

Stony Brook University



OFFICIAL COPY

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

© All Rights Reserved by Author.

A Sphere by Oneself: Hawthorne and Self-Reliance

A Thesis Presented

by

Kevin Johns

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Stony Brook University

May 2010

Stony Brook University
The Graduate School

Kevin Johns

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

Andrew Newman - Thesis Advisor
Assistant Professor, English

Eric Haralson - Second Reader
Associate Professor, English

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

A Sphere by Oneself: Hawthorne and Self-Reliance

by

Kevin Johns

Master of Arts

in

English

Stony Brook University

2010

This thesis looks at the use of isolation within the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, focusing on "Roger Malvin's Burial," while highlighting his points through several of his other short stories and *The Scarlet Letter*. This will primarily focus on the isolation of the one from society who is still apart of it; by that I mean the person who lives in society, interacts with those around him, but holds something inside which isolates him from the others. I pay particular attention to his use of guilt and secret sin, as well as Nature. Guilt and secret sin disease the minds of his characters, forcing their isolation to create misery. Nature is used by Hawthorne both as a way to mirror the emotions of the characters within it and, particularly the forest, as a way to delve into the subconscious of the main characters. I tie these discoveries together throughout the text through a comparison of Hawthorne's views with those of the transcendental writers who wrote at the same time as him, focusing on Emerson's "Nature" and "Self-Reliance" and Thoreau's *Walden*.

Table of Contents

A Sphere by Oneself: Hawthorne and Self-Reliance.....	1
Works Cited.....	32

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "Roger Malvin's Burial", Hawthorne explores the destructive nature of prolonged isolation, especially when coupled with the effects of guilt. By closely reading this text and comparing it to his other works, this relationship becomes clear, as do his overall views on the necessity of isolation. It is necessary, I will prove, because all people are alone at one point or another; because isolation allows for art to develop, ideas to flourish, and appreciation for the outside world to grow. But, unlike his transcendental contemporaries, Hawthorne does not see isolation as necessarily being good at all times, and sees a definitive need to escape that isolation and rejoin society at large after a time.

"Roger Malvin's Burial" is, in brief, a story about the life of Reuben Bourne after a traumatic event in the forest with his friend and father-figure, Roger Malvin. The two men are survivors of the battle "Lovel's Fight" where Roger was badly wounded. He can no longer travel on with Reuben back to their town and the two men have a lengthy discussion, which results in Reuben abandoning Roger in the woods, with the promise that he will either send men back to save him or bury him, and that he will marry Roger's daughter, Dorcas. Once he returns to the village, Reuben lies and says that Roger died and that he buried him to the best of his ability. This leads to great praise of Reuben, and he and Dorcas marry. Reuben's life becomes plagued by difficulties, so he decides to move with his wife and their son, Cyrus, to the frontier and establish a new home in the forest. While in the forest, Cyrus and Reuben go out to hunt for deer, and

Reuben inadvertently kills Cyrus at the same rock where he left Roger. Through this murder, Reuben feels that he has expiated his sin and unburdens his mind.

Reuben Bourne is the victim of societal pressures toward an unrealistic and highly problematic code of chivalry. Through this code, Reuben sees the man who he wishes he could be; the man who he is told he should be. The problem, however, is that this code of chivalry is antiquated and impractical. It calls for Reuben's death where he could otherwise live. This system, which Reuben is neither strong enough to surpass, nor capable of following, leaves him in the difficult position of needing to lie in order to preserve his dignity.

It is in this lie, which begins the moment he starts speaking with Dorcas Malvin, Roger's daughter, that Hawthorne explores the impact of guilt and the consequences of excessive isolation. Dorcas is filled with "filial anxiety" and quickly begins probing Reuben for answers about her father. "'You dug a grave for my poor father in the wilderness, Reuben?' was the question by which her filial piety manifested itself" (Hawthorne 24). Here, Dorcas pointedly asks Reuben what the fate of her father's lifeless shell is. Reuben is now forced to make a choice: tell the truth and face scorn and ridicule from the community but be able to go rectify his misdeeds, or lie and be the chivalrous hero, as his ancestors were before him. Reuben answers in fear and lies, putting the community at ease and himself into utter turmoil.

"'My hands were weak; but I did what I could,'" replied the youth in a smothered tone. 'There stands a noble tombstone above his head; and I would to heaven that I slept as soundly as he'" (24). This is how Reuben Bourne decides to

answer Dorcas' question. His answer is sly, as it is technically true, though intended to deceive. This equivocation is far worse than any material lie can ever be. There is a level of consciousness needed for this formal lie; this level of consciousness ingrains the lie within the liar's very soul, making it a part of him. The intention behind his lie initially creates guilt within Reuben; the effects of his lie reinforce it. Reuben is now unable to rectify his sins against Roger Malvin, who acted as a father in the absence of Reuben's true father. If Roger is actually buried, as Reuben claims, then there is no need to send a party to perform the burial of Roger. Reuben also cannot go out alone to bury his surrogate father, as he lives on the frontier where men were not allowed to travel alone, for fear of Indian attacks or other equally terrifying fates.

Reuben's choice to live, and later choice to lie, is a consciously pragmatic one. The consciousness is where the error, at least for Reuben, lies. Reuben "has no ethical control at all," says Frederick Crews, who believes that the actions of Reuben were beyond his control, part of "a psychological fatalism" (458). This interpretation is a nice way of considering Reuben Bourne; it takes the fault off of him, leaving him again the victim. It also falls in with Agnes Mcneil Donahue's view that by choosing "life rather than heroism and martyrdom [he] becomes Everyman who fails his father, who is guilty of moral cowardice" (18). As Robert Daly points out, however, in "History and Chivalric Myth in 'Roger Malvin's Burial,'" "Reuben's doubling back to spy on Roger from hiding is obviously a conscious act – he had to know what he was doing in order to hide from Malvin's sight" (102). Had Reuben truly believed that he was going to get

help for his dying friend, Roger Malvin, then he would not have doubled back to check on him. This is Reuben's first lie, enabled by Roger, however ultimately accepted and acted upon by Reuben. There is, therefore, ethical control from the very beginning, and through his later lie, he does not fit the role of Everyman.

It is also important to consider Roger Malvin's role in Reuben's original decision to flee, as an important allegory within the story is Roger as Satan. While clearly Roger Malvin is not the devil, there are many striking similarities. For starters, the name Roger is a common nickname for Satan in New England. Next, if one were to translate *mal vin* from French to English, one would find it means "came to evil". Further, if one were to translate *mal vins* (with the inclusion of the 's' from the title) from French to English, one would find the meaning "that you might come to evil." Further comparisons can be found after careful examination of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where Milton describes Satan in much the same way as Hawthorne describes Roger Malvin (see Daly 103). Seeing Roger as Satan, fitting the role of tempter, as he is often portrayed, allows for a deeper understanding of the text. Roger points Reuben to the path of pragmatism and life, the path of pain and isolation. Reuben is not forced to make this choice – he is coerced, perhaps, yet even with Satan's hand guiding the way, Reuben still has to choose a life of damnation for himself.

This role of satanic tempter is not isolated to this text alone. In another of his short stories, "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne more directly explores the relationship between man and Satan. In this story, Young Goodman Brown sets out on the terrible errand of meeting with the devil: "it seems clear that

Hawthorne means us to be in no doubt that Goodman Brown has already had some contact with the forces of evil and does not hesitate to renew that contact, because he feels that he will prove superior to the temptations which may assail him" (Hurley 412). This foreknowledge of the meeting with Satan acts to separate this encounter from the encounter between Reuben and Roger, yet there is still much to be seen in comparing them. In both instances, the hero at first fights against the temptations, but ultimately falls victim to the "wiles" of the tempter. This act of accepting deceit destroys the lives of both characters by creating a guilt born from undesired knowledge.

What makes "Young Goodman Brown" a particularly important text for comparison in this discussion of isolation, however, is the way in which the story concludes. "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting?...it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate, man did he become from the night of that fearful dream" (Hawthorne 75). This question which Hawthorne places in the final paragraphs of the story force the reader to rethink the events of the preceding pages. If the events of the night had truly taken place, then surely there would have been changes to others besides Goodman Brown. He alone seems to have any knowledge of the events which occurred in the forest. There is neither any mention of the shared knowledge which Satan claims the townsfolk will now share in, nor does Faith seem to have any comprehension of where Goodman Brown was the night before (Hurley 418). Instead, we are given an account of Goodman Brown waking in the morning to a

"rock...chill and damp; while a twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew" (Hawthorne 74). This contrast of the flaming twig now covered in morning dew again forces the question of truth in the mind of the reader. According to Hurley, this contrast is "intended to signal Goodman Brown's return to a 'rational' state of mind" (418). If Hawthorne is forcing the reader to understand the events of the night before as all a dream, then what does that say about Goodman Brown, and about the life he allows himself to lead after?

"If one accepts the fact that Hawthorne gives us no valid grounds to believe in the reality of Goodman Brown's visions and voices...he must treat those events as emanations from Brown's subconscious which intimate the corruption of Brown's own mind" (Hurley 416). Now, we are getting somewhere. The tragic life of isolation which Brown ultimately lives is his own doing. He is corrupted by a self-made Satan within his mind. He has committed no sin, beheld no evil, and the good townspeople around him are still the good people he had known prior. His ability to believe the events of his dream, and the inability to come to terms with his false knowledge, create the life of isolation. This is not a healthy isolation, as we will later see, it is in the same line, instead, as Reuben Bourne's - it is based upon lies and guilt, with no wrongdoing actually committed. It is a self-created nightmare of guilt and that is the tragedy.

Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, is another text filled with destructive isolation. The most important characters to consider are Arthur Dimmesdale, whose isolation runs analogous to that of Reuben Bourne and Goodman Brown, and Roger Chillingworth, whose isolation is the most

intentionally self-made of any of Hawthorne's characters. There is, of course, also Hester Prynne, however her guilt is different because it is public knowledge, not secret. Dimmesdale, Brown, and Reuben are overcome by the effects of guilt from their secret sins. Unlike the two discussed, however, Dimmesdale did, actually, commit a crime. A crime which, perhaps, was not so bad as to warrant the life which he ultimately leads because of it. Outwardly, he initially appears to be the "simple and childlike" minister, whose words "affected them like the speech of an angel" (Hawthorne 84). He is beloved by his parishioners, and it is believed by all that he is, in fact, a man with a clean conscience. In this same initial view of Dimmesdale, Hawthorne also gives the reader the other side of this difficult character. He seemed "quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own." Hawthorne is here already showing the comfort which Dimmesdale has in isolation. He has something which keeps him within the confines of the "shadowy by-paths" rather than walking in the open (Fogle 24-25). This secret is, of course, the fact that he is the father of Pearl.

This secret, which he keeps bottled up within himself, slowly changes him. At first, it makes him a better orator and preacher, allowing him to find within himself the voice which had been hidden (Levy 388). Eventually, the guilt builds within him, until he can no longer bear it. The seeds of this difficult guilt are, however, born early within the novel. As he is questioning Hester, he explains the desire he has for his secret to be revealed, and his weakness to reveal it himself. "I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-

sufferer! Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so than to hide a guilty heart through life. What can the silence do except it tempt him – yea, compel him, as it were – to add hypocrisy to sin?” (Hawthorne 84) Here, Dimmesdale is compelling Hester to speak his name, to expunge him of his guilty heart. He explains his difficulty, stating that he is a fellow-sufferer and that, through her silence, he is tempted to add hypocrisy to sin. He understands that this lie is the difficulty which currently binds him. He sees the escape which would come through revelation. Yet, he is tempted not to speak the truth, and she will not grant him this escape, either, thinking she is doing him a kindness. Of course, when she does not speak his name, he is also relieved. “Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart! She will not speak!” (Hawthorne 85). As much as he wants his sin to be public information, he is still excited by the lack of exposure. He, like every other isolated character, is choosing to keep his secret, and thus keep his isolation and torture. He need but speak the truth of his lie and absolve himself of this guilt.

But, he cannot. And his inability to do so overtakes his life and burdens him far more than the truth ever could. In Chapter VIII, we again see Reverend Dimmesdale. This time, he is “more careworn and emaciated” than at the scaffold and “his large dark eyes had a world of pain in their troubled and melancholy depth” (Hawthorne 116). His health is failing and he is being cared for by Dr. Chillingworth, who is growing darker and colder as the novel

progresses. Dimmesdale's guilt is continuing to manifest itself in the form of a great sickness. It has consumed him and will continue to, until the end of his life. Later, in chapter IX, the minister has gone to live with a pious widow who must take care of him. Still, even in this peaceful setting, Dimmesdale “is not lacking in reminders of sin and death” (Fogle 31). He is now at a point where he sees evil, death, and sin in everything. There is no more good in his world, only pain.

Chillingworth, on the other hand, starts the novel in isolation away from society. He is shipwrecked and subsequently captured by Indians. His time away from society has changed him; it made his gaze “so familiar, and yet so strange and cold” (Hawthorne 88). He arrives in Boston in “a strange disarray of civilized and savage costume” (Hawthorne 79). He begins the novel on the precipice of savagery, and quickly falls into it. He chooses a name, Roger Chillingworth, which is quite fitting for his character. Roger, as we have already discussed, is a nickname for Satan (Daly 103). Chillingworth denotes the cold nature of this man. Hawthorne has given him a name to show the reader his place in this story (Male 96).

Upon returning to society, Chillingworth could well have been reincorporated with no difficulty. His time with the natives, “among a people well versed in the kindly properties of simples, have made a better physician of [him] than many that claim the medical degree” (Hawthorne 87). The small time away from society has made a better doctor of Chillingworth. There was a benefit to his isolation. In his reunion with society, he could now have been a more prominent member than when he had left it. Instead, he decides to re-alienate

himself from those around him by hiding his identity. Rather than proclaim that he is the husband of Hester, he instead becomes Roger Chillingworth, in order to exact his proper revenge. This decision to isolate himself from society leads to his rapid aging, even though he starts the novel, “with a furrowed visage, which, as yet, could hardly be termed aged” (Hawthorne 79).

As the story progresses, we are, each time we see him, shown a more grotesque version of Chillingworth. His strange and cold eyes darken as his entire demeanor darkens. Several years after his return to society, Hester sees Chillingworth at the meeting to decide young Pearl’s fate and, “was startled to perceive what a change had come over his features, - how much uglier they were, - how his dark complexion seemed to have grown duskier, and his figure more misshapen, - since the days when she had familiarly known him” (Hawthorne 115). Finally, at the scaffold scene which claims Dimmesdale’s life, Chillingworth attacks the stage and, “so dark, disturbed, and evil was his look,” that perhaps, “he rose up out of some nether region” (Hawthorne 212). This continuous derangement of Chillingworth is a byproduct of his isolation and lust for revenge (Male 97). Had he been capable of returning fully to society as himself, rather than as a stranger, he could have lived a full and prosperous life, rather than dying young and miserable, becoming “evil incarnate” (Male 96). Instead of guilt because of some secret sin, Chillingworth is plagued by a secret lust for revenge which corrupts his heart and forces him into an unnecessary isolation. He is the first character to grow in his initial isolation, but because he

refuses to rejoin his society when necessary, his fate is no better than the others discussed.

As we have so far seen, when secret guilt mixes with prolonged isolation, the outcomes can be catastrophic. Of course, not every character of extended isolation which Hawthorne creates leads a life of anguish and despair. Ernest, the central character of Hawthorne's short story, "The Great Stone Face", leads a quiet life of alternating isolation and social interactions, using his time alone as a time of reflection and self-growth to ultimately fulfill the prophecy and become the Great Stone Face. This story, which James J Lynch sees as a story of progressions in his article, "Structure and Allegory in 'The Great Stone Face'," tracks the life of Ernest from childhood to old age. This progression is, for Lynch, the progression of Everyman from childhood to old age. "Everyman as a child is primarily acquisitive; he surrounds himself with and is engrossed in material possessions...his home is also his hermitage...Everyman's young manhood is above all the time of action, which may bring him notice...Everyman's middle age is pre-eminently a time for words, which necessarily establish him in a social context...Finally, Everyman's old age is the time when ideas, fostered by experience with things, actions and words, and cultivated in solitude, are matured and spread abroad to help others to analyze and interpret themselves and their world" (144-145).

This progression, which is seen in the life of Ernest, is reinforced by the coming of the four imposter Great Stone Faces. First, there is Gathergold who, like the child, is engrossed by possessions and ultimately dies in isolation within

his home. Next comes Old Blood-and-Thunder who, like the young man, has lived a life of action, but as the memory of his actions fade into the past, so too does his resemblance to the Great Stone Face. Third is Old Stony Phiz, the politician, who is the middle age of Everyman, as he is a man of words, strongly established within the social world around him. He decides, however, to leave the village as he is campaigning for presidency and the townspeople soon realize he is not the man of prophecy. Finally, the poet arrives who acts as the man of old age, as he uses the experiences of his life to create insightful works (139-140). None of these men, however, can be the Great Stone Face, as none of them have properly balanced society and solitude - Gathergold and the poet become men of isolation, and Old Blood-and-Thunder and Old Stony Phiz become men of society. It is only Ernest who has properly intertwined time in society with time away from it.

Through these progressions, it becomes clear that Hawthorne does see a value in isolation, when properly utilized. Ernest can become the man of prophecy by skirting the line between social interaction during the day and isolated meditation at night: "they saw nothing remarkable in his way of life save that, when the labor of the day was over, he still loved to go apart and gaze and meditate upon the Great Stone Face" (Hawthorne 28). Early in the story, Hawthorne is already creating a character who respects both his duties to society as well as the necessity to cultivate his own thoughts in solitude. The difference between the isolation which Ernest enjoys and the isolation which plagues Reuben Bourne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Goodman Brown is guilt; Ernest is free

to think in his isolation without the burden of self-inflicted torment, whereas these others must think only of their sins. There is endless potential for growth within the unburdened mind, just as there is endless potential for despair within the guilt-clouded mind.

This vision of isolation which Ernest embodies runs parallel in many ways to the isolation which the transcendentalists often write about. The epigraph to "Self-Reliance" by Ralph Waldo Emerson is the Latin phrase, "Ne te quaesiveris extra," which is roughly translated to mean "Do not seek outside yourself" (Emerson 23). From this opening line, Emerson is already touting the praises of man's inner self and questioning the necessity of society at all. In only the second paragraph, he makes the claim that "imitation is suicide," and he opens his third paragraph with "Trust thyself" (24). This essay is clearly pushing the value of its namesake - self-reliance is the only truth which a man should live by. Man must look only within himself, trust what is there, and never imitate.

As such, the argument quickly shifts to a discussion on the value of society verse the value of an isolated life. He states that "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members" (25). Society, the enemy of the self-reliant man, is constantly begging for conformity, and Emerson is fighting against this corruption. The heart of this corruptible nature is conversation. Conversation can force personal views to change, can force conformity, and can break the trust which men build within themselves. But "conversation will not corrupt us if we come to the assembly in our own garb and speech and with the energy of health to select what is ours and reject what is not.

Society we must have; but let it be society, and not exchanging news or eating from the same dish" (Emerson, 13-14). Here, Emerson admits that the stance which he takes against society is too harsh. He sees the necessity for society, but searches for some unattainable ideal version of it.

Finally we find that for Emerson, "the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (27-28). Again, we see a call to blend a social life with the life of solitude. Emerson is going a step further than Hawthorne, however, by bringing isolation into society. Emerson would see the character of Ernest as only being half way there; he is isolated and uses that time for personal growth and reflection when alone, partly through a communion with Nature (The Great Stone Face), but has not yet learned to be isolated when among the crowd. This extreme isolation is what allows genius to grow. In his essay "Society and Solitude," Emerson discusses the greatest minds of history, claiming that, "they had the necessity of isolation which genius feels" (Emerson 6). He also writes in *Self-Reliance* that, "I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me" (Emerson 26). These are just a few of the many examples that Emerson gives that genius is fostered in isolation.

This view, which is seen at times in Hawthorne, is usually muddled by life in ways which Emerson seems not to accept¹. Emerson does not consider the

¹ Hawthorne does have several characters who actually do grow from their isolation. Parson Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil" becomes a better preacher, as does Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*. Chillingworth, while isolated with the Indians, cultivates his skills as a doctor, and throughout his short stories there are several other examples of this. These examples, however, are all examples of characters who gain this insight as an effect of their horrific isolation, rather than characters who isolate themselves in order that they might grow. Ernest is the only character

potential difficulties of isolation when the mind of the isolated person is burdened with guilt or sin. Emerson calls for a life of singularity, a life which is not burdened by the ideals of others. "What I must do, is all that concerns me; not what the people think" (27). The self-reliant man does not worry about any but himself, and does not give in to the guilt of societal pressures. "Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse" (37). This concept of worrying only about your own code and your own life is necessary for Emerson's ideal isolation to work. If Reuben Bourne could have lived by these precepts, then he would not have been burdened by his lie, nor by the inability to live up to the societal code which surrounded him.

Of course, Reuben could not live the life which Emerson writes of. Even Emerson sees that real men can not live completely isolated. "Solitude is impracticable, and society fatal. We must keep our head in the one and our hand in the other. The conditions are met if we keep our independence yet do not lose our sympathy" (Emerson 15). Emerson constantly calls back his argument for complete and total isolation, understanding the necessity for society, yet he also constantly demands a change to society as it currently is, as well as a certain aloofness while one is within society. Reuben is, unfortunately, real; Reuben is not an idealized form of man, and thus is weak. All men carry the burden of guilt, the knowledge of their own secret sins, and the difficulties of long exposure to their effects. This becomes the crux of the difference between Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists. Hawthorne concerns himself with the real-life difficulties of

who grows from solitude without being harmed by it, and even he is not isolating himself with the same intent which Emerson calls for.

unwanted isolation, whereas the Transcendentalists concern themselves with the idealized form of imposed isolation as a form of growth for the mind.

Further discussions of isolation come from the examination of Nature, specifically the forest, within these texts. "Roger Malvin's Burial" begins in the forest, takes a brief foray through the town, then ends back in nature. According to Donahue's five section version of the story: "three of the five sections of the story are set in the forest and cover a period of six days - one day at the beginning and five days at the end. Part three, which is Reuben's life in the clearing - the community - covers eighteen years yet occupies less than one-fourth of the total space of the tale. The focus of the story is clear; Hawthorne has concentrated three-quarters of the story in the forest and on only two important days in Reuben Bourne's life, of which eighteen years are covered" (5-6). From Donahue's astute breakdown of the story, it becomes painfully clear that the wilderness is as important an element in the story as any major character. Hawthorne is deliberately placing the characters within this location, just as he deliberately describes it throughout the text.

"The forest is, of course his own mind, in which is deeply buried a secret spot, a trauma, to which he will have to return" (Crews 464). Here, Frederick Crews is making the important observation that the forest is an allegory for Reuben's mind. It is also important to note, however, that this oversimplification of the importance of the forest to the story neglects "the naturalistic treatment of the wilderness and its historical dimension" (McIntosh, 201). The forest is not merely an examination of Reuben's mind, nor is it simply a representation of

Nature. It has two uses, both as a natural landscape which can reflect back the feelings of the characters, as well as an allegory for Reuben's mind.

Through this two part function, we can begin to explore the specific language which Hawthorne uses throughout the text while the characters are in the forest, and begin to understand the true importance of the forest. Hawthorne opens his description of the scene between Roger and Reuben by stating that "the early sunbeams hovered cheerfully upon the tree tops, beneath which two weary and wounded men had stretched their limbs the night before" (Hawthorne 18). This initial juxtaposition between the men and nature forces the reader to wonder at Nature's role in the text from the very beginning. Happy sunbeams and wounded men do not generally go together, however Hawthorne purposefully places these two images next to each other, to show the effects which the men involved will begin to have upon the forest around them, and the partiality of everything stated about nature (McIntosh 197). When we later read Roger's description of the "howling wilderness before us" (Hawthorne 19), and the narrator's description of the forest as "wild and lonely" (20) we are already beginning to see the difference between the truth of the wilderness, with its cheerful sunbeams, and the perception of the wilderness, which is howling, wild, and lonely.

Later, when the Bournes move out to the wilderness, Hawthorne digresses into a daydream of youths,

O, who in the enthusiasm of a daydream, has not wished that he were a wanderer in a world of summer wilderness, with one fair and gentle being hanging lightly from his arm? In youth his free and exulting step would know no barrier but the rolling ocean or

the snow-topped mountains; calmer manhood would choose a home where Nature had strewn a double wealth in the vale of some transparent stream; and when hoary age, after long, long years of that pure life, stole on and found him there, it would find him the father of a race, the patriarch of a people, the founder of a mighty nation yet to be. (27)

This is a whimsical description of precisely what Reuben is doing. He is going out into the wilderness, with his family, seeking a home in Nature. He has his son, who would be the second in a line which could become a race of people, and intends to found a new life there. Hawthorne's description of this daydream is intentionally upbeat, it is a "summer wilderness", there is a "fair and gentle being" on his arm, the sublime images of the rolling ocean and snow-topped mountains are man's only barriers, and even Nature is on the settler's side, giving him "a double wealth". Man and nature are acting in harmony, both striving toward the same end - the formation of a mighty nation yet to be.

Unfortunately, this daydream is just that, a daydream. Reuben Bourne is not the youth with a free and exulting step, and this is not the glorious Nature of the Transcendentalists. This is representative of the very real nature of New England, which is reflecting the very real descent of Reuben Bourne into depression and insanity, and Hawthorne has set up this scene of unity with nature so as to set up its very real and very ugly antithesis (Crews 464). "The tangled and gloomy forest through which the personages of my tale were wandering differed widely from the dreamer's land of fantasy; yet there was something in their way of life that Nature asserted as her own, and the gnawing cares which went with them from the world were all that now obstructed their happiness" (Hawthorne 27). Here we see that Reuben is fighting a "tangled and gloomy"

forest. Yet, Hawthorne leaves a glimmer of hope for Reuben, in that he might have a new start, and be at peace with Nature, if he could only drop the "gnawing cares" which he has brought with him from the town. But, he can not drop these cares. Social cares and filial guilt will follow Reuben wherever he goes, and continue to ruin his life until he atones for his sins and absolves himself of his guilt.

This use of the forest to explore the inner turmoil within the main character, as well as a mirror for others is not limited to "Roger Malvin's Burial." "Young Goodman Brown" is another text which takes place mainly in the forest, and which focuses heavily upon the relationship between the forest and man. "Young Goodman Brown," starts and ends in the community, with the central portion of the tale in the forest. This is an exact reversal of "Roger Malvin's Burial," yet Hawthorne's main focus is still upon the incidents within the forest (Donahue 6). Like Reuben, Goodman Brown seems to enter the forest happy, ignorant of guilt, and with a clear conscience. After his night of indoctrination into the cult of evil knowledge, Brown exits the forest a diseased man. Since this forest is almost explicitly deemed an allegory for Brown's mind, as the story is presented as a dream, it is again important to see how the forest, which is representative of the main character's mind, changes as he delves deeper into it.

The story opens in the village, but quickly enters the realm of the forest. "The reader does not fail to see that as Brown goes from the village to the forest he passes from a conscious world to a subconscious one" (Cook 474). As Brown moves into this subconscious, irrational world of the forest at night, Brown begins

to see the forest as a dark and ominous place, where "the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveler knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude" (Hawthorne 66). Just as in "Roger Malvin's Burial," we again see Hawthorne using the forest both as an entrance into the mind of the character and as a tool for expressing the emotions of the characters involved and the effects of solitude. Brown has entered his mind in this dream which, upon entering, he can not leave until he has finished his journey. The forest has closed up behind him, and he is now concealed both from the outside world and from the other illusions which his mind is preparing for him by the trunks and thick boughs. Hawthorne intentionally calls the trees the "gloomiest of the forest," uses the word lonely twice, muses on the "peculiarity in such a solitude," and sets up a foreboding and frightening image for Brown to enter. "Goodman Brown's isolation, his retreat from normal human intercourse into the strange dream world of the subconscious, is intimated by the imagery which describes his journey" (Hurley, 413). Clearly, meaning and word choice go hand in hand throughout the text as Hawthorne discusses the forest.

As the story progresses, we see the "deep dusk in the forest" which is "deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying" (Hawthorne 66). Yet, as despairing as this seems for Goodman Brown, the narrator is quickly refuted by the devil who states that they are "but a little way in the forest yet" (67). Like in

the opening to "Roger Malvin's Burial," this is another moment of juxtaposing the narrator's view of the forest with the description of a character's. This has the effect of seeing a hopelessly deep and sinister forest around our characters, which will only get worse as the story progresses. As Brown digs deeper into the forest, he digs deeper into his own mind, finding his way ever closer to his own internal fears.

This discovery of his own depravity comes about as an effect of isolation. Though only isolated in his mind for a night, it is a long enough time for his life to be forever destroyed. Brown has a diseased mind; these incidents are a self-justification from it (Hurley 419). Goodman Brown entered the forest with a guilty conscience. As he leaves Faith to set out on his journey he states that, "after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven" (Hawthorne 65). He believes his actions to be a sin, hence his need for Faith to lead him to heaven - a place which he himself would otherwise be unable to reach. Later, as he travels further into the depths of the forest, he hears horses and hides himself, "conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither" (69). He was a guilty man before he undertook this journey, and as such his mind was consumed in isolation by this dream. After the journey, his isolated mind is overcome by guilt at his knowledge of sin. The forest isolated Brown for only a night, and that night is all his guilty mind needed. Yet again we see that nature is reflecting back upon the character the guilt which is felt internally.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne continues this theme of using descriptions of Nature to point to the story unfolding around them. "The

symbolic character of *The Scarlet Letter* originates in the analogical relationship between landscape style, the emotions of the characters, and the emergent themes of the work." (Levy 377). When discussing Hester, for instance, he playfully questions her decision to stay among those who have shunned her, then gives her a perfectly characteristic house. It is an abandoned cottage, built on soil which is too sterile for cultivation, and in a location which is "not in close vicinity to any other habitation," and is "out of the sphere of that social activity which already marked the habits of the emigrants" (Hawthorne 93). She has chosen to live apart from the other citizens of her society "out of the sphere of social activity." This decision on her part seems to be agreeable not just to herself and her society, but to nature, in general. "A clump of scrubby trees, such as alone grew on the peninsula, did not so much conceal the cottage from view, as seem to denote that here was some object which would fain have been, or at least ought to be, concealed" (Hawthorne, 93). Hawthorne is driving in the point that Hester is no longer a welcome part of society. She is hidden away on the outskirts, only to see those around her, but never to be a part of them, again (Fogle 26).

Nature also more specifically reacts to the characters of the novel in chapters sixteen through nineteen, which is another famous forest scene by Hawthorne. The path which leads Hester and Pearl into the forest "straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest" (Hawthorne, 165). On this "chill and sombre" day, Hester imagined the forest as "the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering" (165). Hawthorne is simultaneously exploring the mystery of the actual forest, while comparing it to Hester's moral confusions.

On the heels of this introduction, Hawthorne introduces the first important symbol of the forest scene - the sunbeams. "The sportive sunlight - feebly sportive, at best, in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene - withdrew itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier, because they had hoped to find them bright" (165). The sunbeams begin to dodge Hester because, as Pearl says "it is afraid of something on [her] bosom." Yet, it will not dodge Pearl, because in her youthful purity "there is nothing on [her] bosom yet." Through the voice of Pearl, Hawthorne indicates that Hester's taint is spreading to the nature around her, just as Pearl's purity is. Pearl does actually catch the sunshine, and is "brightened by its splendor." (166) Yet, when Hester tries to reach her hand into the sunshine, it vanishes. Nature is literally dodging Hester because of her contamination.

The next symbol which Hawthorne creates is the babbling brook which was "kind, quiet, soothing, but melancholy...and knew not how to be merry among sad acquaintances and events of sombre hue" (168). Here Hester and her sad story force the brook to reflect back the melancholy in the air. A little further down, Hawthorne compares Pearl to the brook, stating that they both gush life "but, unlike the little stream, she danced and sparkled, and prattled airily along her course." We can see from this interaction that Hawthorne's forest can both affect those who walk through it while also being affected by those who walk through it. It has the dual function of forcing those within into a state of isolation while also projecting back the potential fears, worries, and joys that this isolation creates.

As they travel further through the "dismal forest" (169), Hester and Pearl finally come across Dimmesdale. He is "entirely alone...He looked haggard and feeble, and betrayed a nerveless despondency in his air, which had never so remarkably characterized him in his walks about the settlement, nor in any other situation where he deemed himself liable to notice. Here it was woefully visible, in this intense seclusion of the forest, which of itself would have been a heavy trial to the spirits." The forest, with its "intense seclusion," where he can be "entirely alone," allows Dimmesdale to display outwardly the effects his tormenting isolation are having inwardly. His guilt has continued to overtake him, and the progression of his illness represents this, as does his deteriorated walk through the forest. Again we are seeing a character enter the forest and fall apart; Reuben and Brown fell apart mentally, Dimmesdale is falling apart physically.

As the scene goes on, the two sinners "felt themselves, at least, inhabitants in the same sphere" (170). As they come to this realization they are able to discuss "the themes that were brooding deepest in their hearts." From this, they talk about their sin and Dimmesdale refers to his soul as ruined and polluted (171). He then talks again about the freedom which Hester has because her adultery is known. His "burns in secret," which is what causes the torment of seven years. By reconnecting with another, and opening his sphere back up, even momentarily, he is able to again find hope. From this hope, he allows himself to "yield with deliberate choice...to what he knew was deadly sin" (192). And from his experience in the forest, he becomes a new man. "A wiser one; with a

knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached. A bitter kind of knowledge that!" (193) This experience of gaining a "bitter knowledge" reminds us of Goodman's Brown's gained knowledge of man's secret sin through the ceremony in the forest.

These examples act as counter examples to the Transcendentalist ideal that great knowledge comes from isolation; the knowledge gained by a guilty mind is not desirable knowledge; the knowledge gained by a pure mind can, however, be very desirable. This same difference between the effects of isolation on the guilty, plagued mind versus the pure, unburdened mind are similar to the different effects which nature has upon the two. In the first paragraph to the chapter titled Solitude in *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau discusses a leisurely walk through nature where he is at peace and at one with all the elements around him. "This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself" (Thoreau, 211). We see here a man at peace in Nature, a man very opposite to Dimmesdale, Brown, or Bourne. He does not feel the burdens of society or personal guilt, and so instead can connect with Nature in the way which Hawthorne discusses as a daydream in "Roger Malvin's Burial." Looking more closely at the language Thoreau uses, we see "the elements are unusually congenial," "sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away [his] breath," and his "serenity is rippled but not ruffled." He is painting a friendly, nurturing Nature. Though it is an evening stroll through the woods,

there is no discussion of the gloom, nor any hint of evil foreboding. Thoreau creates a surreal vision of nature which he carries throughout his essay.

In the next portion of this chapter, he begins to discuss the relationship between man and Nature. "There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still" (212). This proclamation brings into question the validity of the response of the Hawthorne characters we have seen, as all of them are full of a black melancholy, which only darkens further in Nature. Initially, we see that the difference comes in Thoreau's attitudes outside of his natural isolation: "Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness...nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house to-day is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too" (213). Thoreau is experiencing this isolation without guilt clouding his mind, nor society pressuring him to be anything he is not. This differing perspective on society and guilt forces an equally different view of Nature. As he continues on, he continues to proclaim the wonders of nature and their glory in isolation. He discusses "the indescribable innocence and beneficence of nature" and claims that his panacea is not a "quack vial of a mixture dipped from Acheron and the Dead Sea" but is, instead, morning air (218). Nature heals all wounds for Thoreau, in the same way that it worsens all for Hawthorne.

Similarly, Emerson explores the benefits which Nature bestows upon the enlightened man in his aptly titled essay, "Nature." His theory is that Nature benefits man in four ways: Commodity, Beauty, Language, and Discipline

(Emerson 14). Commodity is "all those advantages which our senses owe to nature" (14). Beauty is first natural, as in the stars and mountains, but once replicated becomes Art (20). "Language is a third use which nature subserves to man. Nature is the vehicle of thought" (20). So, Nature allows for language, which allows for thought. Discipline is "the self-discipline individuals must exercise in order to intuit properly the symbolic meaning of natural phenomena" (491). From this outline, we see that nature is responsible for all goodness and all knowledge in man. Like Thoreau, Emerson is demanding that the reader understand the intrinsic greatness of nature, and thus the inherent shortcomings of its opposite, society.

After discussing the various effects of isolation upon Hawthorne's characters, and giving several counter-examples to "Roger Malvin's Burial," let us now look more closely at how the story ends for Reuben. Reuben's inability to rectify his sins against Roger leads to his self-inflicted isolation. He is deemed a hero and praised as such by the townsfolk; he marries Dorcas and she bears his child under the false pretenses that he buried her father in nobility. These sins of betrayal lead, inexorably, to guilt. From this guilt he has nowhere to turn except into himself, as both at home and in the town, there are constant reminders of his deceit. He is praised in town and sees the woman he loves, and who loves him under the aforementioned false pretenses, within his home. His inability to escape his guilt for his lack of chivalry and the undeserved praise for a false overabundance of chivalry, leads him to isolation. Had he been honest during his discussion with Dorcas, he would have been able to atone; had he been a stronger

man, perhaps he could have told everyone he lied and have then went to bury Roger, but instead he lets his weakness overpower him.

Here is where Reuben finally damns himself beyond salvation. Reuben isolates himself from society, which is fine for a short period. As earlier stated it *is* a necessary evil, and many good things can come from it, such as cultivation of genius and improved clarity. Unfortunately, he cannot draw himself from this isolation and rejoin the community at large. He should have isolated himself for a limited time to come to terms with his current position in life. He should have made a choice: tell the truth of his deceit or accept what he has done and move on with life, as Roger wanted him to. It is Reuben's indecision which holds him in a permanent isolation. This inability to escape his self imposed isolation is the ever present threat which makes isolation such an evil endeavor. Reuben Bourne is the actualization of the potential evil inherent in isolation.

The story concludes that "the world did not go well with Reuben Bourne; and though not till many years after his marriage, he was finally a ruined man, with but one remaining expedient against the evil fate that had pursued him. He was to throw sunlight into some deep recess of the forest, and seek subsistence from the virgin bosom of the wildness" (Hawthorne 26). This is the pivotal moment in the text, where Reuben decides to venture back into the forest. He has become a failed man in both his public and private relationships because of his choices, and is left with nowhere to turn but back into the wilderness (Donohue 18). His blight was gained in the forest, it festered for long years in society, ruining him, and has dragged him back into the forest. As we look at the words

Hawthorne used, we see that society has become the place of failure and evil, where Reuben is ruined. The forest, on the other hand, has a "virgin bosom" from which Reuben might yet be able to seek subsistence. Reuben's preferred location has become the forest, rather than society, as it is both the location of his sin and the location where his sin might be corrected and forgiven.

To this point, Reuben has been unable to deceive himself in any way to cleanse himself of guilt. Since he can not correct his misdeeds against Roger and is not strong enough to tell those around him the truth about Roger, his only salvation from self-deprecation and guilt is to deceive himself in some way which expiates his offenses. In the final scene of the story, Reuben finally accomplishes this task. He believes that by accidentally killing his son, he has absolved himself of any guilt. In one shot, he has managed to wash his hands clean. "The vow that the wounded youth had made the blighted man had come to redeem. His sin was expiated - the curse was gone from him" (Hawthorne 32). This curse, which has plagued his life and forced him into ruin is his guilt. He "has not performed a Christian expiation but simply rid himself of his burden of guilty feeling" (Crews 459). Hawthorne ends the story in a familiar place, where the reader must again wonder at what sin Reuben actually committed; and how the murder of his son would redeem it.

Aside from cleansing his guilt, Reuben also finally believes he has reached the chivalric code which he has so desperately sought to live up to. "Reuben's presumption that an incredibly malevolent deity who sets up impossible codes would demand and accept filicide as expiation for breaking them is the final and

complete self-deception” (Daly 111). Again remember that we earlier discussed the importance of the impossible chivalric code which Reuben attempted to live up to. Here, Daly explains that Reuben is finally understanding the impossibility of these codes. By understanding the code as impossible, yet still holding it in the highest regard, Reuben is able to likewise compensate for breaking the code in an equally foolhardy repentance. Murdering his son clearly does not affect the burial of Roger Malvin nor any of Reuben’s other transgressions; it does, however, clear his mind of guilt, which is the most important deed for Reuben Bourne in the end.

This ending does not come as a surprise when we consider how Hawthorne had led up to it and how he had valued prolonged isolation in his other works. Hawthorne has created a character type, which Reuben fits, who experiences a traumatic event, believes an unpardonable sin has transgressed, and lives a miserable existence from that moment on, hiding this secret. Reuben lies about burying Roger, Dimmesdale does not confess to his part in the adultery, Goodman Brown perverts his image of his town in a dream, and Chillingworth withholds his identity so as to exact revenge. Each of these characters hides something from the community at large, and as such alienates himself. This alienation, whether intentional or not, is corrupted by the secret feelings. The only Hawthorne character who can break this mold is Ernest, because he does not harbor hidden feelings of guilt and sin.

This character of Ernest lives the closest version of isolation to that praised by the Transcendentalists. He is pure and unclouded by secret remorse, he communes with Nature, which displays back his great mind, rather than the

constant fears of the other characters, and as such can actually grow in his isolation. He is able to traverse the chasm between self and society as needed to prosper in both worlds. He sees the value in himself and value in others, and as such can be a real character while also leading a life which falls in line with the expectations of the Transcendentalists. Reuben Bourne shows readers the problems of isolation when not in the right frame of mind, when plagued by guilt and Ernest shows the reader the benefits of isolation when the mind is clear of worries.

Works Cited:

- Cook, Reginald. "The Forest of Goodman Brown's Night: A reading of Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown'". The New England Quarterly. September, 1970. Pages 473-481. Print.
- Crews, Frederick. "The logic of Compulsion in 'Roger Malvin's Burial'". Post Modern Language Association. March, 1962. Pages 92-96. Print.
- Daly, Robert. "History and Chivalric Myth in 'Roger Malvin's Burial'". Essex Institute Historical Collections. April, 1973. Pages 99-115. Print.
- Donohue, Agnes McNeill. "From Whose Bourn No Traveler Returns': A Reading of 'Roger Malvin's Burial'". Nineteenth-Century Fiction. June, 1963. Pages 1-19. Print.
- Fogle, Richard. Hawthorne's Imagery. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1969. Print.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Great Stone Face. Chicago: The Progress Company, 1908. Print.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Scarlet Letter. Boston: Bedford Publishing, 2007. Print.
- Hurley, Paul J. "Young Goodman Brown's 'Heart of Darkness'". American Literature. January, 1966. Pages 410-419. Print
- Krutch, Joseph Wood, ed. Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau. New York: Bantam, 2004. Print.
- Levy, Leo B. "Modes of *The Scarlet Letter*". Nineteenth-Century Fiction. March, 1969. Pages 377-392. Print.
- Lynch, James J. "Structure and Allegory in 'The Great Stone Face'". Nineteenth-Century Fiction. September, 1960. Pages 137-146. Print
- Male, Roy. Hawthorne's Tragic Vision. New York: Norton and Company, 1957. Print.
- McIntosh, James, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales. New York: Norton and Company, 1987. Print.
- McIntosh, James. "Nature and Frontier in 'Roger Malvin's Burial'". American Literature. May, 1988. Pages 188-204. Print.

Norberg, Peter, ed. Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004. Print.

Tanner, Tony, ed. Essays and Poems Ralph Waldo Emerson. Vermont: Everyman, 2000. Print.