NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S 'EDENS OF THE HEART' – *IMAGINED GARDENS AND EVES*

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Abstract: *The present study of the Garden of Eden imagery, as it appears in Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction sheds light on the relationship between the imaginary and the author's background. The paper argues that biographical episodes play an outstanding role in shaping Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary activity. For instance, the Garden of Eden's green world and protagonists Adam and Eve have been used for the symbolic expression of a family's conflicts and reconciliation. We will stress out that the garden as such acts at times as a vehicle for conflict and in other instances as a means of reducing conflict. The symbols adjacent to the mythology of Eden imagery will be analyzed in three of Hawthorne's works: the short story "*The Old Manse*" and the novels* The Scarlet Letter *and* The House of the Seven Gables.

Keywords*: biblical imagery and symbols, conflict, fall or redemption.*

Conceptual Framework

After his departure from the transcendentalist Brook Farm, Nathaniel Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody in 1842, and took up residence for the next four years at the Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts. For Hawthorne, this period stood for a return from an uncomfortable and conflicting environment of culture to Eden. More than that, he was accustomed to speak of himself and his wife at that period as Adam and Eve. They would dwell, only the two of them, in solitude and a serene felicity of mutual understanding and perfect sympathy (Gatta, 1997: 10), provided by their new Eden-like setting and the birth of their daughter Una. During this interval, Hawthorne aims at writing a novel "that should evolve some deep lesson" appropriate to the Manse's sacred space.

In "The Old Manse" Hawthorne tells his "friends" that he has arrived at his private inner garden, "my garden ... of precisely the right extent" which will be featured explicitly in *The House of the Seven Gables*, and indirectly, via the image of the forest, in *The Scarlet Letter*. In his new garden "he plucks the fruit of trees that he did not plant" and which "bear the closer resemblance to those that grew in Eden" ("The Old Manse", 13). As can be noticed, they live in a biblical-like, prelapsarian Eden, before the fall.

The sociologist Lester R. Kurtz asserts that "the Garden of Eden saga has been used in many occasions of social response to crises" and that when social life is at a crossroads, the members of the society find new means for "reinforcing social solidarity" (Kurtz, 1979: 443). Actually, conflict may be an essential factor for supporting interaction within a family and among families. Thus, the Garden of Eden myth and imagery can be used to heighten conflict, and sometimes to emphasize unity. In the present paper we endeavor to point via Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Old Manse", *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*[1] that the Eden story was a

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[1] Hawthorne's quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text by the following abbreviations accompanied by their page number, as follows: *OM* – "The Old Manse", *SL – The Scarlet Letter, HSG – The House of the Seven Gables*

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genuine incentive for the novelist in writing his works and that he employed the biblical saga when causing or solving fictional conflicting situations. As we will show, the sociological theory proposed by Kurtz is viable: in Hawthorne's works, opponents are placed within the same framework and are oriented toward the same central value system of the society, thus bridging the gap and settling the conflict.

The Garden of Eden saga has appeared in many historical contexts, providing a key set of symbols which have articulated aspects of social conflicts. Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the saga provides a Picture of humanity free of social and physical constraints, Adam and Eve's misuse of that freedom, and the fall of humanity.

The nineteenth-century citizens of the United States had undergone extreme situations and ordeal, when they started to develop "a way of making sense out of their life as a new nation" (*Ibidem*: 452). They were interested in emphasizing a comparison of their experience with the story of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve. Thus, they began using the story behind the Garden of Eden, in Genesis 2, giving rise to the New American Adam and Eve and locating their "new garden" on American soil.

With Nathaniel Hawthorne, a descendant of New England Puritans, America's features were her uniqueness and innocence, which are rooted in the religious faith of Puritanism, which could lead to rebirth and regeneration. Irrespectively, looking back at his Puritan ancestors, Hawthorne found no earthly saints, only mortal men who were denying their sinfulness, but, what they had overlooked that they had committed the unforgivable sin of denying their own humanity, by refusing to acknowledge their lineage to the Eternal Adam (Noble, 1968: 24-25) and thus creating the American Adam instead.

Coming back to our literary conflicts, Adams and Eve, we intend to emphasize the following: Hawthorne's, the husband-to be, inner conflict, Dimmesdale's and Chillingworth's torment, and the Pyncheon-Maule feud. The first one awaits a human, real Eve in his life; Dimmesdale and Chillingworth do not appreciate their "martyr" Eve, whereas the feuding families are in need of a complete restoration through a new Adam-Eve relationship. Throughout American literature of the first half of the nineteenth century we find a pervasive belief that the American woman, since the settling on the American continent, had somehow evolved into a higher form of being (McAlexander, 1975: 252), into an American Eve. Hawthorne, for instance, expresses this belief in his description of the Puritan women in *The Scarlet Letter*. In Hester Prynne, the passionately honest woman whose scarlet letter "A" marks her as both adulteress and angel, the novelist created one of the most admirable heroines of American fiction. The biblical Eve might be considered a conflict starter or a conflict bearer. Whereas, her antitypes, Hawthorne's wife, Sophia Peabody, presented in "The Old Manse", Hester, or Phoebe bring peace and put an end to the conflict, release the tension and conclude with a peaceful and serene atmosphere, eventually.

The house (as part of an inheritance), the garden, or the forest, with their specific symbolism, may provide a common focus for social identity. For instance, the members of a family might remind one another of family legends, the way the garden was set up by a clergyman (in *OM*), or a story about an incident, as in our case about a suspicious death (in *HSG*), rumors and gossip about, the letter A (in *SL*) or the rosebush in the Pyncheons' garden. The story told over the years might mean different things to different family members, in our case Nathaniel and Sophia on the one hand, and Hester, Pearl, Chillingworth, Dimmesdale Hepzibah, Phoebe, Clifford, and Holgrave on the other. Our fictional cases relate the following stories: in "The Old Manse" the clergy

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abiding the house are extolled only for planting the trees and vegetables, but their activity as Puritan ministers is condemned by the newly-weds, who will discover a blissful life in their new, but at the same time old, environment; in *The Scarlet Letter*, a woman forced to exhibit herself for hours on a scaffold with both emblems of her sin at her breast – the infant Pearl and the letter "A" – Hester serves as the light that ultimately rescues her lover's soul from damnation, by his public confession.; in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the feud unfolding between the Maules and the Pyncheons is settled when two representatives of the conflicting families reunite in a love relationship, in the family garden, in the vicinity of a rosebush. Therefore, literary strata play a creative role by gathering together symbols such as: the garden, the rose, and the forest.

Mention should be made that the *Imaginary* plays an outstanding part in the use of biblical themes and symbols since the creative impulses, in particular, arise from this Imaginary, the source of all fiction. The concept of the *Imaginary* can be also described in psychoanalytical terms, as a living state, a transition period from infancy to childhood, when there are no limitations or boundaries to imagination. Hawthorne acts as such and writes, without limitations or boundaries. As we will emphasize, perhaps due to the burden he has inherited from his Puritan forefathers. The reflections confessed in "The Old Manse" lead to allegorizing on the garden in the present stage of human history. However, the obscurity of human will intrudes to shroud the present allegorical garden in further mystery; still, Hawthorne would allegorize at great length on the Garden during the period of his residence in Concord (Shurr, 1981: 148).

Biblical Imagery, Types and Antitypes

To highlight it as a dominant influence on American fiction, we consider worth mentioning Northrop Frye's approach in *The Great Code* to biblical imagery. The critic pinpoints that natural images are a primary feature of the Bible and that literally, the structure of imagery in the Bible involves "the imagery of sheep and pasture, harvest and vintage, cities and temples, all contained in and infused by the oasis imagery of trees and water that suggests a higher mode of life altogether" (Frye, 1982: 139). Some of these images and their adjacent symbolism are featured in Hawthorne's novels and they will be thoroughly analyzed.

Another form of conflict can be identified at the level of Frye's theory of types and antitypes. The biblical images and characters enumerated in Frye's work are described in the pieces of fiction that we have chosen to discuss. For instance, harvest is mentioned in "The Old Manse," and especially in *The House of the Seven Gables*, whereas trees and water in all three works. All these images constitute part of what Frye calls the 'apocalyptic world'. He also notes that among them there could be noticed 'the Old Testament types, which the Christian Bible regards as symbols or parables of the existential form of salvation presented in the New'. As an illustration of this structure, Frye examines the female figures in the Bible, mothers and brides (*Ibidem*: 140).

In the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne, we find abundant evidence of the use of imagery derived from the Old Testament, since his working knowledge of the Bible, according to Baker (1960: 251), helped him to infuse the far distant in time and place into such localized New England novels as *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables.* The craft which Hawthorne displays in the employment of biblical contexts is well exemplified in his account of the living-quarters of the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale in the ninth chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*. The walls of Dimmesdale's study are adorned with a Gobelin tapestry representing "the Scriptural story of David

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and Bathsheba, and Nathan the Prophet" (*SL* 168), that is, the ancient story of another adulterous relationship whose consequences were followed by human misery. In Baker's opinion, which we support, the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom, like its counterpart on Dimmesdale's flesh, represents, Puritan society's Nathan-like judgment that no man or woman is justified in separating those whom the Lord has joined together (Baker, *art.cit.*: 252). Thus, we once again encounter another case of type-antitype, in Hawthorne's work: the types being David and Batsheba, and their antitypes Arthur and Hester.

Garden Symbolism and Hawthorne's Recovery of Eden

The two most influential gardens in literature are both biblical: the garden of Eden and the "garden enclosed" of the Song of Solomon (4, 12). "Eden" by tradition means "delight" or "luxury" – with a river and pleasant trees bearing edible fruit (9-10). The garden of the Song of Solomon is metaphorical and erotic: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (4, 12); "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse" (5, 1).

The garden Hawthorne cultivates is at once the one which the old clergymen cultivated, his own present bliss as newlywed, and the allegorical garden which stands at the beginning of Christian history. One could read differently the archetypal Garden story, and interpret what happens in the transition from imagined ideal state to actual fallen state (Shurr, *.op. cit.*: 149). As the "The Old Manse" unfolds, the house, in the author's creative mind, becomes a portal, inviting free entry to nature's green space (Gatta, 2004: 101), to a prelapsarian condition of nature, similar to the one in Genesis 2: 8-10, where God planted a garden "eastward in Eden" and there He put the man, grew "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food", the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil; "and a river went out of Eden to water the garden." For Hawthorne, though, the landscape's strongest emotional attraction lies in the manse's own garden and orchard [reverberating imaginatively in *SL* and *HSG*]. They offer him cherries, currants in the summer, pears, peaches, and apples in the fall. First planted by Thoreau, the garden now demands little human effort to bring forth peas, a hill of beans, fat summer squash, and winter squash. Here is Paradise indeed, where one has only to accept with gratitude the "infinite generosity and exhaustless bounty" of "our Mother Nature" (*OM* 13). The author is also happy to find his wife Sophia becoming pregnant and giving birth to Una, their first child, during this idyllic period of life together in Concord.

In *The House of the Seven Gables* Phoebe and Holgrave, in a biblical sense, become the new Adam and Eve, the antitypes of the biblical couple: "They transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again, and themselves the first two dwellers in it" (*HSG* 355). Their status is reconfirmed when Clifford pronounces the benediction, at the end of the final chapter: '"And so the flower of Eden has bloomed…'" (357). The narrator in *The House of the Seven Gables* speaks of the "Eden" retrieved by the young couple after the conflict has been settled, with the Judge's death. Nonetheless, this Eden is "the Eden in their hearts," a subjective Eden. Functionally, Phoebe and Holgrave are the most important characters in the plot – they reunite the separated families, foreclose the operation of the curse, and marry in rural bliss. Their conversations, which are their courtship dance, are spoken in the garden, secluded behind the rotting family mansion. The scene had been poisoned by a multitude of evils imposed by human artifice: the legalized stealing of Maule's home and property; his treacherous execution, with

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collusion of a corrupt legal system; the curse he uttered from the gallows." The house itself embodies these evils down into the present: "It was itself like a great human heart" (36).

The garden in *The House of the Seven Gables* is similar to Hawthorne's other gardens: in the center is the fountain, not quite poisoned but at least brackish. Flora and fauna have all declined miserably under human husbandry, as has the decayed garden-house where the decayed Clifford sits (Shurr, *op. cit.*: 164-165).

Geographically speaking, for the rivers of Paradise he has "the Concord – river of peace and quietness." His garden, however, will not endure and prevail, since during a rainstorm, "Eve's bower in Paradise must have been but a cheerless and aguish kind of shelter…The idea of sleeping on a couch of wet roses!" and the garden has its demon too: "The summit of a wooded hill, about a mile distant, was enveloped in a dense mist, where the demon of the tempest seemed to have his abiding place, and to be plotting still direr inclemencies" (*OM* 15).

In *The Scarlet Letter,* when the prisoner is publicly displayed in front of the prison, she is welcomed by the wild rose with its "delicate gems" to show that, unlike the Puritans, "the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind"(*SL* 82). Hester Prynne steps with all the radiance and beauty of the wild rose, along with the colorful scarlet letter, adorning her breast. Through her imprisonment and public display, the Puritans believe that they are banning a sinner from their midst, but it is they who are cut off, who have become evil in disassociating themselves from her. Hester has escaped the greater sinfulness of the Puritan community, which is pride. The scarlet letter unites her with the Eternal Adam and Eve, and "the sinful brotherhood of mankind." Consequently, we consider that she has become an American Eve. The two male figures in Hester's life are Chillingworth, a sterile person and a most respected reverend, Arthur Dimmesdale. From Holland, the former had sent Hester to Massachusetts where, in the New World Eden, human beings could transcend their nature. Later, when Chillingworth came to the New World, he found that his ideal had been shattered. because, in the newfound Eden, one of the Puritan saints has fathered her child, thereby blasting his dream of perfection. The traitor to Puritan theology is Dimmesdale, the role-model of the community, the saint-like minister. His clergyman status grants him to be witness of the Eternal Adam in the New World, which consequently allows Hester, by means of their relation and child, to be his Eve.

As we have already mentioned, the garden may stand for a conflict-settler/reliever. Hester, in her status of an outcast, has been able to survive among the Puritans because she finds a refuge in her newfound Eden, the forest and the outskirts of the community. She would work with the needle at the cottage window or labor in her little garden (*SL* 118). Since we have reached this point, we consider worth mentioning that the garden terminology is omnipresent along the novel. One comes upon powerfully connotative statements concerning "the black flower of civilized society" such as "the great law," "iron framework," "reverence for authority," "stern tribunals," or "the Puritan establishment", which are the embodiment of Dimmesdale's values. Pearl could also be considered "the fruit" of sin, but also "a lovely and immortal flower out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion" (127). However, her name symbolism is beyond sin, as it might refer to "the pearl of great price" in the New Testament, which could allow her to inhabit the earthly Garden of Eden; but her whose physical appearance is suitable for the biblical Eden: "Certainly, there was no physical defect […] the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden and to have been left there" (128).

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In the forest, when Hester tears the scarlet letter from her breast, "all at once, with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest. In this "garden", Hester and Pearl have the possibility to meet Dimmesdale, who does not agree to face everyone hand in hand with them." Even though Nature embraces Hester and Pearl, Hawthorne associates Chillingworth with the forest, and his theology of saintly perfection with the context of American nature (Noble, *op. cit.*: 31). When Hester encourages Dimmesdale to see in nature the possibility of escape from Chillingworth she is, of course, only placing her beloved even more in the power of the wicked physician. The forest can also be interpreted as a place where there is no need for abiding laws or observing society rules, a way of restoring a prelapsarian relationship. Unfortunately, Dimmesdale is too grounded in his theological dogmas, which however had not prevented him from committing the sin with Hester, to see beyond the tangible. He does not possess Hester's open-mindedness or Pearl's natural behavior.

In *The House of the Seven Gables* the Pyncheons' garden allows the representatives of the two families to unite their feelings and aspirations, irrespective of their forerunners' discrepancies. The same thing happens in the garden of the Old Manse. In the final scaffold scene, Dimmesdale tears open his shirt and reveals to the world the scarlet letter indelibly stamped over his heart. He has transcended the temptation of Hester's cry to "Begin all anew! . . . Whither leads yonder forest-track?.. Deeper it goes, and deeper, into the wilderness. . . . There thou art free!" He has recognized that in the forest one is only free to choose, like Roger Chillingworth, "to withdraw his name from the roll of mankind"; that his only choice would be to live with the sterile companionship of Chillingworth. Abandoning the sterility of the so-called Puritan innocence, he calls for his daughter, "'My little Pearl . . . dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not yonder in the forest! But now thou wilt?' Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken." (*SL* 317).

Conflict Leading to Fall or Redemption

Although Hawthorne claimed that *The House of the Seven Gables* was a "healthier product of [his] mind [than *The Scarlet Letter*]", in it too he probes the darker sides of human experience, especially those influenced by social expectations and especially the conflict arising from achieving them or not. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne focuses upon the familial past of the Pyncheons, a history intertwined with that of his fictional town modeled on Salem. The narrative states that "the act of a passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit in a distant time" (*HSG* 12). Despite the conflicting episodes within the family and their mixed history, one of its survivors, Hepzibah, is proud of her lineage, evident in her "reverence for the pictured visage" in the ancestral portrait that hangs in the house (44). Hawthorne links the reduction of the family to Jaffrey, his son, Hepzibah, Clifford, and cousin Phoebe, to the actions and choices of various family members, introducing the notion of individual responsibility for the larger family fortunes, but also conflict among them and with another family. Mention should be made that in nineteenth-century New England, the decline of a family, their actions and choices were interpreted through the New England Calvinist legacy that accepted, in practice, the belief that poverty or financial failing was "punishment for sin, a public sign of God's displeasure with an individual or family" (McFarland Pennell, 1999: 192).

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Hepzibah has subsisted for a period of time, relying in part on a meager garden and the few eggs her chickens provide, but as the romance draws to a close, Hawthorne sets in motion a process of restoration for Hepzibah. In this process, the garden plays a major part, which is for the first time mentioned on the 13th page of the book, in connection with Colonel Pyncheon, "the claimant" and Matthew Maule who had protected the earth "he had hewn out of the primaeval forest, to be his garden-ground and homestead" (*HSG* 13), but unfortunately not for a long time. Ten pages later, the same garden is referred to on the night of the colonel's mysterious death. The window was allegedly opened and "the figure of a man had been seen clambering over the garden fence" (23). Therefore, the garden might have allowed the entrance and flight of the "murderer," being a witness and an accomplice at the same time in the fortune/misfortune of the family. Taking into consideration this reference and the ones we will further evoke, the garden is not only a bearer of conflict, but also a complex character, turned from villain into a positive character, eventually, on condition that one follows its voice (not like the case of Dimmesdale's or Chillingworth's, who are too stern in their decision making)

Time has passed. Now the once-magnificent Pyncheon house is in bad condition and decrepitude. A passer-by could only guess there was a garden, as according to the narratorial voice directs our attention to "a crop, not of weeds, but of flower-shrubs. They were called Alice's Posies" (36), which had not been intentionally planted, but "in sport," which might lead us to the concept of involuntary co-creation and to (un)willingly bringing life on earth. We have already mentioned a case of voluntary creation, in Hawthorne's blissful period of being a husband and becoming a father to Una, a period which is imaginatively described in "The Old Manse." Alice Pyncheon was the doomed young lady who allegedly had fallen in love with a Maule, a love that led to her death, her only legacy to the Pyncheons and the Maules, being the flowers and the sound of her piano tunes. She did not procreate; still, she continues living in the house and garden, even through her followers: Hepzibah and Phoebe.

Even though Hepzibah's face is enough scaring as "to frighten the Old Nick himself" (60), Phoebe's appearance in the setting will change things for the better. She is also part of the solution in breaking with the curse. Her stance as a chosen one was identified ever since Phoebe's first night in the house. Why? Her chamber was looking down the garden and fronted "towards the east". Thus, the solution has always been in sight due to the garden's potential of settling the conflict, and the cardinal point referring to Eden.

The rosebush is another landmark in our approach. For instance, Phoebe's first visit in the garden is marked by the sight of such a rose-bush. In the other novel under scrutiny, Hester was greeted by a similar one when leaving the prison, however bearing a different symbolism, due to the red color: "a rare and very beautiful species of white rose. […] the whole rose-bush looked as if it had been brought from Eden that very summer" (87). Unfortunately, only the image resembles Eden and the "fresh and sweet incense" sent up to their Creator. Almost any flower can represent a girl, but the rose has always stood for the most beautiful, the most beloved and often for one who is notably young, vulnerable, and virginal (Phoebe). Along history, many devout Christians took the rose to be an emblem of the false and fleeting pleasures of this world, especially those of lust (Hester). If red and white roses are distinguished, the red stands for charity or Christian love, the white for virginity. The red rose can also represent Christian martyrdom, just like in the case of Hester, who unaware is following the steps of Ann Hutchinson (Feber, 1999: 175).

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Phoebe, "a young flower," is extremely interested in discovering the garden, especially for the rose-bush, but also for the other species of flowers "growing there in a wilderness of neglect" (*HSG* 89), but stroked by the "earthly sunshine" as the one "peeping into Eve's bower" (120). In Chapter Six, "Maule's Well," we are fully acquainted with the range of flowers and plants in the garden. The main attraction of the garden rests in a "white double rose-bush", "a pear tree", and "three damson trees." There is no apple tree, even though most would refer to the tree of knowledge as an apple tree, notwithstanding there is no actual reference to this in the Bible. Other plants and vegetables (also mentioned in "The Old Manse"): "a few species of antique and hereditary flowers," summer squashes, cucumbers, string beans, tomatoes (*HSG* 105). We also encounter a couple engendering life: "a pair of robins had built their nest in the pear tree." The pear tree symbolism is again under/in the spotlight. This, let us say, type of living beings, bent to procreate, are backed up by their real antitypes in the Nathaniel-Sophia couple, and the fictional/imagined antitype of Holgrave and Phoebe. Their happiness is obvious and ultimately "viral": "they were making themselves exceedingly busy and happy in the dark intricacy of its boughs" (106). The sign of abundance is underlined by the living presence of bees in quest of honey. They have always been highly prized for their honey and wax and hive organization. Virgil and other ancients believed that bees had no sexual intercourse but gathered their young from among the flowers. – their human counterpart might be Hepzibah, the old spinster. Others, however, associated bees with love – Phoebe and Holgrave. However, the two-sidedness of bees, producers of honey and stings, makes them good symbols of love. (Feber, *op.cit.*: 21-23)

The narrator of *The House of the Seven Gables* speaks of "the Eden in their hearts," a subjective Eden. The notion as such is not new to Hawthorne. It is congruent with his conviction that if any reform is to be achieved, it can only be of the private order. Such is the privilege of the storyteller, who can cast his tales in diverse narrative frames, providing evidence of the power of form and genre, and ultimately of art.

Conclusions

The ideological sacrifices that Hawthorne makes to arrive at his private Garden happiness are considerable. The new Adam must abandon the pleasures of art and introspection, in order to give attention to his family. The same happens to Hawthorne's fictional Adams, more or less: for instance, Dimmesdale remains flawed because he aspires to be nothing less than a moving force in history, the saint of New England, rather than take Hester as his Eve and Holgrave's visionary plans for the alleviation of society are dropped for marriage to Phoebe.

In conclusion, Hawthorne chooses to analyze people's social energies as functions of human flaws and proposes and provides as his alternative, the redemption of the individual. Simultaneously, he puts forward the idea of a reform of society through sexual/marital fulfillment. As we have shown, this level of enlightenment has been achieved after his experience at the Old Manse, where he discovered the basic myth of the Garden, which would enable him to probe these issues.

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