan luminary Thomas Hooker imported the image for his own discourse: "The devil rules in [witches]; *he speaks by their tongues.*"<sup>35</sup> Often, what passed as diabolical speech was disruptive speech, speech that laid claim to privilege outside of a woman's normal purview: women who argued with their neighbors, especially their male neighbors, who engaged in numerous dealings (and disputes) with tradespeople, or who were forthright or blunt past the point of courtesy all ran the risk of being thought not just unwomanly but diabolically affiliated. Jane Kamensky argues that the Puritan witch combined the ultimate inversion of femininity with the most insidious form of agency: "Where Puritan matrons spoke softly with tongues of silver, witches, their victims, and the demonically possessed, ranted with tongues of fire. Indeed, the witch was not merely a lapsed version of the Puritan matron but her inverse. In a world understood to be "composed of contraries . . . the witch defined the virtuous woman in the negative" (152). Witches' words weren't just unnatural, they were unnaturally powerful. Their words could be angry and unconstrained (even people who didn't believe in witches would later frequently characterize the accused as "Scolds," a tactic common to historians of Salem), and, for believers, carried the power to reshape, and unmake, reality. So essential were language and speech to the practice of witchcraft that a common question for the supposedly afflicted was "did the suspect give you any suspicious words?"<sup>36</sup> While Puritans used the connection between witchcraft and unruly eloquence as a way of circumscribing female speech, Sedgwick embraces the supernatural potential of women's words in order to enfranchise them. Magawisca is ultimately convicted of witchcraft, but not before her eloquence cements the devotion of her previous allies, who engineer her escape.

While men like Gardiner, Winthrop, and his fellow magistrates find Magawisca's eloquence threatening in its potency, characters outside the upper echelons of the Puritan

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<sup>35</sup> Hooker, Webb, and the anonymous pamphlet are quoted in Kamensky, 164.

<sup>36</sup> Kamensky, 160. For more on Puritan responses to deviant female eloquence, and its association with witchcraft, see Kamensky, Gustafson, and Ruttenburg.

hierarchy, like Hope and almost all of the Puritan laypeople Magawisca comes into contact with, including: her jailor, Hope's tutor Master Craddock, and Digby, the stalwart Fletcher family servant, are charmed rather than threatened by Magawisca's words. No character finds Magawisca's eloquence more compelling than Hope. A witness to the same "demonic chanting" in the graveyard that Gardiner uses to condemn Magawisca for witchcraft, Hope is drawn to the power of the Indian woman's performance: "arrested by the uncommon sweetness of the stranger's voice," spoken in tones so "sweet and varied . . . they might have been breathed by an invisible spirit" (2:6, 2:11). Hope ascribes great power also to the words of another Indian woman, Nelema, whom she calls upon to heal her tutor Craddock and whose healing rituals, heavily made up of mysterious chants, she stalwartly defends. In reward for her efforts in freeing Nelema after her conviction for witchcraft, Nelema makes Hope a promise that she will see her younger sister, abducted in childhood, again. Hope's response to this guarantee is telling: she "accepts this promise as prophecy" (1:193).

In assigning Nelema, an elderly Indian woman and accused witch, the power of prophecy, Sedgwick offers the ultimate inversion of the traditional Puritan providential narrative—Nelema's certainty (and the later deliverance of her promise) contrasts sharply with the careful undermining of the portentous certainty of the historical record as composed by Winthrop and Hubbard. Sedgwick rewrites their tales of wonder from the smallest symbolic mouse to the largest Indian battles and heretic's trials.<sup>37</sup> Nor is the promise as prophecy formula significant solely for the recasting of providential authority: it raises the specter of witchcraft's uniquely verbal supernatural agency. The Puritan witch's powers relied largely upon language: a contract with the devil produced many advantages, not least of which the power to curse and prophecy. Witches could pronounce your cow dead or your flesh distempered and the mere act of saying would make it so. Theirs was the ultimate power of language—they could use it to

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<sup>37</sup> For more on Sedgwick's alterations to Puritan sources, and the agenda behind these alterations, see Foster, Ross, Baker, and Kelley.

call forth the forces of the invisible world to reshape the contours of the visual one. As Kamensky points out, “witches, arguably the most despised and distrusted speakers in their communities, were at the same time the most literally credible. There was no escaping their pronouncements, for what they said came true. Carried in the witch’s tongue, words broke free of their moorings in a system of signs and referents and became vessels of actual, palpable power” (154). Nelema then, whose promise is prophecy, has earned her witch's reputation, but Hope venerates rather than fears her for it, not least because Nelema uses her powers not to afflict but rather to aid the young Puritan maiden.

A key feature in *Hope Leslie*, eloquent women dominate all three novels, and Cheney, Child and Sedgwick imbue their heroines’ language, a key source of agency and primary means of dissent, with elements of witchcraft. Child’s Mary Conant, the most literal and stereotypical witch of the set, performs a magical ritual highly dependent upon the power and performance of language: her ritual involves both chanting and writing in blood: “she opened a vein in her little arm, and dipping a feather in the blood, wrote something on a piece of white cloth, which was spread before her . . . looking round timidly, she muttered a few words too low to meet my ear; then taking a stick and marking out a large circle on the margin of the stream, she stepped into the magic ring, walked round three times with measured tread, then carefully retraced her steps backward, speaking all the while” (16). Mary's insistence upon witchcraft as both narrative and text not only follows the Puritan model for understanding a witch's identity (witches gained their powers by signing, often in blood, the devil's black book), it also foregrounds her authorial agency. Molly Vaux reads this moment as Child's deliberate insertion of Mary into the complex chain of narrators who supposedly tell *Hobomok's* tale. The line begins with the narrator, goes on to his friend, who is ostensibly adapting the text of a Puritan forbearer, who is in turn the young man hiding in the forest, observing and transcribing Mary's ritual, and finally ends with Mary, who in her magical circle firmly establishes herself as the final and ultimate narrator—one

with the power to transcribe invisible truths.<sup>38</sup> Cheney introduces Miriam to her novel in a way that foregrounds her bewitching power: wandering for the first time through Plymouth at night, a spectral landscape filled with “bright and beautiful moonlight scenery [that] floated before the eyes like a vision of enchantment,” Atherton hears “a female voice, soft, rich and powerful” whose singing perfectly channels the sublimity of the enchanted space and “haunted his dreams” long before he even meets her (5-6).

In *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick develops and extends the supernatural qualities of heroic female eloquence. Hope possesses, and liberally exploits, a mysterious power of persuasion. Despite profound differences of opinion, and often personal perils, Hope has absolutely no trouble talking a long line of hapless men (mostly Puritan) into doing her bidding. From the faithful Fletcher family retainer Digby, who helps her in both of her jailbreaks for accused Indian witches with no complaint other than an observation of the inevitability of following her orders: “I always said, Miss Hope, it was a pure mercy you chose the right way, for you always had yours,” to the jailor himself, who betrays his deeply held principles after a few persuasive phrases: “It is marvellous,” thought Barnaby, as he reluctantly acquiesced in relinquishing the letter of his duty, “how this young creature spins me round, at her will, like a top. I think she keeps the key to all hearts” (2:68). Capable of effecting results that “the united instances Mr. Fletcher and Governor Winthrop, and the whole colony and world beside, could never have achieved,” the only person Sedgwick does not allow her bewitching eloquence to work on is Magawisca, who stands up to Hope even as she remarks on the potency of her powers: “They tell me,” she said, “that no one can look on you and deny you aught; that you can make old men's hearts soft, and mould them at your will ; but I have learned to deny even the cravings of my own heart” (2:55, 2:16). Hope, like a good witch, can use her words to shape reality—her promises too are prophecy. Figured as destiny embodied, called “marvellous” and regarded with

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<sup>38</sup> Numerous critics have commented on the significance of the act of writing in Mary's ceremony. See Vaux, Sederholm, and Samuels, “Women, Blood, and Contract,” for extended treatments of this topic.



“wonder” (language that directly invokes the Puritans’ systematic appraisal of wonders and marvels, visible signs of invisible agency), Hope has no qualms about using her powers to reshape not only the behaviors but also the discourses of her fellow Puritans.

As a contrast to the female model of witchcraft, which is bewitching eloquence in the service of sisterhood and community, Sedgwick provides a male version that recasts supernatural affliction as a rake’s seduction. The false Puritan Philip Gardiner, Sedgwick’s “magician with two faces,” embodies this negative supernatural agency (2:124). He is a fictional reworking of the historical Sir Christopher Gardiner, known to the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay initially for his serial bigamy and later for his efforts to help in the movement to revoke their Massachusetts charter. Sedgwick’s Gardiner is a secret papist and ally of the infamous Thomas Morton of Merrimount fame. An anarchic libertine, he plans to disrupt the community by releasing Morton and building a hedonistic New World playground, the very definition of the kind of “antisociety” witches reputedly worked toward. Like the devil himself, Gardiner first appears as an angel of light, and his rhetoric is so persuasive that Winthrop easily appoints him a “brother saint.” Not until after his fiery demise does the truth of his character slowly permeate his careful facade. Gardiner abuses the power of language as no woman in Sedgwick’s novel ever does, and he does so almost always with the explicit agenda of creating female suffering: he condemns an innocent woman to death by falsely accusing her of witchcraft, schemes to abduct and rape another, and travels with an erstwhile paramour, the ruined maiden Rosa.

Rosa, in thrall to Gardiner despite his many cruelties, offers readers Sedgwick’s version of the “afflicted girl,” a hapless victim possessed by Gardiner’s seductive and malevolent eloquence. Gardiner’s tormenting of Rosa combines the paradigms of sexual exploitation and supernatural abuse. Gardiner dresses her in boy’s clothing and parades her in front of the Puritan elders as his “brand plucked from the burning,” a refiguration Cotton Mather’s well-known treatise on his efforts to rescue a girl seemingly possessed by demons that both invokes

and perverts the paradigm of a male minister seeking to aid a helpless female ward.<sup>39</sup> Rosa exhibits a number of symptoms congruent with the Puritan definition of an afflicted person, most notably the wild distortion of her own language skills. Silenced publically, her private discourses are comprised of wild appeals to "ministering spirits," forecasts of her own and Gardiner's doom delivered in "prophetic tones" and, most tellingly, of prayers for her "sisters"—those other women who might fall victim to Gardiner's possession: "I have tried to pray, and the words fell back like stones upon my heart; but now I pray for the innocent, and they part from me winged for Heaven. . . . I have sometimes thought that good spirits come down on those bright rays to do their messages of love. They may even now be on their way to guard a pure and helpless sister: God speed them" (2:214).

Sedgwick makes it clear that Rosa's true torment lies in being cut off from her female identity. Disguised as a boy and forbidden all contact with her fellow women, she nonetheless demonstrates more than a trace of the same communal spirit that animates Hope—she even goes so far as to risk exposure and Gardiner's punishment, despite her unhappy obsession with him, in order to warn Hope of Gardiner's inauthenticity and to cryptically hint at his designs. Ultimately, it is Rosa who brings about Gardiner's death. Seeking to free herself and his latest victim, a kidnapped woman in a hood who turns out to be the Puritan scold Jenet, the only ignoble and self-interested woman in the novel, rather than Hope, she blows up the ship, sacrificing her life and his in search of the only freedom she thinks possible.<sup>40</sup> Rosa's pyrrhic victory obviates the two least likeable characters in the novel: the malevolent Gardiner and his enabler and supporter Jenet, Nelema's accuser and general embodiment of Puritan intolerance

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<sup>39</sup> (2:180). In presenting this version of the ministerial savior as diabolical seducer, Sedgwick seems to channel a bit of Robert Calef's famously hostile reading of Cotton Mather's treatment of "afflicted girls," which he frankly categorized as more salacious than spiritual. See his discussion of this topic in *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700).

<sup>40</sup> Rosa's immolation of the ship draws upon a smorgasbord of historical references: not only does she toss a torch into a barrel of gunpowder in a pat recreation of Guy Fawkes's treason, Sedgwick puts her, Gardiner, and Jenet on an actual ship whose fate, down to the lost body of a single passenger, Winthrop documented in his journal. Foster notes that Winthrop's account of the demise of Craddock's ship mentions that "'that man who was the cause of it [the explosion],' is not found," a significant indicator that the guilt of the explosion, despite Rosa's hand on the fateful torch, really belongs with Gardiner (129).

and suspicion. Sedgwick pairs them together under the aegis of supernatural antagonists, noting that: "If an evil spirit had been abroad on a corrupting mission, he could not have selected a subject more eager to grasp temptation than Sir Philip, nor a fitter agent than Jenet."<sup>41</sup> At the end of the novel, she takes care to point out the justness of their demise, particularly Gardiner's. His body is never found and the Puritan colonists assume that the Evil One has reclaimed a faithful minion: "Satan had seized upon it as his lawful spoil" (2:257). Rosa's triumph over the male witch and his familiar Jenet, who crosses the line into villain status herself when she betrays Hope to his machinations, leaves the supernatural playing field clear for "good" witches like Magawisca and Hope.

### **The Example of Anne Hutchinson**

*what is difficult duty to others hath ever seemed impulse in her; and I have sometimes thought that the covenant of works was to her a hinderance to the covenant of grace; and that, perhaps, she would hate sin more for its unlawfulness if she did not hate it so much for its ugliness." (Hope Leslie 1:226)*

When the representative Puritan maidens come back from the wilderness, their invisible world agency allows them not only blend into their cities on the hill but to remake them in their own image, transforming the archetypal Puritan from a powerful patriarch into a defiant matriarch. Cheney and Sedgwick both show the dichotomy between misogynistic rhetoric and gynocentric reality with a deliberate reconfiguration of a famous Puritan pair: John Winthrop and Anne Hutchinson. This process is best and most fully illustrated in *Hope Leslie*, which showcases the eclipsing of Governor Winthrop by a plethora of female characters formed in the image of Anne Hutchinson, the icon of female heresy and eloquence. Replacing Winthrop with Hutchinson as central conscience and founding Puritan rewrites patriarchal into matriarchal lineage and offers a representative woman who reifies supernaturally enhanced female agency.

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<sup>41</sup>(2:209) Castiglia sees Jenet as the ultimate in bad Puritanism, not least because she has turned her back on all of its redeeming feminine aspects: "Moralizing and interfering, Jenet represents Puritanism as its most intolerant and restrictive. She is what one might call today "male identified," seeking to out-Puritan the brethren" ("In Praise" 9).

The first step in this reversal lies in refiguring Winthrop from mythic statesman to myopic patriarch. Despite his position as head of the Puritan states in Massachusetts Bay, and his status in popular history and historical fiction as a founder and statesman equivalent to George Washington, in the novels of Cheney, Sedgwick, and Child Winthrop appears not as the center of authority, but rather as an often inept administrator. At best a failed matchmaker and misguided patriarch, at worst a husband and magistrate rendered unsympathetic by misguided misogyny, Winthrop in all three novels is defined by his relationship to women.<sup>42</sup>

Winthrop's relationship with one woman in particular is of central concern. One of the historical Winthrop's most significant magisterial moments was the trial of Anne Hutchinson. Winthrop's status as "the architect of her persecution" was by the nineteenth century entrenched in the historical record, a record buttressed by his own extensive writings, in both his *Journal* and an independent tract, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists, and Libertines that Infected the Churches of New-England*, on his efforts to mitigate the threats posed by what he saw as Hutchinson's monstrous heresies.<sup>43</sup> Cheney and Sedgwick, like other readers before and after them, adapted the misogynistic overtones they saw in Hutchinson's prosecution into foci of Puritan belief and practice in their novels.

The wife of a prominent Puritan and a member of the upper echelons of colonial society known for her intelligence and breadth of reading, Puritan magistrates led by then-governor Winthrop publicly censured, exiled, and excommunicated Anne Hutchinson for exercising her wit and learning in ways that threatened the established structures of Puritan theology and practice. As the transcripts of her subsequent banishment and excommunication reveal, much of

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<sup>42</sup> A number of critics have discussed the significance of Winthrop in *Hope Leslie* in particular. See Bell, Zagarell, and Foster in particular for readings of the "domestication" of Winthrop as a character. For a compelling reading of Winthrop as a metonym for patriarchal myopathy, see Castiglia's *Bound And Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*.

<sup>43</sup> Fetterley, 96. For more on literary analyses and adaptations of Winthrop's writings on Hutchinson, see Kamensky and Colacurcio's *Godly Letters*.

the anxiety over her influence was expressed in gendered terms: she was accused by both magistrates and ministers of disrupting a strict hierarchy based on feminine obedience. A brilliant, articulate theologian, Hutchinson organized meetings to discuss interpretations of scripture. Originally composed primarily of women, Hutchinson's gatherings grew to include numerous men, and her opinions became so pervasive as to be perceived by watchful ministers as threats to the unity of the church and, thus, the civil community. While not tried as a witch but rather as a heretic, Hutchinson's heresies were attributed to demonic influences at the time, and many, Winthrop included, were not shy about condemning her as, if not a witch, then the next thing to it. This rhetoric only escalated after her conviction and subsequent banishment.<sup>44</sup>

By asserting her right to preach and teach, Hutchinson undermined the gendered paradigms upon which, in part, Puritan society rested. As the remnants of her trial's transcripts make clear, her influence in that regard was greatly feared: "For she is of a most dayngerous Spirit and likely with her fluent Tounge and forwardness in Expressions to deuce and draw away many, Espetially simple Women of her owne sex."<sup>45</sup> Hutchinson's insistence on redefining the proper purview of women figured heavily in the rationale for banishing and excommunicating her, especially since she used that purview to shape a sisterhood outside of masculine oversight. Following her banishment, the minister John Cotton took special care to remind the women of his own congregation, as well as other congregations, to break apart the unnatural female community that Hutchinson had formed. Hutchinson, an avatar of female eloquence more persuasive than that of male ministers, and the creator of female communities more tightly knit and spiritually unified than Winthrop's own frequently fractious community of saints, posed a

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<sup>44</sup> After her exile to Rhode Island, rumors spread that Hutchinson had not only been midwife at the delivery of but also had herself given birth to a monstrous, stillborn child. Winthrop in particular publicized this information as clear evidence that Hutchinson was an aberrant woman so abhorrent to God that he punished her by deforming her maternal capacity, just as she herself had deformed her femininity.

<sup>45</sup> T 365. All further citations from the trial of Anne Hutchinson before the church in Boston—abbreviated T—are taken from Hall, ed., *Controversy* and are noted by page number in the text.

significant threat that needed to be not just neutralized, but utterly and completely demonized at the expense of women's agency in general.<sup>46</sup>

Given this history, it is unsurprising that in the nineteenth century, Hutchinson served as "the embodiment of the radical possibilities for women of the American experiment" as well as a cautionary tale about the retributive instinct of male authority looking out for its own interests (Lang 96). Numerous women's novels, including these, work to recoup both Hutchinson's reputation and the model of female authority she represents. In *A Peep at the Pilgrims* Cheney consistently conflates Hutchinson and female agency: the novel repeatedly circles back to "the noted Anna Hutchinson, whose religious opinions had acquired great influence in the country," and whose trial, while never directly witnessed, unfolds coeval with the action of the novel. Cheney makes numerous references to Hutchinson in her text and defines (and excoriates) Winthrop through his persecution of the besieged Puritan woman: "Winthrop . . . laid aside the spirit of charity and forgiveness . . . and assisted to condemn that unhappy woman" (333).

In pointed contrast, Mrs. Winthrop's biggest moment in the novel occurs when her defense of a woman's right to a spiritual conscience outside her husband's purview earns her the collected wrath of a smorgasbord of Puritan political and religious luminaries including: Mr. Wilson, Mr. Cotton, Mr. Dudley, Governor Vane, and her own husband. During this discussion Mr. Wilson figures female disobedience as a the ultimate sin and compares a wife defying a husband's most basic command to the kind of "idea which Eve entertained on the subject of female independence . . . when she listened to the tempter, and gratified her caprice and inclination in tasting the fruit of the tree of good and evil" (287). From the same source doubtless originate the enormous errors of Mrs. Hutchinson, which are "leading captive silly women," and bringing contention into our land" (287).

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<sup>46</sup> For an overview of Huchinson's transformative effects on Puritan discourses of gender see Kamensky and Gustafson.

The linked examples of Eve and Anne Hutchinson showcase the depth and deviance of Hutchinson's symbolic power. Dudley drives this point home when he assures Mrs. Winthrop that "that may be very suitable in a grave magistrate and experienced man . . . which would be totally unbecoming a woman, whom the Apostle exhorts to 'shamefacedness and sobriety,' and commands not to 'teach or usurp authority over the man' " (287). Dudley's double standard refuses Mrs. Winthrop's proposed spiritual equality and overlooks male culpability in favor of returning to the parable of female defiance—the language of woman as teacher and usurper comes equally from the Biblical Eve and the transcripts of the trials of Anne Hutchinson, the ultimate female cautionary tale.

Sedgwick makes the specter of Anne Hutchinson a central influence in *Hope Leslie* from the earliest pages of the novel, when Puritan paragon Mrs. Fletcher worries about the fate of "poor deluded Mrs. Hutchinson," all the way through to the trial of Magawisca, presided over by John Winthrop, the date of which not-coincidentally coincides with the date of Anne Hutchinson's death.<sup>47</sup> Sedgwick infuses Hutchinsonian qualities and characteristics into nearly every female character in *Hope Leslie*, a significant feat given the novel's voluminous cast. The main source of defiance throughout much of the novel is Hope, who from the beginning takes up Anne Hutchinson's mantle and wears it proudly.

Absorbed against her will into Winthrop's household after defying her local magistrates and helping the "witch" Neleema, Hope immediately begins to push back against his domestic governance: "The idea of this Puritanical guardianship did not strike me agreeably," she writes at the beginning to her beloved Everell, an understatement that underscores not only her own liberal otherness—she implicitly defines herself here as outside of the Puritanical fold—but also proceeds a remarkable cycle of ultimately unpunished defiances (1:167). Sedgwick's Governor

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<sup>47</sup> (1:21). For an in-depth discussion of the Hutchinson/Magawisca overlap, see Fetterley, who argues that Magawisca's disappearance at the end of the text ultimately undermines Hutchinson's subversive potential. Foster too considers Sedgwick's engagement with Hutchinson, arguing that Sedgwick was at best ambivalent about Hutchinson given the potentially anarchic nature of her Antinomianism, which could potentially conflict with the narrative march of civilized progress from Puritan antiquity to modern America's model society.

Winthrop clearly conceives of his household superintendence of Hope as a chance to judge her: he continuously weighs, measures, and finds wanting the everyday activities and conversations of the “lawless girl” in his charge (1:227).

Hope endures a much-softened version of Hutchinson’s persecution—instead of a prisoner before the bar she is a reluctant houseguest before a never-ending parlor court. Sedgwick makes this reenactment explicit in a conversation held between the governor and Hope’s foster-father, who offers his approbation for Hope’s character not in spite of, but rather because of the fact that she’d rather follow her conscience than Winthrop’s many rules, in theological terms: “what is difficult duty to others hath ever seemed impulse in her; and I have sometimes thought that the covenant of works was to her a hindrance to the covenant of grace; and that, perhaps, she would hate sin more for its unlawfulness if she did not hate it so much for its ugliness” (1:226). Sedgwick’s Winthrop is quick to reject this description as a positive one, and well he might, since it perfectly recapitulates one of the key issues of Anne Hutchinson’s trials: she famously accused prominent Puritan ministers of preaching a doctrine of works (good deeds and preparation as a means of salvation) rather than a doctrine of grace (the more strictly Calvinist interpretation, which holds salvation to be the utterly and completely in the hands of God, predestined for every soul). Since the doctrine of grace was the “correct” one, a woman claiming to have the ultimate powers of theological interpretation, and the ability to see male error, upset the hierarchy of ministerial control in a dangerously gendered way. Making Hope the archetype of the doctrine of grace in Winthrop’s trial by parlor allows Sedgwick to affiliate her with the moral and spiritual defiance of Hutchinson.<sup>48</sup> The sentence Governor Winthrop passes on Hope after this hearing: to be married to an ostensible Puritan who is actually Morton’s agent in disguise, is ill-advised and disproportionately harsh for Hope’s “crime.” Nor is

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<sup>48</sup> See Foster for an excellent discussion of the breaking the rules of society that Hope breaks as a doctrine of works throughout *Hope Leslie*. On the implied charge of heresy that comes from linking Hutchinson and Hope, it is worth pointing out that, moral superiority of “grace” notwithstanding, Hope actually *does* hold heretical beliefs by Puritan standards. In her conversation with her guardian after the ritual with Neleema, for example, she professes to identify with Indian spiritual beliefs and practices rather than Puritan ones. Her heresies, however, never receive the same kind of scrutiny that Magawisca’s do.



it a coincidence that his sentence never comes to pass: Hope never even comes close to the banishment of being Gardiner's bride. Sedgwick delivers Hope's from Winthrop's misjudgments in a way that redeems Hutchinson's legacy of female defiance, but Hope's example is not the only, or even most subversive, time in the novel that Sedgwick performs this kind of rewrite of Hutchinson's story.

Hope's Indian sister/other self Magawisca endures the public version of Hutchinson's trials, which, in keeping with historical precedent, Winthrop presides over as chief magistrate. Sedgwick's version of Hutchinson's trial collates and amplifies numerous threads that run through the misogynistic logic of the original trials, attaching special interest to questions of supernatural agency. In publically trying Magawisca instead of Hope, Sedgwick uses her defendant's racial otherness, her status as a "child of the devil," to make literal and explicit the implicit connections inherent in the historical Winthrop's, and his fellow ministers' and magistrates', condemnation of Hutchinson, which conflate eloquence, female supernatural/spiritual agency, and spiritual corruption in the form of heresy bordering on, if not shading into, witchcraft (2:163). Making Magawisca the morally superior heroine and truly sympathetic figure in this ordeal allows Sedgwick to illuminate and lay claim to all of these supposedly demonic sources of agency as the proper tools of righteous women.

From the start Magawisca's trial bears a remarkable resemblance to Anne Hutchinson's. She, like Hutchinson, is articulate and intelligent, questioning both the theological and legal grounds of her trial and often controlling, despite the magistrate's best efforts, the flow of the courtroom. Hutchinson notably discomfited her judges by pressuring them to take an oath to the truth of their own persecutory testimony, a gravely significant act by Puritan lights that proves equally portentous in Magawisca's trial, in which she succeeds in requiring the oath from her chief tormentor, Gardiner.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Gardiner's subsequent acceptance of the ritual, and clear perjury after having done so (even Winthrop remarks upon, but does not pursue, the inconsistencies in his testimony), underscores both Magawisca's virtue and the Puritan magistrates' willful privileging of the testimony of a "brother saint" no matter how dubious, over a woman, no

Female eloquence of the kind Hutchinson embodied presented the ultimate threat to the Puritan hierarchy and its communal unity. Sedgwick, a keen reader of these primary sources, carefully imbues Magawisca with Hutchinsonian eloquence. Not only does she have a voice as sweet and compelling as an “invisible spirit,” (2:11) that voice delivers the wisdom of American heroes. When she addresses Governor Winthrop and cries, “I demand of thee death or liberty,” she repurposes Patrick Henry’s famous phrase and makes clear that she and not the Puritan fathers is fluent in the righteous rhetoric of history (2:174).

The original transcripts of Hutchinson’s trials reveal a carefully crafted confluence between various “unnatural” aspects of female agency. Her unfeminine eloquence, which mirrors and threatens to exceed the “masculine” rhetorical skills of the patriarchal ministers and magistrates, allows her to aspire to specifically male models of authority, which inexorably then leads to monstrous perturbations of that authority.<sup>50</sup> While followers of Hutchinson’s teachers spoke enthusiastically of “a Woman that Preaches better Gospell then any of your blacke-coates that have been at the Ninneversity, a Woman of another kinde of spirit, who hath had many revelations of things to come,” this direct competition between Hutchinson and the “blacke-coates” was not something any of them sought, nor were these trained theologians and biblical scholars happy to hear her adherents proclaim that: “I had rather hear such a one that speakes from the mere motion of the spirit, without any study at all, then any of your learned Scollers, although they may be fuller of Scripture” (Johnson 127). Minister Hugh Peters’s list of Hutchinson’s transgressions links them all together as gendered defiances: “you have stept out of your place, you have rather bine a Husband than a wife and a Preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject” (T 382-3). Cotton makes even more explicit how a would-be husband makes an unnatural wife, accusing her of unholy promiscuity despite no evidence to the contrary: “though I have not heard, neither do I think, you have been unfaithful to your husband

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matter how eloquent. For a discussion of the significance of this moment in Hutchinson’s trial, see Colacurcio’s chapter in *Godly Letters*.

<sup>50</sup> See Kamensky and Gustafson for extended treatments of Hutchinson’s “masculine” rhetoric.

in his marriage covenant, yet that will follow upon it, for it is the very argument that the Saducees bring to our Savior Christ against the Resurrection: and that which the Anabaptists and Familists bring to prove the lawfulness of the common use of all women" (T 372).

Not just unnatural and immoral, but also unholy. After condemning and exiling her the magistrates dwelt at length on Hutchinson's monstrous and diabolical aspects, from a "monstrous birth" that proved God's displeasure to an explicitly diabolical agenda. In his *Short Story of the Rise, Reign and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines*, published eight years later in 1644, Winthrop codifies and amplifies the supernatural and specifically diabolical cast of anti-Hutchinsonian rhetoric, labeling her a "Jezebel," and "an instrument of Satan . . . fitted to his service for . . . poisoning the churches here planted, as no story records the like of a woman since that mentioned in the Revelation."<sup>51</sup> From would-be minister to servant of Satan, Hutchinson's fall from grace ultimately becomes biblical in its proportions.

All of Hutchinson's transgressions begin with her eloquence. As Michael Colacurcio points out, it is easy to see in the historical record of Hutchinson's interactions with the magistrates and ministers a spectacle in which a "dull man delivers a witty woman 'up to Satan'" (*Godly Letters* 405). From the outset, fears of the power of Hutchinson's words predominate. Winthrop bemoans her "very voluble tongue, more bold then a man," Shepherd worries that Hutchinson has used the "flewentness of her Tonge . . . to sowe her seed in us" while Wilson hyperbolically attributes all of the evils befalling the community of saints to her capacity for language: "There was much love and union and sweet agreement amongst us before she came, yet since, all union and love hath been broken and there have been censurings and judgments and condemnings one of another [because of] the misgovernment of this woman's tongue" (T 353, 384). The focus on the evils perpetrated by Hutchinson's tongue, which becomes, in the rhetoric of her prosecutors, a kind of witch's wand, showcases this confluence between witchcraft and words, as well as their purview as a specifically female trait.

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<sup>51</sup> The *Short Story* is anthologized in Hall, ed., *Controversy*. 310, 307.

Sedgwick absorbs and adapts the logic of the Puritan magistrates' arguments about Anne Hutchinson, in which an eloquent woman equals an uppity woman equals a promiscuous woman equals a monstrous woman and makes explicit the last link in the logistical chain: Magawisca is condemned not just for heresy and defiance but also for the witchcraft that lurks at the heart of these earlier associations. Despite the illustrious associations of her eloquence: she does, after all paraphrase a Puritan minister and an American hero, Magawisca's eloquence is nevertheless ultimately associated with demonic agency. Gardiner, seeing the other magistrates softening towards the defendant's arguments, recasts an earlier scene in the novel, of Magawisca singing at her mother's graveside, as a demonic ritual: "he heard a human voice mingling with the din of the storm . . . directly a flash of lightning discovered Magawisca kneeling on the bare wet earth, making those monstrous and violent contortions, which . . . characterized the devil-worship of the powwows; he would not, he ought not repeat to Christian ears her invocations to the Evil One to aid her in the execution of her revenge on the English" (2:162-3). Tellingly, Gardiner lacks Magawisca's eloquence. He does not repeat her words (not least because she never utters what he claims to have heard) but merely offers his fellow judges a familiar framework for misinterpreting them. Sedgwick remarks that associating Indians with witchcraft was a "universally received" error of the time; what she does not explicitly say, but heavily implies, is the corresponding popularity of the linkage between witchcraft and female eloquence. Threatened by Magawisca's eloquence, Gardiner paints her as a witch, as servant of Satan whose every word must therefore be discounted by the community of visible saints: this is the same logic that Winthrop and Wilson draw upon in disowning Hutchinson.

Despite Magawisca's "conviction," she also escapes a dire fate—Hope stages her second daring jailbreak on her adopted sister's behalf. Sedgwick's multiple Hutchinsons proliferate throughout the novel, creating a hierarchy of matriarchal authority that ultimately supplants Puritan patriarchal icon Winthrop. Sedgwick makes Winthrop complicit in his own elision. At the end of the novel, Hope Leslie, heretic, co-opter of chronicles, and freer of multiple witches,

marries her good Puritan man and suffers no repercussions at the hands of the magistrates, despite their penchant for harsh judgments, because their leader Winthrop vouches for her. His report to them “dwelt on the wonderful interposition of Providence in behalf of Hope Leslie, which clearly intimated, as he said, and all his auditors acknowledged, that the young maiden's life was precious in the sight of the Lord, and was preserved for some special purpose” (2:248). Her children found a dynasty that entwines with her community. Generations later her descendants still look after Digby's, a “precious legacy, through many generations” that contrasts sharply with the forgotten legacy of Governor Winthrop himself, whose descendants, Sedgwick informs us early on, are not important to the story: “Governor Winthrop possessed the patriarchal blessing of a numerous offspring; but . . . we have not thought fit to encumber it with any details concerning them” (2:259, 1:213).

It's not just Winthrop's descendants that Sedgwick supplants in *Hope Leslie*. The final sentences of the novel deal not with Hope but with Esther Downing, who for all the fact that she is the “pattern maiden of the Commonwealth,” is in the novel the final Hutchinsonian heroine. Rather than marriage, Esther chooses a life of active and virtuous spinsterhood: “those who saw on how wide a sphere her kindness shone, how many were made better and happier by her disinterested devotion, might have rejoiced that she did not “Give to a party what was meant for mankind” (2:140, 2:260). In choosing this role, she too is defying her patriarchal destiny—it was Winthrop's fervent desire that she would marry Everell to secure his position in the Puritan fold. Esther's decision to help her community not through the narrow role of subservient bride but rather through the “wide sphere” available to an independent woman upends the submissive model of femininity that Winthrop celebrated as ideal in a female saint, creating instead a much more empowered version of female piety. Esther, I want to argue, is the last link in Sedgwick's chain of subversively eloquent Puritan women. Ultimately a counterpart rather than a contrast to the subversive Puritan damsel Hope, Esther is a model Puritan who is also a “a preacher [rather] than a hearer.”

Most treatments of Esther either focus on her as an avatar of Puritan rigidity, a cautionary tale about the "wrong" kind of womanhood.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Michael Daviott Bell argues that the inspiration for Esther Downing . . . is hardly historical at all," pointing out that the historical Emmanuel Downing had numerous daughters but none named Esther. Esther, in Bell's eyes, is not so much a historical character as she is a facile literary device, the "wrong girl of the novel of manners" (218). Critical views tend to share the assumption that Esther functions an archetype of female error. I would argue that while Esther is undoubtedly the wrong girl for Everell, she is the right girl to redeem the Puritan label. A scholar of "scripture warrant," she is nonetheless a revolutionary figure (2:150). Esther too is a reincarnation of Anne Hutchinson: a teacher and preacher bound to no man *but* sanctioned by the Puritan patriarchy as its most orthodox representative.

Sedgwick invokes Anne Hutchinson in her first description of Esther in an ostensible denial that only foregrounds the resemblance between the women: "bred in the strictest school of the Puritans, their doctrines and principles easily commingled with the natural qualities of her mind. She could not have disputed the nice points of faith, sanctification, and justification, with certain celebrated contemporary female theologians, but no one excelled her in the practical part of her religion"(1:197). Sedgwick uses similar denials to establish Esther as an established teacher and guide for her fellow women. When Esther lectures Aunt Gardiner on a point of behavior, Hope laughingly argues that "lecturing is not your vocation, and this is not lecture-day" (1:208). Lecturing, however, does seem to be Esther's vocation, and she is called upon to do it by almost everyone in her community, including Hope, who frequently tells her, "Esther, you are a born preacher" and calls upon her for her advice and blessing (1:262).

Sedgwick repeatedly figures Esther along Hutchinsonian lines: Hope's patient teacher in the ways of scripturally sanctioned behavior, she, like Hutchinson, oversteps St. Paul's strictures on female instruction, offering guidance not only to her fellow women but also instruction to

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<sup>52</sup> See, in particular, Castiglia, Karafilis, and Karcher's introduction to *Hope Leslie*.

men like Everell, responding to his demand that she help him free Magawisca with an extremely learned explanation of why she cannot:

Scripture hath abundant texts to authorize all mercy, compassion, and justice, but we are not always the allowed judges of their application ; and in the case before us we have an express rule, to which, if we submit, we cannot err ; for thou well knowest, Everell, we are commanded, in the first epistle of Peter, second chapter, to ' Submit ourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king, as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.' (2:150)

When Everell disregards this intricate explication, Esther, despite her almost crippling love for him, sharply rebukes him for his presumption in questioning her spiritual conscience: "' Oh, Everell ! do not seek to blind my judgment" (2:150). Even though she couches her decision not to save Magawisca as obedience to the judgment of the magistrates who've condemned her, it is ultimately her own conscience, rather than the patriarchs' dictates, that bind her to her decision.

Often Esther serves as spiritual authority not just for herself, but for her household and community. It is Esther, not Governor Winthrop, who is called upon to make the final judgment on Hope's manipulations of Providence after her escapade as a saint: "Out of thy mouth she shall be justified or condemned," Hope's guardian informs her (2:140). Hope loves and follows Esther, remarking frequently on her effectiveness and indefatigability in explaining and embodying doctrine: "If I were to choose an external conscience," she tells Esther, "you should be my rule" (2:140-141) The roles of teacher and minister doomed Hutchinson but empower Esther, so much so that she supplants Winthrop as the ultimate figurehead of Puritan benevolence. Gardiner, looking upon her with distaste, calls Esther "a woman like a walled city," a metaphor that invokes not just Winthrop's own most famous metaphor, that of the Puritan project to create a shining "city on a hill," but also Cotton Mather's famous biography of Winthrop himself, which labels him the "American Nehemiah," invoking the biblical figure

famous for both literally and spiritually rebuilding Jerusalem (2:33). Esther then, is both the perfect realization of and overseer for the Puritan legacy. In her, Sedgwick creates a Puritan with halo intact and boots clean of mud: Esther, Magawisca and Hope together represent a reimagined world in which Anne Hutchinson, and the female rights and privileges she implies, lives on in some form in all of her capacities: heretic, witch, preacher, teacher, dissenter and pillar of the community: a worthy incarnation of Puritan history.

None of Child's, Cheney's, or Sedgwick's heroines are excised from the Puritan project for their behavior—no matter how supernatural or subversive. Instead, their communities ultimately exalt and protect their representative Puritan status, celebrating them as the founding mothers they become. Miriam's brand of bewitching, multicultural, female-driven faith converts her prospective husband, in spite of his aversion to the rigid, narrow orthodoxy of her father. Despite her magically-sanctioned miscegenation and several years of life in that wilderness, Mary nevertheless forsakes her Indian husband and rejoins the Puritan community by the story's end. Her reintegration occurs with fairy-tale efficiency, and within a few paragraphs she is reconciled with her father, married to her other lover, and her half-Indian son becomes the pride of the family and the community. In the novel's last lines, Child underscores Mary Conant's Indian husband and wilderness life as anything but shameful or erasable. On the contrary, she closes *Hobomok* with the assertion that "the devoted romantic love of Hobomok was never forgotten by its object; and his faithful services to the "Yengees" are still remembered with gratitude; though the tender slip which he protected, has since become a mighty tree, and the nations of the earth seek refuge beneath its branches" (188). The "tender slip" is both Mary, the representative woman who despite her multitude of transgressions, becomes a pillar of her Puritan community, and the community itself. The final metaphor of the tree casts both woman and colony in the image of the wilderness in which the story began.

By the time Sedgwick ends *Hope Leslie* with a triumphant exultation of both her wayward Pilgrim damsel/witch and her female Nehemiah, she has cemented the place of the



kinds of female exemplars posited by Child and Cheney and added to a significant canon of national romances that invoke the Puritan supernatural in the service of female agency. Mary, Miriam, Hope, Magawisca, and Esther all follow in the footsteps of Brown's gothic Clara Wieland, exceeding her representative potential. Unlike the eventually exiled Clara, these heroines remain fully rooted in American soil, pillars of an alternative history whose influence will have strong ramifications in genres to come.

## Chapter Three

### From Eloquent Witches to Enthralled Victims: Adapting Archetypes and Regendering Agency in Hawthorne's Invisible World

In *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) the latest (and last) descendant of the Puritan witch Goodman Maule, nineteenth-century daguerreotypist Holgrave, is able to enthrall the housekeeper, the young and angelic Phoebe Pyncheon, by telling her the story of how her ancestor Alice was mesmerized and possessed by another of the witch's descendants, his own forbear, Matthew Maule. While Holgrave claims that his goal is a literary one, and that he aims to publish the legend in a magazine, his narrative works on his audience like a spell. Telling the tale to Phoebe places her in the role of Alice and reveals its narrator as part of the line of Maule wizards. At the end of the story, his power becomes clear:

Holgrave, plunging into his tale with the energy and absorption natural to a young author, had given a good deal of action to the parts capable of being developed and exemplified in that manner. He now observed that a certain remarkable drowsiness (wholly unlike that with which the reader possibly feels himself affected) had been flung over the senses of his auditors. It was the effect, unquestionably, of the mystic gesticulations by which he had sought to bring bodily before Phoebe's perception the figure of the mesmerizing carpenter. With the lids drooping over her eyes,—now lifted, for an instant, and drawn down again, as with leaden weights,—she leaned slightly towards him, and seemed almost to regulate her breath by his. . . . A veil was beginning to be muffled about her, in which she could behold only him, and live only in his thoughts and emotions. His glance, as he fastened it on the young girl, grew involuntarily more concentrated; in his attitude there was the consciousness of power, investing his hardly mature figure with a dignity that did not belong to its physical manifestation. It was evident, that, with but one wave of his hand and a corresponding effort of his will, he

could complete his mastery over Phoebe's yet free and virgin spirit: he could establish an influence over this good, pure, and simple child, as dangerous, and perhaps as disastrous, as that which the carpenter of his legend had acquired and exercised over the ill-fated Alice. (211-212)

Holgrave expertly (if seemingly unconsciously) accesses the agency which in the original Maule's time was called wizardry, and in his grandson's mesmerism. By conflating the supernatural power of the seventeenth-century wizard, the eighteenth-century mesmerist, and the nineteenth-century storyteller, Hawthorne establishes an unbroken thread of identical supernatural agency. Holgrave, with his Puritan ancestry and authorial inclinations, mirrors Hawthorne himself. Furthermore, the supernatural dimensions of Holgrave's narrative capacity, which bewitches and possesses his female audience, illuminate the ways Hawthorne manages and manipulates the interconnected legacies of witchcraft, gender, authorship, and the Puritan past.

As the inheritor (and radical editor) of the American romantic tradition transmitted by female authors like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick, which couched the Puritan legacy in a subversive female agency enabled by the transgressive eloquence of witchcraft, Hawthorne reassigned supernatural agency. In transforming the archetypal Puritan woman from eloquent to enthralled, Hawthorne regendered supernatural agency in national romances, making the invisible world a realm of male purview and challenging the sway of the "damned mob of scribbling women" who were his predecessors and colleagues. Holgrave is Hawthorne's Hope Leslie, and this makes all the difference.

In the previous chapter, I discussed at length the associations between witchcraft, eloquence, and the potential for protofeminist community in the form of female characters whose subversive supernatural abilities actually provide them with the agency to cement their status as the representative "Puritan" character in American fiction. The women who wrote these characters, I argued, drew upon a Puritan tradition that conflated (albeit much more

problematically) witchcraft, eloquence, and female agency. From both the Puritan archive and the protofeminist romances of his predecessors, then, Hawthorne contended with the specter of the eloquent witch.

In order to make the romance genre, and the Puritan invisible world, his own, Hawthorne took on the reworking of the American national romance of the 1820s and 1830s, and the older tradition of Puritan witchcraft narratives, both genres with strong female influences. Witchcraft and possession, for Hawthorne, represented the intersection of problems of female authorship and the supernatural properties of authorship and writing itself. To deal with this problem, Hawthorne's fiction refigures the representative Puritan archetypes created by writers like Sedgwick, Cheney, and Child, who possess exactly the kind of sphere-transcending supernatural potential he fears, as victims rather than reformers. His fictions emphasize the connections between supernatural agency and witchcraft, but, with one notable exception, Hawthorne makes his witches men rather than women, appropriating for them a formerly female agency.

That exception occurs in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), a novel set in a fictional utopian society presided over by a feminist authoress with mysterious ties to the occult. In the novel, Hawthorne uses the Puritan archetypes of witchcraft and possession as an allegory that illustrates the danger of antebellum mesmeric phenomena, particularly as they connected to women. Antebellum mesmerists relied heavily on female mediums to communicate and transmit the teachings of otherworldly spirits; mediumship allowed women an imperfect but still potent source of spiritual authority and public mobility. The ideological movement that coalesced around mesmeric phenomena, spiritualism, and its associations with millennial communities and reform movements, most notably women's rights, seemed to Hawthorne like an attempt to enact the transformative paradigms of protofeminist romancers' fantasies and to remake society according to the dictates of supernaturally empowered women. *The Blithedale Romance* is his cautionary tale that, in showing the corrosive effect of invisible world agency on

women, attempts to use the Puritan past to obviate the spiritualist present. This gesture protects his reclamation of authorship, and supernatural agency, as masculine domains.

Much has been written about Hawthorne's complex relationship with nineteenth-century gender categories, and the question of where, precisely, Hawthorne stood on the "woman question" continues to plague critics determined to untangle the "unstable fusion of feminism and misogyny" that permeates his work.<sup>1</sup> At times empathetic with female struggles, he nonetheless violently insisted upon keeping women in their own private and circumscribed spaces.<sup>2</sup> I argue that supernatural agency offered him a vital tool in and reason for this attempted circumscription. Again and again, Hawthorne connects writing to witchcraft and figures both witchcraft and writing as transgressive behavior for women.<sup>3</sup>

Hawthorne's relationship to female authors, whom he famously described as a "d--d mob of scribbling women," reflects his intense engagement with the "problem" of gender identity and female authorship. The remark is characteristic of the biting misogyny that permeated his private communications about his female peers, which brims with assertions underscoring what he seems to have held as a central truth, that "ink stained women are, without a single exception, detestable."<sup>4</sup> In female authors, Hawthorne had direct rivals for literary acclaim and

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert, 285. Cases against Hawthorne have been made by innumerable scholars, including Erlich, Leverenz, Fryer, and Mills. Barlowe indicts not just Hawthorne's female characters, but critical tradition's treatment of female Hawthorne scholars and their work, as an exercise in patriarchal Othering and exclusion. On the other side, Baym defends Hawthorne's female characters as complex and protofeminist in "Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist," and "Hawthorne's Women: The Tyranny of Social Myths." Budick argues that feminist critics are "unnecessarily hard" on Hawthorne, who attempts to problematize patriarchal narrative structures only to be (barely) defeated by his own prejudices and assumptions. Wallace, Haberly, and Herbert all attempt to present Hawthorne's seeming misogyny as more about himself than actual women: they, at least, find this argument sympathetic.

<sup>2</sup> No class of female was more apt to broach these confines than the female writer whose labor, and subject matter, made the private doubly public. Wallace argues that "the sense that women writers were especially prone to violating the decorum of privacy and parading before the world personal problems, domestic squabbles, and medical curiosities that ought to be suppressed was a constant theme of Hawthorne's criticism" (207).

<sup>3</sup> I am by no means the first to argue Hawthorne saw writing as a supernatural process. Richard Coale claims that Hawthorne "saw himself as a kind of mesmerist/medium in which he used the very forces he himself morally opposed to describe and produce the techniques and strategies of his art" (3).

<sup>4</sup> (*Centenary* 17:161). The "d--d mob" quotation comes from a letter written to publisher William D. Ticknor in 1855 (*Centenary* 17:304). Hawthorne routinely indulged in fantasies of retributive violence toward his own "sister laborers" malicious enough to be nightmare inducing. In a letter sent to publisher James Fields in 1852, for example, he wrote: "All women, as authors, are feeble and tiresome. I wish they were forbidden to write, on pain of having their

financial remuneration.<sup>5</sup> Female labor in literary fields breached not only theoretical paradigms of gendered behavior but also directly encroached on a purview he sought to claim as his own.<sup>6</sup> Their success in the literary market both proved their agency and undermined his, engendering his need to shape and co-opt archetypes of female eloquence, and to make the project of writing, with all its attached supernatural qualities, a function of male privilege.<sup>7</sup>

Hawthorne's inheritance of powerful female witches and heretics in his female predecessors' national romance, coupled with his own figuration of writing as a kind of witchcraft, made witchcraft his central interest in the Puritan invisible world and a linchpin of his engagement with the Puritan past.<sup>8</sup> In the Puritan paradigm, witches use invisible agency to remake the visible world. The visible/invisible world relationship is conceptualized in gendered and hierarchized terms. Visible and invisible spheres overlapped, and under normal circumstances invisible signs appeared at intervals not significant enough to be alarming, but in a more-or-less steady narrative that could be measured and diagnosed by a community of believers spearheaded by a class of male ministers and theologians. When upset by witches, who

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faces scarred by an oyster shell" (*Centenary* 16:624).

<sup>5</sup> Numerous critics have discussed women's roles in the antebellum literary marketplace in relation to Hawthorne: Frederick documents the proliferation and popularity of female authors, as novelists, magazine writers, and even journalists, to point out that Hawthorne and his male brethren were indeed overshadowed by female competition. Building on this reality, Tompkins argues that Hawthorne is canonical in modern literature only thanks to the male privilege afforded by twentieth-century critics. Pfister traces Hawthorne's interest in gender ideology to the development of a literary marketplace.

<sup>6</sup> Several critics have pointed to Hawthorne's seeming hatred of female writers as a manifestation of his fraught relationship with his own gender identity. What looks like misogyny, they argue, is actually a form of self-hatred, as Hawthorne, the shy, soft-spoken, fatherless "man-child" who lived into his thirties as the special, secluded pet of his mother and sisters saw in himself a dangerous lack of masculinity and an affinity for the very behaviors, and even writing styles, of the women he excoriated. See Haberly, Wallace, and Herbert. This argument is not universally compelling, as identifying without critiquing this easy displacement of female norms to abnormal (and undesirable) male self, is participating in exactly the same male privilege that lets Hawthorne appropriate, and excoriate, female identity. Hawthorne might have negatively identified with women, but he had access to the power and privilege they did not, and he could (and did) take up and discard this affiliation as suited him. Whether he identified with female authors, and/or feminine qualities or not, what is most important is that he was deeply concerned with, and critical of, them.

<sup>7</sup> Hawthorne's investment in co-opting various "female" genres has received significant scrutiny. See Vetere for a discussion of Hawthorne and witchcraft narratives and Wallace on romance.

<sup>8</sup> For an extended treatment of the ways in which Hawthorne saw writing as a kind of mesmeric or bewitching practice, see Coale. For a discussion of how that practice overlaps with gender ideology, particularly in *The Blithedale Romance*, see Goddu.

use the devil's influence to provide them supernatural agency in the visible sphere, the system threatens to overload.

Witches mean more manifestations, fueled not by divine agency but personal malice backed by diabolical intent. Such acts disrupt the stable hierarchy and collapse the visible/invisible balance, bringing invisible world too close and threatening to have the voices of normally disenfranchised women, now amplified by supernatural agency, drown out the comforting cadences of patriarchal normalcy.<sup>9</sup> Puritans instinctively knew that too much contact from the invisible world was not a good sign. As one helpful spirit explains in Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience* (1692), "should there be a continual Intercourse between Visible and Invisible World it would breed Confusion," and so it proved (242).

In Salem in 1692, it seemed to Mather that, "the usual Walls of defence about mankind have such a Gap made in them, that the very Devils are broke in upon us, to seduce the Souls, torment the Bodies, sully the Credits and Consume the Estates of our Neighbours . . . as if the Invisible World were becoming Incarnate on purpose for the vexing of us" (80). Witches could use the invisible world to overwhelming and transforming the Puritans' saintly project into its shadowy inverse, a diabolical mirror society that "turned the right order of family, neighborhood, and state upside-down" (Kamensky 152). Hawthorne perhaps saw just such a transformative threat in the cacophony of transformative female voices in the burgeoning marketplace of literary women; he certainly saw a tradition of supernaturally eloquent witches remaking society. His fictions, then, attempt to repurpose the invisible world to contain both kinds of witchcraft—the female agency of the reforming witch and the same agency in the "witchcraft" of the successful female author. To do this, he imposed the logic of separate spheres on the invisible world.

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of this hierarchy, and for documented examples of female disruptions to the paradigm, including Salem and the Great Awakening, see Ruttenburg, Gustafson, and Ziff's *Puritanism in America*.

Hawthorne found that the geographical dimensions of the Puritans' visible and invisible worlds overlaps well with the geographical metaphor of separate spheres, which codified male and female spaces as similarly overlapping, but not too much, and insisted on a masculine hierarchy of agency. In drawing on the framework of the ideology of separate spheres, I am not claiming to look at a uniform reality of nineteenth-century life, but rather at a developing paradigm that that leant itself to Hawthorne's own ends, not least because Hawthorne saw in its codifications of gender roles a way to make writing a male pursuit.<sup>10</sup> There was, after all, as he saw it, significant overlap between the supernatural labor of the witch and the literary labor of the author—both required eloquence that could shape and control audiences. In this sense, I want to argue that distinctions offered by separate spheres formulations—between male and female, public and private, domestic and industrial—could easily be overlaid on a Puritan system already invested with gendered resonances, and that in this overlay Hawthorne reinforced the invisible/visible world continuum as one that needed to be policed against unnatural female agency. If women could be shown to belong *only* in the visible world as much as they did only in the confines of hearth and home, then the legacy of representative supernatural character, as well as the mantle of supernaturally infused eloquence and authorship, would become a masculine province.

### **Hawthorne's Inheritance: Containing the Pre-Hester Heroines**

*I think I prefer a daughter to a son. There is something so piquant about having helped to create a future woman (Hawthorne, Centenary 16:25).*

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<sup>10</sup> For a problematization of separate spheres as both a nineteenth-century reality and a twentieth and twenty first century critical commonplace, see Davidson's and Hatcher's excellent collection *No More Separate Spheres*. Despite its limits as both reality and rubric, it was still a rhetorically dominant concept, "The ideology of the domestic sphere permeates every woman's guidebook and virtually every description of "woman" published in nineteenth-century America," and one that appealed, as numerous critics, including Pfister, Herbert, and Wallace, have shown, to Hawthorne (Wallace 208). In-depth explorations of the "cult of domesticity," "separate spheres," and the "culture of sentiment," include Welter's foundational "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*, Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, and Tompkins's *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. For a succinct and trenchant summation of the spatial metaphor and historical context of "separate spheres," see Kerber's "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History."



Hawthorne's desire to "create a future woman" was not limited to his biological daughter: he looked at his heroines as templates through which to project and regulate feminine attributes and female behavior.<sup>11</sup> He adapted the template of the Hutchinsonian heroine: his Hester Prynne follows in the footsteps of Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick's heroines, but falls deliberately short of her potential, possessing neither the eloquence nor the communal support of her predecessors. Ultimately, Hester's purpose is to end the legacy of empowered women like Clara Wieland, Mary Conant, and Hope Leslie.

If the extensive body of scholarship analyzing Hawthorne's thoughts on women authors has definitively established anything, it is his deep awareness of his female contemporaries and predecessors. For example, he was complimentary of Sedgwick (in public at least), calling her "our most truthful novelist."<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, it is easy to see traces of the female romancers of the 1820s and 1830s in Hawthorne's own fictions. Indeed, as his predecessors and contemporaries within the genre of the romance, his own chosen milieu, authors like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick represent a strong female tradition that Hawthorne felt compelled to absorb and refashion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For an excellent discussion of Hawthorne's own fraught relationship with Una, and the gendered dimensions of that relationship, see Herbert.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Karcher's introduction to *Hope Leslie* (x). Sedgwick, like Hawthorne, wrote from a familial inheritance of Puritan history: her ancestor Eunice Williams was perhaps the most famous "unredeemed captive" of the eighteenth century and a likely inspiration for the interracial romances of *Hope Leslie*. While I am arguing that Hawthorne did not start the entrenching of the Puritan archetype in the American romance, and I am nonetheless willing to concede that he may have dwelled upon it the longest. While women like Child, Cheney, and Sedgwick invested in the archetype and then went on to a staggering array of other things afterward, Hawthorne seems to have dwelled on Puritans throughout his literary career.

<sup>13</sup> Hawthorne's investment in romance as a genre, and his (re)formulations of that genre, has been the subject of extensive criticism. For a seminal treatment of Hawthorne and Romance, see Porte's *The Romance in America*. For an overview of the supernatural components of the genre in his hands, see Coale. Wallace suggests that despite his avowed preference for and devotion to romance, Hawthorne was ultimately ashamed of his association with the genre, which he adopted, "against his own preferences and better judgment," because he "could produce only works which he was compelled to label "romances." . . . His own themes were too slender to support a vision of reality" (207).

As Fredric Jameson argues, reworking a genre requires taking on the epistemologies and mechanisms entrenched in the older form, and any effort to do so inevitably leaves, and even reifies, traces of what is being written over.<sup>14</sup> In the case of previous romances, this meant the problem of eloquent witches.<sup>15</sup> Hawthorne had a habit of beginning his novels with prefaces explicating the nature of the genre he was trying to create. He began *The House of the Seven Gables* with the assertion that, “When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material” (1). Latitude is all very well, but roots remain. Hawthorne embraced the freedom of the romance as a genre but still had to contend with the legacy of his female predecessors. In this context, it is helpful to think of genre as a means “not just to categorize texts, but also to regulate them” (Vetere 123). Hawthorne could not entirely escape the formulations he sought to reconfigure. Genres, by virtue of their associated conventions, produce not only a system of recognition but also expectation, a canon of traditions that structure through association.

Many of Hawthorne’s texts showcase how he conflates the problem of female agency, from Puritan times onward, with eloquence and particularly with authorship. His sketch of Anne Hutchinson is particularly revealing in this regard. Hawthorne’s treatise on Hutchinson begins not with “the female” in question (she must wait until the second page), but rather as a discourse on the distressing modern female’s penchant for writing. “The press,” Hawthorne writes, “is now the medium through which feminine ambition chiefly manifests itself,” a

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<sup>14</sup> See “Magical Narratives, Romance as Genre” for Jameson’s unpacking of how this legacy operates in the romance.

<sup>15</sup> Vetere argues that antebellum novels were also in the process of generically refashioning a much older genre with strong female narrators: the witchcraft narrative. Beginning in Early Modern stories of what Willis calls “malevolent nurturers,” cunning women who afflicted rather than cured, progressing through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century trial narratives, including Puritan texts, that recognized female *maleficia* as the special handmaidens of Satan, empowered through a diabolical contract, and into post-Enlightenment narratives that reconfigured the central female figure from an evil hag to a withered old victim, women have been essential to stories of witches. Vetere argues that this generic inheritance manifests in antebellum fiction, which focused particularly on the events of Salem, as a two pronged portrayal of witches: innocent young maidens and old hags, sometimes imbued with demonic agency but more and more frequently as innocent, and agency-less, as their young maiden counterparts. These increasingly hapless incarnations of formerly powerful female figures are, Vetere argues, true to the generic conventions of the witchcraft narrative’s female centrality, but represent “the nascent consolidation of separate-sphere ideology in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically in regards to the distinction between properly public (male) and private (female)”(124).

calamity, since, properly maintained, “the great body of American women are a domestic race; but when a continuance of ill-judged incitements shall have turned their hearts away from the fireside, there are obvious circumstances which will render female pens more numerous than those of men” (15). Hawthorne poses this fact as nothing less than the battle cry for complete male disenfranchisement: “the ink-stained Amazons will expel their rivals by actual pressure, and petticoats wave triumphant over all the field” (15). All this despite the fact that women’s writing is, as Hawthorne explains, clearly inferior and suitably only to adorn, in moderation, a predominantly male canon: “a light and fanciful embroidery . . . that might sparkle upon the garment without enfeebling the web” (14). Female writing not only enfeebles American literature, the process of writing destroys the feminine soul: “woman, when she feels the impulse of genius, like a command of Heaven within her, should be aware that she is relinquishing a part of the loveliness of her sex . . . [there is] a sort of impropriety in the display of woman’s naked mind to the gaze of the world, with indications by which its inmost secrets may be searched out” (15).

Hawthorne’s logic here, which devalues women’s writing and hypersexualizes any kind of public female agency, relies heavily upon the logic of domesticated space—a separate sphere—as the only proper place for women, who are fine when left to their natural attunement towards their hearths, rendered indecently vulnerable, “naked,” when their writing meets the public eye and becomes vulnerable to the rape of the public gaze. It also draws heavily on the supernatural aspects of language. As the preface to a sketch of a woman who was accused of both heresy and demonically fueled eloquence, the supernatural component of women’s writing is figured in this introduction as a process of almost magical entrapment: it is “fanciful,” the most delicate and ornamental part of a “web” of words cast over the public. Women, Hawthorne argues in his prelude to *Hutchinson*, should not write, since it is a magic that they cannot do as well as men (although their version will somehow still obliterate male literary contributions) and that destroys their femininity even as it unseats the natural boundaries and hierarchies of gender.

Only after this extraordinary lengthy preface does Hawthorne get to the subject of his sketch, “the female” in question. Through the lens of this introduction, his initial description of Hutchinson, “a woman of extraordinary talent and strong imagination,” reads as more disturbing than flattering (15). In this context, Hutchinson’s “extraordinary” capacities seem more monstrous than magnificent, wonderful only in the old, Puritan sense of the word, in that they serve as markers of an unnatural object, a “wonder” designating some form of either divine or diabolical significance. Given the decidedly negative slant of Hawthorne’s formulation of female eloquence in the prefatory material, it is not a stretch to think he’s more inclined to the demonic reading.

Through this lens, then, we must look at Hawthorne’s own Hutchinsonian characters. Hester Prynne is the critically approved starting place for such an analysis. A potential witch who rejects witchcraft and a would-be heretical feminist who falls short of the female cause, Hester falls short of the kind of Hutchinsonian vision postulated by Sedgwick or Cheney, but this shortcoming is by design. At the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester renounces all claims to archetypal agency before sinking into an anonymous grave:

Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the destined prophetess, but had long since recognized the impossibility that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened with a life-long sorrow. The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and knowing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end. (241)

Michael Colacurcio’s seminal work on Hester Prynne’s resemblance to Anne Hutchinson, archetypal Puritan heretic whose trial and exile had by the nineteenth-century taken on the status of a profeminist parable, underpins modern understandings of the character. As Colacurcio argues, Hawthorne sees Anne Hutchinson’s evolution as a basically feminist

trajectory, from “spiritual counselor to Puritan women, interpreting to them the best of the male theological mind” to “a prophet in her own right, giving voice to a new spirit of freedom and embodying within herself a new awareness of female intelligence and social power” (“Footsteps” 467).

If Hawthorne made Hester in Hutchinson’s image, however, his vision was not the glorious reimagining she received in the hands of authors like Cheney and Sedgwick. As Colacurcio points out, “Hawthorne will have nearly as many reservations about Hester’s sainthood as John Winthrop had about Mrs. Hutchinson” (“Footsteps” 460). “Stained with sin,” “bowed down with shame,” Hester falls short of the “lofty, pure and beautiful” standard set by Hawthorne and perishes in ignominy, banished from the object of her desire, the minister Dimmesdale, even in death, as “the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle” (241). Hester, despite her “antinomian” leanings and the fact that “the world’s law was no law to her mind” aspires to no greater theological or social defiance than the right to be with the man she loves (148). Her defining role is not, Hawthorne reports, that of heretic but rather motherhood, which keeps her from truly becoming a voice for “the whole race of womanhood”: “had little Pearl never come to her from the spiritual world, it might have been far otherwise. Then, she might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Ann Hutchinson as the foundress of a religious sect” (149). So far from Hutchinson’s template does Hester fall that later in life she becomes the poster child for the kind of doctrine of works, rather than graces, that the original Hutchinson excoriated: “None so ready as she to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty...none so self-devoted as Hester, when pestilence stalked through the town...Such helpfulness was found in her,—so much the power to do...” (146).

Hester as Hutchinson, revisited and much diminished, is best understood not only as a direct transmission from the Puritan archive to Hawthorne’s page, although Hawthorne was clearly familiar with these sources, but rather as a composite who also incorporates previous

fictional incarnations.<sup>16</sup> Hawthorne's Hutchinson comes from more than just the journals and trial transcripts of her Puritan persecutors. Hester is a palimpsest, a redrawn version not just of the historical Anne, but also of her earlier fictional incarnations. In Hester Prynne, we can see the outlines of predecessors like Miriam Grey, Mary Conant, Hope Leslie, and Esther Downing, although she falls far short of their protofeminist potential. This alteration, I will argue, is far from accidental. Rather, it is a deliberate reclaiming and circumscribing of Hutchinson, and her invisible world agency.

Before Hester walked past the rosebush at the jailhouse door "sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson," Cheney's William Atherton spends a veritable eternity attempting to cultivate (and in the process nearly destroying) the rosebush Miriam Grey has planted outside the enclave of Miles Standish. Miriam Grey is an eloquent champion of Puritanism as a female faith. She insists to her overbearing patriarch of a father that "you will not...deny the influence of our sex. If the entreaties of Dalilah could subdue Samson, how much more powerful must be the arguments of religion from the lips of a virtuous woman. Even the Apostle saith, 'The believing wife shall sanctify the unbelieving husband'" (172). Cheney's use of Miriam, symbolically interchangeable with the roses she plants and nurtures across the colony, highlights the perils of men's interactions with the flower of Puritan femininity. Atherton's attempts to cultivate Miriam's rose nearly destroy it, just as his influence nearly destroys her, "owing to his want of skill..lopped away branch after branch, till nothing but a mere skeleton remained" (90). Miriam's rosebush symbolizes not female subversiveness, disgrace, and shame, but virtue under attack from male incompetence. If Hutchinson's rose thrives in Miriam's hands it languishes when associated with Hester, who lacks the theological certainty and invisible world agency of her predecessors.

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<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this subject, see Colacurcio's seminal article "Footsteps of Anne Hutchinson," as well as his chapter "Native Land," in *The Province of Piety*.

Many of Hester's experiences deliberately rewrite the paradigms of these predecessors. While Hawthorne offers Hester access to the same wilderness that provided agency for Mary Conant, Hope Leslie, and Magawisca, he also pointedly turns her away from it: "It may seem marvelous that, with the world before her, —kept by no restrictive clause of her condemnation...having also the passes of the dark inscrutable forest open to her, where the wildness of her nature might assimilate itself with a people whose customs and life were alien from the law that condemned her," Hester chooses to stay, as "her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had stuck in the soil" (71). Nor does her exemplary status lend itself to the formation of a community of women, as in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*.

While Hawthorne presents the scarlet letter as a marker of supernatural status, it isolates and contains Hester: "it had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself" (48). Rather than a society of sisters, she gets more shame than sympathy. Hester's travails are excoriated most viciously by the Greek chorus of female Puritan onlookers whose standard response to Hester runs along the lines of "this woman has brought shame upon us all and ought to die" (46). The kindest thing any respectable matron will venture is a halfhearted acknowledgement of her suffering: "the pang of [the mark] will always be in her heart" (46). The only real communal interaction Hester has, in fact, is with Mrs. Hibbins, the self-confessed witch whose eventual execution is foretold in the first chapter, who offers Hester a place amongst her satanic crew: "Wilt thou go with us to-night? There will be a merry company in the forest; and I well-nigh promised the Black Man that comely Hester Prynne should make one" (105). Hester, unlike Hope Leslie, turns down the fellowship of witches, dismissing the "ill-omened physiognomy" of her Mistress Hibbins and telling her "Make my excuse to him, so please you...I must tarry at home and keep watch over my little Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book, and that with mine own blood!" (105).

Hester's devotion to her infant, Hawthorne informs his readers, is her defining virtue: "even thus had the child saved her from Satan's snare" (105).

Hester's status as a mother redeems her from any kind of alternative female community, whether the questionable associations of the devil's legions of witches or as the foundress of a heretical sect devoted to "the whole race of womanhood" (149). Hawthorne complicates this reductively redemptive paradigm of motherhood somewhat by making Pearl, Hester's illegitimate daughter, a decidedly otherworldly child, a living incarnation of her mother's sin. Hester's fear of "some dark and wild peculiarity, that should correspond with the guiltiness to which she owes her being" makes Pearl a kind of living embodiment of Anne Hutchinson's own "monstrous birth." When she delivered a stillborn infant rumored to be hideously deformed, Winthrop, Johnson and other contemporaries argued for the dead child's deformities as evidence of the perversion of the mother's natural femininity. In fact, bastard children formed the primary metaphor for Hutchinson's antinomian heresy, to the point that, "By 1700 one could scarcely tell her "monstrous [biological] birth from her false [theological] conceptions."<sup>17</sup> Certainly Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* elaborates at length on this metaphor. Mather wrote of Hutchinson: "The erroneous gentlewoman herself, convicted of holding about thirty monstrous opinions, growing big with child . . . was delivered of about thirty monstrous births at once" (519). But while Hutchinson's monstrous stillbirth cements her status as a diabolical heretic, Hester's live "witch-baby" stymies hers (224).

Despite the fact that Hester's fears seem justified, as Pearl is the very definition of an unnatural child, her existence locks Hester into a pattern of maternal responsibility. Pearl's childhood is a parable of witchcraft; her childhood play mirrors Young Goodman Brown's travails in the forest:

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<sup>17</sup> *Province of Piety*, 67. Puritan luminaries from Winthrop to Cotton Mather, three generations later, insisted upon this defining biological metaphor of monstrous miscarriage and heresy. Colacurcio points out that this metaphor is so ingrained in Hester that, "Not only does Hester conceive a very real, natural child to accompany (and in some measure embody) her quasi- Hutchinsonian conception of spiritual freedom; but she finds it almost impossible to convince herself that Pearl is not in some sense a monstrous birth" ("Footsteps" 476).



The unlikeliest materials—a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower—were the puppets of Pearl’s witchcraft, and, without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world. Her one baby-voice served a multitude of imaginary personages, old and young, to talk withal. The pine-trees, aged, black, and solemn, and flinging groans and other melancholy utterances on the breeze, needed little transformation to figure as Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted most unmercifully. (85)

Pearl’s mastery of the invisible world in microcosm opens up a world of fascinating potential, but it is potential that Hawthorne quickly curtails. If Hester is mother to a diabolical child, she does not share in its nature. She along with the rest of the villagers thinks “it was if an evil spirit possessed the child” and “tremble[s]” at the sound of her daughter’s angry tones “because they had so much the sound of a witch’s anathemas in some unknown tongue,” (87,85). She labors not to encourage her daughter’s subversive agency, but to curtail it. Nor, ultimately, can she claim Pearl as a kind of alternative legacy of female dissent. Pearl, despite all of her subversive feminine otherness, does not found the alternative lineage of Hope Leslie or Mary Conant. Hawthorne raises this potential only to explicitly cast it down: “So Pearl—the elf child,— the demon offspring...became the richest heiress of her day in the New World....[she] might have mingled her wild blood with the lineage of the devoutest Puritan among them all” but she doesn’t— instead she moves away to become an anonymous “inhabitant of another land,” erased from the Puritan landscape.

Pearl’s invisible world potential is a specter raised only to be discarded, just like Hester’s Hutchinsonian vision. The narrator promises in the prologue a tale of a woman very much formed in the image of Sedgwick’s Esther Downing, “a rather noteworthy personage in the view of our ancestors...a stately and solemn” woman who went “about the countryside [as a] kind of voluntary nurse, and doing whatever miscellaneous good she might; taking upon herself, likewise, to give advice in all matters, especially those of the heart, by which means—as a person

of such propensities inevitably must—she gained from many people the reverence due to an angel” (29). But the ultimate reality proves far different. Hester is, as we have seen, ultimately a failure, a woman too impure and besmirched by sin to be the kind of prophetess that women need. Even the promise of an impossibly purer, better, more beautiful “angel and apostle” to come later is hollowed out by the reality of the novel, which begins with a pointed warning about the general devolution of American women since Hester’s time: “throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity of her own” (45). As Hawthorne’s later novels will make clear, the diminishing of character does in fact keep pace with the languishing of physical frames— Hester’s potential grows only increasingly more spectral as times goes on, only to die completely in the form of Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*.<sup>18</sup>

Hester and Zenobia and a plethora of heroines from the stories and novels before and in between showcase the same curtailed feminist potential that Hawthorne produced in his initial sketch of Anne Hutchinson. Written early in his career, it both acknowledges her as archetypal, referring to her in the first sentence as “this female” who so perfectly forecasts the type of “public women” “which seem to threaten our posterity . . . whereof one was a burthen to grievous for our fathers,” and accepts her banishment as a necessity for the safe functioning of Puritan society, for that very same reason (14). Before getting to the dangers of eloquent women, however, it is worth looking at how Hawthorne uses the invisible world to regender the boundaries of eloquence and agency, stripping it from women and assigning it to men. Hester Prynne doesn’t just lack the female community; she lacks the bewitching eloquence of her

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<sup>18</sup> While he ostensibly lamented the wasting away of the modern American female, Hawthorne ultimately decided he preferred the weakness of the modern waif to the aggressive health of the alternative. A particularly revealing example of this comparison, comes in one of his notebooks when during a trip to England he lamented that English and American women forced a man to “choose between a greasy animal and an anxious skeleton” before confessing that he much preferred the skeleton (quoted in Pfister, 81). Pfister’s discussion of this moment, and Hawthorne’s perspective on women’s “evolution” in America as portrayed in his novels, is an illuminating one.

predecessors, as Hawthorne instead gives that to Dimmesdale, who is actually more “witch” than Hester is.

Hawthorne attempts to solve the problem of generic residue by remaking the archetypal heroines into weakened paradigm and also by giving the agency, and eloquence, of witches and their narratives to men. Hawthorne’s stories carefully separate increasingly silent (and victimized) women from articulate *male* witches. When men have the power of eloquence, they have the power of language and authorship.

### **Reconfiguring Supernatural Agency: Re-Gendering Witchcraft**

*The witches! There is no mistaking them. The witches!* (“Main-Street,” 92.)

The male witches and wizards in Hawthorne’s stories possess supernatural agency that doesn’t just include, but rather emphasizes, eloquence and narrative power.<sup>19</sup> Hawthorne’s stories and novels abound with male witches: these characters serve as the locii of Puritan supernatural agency in his fiction and appear in both Puritan characters and in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century analogues that partake of the same invisible world model of witchcraft and possession. Hawthorne’s male witches are complex, fascinating characters; they run the gamut from demonic villains to tortured heroes.

Hawthorne’s gendered agenda shows in his investment in the Salem witches, or, more particularly, the male Salem witches. The short story “Main-Street” (1849) figures the familiar narrative of progress from wilderness to civilization as a type of supernatural vision. Fittingly, the central spectacle of the panorama organized around a narrative of spectral evidence is the procession of the Salem witches to Gallows Hill. In keeping with his fascination with male supernatural agency, Hawthorne’s catalog of the accused witches in “Main-Street” focuses on

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<sup>19</sup> I use the word “wizard” here as the male form of “witch,” following both Hawthorne and the Puritan sources from which he worked.

the accused men, who, in contrast to their fellow accused “obtuse and uncultivated creatures, some of them scarcely half-witted by nature,” he presents as sympathetic and compelling characters (92).

Many of them are archetypes of masculine virtue: George Jacobs appears as “a quite, blameless, good husband,” and John Willard a model of industry, “so shrewd and active in his business, so practical” (92). He dwells at greatest length on George Burroughs, a tragic hero doomed by his own intellectual refinement. Burroughs, whom he gives “an inward light which glows through his dark countenance, and, we might almost say, glorifies his figure, in spite of the soil and haggardness of long imprisonment” is Faustus at his most sympathetic: “What bribe could Satan offer? . . . Alas, it may have been in the very strength of his high and searching intellect that the Tempter found the weakness which betrayed him. He yearned for knowledge; he went groping into a world of mystery” (94). Readers of this passage in particular, and indeed Hawthorne's fictions in general, would never guess that approximately eighty percent of Salem's accused witches were female: he erases the hags and housewives and supplants them with complex villains and tragic heroes of a distinctly masculine stamp.<sup>20</sup>

Some of Hawthorne's fictional wizards are clearly villainous. He makes several antagonists in the mold of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Sir Philip Gardiner, the false Puritan and tormenter of young Rosa: evil humbugs who still nonetheless possess miraculous and persuasive compelling power: their eloquence enervates and destroys their victims. *The Scarlet Letter's* Chillingsworth, whose malign influence possesses and corrupts Dimmesdale, follows recognizable Puritan patterns. A former Indian captive and wilderness denizen, he implies, if he does not actually command, a mastery of their savage magic and a truly diabolical agenda: the hallmarks of a traditional witch. Hester, in fact, easily recognizes him as such, asking: “Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about us? Has thou enticed me into a bond that

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<sup>20</sup> As Vetere points out, “executing a witch usually meant executing a woman” (143). For studies on the connections between gender and witchcraft in the early modern era, see Karlsen, Willis, and Reis.

will prove the ruin of my soul?" (69). Chillingsworth's reply is not a denial, but a technical correction: it's not *her* soul he seeks.

Hawthorne relies on the argot of witchcraft to describe *The Blithedale Romance's* mesmerist Westervelt. Narrator Miles Coverdale most frequently categorizes Westervelt not as a "mesmerist" but instead as a "wizard," a vision of modern sophistication built over a framework of supernatural evil. Their first meeting, in which Westervelt materializes out of the woods before the distracted Coverdale with "almost the effect of an apparition," is explicitly reminiscent of Hawthorne's Puritan protagonist's wilderness meeting with the devil in "Young Goodman Brown"(65). Indeed, Westervelt's black eyes sparkle "as if the Devil were peeping out of them," and while his sleek attire and blinding grin seem to mark him as the epitome of civilized urbanity, Coverdale's discovery that this smile is the work of expensive dentures blends the modern duplicity and ancient inhumanity. Later, Coverdale explicitly figures these dentures as a "wizard mark," such as "every human being, when given over to the Devil, is sure to have. . . . I fancied that this smile, with its peculiar revelation, was the Devil's signet on the professor" (110). The wizard's mark, or witch's mark, was last deemed a valid piece of evidence by New England standards during the Salem witchcraft trials, where it could easily have been presented alongside "spectral evidence" of Westervelt's apparitions, which Coverdale also frequently describes.

Other male witches are more complex, even sympathetic. *The Scarlet Letter* characterizes the sympathetically tragic minister Dimmesdale as a witch. Characterized by his extreme eloquence and apparent holiness, he is a seeming angel of light, whose deep passions, "the portion of him which the Devil claimed," undercut his "higher, purer, softer qualities" (177). He bears on his breast the supernaturally inflicted scarlet A, a sign of invisible world judgment that closely resembles a witch's mark, and despite a tormented soul and good intentions, is responsible for much of the suffering of his paramour and their illegitimate daughter. Confessed and unrepentant witch Mrs. Hibbins identifies Dimmesdale (and only then his daughter Pearl)

as members of the devil's crew, and even references the scarlet letter that is his witch's mark: "Dost thou think I have been to the forest so many times, and have yet no skill to judge who else has been there? . . . this minister! . . . When the Black Man sees one of his own servants, signed and sealed, so shy of owning to the bond as is the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, he hath a way of ordering the matters so the mark shall be disclosed" (221).

Much of the focus on his daughter Pearl as a "witch baby" is directed towards her parentage, specifically, toward her father. Puritans from the townspeople to the governor and Wilson identify her as the devil's child, a "demon offspring," and Pearl herself claims "the prince of air" as her father (222, 223). While this version of Pearl's parentage implicates Hester, putting her in the familiar paradigm of witch who dallies with the devil, it also, more subtly but just as surely, implicates her real father. This implication is even more pronounced since Hester steadfastly refuses Mrs. Hibbins' invitation to join her community of witches and despairs over Pearl's unholy qualities: Hester, as Hawthorne makes clear, despite her scarlet letter, is no real witch. When she does venture into the wilderness, she sees it only as a natural retreat, it is Dimmesdale who looks around the forest and sees "the boundary between two worlds," and his daughter as a "spirit" of the invisible realm (191). Pearl too figures her father in diabolical terms. She points out to her mother that, like Young Goodman Brown's mysterious companion, he only acknowledges her at night, and will only come to see her in the wilderness: "in the dark night-time, he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine . . . and in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, he talks with thee" (210). Dimmesdale, sympathetic yet supernaturally corrupt, characterizes the compelling complexity of many of Hawthorne's male witches.

Hawthorne's fictions don't just document, they reconfigure the historical record of Puritan witchcraft. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the foundations for the story rest in the past, when an enterprising Puritan named Matthew Maule builds a rudimentary dwelling on a promising piece of wilderness, only to have his home and land confiscated when he is accused

of, and ultimately condemned for, witchcraft. The most vocal of his accusers, Colonel Pyncheon, a severe incarnation of hypocrisy and false piety, then appropriates the land and begins to build his own dwelling upon it, a far grander house with seven gables, work for which he incurs Maule's curse, that "God will give him blood to drink," a prediction that seems realized when, some months later at the housewarming party, the Colonel is found dead in his chair, his collar stained with blood (8). The scene describing Maule's death repurposes material from well known anecdotes from the annals of the Salem witchcraft trials, including one in which noted divine Cotton Mather watched the death of preacher George Burroughs from horseback, just as the Colonel watches Maule. In the original story, however, it is Mather who has the last word, when he responds to Burrough's ability to recite the Lord's Prayer, often touted as proof of a suspected witch's innocence, with the assertion that "sometimes the Devil appears as an angel of light," cementing the execution in spite of potentially exculpatory evidence. In Hawthorne's re-envisioning of the scene, the novel instead draws upon another anecdote, the last words of Sarah Good, a condemned witch who insisted upon her own innocence and promised her accusers that "God will give them blood to drink." This blended scene resurrects and refashions the legacy of Salem as a clear subtext of the novel.

Hawthorne's decision to erase Sarah Good and to give her plight, and eloquence, to Matthew Maule speaks to the careful re-gendering at the heart of his invisible world project. Good's transition from historical figure to fictional character was already one of considerable interest. The original Sarah Good embodied all of the characteristics that Hawthorne's proto-feminist predecessors Child, Cheney and Sedgwick would have showcased: an eloquent woman with a reputation for speaking up for herself without regard for class or gender hierarchies, she was also a tragic mother-figure: her four-year-old daughter Dorcas was the youngest accused witch. Imprisoned and forced to testify against her mother, the young girl survived but was never the same afterward. Good, however, refused to confess, and despite clear inconsistencies with her trial evidence she was executed, where, defiant to the last, she insisted upon her

innocence and promised God's wrath on her executors.<sup>21</sup> After her death, she became a fascinating figure for many writers of historical fiction, and her characterization followed the evolving paradigm of witchcraft narrative conventions: although only around forty years old at her trial, a vigorous woman and mother to a small child, she was increasingly portrayed as a wizened old crone, an embodiment of the stereotypical hag Vetere describes as the disempowered incarnation of female supernatural agency: in John Neal's *Rachel Dyer* (1828) for example, she is depicted as a just such a figure.<sup>22</sup> Hawthorne's decision to bypass even this weakened caricature of a character, to erase Good altogether, to give her defining characteristics: an unfair trial, a supposed family history of witchcraft, and perhaps the most famous words of the Salem witchcraft trials, to a man is a significant choice, one that signposts the fact that in *The House of the Seven Gables*, as in Hawthorne's other works, supernatural agency is a male purview.<sup>23</sup> In *The House of the Seven Gables*, men are the initial aggrieved, the accused witches, who get their generations of revenge (at the expense of significant female collateral damage). The Pyncheon family's supernatural affliction continues across the generations, however, and its victims are innocent Pyncheon maidens, who pay the price exacted by Maule's descendants in ways that closely mirror the sufferings of Salem's afflicted girls and the attendant tradition of demonic possession.

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<sup>21</sup> During Sarah Good's trial, one of the afflicted girls claimed to be stabbed by a knife by the apparition of Good. Examiners found a broken knife on Good's accuser, but a young man produced the other part of the knife, and testified that he had broken the tool earlier in the vicinity of the afflicted girls. Although the girl in question received a reprimand and an injunction not to falsify any more testimony, this clear manipulation of evidence was not enough to save Good, who was still convicted. For more on her trial and life story, see Hill, *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* as well as Burns and Rosenthal, "Examination of the Records of the Salem Witch Trials." Hill, Burns, and Rosenthal analyze Good's portrayal in contemporary media, most particularly the writings of Deodat Lawson.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the phenomenon of depicting witches as debilitated hags whose eloquence was gone and whose magic was really delusion, see Vetere.

<sup>23</sup> Hawthorne did occasionally employ the figure of the evil hag in his own fictions: in "The Hollow of the Three Hills," an old crone uses her magic to provide a fallen maiden with tormenting memories of her lost domestic idol, while in "Feathertop: A Moralized Tale," a lonely old hag uses magic to give her scarecrow life. These stories are, however, as Michael Colacurcio's introduction to *Selected Tales* has pointed out, relatively conventional, and comprise some of Hawthorne's least innovative or complex examinations of the supernatural, only topically associated with Puritan invisible world history or ideology.



Some generations after the Puritan Maule's demise, the original Colonel's grandson summons Maule's descendant, rumored to know the hiding place of a mysterious missing deed. Importuned by the master of the house to undo his ancestor's handiwork and "return" the missing deed, Maule instead commits exactly the kind of supernatural crime that his ancestor, the "wizard," had been presumed guilty of, putting young Alice Pyncheon into a trance that quickly takes the form of a demonic possession. According to the narrator:

The young Matthew Maule...was popularly supposed to have inherited some of his ancestor's questionable traits... He was fabled, for example, to have a strange power of getting into people's dreams, and regulating matters there according to his own fancy, pretty much like the stage manager of a theatre. There was a great deal of talk among the neighbors, particularly the petticoated ones, about what they called the witchcraft of Maule's eye. Some said that he could look into people's minds; others, that by the marvelous power of this eye, he could draw people into his own mind, or send them, if he pleased to do errand to his grandfather, in the spiritual world; others again, that it was what is termed an Evil Eye, and possessed the valuable faculty of blighting corn, and drying children into mummies with the heartburn (189-190).

Described here through the denigratingly humorous lens of female superstition, figured as "petticoated" anxiety, these rumored abilities draw heavily upon the kind of folk beliefs that fueled much of the Puritan anxiety about witches.<sup>24</sup> When Mr. Pyncheon agrees to allow Maule access to his daughter, he does so in the hopes that Maule can contact the spirit world through her, a process his modern ideals tell him is harmlessly scientific but that he inflects with historical danger even as he accedes. While Pyncheon perceives himself as an advanced, cosmopolitan thinker, one whose "long residence abroad, and intercourse with men of wit and fashion . . . had done much towards obliterating the grim, Puritan superstitions, which no man

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<sup>24</sup> Numerous texts document New England Puritans' particular subset of beliefs, derived from both theological and folk traditions, about witchcraft. See Godbeer, Hall's *World of Wonder*, and Winship's *Seers of God*.

of New England birth, at this early stage, could entirely escape,” he nonetheless cannot truly detach himself from these superstitions when it comes to “supernatural” agency, particularly *after* he has turned his daughter over to his supernatural control.

While Maule initially treats the condition he’s placed Alice in as a quasi-scientific mediumistic trance, Mr. Pyncheon immediately figures it as demonic possession, and moves from labeling Maule a wizard like his grandfather to an incarnation of the devil himself: “Fiend in man’s shape, why dost thou keep dominion over my child?” (208). Maule’s effect on Alice in frightens her father to such a degree that he threatens the young carpenter with his grandfather’s fate: “You and the fiend together have robbed me of my daughter! Give her back—spawn of the old wizard—or you shall climb Gallows Hill in your grandfather’s footsteps” (206). As the scene in the parlor progresses, the veil of spiritualist inquiry slips away to reveal the truth behind Pyncheon’s suspicions: when the communion with the spirit world ends, Maule’s control over Alice does not, and she slips into the familiar Puritan model of a possessed girl, as “whatever her place or occupation, her spirit passed from beneath her own control, and bowed itself to Maule” (209). Maule then torments Alice, forcing her to laugh, sing, and dance at will. These transgressions demolish the formerly “impenetrable sphere” of Alice’s mind and body in ways that undermine both sanity and social standing.

Like the afflicted girls of Salem and countless other possessed people from Puritan annals who take the unthinkable steps of defying their elders, dancing in church, shouting blasphemy and spitting upon ministers, Alice’s condition evidences itself in the betrayal of social mores and the clear defiance of conventional behavior. The narrator carefully notes that Alice danced “not in the court-like measures as she had learned abroad, but some high-paced jig, or hop-skip rigadon, befitting the brisk lasses at a rustic merry-making” (209). Her actions are both disruptive and degrading, designed to “wreak a low ungenerous scorn upon her,” and ensure that “all the dignity of life was lost” (209). Hawthorne updates Alice’s behavior to fit her time: rather than blaspheming against the church and ministers who formed the framework of

Puritan society, she flouts the rules of good social conduct and refined female behavior. Nevertheless, her transgressions strike to the heart of her understanding of her place within that society. The implication, that “low” behavior in her genteel world is analogous to heresy in the Puritans’, reflects the black humor of Hawthorne’s parallel. For despite the superficiality of her possessed behavior, the manipulations of her unexorcised demon cause Alice Pyncheon’s death. Summoned in the middle of the night by Maule to act as handmaiden to his new bride, Alice suffers her final humiliation before perishing from exposure; her walk along “the muddy sidewalks” when dismissed from his home proves as fatal as any wilderness trek (209). Maule’s remorse at her death highlights the demonic depths of his crime: “he had taken a woman’s delicate soul into his rude gripe, to pay with;—and she was dead” (210). Unlike his ancestor, Maule faces no censure or prosecution for his powers, but Hawthorne’s narrator nevertheless carefully and clearly establishes him as as much (or more) a wizard than his predecessor. The novel’s next Maule descendant, the mysterious daguerreotypist Holgrave, also seeks out a young Pyncheon maiden for his primary victim: he quickly entralls Phoebe Pyncheon, who might as well be Alice reincarnated.

As the Maule legacy demonstrates, Hawthorne not only saw clear equivalences between the Puritan witches of history and the contemporary mesmerists and spiritualists of his own, he linked the shared ability of witches/mesmerists to possess and entrance their victims to the kind of bewitching eloquence that made a successful writer.<sup>25</sup> For Hawthorne, the eloquence at the heart of witchcraft was most powerfully deployed as a kind of possession, a bewitching of readers and hearers that makes the narrator/author the controller of the most private and sacred imaginable space: the interior, spiritual sphere.

Witchcraft went hand in hand with the ability to afflict innocent victims, and was often associated with demonic possession: witches could aid (or even summon) demons to torment

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<sup>25</sup> Hawthorne, as Coale points out, was familiar with Charles Upham’s considerable body of writing on witchcraft, in which he frequently compared the abilities of modern mesmerists and clairvoyants to those of Puritan witches (3). For more on Hawthorne and Upham’s witchcraft scholarship, see Ferguson.

and even take over the minds and bodies of their chosen victims. The wonder tales and witchcraft narratives of the New England Puritans are full of these instances. Many of the afflicted, foreshadowing Hawthorne's heroines, were women, particularly young women and children.<sup>26</sup> Demonic possession violated its victims in numerous ways, wresting away control of body and mind, and demons used their hosts to violate the most deeply held strictures of social and scriptural decorum.<sup>27</sup> Possessed souls were spiritually molested, tortured into heretical and deviant behaviors, many of which held decidedly sexual components.<sup>28</sup> Possession was about control, and that control inevitably opened the potential for defilement. So if one's words had the power to bewitch and possess, the wizard/author had access to power that was inherently deviant, frequently sexualized, and almost certainly corruptive.

This kind of corruptive eloquence defines characters like *The Blithedale Romance's* Westervelt, whose every conversation is an act of narrative mesmerism. Even the novel's narrator, Coverdale, finds himself caught up in Westervelt's narrative agenda, "The fantasy of his spectral character so wrought upon me, together with the contagion of his strange mirth on my sympathies, that I soon began to laugh as loudly as himself" (68). Westervelt's spectral character is here but a few shades from a literal specter, afflicting Coverdale with its own perverse moods. Westervelt, then, is dangerous in ways that explicitly invoke the supernatural

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<sup>26</sup> The archetypal Puritan Cotton Mather, associated by Hawthorne, like many nineteenth-century authors and their audiences, with the Salem Witch Trials for his text justifying the events there, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, produced his first major publication on the conjoined effects of witchcraft and demonic possession: his *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possession*, documents his successful efforts to prosecute a witch and rescue the children she'd afflicted with demons, particularly the oldest daughter. Similarly, Mather chronicled the affliction of Mercy Short in "A Brand Pluck'd From the Burning," while his (and his father Increase's) efforts on behalf of Margaret Rule were most memorably, and skeptically, documented by Calef in *More Wonders of the Invisible World, Another Brand pluck'd From the Burning.*"

<sup>27</sup> For an example of this, see *Memorable Providences*, in which Cotton Mather recounts with horror that his possessed houseguest, a young woman decidedly his inferior in class, gender, and social position, spoke dismissively of his own household authority and cast aspersions on his theological knowledge.

<sup>28</sup> Numerous critics have drawn attention to the sexual nature of witchcraft and possession. For an overview of the history of witchcraft, possession, and sexuality, see Stephens. For a discussion of Salem in particular, see Karlsen, Reis, and Klaitz. Calef's *More Wonders of the Invisible World* cast the "possessed" Mercy Short as promiscuous and the relationship between minister and "victim" as lascivious and distinctly physical, voicing an increasingly popular skeptical premise that foregrounded the sexual components of possession as a means of discrediting both victims and ministerial "saviors."

powers of a Puritan wizard, and his power of suggestion is overwhelmingly destructive. After a few short minutes with him, Coverdale perceives himself to be infected, “There are some spheres, the contact with which inevitably degrades the high, debases the pure, deforms the beautiful. It must be a mind of uncommon strength, and little impressibility, that can permit itself the habit of such intercourse, and not be permanently deteriorated. . . . I detested this kind of man, and all the more, because a part of my own nature showed itself responsive to him” (72). Westervelt’s conversation is an act of metaphysical force, an imposition of a “sphere” that degrades, debases, and corrupts. Just so, the pervasive rhetoric of the eloquent demon.

In “Alice Doane’s Appeal” (1835), the nineteenth-century narrator, a writer who labors to write fictions “intended to throw a ghostly glimmer round the reader,” escorts two female companions to Gallows Hill, where the Salem witches were hung, in order to practice his storycraft on his unwitting victims. His goal, to tell a story that will make their nerves tremble, pierce “the seldom trodden places of their hearts, and [find] the well-spring of their tears,” makes his own storytelling process mirror the content of his tale, in which an evil sorcerer attempts to bewitch and control a young girl (123). When his own generic fiction fails to rouse their sympathies, he instead calls forth a spectral vision of all of the historical past, calling forth the specters of Salem and parading them from the invisible realm of memory and imagination through the landscape in which his listeners sit: “And thus I marshaled them onward, the innocent who were to die, and the guilty who were to grow old in long remorse—tracing their every step, by rock, and shrub, and broken track, till their shadow visages had circled round the hill-top where we stood” (122-3). The narrator’s story thus becomes spectral evidence of his own bewitching eloquence, a testimony to the supernatural power of language, one that, when individual inspiration fails, can be easily rescued by the canon of supernatural history, particularly the specter of Salem.

In “Main-Street,” the mesmerizing power of the miniature world works most notably a young woman, whose enraptured gaze the proprietor cites as evidence of his own storytelling

agency when he urges the skeptic to: “sit further back, by that young lady, in whose face I have watched the reflection of every changing scene; only oblige me by sitting there; and, take my word for it, the slips of pasteboard shall assume spiritual life, and the bedaubed canvas become an airy and changeable reflex of what it purports to represent” (79). The narrative she beholds is one replete with female sufferings: the showman himself confesses that, “you were bidden to a bridal-dance, and find yourselves walking in a funeral procession.” Indeed, the diorama pairs doomed Anne Hutchinson with the wraith of Lady Arabella, a “pale, decaying figure of a white-robed woman who glides slowly along the street . . . looking for her own grave in the virgin soil,” then goes on to showcase women in the stockades, whipped through the streets for heresy, and marching towards gallows hill (78). The final female image is of the afflicted girls of the Salem trials, a “miserable train” seemingly locked under the spell of the witches they accompany. The showman’s mesmerizing effect on his young female patron makes her uncomfortably like the bewitched girls of the Puritan past she watches so closely, possessed, in a sense, by the history of possession.

In both stories, the male storyteller in both stories is interested in “afflicting” a female audience with his words, his eloquence a kind of witchcraft carefully calibrated for female victims. This kind of afflictive power is a key component in Hawthorne’s novels as well. *The Scarlet Letter’s* Dimmesdale, a seeming “angel of light” who is nonetheless Hester’s adulterous lover, and, as we have seen, subtly affiliated with witchcraft, is distinguished by his extreme eloquence: his sermons on piety and virtue are supernaturally thrilling, as is his persuasive power: he easily bewitches the governor and his fellow ministers into letting Hester retain custody of their child.

Similarly, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave’s supernatural narrative powers reveal that the difference between Holgrave and his forbearers is not a question of supernatural ability or even strategy—like Matthew Maule before him, he initially seeks to lessen history’s hold on his own psyche by transferring the burden to another (in both cases an innocent female

Pyncheon), but rather of willpower. Holgrave, unlike his predecessors, lets go, in spite of the temptations: "To a disposition like Holgrave's...there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit...let us, therefore...concede to the Daguerreotypist the rare and high quality of reverence for another's individuality. Let us allow him integrity also...since he forbade himself to twine that one link more, which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble" (212). Like Matthew Maule, Holgrave ends his possession with a deliberate, clear moment of supernatural command. With "a slight gesture upward, with his hand," he breaks Phoebe's trance. Unlike Maule, he does this before his victim can be fully and utterly possessed. Instead, he chooses to redeem her into the virtue by placing her within the sphere of his own protection: he makes her his wife rather than his thrall, and confines his ownership of her to a healthy plane of domesticity rather than the unhealthy realm of spiritual control. In any case the agency, like the eloquence, is entirely his: Phoebe is the same kind of victim Alice was, Holgrave is simply a more moral witch. Tellingly, the legacy of the Maule wizards requires a corresponding legacy of (female) Pyncheon victims.

If Hawthorne's men are witches, his women are the afflicted girls, refigured from authors to audience and at the mercy of their narrators (and author). As the passive registers of supernatural eloquence, they have no protection against supernaturally-inflicted suffering, nor is Hawthorne often inclined to spare them. Female characters do not truly become cautionary tales, however, until they deliberately seek out contact with the invisible world: seeking any kind of interaction with, let alone entry to, the supernatural sphere exposes them to the full corruptive force of the invisible world.

In Hawthorne's fiction, the invisible world acts as a sphere for female suffering. In so figuring it, he turns Puritan history into a supernaturally-inflected cautionary tale for women, effectively cutting off women's access to the invisible world, since their susceptibility to the influences of the invisible world means that they are only truly "safe" in the visible one. More and more, the spiritual wilderness comes to equal guaranteed peril, a fate reflected in the danger

to Hawthorne's women who stray outside of both the literal boundaries of their sphere, leaving the safety of hearth and home, and those who transgress against its metaphorical confines.

Hawthorne draws attention to the necessity of the proper spheres for ideologies, practices, and people ostensibly in order to argue for a defense against the encroachment of supernatural phenomena into natural space but also, more metaphorically and fundamentally, to reinforce a comforting spatial template for gender roles, one that ultimately separates women from their spiritually empowered mobility. The logic of separate spheres rests in spatial controls that designate types of labor and agency. Arguing that woman's proper sphere was the domestic one implied that she was by nature suited to, and safest in, the household creature, and at risk when exposed to any external influences or activities. Many of Hawthorne's heroines literally as well as symbolically leave the protection of this sphere and thus make themselves vulnerable to the wizards who afflict them when they stray beyond the confines of their parlors. For example, in order to bewitch his young female audience, the narrator of "Alice Doane's Appeal" takes them from the safety of hearth and home to the top of Gallows Hill, where he can afflict them with his gothic legend, and, when that fails, Salem history. In "Main-Street," the seductive eloquence of the showman's presentation happens at a public exposition. The vulnerability of the casual visitant pales, however, when compared to the utter devastation wreaked on women who venture outside of their domestic spaces and into supernatural peril as a full-time occupation, as *The Blithedale Romance's* Priscilla does.

Priscilla's experiences as a medium mark her as more an "afflicted maiden" of the Puritan stamp than a nineteenth-century spiritualist practitioner exercising the extradomestic agency imbued by the spiritual world. Physically and mentally enervated, she is the picture of dilapidated femininity.<sup>29</sup> In a letter introducing the book manuscript that became *The Blithedale*

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<sup>29</sup> Many critics have discussed Priscilla's wasted mental and physical state. Pfister argues that she embodies femininity as separate spheres would have it: delicate, suited only for the domestic, completely destroyed by contact with public sphere and unfeminine labor. Colacurcio makes the case for a sexual component to her degradation as well, pointing out that seamstresses, like mediums, were often also prostitutes, and that marketplace associations of any kind frequently lent the laboring female body the status of sexual commodity.



*Romance*, Hawthorne proposed and then rejected the title of *The Veiled Lady*. An acknowledgement of the primacy of Priscilla, the young medium whose experiences with the performative mesmerism at the heart of spiritualist phenomena, Hawthorne dismissed the idea because he did “not wish to give prominence to that feature of the *Romance*.” In settling for the more vague and innocuous *The Blithedale Romance*, which he lukewarmly endorsed as one that, “would do, in lack of a better,” Hawthorne portrays his decision as an act of literary chivalry, since Priscilla “is such a shrinking damsel that it seems hardly fair to thrust her into the vanguard and make her the standard bearer” (*Centenary* 16:536). By denying Priscilla, and explicitly her public persona as the Veiled Lady, a central place on the novel’s cover and title page, he removes her from public display and relegates her to the enclosed space of the inner pages, reifying the “shrinking damsel” over the public performer.

The female ability to access a spiritual realm allowed women a kind of mobility that threatened to undercut the sanctity of the separate, contained domestic space even as it capitalized on the ideological conceptions that created it. After all, female mediums not only accessed spiritual spaces, they brought the inhabitants of those spaces into their own—first into their parlors and then onto public stages, making lecture halls and theaters not just the domain of the spirits, but to a certain extent their own as well. Thus, when Hawthorne describes the veil, he focuses not so much on what it protects as what it permits: “falling over the wearer from head to foot, [the veil] was supposed to insulate her from the material world, from time and space, and to endow her with many of the privileges of a disembodied spirit” (7). For Hawthorne, invested as he was in divesting women of supernatural agency, these privileges were a source of significant concern.

Because of its transgressive potential, Hawthorne demonizes mesmerism and its spiritualist underpinnings, creating a medium who wants nothing more than to escape from her

own spectral agency. In fact, for most of *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne's veiled lady is on the run from her mesmeric persona—existing instead as Blithedale Farm's resident charity case. While her alternate identity is supposedly a secret from the Blithedalers, her status as the diminished product of unnatural labor is nonetheless immediately apparent to her new companions. Her professed identity as a seamstress, along with her “wan, almost sickly hue, betokening habitual seclusion from the sun and free atmosphere” potentially marks her as a victim of the factory, a refugee from the newly industrialized workforce (21). In her case, however, the truly damaging labor is not manual but spiritual, that is, supernatural.

Mediums' participation in the invisible world is deliberate and commercialized; they interact with spirits for profit in ways that threaten the boundaries between public and private.<sup>30</sup> Mediums not only left the domestic space of their parlors for lecture halls and theaters, they made public the private spheres of their bodies and minds, opening themselves up to the presence (and possession) of multiple spirits. Through these spirits, mediums became the ultimate storytellers—they could be any character and adopt any voice, and could channel identities of radically different racial, class, and gender backgrounds. This not only makes them compelling narrators, it also makes them the ultimate public space, a violation of standards of female privacy that Hawthorne was not alone in understanding in highly sexual terms.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Murison points out that the medium's work was both work in the sense of paid labor, and also work that transgressed even further the very domestic boundaries female mediums were violating by working at all. Mediumistic clairvoyance, at its heart, she argues, is an abridgement of public and private spaces: “the clairvoyant's work is invasion of privacy, both domestic and corporeal” (77).

<sup>31</sup> Spirits, according to spiritualist belief, like demons, once in possession of their host, subdue that host utterly. The *Banner of Light*, a Spiritualist journal, described the process thusly: “subject to the entire control of the predominating spirit. . . [the medium] is, in a word, magnetized by the spirit; held in perfect subjection” (quoted in Weinauer 303). This process supposedly requires the consent of the medium, but since that medium is already under the absolute control of the mesmerist, it actually his consent they have implicitly received. This dynamic, of absolute possession, penetration, and ownership of not just body but also soul, casts the mesmerist in the role of the ultimate pimp. Through this lens, it does not matter how much “propriety” the mesmerist can command from his subject, as his entire design is to subject her to the utter impropriety of possession, by spirits (the plural is important) of gender, character, and pedigree unknown. What was always known, however, was that the purity of the subject could not help but be utterly compromised, as the private sphere of self, both in terms of body and spirit, became a public space. Mediums were often figured (and sometimes worked) as prostitutes. For the rhetoric and reality of this practice, see Braude, Goddu, and McGarry.

In a letter to his future bride Sophia, Hawthorne begs her not to participate in any supernatural activities, and particularly never to allow herself to be mesmerized:

Take no part, I beseech you, in these magnetic miracles. I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on you of which we know neither the origin nor consequence, and the phenomena of which seem rather calculated to bewilder us than to teach us any truths about the present or future state of being. . . . Supposing that the power arises from the transfusion of one spirit into another, it seems to me that the sacredness of an individual is violated by it; there would be an intruder in the holiest of holies. (*Centenary* 15:588).

Hawthorne's rhetoric here reflects less the anxieties of quasi-scientific modernity and more the familiar temptations and perils of theologically defined demonic seduction—what's at stake is the "holiest of holies," and a "vision of heaven;" the duplicitous nature of "magnetic miracles" is not threatening because it portends the embarrassment of being taken in by a new scam, but rather that it reflects a literal flirtation with potential damnation. His gesture towards "material and physical" influence comes across as more wishful than persuasive—born more from the anxious desire that these influences be "not spiritual" than from any cogent argument for how they might not be. Clearly, Hawthorne's view of spiritualist manifestations is entirely disenchanted, but not entirely disbelieving.

Hawthorne's letter to Sophia is filled with sexual possessiveness and anxiety. He worries about the violation of his fiancée's purity, "Supposing that the power arises from the transfusion of one spirit into another, it seems to me that the sacredness of an individual is violated by it," and the usurpation of his own proprietary control over that purity, "I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on you of which we know neither the origin nor consequence."<sup>32</sup> Coverdale,

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<sup>32</sup> As Goddu explains the logic of antebellum critics of spiritualist phenomena, "In transgressing the boundaries of her proper sphere by going public as a performer, the medium became vulnerable to the male monsters of the market" (98). Moreover, her vulnerability was actually threefold, since "mediums were taken over by spirits and male mesmerists and voyeuristically consumed by their audience" (Goddu 98). This kind of public spiritual promiscuity voided all the notions of private, virtuous domesticity at the heart of nineteenth-century idealized femininity. For an

the narrator of *The Blithedale Romance*, who adapts and magnifies Hawthorne's own supernatural anxieties, constantly figures spiritualist practices, particularly mesmeric trances and seances, as assaults on feminine virtue.<sup>33</sup> So it is no wonder, then, that as Coverdale sits waiting for the Veiled Lady's second performance, his neighbor, a seasoned veteran of mesmeric demonstrations, regales him with a catalog of supernatural ravages to "natural" femininity:

He cited instances of the miraculous power of one human being over the will and passions of another; insomuch that settled grief was but a shadow, beneath the influence of a man possessing this potency, and the strong love of years melted away like a vapor. At the bidding of one of these wizards, the maiden, with her lover's kiss still burning on her lips, would turn from him with icy indifference; the newly made widow would dig up her buried heart out of her young husband's grave, before the sods had taken root upon it; a mother, with her babe's milk in her bosom, would thrust away her child. (136)

Maiden, mother, and widow all become monsters under a mesmerist's power—figured here, as so often in Coverdale's imagination, as not a scientist or even a stage performer but as a wizard, a dangerous and malevolent agent who deliberately strips the womanly virtue from his victims. Through Coverdale, Hawthorne deliberately distorts the invisible world's effects on female participants and practitioners, eliding any empowering possibilities.

The potential for female empowerment, for a kind of "supernatural labor" that allowed women to become the custodians (and arguably expert manipulators) of the invisible world,

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in-depth treatment of women's relationship to spiritualism, see Braude. See also McGarry for a discussion of spiritualism's potential to "unsettle immutable boundaries" between gender roles as well as sexual and racial identities (46).

<sup>33</sup>Many of Coverdale's thoughts and opinions in *The Blithedale Romance* are barely altered excerpts from Hawthorne's letters and notebooks during his tenure at Brook Farm. For a reading of the "overlap" between Hawthorne and his narrator, see Turner's introduction to *The Blithedale Romance* (Norton, 1958). In spite of Hawthorne's liberal use of journal materials, however, the temptation to toward "literalist logic" that equates Coverdale's "ingrained conservatism" and rejection of reform exactly with Hawthorne's own beliefs is problematic on a number of levels, not least because Coverdale demonstrates an incredibly un-Hawthornian lack of awareness, his narrative "miss[ing] so much of the story it purports to tell" (Colacurcio "Nobody's Protest Novel" 2; Broadhead 58).

represented a gendered agency Hawthorne saw as unnatural and outside female purview.<sup>34</sup> Hawthorne overlays the invisible and visible worlds with the gendered boundaries of separate spheres. While acknowledging and even privileging the special affinity women have for spiritual concerns, a key component of the separate spheres paradigm and a justification for woman's relegation to private, domestic concerns, he treats any attempts to translate that special influence into public spaces or extra-domestic agency as a betrayal of feminine standards and an invitation to spiritual corruption.<sup>35</sup> Just as Puritan witches threatened the stability of the invisible/visible world dynamic by saturating the visible sphere with their own, maliciously directed invisible influences, antebellum mediums threatened to collapse the balance of the natural and supernatural space in a bid to derive unnatural agency. For this reason, his portrayals of female mediums consistently focus on corruption and affliction, eliding this potential power. Priscilla is a possessed girl under the spell of the wizard Westervelt because if she were not, she could be a witch with all the power to remake the visible world, and the narratives that define it, in her own image. Women as victims fill the pages of Hawthorne's texts, and the only thing more potentially devastating to their spiritual and physical health than the influence of male witches is that most unnatural of all possibilities, a female witch who can effectively wield the power of supernatural eloquence in service to their own devices. *The Blithedale Romance* deals with exactly this problem.

Supernatural perils involve dangers to the status quo, a transformative potential to change and destroy everything, especially virtuous femininity. For this reason, as we have seen,

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<sup>34</sup> While not without caveats, Broadhead and other critics have made compelling arguments for the potential of mediumship to be empowering for women, who in contrast to Priscilla could acquire "wealth, power, prestige, and a measure of independence from their historical careers" (Broadhead 279).

<sup>35</sup> Despite the reality of antebellum mediums being roughly equally divided between male and female practitioners, the role was largely perceived as a female one, as the passivity and spiritual sensitivity required for the role were seen as distinctly feminine traits. Men were, in the emerging binary delineation of gender roles, simply too manly to make good mediums. In his 1856 "Review of Modern Spiritualism" the Reverend William H. Ferris expanded upon this point: "I never knew a vigorous or strong-minded person who was a medium, I do not believe that such a one can ever become one. It requires a person of light complexion, of a nervous temperament, with cold hands, of a mild, impressible, and domestic disposition. Hence girls and females make the best mediums" (Moore 92).

Priscilla the medium is a specter of herself, a dilapidated ruin of femininity. For all the horrors of the spiritually enslaved Priscilla, however, intercourse with the invisible world can create an even scarier wonder than the woman as victim: the woman as successful manipulator of supernatural forces. Female "witches" are rare in Hawthorne's work, but when they exist they are terrifying indeed. As an eloquent witch/heretic who threatens to upend gender hierarchy, Zenobia embodies the dangerous potential Hawthorne saw at the heart of female eloquence.

**“Fair Enough to Tempt Satan with a Force Reciprocal to his Own”<sup>36</sup>: Mesmeric**

**Labor, Women’s Rights, and the Fall of Zenobia.**

*I saw in Hollingsworth all that an artist could desire for the grim portrait of a Puritan magistrate, holding inquest of life and death in a case of witchcraft; in Zenobia, the sorceress herself, not aged, wrinkled and decrepit, but fair enough to tempt Satan with a force reciprocal to his own;—and, in Priscilla, the pale victim, whose soul and body had been wasted by her spells (The Blithedale Romance 147).*

*“The woman writes as if the devil was in her; and that is the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading...when they throw off the restraints of decency, and come before the public stark naked, as it were—then their books are sure to possess character and value” (Hawthorne: Letter of 2 Feb. 1855)*

*The Blithedale Romance* uses the analogy of the Puritan past in order to combat the destructive potential of reform movements that associated occult agency with various reform projects, particularly women’s rights. Zenobia, the leader of the Blithedale utopian community, is three types of supernatural potential in one: a Puritan witch, a Spiritualist mesmerist and a feminist author and icon.<sup>37</sup> Her downfall and supplanting by the enervated, inarticulate Priscilla represents a fundamental break with the invisible world legacy and attempt to contain its transformative potential.

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<sup>36</sup> *The Blithedale Romance*, 147.

<sup>37</sup> While the word “feminist” didn’t achieve popular usage in the United States until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term itself is generally thought to have originated with Charles Fourier, the utopian socialist upon whose model Brook Farm (and the fictional Blithedale) is built, so the term seems particularly apposite for Zenobia. In addition, feminist thought predates the term, and most critics place the emergence of modern feminism “in the wake of the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century” (Macey 123).

Women's rights activists, like other reformers, were often affiliated with spiritualism, which gave ideological structure and performative cachet to occult practices like mesmerism and mediumship, all of which laid claim to the purview of supernatural space— the “other” world of the mesmerists and spiritualists, like the invisible world of the Puritans, was an overlapping realm of spiritual potential. Spiritualism's reliance upon mediums, many of them female, offered women agency as speakers and teachers imbued with spiritual authority. Channeling spirits, whether through possessed speech, spirit writing, or telekinesis, allowed mediums to cross otherwise immutable boundaries and embody a range of class, gender, and racial identities.<sup>38</sup> This fluidity lent itself to radical re-imaginings of social roles, particularly for women. Many spiritualist organizations supported women's rights and endorsed “self-sovereignty” in marriage and family life.<sup>39</sup> Beginning the same year as the Seneca Falls Convention and touching off a wave of corresponding manifestations, many of which required the presence of previously parlor-bound young women now “consecrated as high priestesses of a new, female-dominated religion,” spiritualism threatened to upend domestic roles and domestic spaces (70). The vast majority of manifestations would happen, as the Fox sisters' had, in bedchambers, basements, and parlors before being moved to venues for more public demonstration. When they went, the young women went too, and gathered about themselves an agency and authority as dubious, for many critics, as the spirits they claimed to channel.

Spiritualists posed the renewed threat of a dangerously transformative, female community who, like Puritan witches, possessed an excess of supernatural agency as well as a particular agenda—women had much to gain by upsetting the restrictive status quo. Puritan witches and antebellum feminists had similar goals: both aimed to restructure society in an

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<sup>38</sup> According to McGarry, “The materialization of spirits in the séance room . . . threatened the boundary between the pure, “private” middle class home and the morally tainted “public” sphere. Meanwhile, male mediums assuming female voices and vice versa broached subversive sexual identities, subverting the familiar male-female binary.

<sup>39</sup> For an in-depth treatment of women's relationship to spiritualism, see Braude. See also McGarry for a discussion of spiritualism's potential to “unsettle immutable boundaries” between gender roles as well as sexual and racial identities (46).

image that enfranchised them. Confessed Salem witch William Barker in his testimony in 1692 told of the devil's promise of equality for all, regardless of gender, and a social freedom that implicitly included sexual freedom as well: "all his people should live bravely that all persones should be equall; that there should be no day of resurection or of judgement, and neither punishment nor shame for sin." <sup>40</sup> Such rhetoric was not uncommon in nineteenth-century calls for gendered equality and free love.

The Puritan analog for spiritualist manifestations was widely employed by both skeptics and believers.<sup>41</sup> Many of the phenomena associated with the Puritan invisible world: apparitions, spirit possessions, mysteriously moving objects, prophetic dreams, etc. reappeared to spiritualists with a vengeance, this time as "spectral evidence" of the proximity of the "other world" inhabited by the spirits of departed human souls. Charles Upham, in his *Salem Witchcraft; With an Account of Salem Village, And a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (1867) observed that "the witch could perform the same wonders, in giving information of the things that belong to the invisible world, which is alleged in our day, by spirit rappers, to be received through mediums" (404). Critics of the movement drew upon the events of Salem and the Puritan formulation of an invisible world peopled by demonically motivated forces in order to dually discredit Spiritualist phenomena: either they were delusions fueled and even fabricated by earthly malice and hysteria (as skeptics of the witch trials increasingly claimed) or the spirits in question were real but operating with dishonest and probably demonic agendas, in which case the spiritual messages were extremely dangerous and corruptive influences. Hawthorne, as we have seen, genders these corruptive influences.

Both critics and supporters of spiritualism saw the proximity of the spirit world as portentous, even millennial—for good or ill its intrusion into the safe space of the everyday heralded transformations of such substantive (or destructive) force that nothing could ever be

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<sup>40</sup> quoted in *The Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*.

<sup>41</sup> For examples of these comparisons, and the evolution of Salem as a metaphor over the course of the nineteenth century, see Adams.



the same again. In no space were transformative influences more likely to manifest transformative results than in the reform communities that proliferated in antebellum America. Utopian projects that sought to expose and restructure social and gender norms, they were havens for feminists, spiritualists, and numerous other “isms” and “ists” determined to restructure the status quo.<sup>42</sup> Justine S. Murison sees a fundamental overlap between utopian projects and spiritualist practices like mesmerism and clairvoyance. Both “eroded the boundaries of privacy,” for “just as demonstrations of clairvoyants’ skills imagined both homes and bodies as open to scrutiny and invasion, utopian experiments in the antebellum United States sought to expose and reimagine domestic space and labor” (Murison 78).

From Hawthorne's perspective, Brook Farm (and the Blithedale he created from its image) perfectly embodied the dangers of millennial societies, which combined the revisionary impulses of a wide spectrum of reform movements with the heady potential of a particularly American sense of historical destiny—for what was the Puritan past if not a successful millennial project?<sup>43</sup> The gendered dimensions of millennial reform impulses and the supernatural ones, went together, as spiritualism promised a source of female agency that depended upon women as the best facilitators of contact and even travel between visible and invisible worlds.

Set primarily on Blithedale farm, a fictional recreation of Brook Farm, where Hawthorne actually worked, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) follows a millennial society with serious Puritan overtones. Blithedale is supposedly Hawthorne's most “modern” novel. Neither set in Puritan times like *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), nor based on the legacy of Puritan family history like *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* is nonetheless built upon a deliberately Puritan allegory, one that determinedly invokes the specter of Puritan origins and their invisible world influences.

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<sup>42</sup> These reformist utopias have received significant critical scrutiny. For a discussion of their connections to occult practitioners and the reflections of these connections in literature, see Karcher, “Philanthropy and the Occult.”

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of this project and its Puritan heritage as conceived by Hawthorne, see Berlant, Colacurcio “Nobody’s Protest Novel,” and Karcher, “Philanthropy and the Occult.”

The profound resemblance between the fictional utopian commune of Blithedale and the historical utopian commune of Brook Farm, founded by George Ripley in 1841 to create a model society conducive to “a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor” did not escape Hawthorne’s contemporaries and has not escaped subsequent critics.<sup>44</sup> Meant as more than just a retreat from modern life, Brook Farm was conceived as a project of creating a world unto itself, one that, in its visible perfection, and distance from existing social structures and norms, would ultimately provide a template from which to remake the rest of society.<sup>45</sup> *The Blithedale Romance* takes on not just the historical details but also the ideological implications of the confluence of reform movements that came together to structure their new world order, figuring them alongside what Covederdale ambiguously describes as the “new science, or old humbug” of mesmerism, magnetism, and spiritualism. Hawthorne used Brook Farm to create the framework for *The Blithedale Romance*, which invokes the specter of antebellum reform movements alongside those of a previous set of utopian reformers—the Puritans.

Between the Veiled Lady’s first mesmerist demonstration and the final impromptu “witch trial” endured by Zenobia, the novel weaves together an intricate tapestry of spiritualist and Puritan allegories and images, all connected through spatial metaphors of divided spheres (visible/invisible, communal/domestic, public/private, masculine/feminine) and the potential calamities of intersection. Ultimately, Hawthorne’s project in discrediting spiritualist phenomena through insisting upon its close connection to the darkest possible version of a Puritan analog rests on the need to defend nineteenth-century femininity from the dangerous and destructive agency provided by any kind of escape from confinement to the proper sphere.<sup>46</sup> Just as Zenobia’s death signifies the death of feminist reform, the end of Priscilla’s career as the

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<sup>44</sup> quoted in Frothingham, *George Ripley*, 207.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of antebellum millennial projects, and Hawthorne’s doubts about them, see Berlant and Colacurcio.

<sup>46</sup> Here I follow Pfister in underscoring femininity as an artificial network of expectations rather than a natural state, a “range of potential meanings for woman which are seen as natural but are in fact socially constructed” (5).

Veiled Lady and her “rescue” into the confines of marriage obviates the ideological threat posed by the extra-domestic capabilities of female mediums and defends “natural” domestic space from supernatural encroachment.

Hawthorne experienced his time at Brook Farm through a Puritan lens: letters to his wife Sophia are full of invisible world imagery.<sup>47</sup> He took heart at the beginning of his tenure at Brook Farm by comparing his retreat from civilized urban comfort to the remote “wilderness” of rural labor to the experiences of his Calvinist forebears. He described the horrific snowstorm in which he arrived as both a natural and philosophical connection to the Puritan project: “I reflect that the Plymouth Pilgrims arrived in the midst of the storm, and stepped ashore upon mountain snow-drifts; and, nevertheless, they prospered and became a great people—and doubtless it will be the same with us” (*Centenary* 15:526). He thought of his farm laborer self as a kind of supernatural projection, a symbol of his own bewitched spirit in thrall to what he ultimately felt was an unnatural project: “I take this to be one proof that my life there was an unnatural and unsuitable, and therefore an unreal one. . . . The real Me was never an associate of the community; there has been a spectral Appearance there, sounding the horn at day break, and milking the cows” (*Centenary* 15:566).

The characters too participate in a landscape dominated by Puritan images and symbols. Not only, as we have seen earlier, does Coverdale filter his mesmeric experiences through the rhetoric of the Puritan supernatural, the larger utopian project of Blithedale Farm is filled with spatial and metaphorical overlaps with Puritan precedent. Hawthorne compared his retreat from civilized urban comfort to the remote “wilderness” of rural labor to the experiences of his Calvinist forebears. Hawthorne initially envisions Blithedale as a the work of “the descendants of the Pilgrims, whose high enterprise, as we sometimes flattered ourselves, we had taken up, and were carrying it onward and aloft, to a point which they never dreamed of obtaining” (82).

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<sup>47</sup> For a critical reading of Hawthorne’s disenchantment with Brook Farm, see Colacurcio, “Nobody’s Protest Novel.”

The favorite wilderness retreat of the Blithedale reformers is “Eliot’s Pulpit,” named after the Puritan “apostle” who had worked to convert the local Indians and who had supposedly preached in the same spot. At Blithedale, the Puritan’s pulpit and his efforts at conversion have been transferred to Hollingsworth, a staunch, humorless reformer single-mindedly devoted to his own project, transforming the farm at Blithedale into an asylum for the mentally deranged. Coverdale pictures the succession in detail: “I used to see the holy apostle of the Indians, with the sunlight flickering down upon him through the leaves, and glorifying his figure as with the half-perceptible glow of a transfiguration. I the more minutely describe the rock, and this little Sabbath solitude, because Hollingsworth, at our solicitation, often ascended Eliot’s pulpit, and not exactly preached but talked to us, his few disciples” (84). The “transfiguration” of Puritan specter into the flesh-and-blood Hollingsworth clearly marks the reformers as at least the would-be inheritors of the Puritan legacy.

Eliot’s pulpit, and the wilderness thickets that surround it, become the loci of Coverdale’s Blithedale experience, a miniature Puritan wilderness at the heart of the nineteenth-century utopia.<sup>48</sup> From the vantage point of Eliot’s pulpit, all of Blithedale’s reforms must be read through the lens of their Puritan allegories. Hollingsworth’s desire to turn empty pastures into the space for his new prison, as a number of critics have noted, channels John Winthrop’s 1630 arrival sermon: “I offer my edifice as a spectacle to the world . . . that it may take example and build many another like it. Therefore I mean to set it upon the open hill-side.”<sup>49</sup> Winthrop’s “Model” sets the terms for the utopian community-in-Christ the Puritan settlers have come to New England to create with the same metaphor: “men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘may

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<sup>48</sup> Berlant identifies Eliot’s pulpit as both the geographical and metaphorical heart of Hawthorne’s novel: “Eliot’s pulpit is to Blithedale what the scaffold is to *The Scarlet Letter*: the place of sexual, juridical, and theological confrontation. It is also Coverdale’s personal touchstone . . . the place that contains the tangle of memory and desire his narration attempts to unravel (or reconstruct)” (43).

<sup>49</sup> *Blithedale*, 58. Brown reads the debate between Hollingsworth, who wants his building to stand as the encapsulation of a very visible city on a hill, and Coverdale, who is much more taken with a sheltered edifice built beneath the cover of trees, as a clash between the older colonial model of the household as a visible, exemplary site of production and the nineteenth-century focus on a “home” as the site of secluded, private, *individualized* and separate space (103).

the Lord make it like that of New England. ‘For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us’ (177). Hollingsworth, for all his Eliot-like affiliations, is not the true head of the Blithedale society, however, and his vision is not the one the reformers are enacting. Instead, it is Zenobia’s.

Zenobia exists at the heart of the Blithedale society, the leader and manipulator of its millennial potential. Eloquent, bewitching, and a proud bearer of the standard of women’s rights, she, at least for a time, undermines not only visible hierarchies that reinforce the logic of separate spheres but also Hawthorne’s carefully gendered access to magical eloquence. Zenobia, the mesmerist, orator, and successful author, is a modern witch whose existence threatens the kind of transformative reversal at the heart of patriarchal anxiety. Zenobia’s classical namesake, the Palmyrene queen who briefly defied Rome before becoming its prisoner and the emblem of the humiliation and defeat of those who defy the establishment, clearly foreshadows her eventual downfall. It also foregrounds the breadth of her original authority. Zenobia’s potent combination of physical allure and performative eloquence establishes her as the *de facto* head of the Blithedale community. A successful author of popular fiction (Zenobia is in fact her pen name, which she uses in place of her “Christian” name, an act Coverdale interprets as prideful, and must, at the least, be seen as the preference of a public over a private identity), an accomplished lecturer and a brilliant wit, Zenobia offers a compelling model of female leadership couched in eloquence and utterly estranged from the archetype of nineteenth-century domesticated femininity.<sup>50</sup> As Coverdale points out, “we seldom meet with women, now-a-days, and in this country, who impress as being women at all; their sex fades away and goes for nothing, in ordinary intercourse. Not so with Zenobia. One felt an influence breathing out of her, such as we might suppose to come from Eve, when she was just made, and her Creator brought

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<sup>50</sup> Goddu argues, in fact, that Zenobia’s model of authorship is at the heart of her problematic agency, as she represents the kind of mesmeric success that Hawthorne hoped to create in his own writing, and her engagement with the public sphere (unlike Coverdale’s modest withdrawal) is much more in keeping with Hawthorne’s own behavior, or, at least, the kind of behavior he knew would be necessary from a successful author.

her to Adam, saying—‘Behold, here is a woman!’ (14-15). Coverdale’s suspicion that Zenobia’s vitality, confidence, and sexual allure are essentially female characteristics, the qualifications, in fact, of the original woman, are all the more disturbing because they are so clearly opposed to nineteenth-century ideals. Zenobia’s laugh is “delectable,” but “not in the least like an ordinary woman’s laugh,” her “warm and rich characteristic” *does not* “convey the idea of especial gentleness, grace, modesty, and shyness” (15). Zenobia, the ultimate female, is everything “which seems, for the most part, to have been refined away out of the feminine system.”<sup>51</sup> Zenobia makes Coverdale uncomfortable precisely because she foregrounds the difference between “female” and “feminine,” and because she can parlay her female authority into equal domain over both public and private spheres.

On their first night at Blithedale, crouched over a hearth that Coverdale makes sure to compare to that of their Puritan predecessors, “a family of the old Pilgrims might have swung their kettle over precisely such a fire as this,” Zenobia takes unabashed control, figuring the communal home and hearth they are embarked on creating as her tantamount to her personal domain, “my own fireside”(13). From that moment onward, all aspects of Blithedale’s social life are filtered through her authority. She organizes the masques, plays, and storytelling sessions, decides the holidays, and even structures the social hierarchy. Hollingsworth introduces Priscilla to the community, but it is at Zenobia’s feet that she prostrates herself, and Zenobia’s touch that raises her up to membership in the community, marking “her tenure at Blithedale [as] thenceforth fixed” (26). Also, when not uncharacteristically deferential to Hollingsworth, Zenobia passionately advocates her feminist position: “when my sex shall achieve its rights, there shall be ten eloquent women, where there is now one eloquent man” (84). Zenobia’s version of empowerment, as Coverdale frequently reminds his readers, is not one of equality but rather one of replacement—ten women shall occupy the place that the one eloquent man, by

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<sup>51</sup> (15). Pfister argues that “Hawthorne’s idea of feminine evolution (more like the progressive atrophy of women’s bodies) is developed most fully in *The Blithedale Romance*, which offers Zenobia’s figure of Edenic womanhood in sharp contrast to Priscilla’s enervated encapsulation of nineteenth-century femininity.

implication, will have to relinquish.

Such a powerful figure cannot help but have serious implications, especially for a narrator as hyper-aware as Coverdale is about the potential “contagion” of female influence. The same narrator who takes pains to describe how merely holding an unopened letter from Margaret Fuller “transforms” Priscilla, imbuing her with her mannerisms and aura of determination, thereby couching the power of female rhetoric as a type of spiritual possession, cannot help but be aware of the significance of Zenobia, who both writes and declaims daily from the heart of her reformist Kingdom.<sup>52</sup> Hollingworth/Eliot may have his pulpit, but Zenobia has her throne, at least until her trial. Zenobia’s agency is even more problematic for Coverdale because the model of female authority she embodies undermines the one he idealizes. He prefers Priscilla’s “innocent” enervation, and almost immediately fetishizes it. Upon her arrival Coverdale wants to imagine Priscilla as an essential part of the Blithedale project, a historically entrenched “domestic sprite, who had haunted the rustic fireside of old, before we had ever been warmed by its blaze,” Zenobia is having none of it (26). Instead she insists upon the girl’s materiality: “she is neither more nor less, than a seamstress from the city, and she has probably no more transcendental purpose than to do my miscellaneous sewing” (25). What Coverdale sees as Priscilla’s “spiritual” mein, Zenobia translates as the “half-alive” aspect of an overheated, badly fed laborer, the work of “dough-nuts, raisins, candy, and all such trash” (25). The only thing more dangerous than Zenobia’s disdain for what Priscilla implies, in fact, is the possibility that her influence can eradicate it.

Zenobia’s influence threatens to create of a female-dominated world that not only exists counter to, but also actively remakes the entitled masculinity of separate spheres. Should Zenobia adopt Priscilla and make her over in her own image, rather than competing with her in a doomed rivalry over the questionable prize of Hollingsworth, nineteenth-century femininity would utterly disappear from the halls of Blithedale and the pages of *The Blithedale Romance*.

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<sup>52</sup> Pfister reads this episode as an example of the contagious power of female influence (86).

Instead, Zenobia exploits Priscilla as easily and completely as Westervelt had ever managed to do.

It is exactly the kind of unnatural, sphere-distorting and gender-inverting abuse of the supernatural component of language Hawthorne attributed to Hutchinson in his early sketch that Zenobia embodies in *The Blithedale Romance*. Nowhere is this eloquence more evident than in her treatment of Priscilla, whom she ultimately betrays back into Westervelt's control. Before she does this, however, she puts on a dazzling performance for the Blithedale community that showcases her status as witch, mesmerist, and storyteller all in one.

Ostensibly a ghost story made upon the spot, Zenobia performs the tale for the Blithedale reformers. Not content simply to narrate, she uses Priscilla as a prop, calling her up onto the "stage" beside her to serve, she says, as special inspiration for the tale. The story itself, "The Silvery Veil," concerns the thwarted love and aborted escape of a young veiled lady, and is Priscilla's life story covered by a thin tissue of fiction. In the story, Zenobia documents her own betrayal. The tale ends with a jealous woman, seeking to remove the veiled lady from competition for a lover's affections, tracking the protagonist, a "shadowy girl," to her refuge amongst "a knot of visionary transcendentalists" and casting a veil over her that represents "a powerful enchantment" that will make her "forever the bond-slave" of a powerful magician (81). At the tale's conclusion, Zenobia visibly reinforces her own double status as author and villain: "Zenobia all this while, had been holding a piece of gauze, and so managed it as to greatly increase the dramatic effect of the legend at those points where the magic veil was to be described. Arriving at the catastrophe, and uttering the fatal words, she flung the gauze over Priscilla's head" (82). It is Zenobia who re-veils the veiled lady, and Zenobia who both assures her fate and solidifies it in narrative form.

Zenobia's authorial agency here clearly extends into the realm of the supernatural. As the mesmerist who binds Priscilla into her participation in the tale, Zenobia usurps not just the traditionally male role of the mesmerist, but also takes on his more sinister analog: she is the



wizard, or rather witch, who possesses and manipulates the afflicted Priscilla for her own ends.<sup>53</sup> In her story, the evil Magician, the figure of Westervelt, is not a real character on the stage. Instead, she, as Zenobia the author, has taken his place. Zenobia's performance with Priscilla demonstrates the extent of her gender-bending authority, but it also illustrates the spiritual corruption inherent in that authority.

Zenobia's masterful yet malicious narrative eloquence encapsulates what Hawthorne saw as the perverse paradox at the heart of female writing, as well as the supernatural metaphor that encapsulated it. On the one hand, that writing, like Zenobia's legend, is spellbinding. On the other hand, its potency is derived from its transgressive nature, and it is illustrative of a betrayal of femininity that compromises every notion of private, pure female self-hood. Hawthorne uses supernatural formulations to excoriate this betrayal not just in his fictions, but in his descriptions of his own female competitors. Of Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* he wrote, "The woman writes as if the devil was in her; and that is the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading. Generally women write like emasculated men, and are only to be distinguished from male authors by greater feebleness and folly; but when they throw off the restraints of decency, and come before the public stark naked, as it were—then their books are sure to possess character and value" (*Centenary* 17:307-8). When women write with decency and propriety, they produce only "feebleness and folly." Throwing off the restraints of decency, on the other hand, produces excellent writing, but at the expense of supernatural and sexual corruption. Women's literature worth reading must by definition be witchcraft—it requires a compact with the devil, and a highly sexualized publicity, a "nakedness" that obliterates any kind of social or spiritual purity and firmly ejects them from the public sphere. For this reason, Hawthorne argues, authorship is too high a price for women to pay. In a different letter, this one to his wife Sophia, he praises her for her domestic decorum, a sharp contrast to the female

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<sup>53</sup> Broadhead points to the necessity of female celebrities, mediums and authors included, for a male manager/partner as one of the underlying realities (and ultimately limitations) of the developing paradigm for nineteenth-century female fame (98). Here, at least, however, Zenobia has obviated this need.

writer he is currently condemning, "thou hast never -forgive me the bare idea!-never prostituted thyself to the public, as that woman has, and as a thousand others do. It does seem to me to deprive women of all delicacy; it has pretty much such an effect on them as it would to walk abroad through the streets, physically stark naked. Women are too good for authorship, and that is the reason it spoils them so" (*Centenary* 17:456-7). Again and again, Hawthorne links female authorship with extra-domestic spaces (both letters mention "public"), figuring them not just as outside of their sphere but utterly open to all manner of corruption and scrutiny—he imagines them not just in public, but "naked" and exposed.<sup>54</sup> If women really are "too good" for authorship, then something must be done about Zenobia, who has happily signed the devil's book.

Zenobia's transformative hold on Blithedale's society threatens to regender the paradigms of authority and authorship in striking ways. One of the first, and most through victims of this re-gendering is Coverdale, the reluctant reformer and, at least in the outside world, renowned poet and author. In fact, Coverdale's status not just as the author of this narrative, but as an author, *period* is one that he insists upon throughout the novel. In Zenobia's world, however, Coverdale is not the author but rather the afflicted. While Priscilla seems to escape her role as medium while at Blithedale, Coverdale increasingly takes up her discarded mantle. As Priscilla recovers her diminished physical health, Coverdale loses his, falling mysteriously ill and lingering for days in a kind of trance, ministered to most often by Hollingsworth and Zenobia, whose appear, spirit like, before him. Coverdale figures his illness as an experience of intense physical as well as spiritual peril. Reduced to a "skeleton above ground," he courts spiritual danger with a defiant spirit: "I lay abed, and if I said my prayers, it was backward, cursing my day as bitterly as patient Job himself" (29).

In comparing himself to Job, Coverdale invokes the specter of the biblical figure

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<sup>54</sup> Wallace analyzes these letters as part of his reading of Hawthorne's relationship to female authors. For him, they illustrate a "constant theme of Hawthorne criticism," namely that "women writers were especially prone to violating the decorum of privacy and parading before the world personal problems, domestic squabbles, and medical curiosities that ought to be suppressed" (207).

tormented by Satan, while the performance of the backward prayer mirrors the performance of demonically-possessed persons from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century annals. His sickbed experience thus blends the biblically-inflected peril of Puritan invisible world manifestations with the nineteenth-century experience of other-world spiritual visitations. Like the young female mediums conventional spiritualist wisdom held were particularly well connected to the spiritual plane because of recent physical illness, Coverdale finds his weakened state leaves himself particularly vulnerable: “the soul gets the better of the body, after wasting illness” (34). This vulnerability leaves him open to possession, and the possession he worries about most is Zenobia’s: “The spheres of our companions have, at such periods, a vastly greater influence upon our own, than when robust health gives us a repellent and self-defensive energy. Zenobia’s sphere, I imagine, impressed itself powerfully on mine, and transformed me, during this period of my weakness, *into something like a mesmerical clairvoyant*” (34). Coverdale figures the spiritual receptiveness created by his weakness as a decidedly perilous state. His most salient insight, whispered to Hollingsworth, is that “Zenobia is an enchantress. . . . She is a sister of the Veiled Lady! That flower in her hair is a talisman. If you were to snatch it away, she would vanish, or be transformed into something else!” (33). Hollingsworth makes this foreshadowing rhetoric even more supernaturally freighted when he translates it for Zenobia as hysterical rambling that nonetheless contains a pointed allegation: “He is a little beside himself, I believe, and talks about your being a witch, and of some magical property in the flower you wear in your hair” (33). This moment of supernatural “clarity” is the first time Coverdale identifies Zenobia as a witch, and as he has already blamed her spectral presence (as spherical influence) for forcing him into the role of clairvoyant. Her witchcraft enervates (and emasculates) him, reducing him to the kind of physical and mental wreckage that Priscilla has already sharply defined as “feminine.” Coverdale, the unwilling medium who finds himself spiritually afflicted, seduced, and rejected by the companions who profess to care for him but, at least to his fevered imagination, are really “cold, spectral monster[s]” in thrall to their various agendas, becomes for

a time the true damsel in distress at Blithedale (40).

Coverdale's insistence on a private sphere: his woodland hermitage, in which he hides from his fellow reformers, his individual sickroom, and even his own private and unknowable thoughts, marks him not only at odds with the communal project of his fellow Blithedalers but also affiliates him with a kind of idealized femininity eschewed by the female characters. According to Teresa Goddu, "throughout the novel, Coverdale crosses genders by claiming the position of inviolate woman who refuses . . . seduction" (108). But in this weakened position, he runs the risk of being more audience than author, and of losing control of the narrative that, in his weakened state, is clearly Zenobia's to shape. Hawthorne does not long let her maintain this power, however. Zenobia's complete destruction, and that of the new society she posits, returns Coverdale to authorship and agency.

Zenobia, like her predecessors, insists that women are authors rather than audiences. She, like Hope Leslie and Anne Hutchinson before her, speaks with the rhetoric of sisterhood and posits this sisterhood as a replacement for patriarchal rule. Throughout the novel, she casts herself as preacher rather than hearer, magistrate rather than subject. And like Hutchinson, she finds herself on trial. Hawthorne undermines her heretical, supernatural potential by making her a hypocrite, a false prophetess. She betrays her rhetoric by undoing her own sister in competition for the ultimate patriarchal overseer, Hollingsworth, who has absolutely no use for her egalitarian vision, as he tells her, "woman's whole sphere of action is in the heart, and can conceive of no higher nor wider one" (150). For a short time, Zenobia embodies the potential of characters like Magawisca and Hope Leslie, but in short order Hawthorne makes her betray her principles, then tries and executes her for her crimes. Zenobia's betrayal of sisterhood is a large part of her trial. During it Priscilla offers her a declaration of sisterly allegiance that Coverdale reads as nothing less than a complete surrender to Zenobia's female authority: "We are sisters,"

gasped Priscilla. I fancied I understood the word and action; it meant the offering of herself, and all she had, to be at Zenobia's disposal, but the later would not take it thus."<sup>55</sup>

The real end of the transformative potential of Zenobia's Blithedale is at the metaphorical heart of Puritanism, in Eliot's pulpit, where Zenobia is essentially put on trial for witchcraft. One of the last scenes in the novel presents the final confrontation of the love triangle, staged at Eliot's pulpit, and Coverdale, arriving late, beholds a scene straight out of the spectral past:

I saw in Hollingsworth all that an artist could desire for the grim portrait of a Puritan magistrate holding inquest of life and death in a case of witchcraft;—in Zenobia, the sorceress herself not aged, wrinkled, and decrepit, but fair enough to tempt Satan with a force reciprocal to his own;—and in Priscilla, the pale victim whose soul and body had been wasted by her spells (147).

Zenobia informs Coverdale that she has been “on trial for her life,” and anoints him “Judge Coverdale.” She does not accept her own classification as the witch, however, as she turns the interrogation from herself to Hollingsworth: “I see it now! I am awake, disenchanting, disenthralled! . . . You are a better masquerader than the witches and gypsies yonder” (150). Zenobia refigures herself as the possessed/enthralled victim, and Hollingsworth in the role of wizard. Her eloquence and defiance of Hollingsworth's magisterial rights recalls Anne Hutchinson, as does her initial sentence, exile, although Zenobia at least initially seems to have reversed Hutchinson's fate, since she banishes Hollingsworth and Priscilla, from Eliot's pulpit, rather than the other way around.

She maintains her air of defiance just long enough for Hollingsworth and Priscilla to depart, and then she collapses: “as if a great, invisible weight were pressing her to earth” (152).

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<sup>55</sup> (151). As Mills points out, unable to reconcile with her biological sister, Zenobia's last wish is nevertheless a poignant request for the female community she could have created but ultimately forsook: she tells Coverdale she should seek out a sisterhood of nuns. See her article “The Sweet Word, Sister: The Transformative Threat of Sisterhood in *The Blithedale Romance*,” for a detailed and compelling argument about the threat of female community as a central peril of Zenobia's transformative potential.

Professing himself moved by her predicament, Coverdale feels something like a calling to Hollingsworth's abandoned parish: "I felt myself consecrated to the priesthood by sympathy like this, and called upon to minister to this woman's affliction" (152). Instead of intervening, however, Coverdale chooses to retreat in silence, watching Zenobia without offering a single word or gesture to alleviate her torment. Zenobia's suffering, figured as the spectral affliction of an "invisible weight," returns her to the realm of Puritan possession, and Coverdale, in the transformation from ineffective magistrate to ineffective minister, watching but not alleviating the trauma of the afflicted girl that he has already designated as his own responsibility, continues the metaphor until Zenobia breaks her own trance and sees him. She returns him to his role as poet, passing on the mantle of authorship and setting him the task of making her the subject of "a ballad." When he asks her for the moral, she assures him that "there are no new truths, much as we have prided ourselves on finding some," and offers him the hard won knowledge that "the whole universe, her own sex and yours, and Providence, or Destiny to boot, make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair's breadth off the beaten track"(155, 153). Finally, after casting off the burden of utopian reform, "sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress . . . the very emptiest of mockery in our effort to establish the one true system," and directing Coverdale to assure Hollingsworth that she will "haunt him," Zenobia disappears and Coverdale, surprisingly underwhelmed at both the reclaiming of authorship and the death of the reformers' utopia, falls asleep at the base of Eliot's Pulpit, only to reawaken at midnight to an appropriately strange and spectral wilderness (155).

Filled with some nebulous suspicion, he rouses Hollingsworth and Silas Foster, the proprietor of Blithedale Farm, and they search the river for her corpse. Their search takes on decidedly invisible world overtones; shortly before discovering her body, the party finds a stray log, a "devilish looking object" which Foster confesses he "half thought was the evil one, on the same errand as ourselves—searching for Zenobia" (161). When Coverdale cries that the devil shall not have her, Foster rebukes his presumption, telling him that it's "not for [him] to say,"

and indeed shortly there after her corpse is discovered, floating in the water, her body contorted into a final symbolic posture:

[Her arms] were bent before her with clenched hands; her knees, too, were bent, and—thank God for it!—in the attitude of prayer. Ah that rigidity! . . . it seemed as if her body must keep the same position in the coffin, and that her skeleton would keep it in the grave; and that when Zenobia rose at the day of judgment, it would be just the same attitude at now. . . .With the last, choking consciousness, her soul, bubbling out through her lips, it may be, had given itself up to the Father, reconciled and penitent. But her arms! They were bent before her, as if she struggled against Providence in never-ending hostility. Her hands! They were clenched in immitigable defiance (161).

While Coverdale rationalizes Zenobia's watery death as an attempt at a pastoral suicide scene gone awry, the means of her death (and the explicitly, if problematically 'holy' posture of her body) suggest another reading: Zenobia dies like an accused witch put to the water test. Since her body floats, she is technically exonerated, although the victory, as with the many real victims of this particular mode of inquiry, is a posthumous, and thus hollow, one.<sup>56</sup> Coverdale's preoccupation with Zenobia's posthumous penance, his invocation of judgment day, and his earlier desire to save her from the grasp of the devil, all extend his adopted role of quasi-Puritan minister, as does his desire to inter her at the base of Eliot's pulpit.

Zenobia, the specter of Hutchinson, who possesses the bewitching eloquence and dream of Child's and Sedgwick's heroines, threatens to use her supernatural agency to reconfigure the world into the kind of anti society that Coverdale, the gothicized, exaggerated version of Hawthorne, himself, deeply fears. Ultimately Zenobia the bewitching heretic must not be. With her death the invisible world remains contained in the wilderness of Blithedale. At the end of the novel, Blithedale's supernatural potential is safely contained, the spectral space abandoned.

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<sup>56</sup> While trial by water was rarely, if ever, used by the American Puritans, it was frequently cited and often suggested, up to and including the events of Salem.

Through this lens, the novel's famously baffling ending makes sense; Coverdale is not so much "in love" with Priscilla as Hawthorne in love with the kind of mundane female containment that she represents. With Zenobia's death, Blithedale the city on a hill and Hollingsworth the reincarnated Eliot, are as done for as Priscilla the medium. Into this ending space then comes the final "reveal" of the novel, which returns readers sharply to the gendered logic that has been at the heart of the supernatural manipulations all along.

Coverdale's final confession, "I –I myself—was in love—with—PRISCILLA" is disingenuous only if read as a declaration of love for Priscilla the supposed individual, rather than Priscilla the constructed archetype of femininity. Hawthorne takes pains throughout the novel, however, to set up the unveiled Priscilla as exactly this kind of archetype. She is compelling not for herself, but because she embodies what Zenobia describes as "the type of womanhood as man has spent centuries in making it" (85). This archetype is never more triumphant than at the end of the novel, when both her Veiled Lady alter-ego and her sister the feminist have fallen before it. When Coverdale last sees Priscilla, she is well established in her new role as the contented wife and loyal helpmeet of Hollingsworth. The physical frailty and enervated pallor that had been her defining characteristics as maiden/medium have faded away, leaving a "slender" woman who exudes a particularly feminine kind of strength. Walking beside her husband, she both literally and metaphorically bears his weight: "the powerful man showed a self-distrustful weakness, and a childlike, or childish, tendency to press close, and closer still, to the side of the slender woman whose arm was within his. In Priscilla's manner, there was a protective and watchful quality, as if she felt herself the guardian of her companion, but likewise, a deep, submissive, unquestioning reverence, and also a veiled happiness in her fair and quiet countenance" (165). "Submissive" yet "protective" of a husband who is at once her lord and master and her child, Priscilla has exchanged the veil of the spiritualist performer for the "veiled happiness" of domesticity, and her happiness is a marked contrast to her former companions' misery. Gone is the prison reformer with his echoes of the Puritan evangelist, gone



the feminist ideologue with her Hutchinsonian eloquence, and gone is the poor little medium, once as spiritually oppressed as any of the possessed girls of Salem. Only Priscilla, the newly incarnated angel in the house, is left standing, her snug little cottage full of life and light while the mesmerist's hall, the once cheery rooms of Blithedale, and the echoing space of Eliot's Pulpit now stand empty. Only Priscilla and Coverdale endure.

Coverdale is left as the last author standing, the chronicler of the Blithedale legacy, at turns biographer, poet, cultural critic and even romancer. With Zenobia gone, he is no longer the afflicted, once more the author, the agency of eloquence safely restored to a properly masculine purview. He is also, despite his professed ambivalence, the last reformer standing. And while, for the most part, he takes care to distance himself from the utopian project, he does posit one utopia of his own:

I shall never feel as if this were a real, practical, as well as poetical, system of human life, until somebody has sanctified it by death. . . . Would it not be well, even before we have absolute need of it, to fix upon a spot for a cemetery? Let us choose the rudest, roughest, most uncultivable spot, for Death's garden-ground; and Death shall teach us to beautify it, grave by grave. By our sweet, calm way of dying, and the airy elegance out of which we will shape our funeral rights, and the cheerful allegories which we will model into tombstones, the final scene shall lose its terrors; so that hereafter, it may be happiness to live, and bliss to die. (91)

The sheer morbidity of Coverdale's vision—a model cemetery hewn from the wilderness that he projects as the ultimate expression of the utopian project to create new “systems of human life,” highlights his subconscious desire for the death of the reformers' projects. There is a way, too, in which Coverdale's narrative attempts to be an incarnation of this project, a kind of weirdly “cheerful allegory” turned “tombstone” for Blithedale and all its victims. The decline and fall of Zenobia is the destruction of Hope Leslie. In her downfall, Hawthorne replaces a legacy of supernaturally subversive female characters with a cautionary tale about the necessity of

suppressing both the invisible world and women's agency.

## Chapter Four

### "Some Elements of Them All": The Wonderful Form of Orestes Brownson's *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography*

When the protagonist of Orestes Brownson's *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography* (1854) announces his decision to take up the practice of mesmerism in service of the great project of spiritualism, he deliberately couches his project in the language of the Puritan supernatural: "I am enlarging the boundaries of human knowledge, laying open to view the invisible world, and proving that, under the old doctrine of the communion of saints, there is a great and glorious truth, cheering and consoling to us in this life of labor and sorrow" (127). He pictures mesmeric practice as a kind of voyage of spectral discovery, and in actively seeking to summon the denizens and chart the boundaries of the invisible world, he promises that, "it is a good work, and none but white spirits will aid me in it!" (127). Unmoved, his companion, a minister named Increase Mather Cotton, "a staunch puritan, whose great ancestor had taken so conspicuous a part in Salem Witchcraft," channels that ancestor, Cotton Mather, with his reply: "Alas! You seem not to have reflected that the devil, when he would seduce, can disguise himself as an angel of light" (27, 128).

Brownson's *The Spirit-Rapper*, a darkly-inflected text featuring a protagonist/narrator who claims to have begun the spiritualist movement as part of a diabolical bargain to supplant Christianity, resurrects the Puritan archive of supernatural materials and insists upon the parallels between spiritualism and Puritanism as legitimate, theologically-rooted threats that will ultimately erode moral truths and collapse all boundaries between public and private, natural and supernatural, and, most frighteningly of all, male and female spheres. The novel focuses on wonders and prodigies, as well as demonic possession, as phenomena that represent ruptures between the should-be separate spheres of visible and invisible, public and private space. Destabilizing the invisible world destabilizes the carefully created antebellum gender

hierarchy.

*The Spirit-Rapper's* protagonist realizes that spiritualist spirits and Puritan demons are one and the same by exhaustively cataloging the spiritual and sexual degradations these demonic forces inflict on their principal targets: the reformers whose utopian communities and millennial projects are, unbeknownst to them, diabolical constructs. Of these reformers, women's rights activists, and the diabolically perverted femininity they embody, stand out as the ultimate agents, and casualties, of misguided contact with invisible world forces.

In *The Spirit-Rapper*, Brownson attempts to discredit the associated traditions of reform (notably women's rights) and the occult, particularly spiritualism. By directly linking the Puritan invisible world, particularly its witchcraft and demonic possession, to the Spiritualist other world, Brownson seeks to provide a negative example powerful enough to discredit spiritualists and reformers, to shore up gendered hierarchies, and turn the tide of supernatural agency. His methods, however, ultimately undermine his agenda.

To this end, the novel offers an extensive catalog of female victims, and stories about these victims, synthesized from a number of different genres and sources. Brownson's text represents the apogee of supernatural conservatism. As such, *The Spirit-Rapper* radically differs ideologically from the protofeminist efforts of earlier genres while remaining equally invested in the same Puritan framework of supernatural belief. Brownson shares and magnifies Hawthorne's gendered millennial anxiety; his agenda is to convert the textual archive of the invisible world into a body of evidence arguing against any kind of invisible world intervention.

*The Spirit-Rapper* brims with discussions of supernatural evidences, specifically of the origins and meanings of wonders, marvels, prodigies and providences, for, as one character argues, these visible signifiers of invisible world intent "are not rare... I could fill volumes with phenomena equally extraordinary, which I cannot deny, and which cannot be explained without the assumption of a superhuman agent, and I may add, a diabolical agent" (310). It is worth pointing out that this conclusion, that wonderful phenomena come from "superhuman," and

likely diabolical, agents mirrors the understanding of wonders and prodigies shared by Brownson's own Catholic church and the Puritan Calvinists.<sup>1</sup> It is also worth pointing out that the marvelous and prodigious examples that support this reading come from both Catholic and Puritan sources, as well as numerous others. *The Spirit-Rapper* not only contains a plethora of wondrous content, it also follows the pattern of wondrous form with the "volumes of extraordinary phenomena" it both draws from and promises to fill. Brownson's novel takes on both the substance and shape of the wonder tale.

Brownson's extensive use of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century archival materials and mimicry of diverse genres and authors, including conventional seduction tales and more famous "supernatural stories," particularly *The Blithedale Romance*, mimics both the form and content of the wonder tales that formed the backbone of Puritan supernatural literature. These tales, which appeared in massive collections that ranged from elite scholarly tomes to cheap and popular broadsides, drew upon multiple sources and traditions, including (even especially) those from defunct pagan mythologies, supposedly discredited Catholic saints and legends, and a plethora of other sources all (loosely) organized under the rubric of Protestant providentialism. While Brownson takes a distinctly derogatory tone about the world established by these texts, his approach nevertheless replicates the inclusive process of the wonder tale tradition, which draws upon a variety of stories and sources in an "old made new" approach that gives the impression of a long and unbroken trajectory of invisible world phenomena—a colossal archive that Brownson embellishes and preserves as he contributes to it.

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<sup>1</sup> Brownson's life and writings encapsulate the turbulence and fluidity of religious belief and identity in nineteenth-century America, and the way he moved through various religious identities, refashioning and rewriting his treatments of them as he went, gives his own religious life aspects of the wonder tale. Called the "American religious weathervane" by critics, Brownson was born to parents so religiously lax they forwent his baptism (an unthinkable decision even a decade or so before his birth). He became a Universalist pastor at the age of 23, after having first tried Presbyterianism and atheism. Uncomfortable with the Universalists, he left organized religion altogether until he encountered the writings of William Ellery Channing, and he next served a brief stint as a Unitarian pastor. From Unitarianism he moved on to become a charter member of the Transcendentalist Club, and for a time participated in many of its affiliated reform movements. Ultimately, however, Brownson began to see the liberalism of the Transcendentalists as a form of insidious spiritual corruption, and the final (and longest) religious phase in his life was a deeply conservative turn to Catholicism, to which he converted in 1844.

While *The Spirit-Rapper* posits an end to the sway of invisible world agency once it is legitimately recognized and reviled as the result of demonic influences, the novel's reliance upon the Puritan supernatural's framework of familiar formulas and content ultimately reinforce its continuing appeal. Brownson's mirroring of the wonder tale formula, like his appropriation of its content, actually undermines the narrative of distance and "progress" away from the supernatural that he is striving to create, reifying familiar forms and conventions in ways that enhanced, rather than diminished, the supernatural's appeal.

### **Brownson's Gendered Anxiety: Puritan Analogies for Millennial Perils**

*"Wonderful nineteenth century! I exclaimed; wonderful seers and seeresses, and most delightful moralists are these modern world-reformers! In this pleasant and delightful circle mesmerism attracted its full share of attention. . . . It seemed to take the place of cards, music, and dancing." (The Spirit-Rapper 50)*

Once a friend of Brook Farm founder George Ripley and an acquaintance of women's rights activist Frances Wright, Brownson's conversion to Catholicism in 1844 pushed him firmly out of the reforming sphere, inspiring a reactionary conservatism thoroughly permeated by theological anxiety. Brownson's Catholicism, like Hawthorne's literary Calvinism, manifested itself in a deep need for hierarchies, social and supernatural, as well as dark suspicion that at the heart of anything new and transformative lay, like as not, an old and recognizable malevolence.<sup>2</sup> In the reformers who sought to remake society into a vision of progressive modernity, Brownson saw unwitting agents of the devil's millennial agenda—reworking the conservative Christian underpinnings of American culture, he feared, would destroy that culture all together. Reform movements, no matter how sincere or idealistic, ran the very real risk of ending the world while

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<sup>2</sup> Unlike Hawthorne and many of his contemporaries, Brownson had no strong Puritan heritage upon which to draw. As Larsen points out, his first name, Orestes, "a tribute to Greek mythology rather than the Bible," marks his alternative religious heritage, yet Brownson studied and used numerous Calvinist examples in his own writing at various stages in his literary career. It may not have been part of his individual heritage, but it dominated New England's cultural heritage, and that was enough for Brownson. As I will argue here, *The Spirit-Rapper*, an ostensibly Catholic text, is filled with Puritan phenomena—the invisible world inheritance one more piece of repurposed religious narrative to be built into his larger theological project.

trying to change it. For this reason, spiritualism, grounded in a celebration of supernatural influence as a new and transformative source of political and cultural agency, posed a potent threat indeed.

In her introduction to *Three Spiritualist Novels*, Nina Baym lists the “diverse kinds” who made up the range of spiritualist believers:

Idealistic, anti-conformist optimists distrustful of organized religion but inclined toward belief rather than skepticism, who thought of spirits making contact with morals as a great step forward toward the millennium....Radical Quakers, Unitarians, and especially Universalists—with their belief in immediate salvation for all—were especially drawn to spiritualism. Kind-hearted, pious people uncomfortable with the wanton cruelty of an all-powerful God who would wrap up a life of earthly torture by sending one to hell also adopted spiritualism. Orthodox people trying to understand what St. Paul meant by saying the dead would rise as spiritual bodies, not disembodied essence, thought perhaps spiritualism had the answer. Utopianists and communitarians of all kinds, including socialists, found the progressive Spiritualist afterlife attractive. Advocates for women's rights and abolitionists were often Spiritualists. (xviii)

The spiritualist “congregation” mirrored its distinctly nineteenth-century cultural fabric. That reflection, as seen in the catalogue above, skewed toward the revolutionary and reformatory. Spiritualist descriptions of the other world discarded the rigid class system that structured colonial life, positing instead a spiritual sphere patterned after the fluidity at the heart of the nineteenth-century entrepreneurial mythos of American possibility, in which “hard work and free action resulted in spiritual ascent, status and authority were achieved rather than ascribed, and success (salvation) was within grasp of all” (Carroll 75). In particular, spiritualism, in the form of the female mediums who were deemed best suited to spiritual communication, and in its associations with feminists, utopianists, and various other social progressives, posited remarkable opportunities for women.

Not only did the spirit world reflect modern society, it also portrayed that society's disenfranchisement with the doctrines of its predecessors, explicitly rejecting Calvinist predestination and divine election and even the providential framework that formed the bedrock of the Puritan supernatural. While good Puritans knew that any manifestation from the invisible world was either directly produced or allowed by God himself, many spiritualists sought the other world because God seemed so completely unconnected to their own. For this reason, they "looked to spirit mediators for cosmic comfort because alienation not only from the earth at the bottom of the spiritual universe but from the deity at the top. God remained uncomfortably remote to them. Like many other liberal Protestants of the mid-nineteenth century, they harbored serious doubts about the extent of direct divine interaction with the world."<sup>3</sup> In addition, the spirits who inhabited these invisible worlds laid claim to vastly different identities. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinists, in keeping with the Protestant renunciation of purgatory and a strict desire for scriptural rather than "superstitious" interpretations of supernatural phenomena, rejected the idea of ghosts, or spirits as the disenfranchised human souls, and instead saw a vast hierarchy of angels and demons.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the spiritualists of the nineteenth-century held firmly to the conviction that the spirits they interacted with were the returned souls of departed human beings, from the famous (the founding fathers were popular messengers) to the deeply familiar in the form of departed spouses, siblings, offspring, etc.<sup>5</sup> Spiritualists shared phenomena with their Puritan predecessors that nevertheless overlaid

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<sup>3</sup> Carroll, 67. A number of critics mention this distinction. According to Carroll, while spiritualist believers ranged from atheistic rationalists to various spectrums of conventional Christianity, the possibility of progress, both in terms of spiritual salvation and social status within the other world served as a core belief. Baym's "Introduction" also stresses the importance of this progress to the novels of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, the "daughter of one of the nation's Calvinist theologians" whose spiritualism Baym argues rested on her need to reshape the "central Calvinist tenant that almost everybody had been damned" (viii).

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the transition from Catholic "ghosts" to Protestant spirits, see Thomas.

<sup>5</sup> The primacy of the familiar was in fact a major complaint for a number of critics, and even a means to discredit a number of them. The author of "Modern Necromancy," for example, argues that "wherever, we say, such a [sincere] medium deems himself or herself in communication with several spirits, if there be among them a father, brother, or intimate friend, that person is always represented as exercising a commanding, controlling influence over the rest, even though he seems to every other mind a spirit of a much inferior order to his supposed associates," proof positive that "the self-born character of these phenomena betrays itself" (516).



an ideological divide significant enough to require careful mediation and explication. What did it mean if the works of invisible hands could look so similar and yet ostensibly herald such different things?

To conservatives like Brownson, who deeply feared the millennial transformations spiritualism could make possible, the difference was an illusion prompted by at best gullibility and at worst malicious intent. There was, in his opinion, absolutely no difference between Puritan demons and spiritualist spirits. In seeking to unmask the origins of this “old superstition under a new name,” spiritualism, Brownson joined a host of critics, scholars, and authors who saw in the nineteenth-century spiritualist movement a clear line of continuity from the not-so-distant Puritan past (i). Many observers, including the influential historian Charles Upham, noted the resemblance between the behavior of the entranced mediums channeling spiritual messages and the activities of possessed or “afflicted” persons in chronicles of the Puritan colonies.<sup>6</sup>

The nineteenth century saw the birth of the Salem Witch Trials as a metonym for the Puritan legacy. While “Salem’s episode of witch hunting appeared so seldom in the eighteenth-century as an example of where excessive religious enthusiasm might lead society that it is difficult to find any at all,” by the mid-nineteenth century it was everywhere, in histories and fiction, emblematic of “the contrast between the dark colonial past and the promise of the national future” (Adams 39). The Puritan project and the attendant nobility of its progenitors, while enshrined in the historical novels of the first few decades of the nineteenth-century, had always been attended by darker, more gothic implications, and with the antebellum arrival of spiritualism, the supernatural shadows seemed especially applicable. The confusion, persecution, and needless death of the Salem “witches,” as antebellum historians wrote, was the

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<sup>6</sup> See *Salem Witchcraft* (404). By far the most frequently cited source for this comparison in the nineteenth century is Cotton Mather, whose *Magnalia Christi Americana*, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, *Memorable Providences*, and *Another Brand Plucked from The Burning* all offer significant treatments of demonic possession and spectral phenomena. The *Remarkable Providences* authored by his father, Increase Mather, also frequently provided useful provenance.

obvious and only result that this kind of belief in the supernatural could produce, moreover, it was the Puritans' tragic flaw, and should be rigorously guarded against in order to preserve any narrative of American progress. So toxic, in fact, had Salem and its attendant figures become that, according to Gretchen Adams, "by 1830, witchcraft beliefs could be held by a white American man only if there was evidence that he was in some way deranged" (78).

Critics repurposed this most famous "mistake" in the American tradition of supernatural inquiry to illustrate (and exaggerate) spiritualism's potentially disruptive effects on the moral and cultural fabric of society, while believers instead worked hard to distinguish between nineteenth-century spirits and the dangerous "spectral delusions" experienced by their Puritan forebears. Spiritualist adherents too acknowledged the legitimacy of the comparison and found ways to utilize implied supernatural heritage. One author intent on illustrating the legitimacy of the spirit world's progressivism repurposed Calvinist vocabulary to assert that all spirits were "predestined to eternal progress" and cited Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century scion of Puritan theologians, to substantiate his case (Carroll 78). Others worked to glean "legitimate" spiritual evidence from the dross of the "primitive" framework of Puritan wonder-tales and possession narratives, accentuating chosen incidents as useful proofs for spiritualism's legitimacy. This pro-spiritualist article printed in 1853, for example, carefully delineates the boundaries that separate "legitimate" spiritual manifestations and Puritan superstition:

When Cotton Mather tells us that the devil sat all night upon his chest, oppressing his breathing, and well nigh killing him with his weight, we may properly advise him to eat no more indigestible suppers, and to sleep no more on his back, and so be rid of the nightmare and the devil together. But when the same Cotton Mather and scores of other reputable people that they have seen the laws of gravity defied,—that they have seen a young woman raised from her bed to the ceiling, and held there horizontally for seconds together, without any apparent human agency, and under circumstances where trickery was impossible, we feel obliged to give some other answer than humbug. (249)

The article, which begins with the disclaimer that “the history of the Salem Witchcraft is rarely alluded to in modern times, except to furnish the foundation for an invective against the Puritans, or to overthrow some new theory that involves occult or supernatural influences,” initially rejects the implied affiliation between colonial superstition and modern thought. Rather than denying the overlaps between spiritualist phenomena and some forms of spectral evidence, however, the author attempts to salvage the legitimately “spiritual” from the unenlightened fallacies of the seventeenth century, “there must have been something beyond the tales of old crones, to produce an impression so universal and so profound . . . after rejecting whatever is manifestly absurd, or inconsistent . . . there still remain attested facts, which are utterly irreconcilable with the philosophy of to-day, unless, indeed, one take refuge in the vague, and, as yet, indefinable notions of modern spiritualism” (“Curiosities of Puritan History” 249). Doing so, he hopes, will discredit colonial superstition while legitimating the history of supernatural manifestations and setting forth spiritualist interpretations of those manifestations.

Less sympathetic critics argued that any such separation was categorically impossible. An 1860 review of the spiritualist text *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* in the *The New Englander* chided the spiritualist author of the book it was reviewing for failing to note the congruence of the Puritan example: “Mr. Owen forbears to cite the Salem witchcraft in evidence of his theory of “ultra-mundane interference;” yet there is nothing so complete and pertinent as a parallel to spiritualism, and nothing that is better accredited by the number and character of the witnesses” (“Are the Phenomena of Spiritualism Supernatural” 405). The reviewer then built upon this perfect example by excerpting Cotton Mather’s description of an episode of demonic haunting in 1679, in which “bricks, sticks and stones . . . were thrown by some invisible hand,” to argue its close resemblance to the rappings of invisible hands common to spiritualist demonstrations: “the very performances which are now adduced to prove the agency of spirits, were in vogue among the witches of Salem two hundred years ago. Indeed, the craft *do not seem to have made any progress* in two centuries” (“Phenomena” 404-5, my italics). In an era deeply

invested in progress of all kinds, this accusation of apodictic stagnation offered a crippling critique.

The difference between spiritualism as progress, with all the positive connotations of forward momentum, development, and intellectual illumination that believers saw as the heart of spiritualist phenomena, and spiritualism as regression, the nagging suspicion that spiritualist phenomena were, rather than “original” manifestations presaging the dawn of supernatural demystification, instead reincarnations of a familiar model of “backward” superstition that invoked an uncomfortably legacy of demonic intervention, epitomized the division between nineteenth-century belief and skepticism. Spiritualist believers saw supernatural visitations as heralds of modernity. They celebrated social and technological advancement through the aid of spirits that would otherwise have been impossible.

Detractors, on the other hand, looked to the specter of Salem and saw only a return to the superstitions of the past, and particularly to the attendant fears and hysterias that a belief (deluded or otherwise) in the propinquity of the spiritual world had proved so capable of invoking. Both critics and supporters saw the proximity of the spirit world as transformational—for good or ill its intrusion into the safe space of the everyday heralded transformations of such substantive (or destructive) force that nothing could ever be the same again. The idea of a dawning millennial age was itself not new to the nineteenth century. Rather, it was part of the cultural fabric of New England from the beginning, inherited from Puritans who came into the wilderness to build their city on the hill in order to prepare for the imminent revelation of divinity. Anxieties over whether this reincarnation was to be divine or disastrous, even diabolical, were not new either. In times of hardship and conflict, millennial anxiety permeates Puritan writings. The difference was that the invisible intrusions into visible space that they accepted as inevitable, even predestined, anti-spiritualists saw as preventable.

One anti-spiritualist editorial expressed a fervent desire “to abide in the “visual plane” of mundane realities” alone and assured readers that “we cannot break the seal of silence by

knocking at the door of death, nor can we believe that is given to spirits to break it by knocking on the other side” (“Phenomena” 461). The idea of natural and supernatural spaces as separate rooms and the spiritualist desire to knock (or rap) at the adjoining door became a recurrent image, one often laden with anxiety about the hubris implied in attempting to allow, let alone encourage, the overlap. Detractors were also often careful to figure this overlap as a particularly Puritan failing. George Offor’s 1856 introduction to a reprint of Increase Mather’s *Remarkable Providences* highlights “the most striking feature [of Puritan life] being an implicit faith in the power of the invisible world to hold visible intercourse with man,” but takes pains to assure readers that the more enlightened people of his own century could take comfort in the knowledge that such communications were, in fact, impossible, since, “We know from divine revelation that an impassible barrier, a great gulf, is fixed between this world and that of departed spirits—impenetrable to either side” (x, xvii). For Offor, it was this barrier between invisible and visible worlds that signified progress. To erase it would be to erase over a century’s worth of progress.

A large part of the insistence upon the barrier between visible and invisible worlds lay in the power of the invisible forces to change the visible status quo. The stakes for other world revelations were particularly high because, like their Puritan predecessors and countless other movements before them, spiritualists used their psychical connections as legitimating forces for reforming the physical world they inhabited. As Brownson noted with barely contained horror, “the connection of spirit-rapping, or the spirit manifestations, with modern philanthropy, visionary reforms, socialism, and revolutionism, is not an imagination of my own. It is historical, and asserted by the Spiritists, or Spiritualists themselves” (vi). Spiritualists were especially dangerous because they seemed to lack all sense of the danger posed by invisible interaction. While Cotton Mather worried about “Embroiding, first of our Spirits, and then of our Affairs, is evidently as considerable a Branch of the Hellish Intrigue” (*Wonders* 37), spiritualists were eager that spiritual embroilment result in the change of real-world affairs, seeing, apparently,

only the good in such change.

The Reverend Hiram Mattison cited spiritualism as the apex of perilous reformist potential, worrying that the movement “embodies more elements of ruin than were ever before combined under any one system” (104). Spiritualist precepts, he wrote, “not only destroy everything fair in religion and morals, but they upheave at once all the foundations of society; abolish the relations of husband and wife; and parents and children, annihilate all law; subvert all order; strike down all justice and right; and fill the land with anarchy, corruption, and bloodshed” (104). The threat of invisible reformation invoked a vast host of anxieties, beginning with the eradication of the established hierarchies of individual relations (husband and wife, parent and child) and ending with the anarchic undermining of civilization itself. With such high stakes, all seemingly trending toward the eradication of everything familiar, it was no wonder, then, that critics of spiritualism insisted so much on the movement as part of a recognizable, and questionable, continuum. With *Spiritualism Unveiled, and Shown To Be the Work of Demons*, as one 1866 pamphlet promised, it could no longer exist in a vacuum of potential.

Of all the “individual relations” spiritualism threatened, in *The Spirit-Rapper* none is more fraught than the one between husband and wife. Brownson’s anxiety about spiritualism’s millennial potential absorbs and amplifies the gendered dimensions of Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*. In contrast, Brownson’s concern is not so much about authorial rivalry or female competition for male jobs, but rather a sincere (if overwrought) concern for the end of the world and the organizing logic of the universe. No character demonstrates this better than the novel’s ostensible heroine, Priscilla. Brownson’s Priscilla, like Hawthorne’s, is the battleground on which anxieties about spectral agency, feminine types, female capability, and reformist doctrine play out. A composite of *Blithedale*’s feminist Zenobia and would-be domestic sprite Priscilla, Brownson’s Priscilla begins as a women’s rights activist, falls under the spirit rapper’s spiritual (and sexual) control and serves as his medium, then a witch, before being

redeemed into her proper place within the limits of a single, mundane, domestic sphere.<sup>7</sup>

Brownson allows for Priscilla's release only after he has made sure his audience understands the unholy, unnatural, and unfeminine spectrum that contains women's rights, reform, spiritualism, and sexuality.

A twenty-seven-year-old Amazon, Priscilla begins the novel as a dedicated advocate for women's rights who has already reworked the bonds of marriage to invert gender norms. Her husband "interferes with none of my plans, restrains none of my movements, and is satisfied with feeling that he is my husband and belongs to me, without once presuming to think of me as his wife and as belonging to him" (76). In spite of her happiness with this arrangement, Priscilla readily admits that under different circumstances, marriage, and female behavior, would look quite different. She assures the spirit rapper that she herself could never have been a philanthropist, had she married him and had a happy, fulfilling marriage in which she was properly dominated: "I might have loved you, and you alone, and then I should never have become a philanthropist, and devoted all my sympathies and energies to the emancipation of my sex, and to the development and progress of my race. You would have engrossed all my thoughts and affections, and have been my tyrant" (72). Being subject to this kind of tyranny represents ideal femininity for Brownson; women without men's controlling and guiding influences are dangers not just to themselves but to society as a whole. Women's adherence to domestic roles

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<sup>7</sup> Although she ends the novel as the dedicated housewife that the Blithedale Priscilla seems always to have aspired to be, in looks, temperament, and history Brownson's Priscilla is much closer to Hawthorne's Zenobia. Like Zenobia, she is even figured, originally, as a queen among her reformer subjects. Brownson's transformation of Zenobia into Priscilla erases the icon of the defeated heathen queen and replaces it with a domesticated archetype, and Priscilla does, indeed, end the novel as a redeemed wife and dutiful mother, protected by a husband who reclaims his manhood just in time to reclaim ownership of his wife. It is Priscilla's husband who grows frustrated with the cause of women's rights and starts asserting his will over his wife. Once he does so, her purity is restored and protected, and the spirit rapper can no longer mesmerize her. One night he is discovered attempting to reestablish his hold on Priscilla and mortally wounded by her husband James, a move that, bizarrely, the spirit rapper quite understands and approves. This is, Brownson takes pains to explain, a redemption of the natural order, and a happy ending for everyone, including Priscilla, who in her first meeting with The spirit rapper explains that she cannot love her husband because he cannot demonstrate his ownership of her, "no woman can love, with all her heart, a man she can make her slave, or who does not maintain himself as her master," but that without this kind of love she is free to be a philanthropist (76). With it, of course, she isn't free to be anything, and that is exactly as Brownson suggests that it should be. Priscilla's redemptive return to the right kind of slavery, her earthly rather than spiritual marriage, is the ostensible happy ending of the book.

and confinement to domestic spaces represent the ultimate natural order.

Brownson's scathing review of Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1844) offers a detailed articulation of his perspective on gender relations. In it, he dismisses Fuller's call for women to have access to "all offices, professions, callings, [and] pursuits" open to men on the grounds that such opportunity is not only unnatural but inherently corruptive to both men and women, for no less a reason than it runs afoul of the dictates of divine command.<sup>8</sup> He assures his readers that "appropriate spheres are allotted to man and woman by their Creator" and "the two sexes cannot mingle in certain spheres . . . on the terms Miss Fuller proposes, without the mutual corruption of both" (253). Furthermore, he reminds "Miss Fuller" that "the dominion was not give to woman, nor to man and woman conjointly, but to the man" (255). Responding to Fuller's claim that ancient cultures built women's agency into their religion, Brownson denigrates the "superstition" of the ancient world and counters with the assertion that "even setting aside all considerations of divine inspiration, St. Paul's authority is, to say the last, equal to that of Miss Fuller" (253). In invoking Saint Paul, Brownson calls upon a heavyweight of Christian tradition, one famous for his restrictions on female purview.

The fact that anyone might think that Miss Fuller's inspiration might trump Paul's edict represents a central anxiety of his review, as the specter of "divine inspiration" is genuinely troubling for Brownson. Here, as he will again in *The Spirit-Rapper*, Brownson links women's rights and other reform movements to a kind of millennial upheaval that threatens to remake not only earthly but heavenly planes. Fuller, he worries, "seems to think that the lost Eden will not be recovered till the petticoat carries it over the breeches" (253-4). It is interesting that Brownson figures Fuller's call for equal opportunity not as a genuine plea for equity but as a revolution— men and women cannot be equal, as women want to disenfranchise men. The text often reads more as a review of Brownson's own anxieties rather than Fuller's treatise. Indeed,

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<sup>8</sup> Any critic wishing to make an argument for Brownson's antifeminist bias can find a plethora of material in this review, which refers to Fuller's writing as the "interminable prattle" characteristic of all women and insists that Fuller's objections are groundless, since "woman is no more deprived of her rights than man is, and no more enslaved" (252, 253).



he does not confine his remarks to that text, but rather leverages it into an opportunity to talk about the perils of all reform movements: “The first mistake which Miss Fuller commits is the mistake committed by all reformers—from him who understood in the Garden to reform God’s commandment to our first parents, down to the author of the “Orphic Sayings” (255).

This mistake, not coincidentally, is to attempt to make paradise on earth by trusting in the seemingly virtuous impulses of human nature: this way lies perdition and imperils true salvation, or so Brownson projects. Outside of the “Catholic world” and “the few remnants of the old Calvinists sects,” of whom he approves, reformers forget the essential, soul-saving truth that “Eden, the terrestrial paradise, is lost, never to be regained” (256). That reformers’ and especially feminists’ desire to undermine gendered hierarchy and make permeable domestic and public spheres is in and of itself a threat to heavenly as well as earthly society illustrates the enormous weight Brownson had invested in the logic of separate spheres, which are, quite literally in his eyes, God’s gift and the cornerstone of Christian society. With this in mind, the kind of supernatural agency posited by spiritualist women, who as mediums could move freely through supernatural space and, with the help of the spirits literally be possessed of different gender and racial identities, represents an even greater provocation.

Feminism, as threatened by Fuller threatened and embodied by Priscilla, requires a reworking not just of modern gender roles, but an upending of scripturally based morality, one that threatens heavenly as well as earthly existence. Spiritualism’s focus on female enfranchisement and the special supernatural capabilities of women elevates female agency beyond the circumscribed limitations of the physical plane to the unsupervised wilderness of the supernatural. Brownson paints the spirit rapper’s introduction to women’s rights as a kind of deliberate seduction, one at once explicitly sexual and reminiscent of both the biblical serpent and the skillful manipulations of an accomplished mesmerist:

It was a real pleasure to hear a charming young lady, whose face a painter might have chosen for his model, in a sweet musical voice, and a gentle and loving look, which made

you all unconsciously take her hand in yours, defend our great grandmother Eve, and maintain that her act, which an ungrateful world had held to have been the source of all the vice, the crime, the sin and misery of mankind, was an act of lofty heroism, of noble daring, of pure disinterested love for man. Adam, but for her, would have tamely submitted to the tyrannical order he had received, and the race would never have known how to distinguish between good and evil. How, with the sweet young lady — I see and hear her now — sitting on a stool near me, laying her hand in the fervor of her argument on mine, and looking up with all the witchery of her eyes into my face, how could I fail to be convinced that man is cold, calculating, selfish, and cowardly, and that the world cannot be reformed without the destruction of the male (it might be called the *mal.*) organization of society, the elevation of woman to her proper sphere, and the infusion into the government and management of public and private affairs, some portion of the love, the daring, the enthusiasm, and disinterestedness of woman's heart? (47)

“With all the witchery” of physical beauty, seductive touching, and blasphemous rhetoric, Priscilla, like Blithedale’s Zenobia, projects female agency as dangerously sexual and implicitly a replacement rather than an accommodation, a “destruction of the male,” rather than a move for equality. “Woman’s proper sphere” here explicitly threatens men.

Women’s rights alone dangerous enough, but feminist reform when combined with the specter of supernatural agency and mobility, namely through mesmerism, is the corruptive force that utterly destroys female virtue. Priscilla eventually becomes the most vivid of example of the kind of spiritual-sexual corruption Brownson presents as the natural and inevitable result of female contact with the invisible world. As part of her seduction, The spirit rapper pretends to offer Priscilla equal partnership in his mesmerist experiments, which he swears will ultimately serve philanthropic ends. He reluctantly acquiesces to her formulation of their bond as a chaste “spiritual marriage” in which, as she assures him, “there can be no love passages between us. . . . United, married, if you will, in spirit, we are, or if not, must be, but we have no leisure or

inclination for dalliance, which would be foreign to our mission. Our thoughts, I trust, yours as well as mine, rise higher, and move in a serener atmosphere” (87). Almost immediately after agreeing to her terms, however, he corrupts their “spiritual relation” by mesmerizing her (87). The actual spiritual experience of mesmerism erases Priscilla’s idealistic rhetoric of spiritual matrimony, replacing it with the concrete reality of the corruption of spiritual power: “I whispered a word in her ear, gave her one or two directions, pressed her hand, only as my accomplice, and henceforth my slave. The next morning I left Philadelphia, and returned home a much-altered man. My body was light and buoyant, and I felt as if I was all spirit” (132). The spirit rapper’s spiritual epiphany, the moment at which he is “all spirit,” is the one in which he has successfully made his “partner” his slave.

Russ Castronovo argues that the introduction of the mesmeric component of their relationship is what strips the innocence from Priscilla’s reformist idealism, transforming “liberty to license” and explicitly sexualizing what before was only intellectually “passionate” (146). Certainly mesmerism is what gives the spirit rapper sexual control over Priscilla (although, once compromised, she disgusts him), but it also extends his agency into every aspect of her mind as well as body. Tellingly, the spirit rapper interprets his new possession as a supernatural slave. He treats her as a familiar, since he can (and does) summon her apparition at any time, often to his own chambers late at night, but just as frequently into “mixed gatherings” where she faithfully parrots whatever message he inscribes upon her mind. His most notable abuse of his supernatural dominance comes when he forces her into the paradigm of the Puritan witch. Incensed at Increase Mather Cotton, who warns him against the perils of both Priscilla, a “Mohabish woman,” and demonic agency in the guise of scientific progress, he decides, notwithstanding his respect for the “stern but well-meaning old Puritan,” to impose “a severe penalty for the slighting manner in which he had spoken” (140). To do this, he restages Cotton Mather’s experiences with afflicted girls for his fictional descendant, and he uses Priscilla as his agent:

[she] contrived it to rub against a granddaughter of Mr. Cotton, an interesting child of some twelve or thirteen years of age, and without anybody observing it. . . . The next day the young girl, Clara Starkweather, was singularly affected. Every thing she touched seemed to stick fast to her fingers. . . . Her mother scolded her, and she, poor thing, began to cry, and declared that she did not do it, but that it was done by a strange woman, very beautiful, but very wicked, whom she did not know. The family were all in consternation. Mr. Cotton was called upon to interpose. He concluded that it was a case of witchcraft, or diabolical obsession (140).

In this episode, The spirit rapper makes Priscilla a modern incarnation of a Puritan witch, afflicting a young girl and providing spectral evidence of her own guilt by appearing, in classic style, to her victim. Under the spirit rapper's guidance, her afflictions grow steadily more extreme. While the first trick was to make objects fly toward the girl, "attraction now succeeded repulsion. All the objects near Clara, instead of being drawn towards her, were repelled, and moved away from her. Soon one article of her dress after another flew off, and it was with the utmost difficulty that they could keep enough on her to hide her nakedness" (141-2). Removing the (very young) girl's clothes explicitly sexualizes her "possession," as does the transition of the tormenting effects from the kitchen, where they began, to her bedchamber.

When the most severe events begin, they deliberately recreate the mysterious knockings in walls and floors that characterized the initial supernatural experiences of the iconic Fox sisters, the figureheads of the spiritualist movement. Increase Mather Cotton's household, like the Foxes,' is disturbed by mysterious rapping noises: "all in the house were awakened by tremendous knocking sheard on the walls and under the floor of the apartment" (142). Arriving at her bedchamber, however, they find not communicative spirits but a paralyzed victim, "lying on her bed sobbing, apparently in the greatest agony" (142). Instead of the innocent exchange of spiritual communications, Clara Starkweather's experiences more closely mirror the traumatic experiences of Mercy Short or Margaret Rule, young Puritan women whose experiences with

demonic possession, and his own attempts to deliver them, were chronicled by Cotton Mather.<sup>9</sup> This episode reifies not just the Puritan/Spiritualist comparative paradigm, but also the framework of female corruption and victimhood. Priscilla the afflicted woman uses her invisible world agency to afflict a young girl, transmitting both corruption and suffering onto a female victim.

Priscilla's turn as a witch is both memorable and short—as are all her roles. She has many different incarnations, all recognizably drawn from a plethora of different sources. She is clearly adapted from Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), which Brownson “immediately recognized as a powerful propagandistic weapon” in his antifeminist, antispiritualist project (Karcher, “Philanthropy and the Occult” 72). She is not, however, simply the enervated possessed girl turned dutiful housewife that is Hawthorne's Priscilla (although she does play both of those roles over the course of the novel). Along the way, however, she is also the feminist Zenobia, who was already Hawthorne's adaptation of Margaret Fuller.<sup>10</sup> To these archetypes, Brownson almost certainly added his own familiarity with Frances Wright, a women's rights advocate heavily involved with utopian community projects.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the contemporary precedents, both real and fictional, Brownson also had the biblical implications of his chosen character clearly in mind.

Priscilla is a Latinate name first adapted into common English use by the Puritans, who most likely favored it for its associations with the Priscilla of the biblical era, or, at least, for its

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<sup>9</sup> Mather chronicled the affliction of Mercy Short in “A Brand Pluck'd From the Burning,” while his (and his father Increase's) efforts on behalf of Margaret Rule were most memorably, and skeptically, documented by Calef in *More Wonders of the Invisible World, Another Brand pluck'd From the Burning*.” Cotton Mather's first major publication, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possession* (1689), documents his successful efforts to prosecute a witch and rescue the children she'd afflicted with demons, particularly the oldest daughter.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Fuller's relationship to Zenobia, see Cary.

<sup>11</sup> For a reading of Wright's presence in *The Spirit-Rapper*, see Karcher, “Philanthropy and the Occult.”

associations the “good” biblical Priscilla.<sup>12</sup> Before getting to that positive example, however, it is worth looking at another. Priscilla is the name of one of two female colleagues of Montanus, the founder of a schismatic Christian movement that prophesied imminent world transformation.<sup>13</sup> Recognized as a prophetess, Priscilla, like Montanus, claimed the ability to receive direct contact with holy spirits, whose communications would then override the dictates of established Church doctrine. Because the Church believed they were possessed, both Priscilla and her companion Maxima were victims of failed exorcisms. This Priscilla offers excellent material for a cautionary tale about women and supernatural agency. Possessed of heretical beliefs, not least her own ability to make direct contact with the spiritual world she is easily recognized in the modern medium. This is the Priscilla, then, that Brownson’s heroine becomes under the spirit rapper’s influence.

The other biblical Priscilla, however, is far from heretical. Instead, she is the ultimate helpmeet. One half of the biblical couple Priscilla and Aquila, who always appear in that text *as a couple*, Priscilla and her husband were companions of Paul and teachers in their own right, who, upon hearing the evangelist Apollus preaching without full knowledge of the gospel, “invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26). An exemplar of domesticated Christianity, a faithful woman, never without her husband, whose home is a center of religious instruction, the biblical Priscilla offers Brownson’s incarnation of the only righteous potential for an “educated” woman, one who blends knowledge and matrimonial obedience. This Priscilla, rather than preaching from public, teaches from home. And unlike Margaret Fuller, her teaching comes with Saint Paul’s explicit approval. Brownson’s Priscilla eventually embraces this biblical template as the model for her own identity, even to the

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<sup>12</sup> Douglass argues that Calvin’s exegetical comment on Priscilla and Aquila reveals Priscilla to be a desirable model of female teaching; she was a woman who confined her teaching to the home. Brownson, avid Catholic and diligent archival researcher, would almost certainly have been familiar with both biblical Priscillas.

<sup>13</sup> "Montanus." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014. Web. 30 May. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/390572/Montanus>>.

point of never again appearing in the text without her husband. In conforming to this archetype, she denounces what was formerly the surest indicator of the diabolical component of her feminist project. At the height of her reforming power, Priscilla dramatically rejects the bible as “a genuine book . . . of no value . . . Much of it is local, temporary, colored by the nation and age that produced it, and is no longer of any significance for us” (101). After her conversion, she becomes an exemplar of piety as well as submission, cleaving to rather than denigrating biblical models. Aquila’s Priscilla, for Brownson, is the scriptural precedent for true womanhood: pious, subservient, domestic, and pure, that every good nineteenth-century woman must become, and that his Priscilla eventually does.

Priscilla’s narrative journey sees her embody not one but a series of highly charged and recognizable archetypes. A reformer, a medium, a witch, a wife, and a mother all within the space of some three hundred pages, she progresses too quickly through defining identities to ever project a stable sense of self, nor, arguably, was she ever meant to. Priscilla’s status as an archive of different archetypes and a composite of countless other characters, including multiple “Priscilla’s” makes her somewhat difficult to classify as a character. She contains multitudes and is, by virtue of her multiplicity, generically uncertain. She shares this with *The Spirit-Rapper* as a whole.

### ***The Spirit-Rapper* as a Wonder Tale: Reworking the Supernatural Archive**

*All history has its superstitious and marvellous side. . . . These mesmeric phenomena may throw a new light on that class of facts; they may even relieve history from the charges which have been brought against it, and rehabilitate the ages that we have condemned, so far at least as the facts themselves are concerned, though not necessarily as to the theories by which they were in past times generally explained" (The Spirit-Rapper 29)*

*The Spirit-Rapper* consistently defies easy generic classification. It has been variously declared a “roman-a-clef”; an “anti-reform satire,” an “experimental autobiography,” a “modern

gothic romance” and “a strange novel.”<sup>14</sup> What accounts for this generic fluidity? Brownson himself seemed unsure of how to classify his text. In his preface to *The Spirit-Rapper*, he begins with an odd gesture of generic defiance: “If the critics undertake to determine to what class of literary production the following unpretending work belongs, I think they will be sorely puzzled. I am sure I am puzzled myself to say what it is. It is not a novel; it is not a romance; it is not a biography of a real individual; it is not a dissertation, an essay, or a regular treatise; and yet it is *perhaps some elements of them all*, thrown together in just such a way as best suited my convenience, or my purpose” (v, my italics). While Brownson professed himself unclear on how his text might be categorized, he had no such uncertainty about what it had been designed to do, “I wanted to write a book, easy to write and not precisely hard to read, on the new superstition, or old superstition under a new name, existing just now no little attention at home and abroad” (v). Brownson's goal, to expose the spiritual manifestations hailed as modern miracles by enthusiastic spiritualists as neither modern nor miraculous, but rather only the latest in a centuries old cycle of demonic manifestations designed to lure innocent souls away from the Godly path, places him squarely within a long tradition of chroniclers who sought to catalogue and interpret supernatural phenomena across a vast stretch of chronological and cultural space.

To the list of potential genres for Brownson's text, then, I would like to add one more. I propose that we read *The Spirit-Rapper* as a nineteenth-century version of a compilation of wonder tales, a continuation of the cosmopolitan narrative of supernatural phenomena that

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<sup>14</sup> Schlesinger Jr., notes the wide swath of antebellum reformers, spiritualists, feminists, utopianists, as well as numerous figures from more distant history, some appearing under their real names, like the Fox sisters, Joe Smith and Dr. Poyen and others under elaborate pseudonyms: characters like “Thomas Jefferson Andrew Jackson Hobbs” and “Increase Mather Cotton” as well as exaggerated incarnations of notables like Fanny Wright, Emerson Alcott, Garrison, Parker, Charles Newcomb, Mazini, Fourier, Cabet, and Proudhon in *The Spirit-Rapper* as the chief source of its potential to interest— it at least, he wrote “had the scandalous potential of a roman a clef” (225). Karcher’s “Philanthropy and the Occult” also notes the extensive catalog of spiritualists and idealists and defines the text as an “anti-reform satire,” part of an antebellum tradition rooted in conservative angst over the millennial experimentation of early and mid- nineteenth-century American society. Later critics have focused more on formal definitions, but even those are surprisingly slippery. Butler presents *The Spirit-Rapper* as “an experimental autobiography, told in both narrative and dialog form,” but he quickly complicates his own classification by admitting that “this unusual work is not really an autobiography in the strict sense.”(145). Takayanagi labels the text a “modern gothic romance” (14). Carey takes perhaps the safest approach, bypassing the issue of genre altogether and categorizing the text as, “a strange novel in the form of a dialogue between a young man . . . and a host of representatives of the religiously exotic in nineteenth-century American society” (227).



dominated English and New English popular literature for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>15</sup> Reading *The Spirit-Rapper* as a compendium of wonder tales in the guise of a novel does much to contextualize both the shape and aim of what might otherwise be seen as a "failed" incarnation of something else, whether that something takes the shape of an "antireform satire," a roman a clef," a quasi-autobiography, or an attempt at a "modern gothic." As a wonder tale, *The Spirit-Rapper* is amorphous and meandering, full of exciting images and incidents as well as dogmatic sermons and wearily long exchanges on the limitations of empirical observation and the exact definition of superstition, along with transcripts of séances, and archival descriptions of witchcraft and demonic phenomena. The plot is liminal and often hard to follow, the thread of Brownson's explicitly anti-supernatural purpose for the text even more so. Ultimately, Brownson's methods, like the wonder tales they resemble, do a better job of preserving his myriad source texts rather than demonstrating his particular argument. The invisible world he hoped to control and contextualize by invoking its archival past instead lives on, vividly unconstrained, in its pages.

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<sup>15</sup> "Wonder tales" have been the subject of complex and fascinating scholarship. Seminal examinations of the phenomenon of wonders and the tales chronicling them are legion. Among those most helpful to this project are: Daston's and Park's *Wonders and the Orders of Nature*, which documents the complicated evolution of supernatural phenomena from medieval prodigies to Renaissance wonders to the natural objects of the Early Modern period with a focus on continuities and the changing nature of "wonder," and the how the phenomena related to different epistemes governing "the order and regulation of nature" during each period. Burns's *Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics, and Providence in England 1657-1727*, explores the pervasive political significance of the discourse of wonders, which first fed and then circumscribed their scientific and theological currency. Campbell's *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* follows the development of "wonder" as an epistemological category in scientific and quasi-scientific texts of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. For New England incarnations of the genre, Hall's *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* convincingly establishes the great extent to which the proliferation of providential literature documenting the "wonders" and "prodigies" by which God (and the devil) made their supernatural presences felt in the natural world defined both the popular and theological culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wonder tales drawing on the same sources appeared in weighty theological tomes as well as the cheapest broadsides, pamphlets, chapbooks, and ballads, and the "popular" incarnations in particular were consistently in wide demand, not least because of the fantastical and exciting nature of their material. Several critics have examined wonder tales as source texts and generic templates for the formulation of the novel. Hunter's *The Cultural Context of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* cites spiritual autobiographies and wonder books as genres compelling enough to impact the novel's development. McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel* looks at apparition tales and sea deliverances amongst his own catalog of formative texts. Hartman and Baker, both of whom have developed and enhanced the legacy of the genre of wonder literature in establishing the framework for American fiction, prefer the term providence tale: to a certain extent the terms are interchangeable, as wonders, at their most simply and broadly defined, "events betokening the supernatural," are the means by which God demonstrates his providence.

The form of *The Spirit-Rapper*, with countless excerpts from texts documenting supernatural phenomena, including antebellum Spiritualist tracts, wonder tales, and possession narratives from various sources, especially the writings of English and American Puritans, themselves often compilations of various older supernatural traditions, creates a heteroglossic supernatural archive that mirrors the inclusive and collective nature of the sources from which he drew. These sources represented a vast body of literature covering phenomena ranging from witchcraft relations, demonic possessions, stories of sea deliveries and catastrophes, anecdotes of pious children's last words, apparition tales, people speaking tongues they haven't learned, and any and all permutation of stories of the awesome and strange powers of nature, from warm rain that tastes and smells like blood to mysterious comets in the sky, can all be collected together as illustrations of invisible powers at work in the visible world. While these tales were immensely popular in the seventeenth century in particular, they came from much older places, as "the love of wonders [was] rooted in antiquity," and writers of wonder tales used a "borrowed language," that preserved and reworked the "debris" of cultures and moments long past.<sup>16</sup> Much of the appeal of the wonder tale lay in the genre's participation in a vast and diverse cultural discourse. Numerous tales were (and proudly advertised themselves as) "translated or adapted from a foreign source," often multiple times over. While slight amendments would be made to ancient texts to reflect the faith of the current author, the core material remained unadulterated. As an archival mechanism, the wonder tale was unparalleled. It preserved with few alterations the cores not just of narratives but also epistemologies like astrology, meteorology, and eventually, providentialism itself.

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<sup>16</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 72. The Christian Bible was full of wonder tales, so too was the lore Chaucer adapted into the *Canterbury Tales*. Many popular sources were much much older than that: Classical and Early Christian sources included Vergil, Pliny, Plutarch, Seneca, Cicero, Josephus, Gildas, Eusebius, and Bede, among others. The Medieval period produced a vast body of chronicles and collections of exemplia, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced new series, including the *Madeburg Centuries*, the *Chronicles* of Hollingshead, and collections by writers including Polydore Vergil, Sleiden, Camden, and Heylin, as well as John Foxe's colossal and influential *Acts and Monuments*, a "resume of narratives and chronicles extending back to Eusebius" (*Worlds of Wonder* 72).

One of Brownson's chief concerns in *The Spirit-Rapper* is the modern proclivity for the misinterpretation of wonders and prodigies. So worrisome does he find this trend that he gives two different characters virtually identical speeches on the subject. Early in the novel, it is Mr. Wilson, an "ex-Unitarian parson . . . who passed for a Transcendentalist," who points out that, "the history of our race everywhere bristles with prodigies. These prodigies were once regarded as miracles, and supposed to be wrought by the finger of God; now an unbelieving age treats them as impostures, cheats, fabrications, proving only people's love of the marvellous" (56). A love of the marvelous, however, while intrinsically human, is not the point of these phenomena, as even the Transcendentalist, when pressed, agrees: "I believe them, for the most part, real," he says, and almost but not quite reaches Brownson's own inevitable conclusion, "the assumption of Satanic intervention" (56, 305.) The next character to deliver the same speech does make the logical leap from the existence of wonders and prodigies to those phenomena as clear evidence of diabolical influence. Mr. Merton, two hundred and fifty pages later, speaks nearly identical words: "The whole history of our race bristles with prodigies, with marvellous facts, clearly divisible into two distinct and even opposite orders. The one seem to have for their object to draw men towards God, and assist them in ascending to him as their last end and supreme good; the other seem to have for their object to draw men away from God, and to aid men in descending into the depths of night and darkness" (304). The identical phrasing of two disparate characters—one confirmed transcendentalist and progressive reformer, the other, Merton, an ambiguous everyman, described only as "a young man, with a fine classic head and face, who seemed to have been drawn hither by mere curiosity," makes the speech transcend individual speakers—it is Brownson's own rhetoric, reiterated for emphasis, and passed between characters like one of the stories of the wonders it purports to contain.

In its second iteration, in fact, the "bristling history" acts as the prelude to a copious catalog of wonderful phenomena. Merton, despite being drawn into a conversation of wonders from "mere curiosity," proves himself a master of numerous specific examples, particularly

those that demonstrate "Satanic intervention" (304). After speaking his set piece, he provides this catalog:

Such are some of the cases which you have heard me relate. Such are many of the phenomena which you yourself must have witnessed, and perhaps been instrumental in producing. Such, too, is the inspiration of Mahomet, if we may rely on the account given us by his friends, as well as the demon of Socrates, and such are evidently the Well known cases of the Camisards or Tremblers of the Cevennes in 1688, George Fox and the early Quakers, Swedenborg, and the trance or ecstasy of the Methodists, and finally Joe Smith and the Mormon prophets. In all these cases there are evident marks of superhuman intervention, and which no man in his sober senses, and instructed in the Christian religion, can pretend is the intervention of the Holy Ghost, or of good angels. The perturbation, the disorder, the trembling, the falling backwards, the foaming at the mouth, the violence which always in these cases accompany the presence of the spirit, are so many sure indications that it is an evil, not a good spirit. (305-6)

Merton, the ostensible dilettante who wandered into a discussion of supernatural phenomena without identifiable creed or agenda, nevertheless provides a specific narrative of dizzying historical breadth and content, starting with Mahomet and Socrates and working through to the modern Mormons. That the most specific thing about Merton, a vague, deliberately generic outline of a character, is his encyclopedic knowledge of wonders, reveals not just the importance of the wonder tales to Brownson's argument, but the ways in which he conceives of the characters who deliver them. They seem, in Merton's case in particular, to be the archive embodied, not so much individuals as volumes that, when conversed with, open themselves at will to the page containing the pertinent lore. This makes for a fascinating archival mechanism, but a somewhat disconcerting narrative experience.

I do not mean to imply that the generic confusion that characterizes Brownson's text is also characteristic of wonder tales. Rather, it is Brownson's misunderstanding of how wonder

tales work that undermines their successful function in *The Spirit-Rapper*. Wonder tales, with their myriad sources and constant re-fashionings, nevertheless preserve their generic integrity. Genres, like languages, always carry the residue of previous uses and conventions, and this residue is not just characteristic of but essential to wonder tales, which functioned as cosmopolitan archives of many diverse supernatural traditions. Brownson's attempt to write a kind of wonder tale, a collection of anecdotes and experiences illustrating supernatural phenomena, thus works for his subject matter, but not his agenda. As a genre, wonder tales are cosmopolitan, inclusive and enduring—whatever their ideological trappings, they ultimately endorse and reify the presence of the invisible world and its phenomena.

Wonder tales' cosmopolitanism makes them inherently archival, not just in terms of content but also ideology. To some extent, this is true for any genre, or even any narrative act. In Fredric Jameson's formulation, genres function like "contracts" between author and audience, "literary institutions, which like the other institutions of social life are based on tacit agreements or contracts....all speech needs to be marked with certain indications and signals as to how it is properly to be used" (135). Bakhtin sees narrative itself as a repository not just of the individual narrator's intent, but as also freighted with the implications and associations of previous narrators: "Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including our creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness. . . . These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (*Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* 89). Thus, a speech act can never easily work toward a single agenda, as within each utterance "languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another" (*Dialogic Imagination* 291). In this sense, "Dialogic expression is unfinalizable, always incomplete, and productive of further chains of responses: meaning is never closed" (*Dialogic Imagination* 294). This process is particularly visible in wonder tales, which preserve so much and so many of the myriad sources and traditions.

As a genre, wonder tales collect, preserve and adapt the narratives of previous cultures and ideologies. They are stories, but also archives of stories and systems of interpretations. Jacques Derrida traces the etymology of *arkhe* to the dual signifiers ‘commencement’ and ‘commandment’, implying both beginning and authority and coordinating “two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* –physical, historical or ontological principle, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order is exercised” (1). The ‘archive’ exists simultaneously on literal and abstract planes as both a place of storage, or the collection of things stored, and a system that creates the need for, and meaning of, that space and all it contains. Michel Foucault situates the significance of the archive not in its literal incarnation as an actual collection of artifacts or texts, but rather in the theoretical system that imbues these compilations with significance: “the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (129). The archive, then, functions as a constructed system as well as a compilation of stories, and makes each wonder tale an excellent place to consider the archive as a means of directed organization, privilege, and ordering.

Wonder tales evolved with their times, taking on in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a framework of empirical inquiry that formed the bedrock of Enlightened analysis.<sup>17</sup> In keeping with emerging scientific discourse, they increasingly presented their unique “combination of empiricism and strangeness” in ways that foregrounded empirical processes, including “systematic collection, comparison, categorization, collation, editing and indexing” of wonderful phenomena (Hartman 3). This framework showed the tales’ adaptability, an adaptability Brownson interpreted as a kind of vulnerability to hostile adaptation. Accordingly, he sought to co-opt the invisible world archive and to remake it into a case study for avoiding

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<sup>17</sup> According to Hartman, this evolution not only included the incorporation of empirical evaluative models but also a distinct agenda: to defend wonders as legitimate evidences in the face of increasingly skeptical and potentially atheistic modernity (43). I would argue that Brownson’s novel shares this sense of embattled religious authenticity in the face of spiritualism, which, if not atheistic, showed distinct disregard for respecting established Christian proscriptions about supernatural contact and interpretations of supernatural phenomena.

supernatural contact. Brownson's goal in *The Spirit-Rapper*, equating Puritan and Spiritualist spirits as demonic and therefore in need of containment and excision, is too simplistic and ultimately counter to the point, and the thrill, of the genre, which reifies and even celebrates contact visible and invisible worlds. Wonder tales are archives, terrifying, entertaining, uncontainable, ever-proliferating archives that rely not just on a dense history of supernatural contact but also the promise of future interactions—for wonder tales, the invisible world is always already overlaid on and intertwined with visible existence. Brownson's agenda runs counter to the very ethos of the wonder tale genre, and this creates a kind of cognitive dissonance between project and agenda that ultimately leads that agenda to be subsumed within the wonder tale he creates.

Some of these texts, particularly seventeenth-century Puritan witchcraft and possession narratives and their distinctly wary approach to the demonic, resonated at least tonally with Brownson's own pessimistic agenda for the novel. His larger project, however, to expose the perils of supernatural interaction, to supplant dangerously ignorant spiritualist optimism, and ultimately to persuade the reader to close "everyday" communications with the invisible world for good, was anathema to the genres he drew upon to support these arguments, which documented and perpetuated a world eternally full of human contact with supernatural phenomena. The anecdotes Brownson's spirit rapper presents are harrowing, the consequences of all supernatural contact are dire, and Brownson presents his chronicles as a deathbed confession meant to deter the curious layman from otherworldly exploration, properly the province of priests and theologians. This argument, however, is lost in the larger framework of supernatural history that he invokes to substantiate it.

Brownson adopts a number of sources and strategies in his creation of his wonder-tale novel, *The Spirit-Rapper*. His narrative relies heavily on a larger supernatural narrative that almost perfectly mirrors the providential histories and chronicles of wonder from which he

drew. The universality of divine design that guides these texts emerges repeatedly. In one particularly earnest speech, a character proclaims to the spirit rapper:

There was something superhuman in the English rebellion and revolution of the seventeenth century; and if Cromwell and his party were not specially moved by the Holy Spirit, as they believed, they must have been animated and driven on by the old Norse demon. So also of the old French Revolution, and of all those terrible convulsions which have ruined nations and shaken the world. Men are indeed in them, with their wisdom and their folly, their beliefs and their doubts, their virtues and their vices, but there is more in them than these. There is in them the fierce conflict of invisible powers, ever renewing and carrying on that fierce and unrelenting war. . . . *All history, if we did but understand it, is little else but the history of the conflict between these invisible powers.* (377, italics mine)

While Brownson's Catholic leanings lead him not so subtly to suggest that the Puritan revolutionaries might have been motivated by the devil rather than God, they are nevertheless to be commended for understanding that a larger providential framework is the guiding force of human existence. Evidence for this framework can be (and is) drawn from everywhere—the distant past of the pre-Christian Norse as well as the much more modern examples of the English and French Revolutions. In fact, in his enthusiasm for the scope of supernatural history, Brownson appears to forget that arguing for its inevitable universality might undermine the now repentant spirit rapper's ostensible purpose for writing the novel—to deter people from attempting to intervene in supernatural spheres.

Brownson also makes use of a number of colonial era wonder tales, particularly those that focus on, or at least offer a significant store of, demonic phenomena, which he like his fellow critics saw as apposite analogues for the poltergeist-like manifestations and trance states of spiritualist mediums and practitioners. To that end, he quotes frequently from late sixteenth-century texts, particularly those of Cotton Mather, whose *Magnalia Christi Americana*,



*Wonders of the Invisible World, Memorable Providences, and Another Brand Plucked from The Burning* all offer significant treatments of demonic possession and spectral phenomena. *The Remarkable Providences* authored by Cotton Mather's father, Increase Mather, also frequently provided useful provenance. At times, Brownson paraphrases (or simply excerpts) entire wonder tales, as he does with the story of the nuns of Uvertet, taken from *The Dictionnaire des Sciences Medicales*. In other places, or following one or two such anecdotes, the character ostensibly relating the event suddenly switches into the role of chronicler/librarian, informing his audience, for example, that "you may read the fourteen well authenticated cases recorded by Cotton Mather in his *Magnalia*, and you will find all these, and similar phenomena" (268).

*The Spirit-Rapper* also juxtaposes numerous selections from various spiritualist discourses with the "real" phenomena offered by older traditions, reinterpreting the supernatural significance of some and debunking others. This is the case in his treatment of the relatively well-known saga of the Cideville poltergeist. The events took place in 1851, were described shortly thereafter in pamphlet form and much discussed in spiritualist circles, later finding their way into the prominent Spiritualist text *Footfalls on the Boundary of the Other World* (1860), by Robert Dale Owen, who cites them as excellent examples of other-worldly phenomena. Brownson's reading, however, is decidedly anti-spiritualist. He implies that the mysterious rappings and flying furniture documented by the original pamphlet, *Pneumatologie des Esprits, par le Marquis Eudes de M*, are really the work of the ostensible child victims, pointing out that when the boys who were supposedly suffering poltergeist attacks were removed from the parish where they had been (unhappily) living, the attacks "then ceased, when the original reason for producing them had been answered" (164), and that only the truly gullible (spiritualists) would not recognize the malignant human influence at work, as opposed, say, to the legitimately diabolical phenomena documented in the *Magnalia*, which he references in the next paragraph.

Brownson also follows the wonder tale tradition of recycling and restructuring narratives from competing ideological frameworks. He discredits spiritualism in general and the female mediums it enables by claiming the mysterious rappings heard and interpreted by the Fox sisters, widely seen as the moment that touched off antebellum spiritualist enthusiasm, as a diabolical hoax perpetrated by his own protagonist. Acting under orders not from friendly spirits but rather the devil himself, the spirit rapper provides the Fox sisters with a bouquet of spectrally-charged flowers, bewitching them into falling under his illusion. Brownson's version of this seminal tale rewrites the origins of the spiritualist movement, stripping away the Fox sisters' special connection to the other world by making his diabolically motivated spirit rapper the architect of it: "The public never suspected me of having any hand in the Rappo-Mania, and the Fox sisters, even to this day, suspect no connection between the flowers which I gave them and the mysterious knockings which they heard" (138-139).

It is not just the many anecdotes that Brownson pillages and reshapes to make *The Spirit-Rapper* that mark it as a wonder tale: as I have argued, Brownson also treats his characters as wonderful anthologies. Rather than individual actors, his characters are themselves embodied archives, compendiums of numerous historical and/or fictional personages that act as signifiers and referents for the novel's anti-supernatural agenda. Two characters in particular highlight this agenda: Priscilla, who as we have already seen embodies a whole host of roles in order to epitomize the entwined corruptions of women's rights and invisible world agency, and Increase Mather Cotton, a Puritan divine who embodies a comfortingly masculine figure of spiritual authority.

### **Embodying the Archive: Brownson's Composite Puritan**

*a staunch puritan, whose great ancestor had taken so conspicuous a part in Salem Witchcraft  
(The Spirit-Rapper 27)*

Brownson's characters are not so much individuals as embodiments of archival potential, composites that allow the fate of a character to forecast the fate of their constituents. Like Priscilla, the everywoman whose journey from feminism to supernatural degradation to redemptive marriage writes women out of supernatural agency, the minister Increase Mather Cotton functions in Brownson's novel not so much as an individual but rather an archetype of acceptable supernatural agency. When Increase Mather Cotton, who embodies the Puritan wariness towards invisible world phenomena, cautions against the mechanizations of demons or science without the temperance of theology, or the diabolical seduction inherent in the seemingly noble goals of philanthropy, and when he points to women's affinity for spiritualism as an outgrowth of their inherently sinful natures, and warns that "Things are best as God made them. . . . Men and women have each their peculiar character and sphere," he speaks with the true moral authority of the "Christian philosopher" that the repentant spirit rapper lauds him as at the end of the text (105). Increase Mather Cotton's heroic status legitimates all the evidence offered by Puritan sources and encourages "Puritan" readings of supposedly spiritualist texts and experiences. The character embodies not so much an individual personality as an archive of texts and a method of interpretation that Brownson intends to stand against the threat posed by the spiritualist capacity for textual production and their appetite for archival revision.

Increase Mather Cotton is by far the wisest and most respected of the many ministerial characters in *The Spirit-Rapper*. Much of this respect hinges not on his individual character but rather on the denomination that he embodies. On one hand, the repetition of his lineage of the man, "whose great ancestor had taken so conspicuous a part in Salem witchcraft" foregrounds his descent from a particular Puritan, Cotton Mather (27). The combination of Cotton Mather's name with that of his father, Increase, however, and the text's tendency to refer to the character as often by his last name, Cotton, as by his full appellation, suggests also the presence of John Cotton, Cotton Mather's grandfather and a famous minister of the first generation of Massachusetts Bay Puritans (involved, among other things, in the prosecution of Anne

Hutchinson). Conflating three generations of prominent ministers creates a composite character that posits not just on one learned divine but rather a distinguished Puritan tradition. Increase Mather Cotton is a dynastic embodiment of Calvinist heritage, an insistence upon a network of invisible-world believers that belies the antebellum tendency to single out and vilify Cotton Mather.

In numerous antebellum texts, Cotton Mather serves as the representative of a multi-valenced failure, a touchstone invoking the failures of the Puritan supernatural system. The author of numerous tracts, sermons, and treatises upon the invisible world and its visible manifestations, ranging from his idealistic first accounts of his battle to save a young girl from demonic possession in *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions* (1689) through his murky, ambiguous defense of the Salem Trials in *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692), a text reproduced and expanded upon in his epic spiritual history *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Mather inarguably provided a wealth of source material. While in the beginning of his career this work helped to establish him as an entrenched authority on spiritual doctrine, much of this material had become controversial by the latter portion of his own lifetime, particularly his treatment of the events of Salem. Upon Cotton Mather's death in 1728, Benjamin Colman's funeral sermon waxed eerily prophetic about both the source and fate of his legacy: "his Name is like to live a great while among us in his printed Works; but yet these will not convey to Posterity, nor give to Strangers, a just Idea of the real Worth and great Learning of the Man."<sup>18</sup> Mather's copious publications did indeed endure, consistently revisited by a range of readers, from scholars to schoolchildren. As time went on, however, fewer of these readers saw in Mather's texts the "great Knowledge, and singular Piety, his Zeal for God, and Holiness and Truth; and his desire of the Salvation of precious Souls" that Coleman attributed to them. Instead, nineteenth-century editors who republished *Wonders of the Invisible World* felt

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Levin.

confident in vilifying Mather as the embodiment of Puritan malice and superstition. One popular edition published Mather's *Wonders* in the same volume with Robert Calef's scathing attack on Mather's conclusions, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700). Many critics laid the blame for Salem directly at Cotton Mather's feet, despite his somewhat peripheral role to the actual historical events, by claiming that the influence of his position and the persuasiveness of his writings lead others to "countenance...the proceedings out of respect" for him despite his "want of anything like sound judgment."<sup>19</sup>

In *The Spirit-Rapper*, however, Mather is not only blameless, he is vindicated. Priscilla's affliction of Increase Mather Cotton's grandchild not only concretely establishes that the new phenomena of spiritualism are absolutely indistinguishable from the old demons of the invisible world, it recasts Cotton Mather, already well enshrined as a historical villain, as a noble victim rather than an antagonist. In addition, Increase Mather Cotton's composite status similarly redeems countless other Puritan magistrates, ministers, and theologians tarred with the stigma of Salem. In calling for (and failing to receive) Priscilla's trial for witchcraft, Increase Mather Cotton restages the Salem Witch Trials as not a failure of the system of supernatural belief but rather as a failure of witnesses, and more broadly society as a whole, to understand the true significance of supernatural manifestations. After this failure, he cajoles, remonstrates, proselytizes, and even begs with hands outstretched for his young friend to renounce his diabolical designs, and when the spirit rapper will not be deterred, tells him sadly that: "I see by your incredulous smile that the devil has you fast in his grip. I have done my duty. My garments are clean of your blood" (130).

Here Increase Mather Cotton refigures a Salem-like moment, changing condemned witch Sarah Good's infamous gallows condemnation of minister Nicholas Noyes, "You are a liar, I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life God will give you blood

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<sup>19</sup> John Russell Smith, introduction to 1862 republication of *Wonders of the Invisible World*.

to drink,” into an explicit disavowal of that blood.<sup>20</sup> While Nathaniel Hawthorne adapted this anecdote into a memorable metaphor for Puritan ancestral guilt in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Brownson realigns the paradigm to once again exonerate the minister. In fact, his most blatant rebuttal of the anti-Puritan sentiments raised by Salem comes in one of Increase Mather Cotton’s most compelling speeches to his young friend, in which he argues that, “alas! you seem not to have reflected that the devil, when he would seduce, can disguise himself as an angel of light” (128). While the spirit rapper initially refuses to concede this point, he later has plenty of cause to concede its veracity. Robert Calef’s scathing indictment of the Salem Witch Trials, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, includes a description of the hanging of the former minister of Salem, George Burroughs. On the gallows, according to Calef, Burroughs recited the Lord’s Prayer perfectly, but even though common belief, and Cotton Mather himself, held that no witch should be able to do such a thing, Mather refused to allow the sentence to be commuted, insisting instead that they hang the man. To convince the ambivalent crowd, he quoted 2 Corinthians 11:14, arguing that, “the Devil has often been transformed into an Angel of Light.” Increase Mather Cotton, of course, never hangs anyone, but Brownson’s consistent allusions to the specific history of Salem conflate the two, and Brownson’s presentation of the speech in the form of a gentle dialog with a concerned friend dramatically reworks the allusion’s significance.

Increase Mather Cotton’s status as the hero of the text legitimates all the evidence offered by antique sources, particularly Puritan ones, and encourages “Puritan” readings of supposedly spiritualist texts. The character embodies an archive of texts and a method of interpretation that stands against the threat posed by the spiritualist capacity for textual production and their appetite for archival revision. When the spirit rapper, incensed by Increase Mather Cotton’s theologically grounded obstinacy, decides to afflict and torment the minister, he does so by making manifest the spiritualist threat to the supernatural archive and the providential tradition that Increase Mather Cotton represents. One night, the minister is drawn

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<sup>20</sup> a copy of the transcript can be found at [law.2umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL\\_Bgoo.HTM](http://law.2umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_Bgoo.HTM)

to strange lights and noises in his study and confronted by the apparition of a large assembly of figures apparently engaged in either worship or debate, led by the figure of a Puritan divine, “in Genevan gown and band . . . who seemed to have usurped his function” reading and preaching from his books to a mysterious audience. The experience invokes both spiritualist poltergism and the Protestant tradition of demonically possessed objects, a moment of high drama that is also so over-the-top as to be explicitly comedic. Summoning his courage, Increase Mather Cotton reaches out to touch the figure, which immediately knocks him unconscious. When he awakes, he finds that, “the seeming minister was a huge folio of theology, moulded into a human shape by pieces of carpet, a coat and trousers of his own, and dressed in his own gown and band. The other figures were volumes from his library, elongated and stuffed out in a similar way, and dressed in clothes belonging to different members of the family” (142). This manifestation, which initially purports to be a fully fleshed and articulate presentation of doctrine, turns out to be a sham drawn from the extant archive and forced to masquerade as a new and profound articulation, one that collapses upon perfunctory examination. Dismayed but not, ultimately, daunted by this literal incarnation of textual haunting, Increase Mather Cotton continues to press back against the spirit rapper and his dogma, insisting upon the legitimacy of the tradition he himself represents.

That the "spiritual lesson" of this anecdote is easy to misplace in the entertaining spectacle it presents is emblematic of the wonder tale tradition (the popular incarnations of wonder tales would doubtless not have been so wildly popular without the high quotient of spectacle and gore) and also of one of the problems that tradition presents for Brownson's sober, cautionary ambitions for his novel. Just as the dazzling potential of the scope of providential history he invokes threatens to subsume the bleakness of the lessons he hopes to draw from that potential, the cosmopolitan flexibility and universality of wonder tales and the fantastic materials they encompass endorse rather than deter supernatural enthusiasm. The spirit rapper's desire to produce the "definitive" cautionary text is easily lost within the larger dialectic

of countless similarly minded projects—the broad content so much more powerful and appealing than the narrow scope of the message.

Brownson’s relentless focus on redeeming the events of Salem, and his insistence on highlighting Cotton Mather’s connection to these events through Increase Mather Cotton, marks a deliberate intervention into a historical narrative that increasingly relied upon delineating and disparaging the Puritan ‘other’ to define American modernity. Increase Mather Cotton challenges a dichotomy frequently put forth by spiritualist reformers between established Christian religion, figured through the Puritans as dangerous superstition, and science, figured as the gateway to spiritual truth.<sup>21</sup> Many spiritualists were bent on creating a scientific discourse that *normalized* supernatural phenomena, marking them not as “wondrous” but rather natural, in the sense of being absolutely observable, classifiable, and ordinary; no different, categorically speaking, than a rainbow or a rainstorm.<sup>22</sup> These spiritualists, in other words, presented supernatural manifestations as visible rather than invisible phenomena, or rather, they insisted upon no quantifiable difference between the two. In doing so, they drew upon the increasingly strict delineations of scientific naturalism, with the double advantage, from their perspective, of both marking supernatural phenomena mundane, and thus, by implication, unthreatening and accessible, and of affiliating spiritualism with “modern” scientific thinking rather than

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<sup>21</sup> The distinction between theological and scientific modes of supernatural inquiry has been successfully problematized by a number of scholars. Hartman and Winship (“Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy”) both argue compellingly that Puritan authors of the seventeenth-century increasingly appropriated the developing languages of rationalism and natural philosophy to bring their discussions of supernatural manifestations into alignment with the emerging discourse of science. On the other hand, critics working on the writings of nineteenth-century Spiritualists like Baym (“Introduction”) and Harde argue that many drew upon Christian traditions and relied upon scriptural rather than scientific Spiritualist rationales.

<sup>22</sup> In “Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings,” Moore argues that science was in fact an integral prop of the spiritualist movement: “Leading spiritualists for most of the 19th century held a childlike faith in empirical science as an exclusive approach to knowledge and probably benefited more than any other group from the great popular interest in science awakened in that century” (477). He points out, however, that spiritualists’ use of scientific epistemes lacked nuance. Spiritualists, he argues, “confused natural with observable” (484). Moore develops these arguments further in his book, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*.



“backward” superstitious beliefs.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, however, spiritualist scientists seemed to observers like Brownson to have committed a gross and dangerous oversimplification.

To have “eschewed all interest in the marvelous and sought to erase supernatural as a category of human thought” threatened to undo the governing logic of supernatural phenomena as wonders (Moore, “Spiritualism and Science” 477). This revision would both undo the relative security of invisible/visible spheres, which, while permeable, were still somewhat separate, and accessible only to those with divine or diabolical agency, and erase the presence of anything truly *spiritual*, at least in a religious sense, from the supernatural. This, for Brownson, was the ultimate worry: “if much harm is done by superstition, perhaps even more is done by the denial of all demonic influence and invasion, and the attempt to explain away the Satanic phenomena on natural principles. It generates a skeptical turn of mind, and the rationalism resorted to will in the end be turned against the supernatural facts of religion” (382). When “supernatural facts” can no longer be recognized as such, society risks the worst and most final type of heresy.

Spiritualist rhetoric frequently accessed transcendental formulations and scientific (and pseudo-scientific) discourses that postulated that the “supernatural” should be discussed and examined through the medium of scientific discourse. The vocabulary of science, the staging of demonstrations, lectures, and “experiments,” as the spirit rapper cagily refers to his own manipulations of other-world phenomena, all draw upon the ideas of modern progress, development, and discovery that a rational, enlightenment-framed discourse implied. So passionate were many spiritualist practitioners about the role of science in other-world revelations that they worried some of their less zealous comrades, who felt compelled to warn of its perils. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, author of *The Gates Ajar* (1868), argued in her article, “The Great Psychological Opportunity” (1885), that “the bigotry of the laboratory and the library is quite

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<sup>23</sup> Moore argues that many spiritualists, in rhetoric and practice, desperately sought this modern affiliation. For an overview of the transition in natural philosophy from the myriad phenomena of wonders, marvels, prodigies and portents that occupied and originated from a spectrum of natural, preternatural and supernatural spheres, see Daston’s “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe.” For a longer treatise on these evolving classifications, see Daston’s and Park’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (1998).

as robust as the bigotry of the altar and the creed” (259). Spiritualists did not set themselves up as opponents of religious truth, however. To the contrary, they “claimed for it divine sanction” and insisted upon scientific practices as a means of distinguishing spiritual reality from theologically rooted superstition, a tactic Brownson abhorred. As he points out, “Nothing better serves [the devil’s] purpose than to have us deny his existence; to ascribe his influence to imagination, hallucination, to natural causes or influences, or in fine, to good spirits. . . . Possessed persons are insane, epileptic, or lunatic persons, and the wonderful phenomena they exhibit . . . are to be explained on natural principles” (130). Brownson treats the alignment of spiritualism, scientific practices, and the “scientifically-predicated” social experiments they spawn as clear and explicit embodiments of theologically rooted threats. The devil himself offers old seduction dressed up as “new knowledge;” he suggests the “reforms” that should come from them. Scientists without religion are, as the spirit rapper becomes, minions of the devil. In Increase Mather Cotton, however, Brownson amalgamated a different kind of scientist.

He refers to Increase Mather Cotton as “the Christian philosopher,” an appellation his repentant spirit rapper desperately desires to gain on his own deathbed. The label alludes to Cotton Mather’s *The Christian Philosopher: A Collection of the Best Discoveries in Nature, with Religious Improvements* (1721), an epic attempt to illustrate the congruence of Calvinist theology and Newtonian science and the “first comprehensive book on science to be written by an American.”<sup>24</sup> Science without scripture, Brownson claims, is unnatural and dangerous. But the two together, as Cotton Mather’s work proves, are not mutually exclusive. Cotton Mather’s mode of supernatural analysis, blending religiosity and science in order to demonstrate “a unified cosmos by empirically observable phenomena of spiritual healings, ghostly encounters, and clairvoyance,” along with his desire to “bridge the gap between matter and spirit that the Enlightenment had opened up,” characterizes not just Puritan approaches to the supernatural but also those of the Mesmerists and Spiritualists (Wise 242). In numerous ways Cotton Mather

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<sup>24</sup> blurb for Solberg’s edition, University of Illinois Press, 2000.

actually was an appropriate precursor for spiritualist practitioners, who had more in common with him than those possessed of the prevailing desire to make him a figurehead for ignorant superstition and malice felt comfortable admitting. He grew up in a supernaturally charged environment, the child and grandchild of ministers conversant with and invested in providential narratives, case studies of witchcraft and possession, and the broader discourse of wonder tales. Both his father and his two famous grandfathers, Richard Mather and John Cotton, left detailed accounts of their thoughts on and experiences with the invisible world. Mather made a concerted effort to follow in their footsteps, studying and seeking supernatural phenomena. His efforts to make himself susceptible to invisible experiences, including intensive meditation, marathon prayer sessions, and rigorous fasting, were all manifestations of “the Puritan culture of piety;” these same techniques were later used by spiritualist mediums and mesmerists outside that culture to connect with the other world.<sup>25</sup> A scholar deeply invested in the exegetical tradition of biblical analysis, which used hermeneutics to produce “naturalistic readings of scriptural events,” and, like many Puritans, a devoted member of the Royal Society also entrenched in “rational” Enlightenment models that sought to catalog and categorize natural phenomena in order to flesh out the realities of the visible realm, Mather was in fact dedicated to a “scientific” study of the supernatural, to “establishing the laws of the supernatural realm in order to link these into the known laws of the natural realm,” which he believed required careful methodology and rigorous research to properly analyze.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Phrase borrowed from Wise’s “Cotton Mather and the Invisible World.” For an overview of Mather’s incredibly pious childhood, see Levin’s biography, and for a discussion of his application of “the methods of natural science to prayer,” see Wise and Clark (“Eschatology of Signs”). Carroll and Baym, among others, have informed my understanding of the methodology of spiritualist preparations. Many spiritualists believed that any kind of weakening of the body would make the gulf between the mundane plane and the other world easier to breach, and so mediums and séance participants were often advised to fast before seeking contact. Chants, silent prayers, and even extended meditation periods were often also prerequisites for otherworld contact.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, “Eschatology of Signs,” 413. This article provides an expansive treatment of Mather’s scientific disposition as well as a detailed comparison between the “proofs of providence” as they were collected and interpreted by Cotton Mather, and, later, Jonathan Edwards. Wise discusses the balance between natural observation and supernatural study.

Cotton Mather's mode of supernatural analysis, blending religiosity and science in order to demonstrate "a unified cosmos by empirically observable phenomena of spiritual healings, ghostly encounters, and clairvoyance," along with his desire to "bridge the gap between matter and spirit that the Enlightenment had opened up," is something Brownson wishes to designate as the proper alternative to spiritualists' scientific enthusiasm (Wise 242). Such a figure, in the form of composite Puritan divine Increase Mather Cotton, can authoritatively rebut the spirit rapper's rapturous descriptions of spirit rappings as "purely natural" indicators that spiritual science would soon be overcoming religious superstition by demonstrating that no empirical evidence exists to substantiate that the spirit rapper's phenomena are not unnatural. Pointing out the extant canon of wonder tales and possession narratives as an equally viable archive of spirit phenomena, Increase Mather Cotton cites these stories as evidence that manifestations are often the product of demonic agency. He goes on to argue that the spirit rapper's refusal to countenance the possibility represents his limitations not just as a scientist but as a rational being, "If the real origin of the phenomena we have been considering is diabolical, then nothing is more reasonable than to believe it; and to ascribe them to natural causes would be unscientific and a sort of superstition" (325). Brownson's pointed insistence that Increase Mather Cotton and not the spirit rapper represents the ultimate blend of rational and religious thought reflects a significant moment of archival intervention. The resurrection of the Christian philosopher, the precursor to the mere natural scientist, who could work within the framework of rational inquiry but also transcend it, offers Brownson an alternative paradigm, sufficiently scientific and spiritual, yet safely grounded in the tradition of religious inquiry.

In *The Spirit-Rapper*, Brownson seeks to highlight the fraudulent nature of the spiritualist archive while simultaneously re-establishing the case for the "original" pool of available sources. In order to accomplish this, he relies upon the materials and strategies made available by the wonder tale tradition and the guiding voice of Increase Cotton Mather as the Christian philosopher to distinguish between the wheat and chaff of supernatural narrative

material. He found the watchful oversight of the Christian philosopher was more necessary than ever because spiritualists, not just content to reform the organizing structures of natural and supernatural spaces with their rappings and manifestations, were also reformatting the archive that contextualized that space. Spiritualists were not only experts in textual production, generating thousands of texts documenting the results of mesmeric and magnetic experiments, the experiences of supernatural phenomena, and the results of séances and trances, they were also adept at archival revision. Like the wonder tales that freely incorporated materials from many different traditions, spiritualists drew upon the experiences and ideas of venerated characters and traditions both ancient and recent, claiming the endorsement of such luminaries as Socrates, Plato, Cicero, John Fox, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, to name just a few. Alongside simply revisiting and repackaging the writings of these luminaries, spiritualists claimed to have access to new materials, communications from the spirit world that imbued the existing canon of supernatural stories with a flood of revisionist, pro-spiritual texts.

Spiritualists, like the Puritans themselves, were remarkably textually oriented. Documentation of mesmeric and magnetic experiments abounded, but when the Fox sisters experienced and then had chronicled their personal other-world interactions, they touched off not just the “spiritualist” movement but also a plethora of similar accounts, usually couched in the language of one who professed to have been utterly disinclined to believe in the phenomena to which he or she now attested. These “conversion narratives” charting the specific circumstances that made skeptics into believers proliferated, often collected together and published with descriptions of public séances and experiments. The movement’s capacity of textual generation, in fact, was often cited as a worrisome indicator of its potential influence. The *North American Review* article “Modern Necromancy,” the title of which implies the article’s view on the subject of spiritualism rather explicitly, cites “no less than twelve or fourteen” periodicals “devoted to the publication of [spiritualist] phenomena and the

dissemination of its principles” and adds that “nearly every succeeding week brings through the press some new books treating exclusively on the subject” (512). Spiritualists, clearly, were in the process of creating a formidable archive of their own.

Spiritualist believers construed the mission of the “white spirits” they interacted with as a broad and far-reaching project of uplift. Not only did these spirits convey universal spiritual truths, they often offered concrete suggestions about how to remake visible society into a reflection of a more perfect invisible image. While often these reflections came from the shades of familiar and beloved figures—dead friends, lovers, and family members—they as frequently purported to be the words of far more broadly influential figures. The founding fathers, associated with both the birth of the nation and the comforting modernity of Enlightenment logic, rather than Calvinist perspectives, were particular favorites. Dellon Marcus Dewey’s influential text documenting the rise of spiritualism, the *History of the Strange Sounds or Rappings Heard in Rochester and Western New-York, and usually Called the Mysterious Noises!* (1850), cites a lengthy question and answer session with the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, ending with: “now I am ready, my friends. There will be great changes in the nineteenth century. Things that now look dark and mysterious to you, will be laid plain before your sight Mysteries are going to be revealed. The world will be enlightened. I sign my name Benjamin Franklin. Do not go into the other room” (62-3). Although there is something slightly comical about Benjamin Franklin’s injunction to his hearers that they not leave the parlor, the overall tenor of the conversation presages significant alterations to the structure of civilization and showcases the ready conflation of spiritual authority and mundane reform. The “great changes in the nineteenth century,” include no less than the “enlightenment” of the world.

Brownson attempts to dramatize the dangers of this kind of textual production. While in the process of seducing him into his demonic compact, the devil (through the mesmerized table) communicates with the spirit rapper in the persona of Benjamin Franklin, producing ” a communication...in the handwriting and signed with the name of Benjamin Franklin. [It]

consisted of one or two proverbs from Poor Richard, and a commonplace remark about electricity” (134). As part of his own role as a diabolical minion, the spirit rapper arranges for the spurious communications of many prominent historical figures, telling one guest, who “had called to see me in obedience to an order given him by Benjamin Franklin, who assured him that I could, if I chose, give him some information on the subject of the spirit-manifestations, for I had had more to do with them than any man living,” that: “He could probably learn much more from the shades of Franklin, William Penn, or George Washington, than from me. George Fox and Oliver Cromwell could tell him many things; Swedenborg and Joe Smith more yet. I advised him to call up the Mormon prophet, who could probably give him more light on the subject than any one who had gone to the spirit-world since Mahomet” (291). The attributing of new words to these foundational figures adds to the canon of supernatural literature in ways that privilege the spiritualist project. The spirit rapper takes great pains to explain the purpose of this archival borrowing:

This new religion, which, indeed, contains nothing new, and which it certainly needed no ghost from the other world to teach or to suggest, would amount to very little if promulgated on mere human authority, unsupported by any prodigies, mysterious or marvellous facts; but, communicated mysteriously from alleged denizens of another world, bearing the imposing names of William Penn, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, assumes in the minds of the vulgar a high importance, and can hardly fail to be regarded as overriding Moses and the prophets, our Lord and his Apostles. It strikes at the foundation of Christianity itself, and once accepted, it will seem to have a directness and a completeness of evidence that will entirely set aside, in the minds of the spiritualists, that in favor of the Gospel. (237)

These new writings are both wonders (marvelously produced) and wonder tales. And while Brownson attempts to combat these “specious” tales and their addition to the archive by exposing the fraudulence of their origins and the dangers they pose to proper Christian thought,

this project of exclusion runs counter to the historical trajectory of the wonder tale genre, in which new additions are welcomed, and new ideologies accommodated. Spiritualists, on the other hand, embraced this kind of collective, celebratory repurposing, which made wonder tales so popular.

Against this, embodied archives like the good Puritan minister pale. Increase Mather Cotton's effectiveness as an archival countermeasure is ultimately even further curtailed by his untimely death. While rendering him unquestionably correct in his insistence upon the demonic underpinnings of supernatural interactions and setting him up as the principal voice of spiritual reason and morality in *The Spirit-Rapper*, Brownson nevertheless ultimately disposes of his Puritan archetype: "Mr. Cotton, the stern but well-meaning old Puritan, who had infinitely more mind and heart than Young America, that has learned to laugh at him, had indeed died during my absence abroad" (257). *The Spirit-Rapper* preserves but also entombs Puritan authorship in Increase Mather Cotton, the historical and spiritual benchmark of the Puritan past.<sup>27</sup> Brownson's reasons for writing off Increase Mather Cotton are unclear. On one hand, Cotton's death allows him to take his place as the central martyr of a modern jeremiad, a character simply too good for "Young America," which is, catastrophically, unable to appreciate his wisdom. His removal is perhaps understandable in terms of Brownson's own ultimately Catholic agenda—an appreciation for the Puritan's historically well documented position on spirits and the goldmine of the Salem example, while useful to a certain degree, was ultimately counterproductive if it meant establishing a modern Calvinist foothold in the antebellum consciousness. Nevertheless, it is hard to read the death of Increase Mather Cotton as anything less than a tactical error on Brownson's part, since, once dead, the character's potential recedes back into the archival past.

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<sup>27</sup> This death is perhaps not surprising given Brownson's own Catholic convictions. While he agreed with the Puritan (Calvinist) position on spirits, he had no interest in establishing a modern Calvinist foothold in the antebellum consciousness. For a detailed overview of Brownson's religious convictions, see Carey's *Orestes A. Brownson: American Religious Weathervane* (2004).



Brownson posits the archival potential of composite characters like Increase Mather Cotton as an alternative to the spiritualists own archive of new wonder tales. Channeling and spirit writing allowed spiritualists to make new texts as well as engage with the authors and subjects of the old ones, with the clear agenda of propagating and encouraging supernatural phenomena. Increase Mather Cotton, the archive brought to life and made to stand witness against these new texts and traditions, acts as Brownson's attempt to delegitimize these new phenomena. As an alternative, Increase Mater Cotton ultimately fails because his view of wonder tales and the archive they offer, like the invisible world they document, is predicated on an outdated interpretive episteme that without any pretense of translation for modern sensibilities and designed to resist rather than engage with the materials it presents. For this reason, even when he speaks he is not properly understood. As the events unfolding around Priscilla's affliction of his granddaughter make plain, Increase Cotton Mather makes the right accusations but is never believed.

Like Cotton Mather, who recognized the flying objects, mysterious noises, and physical convulsions suffered by the young women, as he had recognized the identical symptoms in the Godwin children at the start of his ministerial career, as clear evidence of demonic influence, Increase Mather Cotton saw the same symptoms in his granddaughter and "was sure that it was the work of the devil, that it was witchcraft, and he did not hesitate to accuse Priscilla" (144). Unfortunately for him, while all the appropriate signs are there, he can find no one willing to share his interpretation of the evidence: "Although the laws of Pennsylvania . . . recognized witchcraft as a punishable offense, no magistrate in the city could be found who did not look upon witchcraft as imaginary, and suspect the good minister of being in need of physic and a good regimen for entertaining a belief in its reality" (144). While Brownson writes Increase Mather Cotton as out of sync with modern times in order to illustrate the depth of modern ignorance, his need to condemn the shortsighted folly of "Young America" also drastically

reduces Increase Mather Cotton's effectiveness as a character.<sup>28</sup> When he is gone, his words go with him, and only their shadow remains, as insubstantial as the apparitional divine Priscilla once created from books and old clothes.

If Brownson can erase Increase Cotton Mather, it is less easy to do away with Priscilla. Although supposedly safely redeemed into the benevolent captivity of matrimony, the wonderful potential and antifeminist agenda of her previous incarnations provide compelling archetypes for other, similarly minded texts. Like *The Spirit-Rapper*, however, these texts were more effective at showcasing the entertaining potential and wonderful durability of the invisible world than at highlighting its highly gendered dangers. While never as critically or commercially successful as *Hope Leslie* or *The Blithedale Romance*, *The Spirit-Rapper* fit well within a canon of contemporary works, many of which adapted the wonder-full form and anti-women's-rights platform of Brownson's text.<sup>29</sup>

Many of the novels David S. Reynolds categorizes as "paradigmatic comic American volumes of the 1850s," which "dramatiz[e] the chicanery associated with a variety of modern fads and movements" mirror *The Spirit-Rapper* in both form and content.<sup>30</sup> While Reynolds emphasizes the novels' shared dystopic settings and their amalgamations of occult and reform

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<sup>28</sup> There seems to be a critical consensus that Brownson grew increasingly disillusioned with the moral and spiritual makeup of his countrymen, particularly the youthful ones, over the course of his career. Franchot links this increasing pessimism with his increasingly secure ties to Catholicism: "The more secure Brownson's own rescue," she argues, "the less he predicted salvation for his culture" (347). James Emmett Ryan's "Orestes Brownson in Young America: Popular Books and the Fate of Catholic Criticism" argues that in Brownson's writing "young America metamorphoses from a nationalistic politico-literary stance into a flexible weapon of religious cultural critique. 'Young America,' rather than signifying political idealism and literary innovation, instead became an epithet suggesting the naiveté and shallowness of American social mores and cultural production that obstruct the development of American religion" (444).

<sup>29</sup> Butler argues that this has much to do with the fact that "prior commentators do not consider it an important work in philosophy, theology, or psychology" (158). Schelssinger Jr., for example, refers to it as "a work of few merits . . . an overly long and oddly tedious tale, good-natured, but having throughout the air of a bad joke" (*A Pilgrim's Progress*, 225-226). For Butler, however, "it is an important work in political thought because it shows that he was acutely sensitive to the motivating spiritual forces behind modern revolutionary political symbolism" (158).

<sup>30</sup> (566). Reynolds includes Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857) in this grouping, as well as C.W. Webber's *Spiritual Vampirism: This History of Etherial Softdown* (1853), a novel which links spiritualism, women's rights, and "the pseudosciences" as part of a secret "Council of Disorganization" headed by a female villain. *The Spirit-Rapper* (1854) and *Lucy Boston* (1855) also make the list.

agendas, it is also worth pointing out that many of these texts also evince a measure of Brownson's affinity for both the form and content of the wonder tale. One of these in particular, *Lucy Boston: or Woman's Rights and Spiritualism, Illustrating the Follies and Delusions of the 19th Century*, published by the pseudonymous Fred. Folio a year after *The Spirit-Rapper* in 1855, shares both *The Spirit-Rapper's* antifeminist intent and the discourse of wonder. A supposed expose of the spiritualist agenda of "universal female dominion" it too linked spiritualist practitioners to demonic agency: "as Satan used the serpent, in like manner the spirits impress individuals into their service" (51).

The height of the action in the novel is the diabolically-driven plot to end society by destabilizing gender norms and giving women public agency. To this end, the text dramatizes the takeover of the New York legislature by feminists and mediums who aim to remake earthly society into a vision of spiritual paradise, where "woman holds the sceptre, [and] man obeys" (51). To aid their cause, the revolutionary mediums channel a diverse cast of spirits, including Saint Paul, Thomas Paine, and John Calvin. Despite the aid of these luminaries, the revolution utterly destroys the society it seeks to remake: "The Ship of State, remodeled and new-rigged with such dispatch, launched so triumphantly, and without ballast, chart, compass, or practical helmsman, under the mighty press of her canvass, dashing through foam and spray, among rocks, quick sands and whirlpools, on the sea of Experiment, had quickly foundered and gone to pieces amid darkness and tempest" (403).

The nautical metaphor for female failure is a particularly appropriate one, since the revolution begins at the hands of a spectral mermaid who appears to her chosen thrall in a vision. A beautiful apparition who is quite self-consciously a wonder, she describes herself as prodigious, but not the kind of prodigy she has heretofore been classified as: "I am...not the fabled monster, false and ingrate man hath made me" (41). The figure of the mermaid is a fascinating choice, not least for its complex history. Mermaids represented both an old archetype of wonderful phenomena, a staple of Renaissance cabinets of curiosities as well as a

newly revived and highly recognizable archetype of antebellum pseudoscience. P.T. Barnum's infamous Fiji Mermaid exhibit ran, amidst much controversy and carefully engineered spectacle, from 1842 until the 1860s.<sup>31</sup> The Fiji mermaid was a singularly unlovely specimen of a monkey's body sewn to a fish's tail and Barnum exhibited it despite his naturalist's protests that it couldn't possibly be authentic.

*Lucy Boston's* spectral mermaid, then, has plenty to be angry about, as she believes herself to have been falsely represented and exploited for male gain, which, as she points out, is typical of men, and the reason they must be punished: "when Imploring royal woman, to restore The 'rights of man,' for answer this receive, \* Remember woman's wrongs" (46).<sup>32</sup> While she presents herself as a wonder men have lied about, she quickly reveals herself also to be, to the perspective of a good patriarchal Christian at least, a lying wonder: she, like any good witch, aims to remake the visible world in the image of her own desires, subverting the natural order and giving women dominion over men: "On earth...Shall man to his own proper level fall, And woman rise, her place to take" (46). While this project doesn't end well, it is, for a while, a "wonderful" threat.

Women as wonderful threats, or threatening wonders, present a real menace for writers like Brownson and Folio; their interactions with the invisible world produce dramatic, (and for Folio, literally nightmarish) effects. Their dramatic potential makes them both recognizable cautionary tales but also compelling loci for and embodiments of invisible world potential. Brownson's Priscilla, like *Lucy Boston's* mermaid, haunts the novel that ostensibly works to contain her. Even after Priscilla has supposedly been redeemed into the role of decent wife and mother, the reverberations of her other selves remain; she is more entertaining than didactic. A number of contemporary reviewers found themselves more amused than persuaded by the

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of Barnum's Fiji mermaid, see Levi's "P.T. Barnum and the Fiji Mermaid."

<sup>32</sup> While the novel never explicitly references the Fiji mermaid, it is dedicated to one "Murab," whom the author lionizes for "the immortal honor of having first verified the existence of that hitherto fabulous amalgamation of fish and flesh the Mermaid."

antifeminist agenda espoused by Brownson and his conservative contemporaries. Reviews of *Lucy Boston*, for example, ranged from straight-forward endorsements of its platform to appreciation of the entertaining content without much regard for the gendered message. *The Criterion* sincerely if hyperbolically praised the "chivalry" of the author and his project, a "bright lance gallantly [rung] on the black buckler of error," while *Telegraph Nashua N. H.* argued that the message need not get in the way of the medium: "there is a deal of fun in it, which may be enjoyed, even by those who believe in Spiritualism and Woman's Rights." Because these wondrous women ultimately represent "A deal of fun" as easily, and even more easily, than they do the kind of transformative demonic agenda that Brownson wishes to warn against, it is his medium, rather than his message, that endures.

## Coda

### Afterlives: Domesticating the Invisible World

*The Spirit-Rapper* and its invisible world archive also appear in Herman Melville's short story "The Apple-Tree Table: Or, Original Spiritual Manifestations, published in *Putnam's* in 1856. A satire of satires like *The Spirit-Rapper*, "The Apple-Tree Table" discards Brownson's antifeminist, anitspiritualist agenda while offering Melville's own take on America's relationship with its invisible world history. The story picks up and links the Puritan past, the spiritualist present, and the accompanying discourse of wonderful phenomena from Brownson's text while satirizing his millennial anxiety. The narrative, which draws upon a New England wonder tale about bug larva that survives and hatches from an apple-wood table nearly a century after the original tree was cut down, had appeared in both Reverend Timothy Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York* (1821) and D.D. Field's *A History of Berkshire County, Mass* (1829), and, more famously, in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). The story, which concerns a supposedly haunted table discovered in the garret of the new England home purports to trace the "original spiritual manifestations" apparently evidenced by the table's mysterious movements and noises. These manifestations turn out to be bugs, which hatch after the table is restored and moved to the light and heat of the downstairs parlor. "The Apple-Tree Table" explicitly satirizes *The Spirit-Rapper*; it adapts one of the central props of the novel, a mesmerized table that provides the spirit rapper with instructions from the devil, into a running joke. Moreover, Melville's "satanic table" turns out to actually be what Brownson emphatically claimed all spiritualist manifestations absolutely could not be: an exemplum of (harmless) natural phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Karcher's article, "The Spiritual Lesson of Melville's Apple-Tree Table," which contains not only the Brownson/Melville comparison but also a careful summary of the (relatively sparse) critical perspective on the story. Karcher also argues for "The Apple-Tree Table" as a preliminary incarnation of the "satire of satires" format he would go on to perfect in *The Confidence Man*.

“The Apple-Tree Table” is a wonder tale that both celebrates and domesticates the Puritan supernatural, making the quintessential American household, particularly the parlor, the site of visible and invisible world overlap. The story’s narrator, whose tale vacillates between hyper-rational denial and supernaturally-inflected anxiety, ultimately dispenses with both narrative agency and invisible world custodianship altogether, making both the story and its substantiating wonderful evidences the purview of his young daughters. In consigning the Puritan supernatural, and its narrative trajectory, to female custody, Melville’s narrator taps into a familiar vein of gendered anxiety in supernatural narratives, one that has run through all of the texts in this study, from Brown’s *Wieland* through to Brownson’s *The Spirit-Rapper*. Melville’s choice, to hand the tradition back to female arbiters, is a telling one: the daughters in “The Apple-Tree Table” have much more in common with Clara Wieland than with either Hawthorne’s or Brownson’s Priscillas. For all of that, however, the supernatural agency they claim is not transformative, either for themselves or their societies. There are no Mary Conants or Hope Leslies in Melville’s story. If Melville concedes the supernatural to be a feminine purview, there is little evidence, to paraphrase Nina Baym, that he meant it to be a feminist one.<sup>2</sup> “The Apple-Tree Table” argues for the invisible world as part of a stable domestic heritage, not a means of supernaturally-inflected reform. Still, “The Apple-Tree Table” is also a far cry from Brownson’s antifeminism; in its safely domestic sphere it moves beyond *The Spirit-Rapper’s* anxieties and gestures towards a later iteration of the invisible world.

For Melville, the comedy of the supernatural, and its enduring potential, lies not in the extraordinary, but in the essentiality. “The Apple-Tree Table,” then, presents both Puritan attic and Spiritualist parlor as a kind of stable invisible world heritage, ultimately making an argument for the enduring legacy of the Puritan supernatural as a vital part of the American literary tradition and cultural imagination. While much of the criticism of the novel, including

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<sup>2</sup> Baym makes this argument in her introduction to Elizabeth Stuart Ward’s “Gates,” novels, which portray the other world as a recreation of earthly domestic space. Baym sees the novels’ spirit as “profoundly feminine,” but, “whether it is feminist or not is a matter for debate” (xii).

Karcher's, has focused on the significance of the apple-tree table, it is not the only, or even the most significant, supernatural artifact in the story. It is, in fact, part of a set, one discovered by the narrator in the dusty old garret, a space several critics have argued is a representation of America's Calvinist past, complete with a dilapidated copy of Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*.<sup>3</sup> The narrator, in fact, restores both, pairing Puritan text and spiritualist table, then sitting up late into the night at the table to read Cotton Mather.

The narrator encounters them both together, "in the least lighted corner of all . . . stood the little old table, one hooped foot, like that of the Evil One, dimly revealed through the cobwebs . . . and how strangely looked the mouldy old book in the middle—Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*," and takes equal pains to restore them both, having "the dislocations of the one and the tatters of the other" repaired together (14). In restoring table and book together, Melville repairs an explicitly literary tradition of the Puritan supernatural alongside the liminal artifact of the table, with one (wooden) foot literally in the demonically inflected, biblically infused tradition of Calvinism, while simultaneously evoking the table-rapping, mesmeric potential of spiritualism. A parodic echo of the table that Brownson's spirit rapper so memorably mesmerizes and then recognizes as a direct line to conversation with the devil, the apple-tree table offers the

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<sup>3</sup> The few existing critical treatments of "The Apple-Tree Table," frequently begin with the same explanation for the story's neglect—its subject matter. According to Karcher the story "enjoys a unique place among [Melville's] works as a topical satire on a current religious movement: the Spiritualist cult of the 1850s" (101). "This asset," she argues, "has also proved a bane; for the apparent narrowness of its subject has consigned 'The Apple-Tree Table' to near oblivion" (101). Most critics also conclude that spiritualism is the surface, rather than the substance, of the story. Like Frank Davidson, who first argued that "The Apple-Tree Table" was being unfairly "passed over as a good natured satire directed at the spiritualists and their séances while these were in an early stage of decay" since "this level of meaning, though it be present, is only cover for another of profounder depth," Karcher ultimately concludes that the real significance of the work lies not in the plethora of overt spiritualist trappings, including a noise-making table and allusions to the Fox Sisters" (479). Instead, Davidson and Karcher both see the story as a record of Melville's "thoughts on religion at a key time in his life" (Davidson 479). Davidson sees it as a record of Melville "taking stock in 1856 of his speculations on Calvinism, the liberalization of Calvinistic thought, the intermingling of good and evil, paganism, nature and spirit, and the immortality of man" (484). Karcher sees a multilayered satire that uses the "triviality" of spiritualism's "certitude of a life immortal [based] on incidents so banal" as it "subtly implicates Christianity as a whole in its indictment of spiritualism" (105). Cook sees the ostensibly spiritualist subject matter as fodder for an exercise in "typographical symbolism [that] illustrates the importance of this exegetical method both as a symbolic model for his imagination and as a means of dramatizing his ongoing problems of faith" (122). He reads the narrator as the typological analog of Adam, Noah, Moses and Solomon, arguing ultimately that invoking these biblical tropes allows Melville to evoke "the familiar conflict between religion and science that constituted an outstanding intellectual debate of the era" (121). In agreeing with the critical consensus that the "The Apple-Tree Table" offers much more than *only* spiritualism, I want to insist upon the relevance of spiritualism's primary analogy—Puritanism.



“forbidden fruit” of both traditions, but it is never without the guiding context of the *Magnalia*. In fact, the narrator’s experiences with the table are shaped by his reading of Mather’s work, which offers the narrator, with “all the plainness and poetic boldness of truth . . . detailed accounts of New England witch-craft, each important item corroborated by respectable townfolk, and, of not a few of the most surprising, he himself had been an eye-witness.”<sup>4</sup> When the table begins to rap and tick, the narrator responds not with joy or even curiosity at what seems like quintessentially spiritualist phenomena, but rather with the terror of a good Puritan when faced with the potential for demonic manifestations.

“The Apple-Tree Table” appeared in the same issue of *Putnam’s* that contained an article entitled “The Spirits in 1692, and What They Did At Salem.” The decidedly hostile article is brutally explicit about the parallels it draws between “witchcraft hysteria” and “the spiritualist craze,” and it condemns Mather as a “pedantic, painstaking, self-complacent, ill-balanced man,” clearly guilty of “slavishness and malignity” as well as “credulity” and “an unwise and superstitious curiosity about devils and spirits.”<sup>5</sup> In these allegations, the anonymous author articulates what had become boilerplate anti-spiritualist rhetoric, and Melville, an avid reader and consumer of a variety of print media, would almost certainly have been familiar with these arguments. But the villainous Cotton Mather of these accounts is not the one he brings to life in “The Apple-Tree Table.”

Unlike Brownson, who invokes Cotton Mather’s archival potential by reincarnating him as a flesh-and-blood character, Melville chooses an explicitly literary form. It is the *Magnalia* he chooses to bring to life, with the specter of Cotton Mather the *author* behind it. The table’s manifestations begin while he reads the *Magnalia*, and it is to the book’s imaginative effects that the narrator first attributes his experiences: “I began to think that much midnight reading of

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<sup>4</sup> (19). It is worth pointing out here that Melville’s narrator’s has condensed the two volume, seven book reality of the *Magnalia* into a narrative on “New England witches,” a repetition of the popular tendency to condense Mather’s complicated legacy, and the scope of his authorship into a metonym for the Puritan supernatural.

<sup>5</sup> See Weinauer for an extended discussion of this article and their overlap.

Cotton Mather was not good for man; that it had a morbid influence upon the nerves, and gave rise to hallucinations. I resolved to put Cotton Mather permanently aside” (23). Moreover, even when the narrator attempts to insist upon Mather as “a practical, hard-working, earnest, upright man, a learned doctor, too, as well as a good Christian and orthodox clergyman” and compares his belief in witches and demons to Dr. Johnson, the “matter-of fact-compiler of a dictionary” and also “a believer in ghosts,” working him into a tradition of “sound, worthy men,” he also confesses to his perception, and enjoyment, of Mather as an *entertainer*. Before the table starts ticking, “in my previous night-readings, Cotton Mather had but amused me . . . A thousand times I had laughed at such stories. Old wives’ fables, I thought, however entertaining” (18). When the manifestations begin, the narrator tries to make the *Magnalia* not literature but science, and its accounts “began to put on the aspect of reality. Now for the first time it struck me that this was no romantic Mrs. Radcliffe, who had written the *Magnalia*” (18). “The aspect of reality,” however, is no more than the mark of compelling fiction, and the analog of Mather and gothic novelist Anne Radcliffe keeps the narrator’s experiences firmly inside the frame of literary entertainment. Moreover, while the narrator wishes explicitly to contrast the fancies and imaginative transports of the female novelist with the sober rationality of the male chronicler-theologian, he himself illustrates not the comforting familiarity of gender-binaries, but rather a distinct gender fluidity.

From the beginning Melville reverses the gendered polarity of spiritual affinity. It is the narrator, rather than his wife and daughters, who provokes invisible world phenomena, while they resist its intrusion into their rationally-ordered domestic space. Knowing that his daughters “were well enough pleased to see the entrance to the haunted ground closed,” the narrator investigates the attic anyway, and he insists upon introducing his “satanic looking” treasures to the family parlor, despite the fact that his daughters explicitly “besought me to give up the idea of domesticating the table” (17). In fact, Melville moves his narrator through a variety of

stereotypically feminine roles in relation to the table.<sup>6</sup> The first of these occurs when he first carries it down from the attic to the parlor:

    Holding it by the slab, I was carrying it before me, one cobwebbed hoof thrust out, which weird object at a turn of the stairs, suddenly touched my girl, as she was ascending; whereupon, turning, and seeing no living creature—for I was quite hidden behind my shield—seeing nothing indeed, but the apparition of the Evil One’s foot, as it seemed, she cried out, and there is no knowing what might have followed, had I not immediately spoken. (16)

Behind the physical comedy of this moment, in which the narrator accidentally runs into his daughter with the foot of the awkwardly balanced table, Melville weaves in a darker thread: the narrator doesn’t just run into his daughter with the table, he afflicts her with it—an invisible (spectral) presence commanding the apparition of the “Evil One’s foot” to strike a young girl. Like the afflicted girls whose testimony of spectral torments touched off the Salem witch trials, his daughter’s first instinct is to “cry out,” which she does. Even though he “immediately” speaks to dispel the illusion, and so forestalls the potentially ominous consequences (“there is no knowing what might have followed”) of a domestic witch-hunt, the girl remains “superstitiously grieved” at her father’s actions (16).

Having momentarily tried on the stereotypically female role of the witch while transporting the table, the narrator then tries on the identity’s rough nineteenth-century equivalent when the table reaches its new station in the parlor, becoming an unwitting medium. The first (and for a good time the only) one to hear the table’s ticking, the narrator, rather than his daughters, despite their frequent chorusing of “spirits, spirits,” experiences the real “spiritual” effects of the treasures he has taken it upon himself to retrieve. Significantly, the narrator does not experience the table’s phenomena before first being mesmerized by the effects

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<sup>6</sup> In her chapter, “Hawthorne, Melville, and the Spirits,” in which she argues that Melville, like Hawthorne, was unable to dismiss spiritualism because of its engagement with issues of “autonomy” and “(male) personage,” Weinauer points out that Melville’s narrator not only moves between the perspectives of Democritus and Cotton Mather but also “masculinity and femininity” (313, 316).

of the *Magnalia*. As Ellen Weinauer points out, “the ironically bewitching Mather” prepares the narrator for a “loss of autonomy” (315). The narrator experiences the text as a type of literary possession, reading “under a sort of fascination,” which literally enthralls him, keeping him at the table, in the darkened parlor, reading long into the night (18). So personally does he feel the presence of “Cotton Mather—doleful, ghostly, ghastly Cotton Mather,” and the suspicion that “spirits haunt a tea table..the Evil One dare show his cloven foot in the bosom of an innocent family” that halfway through the story the narrator desperately searches for the spirit of another author to take over possession. He settles upon Democritus, the ancient Greek philosopher whom he lionizes based on the philosopher’s “foregone conclusion, that any possible investigation of any possible spiritual phenomena was absurd; that upon the first face of such things, the mind of a sane man instinctively affirmed them a humbug, unworthy the least attention” (30-31). Democritus, however, fails to adequately drive out Cotton Mather.

When the bugs do appear, the narrator channels not Democritus, but Cotton Mather, standing “becharmed” and wondering “are there indeed spirits?” Applying a scientific perspective is an act not of instinct but of will, “supernatural coruscation as it appeared, I strove to look at the strange object in a purely scientific way” (34). In short order, however, the “purely scientific” dissolves back into the potentially supernatural, as he, like his daughters, moves easily away from the scientific track. When he asks if they see the crack left by the bug, one daughter answers, “yes, yes . . . that was what frightened me so; it looks so like witch-work” (37). As the bug’s cavity becomes physical evidence of the supernatural, a witch’s mark that designates the table’s spectral agency, the bug itself becomes a spectral presence: “A bug—a bug! . . . I feel it crawling all over me, even now. Haunted table! Spirits! Spirits!” (38). Meanwhile, his relentlessly practical wife, who “without knowing it herself . . . was a female Democritus” sees spirits as “nursery nonsense” and “the most foolish of all foolish imaginations,” and can easily embody the skepticism her husband craves (43). “Mrs. Democritus,” whom Weinauer describes as “in essence a rational man,” envisions roach powder as the solution; the narrator thinks

instead she might “call in some old dominie to exorcise the table and draw out the spirits.”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, then, when the daughters chose to follow the spiritualist rather than scientific path, they are following in the footsteps of their father. In addition, Melville’s narrator gives himself over to his supernatural experiences in ways that his daughters, at least until they themselves witness the phenomena first-hand, do not. Along with the fears incited by the *Magnalia*’s magnetic pages and the table’s ominous tickings, there are also significant thrills, not to mention the odd satisfaction of channeling two diametrically opposed perspectives: “in a strange and not unpleasing way, I gently oscillated between Democritus and Cotton Mather” (44). The odd, almost sexual satisfaction the narrator derives from submerging his own identity in not one but two others, at times declaring himself “Democritus forever” and at others “Cotton Mather,” is an act of mediumistic promiscuity most typically illustrated as one of the feminine perils of spiritualism. However, what in *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Spirit-Rapper* would have had tragic consequences, in “The Apple-Tree Table” only produces comedic ones.

In taking the *Magnalia* and the apple-tree table, the principle relics of the cobwebby garret that represents nothing so much as a fossilized shrine to Calvinism, down the “pulpit-stairway” into the parlor, Melville’s narrator amalgamates the supernatural heritage of the early American tradition with the supernatural modernity of the nineteenth-century parlor. In insisting upon the place of Puritan artifacts, particularly the *Magnalia*, Melville conflates spectral and spiritual evidence, and in showcasing the confines of a single house as a naturally supernatural space, with “goblins aloft” and spiritual bugs “embalmed in silver vinaigrette” on the mantle, he establishes not just the domestic compatibility of supernatural phenomena but also those phenomena’s role in an essential lineage (10, 51). Rather than being the province of radical reformers or demonically inspired masterminds, the Puritan supernatural is, if not comfortable, then at least familiar, a fundamental component of even the most conventional

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<sup>7</sup> Weinauer 316; Melville 39. For an analysis of Democritus not as the bastion of rationality that the narrator portrays but rather the Laughing Philosopher who insisted upon the essentiality of human folly, see Pribek.

American existence. Moreover, in writing a Cotton Mather who is more Mrs. Radcliffe than Professor Johnson, and creating a narrator drawn to him for exactly that reason, Melville punctures the edges of the polarized gender binaries associated with nineteenth-century supernatural perceptions while insisting, first and foremost, on the literary potential of invisible world heritage.

Carolyn Karcher sees the battle between Democritus and Cotton Mather as ultimately a victory for Democritus, who “wins out in the end, when a natural explanation for the ticking exorcises once and for all the specter of diabolical invasion” (“Spiritual Lesson” 106). This reading only holds, however, if one considers Cotton Mather’s stake in “The Apple-Tree Table” to be the actual existence of demonic manifestations. And while this is definitely his role in *The Spirit-Rapper*, in “The Apple-Tree Table,” he functions somewhat differently, as a literary, rather than literal figure. And as a literary figure, Cotton Mather’s victory is clear. Thomas Cook ends his analysis of Melville’s story by asking “whether Melville’s use of a typological design in “The Apple-Tree Table” is intended as an ironic parody of this mode of Christian exegesis or as a testament to its continuing power as a mode of figural language” (136). The answer to this question, I think, is yes, or rather, both, and the same could be said if the same question were asked about the potency of the invisible world. The story is comedic, but that comedy is nonetheless a powerful preservative.

In Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1821), one of the first things the villagers do upon the disappearance of their credulous schoolmaster is to burn the books he left behind, “Cotton Mather’s History of Witchcraft, a New England Almanac, and a book of dreams and fortune-telling,” which of a piece are written off as “magic books” from which no good can come (316). For Irving, destroying Mather’s literary legacy is interrupting a dangerous tradition of superstition and credulity. Melville, on the other hand, takes pains to preserve that legacy. Not only does his narrator carefully repair Mather’s tomb, he also preserves it, and though at the height of his interactions with the ticking table he attempts to distance himself, at least

physically, from the volume, “with trembling hands, putting Cotton Mather out of sight,” he never successfully puts Cotton Mather, or his *Magnalia*, out of mind. It is not the book that gets burned in “The Apple-Tree Table,” it’s the bug. And while the bugs’ fates reenact the perils of both witchcraft (burning alive) and spiritualism (the reduction of spiritual truth to the petty reality of a commoditized object for parlor display), nothing so undignified happens to the *Magnalia*. The text, as the primary creator of the story’s context, survives unscathed.

In “The Apple-Tree Table,” Melville folds the authority of a Mrs. Democritus and the imaginative fancies of an avid reader of Cotton Mather, as well as the antics of a pair of highly impressionable young girls intent upon learning “spiritual lessons,” into a single household, marking that household as a stable space nevertheless thoroughly inflected by the invisible world. Just as “The Apple-Tree Table” makes the domestic sphere stable and expansive enough to contain spiritual realms, it makes the “angel in the house” a role flexible and powerful enough to include a wife who acts as an incarnation of rational philosophy.<sup>8</sup> In the last lines of the story, Melville invokes Puritan precedent even as he reinforces feminine purview:

And whatever lady doubts this story, my daughters will be happy to show her both the bug and the table, and point out to her, in the repaired slab of the latter, the two sealing-wax drops designating the exact place of the two holes made by the two bugs, something in the same way in which are marked the spots where the cannon balls struck Brattle Street Church (51).

Brattle Street Church, as Frank Davidson pointed out “is significant, as this was the first in Boston to revolt against the Calvinism of the Mathers in favor of a more liberalized form of worship” (480). That Melville invokes the Brattle Street church in connection to the table here, however, is not significant as an act of defiance but rather as an allusion to the continuity of the Mathers’ legacy—the ticking table and its spiritual bugs are of a piece with the same

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<sup>8</sup> Thompson argues that “The Apple-Tree Table became an active voice in the call for women’s liberation from patriarchal authority, and, more specifically, from many of the ideals of domesticity that permeated mid-nineteenth century society” (38). While this seems to me an overstatement, I do think that Melville is deliberately drawing attention to gendered structures and the limitations of “femininity.”

supernatural story. At the same time, in this last paragraph the narrator effectively hands custody of this narrative to his daughters and an explicitly female audience. The parlor in which the insect and table are displayed is at once a safely domestic space and the legitimate realm of rational supernatural inquiry. Their custodians, Mrs. Democritus and her daughters, while neither witches nor mediums, and far cries from the subversive eloquence of Clara Wieland, Miriam Grey, and Hope Leslie, are also not tragic Zenobias or Priscillas.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps posits a similar intersection of safely domestic and legitimately supernatural space in her “Gates” novels. A series of three works connected by title and subject matter, if not characters, she published the first, *The Gates Ajar*, in 1868, the second *Beyond the Gates*, fifteen years later, and finally, *The Gates Between* in 1887. All three novels are deeply invested in the question of supernatural space. What begins as a discourse on the nature of heaven in *The Gates Ajar* becomes the impetus for explorations of non-heavenly, but non-earthly invisible realms. In these realms, spiritual life, and supernatural interaction, both follow domestic, feminine patterns and supplant the realities of existence in the visible sphere. In the first novel, *The Gates Ajar*, Phelps’s narrator Mary, grieving for a brother killed in battle, is slowly convinced by her widowed aunt that heaven, and its inhabitants, are, in spite of death, always close at hand. This rationale requires a careful reconfiguration of supernatural geography, one that does not end with the exploration of heaven but instead evolves into a quest to define the (infinitely superior) spiritual realm:

The truth is, [God] has obviously not *opened* the gates which bar heaven from our sight, but he has obviously not *shut* them; they stand ajar, with the Bible and reason in the way, to keep them from closing; surely we should look in as far as we can, and surely, if we look with reverence our eyes will be holden, that we may not cheat ourselves with mirages. And, as the little Swedish girl said, the first time she saw the stars: ‘O father, if the *wrong side* of heaven is so beautiful, what must the *right side* be? (133)

So taken is she with this exploration that Mary substitutes the spiritual world for visible reality,



withdrawing from the everyday to contemplate the eternal: “But now—I cannot help it—that is the reality, this the dream; that the substance, this the shadow” (109). In fact, this phrase becomes a repeated mantra as she impatiently waits out her earthly tenure in anticipation of a spiritual one. In the later novels, protagonists don’t just lose themselves in visions of supernatural space, they inhabit it. In *Beyond the Gates*, the narrator, ill to the brink of death, sojourns in the spiritual realm under the care of her deceased father. Over the course of the novel, she learns to function in supernatural space, establishing herself in her father’s household and even briefly reuniting with the spirit of a deceased beau before returning to her less-than-satisfying earthly existence. In *The Gates Between*, the deceased male protagonist must care for his (also dead) son in the spirit world. The process transforms him into a worthy father and a suitable husband for the still-living wife whose arrival he awaits with increasingly domestic fervor. In all three novels, Phelps’s figurations of the afterlife, as Baym points out, offer not a closed endpoint that is the traditional heaven, but rather an “interim space,” a liminal realm between natural and supernatural realms predicated on two-way traffic between the two (xxii). For Phelps, the visible/invisible overlap was everything, and the model she offered was an appealing one for many.

*The Gates Ajar*, despite certain generic oddities, was an immediate bestseller. It provoked intense reactions, particularly from women, who showered Phelps with thousands of letters and stories of their own grief.<sup>9</sup> Much of the novel’s appeal can be explained by its immediate context. Numerous scholars point to the change effected in the ways postbellum Americans processed occult beliefs, and spiritual phenomena, as the result of the devastating carnage of the Civil War, which dealt death on a massive scale. Not just unprecedented numbers

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<sup>9</sup> See Baym’s introduction for a description of Phelps’ resulting celebrity and her subsequent literary career, particularly its concern for female issues and focus on female audiences. Weinstein argues that the novel’s form, a series of journal entries that range vary widely in terms time, tense, and length, reflects its content. She sees the “(re)arranging of grief . . . [as] a profoundly temporal exercise” and argues that its oddity is part of its appeal, as “women in pain,” as Phelps’s audience of post-war mourners would have been, “require a different language” (64, 59). Like *The Spirit Rapper*, *The Gates Ajar* and their sequels defy easy generic classification; also like *The Spirit-Rapper*, the legacy of the invisible world lies at the heart of their appeal.

of dead, but the process of dying as an anonymous, undignified, and incomprehensibly quick, created a need for supernatural proximity. Loved ones could not simply be gone, so their spirits not only needed to endure, they needed to inhabit a spirit world that was close and permeable.<sup>10</sup>

In such an atmosphere, it arouses little wonder that the invisible world would be especially appealing as a familiar, and domestic, realm. In her novels, Phelps offers an invisible world that perfectly reflects the visible one, a static kingdom designed with spectral streets, households, and even pianos, a space at first glance so safe, obvious, and appealing as to be worlds away from the Puritan wilderness of potentially misreadable signs. Its basis, however, rests upon a familiar Puritan paradigm. The crucial proximity of supernatural and natural spaces remains, and its relationship to the visible world, as a mirror and overlap of invisible potential, the “wrong side” of Heaven whose every object nonetheless exactly corresponds to “heavenly types” replicates and refashions the idea of wonders, making everyday objects signposts for spiritual equivalents (*Gates Ajar* 133, 81). The daughter of a staunch Calvinist, Phelps drew upon its foundations, radically imagining them as safe, feminized spaces. Her invisible world was not the space of spiritualist utopias or the font of feminist uprisings, but it offered a female reimagining of a masculine paradigm, one that made the supernatural once again an accessible female purview.<sup>11</sup>

With this future in mind, then, it is worth returning for a moment to Melville’s Mrs. Democritus and her daughters. It would be easy, given the wife’s nickname and unwavering practicality in regards to the apparently possessed table, to read her as supernatural skepticism embodied; in fact, she is merely the personification of domestic order. Melville characterizes her as much by her domestic authority as by her steadfast insistence upon a “natural” solution, such as roach powder, tack hammers, or the wood pile, to the problem posed by the table. She dislikes

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<sup>10</sup> See Faust for a compelling overview of the way the Civil War changed American attitudes towards and understandings of death and dying.

<sup>11</sup> Phelps dedicated *The Gates Ajar* to her father, despite its severe break from the major tenets of Calvinist philosophy. For a discussion of her relationship with her father, and her opinions on Calvinism, see Baym’s introduction.

it not for its own sake, but rather for its perturbations of domestic harmony, and, worse, for the disruption it causes to the intellects of her daughters, whose capacities for empirical reason evaporate at the very beginning of the story. While they hear spirits in every noise, their mother exasperatedly reminds them about ordinary things they should already be mindful of, namely the bottled cider wired in the cellar and the baker delivering the morning's bread. Her ire is for breaches in domestic awareness and decorum, not spiritual intervention, as "it was her maternal duty . . . to drive weakness away" (17). It is her leavening rationality that forces her husband, and more importantly, her daughters, to confront and come to terms with the "spiritual lesson" that the table eventually offers.

At the end of the story, the narrator's young daughter Julia finally understands the bugs as "wonderful, very wonderful," natural signs with supernatural significance (48). Moreover, she is able to correctly diagnose, and appreciate, the bugs as wonders, even when dissuaded from doing so by both her father and the pedantic naturalist he has summoned. It is her mother's strength of will that she draws upon to resist the determined misreading offered by male authority figures, and it is her mother's parlor into which she and her sister install and oversee their wonderful evidence. Theirs, ultimately, is the narrative agency; a hybrid of female authority, and superiority in domestic space, and a historically grounded appreciation for invisible world phenomena. As both superintendents of the parlor and experts in spiritual phenomena, the narrators' daughters foreshadow the invisible world as envisioned by writers like Phelps. As custodian of the bug, table, and tale, they stand on the threshold of domesticated, feminized supernatural space.

In the later half of the nineteenth century, the invisible world, in the form of spirits and their spiritual lessons, and the larger sense of spirituality that these lessons imply, takes up residence in women's spheres and spaces. This incarnation of the invisible world permeates domestic spaces and feminine consciousness as a kind of higher authority, and so empowers women; they are no longer maligned, or even persecuted, except when they venture into the

public political sphere in search of agency that threatens the hegemonic masculine governance of visible spaces. Supernatural agency is no longer deviant or heretical, as it was with Hope Leslie and Mary Conant. For the narrator's daughters in "The Apple-Tree Table," as for Phelps' heroines, invisible world interaction is not a demonic, but rather an angelic project. Despite the limitations on this model (spiritual space and domestic space may intertwine, but public space is still forbidden), and despite the shift from transgressive to idealized models of feminine agency, this domestication of the invisible world participates in the existing tradition of religiously-inspired rewrites to feminine archetypes and the inherited paradigm of feminine supernatural agency, and thus maintains its ties to the projects of the earlier editors who have been the subject of this dissertation project. No longer persecuted as deviants, albeit sometimes mocked as overstepping their bounds of their domesticated world, supernaturally-inclined women of the later nineteenth century take up their stations as powerfully authoritative narrators, less Hawthorne's "damned mob" than an angelic chorus of feminine spirituality. As such, they possess a literary "substantiality" that conveys still the intersections of the two worlds—the invisible world of godly presences and providential guidance and the visible world of morality, enacted through new codifications of the spirit made manifest. The worlds and words imagined and inscribed in the works of these later-nineteenth-century American novelists offer a new destiny and destination unforeseen by, but nonetheless linked to, the supernatural visions of Puritans like Winthrop and the Mathers.

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