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FORESTS AS MORAL AND ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES: A SYMBOLIC AND ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S THE *SCARLET LETTER* AND *YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how forests are used by Nathaniel Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter (1850) and Young Goodman Brown (1835) using both symbolic and ecocritical approaches for the analysis. During the symbolic stage, key passages are explored to reveal moral, psychological and social meanings in which the forests can be seen as mirrors of human inner struggles, ethical dilemmas as well as social pressures. The ecocritical stage examines the forest as an ecologically and ethically dynamic zone, the human-nature relations, the agency of the environment and the ethical dimensions inherent in the description of the natural world as a representation by Hawthorne. Combining these views, the paper shows that the forests of Hawthorne represent moral landscapes as well as ecological spaces and present a deep understanding of how human conscience, social norms and nature interact.

Keywords: *Nathaniel Hawthorne, forest symbolism, ecocriticism, moral conflict, human–nature interaction, Young Goodman Brown, The Scarlet Letter*

INTRODUCTION

The fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne is famous by its themes of morality, sin, and the human psychology in the context of the natural and social environment of early New England. Forests are one of his motifs, which have a rather complicated position, as they can serve as both a physical terrain and a moral arena, as well as an embodiment of human consciousness. In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the woods become a place of solace and descent and a meeting point of personal feelings and social norms. Likewise, in *Young Goodman Brown* (1835) dark and mysterious forest is a place where the main character challenges the evil nature and hypocrisy of the human society.

The description of forests by Hawthorne, therefore, presents two ways of literary investigation. On the one hand, the symbolic analysis shows the moral, psychological, and social layer coded in the forest images, in which the interaction of characters and the construction of the plot demonstrates the ethical dilemma, inner struggle, and social pressures (Brooks, 1947; Frye, 1957). While, ecocritical approach looks at the forest as an ecological and ethical living system that is characterized by human-nature relations, environmental agency and the morality of the natural world in Hawthorne (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995).

This paper takes a two-step analysis to explore forests of Hawthorne in these aspects. To start with, it carries out a symbolic analysis of important passages in order to reveal their moral, psychological and social meaning. Second, it

provides an ecocritical analysis to question the forest as a moving environment that influences and shows human activities. Combining these methods, the paper will help to shed light on the complicated perception of the natural world by Hawthorne as a reflection of the human conscience and society and provide the understanding of the interaction between morality, human psyche and the ecological consciousness in his writings.

Research Questions

1. How does Nathaniel Hawthorne use the forest as a symbolic space to reflect moral, psychological, and social themes in his work?
2. How can the forest in Hawthorne's work be interpreted through an ecocritical lens as an ecological environment that interacts with human characters and shapes narrative meaning?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the symbolic significance of the forest in reflecting moral, psychological, and social conflicts in Hawthorne's work.
2. To examine the ecological role of the forest, exploring how it functions as an active natural environment that influences characters and narrative development.

Literature Review

Nathaniel Hawthorne is considered one of the key representatives of the American Romanticism of the nineteenth century, whose literary works often touch the themes of morality, sins, guilt and the opposition of the individual and the social order. Another important element of the literary imagination that is evident in the works of Hawthorne is the consistent use of nature, especially the forest, as an important and multifaceted space and not a background. It has long been observed by scholars that Hawthorne has greatly symbolic natural landscapes, which are strongly connected to the psychological and moral conflicts of his characters (Bercovitch, 1991; Bloom, 2007).

In American Romantic literature, the forest can be described as the place of wilderness in contrast with civilization and cultural fears of morality, law and social order. This contradiction is particularly strong in the works of Hawthorne, as the moral system of the Puritan society was strict. The critics suggest that the forest is the opposite place to Puritan settlements, which symbolizes freedom, uncertainty, and the opposition to authoritarian ethical principles (Crews, 1966; Fogle, 1952). Such symbolic opposition can be vividly traced in *The Scarlet Letter* and in the short story *Young Goodman Brown* in which forest settings are important in developing narrative meaning and character growth.

Earlier studies in literature have greatly analyzed the forests of Hawthorne as a symbolic and moral context with the focus on their connection to sin, secret and transgression. Research has demonstrated that the forest turns to be a place where social hierarchies are shattered and repressed truths are revealed to challenge the Puritan ideology (Bloom, 2007). But these readings tend to give precedence to human-focused ethical issues, and nature is used as a symbolic representation of the psychological or moral struggle.

Later on, the emergence of ecocriticism has prompted researchers to take a fresh look at literary nature representations as active and effective contributors to the textual worlds. Ecocritical critics recognize that it is necessary to study how literature explains human interactions with nature and non-symbolic abstraction of nature (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995). In these circumstances, the forests of Hawthorne may be considered as symbolic spaces as well as ecological settings that demonstrate human fear, domination and alienation of natural world.

However, regardless of the increasing attention to ecocriticism, there are few detailed studies that would put Hawthorne forests in the context of symbolism and ecocritical discourse. The available literature is more inclined to emphasize either moral symbolism or theological interpretation and the ecological aspect is not fully explored. Thus, a definition of the importance of forests in the works by Hawthorne as symbolic structures and ecological places can offer a required basis of further critical research.

Symbolism is one of the most important literary elements which allow authors to say more than the

text itself. Symbolism is a literary device used in literary works to embody abstract concepts, feelings or values in terms of a thing, a place or a deed. Frye (1957) argues that symbols in literature work within larger mythic and cultural structures, which are able to convey more elaborate ideological and psychological messages through texts. In the same manner, Brooks (1947) states that literary symbols acquire meaning in the recurrence of use and in the relationships in context of a text and not by some predetermined definitions. Symbolism is frequently used in the works of American Romanticism in order to develop the theme of internal conflict, the lack of moral clarity, and the opposition of personal desire and social limitations. The dense use of symbolic texture, in which physical surroundings like houses, prisons, and forests are symbolically used as a symbolic representation of psychological and ethical conditions, is particularly characteristic of Hawthorne fiction (Fogle, 1952). It has often been observed by scholars that the symbols used by Hawthorne are intentionally ambiguous and cannot be interpreted in one way or another and that the reader is supposed to think about the morality of his or her actions (Bloom, 2007). In the works of Hawthorne, the forest has been generally construed as a strong sign of liberty, craving, and sin. It is usually opposed to an ordered space of the Puritan town, and it is a symbol of opposition to strict social rules and moral surveillance (Crews, 1966). The forest is frequently interpreted in *The Scarlet Letter* as a place where the characters can forget about social condemnation and face themselves. The forest in *Young Goodman Brown* represents both the moral bewilderment and spiritual doubt, which depicts the inner conflict of the main character. Such allegoric meanings reveal how much the forest was the focus of moral and thematic interests of Hawthorne.

The ecocriticism is a relatively new theoretical approach that studies the connection between literature and the natural world. According to Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism refers to the examination of the ways in which nature and the physical world are depicted in literature and the ways that these depictions affect human feelings towards nature. Ecocriticism, in contrast to the conventional literary criticism, questions the anthropocentric interpretations of literature, by focusing on non-human nature and its agency, presence, and value in literary texts. Buell (1995) also states that literary work is very critical in the development of environmental awareness, since it represents cultural understandings of nature, wilderness, and environmental accountability. Ecocritically, nature is not just a symbolic setting but an active component, which interrelates with characters and social structures of humans. According to Garrard (2012), the ecocriticism mostly revolves around the ideas of wilderness, pastoralism, and environmental ethics, which is why it is especially useful when the texts about forests and natural landscapes are under consideration. Though ecocriticism has been employed extensively to American nature writing and transcendentalist literature, its use in Hawthorne fiction is relatively little. The current research is inclined to focus on the religious, psychological, or moral interpretation of the natural settings of Hawthorne. Ecocritical analysis of the forests in Hawthorne would enable one to better appreciate the way in which nature has been portrayed as a realm of fear, opposition and moral challenge, especially in the context of Puritan efforts to dominate and tame nature.

A mixture of symbolism and ecocriticism would give a holistic approach to the discussion of forests in the works of Hawthorne. Although symbolism can be used to perceive forests as the metaphor of moral and psychological contradiction, ecocriticism can widen the perception and focus on the forest as the ecological space that represents the world beyond humanistic definitions. This combined method enables the forest itself to be considered as a symbol of culture and worldview influenced by Puritanism as well as a natural habitat threatening the power of human beings and their moral absolutism. This kind of treatment is part of a wider debate in literary criticism since it shows that symbolic meaning and ecological consciousness can co-exist in the fiction of the nineteenth century in America.

Many critical works have been completed on the role of the forest in the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne, frequently focusing on the symbolic

value of the forest as it is used in concerns of morality and culture. The forest has been understood in *The Scarlet Letter* as a place of liberation and defiance of Puritan social order, and a location where natural elements show repressed human passions and moral ambiguity. Critiques of the Hawthorne novel reveal that the forest is the opposite of the organized existence of the Puritan town, a part of the wilderness where Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale face the emotional and social burden of their sin outside the judgment of the community. The Puritans are also criticized to perceive the forest as something sinful and the realm of the unknown, but Hawthorne employs the forest setting to help to emphasize the potential of breaking free of social oppression. According to the recent ecocritical research, such nature/culture division in *The Scarlet Letter* reflects an ecological awareness, as nature is opposite to the human culture, and it provokes a reevaluation of the moral and ethical presuppositions regarding the natural world (El-Diasty, 2017).

The forest in the story *Young Goodman Brown* serves as a certain symbolical and psychological environment where the moral certainties of the protagonist are put to the test. Critical readings underline that the journey of Goodman Brown into the woods is a descent into moral grayness and self-doubt with the forest being a protracted allegory of facing the darkness that is thought to be out there in the world and in himself. The exotic and threatening nature of the forest has been characterized as a place that reflects the Puritan fear of the unknown and the wilderness beyond the organized society (JELA, 2026). Other critics interpret the forest as belonging to the allegorical nature of the story, whereby the social boundaries are broken down and the truths concealed are brought to light, which provokes a breakdown in the belief and faith held by the protagonist to his community (enotes, 1999).

In spite of these contributions, the current scholarship tends to focus on the forest rather as a symbolic space in moral and allegoral contexts than as a less frequently studied problem to incorporate ecocritical approaches into interpreting the natural environments of Hawthorne. Although there is a developing ecocritical interest in *The Scarlet Letter*, there is little scholarly interest in approaching the story ecocritically, that is, as an ecological setting and not merely as a symbol. This implies that a literature gap exists whereby ecocritical focus on forests in both texts may enhance the knowledge of how Hawthorne describes the surrounding environment and its moral, psychological, and cultural implications.

Though much has been done to talk about the symbolic and moral aspects of forest in the works of Hawthorne, there are a number of shortcomings. To begin with, a lot of the literature is narrowly devoted to symbolic or allegoric interpretation, with a focus on moral, religious, or psychological interpretation and leaves the ecological or environmental aspects of the forests in Hawthorne almost completely unexplored. As an example, a close reading of *The Scarlet Letter* often talks about the forest as a place of liberalization and escape of Puritan restrictions but seldom dwells upon the fact that the forest is an ecological space with agency and inherent worth (El Diasty, 2017).

Second, when it comes to *Young Goodman Brown*, the critical readings are more likely to interpret the forest as a tool of moral allegory or psychological projection, not paying attention to the way the natural environment itself communicates with human characters and adds to the narrative meaning (enotes, 1999). Third, there are few comparative studies between the two writings, most of the studies analyze *The Scarlet Letter* or the *Young Goodman Brown* in isolation, which does not provide a clear picture of how Hawthorne continues to depict forests in various stories.

Lastly, despite the recent years of the emerging ecocritical approaches, they are still narrow in terms of scope and use. The vast majority of research takes nature as a symbolic manifestations of human interests, instead of as an environment having moral and ecological values (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995). This gap is highly important and thus necessitates the adoption of the integrated approach whereby both the symbolic and ecocritical approaches are merged to

give a more comprehensive overview of the forests in the works of Hawthorne.

Although there is a lot of literature about the forests of Hawthorne, there are still some gaps that this study attempts to fill. To begin with, although symbolic interpretations of forests in *The Scarlet Letter* and in the short story *Young Goodman Brown* are not a new topic, the ecological relevance of these nature zones is under-researched.To fill this gap, the given work employs a combined method involving symbolism and ecocriticism and interprets the forests in both works as multi-layered spaces as the embodiment of moral uncertainty, psychological conflict, and environmental consciousness. This methodology places the study in the position of making a contribution to the study of Hawthorne by intersecting the old literary criticism with the new ecocritical discourse, providing a deeper insight into how forests are used in the works of nineteenth-century American literature as a symbolic, moral, and ecological environment.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design of this paper is a qualitative with textual and interpretive approach, that seeks to investigate forest representations in the fiction works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Qualitative analysis is especially adequate to literary research since it can deeply analyze meanings, themes, and representations instead of measuring them numerically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The paper uses a dual-theoretical approach of combining Symbolism and Ecocriticism to examine the forest as a moral and psychological space and the ecological environment.

Data Source

The main sources that will be used in this study are:

1. *The Scarlet Letter* - the novel will be examined for passages related to the forest with the aim to identify moral, psychological, and social tensions.
2. *Young Goodman Brown* - the short story will be discussed on the basis of forest setting which illustrates the psychological conflict, temptation, and interaction between man and nature.

The choice of these texts is due to the fact that the forest is one of the key narrative elements of the two works which offers a significant amount of material to be analysed through symbolic and ecological approaches (Bloom, 2007; Fogle, 1952).

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis is carried out in two complementary stages:

Symbolic Analysis:

Passages are analyzed to have symbolic meanings that are moral, psychological, and social and emphasis is laid on narrative patterns, imaginations, and character relations which bring out human moral dilemmas or psychological struggle relating to the forest.

Ecocritical Analysis:

The representations of the forest as an ecological environment are analyzed in passages and analysis is done on the interactions between humans and nature, the agency of the forest and environmental or ethical connotations that Hawthorne places in his portrayal of nature.

Data Analysis

The Scarlet Letter

Symbolic Analysis

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne uses the forest and the nature around it as a multifaceted symbolic terrain, where the conflict of the morality, the struggle of the psyche, and the conflict of the social world are examined. Instead of serving as a backdrop scenery, the forest serves as a metaphorical counter-world to Puritan society, which enables Hawthorne to challenge the strict rules of morality and to show the inner world of his characters. Based on symbolic literary theory, where the significance of the imagery and narrative form is gauged by the multiple layers of meaning (Brooks, 1947; Frye, 1957), this discussion will focus on how the forest is used symbolically to imply moral uncertainty, mental hiding, and rebellion against social order.

Hawthorne brings out natural symbolism by the contrast between natural and human institutions. In the first pages of the novel, the prison, which is

referred to as "*the black flower of civilized society*", becomes the symbol of the moral rigidity and institutional punishment. Next to it, Hawthorne places a wild rose-bush, **"***its delicate gems... to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom*". The rose-bush, symbolically, is a representation of natural pity and moral controversy, indicating that nature can be merciful where the law of man cannot forgive. This opposition is an example of what Brooks (1947) refers to as symbolic tension in the creation of moral meaning in literary works. The forest themselves are being reiteratively depicted as a place where Puritan control has no power. According to Hawthorne, it is **"***the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region*". This description makes the forest a place of freedom and moral ambiguity, which is contrasted with the strict moral policing that exists in the town. In this space, characters are not in a position where they are being put in certain socially imposed identity and thus repressed emotions and desires are brought out. The forest, in the sense described by Frye (1957), is a mythic space that helps one to psychologically reveal and ethically question.

The fact that Hester Prynne stands on the periphery of the society is symbolically supported by the physical and emotional closeness of the woman to the forest. Her cottage has been said to be **"***on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-covered hills*". This physical configuration is an allegory of her being considered as an outsider to Puritan society and at the same time, it makes her closer to nature. The forest is treated as a psychological shelter, which is a manifestation of the inner opposition of Hester to imposed shame and moral judgment. Hawthorne extends this symbolism by applying organic metaphors to explain her persistence by stating that her pain turned **"***the roots which she had struck into the soil*". This imagery symbolically blends the identity of Hester with the landscape, and it is resilience and not moral corruption. The forest also represents the sense of moral uncertainty and other options of living outside the law of the Puritans. Through this, Hawthorne implies that Hester might have gone off **"***into the dark, inscrutable forest*" where her character would integrate **"***with a people whose customs and life were alien from the law that had condemned her*". The forest is symbolically the place of possible change, where the strict moral categories are breaking down, and identity is deformed. This supports the notion that moral judgment is relative instead of absolute.

Moreover, Hawthorne takes forest as a symbol of secret knowledge and forbidden wisdom. The mention of medicinal herbs and Indigenous knowledge points out that the forest holds some sort of knowledge that is not available to the Puritan institutions. The familiarity of the physician with **"***medicinal herbs and roots that grew in the forest*" is a symbolic opposition to European education and the sanctity of religion. The forest thereby turns into a place of intellectual and moral opposition, which identifies nature with the suppressed or marginalized knowledge systems. Nature too is personified as a moral accuser of human sin. Hawthorne fantasizes that **"***the leaves of the trees whispered the dark story among themselves*", and **"***the summer breeze murmured about it*". Such personification is an indication that moral truth is not confined to human institutions but in the natural world. The forest symbolically takes part in the moral drama of the story, to support the notion that morality and guilt cannot be fully absorbed by social silence or repression.

On the whole, the symbolic analysis shows that the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* is a moral and psychological territory which reveals the shortcomings of the Puritan ideology. In contrasts, imagery and symbolism of space, Hawthorne turns the forest into a story stage where the moral rigidity is challenged, the inner struggle is displayed, and the other ethical possibilities are brought into light. This symbolic role of the forest directly serves the argument of the study that nature in Hawthorne fiction works as a purposeful and working force in forming human experience.

Ecocritical Analysis

Ecocritically, *The Scarlet Letter* offers the forest as an ecological location, rather than just a symbolic setting, which interacts with human characters and opposes anthropocentric moralities.

Ecocriticism also focuses on the human-environment interaction and the moral aspect of environmental representation in literature (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). The forest in the story by Hawthorne becomes a dynamic and non-human entity that influences the behavior of human beings, knowledge and moral perception.

Hawthorne is repeatedly juxtaposing the civilized Puritan town with the natural wilderness in the background, anticipating the forest as something that cannot be controlled by man. The forest is referred to as **"***the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region***"** the language that is indicative of colonial anxiety towards the un-civilized nature. Ecocritically speaking, this description reveals the efforts of Puritan society to define nature within the context of moral and religious constructs, calling it lawless to be able to control it and exclude it. The forest, however, is not ready to be categorized in such a way, it retains its independence outside the control of a man. Another use of the forest as a source of ecological knowledge that is evident in the novel is the use of medicinal herbs and Indigenous practices. According to Hawthorne, Chillingworth had learned from **"***the savage people... medicinal herbs and roots that grew in the forest***"**. This recognition makes the forest a living archive of environmental knowledge, and the European scientific rationalism is in opposition. This is indicative of the argument of Buell (1995) that literary texts frequently expose subordinated ecological epistemologies that contest prevailing, humanized systems of knowledge.

The interaction between human and nature in the novel is further brought out by the fact that Hester Prynne spends most of her life living close to the forest. Hawthorne notices that her identity is mixed with the land, and she suffers as she says **"***the roots which she had struck into the soil***"**. This organic metaphor, through the ecocritical perspective implies that human life and environment have a reciprocal relationship. The forest is not simply a place of refuge that is chosen by Hester but it actually gives her her strength, her stamina, and her personality. This is in line with the ecocritical focus on environmental agency where nature does not have a passive role on the human experience. The forest is also the moral site of ethical opposition to the anthropocentric morality. As a society that aims to enforce strict rules of moral code, Puritan society is unable to enforce such rules on the forest, which serves as an alternative to the structure. Hawthorne implies that Hester might run away into the dark and incomprehensible forest where life does not follow the laws that accused her of a crime, **"***into the dark, inscrutable forest***,"** There is an ecocritical emphasis here of nature as an ethical counter-space, that is, as a place where human being can experience itself in relation to ecological rhythms, not to institutional control.

In addition, Hawthorne gives natural world certain agency and consciousness. Nature is portrayed as a part of the moral landscape of the novel when he envisions that **"***the leaves of the trees whispered the dark story among themselves***"** and that **"***the summer breeze murmured about it***"**. This personification breaks the anthropocentric assumptions implying that the environment is the witness of human activities. Such representations in ecocritical terms anticipate the ethical presence of the non-human world, which supports the argument by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) that literature has the ability to disrupt human-based ethical systems. Lastly, the way Hawthorne describes the forest can be seen as a wider environmental and moral conflict of the colonization. The forest is also characterized over and over again as **"***still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer***"** which highlights the inability of settlers to live in harmony with the surrounding world. This estrangement in a way reflects an exploitative and fearful attitude towards nature, where the attitude is based on domination and not coexistence. Hester, in her turn, adapts to the forest, which implies that a more sustainable, respectful relationship between people and nature could be achieved.

Overall, the ecocritical approach shows that the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* is an independent ecological space that has ethical, cultural, and narrational values. The forest as portrayed by Hawthorne challenges the anthropocentric moral authority, foreshadows the environmental agency, and reveals the conflict between human society

and nature. In these descriptions, the novel prefigures some of the most important ecocritical issues, and nature is seen as a moving power that determines human identity, morality, and narrative meaning.

Young Goodman Brown

Symbolic Analysis

Nathaniel Hawthorne extensively employs symbolism in his works as a way of exploring the themes of moral ambiguity, psychological conflict, and human vulnerability to sin in *Young Goodman Brown*. The story starts with the separation of Goodman Brown with his wife Faith, which in turn preconditions a conflict between the sense of innocence and ethical provocation. Hawthorne presents Faith with the picture of innocence and piety: *"And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap..."* The pink cap ribbon of Faith is used as an indication of her innocence and spiritual purity. Its frail, fluttering appearance is symbolic both of Faith itself and the moral core of Goodman Brown--that element that holds to goodness and piety. The symbolic opposition between the safety of home and the black wilderness is the moral setting of the story as he enters the forest: *"He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind".* The forest is allegorically associated with temptation, moral ambivalence and unconscious. The thoughts of Goodman Brown are marked with fear: *"What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"* This creates a figurative contradiction: the forest represents the mystery of human sin and the mental terrain of uncertainty and apprehension.

Hawthorne also intensifies the symbolic structure by the addition of the traveller with the serpent-like staff whose very staff reminds the reader of the serpent in the bible: *"But the only thing about him, that could be fixed upon as remarkable, was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought, that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent".* The employees are the embodiment of evil, temptation, and the all-encompassing sin, which reminds the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The traveller himself is a kind of a daimyo into moral ambiguousness, who encourages Goodman Brown to challenge the sins that are lurking within the community and his own suppressed potential to do wrong.

The situation with the characters of Goody Cloyse and the religious congregation, which appear during the forest journey, are symbols of the duplicity of humans. Those who are venerated in Salem as being pious are, figuratively speaking, shown to be part of evil: *"Yet, here are they all, in my worshipping assembly! This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds; how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households..."* These revelations emphasize the symbolic theme which is that sin is everywhere and moral certainty is fragile. The conflict between perception and reality in the case of Goodman Brown is the inner psychological conflict between faith and doubts, virtue and temptation. The pink ribbon is again introduced at a crucial point, being now disconnected with Faith: *"But something fluttered lightly down through the air, and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon".* The fall of the ribbon is representative of the failure of the moral assurance of Goodman Brown. The ribbon is an indication of the death of innocence in the mind of Goodman Brown whether Faith has literally fallen into the hands of the evil or not. It is the weakness of virtue against the perceived corruption and the irreversibility of his naive understanding of the world.

The symbolic ramifications of this moral and psychological confrontation are put into emphasis at the end of the story: *"A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream".* The symbolic setting of the forest, the serpent-staff and the corrupt congregation all contribute to the internalization of evil in Goodman Brown, which permanently changes the way he sees human beings and religion. The story displays the figurative intercourse of the external world (forest, figures, rituals) with internal moral consciousness, the way the psychological terror may be created due to the realization of the universal sin. Overall, symbolism (pink ribbon, serpent-staff, forest,

duality of human nature) helps Hawthorne to develop a story that examines the moral ambiguity, human vulnerability to evil, and psychological effects of disillusionment. The symbols in the tale serve as ethical guideposts as well as psychological stimulants, which defines the views of Goodman Brown and his eventual discouragement.

Ecocritical Analysis

The forest in *Young Goodman Brown* is not merely a moral and psychological stage of Nathaniel Hawthorne, but an ecologically and ethically dynamic one. The forest is a sort of liminal space, a border between the natural and supernatural, moral and immoral, human and nonhuman forces (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995).

Since the very start of the adventure, the forest is described as thick, gloomy, and encircling with an effect of isolation and unrealness: *"He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind".* The agency of the forest is highlighted in this description, the trees themselves appear to determine the route, limit movement and define the experience of the traveller. The forest is also an ecocritically active participant of the narrative; it is not just a passive landscape. It plays with Goodman Brown both psychologically and morally, making him even more fearful and leading him into meetings with evil. Hawthorne has also used nature as a way of making the setting sentient and ambient. The music and the actions of the forest are the reflections of the inner world of Goodman Brown: *"The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds; the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while, sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church-bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn".* In this case, the agency of ecological factors is projected to wind, trees, and animals, which are actively involved in the story. The forest is not only a location but a living ethical landscape, indicating and magnifying human guilt, fear and moral confusion. Its laughter and its tolling are symbolic, but they are based on the natural phenomena, and it indicates that Hawthorne can combine the ecological presence with the psychological and moral meaning.

The forest is also another place of concealed human-nature interaction as illustrated by Hawthorne. An example is when Goodman Brown sees the assembly of people in the village in the woods, the woods is transformed into a meeting place between man and nature: *"The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages of horror on the smoke-wreaths, above the impious assembly".* The blaze lights the forest and the people in it proving the ability of natural forces to influence the perception and the ethical knowledge. This text, indicates that man-made action rituals, moral decisions, sins are entangled with nature and the forest is the mediator of such relations. The forest is also an area of moral and ecological gray zone. Goodman Brown sees the world as something dangerous and something to be admired: *"He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him. Yet, there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it".* This contrast of darkness and wilderness and light sky is the reflection of human moral indecision. In the ecocritical sense, Hawthorne describes the forest as a reflection of human consciousness, indicating that the natural world is not only a physical but also an ethical space, and the forces of human and nonhuman beings co-construct the meaning.

Lastly, Hawthorne focuses on the presence of the forest in the context of moral implications and human psychology. The experience that Goodman Brown has with the wilderness has long-term impacts: *"A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream".* The ecological presence of the forest, its darkness, sounds and the unseen spaces change the human perception and ethical understanding and demonstrates how the environmental influences can be irreplaceable by the moral and psychological ones.

To sum up, the forest in *Young Goodman Brown* is an ecological environment where Hawthorne brings life to life and employs this setting to depict the moral conflict between humans and nature. It mediates human communication, expresses inner psychological conditions and intensifies the moral

drama of the story. The agency of the forest, the way in which the natural elements act in response to the human action, and the ethical overtones of the description help to highlight how Hawthorne applies the ecocritical issues to the symbolic and psychological ones. The wildness is not only an ecological fact, but also a moral topography, which proves that in the writings of Hawthorne the nature cannot be discussed outside the context of human ethical experience.

Discussion

The reviews of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Young Goodman Brown* show that Nathaniel Hawthorne repeatedly uses forests and natural landscapes as central locations of moral, psychological, and social discovery. The forest in both works is symbolic as a transitional place where the lines between innocence and sin, right and wrong are blurred. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the woods give Hester and Dimmesdale a place of relative freedom of Puritanical reproach, the place where secret truths may be revealed, where moral and emotional issues may be addressed. Likewise, in *Young Goodman Brown*, the forest will serve as the arena of dealing with the latent evil in the community and in the individual, as the novel is illustrated by the discovery of seemingly religious characters engaging in devilish ceremonies. Such symbolic interpretations highlight the fact that Hawthorne is preoccupied with the moral ambiguity of human nature, and is consistent with Brooks (1947) claim that Hawthorne work reveals the conflict between the individual conscience and social expectation as well as Frye (1957) idea of the forest as a place of imaginative moral trial.

Ecocritically speaking, both the stories insist on assigning the agency to the forest, making it an active subject in the construction of human experience. The forest is not only a scenic setting in *The Scarlet Letter*, but a place that responds to actions of characters, and offers a place where nature takes on a role, and thus, the nature is in parallel with the human feeling and social sins (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995). Similarly, in *Young Goodman Brown*, the darkness, the sounds and the muddled paths in the forest make Goodman Brown even more frightened, anxious and morally lost, as an example of how the natural world can play with the human psyche. The ecological presence of the forest can be seen as a reflector and amplifier of internal conflict, which gives reason to believe that the natural landscapes described by Hawthorne are ethically and symbolically loaded, which agrees with the notion of Buell (1995) that literature is an ethical relationship with the environment.

Compared through cross-textual analysis, it is evident that although the two stories employ forests as the mediators of moral and psychological issues, they are different in their focus. The forest in *The Scarlet Letter* provides a means of bargaining over the guilt and redemption of society and presents a complicated game between social values and inner values. The forest is the symbol of psychological horror and the face of natural human evil in *Young Goodman Brown*, which results in the spiritual hopelessness of the main character throughout his life. However, in both instances, the wood serves as a transitional boundary between the human and the natural, moral and the immoral, and this intersection point discloses another consistent thematic issue of Hawthorne: the confounding of human morality and the natural world.

Moreover, the combination of symbolic and ecocritical interpretations proves the fact that the manner in which Hawthorne addresses nature cannot be separated with his moral and social criticism. Symbolic stands of forest as a place of temptation, revelation, and transgression are in juxtaposition with the ecocritical perspective of forest as a responsive environment that is ethically charged. This doubling of the lens implies that the literary topography of Hawthorne is psychologically, socially, and ecologically rich, a point of convergence that is convincing of interdisciplinary investigations of the morally and ecologically inclined literary criticisms of the 21st century (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996).

In general, the results suggest that the forests around Hawthorne are dynamic in their nature and the human nature, social expectation, and the agency of the environment come together. The forest mediates between the moral ambiguity, ethical choice, and psychological tension whether

in the secretive encounter of Hester and Dimmesdale or in the nightmarish journey of Goodman Brown. Combining them with the symbolic and ecocritical approaches, it is also clear that the work by Hawthorne challenges the readers to think about the interdependence of human beings and nature in their intricate way, which makes both the ethical and ecological aspects of his work prominent.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the forest symbolism, psychological, and ecological meanings are used interchangeably in both the Scarlet Letter and Young Goodman Brown by Nathaniel Hawthorne. As a symbolic point, the forest is a transitional place where moral ambiguity, inner struggle, and social pressures are manifested and characters are able to face temptation, sin, and self-awareness. The forest is ecocritically represented as a dynamic, ethically infused space, which is receptive and responsive to human actions and moods. Cross-textual analysis indicates that The Scarlet Letter is characterized by the focus on negotiating social guilt and personal conscience, whereas Young Goodman Brown prefigures the conflict with human evil nature and spiritual hopelessness. The combination of symbolic and ecocritical approaches helps to reveal that Hawthorne constantly treats nature as something that is connected to the morality of people, their social structure, and psychological life. Finally, the forests featured in the works by Hawthorne are not only places but active areas, which clarify the intricate relationships between human and their moral and natural worlds and support his eternal interest in ethical and environmental consciousness.

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