

Three Aspects of Spiritualism in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*

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I. Spiritualism and Mesmerism in Hawthorne's Fictions

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance* were published respectively in 1851 and 1852, and both of them contain references to spiritualism. For example, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, when Clifford comes back home after many years of imprisonment, "her [Phoebe's] physical organization. . . being at once delicate and healthy, gave her a perception, operating with almost the effect of a spiritual medium, that somebody was near at hand." (96) To emphasize Phoebe's acute sense, the narrator describes her as having "the effect of a spiritual medium." That the phrase "spiritual medium" could be used as a metaphor for one with delicate sensibilities shows that spiritualism was quite prevalent in the early 1850s.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, we see evidence of the historical movement from mesmerism toward spiritualism in the opening of the novel:

Now-a-days, in the management of his 'subject,' 'clairvoyant,' or 'medium,' the exhibitor affects the simplicity and openness of scientific experiment; and even if he profess to tread a step or two across the boundaries of the spiritual world, yet carries with him the laws of our actual life, and extends them over his preternatural conquests. Twelve or fifteen years ago, on the contrary, all the arts of mysterious arrangement, of picturesque disposition, and artistically contrasted light and shade, were made available in order to set the apparent miracle in the strongest attitude of opposition to ordinary facts. (5-6)

The images of mesmerism and spiritualism are mixed in this passage. The performance "now-a-days," described as having "the simplicity and openness of scientific experiment," clearly refers to spiritualism, as it attempted to emulate the scientific method. On the other hand, the performance acted "twelve or fifteen years ago" using "all the arts of mysterious arrangement" speaks of the non-scientific mesmerism. Priscilla was referred to as a medium, yet, as Taylor Stoehr argues, that was somewhat anachronistic since

spiritualism did not even exist in the U.S. until some 15 years later (171). Mesmerism became popular “in the mid-1830s, reached an ultrascientific phase when it merged with phrenology as phrenomagnetism in the early 1840s, then developed an other-worldly aspect as it gradually melted into spiritualism during the 1850s” (Stoehr 32). This period of transition corresponds with the difference of time between Coverdale's experience at Blithedale and his narrating it. Some critics consider the time lag to be a decade (Kerr 59, Moore 15), while Samuel Chase Coale hypothesizes that the Coverdale's story is set in “about 1836-38” (108). The mixed images of mesmerism and spiritualism in *The Blithedale Romance* reflect the relation between the two. This quotation provides clear evidence that mesmerism came first as a mysterious miracle, but gave way to spiritualism, which found credibility by associating itself with the growing scientific knowledge of that time.

Though Holgrave and Westervelt are depicted as mesmerists, spiritualism is alluded to in some parts and mentioned directly in others in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Both fictions were published in the early 1850s when spiritualism had just come into vogue after mesmerism had “laid the intellectual groundwork for its successor” (McGarry 21). Many spiritualistic descriptions and allusions in these two fictions contain lingering images from mesmerism and strongly imply that spiritualism permeated everyday life in the early 1850s in the U.S. The purpose of this paper is to examine what spiritualism looked like in the mid-19th-century U.S. and how it is represented in Hawthorne's two fictions.

II. Three Aspects of Spiritualism

Spiritualism began to be popular with the so-called “Rochester Rapping.” According to E. Fornell, strange noises began to disturb the Foxes' household, a Methodist farming family in Hydesville near Rochester, upstate New York, in 1848. Among the family, two sisters, Margaret and Kate, were said to have unusual talents in communicating with the spirits that made the noises. Margaret and Kate not only heard occasional sounds of rapping, but also saw furniture move, felt a cold hand tug at the bed comforters, and heard a sound like a death struggle and a gurgling from a throat. To avoid curious inquirers coming to their house, the sisters were sent to their elder sister, Leah Fish, who lived in Rochester. After that, Kate was sent to stay in Auburn, New York, but fourteen-year-old Margaret remained with Leah and the spirits communicated with Margaret more often. While many people in Rochester slandered Margaret and her spirits, one friendly group formed a “spirit circle” and held meetings with her, and the members started to hold public lectures under the management of Leah Fish (9-18). After the “Rochester Rapping,” many Americans, especially women, began careers as spiritual mediums. “By the early 1850s spiritualism had been so integrated into the pervasive culture of the times that both its supporters and detractors began attacking one another in print” (Coale 106). Though the exact number is unknown, one researcher estimates that, in the 1850s there were likely “several hundred thousand men and women who were to some extent interested” in spiritualism (Delp 102). Whitney Cross reports that in 1859 those affiliated with spiritualism had reached nearly a million and a half, and that the number of mediums was 71 in New York,

55 in Massachusetts, and 27 in Ohio (349). As Ann Braude points out, “Whether revered or ridiculed, Spiritualism was ubiquitous on the American scene at mid-century” (Braude 2). We can see that many people believed in the possibility of communicating with the dead or with the other world in some way.

There were three aspects in which people related to spiritualism: as entertainment, as a new science, and through social reform. First, spiritualism can be seen at this period as entertainment in that P. T. Barnum, a successful showman, struck a bargain with the Fox sisters to exhibit their powers both at Barnum’s Museum and his hotel in 1849. During the sessions, though the majority regarded the rapping as a humbug, some observers were convinced of the sisters’ gift. Prominent literary persons, such as James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, and George Ripley, also attended a private “sitting” to examine the sisters’ gifts (Fornell 25-26). Besides public exhibitions and private sittings by spiritual mediums, there were also many séance circles formed in major cities during this period: 300 in New York, between 50 to 60 in Philadelphia, and, “quite numerous” in Boston (Carroll 124), though the exact number is unknown.

In addition to public exhibitions, private sittings, and séance circles, what made spiritual phenomena more accessible in everyday life of ordinary people is “planchette,” or “ouija board.” A planchette was a tool for receiving messages from spirits, as shown in Figure 1. It is “a heart-shaped piece of wood mounted on three casters,” and “was believed to respond to magnetic forces passing through the bodies of those who placed their fingers on it, thus communicating messages from spirits.” The introduction of the planchette into private homes helped spread spiritualism into American culture in the 1850s. It was used by untrained family members in the home and, thereby, dispensed with “professional” mediums. As a result, “the line between parlor game and religious inquiry blurred when families who tried the spirits in fun discovered mediums in their midst. . .” (Braude 25).

At first, planchettes were imported from France and sold in spiritualist bookstores by the late 1850s. Then they were mass-produced in the U.S. until the 1860s (Braude 24-25). Figure 1 also shows planchettes advertised and sold at the price of 1 to 3 dollars. This means that spiritualism spread in the U.S. along with the consumer culture. Molly McGarry points out that people in the mid-19th century, especially white, middle-class women, had “the Victorians’ obsessive interest in death,” owing to the rising of the mortality rate and the shortened life expectancy that was brought about by the epidemics of typhoid, yellow fever, and tuberculosis from 1790 to the time of the Civil War. This demographic fact helped usher some people into spiritualism as well as encouraging a culture of mourning. As a result, not only was the epistolary “consolation literature” printed by the spiritualist press, but also many women writers picked up “the themes of death and dying, bereavement and mourning.” In addition, many “mourning manuals” were published, just as etiquette books, “prescribing elaborate funerals and bereavement rituals” (22-23). Though some spiritualists criticized “the showy and utterly hollow rituals” (26), these trends in press can be regarded as a part of the material and consumer culture of the mid-19th century, and along with the planchette attracted people to spiritual phenomena.

The sensational nature of spiritualism drew curious seekers to spiritual mediums, to séance circles,

and to planchettes, all these things showing that spiritualism had spread into everyday life as entertainment in the U.S. after the "Rochester Rapping."

While the entertainment aspect of spiritualism stimulated many people's interest, spiritualism would not have permeated the intellectual elite class of the mid-19th-century U.S. so deeply without its connection with science and social reform. Spiritualism maintained a close connection with empirical science and technology, dominant cultural values in the 19th century, which is its second aspect. The spiritualists of the mid-19th century held an optimistic view of the world in terms of science and technology. The spiritualists held "a childlike faith in empirical science as the only approach to knowledge" and, therefore, when explaining their spiritual phenomena and their doctrines, they "drew their language from popular tracts on scientific empiricism," using the same language as people who explained technological inventions, such as the locomotive or the telegraph (Moore 7, 22). Spiritualists "called into question the categories of religion and science" (McGarry 17-19) or "rejected the distinction between natural and supernatural" (Moore 24). Inversely some men of science converted from pure science to a fusion of science and spiritualism. For example, Robert Hare, "after ending a distinguished career at the University of Pennsylvania, began to mix research into spiritualism with his work in chemistry" (Moore 31). These facts show that some men of science regarded spiritual phenomena not as paranormal or supernatural but as explainable by science, and in the same regard, spiritualists felt strong affinities with science.

The connection between spiritualism and empirical science and technology is partly seen in a model séance circle found in Figure 2. As Bret E. Carroll suggests, an ideal circle was considered to be "an electrical circuit" and, in this circle, technical precision was utilized in the circular arrangement with alternating seating of males and females, and physical contact between participants. The model circle indicates that spiritualists were searching "for the best technical means of producing religious feelings" by a scientifically designed séance, which "exemplifies a 19th-century strain of religiosity that has been called 'technical religion' " (135-37). We can also see that the model séance shows a domestic setting by the basket of knitting materials under the table. This model is a good illustration of séance circles spreading in everyday life in the 19th-century U.S. People joined séance circles not only for entertainment, but also for the "scientific aim of penetrating nature's mysteries," and they thought themselves to be "making an important contribution to empirical science" (Moore 14, 43).

McGarry explains the vogue in spiritualism in the other way: spiritualists invoked "a secular optimism and faith in human, material progress," and "believed in science and the possibility of making 'all things new' ". Many spiritualists, therefore, espoused social reform, which is the third aspect of spiritualism. Growing ideas of social reform in the 19th century sprang up alongside spiritualism and the spiritualists' optimistic belief in human progress. Spiritualists' social reform ideas were closely related with religious changes occurring at that time. A key conception to analyze the connection between spiritualism and social reform is millennialism that was inherited from the Second Great Awakening, involving various revivalist movements in the early 19th century. After the Second Great Awakening reached its peak in the 1830s, spiritualism followed the religious enthusiasm at the end of the 1840s.

According to Carroll, there were two opposing religious moods that influenced spiritualism. One was the pessimistic premillennialism, which claimed that God himself would have to come to the earth before humans could provide a utopian world. It “assumed that a human race incapable of substantially improving the world required a sudden and imminent infusion of supramundane aid to reach the millennial state.” The other was the more optimistic postmillennialism, which held that the great millennial age was now, and that we were already on the way to utopia. Thus it “assumed human beings to be capable of contributing through their efforts to the gradual achievement of the perfect society or millennium prophesied in the Bible.” These two ways of thinking can be considered to have fused into spiritualism, because “spiritualists at once emphasized the importance of human effort and hopefully summoned the superhuman help of spirit ministry to sustain their millennial expectancy” (Carroll 101-2).

Another religious change, along with millennialism, thought to help connect spiritualism with social reform ideas was “an aging Calvinism” (McGarry 19) or “the weakening of Calvinist orthodoxy in the early nineteenth century” (Moore 45). Many millenarian reformers expected to see the second coming of Christ and their ideal society, and they “saw the raps [by the spirits] as signs of a prophecy heralding the beginnings of an age of perfect human brotherhood” (Moore 77). After the Second Great Awakening in the first half of the century, Calvinistic views of the world such as predestination of the soul, were being replaced by more liberal views from the new revivalist denominations. For example, the Methodists rejected Calvinistic predestination and held the belief that anybody had the potential to achieve salvation. The denominations that had once been dominant feared that their authority would be less effective and that social morality would be undermined “with the weakening in the popular imagination of such orthodox concepts as Hell” (Moore 45). In place of once-dominant denominations, new revivalist ones proposed an optimistic idea that human beings could find salvation and reach the millennial state. Spiritualists also held this idea and thought themselves able to improve the world and to achieve the millennium while anticipating the help of the spirits.

In accordance with these changes in religion, a leading spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis, who “reflected the basic millenarian tradition,” thought that spiritualism was “only another branch of knowledge designed to better the quality of human life, much as science and technology were attempting to do” (Delp 115). At the same time, spiritualists including Davis embraced the principle of individualism, which was shared by such social reformers as abolitionists and women’s rights advocates, and the principle attracted many of them to spiritualism. Based on their idea of individualism, radical abolitionists and women’s rights advocates rejected the church that, they thought, was complicit in human inequality. Spiritualism “provided a positive religious expression that harmonized with the extreme individualism of radical reform.” As a result, “spiritualism offered a rosy picture of reality that many Americans found more consistent with nineteenth-century optimism than the religious traditions from which they came.” (Braude 36, 62) Because of their shared optimism that human beings could improve the world, spiritualist freethinkers were influenced by ideas of social reform, including antislavery, women’s rights, temperance, and other issues.

Figure 3 provides a good example of the connection between spiritualism and social reform. Though this photograph was taken after the Civil War, it reflects lingering attitudes that had begun in the 1840's. In this photograph entitled "The Spirit of Temperance," the spirit seems to admonish the man with a bottle and a glass not to drink liquor. Many spiritualists forwarded such messages from spirits to the public and tried to solve the social problems of the day. Both spiritualists and social reformers had the same kind of millennialist expectation that a new harmonious age would come.

Therefore, spiritualism and social reform movements, such as the women's rights movement and the antislavery movement, were in sympathy with each other. The first leaders of the women's rights movement thought that the only religious sect recognizing the equality of men and women was the spiritualists (McGarry 46-47). The leaders of the movement, in part, seem to have believed in spiritualism and collaborated with some of spiritualists who had social reform ideas. It was reported that raps rocked the table where Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were writing the "Declaration of Sentiments" for the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls in 1848, and that Andrew Jackson Davis and his wife Mary Fenn Love, adamant women's rights activist, joined Stanton and Susan Anthony in the first New York State Woman's Rights Convention with a half dozen Rochester spiritualists in 1853 (Braude 58). In the same way, such radical abolitionists as William Lloyd Garrison considered spiritualism as a religion in harmony with their principle, and the Garrisonian American Anti-Slavery Society regarded spiritualism and women's rights movements as the "sisterhood of reform." Abolitionists thought slavery as "the unjust usurpation of the individual autonomy of one person by another," and "found the same injustice in the relation between men and women," on the basis of "the principle of individualism," on which many spiritualists also stood (Braude 60). Thus spiritualism was connected with social reform movements.

Such is an outline of spiritualism beginning with the Rochester Rapping in 1848, a movement both espoused and distrusted by many people in the 1850s. With the movement's value as entertainment, its appeal as a new science, and its connections to social reform, spiritualism came into vogue in the U.S.

III. Hawthorne's Representation of Spiritualism

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Clifford's conversation with an old man on the train in chapter 17 shows both positive and negative reactions to spiritualism:

"... even to me, the harbingers of a better era are unmistakable. Mesmerism, now! Will that effect nothing, think you, towards purging away the grossness out of human life?"

"All a humbug!" growled the old gentleman.

"These rapping spirits that little Phoebe told us of, the other day," said Clifford. "What are these but the messengers of the spiritual world, knocking at the door of substance? And it shall be flung wide open!"

"A humbug, again!" cried the old gentleman, growing more and more testy at these glimpses of Clifford's metaphysics.—"I should like to rap, with a good stick, on the empty pates of the dolts who circulate such nonsense!"

“Then there is electricity;— the demon, the angel, the mighty physical power, the all-pervading intelligence!” exclaimed Clifford. “Is that a humbug, too? Is it a fact—or have I dreamt it—that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time? . . .” (263-64)

For Clifford, mesmerism and spiritualism are “the harbingers of a better era.” He regards mesmerism as a means of “purging away the grossness out of human life.” However, the old man considers it as a humbug. Just after mesmerism is rejected by the old man, Clifford refers to “rapping spirits” which Phoebe has told him of at home. His bringing up the topic shows that spiritual phenomena were a common topic of conversation for families in the early 1850s. The old man distrusts the existence of the rapping spirits. It is probable that, in the old man’s mind, spirit rapping is seen only as entertainment, such as spiritualistic shows promoted by B. T. Barnum. In contrast, Clifford compares spiritual phenomena with electricity and the telegraph, linking spiritualism to empirical science and technology. In spiritualist journals of this period, the telegraph “suggested a model of how spirit communication might take place” as “a symbol of long-distance communication” (Moore 22), while they compared spiritualistic events with new developing technologies like the telegraph and even the locomotive that Clifford is riding. “In Clifford’s mind, mesmerism, spiritualism, and electricity coexist as the permeable peripheries of science” (Inagaki 5). Thus new technology, social reform, and spiritualism together seem to Clifford to be purging the society. This controversy between Clifford and the old man suggests that, while some people distrusted spiritual phenomena as fraudulent, others considered them to be as factual as electricity or the telegraph, a step toward the perfection of the world that spiritualists had in mind.

Oposing views on spiritualism also appear in *The Blithedale Romance*. “The Veiled Lady” is referred to as “a phenomenon in the mesmeric line” (5) by Miles Coverdale at the beginning of this novel. However, Westervelt describes her performance as that of spiritualism, when he introduces “the Veiled Lady” to his audience:

“You see before you the Veiled Lady,” said the bearded Professor [Westervelt], advancing to the verge of the platform. “By the agency of which I have just spoken, she is, at this moment, in communion with the spiritual world. That silvery veil is, in one sense, an enchantment, having been dipt, as it were, and essentially imbued, through the potency of my art, with the fluid medium of spirits. . . .” (201)

He uses such spiritualistic language as “communion with the spiritual world” and “the fluid medium of spirits.” Even though the scene of this novel is set in the late 1830s or early 1840, in which mesmerism was in vogue, his introduction of the mesmeric performance contains some phrases used in spiritualism that became popular in the early 1850s when Hawthorne wrote this novel. Therefore, the performance of “the Veiled Lady” can be regarded as a mixture of mesmerism and spiritualism. We see that Westervelt’s mesmeric or spiritualistic performance is enthusiastically accepted as entertainment by the people, because he feels urged to start the performance by the impatient audience’s “desire for the entertainment” (199).

However, Coverdale shows his vile feeling toward Westervelt's performance:

It [Westervelt's discourse] was eloquent, ingenious, plausible, with a delusive show of spirituality, yet really imbued throughout with a cold and dead materialism. I shivered, as at a current of chill air, issuing out of a sepulchral vault and bringing the smell of corruption along with it. (200)

Coverdale describes his feeling with such phrases as "a delusive show of spirituality," "a cold and dead materialism," and "the smell of corruption." His narrative reveals that spiritualism is regarded, not only as entertainment, but also as something fraudulent and corrupted. In contrast to Coverdale's narrative, Westervelt introduces the performance with a spiritualistic and millennialist view of the world, speaking as if he were a man of science:

He [Westervelt] spoke of a new era that was dawning upon the world; an era that would link soul to soul, and the present life to what we call futurity, with a closeness that should finally convert both worlds into one great, mutually conscious brotherhood. He described (in a strange, philosophical guise, with terms of art, as if it were a matter of chemical discovery) the agency by which this mighty result was to be effected. . . . (200)

Westervelt refers to a dawning "new era" and uses the spiritualistic phrase, "a closeness that should finally convert both worlds into one great, mutually conscious brotherhood." He also describes a substance called "agency," "as if it were a matter of chemical discovery." Westervelt's discourse and attitude are similar to those of Clifford in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Both Westervelt and Clifford express spiritualistic and millennialist expectations for the coming of a new world, and adopt the vocabulary of empirical science. Their way of thinking is in common with the spiritualists of the early 1850s, who held ideas of social reform and employed the ideas and vocabulary of empirical science. The scenes on the train in *The House of the Seven Gables* and of the Veiled Lady's performance in *The Blithedale Romance* display the three aspects of spiritualism discussed in this paper: as entertainment, which may sometimes be deceitful; as a new type of science, which led people to an optimistic world-view; and as a movement with ties to social reform movements, which the spiritualists shared and ardently espoused.

Hawthorne's narrative seems to leave his own attitude or position toward spiritualism unclear in both of the novels, because Coverdale and the old man on the train regard spiritualism as fraudulent or vile, while Clifford and Westervelt express a millennialist expectation for the coming of a new world through spiritualism. Even though spiritualism is described as a new type of science by Clifford and Westervelt, their discourses on spiritualism are hard to trust, because Clifford is depicted as half-insane, and Westervelt as a vile mesmerist.

Hawthorne's ambiguous representation of social reform ideas, which are related to spiritualism or mesmerism, can also be observed in the contrast between Holgrave and Phoebe in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Holgrave shows his reformist views in the scene where he first appears in this novel, rejecting "the past history of the world," which is notable in the system of the aristocracy and thinking that the titles of aristocracy ("gentleman and lady") are "not privilege, but restriction" (45). His modern, democratic views of the world seem to draw from his career as a lecturer of mesmerism and his experience in a

Fourierist community. Both mesmerism and Fourierism likely led him to a critical view of the society and to social reform ideas. Holgrave thinks “that in this age, more than ever before, the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses buried, and everything to begin anew” (179). Holgrave’s spiritualism or mesmerism and his critical views of the society exhibit a clear contrast to the personality of Phoebe, who is an ordinary New England girl. The narrator shows the contrast that “both [Holgrave and Phoebe], it is true, were characters proper to New England life, and possessing a common ground, therefore, in their more external developments; but as unlike, in their respective interiors, as if their native climes had been at world-wide distance” (175). Though they share a “common ground” as New Englanders, they have totally different personalities from each other. While Phoebe displays her gifts of cooking and commerce as an ideal conservative woman, Holgrave is described as having the “strangest companions imaginable” such as “reformers, temperance-lecturers,” “community-men and come-outers.” Furthermore, he is believed by Hepzibah and Phoebe to have made “a speech, full of wild and disorganizing matter” and is said to practice “animal-magnetism” (84). Hawthorne’s representation of Holgrave and Phoebe seems to carefully refrain from expressing which one’s personality is favorable or whether Holgrave’s critical view of the society is trustworthy.

Notably the critical views of the society and the social reform ideas that mesmerists and spiritualists shared are abandoned at the ends of both novels. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave takes a critical view of the current family system:

To plant a family! This idea is at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do. The truth is, that, once in every half-century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors. (185)

Holgrave seems to think the cause of “most of the wrong and mischief which men do” is to make a family and to keep the family line pure for generations. His criticism of the family unit can be attributed to the so-called “free love” concept regarding the marriage system, which was shared by many spiritualists and utopian socialists in the 19th-century U.S.

However, in contrast, in the last chapter, he refers to the inherited house of late Judge Pyncheon and expresses a conservative view toward the family, one of permanence and continuance:

Then, every generation of the family might have altered the interior [of late Judge Pyncheon’s house], to suit its own taste and convenience; while the exterior, through the lapse of years, might have been adding venerableness to its original beauty, and thus giving that impression of permanence, which I consider essential to the happiness of any one moment.” (314-15)

Here, Holgrave emphasizes the importance of a family’s continuity, which, he insists, may add “venerableness to its original beauty” of a house and he thinks that “that impression of permanence” is “essential to the happiness of any one moment.” The contrast between his earlier and later views of the family system is remarkable and shows his changing attitude. By withdrawing his own criticism of the family system, as T.Walter Herbert points out, Holgrave “displays the virtue that establishes his right to a fortune only in his relation to the woman from whom he filches it” (104). Though it seems doubtful that

Holgrave intends to “filch” her fortune, he abandons his radical ideas about social reform when he becomes engaged to Phoebe, who used to think him dangerous because of his commitment to mesmerism or spiritualism and because of his overall radical thinking. In other words, the happy ending of *The House of the Seven Gables* is brought about by spiritualist or mesmerist Holgrave's change of mind and his throwing away radical social reform ideas, without which the marriage between the two would not be realized.

Also in *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth, a community-man and egocentric philanthropist, devotes himself to the reformation of criminals, but gives up his project in the end. Some years after Priscilla accepts Hollingsworth's urge to come under his guardianship and suddenly throws off her veil as “Veiled Lady” in her performance, Coverdale notices that Hollingsworth is discouraged against his reform project:

As they approached me, I observed in Hollingsworth's face a depressed and melancholy look, that seemed habitual; the powerfully built 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. (242)

Hollingsworth's “self-distrustful weakness” shows that he no longer has a strong will toward social reform. Actually, he grudgingly admits that the construction of the “grand edifice for the reformation of criminals” (242) has not begun yet, and that he has not reformed even one criminal, implying that he is conscious of his own responsibility for Zenobia's death. His “childlike, or childish tendency” to both physically and mentally depend on Priscilla reveals that she acts as his guardian instead of being protected by him. Hollingsworth's withering features can be interpreted as “the paradoxical spectacle of a man so guilt-ridden.” (Herbert 23) In contrast to Hollingsworth, Priscilla shows “a veiled happiness in her fair and quiet countenance,” after giving up her career as a performer of mesmeric or spiritualistic shows. Though Hollingsworth is not, of course, a mesmerist or a spiritualist, his abandoning of the social reform idea seems symbolically paralleled by Priscilla's rejection of Westervelt's mesmeric or spiritualistic control over her, because, when Hollingsworth and Priscilla enter into the state of matrimony, he seems to give up his own social reform projects. What their clinging to each other implies is that Hollingsworth and Priscilla abandon his social reform projects and her mesmeric or spiritualistic career respectively at the end of the novel.

Hawthorne's representation of spiritualism reflects his response to pseudoscience, as it is now called. As Howard Kerr points out, Hawthorne grew “disgusted with spiritualism and mesmerism alike.” We see this when “Clifford's millennial rhetoric became sinister . . . when assigned to the evil mesmerist, Westervelt, who spoke of ‘a new era.’” Coverdale's critical view of spiritualism or mesmerism also reflects “Hawthorne's irritated and fearful feelings about trafficking with spirits, whether mesmeric or spiritualistic” (Kerr 58-59). Though Clifford and Westervelt show the optimistic and science-oriented views of mesmerism and spiritualism, Hawthorne's uncomfortable feelings can also be read in both of

the novels, in which the main characters abandon their own social reform ideas that are connected with mesmerism and spiritualism.

IV. Conclusion

Hawthorne's negative views of mesmerism and spiritualism can be seen not only in the representation in his novels but also in his relation with his wife, Sophia. Before she got acquainted with Hawthorne, Sophia had suffered from chronic headaches for years and depended upon the curative powers of mesmerism, which was introduced to her by her sister, Elizabeth Peabody. Hawthorne, staying at Brook Farm in 1841 while he was engaged to Sophia, was shocked by a letter from his fiancé because she confessed her interest in animal magnetism (Stoehr 38-42). His entreating and remonstrating reply to Sophia against mesmerism is worth noting, because it reveals his unsparing criticism:

Supporting that this [mesmeric] 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 intrusion into thy holy of holies—and the intruder would not be thy husband! (Hawthorne, *The Letters* 588)

This passage makes clear that Hawthorne admitted the existence of mesmeric power but regarded its use as evil, seeing “the transfusion of one spirit into another” as very intimate and something akin to adultery since it did not involve the husband but a third party. The evilness is further represented in such characters as Matthew Maul and Westervelt respectively mesmerizing Alice Pyncheon and Priscilla.

On the other hand, in the same letter to Sophia, Hawthorne explains mesmerism in another way:

Now, ownest wife, I have no faith whatever that people are raised to the seventh heaven, or to any heaven at all, or that they gain any insight into the mysteries of life beyond death, by means of this strange science. Without distrusting that the phenomena which thou tellest me of, and others as remarkable, have really occurred, I think that they are to be accounted for as the result of a physical and material, not of a spiritual, influence. *Opium* has produced many a brighter vision of heaven (and just as susceptible of proof) than those which thou recountest. (Hawthorne, *The Letters* 588-89)

This passage of his letter in 1841 reveals that he thought mesmerism not to have such magical power as one by which “people are raised to the seventh heaven,” but to have “physical and material” power just as opium has. Such kind of mesmeric power was, for Hawthorne, to be proved in the near future. His denial of the supernatural nature of and his physical view of mesmerism were the same emerging attitude seen in certain other people who tried to investigate spiritual phenomena in the mid-19th-century U.S.

However hard he tried to lead Sophia to give up her belief in mesmerism and spiritualism, she clung to them for about a decade. Sophia referred to “a pervasive universal energy, termed the ‘Od’ by Charles von Reichenbach, that was active in mesmerism and spiritualist seances [*sic*]” (Herbert 28). Also during the period when she was alone with the children during her husband's stay in the Isle of Shoals in 1852, she made references in her diary that implied her interest in mesmerism and spiritualism (Herbert 25-28). From this biographical fact, it is clear that Hawthorne thought mesmerism and spiritualism to contain

evil elements, but it is also probable that he was influenced by empirical science and that he admitted the physical nature of mesmerism and spiritualism when he was confronted with his wife's belief in them.

It may be true that Hawthorne "accepted mesmeric clairvoyance as physiological fact" (Kerr 56) and that "however much Hawthorne detested the dogma of the spiritualists, he could not shake his belief in the power inherent in it" (Coale 15). He also worried about his wife's reputation by saying that "some (horrible thought!) would pronounce my Dove an impostor; the great majority would deem thee crazed; and even the few believers would feel a sort of interest in thee" (Hawthorne, *The Letters* 590). His anxiety about his wife's reputation shows how the ordinary people responded to mesmerism and spiritualism. If a person was known to espouse mesmerism or spiritualism, he or she may have been regarded as "an impostor," or "crazed," or treated just as a subject in entertainment. His response is "typical of the public experience" (Stoehr 29) in the mid-19th century. Many people went to spiritualistic exhibitions for entertainment, though some of them were skeptical about the spiritual phenomena and others may have even felt something evil of them as Coverdale did of Westervelt's performance. At the same time, like Clifford, not a few people saw in spiritualism the prospect for opening up a new world much like empirical science and technology, as well as an avenue toward social reform in relation to millennialism that was popular at that time. That is the very reason why spiritualism was accepted so widely in the U.S. in this period. Hawthorne's representation of spiritualism in these two novels, in addition to the biographical evidence regarding his wife's involvements in it, reveals the ambivalence that ordinary people held toward spiritualism in the mid-19th-century U.S. These two fictions complementarily show how people dealt with spiritualism, and must have interested readers who shared Hawthorne's evolving feelings of belief and acceptance, as well as disbelief and repulsion toward spiritualism.

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Figure 1. The Boston Planchett
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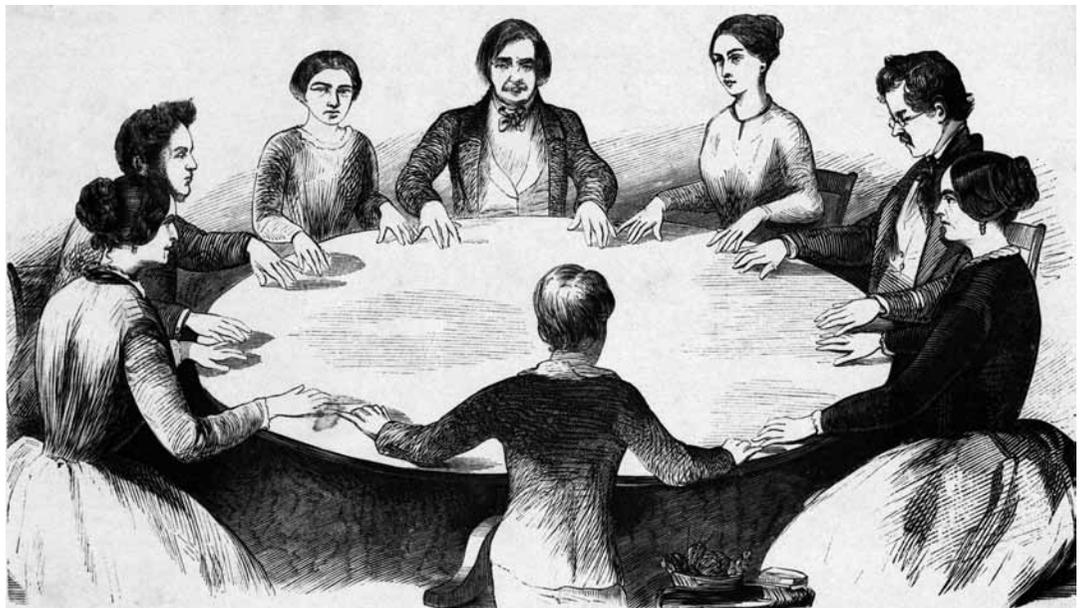


Figure 2. The Séance Table
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Figure 3. "The Spirit of Temperance"
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Photography