

Climatic Awareness in the Giving Waters in Hawthorne's Uncharted Short Stories

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Abstract: This study intends to do an ecocritical reading of several of Hawthorne's relatively less-known works and focus on how nature frames or guides the story, acting as a powerful element in his stories. Hawthorne's less-studied short story *Sights from A Steeple* is the starting point of this study, exploring how it mainly describes a scenery where natural forces act together as an overwhelming power. The elements of water, including the climatic clouds and rain, affect the story's direction, with both the overarching plot and the sub-plots predestined by the forces of nature. Similarly, this notion is hinted at by Hawthorne's other two short stories analyzed in this essay, *The Gentle Boy* and *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, where the water elements of nature also set the events and the noble destinies of the main characters. However, a subverted direction is given in the final short story to be investigated, *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, where the seemingly magical water fuels humans' greed down to the path of destruction. By discovering how the element of water is presented in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories as a natural, powerful climatic force, this study contributes to revealing climate awareness in the canons of English literature.

Keywords: Nathaniel Hawthorne; Ecocriticism; Water Imagery; Sights from A Steeple; Climate Awareness

1. Introduction

Most of the modern studies on Nathaniel Hawthorne's works have emphasized thoughtful explorations of the social depth of Hawthorne's stories, focusing on understanding Hawthorne's search for human 'nature' of morality, while readings of 'nature' in the ecocritical sense have only been explored relatively recently. To take examples of notable early studies on Hawthorne are Henry James' early but influential critical analysis of Puritan morality in Hawthorne's more famous stories and Edgar Allan Poe's criticism of Hawthorne's depiction of morality within its cultural setting (James, 2013; Poe, 2013). Explorations on Hawthorne's American cultural and historical settings in his works have similarly been far and wide, a noteworthy example being Q.D. Leavis' seminal study on Hawthorne's poetics (Leavis, 2013). These previous studies mostly set the tone for later critical work on Hawthorne in the twentieth century (McIntosh, 2013). We can see that what follows then can be generalized as a mainstream tradition of socio-critical analyses of Hawthorne's more famous works, focusing on defining the 'nature' of human morality from various perspectives (Huang, 2012; Petersheim, 2020). Yet, as Sara L. Crosby (2020) has noted, there has been relatively limited attention paid to the very subject of nature itself in studies on Hawthorne. This is evidenced in a recent study on Nathaniel Hawthorne by Verma and Vehra (2024), which only briefly explores how Hawthorne's famous novel *The Scarlet Letter* weaves natural phenomena into his storytelling. Also in line with Crosby, Guo (2024) mentions that only a few critics have

focused on the ecocritical reading of Hawthorne. Guo's own study has revealed much ecocritical insight into Hawthorne's works, but Guo's ecocritical reading only focuses on well-known Hawthorne's works, which are *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of Seven Gables*, and *Rappacini's Daughter* (2024). Thus, it is imperative to apply ecocritical study to Hawthorne's earlier, lesser-known works. There is a critical need to further investigate Hawthorne's less-known narratives, looking not at the beaten path of the socio-cultural 'nature' or socio-cultural settings but their ecocritical setting of nature.

Steven Petersheim's pioneering work (2020) within this natural perspective has started a major re-reading of Hawthorne's more famous works as nature writing in the ecocritical sense. Against the more conventional reading of Hawthorne as a brooding writer of dark secrets of the human heart, Petersheim's revealing analysis has discussed how Hawthorne is instead a writer fascinated with nature. While most readers and scholars assumed that Hawthorne was unconcerned with nature and viewed him not as a nature writer, Petersheim believes otherwise. For one, Petersheim relates how Hawthorne is described by some of his contemporaries as a nature writer: Herman Melville described Hawthorne as one of the "painters of Nature," while Margaret Fuller described him as a writer who maintains a "gentle and sincere companionships with nature." Petersheim (2020) has noted that the depiction of nature is significant and more than just a backdrop for most of Hawthorne's stories. Petersheim contends "not only that Hawthorne's writing bears the characteristics of environmentality but also that it does, in fact, address the environment in many cases as an active presence whose history affects and is affected by human history. In this respect, Hawthorne often put nature as a reality that is veiled and disguised by human culture and delusions (Petersheim, 2020, Chapter Introduction, para. 14). Petersheim's analysis reveals how the major themes of humanity's humility before nature and criticism toward violations against nature are found within important Hawthorne's works, notably his novels *The Scarlett Letter*, *House of the Seven Gables*, and his short stories *The Marble Faun*, among others. In the end, Petersheim considers his study "represent only the beginning of a recovery of Hawthorne's attention to the natural world as a reality with which we are so thoroughly imbricated" (Petersheim, 2020, p. 178). This current study, therefore, wants to enter that relatively less-traveled ecocritical direction: to investigate the powers of nature that shape Hawthorne's stories into their refined forms. Additionally, this study takes note of what Crosby (2020) has proposed, that later analyses of nature in Hawthorne need to begin a 'detailed narrative arc for Hawthorne's ecological intellectual development' and, as such, an investigation of earlier Hawthorne's work would be beneficial to this purpose.

This study, then, was a Literary criticism using ecocritical reading of Hawthorne's earlier, less-known works, firstly in the short story *Sights from A Steeple*, focusing on how the significant natural element of water in its many forms such as climatic phenomenon: clouds, rain, shower, storm, thunder, and rainbow, actually shapes Hawthorne's story, and then, the study further explored this effect on three of Hawthorne's short stories: *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, *The Gentle Boy*, and *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*. In this study, the depiction of water in *Sights from A Steeple* was scrutinized, and then possible connections of such depiction to other Hawthorne short stories were established to get a fuller understanding of how the power of water as the force of nature is presented in Hawthorne's short stories.

This study aimed to show from the ecocritical point of view, what Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) defines as nature being the 'actor' instead of a setting of a story. The study focuses on how the element of water and its manifestations, such as climatic clouds and rains, plays an active and significant part in how the story flows and unfolds within Hawthorne's selected short stories. With water understood as being a principal element of climate and climate change (United

Nations, n.d.), the study was aimed to reveal a sense of climate awareness within selected Hawthorne short stories.

Our understanding of water in this study relates to the meaning of water within its socio-political, philosophical, religious, and cultural interpretations of water. This is in line with what Michael Bennet (2001) has proposed in his argument of the necessity of grounding ecocritical understanding of nature within its socio-cultural context. In order to posit a more complete reading of water to be related to our discussion here, it is worthwhile to explore some basic meanings of water. Water has been understood by Western philosophy as the basic element of the universe where life springs from, much like the philosophical beliefs of the Ancient Greek philosophers Empedocles and Thales (Lindberg, 2008). Henry David Thoreau similarly perceived water, along with food, as the main 'necessary' of human life (2017). Water also has divine healing, renewal, and destructive properties, according to the understanding of major religions of the world (Bouguerra, 2005; Allen, 1996). For example in the Quran, 'We made from water, every living thing' (2003, 21:30). On the opposite side, a noteworthy discussion on water as a threat, in the form of human-poisoned water, is that of Rachel Carson's 1962 seminal book, *Silent Spring*, where she discussed how pesticides poisoned the groundwater, which then initiated the destruction of biodiversity (Howarth, 1996).

Water, indeed, has been interpreted as many things. James Linton, in an attempt to locate and identify the ecological water crisis, starts with the statement that "water is nothing but what we make of it" (2006, p. 2). Linton then points out the difficulty of defining water, stating that "people mix language, meaning, and gods with water to give it life and transcendence," and also argues that the Western positivistic idea of reducing water into its basic chemical component as a 'natural resource' by itself is insufficient to deal with many contemporary problems with water. What Linton proposes is that understanding water must never be separated from the social context of water – water interaction with humans and its subsequent socio-cultural interpretation by humans (2006, p. 84). Water always carries with it human influence. Agreeing with Linton's idea that water is "what we make it," Astrida Neimanis (2017) extends the understanding of water *ashuman bodies* themselves. Water, Neimanis argues, is not separated from human bodies as something "out there" such as a part of the environment, resource, commodity, or a backdrop – but it is also "the stuff of human bodies, and never separate from our own incontestable materiality" (2017, p. 21). This study, therefore, also aims to incorporate the understanding of water as it is shaped by its socio-cultural interaction with humans in several of Hawthorne's works, taking note of instances of water depiction with (and as) human bodies.

To truly define the role of water as it interacts with human lives and cultures in the stories, this study also considers the spaces of the urban, the human settlement, with nature and its wilderness. Bennett (2001) argues that urban, human environment, and wilderness space are inextricably linked and exist together. Tvedt and Oestigaard (2014) similarly agree with this idea, believing that:

... it is important to highlight the role of water, because it is important to learn to look at and to think about urban space not just as culture, as a reservoir of collective memory and imagination, or as an engineering relation, but also as nature, and on how these factors are interconnected. (Tvedt & Oestigaard, 2014, p. 19)

Bennet's and Tvedt & Oestigaard's arguments are therefore especially important in analyzing the urban landscape of Hawthorne's *Sights from Steeple*, the first focus of this study.

A recent study by Widodo (2021) contains a belief that Hawthorne's *Sights from A Steeple* contains something of a 'blueprint' that Hawthorne's later short stories would follow. *Sights from A Steeple* is peculiar among Hawthorne's other stories for two reasons. First, in that it does not mainly try to bring up a question of morality or other common themes found in Hawthorne's works; the short story simply portrays a montage of various sights that a narrator – equated with Hawthorne himself – has seen from his lofty steeple (Widodo, 2021). Such peculiarity, Widodo (2021) believes, may be the basis of an argument that *Sights from A Steeple* is actually a 'rough map' of what several of Hawthorne's later short stories would follow. Second, more related to this study is how this particular short story depicts nature in an interesting way: it shows how natural forces act together as an overwhelming power that 'shapes' how events would unfold (Widodo, 2021). Seeing that this study intends to focus on how nature shapes Hawthorne's stories, an initial focus on Hawthorne's *Sights from A Steeple* is motivated through its blueprint-like qualities of how nature frames, guides, or even seemingly sets Hawthorne's later stories.

2. The Climatic Natural Forces of Water in Hawthorne's Short Stories

The most overwhelming natural power in Hawthorne's *Sights from A Steeple* is that of water. The forces of water are depicted in the story's main forms: the seas, and especially the climate related forms of clouds, and rain. Together, these forms create a formidable force of nature that not only serves as backdrops of events but as influencers, even instigators, of the events that happen in Hawthorne's short stories: *Sights from A Steeple*, *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, *The Gentle Boy*, and *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*.

The beginning of *Sights from A Steeple* starts with the narrator's extensive but rather ambiguous pondering of nature. The clouds in the heavens are both portrayed as menacing as the 'black' fleet of 'air-ships of death' transporting tempests, signaling its dire intent with thundering cannons. Yet, in the very next sentence, the narrator describes the lower clouds as playthings: 'fleecy' 'repose' for the 'sky pilgrims' that he could play with all day (Hawthorne, 2012, p. 163). These clouds are said to be harboring heavenly maids¹, and the narrator then draws an extensive description and even longing of these imaginary creatures and beautiful sights of nature, only to end it all with sudden and ambiguous chillness:

Yonder again is an airy archipelago, where the sunbeams love to linger in their journeyings through space. Every one of those little clouds has been dipped and steeped in radiance, which the slightest pressure might disengage in silvery profusion, like water wrung from a sea-maid's hair. Bright they are as a young man's visions, and, like them, would be realized in chillness, obscurity, and tears. I will look on them no more. (Hawthorne, 2012, p. 163. my emphasis)

It would seem the sun-lit 'archipelago' of sea-like clouds on the azure sky has hidden mythic sirens that would lure the young man's ambitious eyes. His gaze would reach into unreachable visions of hope that would only drown him into a sad realization that disengages him from his elevated fantasies down into his cold reality. It is very interesting to explore here how an image of nature has evoked a multitude of conflicting yet deep images in the narrator's mind.

There are many possible interpretations of what the depiction of clouds here can represent. First of all, the clouds are depicted as an 'archipelago' with invading air-ships that bring the tidings of nature's 'invasion' in the form of the ship-like darkening clouds, which comes into full effect later on in the story. Noting how Linton considers that the depiction of water can contain "the hegemonic, yet unmarked nature of water in the western, industrialized world" (2006, p. 104). We see here that the natural occurrence of water in the heavens evokes through Western eyes a sense of colonialistic power, especially when these cloud-ships later

release their thundering loads. The image of the sky invaded by black ships is colored by Hawthorne with a sense of journey through an airy and sunny archipelago and discovery, perhaps a nod to the prevalence of travel and adventure literature during Hawthorne's era. However, what is interesting is that it needs to end with a darkened sense of "chillness, obscurity, and tears." In what Neimainis (2017) termed as human-centered and human-scaled embodiment of water, the depiction of water has indeed been processed as an (imaginary) lived embodiment through human perceptions, capable of evoking conflicting emotions even when nowhere and in no time in human history has black clouds actually become or function as ships.

The changing meaning of clouds as bodies of water, from an image of fascination to an image of danger and sorrow, coincides with Linton's (2006) and Neimanis' (2017) idea that the meaning of water is always fluid, fleeting, and changing. The effect of such fluid meaning of water here is that it induces what Neimanis has termed as human and environment being the universal 'hydrocommon' entities (2017, p. 64). The term means the sameness of water within and without the human body; in that the realization of a human as a body of water producing tears/water is the effect of watching, internalizing, and expecting what the bodies of water clouds will bring. In that moment, human and clouds show that they can both produce water, because they are the same water beings. Water has then become the past (colonial ideas), present (joy and satisfaction), and future (fear, possible thundering death). For Hawthorne, watching the bodies of water in the clouds has become a contemplation of sameness, origin, and end of water bodies of humans and clouds.

The heavenly projection of the angelic sirens indeed provides an additional vision of conflict of religion², lust, and temptations to the young observer in the steeple. The young man's faltering vision can be interpreted as young Hawthorne's own contemplation of his place in the universe, as is written early in his writing career, where he had been known to be in obscurity and even in tears (McIntosh, 2013). The arrangement of sudden conflicts of contrasting images gives a foundation to Hawthorne's notoriety as being unreachable and darkly ambiguous in his works, as even very early critics such as Poe suggested in his review of Hawthorne's works (Poe in McIntosh, 2013). However, most interesting here is how the clouds become a moving image of ideas that Hawthorne would later develop in this short story and the next.

The clouds in *Sights from A Steeple* act as an opening scene that frames the entire short story, but it is interesting to note the similarities of the imagery of the clouds present in Hawthorne's other short stories, namely *The May-pole of Merry Mount*. *The May-pole of Merry Mount* tells a story of colonists of Merry Mount who merrily celebrate the marriage of a young couple, Edgar and Edith, in a wild, almost druidic fashion around a Maypole covered in nature's beauty as the "pole was dressed with birchen boughs, and others of the liveliest green, and some with silvery leaves... Garden-flowers and blossoms of the wilderness laughed gladly forth..." (Hawthorne, 2013, p. 111). However, a group of armed, jealous Puritans then storms the wedding, cuts down the Maypole, and puts an end to the heretic community and its wild revelries, punishing those who are involved. The young, newly-wed couple are spared the harshest punishment in the end, however, because the captain of the armed Puritans, Endicott, perceives a 'pure' and 'high' youthful beauty about them. The young groom had been stripped by the Puritans of his tenure of nature's May-lord and his 'glistening locks' - reminiscent of the high and heavenly hair sea maids of *Sights from A Steeple* - are cut into the frugal Puritan hairstyle while his and his bride's glistening natural costumes are changed into spartan garments. Nevertheless, the young man and his bride, in the end, are said to regain nature's garlands, achieving harmony with their natural selves wreathed again in nature's beauty, becoming beings of the heavens (p. 120). In a fashion reminiscence to how the beautiful spirits

of the heavens are depicted in the *Sights from Steeple*, the young couple seemingly ascends beyond the cruelty of the Puritans and the vanity of the Merry Mount colonists:

But as their flowery garland was wreathed of the brightest roses that had grown there, so in the tie that united them were intertwined all the purest and best of their early joys. They went heavenward supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on the vanities of Merry Mount. (Hawthorne, 2013, p. 120)

Here, the young couple is depicted as overcoming both the Puritans' stern oppression and the Merry Mount colonists' extravagance. Aside from this, there are also natural events that are used as foreshadowing in both *The May-pole of Merry Mount* and *Sights from A Steeple*: that of the rain and the darkness of the sky.

At the beginning of *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, the young groom and bride share an ill omen in the 'shower of withering rose-leaves from the Maypole,' feeling that their world of happiness is about to end, which is then proven to be true (Hawthorne, 2013, p. 114). The skies darken while the 'dark' Puritan soldiers move in from the 'benighted wilderness' to ransack the merry colony in the growing twilight (Hawthorne, 2013, p. 117). It is interesting how Hawthorne equates in his nature symbolism, the 'shower' and the darkening nature as ill portents of happiness' demise in *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, which is similar to what is done in *Sights from Steeple* in the form of a dark, thunderous rain that cuts the story and almost put an end the whole narrative. The importance of light and darkness and the intersection of the two has been well noted by critics for at least six decades, as Sarah Cullen has noted in her study (2019). Cullen's idea that darkness in Hawthorne's stories in an ecogothic sense is a period or place of necessary growth (2019, p. 108), is applicable here in that the darkness of the rain and the forest is a necessary time and place for the couple in *The May-pole of Merry Mount* to grow or ascend into better and happier versions of themselves. In *Sights from A Steeple*, the darkness is in the form of the rain, and it has more roles to be discussed here.

The coming rain takes an active role in *Sights from A Steeple*, deciding how the events would transpire in the story. After describing the opening scenery, the narrator continues the story by describing events in the parts of the town below him while the clouds above him continue to darken. There are three main events in the town described by the narrator in *Sights from A Steeple*. The first is the hustle and bustle of the town's old merchant as he traveled the port and the streets, while the second is the seemingly ill-fated love relationship between a young couple, a young man and his young lady lover, in a way similar to *The May-pole of Merry Mount*. The third is the processions of military soldiers, children, and a funeral. Widodo (2021) has remarked on how these three events foreshadow the events of Hawthorne's later short stories, where each is then developed into its own complex stories and characters. Adding to his interpretation, there is another agent that plays a role in these three events and, in effect, in Hawthorne's later short stories, that is the rain that comes in under the darkened clouds, which alters the course of the events, and even threatens to evict the narrator from his lofty steeple.

The narrator first senses the coming rain after he describes the funeral procession and feels a grim and menacing omen of the young couple whom he has described earlier:

The mourners enter the churchyard at the base of the steeple, and pause by an open grave among the burial-stones; the lightning glimmers on them as they lower down the coffin, and the thunder rattles heavily while they throw the earth upon its lid. Verily, the shower is near, and I tremble for the young man and the girls, who have now disappeared from the long and shady street. (Hawthorne, 2012, p. 163)

The narrator here feels the force of the coming climatic forms of water in rain and storm, and in a way reminiscent of the young newly-weds in *The May-pole of Merry Mount*: he too

perceives an ill omen brought by the 'shower' toward the young couple in this short story – the young man and the girl. Indeed, there are many similarities in Hawthorne's particular depiction of how nature's shower - a symbol of renewal and growth - signals the ending and impending doom for young couples in *The May-pole of Merry Mount* and *Sights from A Steeple*.

The two short stories share similarities in the sense that the 'shower' heralds coming separation and that there is an older, more powerful, outside faction that hates and tries to separate them. In *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, the 'shower' of leaves and the dark clouds signal the coming of the armed Puritans, led by the stern Endicott and the elder and hateful Peter Palfrey, who threatens to put harsh punishment, even possible death, to one of the newly-weds. Similarly, in *Sights from A Steeple*, the rain separates the young couple as the old merchant, wealthy and powerful, takes the young girl away, leaving the young man standing in the rain. The rain in *the Sights from A Steeple* does more than signaling an end to the young couple, as it also ends the processions in the town, seemingly shutting down the entire activity in the town:

A strong wind has sprung up, howls through the darkened streets, and raises the dust in dense bodies, to rebel against the approaching storm. The disbanded soldiers fly, the funeral has already vanished like its dead, and all people hurry homeward,—all that have a home; while a few lounge by the corners, or trudge on desperately...
(Hawthorne, 2012, p. 164)

The storm is then described as powerful, even paradoxically, 'fiery' water, as the houses then have their windows closed by housemaids as if the city itself cowers under the might of the storm. The narrator himself feels 'powerless' on his lofty steeple and decides that the raging, thunderous storm evicts him as he decides to descend and stop his story. The stormy rain, it can be summarized then, is a powerful natural force that intercedes for the interest of an older, hateful faction, here the old merchant from *Sights from A Steeple* and the Puritan elder in *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, effectively stopping and ending the stories. Based on this interpretation, it is interesting to draw a comparison to that of the ancient power of God to continue the understanding of the elements of water and rain.

The rain has been interpreted differently across cultures and religions, but in the Christian tradition, most relevant here to the context of the setting and Hawthorne's intended American setting and audience³, is that Rain can symbolize the coming of God's righteousness (Hosea 10:12), God's punishment as He sent the rain as a preparation to the Great flood that wiped clean the sinners in Noah's story (Genesis 7:4), and God's kindness and blessing of food and growth (Acts 14:17) (Bible Study Tools, 2021). Hawthorne here seems to be doing what Petersheim (2020) understood as a contemplation of 'overlapping' physical and spiritual realities. Given that Hawthorne chose to depict rain as signaling coming separation, an end to heavenly love, the coming storm can be interpreted first as the coming of punishment. Indeed, if the mass deluge of the storm is fearful to behold in *Sights from A Steeple*, as like the biblical Great Flood, it seems to put an end to all humans' worldly affairs and cares in the world.

Looking back at how the clouds are first described at the beginning of *Sights from A Steeple*, the coming of massive water in the form of a stormy rain is foreshadowed menacingly as an invader, a powerful oppressor. The clouds are described as black ships with thundering cannons, seemingly eager to invade the town. The town, underneath an 'archipelago' of calm skies and clouds, is filled with activities. When the storm finally comes, invades, and shoots forth its thundering cannons and water deluge, the town is drenched, conquered in water, and all the activities in the town stop - even the narrator then stops the story. The housemaids then close the houses' curtains, symbolizing the closing of the flow of the story, as these windows are the openings through which the narrator longs to be able to gaze and tell the stories of the

inhabitants inside their houses. The water then becomes the oppressor in that it forces its massive coming and uses its might to control and effectively stop the story.

All the processions of life and death, old and young, all the hustle and bustle of the activities of the town, and the young man and the girl's intense but brief love story are ended by the coming of the storm. However, it is worth noting that the love pursuit of the young man and the possible clashing interest of the young man versus the old man and his family is also avoided because of the coming of the storm. The storm then holds sway over the story in *Sights from A Steeple*, as it can control how events will unfold, deciding what events can transpire in the story and what events will be forever unsettled. The stormy rain is the overseer riding on the conquering cloud-ships that invade and conquer the archipelago of separate events in the town. However, it is to be noted that the depiction of rain and storm seems to be ruthlessly powerful – it is interesting that the natural, even necessary occurrence of water and rain is portrayed in a negative light.

The coming of water in the form of rainstorms can be a positive natural occurrence. Rains and storms bring water, a very significant element of the natural environment, and it is very important in maintaining natural life on Earth. That the storm and rain are considered invaders to their natural environment, is because the setting of the short story is not exactly natural. The setting where the short story takes place is the town. Focus is given to the port, the streets, the houses, and the inhabitants of the town. The town is man-made and unnatural, so much that the coming of the natural rain is perceived as a threat to the 'unnatural' town and its human inhabitants. The town's inhabitants - the reason why the town needs to exist in the first place - must try to avoid the invading deluge of rain. Water is depicted as bringing damage, as it is true that water can cause structural damage to man-made buildings and is an important factor to consider in the construction of settlements, especially towns and cities.

In this regard, a study by Tvedt and Oestigaard (2014) brings to light the vital relationship between towns and water. In one series of socio-cultural studies of the history of water, focusing on the relationship of water to urban areas, Tvedt and Oestigaard stated that the importance of water cannot be overestimated. Firstly, this is because every town dweller needs water to survive - water is an essential urban resource that must be provided in any way possible (Tvedt & Oestigaard, 2014). The relationship between elements of water management: the natural waterscape, weather, rains, etc., and the human side in both water management and water manipulation, is of such importance that Tvedt and Oestigaard believe that "the geography and history of all cities in the world are therefore written in water" (2014, p. 2). This is mainly seen in the humans' need to modify natural, often haphazard, waterscapes to fulfill their purposes, and indeed, human-modified waterscapes 'have been the very symbol of urbanized life' (Tvedt & Oestigaard, 2014). Due to this, human control of water is a necessity, and in *Sights from A Steeple*, the townspeople are portrayed as failing to control the torrent of water drenching their town in the rainstorm.

Sensing this mistake, the town inhabitants quickly shelter themselves in their homes, abandoning their usual cares to be safe from the menacing water deluge that the rainstorm brings. The town, the setting of the *Sights from A Steeple*, then is a space where nature is not welcomed. When human control of water fails in the form of massive water raining down from the sky, then nature reasserts its true dominance, invading the artificial 'safe-space' of the inhabitants, walling them in their leaky buildings, and forcing the narrator down from his high steeple. Here, Hawthorne is making a statement about how powerful nature's true power is. It is as if Hawthorne purposefully put nature in the background of his story, readying it to take back the narrator's throne up high on the steeple. There is even the sense that nature, in the form of the unstoppable deluge of water, holds the truth in the story, forcibly putting humans in their

places, even reclaiming its influence in the storytelling – a symbolism that is also similarly done by Hawthorne in his other short story, *The Gentle Boy*.

In *The Gentle Boy*, a Quaker boy by the name of Ilbrahim is found alone in the woods by a Puritan farmer, Pearson, who, along with his wife, finds themselves persecuted by the Puritan community by attempting to raise the gentle Quaker boy. While Pearson, his wife, and Ilbrahim go to the church one day, Ilbrahim's mother, not knowing not that her son is still alive, goes to the pulpit and delivers damning truth and vengeance toward the Puritans for killing her husband and son and leaving her to die in the wilderness. In her fiery speech, she delivers the awful, pure truth of the Puritans' diabolical 'piety,' ending it with a terrible curse upon the Puritans in the church. Perhaps most interesting here is that her damning speech is delivered in the metaphor of raging water. The woman begins by delivering a "turbid river" of rhetoric where bright ideas "leapt" like fish, and ends with a "flood of malignity" released to the audience strained by "torrents" of her curse, deafened by its "roaring" (Hawthorne, 2013, p. 45-6). Related to the imagery of water used in rhetoric, James L. Smith (2013) in his thesis, described how the natural imagery of water is used as an intellectual tool to mirror the structure of ideas of the external world in High Medieval Western monastic thoughts, rhetoric, and texts. An example provided by Smith is how rhetorical and mnemonic image of a river system is used in order to teach grammar. The images of water's integrity, fluidity, and interconnectivity are used in teaching grammar so that water "represents the spread of ideas from place to place along the paths of the mind" (Smith, 2013, p. 2). It is interesting that the opposite, negative imagery of water is used here by Ilbrahim's mother to deliver her scathing criticism of Puritanism in the church. The violent and destructive imagery of water is used to attack the churchgoers' spirituality. Here, Hawthorne reinforces the idea of divine punishment through the imagery of the raging water, similar to how the raging storm acts as a conquering element of nature in *Sights from Steeple*.

Not everyone, however, would feel nature in this somewhat negative and ruthless light. Farmers, animals, or plants would welcome rain, but these are not mentioned in *Sights from A Steeple*. However, there are people who do not hurry themselves to be out of the rain in this short story - people who ignore the thundering threat of the storm. These are the homeless people wandering the streets, who leisurely try to shelter themselves, and the love-sick young man whose expensive garments are threatened by water damage.

The homeless people and the infatuated young man draw similarity to the colonists and the newly-wed youngsters in *The May-pole of Merry Mount*. The seemingly animalistic colonists and the homeless townspeople have something in common in that they have forfeited material life and shelter, willingly or not. They both then live their fullest in nature's embrace. The colonists living in the Merry Mount don animal costumes to become one with nature, while the homeless people from *Sights from A Steeple* ignore the showers of the thunderous storm, even walking 'leisurely,' perhaps outwardly showing their enjoyment of nature's giving waters. On the other hand, the love-struck young man and the newlyweds of Merry Mount share more than this.

The young man and the young girl of *Sights from A Steeple* and the young couple from *The May-pole of Merry Mount* seem to be very much alike. The first similarity is that these couples are in love, an instinct that can arguably be considered pure or natural in humans. Second, and most importantly, is that they are both harassed and forcibly separated by older, sterner men who do not ever seem never to understand the couples' natural love. These older men are also described in the two short stories as somewhat 'unnatural.' Endicott and Palfrey, the leaders of the Puritan invaders in *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, are described as made of 'iron,' while the old merchant in *Sights from A Steeple* is engrossed in human affairs and shuns the coming natural rain.

Seen in their relationships to the natural force of water, the most significant symbolic similarities between the couples are in terms of their outward appearance, especially the young men in *Sights from A Steeple* and *The May-pole of Merry Mount*. Firstly, the young men share the same fate shown in the garments that they wear. The young man in *The May-pole of Merry Mount* is described as wearing an extravagant costume of the beauties of the Earth. When the Puritans, Endicott, and elder Palfrey come to end the young man's life and beliefs, they are especially angry at the sight of the young man's garlanded clothes and want his costume to be burned and to be swapped with a more civilized garment. The change of clothing here marked the conversion of the young man, the May-lord of nature, who has been downcast into a 'civilized' Puritan. On the other hand, the young man in *Sights from A Steeple* is already garbed in refined, civilized clothing, but then this clothing is what the water of the rain is damaging. It can be interpreted that the civilized garment, taken as the symbol of human civilization, is what nature abhors and damages. It is worthwhile to note how the textile and leather industries are some of the most damaging industries to nature, especially damaging to the quality of water in the environment (Islam, et al., 2020). Therefore, nature here abhors the symbols of civilization in men's clothing: a person is detached from nature's throne the moment he wears refined clothing, as is the case with the young groom in *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, while in the *Sights from A Steeple*, the young man's refined clothing is what nature's waters threaten to destroy.

However, the force of nature does not solely act to destroy, as it can be seen as a natural power of renewal as well. At the very end of the *Sights from A Steeple*, the natural force of the storm subsides, and it then becomes a symbol of new hope and renewal, in the form of the subsiding darkness of the clouds and, finally, a rainbow. In *Sights from A Steeple*, the narrator, getting ready to depart from his lofty steeple, sees the subsiding of the storm:

But stay! A little speck of azure has widened in the western heavens; the sunbeams find a passage, and go rejoicing through the tempest; and on yonder darkest cloud, born, like hallowed hopes, of the glory of another world, and the trouble and tears of this, brightens forth the Rainbow! (Hawthorne, 2012, p. 164)

Here, darkness passes and allows the narrator to feel the glory of "another world" through the glimmer of hope from the "western heavens." There is the repetition of the colonialistic theme found at the beginning of the story with the fleet of the black clouds. Aside from the use of repetition that can be taken as the rounding or the denouement for the closing of the story, the meaning of water here again shows the hegemonic Western idealization through the parting of the bodies of water: the rays of western hope being given birth, to borrow Neimanis' (2017) idea of gestational bodies of water, by the receding clouds. The resulting tears of the narrator's water are the opposite of the tears at the beginning of the story; these are the tears of happiness, not of the coming evil. The narrator seems to experience an almost divine revival of hope. The element of water ceases to become the menacing storm, but becomes the bright rainbow, bringing glory to a new reality of revival and renewal. Likewise, the preceding stormy rain, because it is relatively brief, does not truly symbolize divine punishment like the biblical Great Flood. The rain acts more like the water for the spiritual ablutions that wash away sin and allows God's light and revelations to appear from the heavens, in a manner similar to how water is perceived in Early Christian beliefs, some Eastern Orthodox churches, and in Islam (Bradley, 2012). Truly then, the natural force of water in the story is not depicted as the wrathful Great Flood but rather as the giving water from the heavens. The opposite of this is true as well: that unnatural water would lead to disease and ruin.

3. Poisoned Man-Made Waters in *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*

A subverted direction for the natural water is given in another of Hawthorne's short story, *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, where the unnatural water fuels humans' greed down to the path

of destruction. Hawthorne, in writing this story, seems to be taking the basis of the magical water to be purportedly taken from the fabled Fountain of Youth, which was told in the story to be discovered somewhere in Florida. This is taken from a story of the Fountain's discovery attached to the Portuguese explorer Juan Ponce de Leon, who traveled to the New World in the 1500s - a somewhat misleading belief that de Leon had not actually been venturing to Florida in search of the Fountain of Youth (Peck, 2008). Perhaps Hawthorne truly intends the fact to be misleading, as the water does seem to mislead people who drink them. Dr. Heidegger, in the short story, invites four of his elder friends: Mr. Medbourne the merchant, Colonel Killigrew, Mr. Gascoigne the politician, and the widow Wycherly, for his experiment, where each of his friends would imbibe the magical water, turning each of them briefly into a wicked youthful mockery of themselves, leaving them wanting more of the water as Heidegger concludes that the water is evil. The water is presented in an unnatural manner: an artificial beauty that deceives mankind.

The water from the Fountain of Youth is described in the story as beautiful, mineral-laden, but unnatural. The water from the Fountain of Youth is usually depicted as magical in many stories (Peck, 2008), and Hawthorne's description of the setting of Dr. Heidegger's office where the water is presented would support that. However, a closer look would put this particular water as artificial and man-made. This water is described as effervescent, continually bubbling, and glistening like 'diamonds' (Hawthorne, 2012, p. 138). The connection with minerals here is described as water being derived from the depths of the earth, perhaps extracted, mined, or brought out by springs and geysers. When put into context as water derived from a Fountain, which can be interpreted as *aman-made* marbled Fountain - as Renaissance depictions often do - would put this water more as artificial: water that is naturally hidden inside the earth, extracted out using an artificial Fountain by the hands of man. Indeed, fountains, as human instruments to control water, can be seen to symbolize man's control over nature (Tvedt & Oestigaard, 2014). Further interpretation of the Fountain of Youth's water as artificial is in the water's almost radioactive illumination. If the water is put in a vase in the dark, the water would give "a mild and moonlike splendor" which gleams from within the vase (Hawthorne, 2012, p. 138). The water's source is also described as having giant, mutant magnolias around it, giving more support to the water perhaps being 'radioactive.' This short story then depicts the water as unnatural and artificially modified, which brings evil consequences. Similarly, Guo (2024) has explored how Hawthorne has extolled through his short story, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, that humans' interference and manipulation harm nature, which is then followed with tragic consequences for humans. *Dr Heidegger's Experiment* is in similar vein in that Hawthorne gives the unnatural water a power of reversing natural aging with evil consequences⁴.

The unnatural water from the Fountain of Youth in *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment* has a malevolent quality that is the opposite of the natural giving waters in the *Sights from A Steeple*. The Fountain water turns Dr. Heidegger's elderly friends back into their passionate, wild, wicked youths that they once were, and, worst still, the water afflicts them with addiction to it. All of Dr. Heidegger's friends, at the end of the story, set out at once to find the source of the Fountain of Youth. Considering their ambitious, greedy nature, there is little doubt that if they found the Fountain, they would most likely desecrate and over-exploit its environment to get a limitless supply of it. Unlike the rainwater from the *Sights from the Steeple*, as terrible as it might seem, the natural rainwater is freely given, brings out the truth of nature, and gives renewal and hope in the end. The Fountain water, in contrast, is outwardly beautiful but secretive and deceitful in origin, and its unnatural power brings out greed and wickedness in humans, which is too often the cause of nature's destruction in human hands. These waters, however different, still share a commonality in the short stories, as they both seem to control the events and thus destinies of the characters in the story. Water becomes the powerful force

that drives the stories. Without the existence of the water from the Fountain of Youth, there would not be any *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*.

4. Conclusions

This study used ecocritical approach to analyze how Nathaniel Hawthorne depict water as crucial in his less-known works, *Sights from A Steeple*, *The May-pole of Merry Mount*, *The Gentle Boy*, and *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, in order to get a full understanding of how nature is presented in these works. As the previous discussion shows, Nathaniel Hawthorne depicts water as having a great significance. Water has always been dominant, firstly in the background as a part of a seemingly passive setting or objects that would burst out, showing its hidden climatic power in manipulating the flow of the story and the characters' destinies, even reclaiming the throne of the storyteller himself. Nathaniel Hawthorne tries to put forward a message that natural climate in many forms of water controls human life and environment.

Firstly, the power of water in *Sights from A Steeple* is depicted as powerful in its many forms, such as the climate-related forms of the shower, the clouds, the rain, the storm, and the rainbow. Water is then seen as an agent that is able to control the events in the plot, and in the process, affect the motivations, success or failure, of the characters. As such, water is first seen as ruthless power that brings down human activities and wants, but then it turns into the giving water that promises renewal and hope. This imagery is similarly depicted in Hawthorne's other short stories, *The May-pole of Merry Mount* and *The Gentle Boy*, while it is subverted in *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*.

The other short stories further explore the many facets of water. The darkness and a 'shower' in *The May-pole of Merry Mount* bring an ill omen to the newly-weds, while the clouds of the heavens symbolize the youths' ascendancy from the profane and artificial beliefs of both the Puritans and the colonists of Merry Mount. The mighty and fearful delivery of truth by Ibrahim's mother in *The Gentle Boy* is done in the fashion of the raging water that uncovers the false piety of the murderous Puritans. A different, subverted depiction of water is given in *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, where the water of the Fountain of Youth, instead of becoming the giving water offering hope and renewal, is artificial water that awakens humans' greed that will lead to their own, and nature's, destruction.

Related to the power of nature to be put in that position in Hawthorne's storytelling, it is interesting to explore further in the future how nature is presented in a narratological sense in Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories. Also, a Postcolonial discussion would merit exploration, seeing that much of nature's imagery in *The Sights from A Steeple* is likened to an invasion or even colonization.

Notes

1. Hawthorne's description here almost echoes Thoreau's description of a lake and clouds, as both hinting at a heavenly imagery of water: "A lake like this is never smoother than at such a time; and the clear portion of the air above it being, shallow and darkened by clouds, the water, full of light and reflections, becomes a lower heaven itself so much the more important." (Thoreau, 2017, Chapter 2, para. 11). A notable similarity in that 'clouds' and 'water' are connected to the 'heavenly' imagery in these nature writers.
2. Indeed, it is very tempting to analyze the imagery of the ships in the clouds between the sirens of religion in a postcolonial context. The clouds, depicted as an 'archipelago' with invading air-ships, may conjure an image of conquest and colonization. Taking into account the consideration of the setting of the short story, which may very well be Hawthorne's imagined colonial America, a potentially rich interpretation can reveal the connection

- between nature as symbolic of power as constructed by the narrator's gaze. It is prudent for this study, however, to stay on course with the ecocritical readings at present.
3. American Great Plains' Tribes has similar belief as well. The Cheyenne's beliefs in the creation of the world put Maheo, the creator, working together with water beings to create Earth, creatures, and humans (Gunn, 1996). There is a relationship between Hawthorne and the Native Americans, as topics on Native Americans are present in Hawthorne's works, and in Hawthorne's unfinished romance, *Septimius Felton*, Hawthorne seemed to take Native American ancestry and race in a flattering light (Petersheim, 2020)
 4. Hawthorne often explored the theme of magical waters in his other works, and in one of his unfinished manuscript about an Elixir of Life of permanent health and immortality, while he himself was dying of an undiagnosed medical conditions (Petersheim, 2020). This information, coupled with Hawthorne's long-time interests in medicine and science, would be an interesting starting point to explore more about the theme of 'magical' curative water in his life and works.

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