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Distorted domesticities: Hawthorne and the Democratic domestic sphere

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Distorted Domesticities:

Hawthorne and the Democratic Domestic Sphere

(TITLE)

BY
John Stromski

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
English
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2011
YEAR

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Distorted Domesticities: Hawthorne and the Democratic Domestic Sphere

Introduction

When President Andrew Jackson gave his Farewell Address on March 4, 1837, he argued that the “foundations” necessary to maintain the Constitution and preserve the Union “must be laid in the affections of the people, in the security it gives to life, liberty, character, and property in every quarter of the country, and in the fraternal attachment which the citizens of the several States bear to one another as members of one political family, mutually contributing to promote the happiness of each other” (Jackson para. 13). Though in his speech Jackson tapped a widely used republican rhetoric concerning the relationship between the domestic sphere and the public sphere, his remarks did not merely recapitulate that rhetoric according to which domestic values and morals found within the Christian home come to shape the public sphere. For Jackson, the transference of ethics from the domestic sphere to the public assumed by the prior republican ideology may produce a tranquil politics, but this tranquility was not the point he emphasized. Jackson’s transformation of the republican model emphasized a metaphor through which the preservation of domestic harmony becomes synonymous with political and national placidity; a metaphor that would be extended and developed by Democratic Presidents throughout the antebellum era.

Indeed, numerous pieces of Democratic Party literature often used filial rhetoric to emphasize their own political platform, and Democratic magazines such as The United States Democratic Magazine and Review would often print pieces of literature written by notable Democratic authors; Nathaniel Hawthorne was a regular contributor.
Hawthorne was a life-long Democrat and often served in ranking political positions granted him by the party. The following chapters posit Hawthorne’s writings as pieces of party literature that distort the domestic sphere in order to critique Democratic party platforms, and at other times to reify and crystallize Democratic ideals.

Outside of discussions of the introductory story to *The Scarlet Letter*, “The Custom-House”—in which Hawthorne discusses his dismissal from his job at the Salem Custom House—many scholars have often ignored Hawthorne’s life-long political involvement, at times arguing the politics of his writings was not based upon his party involvement, but more with coinciding events or which Hawthorne had drawn upon. Indeed, Hawthorne himself would have wanted us to do this, as throughout his literary career he often sought to downplay his political involvement, particularly when it concerned his writings. In Chapter One, I trace Hawthorne’s life-long political involvement, attempting to answer why Hawthorne was so dismissive of political positions he had long worked hard to gain.

Hawthorne’s tic of explaining away his involvement can be attributed in many ways, I argue, to the state and condition of the Democratic Party throughout the 1840’s and 50’s. At this point, the question of abolition forced Democrats to take a moral stance either in favor of abolition or against it. Newspaper articles tended to frame the issues of both slavery and abolition in terms of “poison” and “disease,” and the issue almost came to completely dissolve the Democratic Party. Though not completely destroyed, the party definitely became fragmented, most notably as John Calhoun and Andrew Jackson attempted to force the party into a Pro-Southern or Pro-Northern direction. Hawthorne adopted this poisonous rhetoric throughout his literary career, utilizing poison to reveal
the true moral natures of various characters. In some of his shorter fiction, such as “Rappaccinni’s Daughter,” Hawthorne uses poison to allegorize how dangerous dealing with the issue of slavery was to the Democratic Party, positing the issue as toxic to all members involved, ensuring the party’s inevitable destruction if abolition continues to be a central focus of the party.

In chapter two, I explore several of Hawthorne’s writings in which he codifies Democratic ideals, particularly concerning filial relations, within tropes of blood. Stories from Hawthorne’s early career, such as “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” to more canonical works such as *The House of the Seven Gables*, and even in his later, unfinished *American Claimant* manuscripts, used bloody images to romance Democratic politics.

By romancing politics, Hawthorne was able to present Democratic ideals within his writing, centralizing them around images of blood. For instance, in *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne presents the image of the bloody throat to re-imagine the Compromise of 1850, a political action spear-headed by Democrats. Forging a similar compromise within the novel, dependent upon “a manuscript” whose secret location is discerned only through a revival of the bloody trope, the success of the eventual compromise comes to fruition only through a marital union of two opposing families (representative of the North and South). By engaging with—romancing—the Compromise of 1850 in a familial setting, and also through the imagery of blood, Hawthorne’s writings do not merely reflect Democratic political discourse, but also register his deepening involvement with the Democratic Party.

These bloody tropes are pervasive throughout Hawthorne’s writing, displaying his abiding concerns over lineage. However, these concerns take on different ramifications in
what have been named his *American Claimant* manuscripts—unfinished attempts at an English Romance, written near the end of his life—when the bloody image is extended across the Atlantic. In his first attempt, *The Ancestral Footstep*, the main American character, Middleton, seeks to restore an ancient English land claim, whose restoration depends upon the discovery of a bloody footprint left on the threshold of a home near a century before. While this opening motif seems perfectly Hawthornian, as the manuscript progresses Middleton comes to find that individual prosperity need no longer rely on the documents from one’s forefathers, but rather upon the strength of one’s own filial relations. Therefore, Middleton returns to America with a new wife, forgoing the ancient land claim, demonstrating that the restoration of the domestic sphere must actively be sought after within America.

While images, rhetoric, and tropes of blood and poison are pervasive throughout the breadth of Hawthorne’s career, they never collide more prominently than within Hawthorne’s most canonical work, *The Scarlet Letter*. In my third chapter, I discuss how Hawthorne here presents a distorted domesticity, a broken family, in order not to only question and critique contemporary Democratic politics (as well as voice his resentment over having been recently fired from his job at the Custom House), but to ultimately restore that familial unit, thereby exemplifying Democratic ideals voiced through filial rhetoric.

Within *The Scarlet Letter*, the central antagonist, Chillingworth, is himself an alchemist, and numerous characters throughout the novel are referred to as diseased or poisoned. Both the scarlet *A* and the child Pearl come to serve as the novel’s central blood tropes, the former through its deep, crimson hue, and the latter through her literal
blood ties with both Hester and Dimmesdale. The novel’s redemptive dénouement is brought about only through the restoration of the familial unit, namely by Dimmesdale at last admitting his paternity. Through this restoration, Pearl comes to be reborn, losing her “imp-like” nature and developing sympathies and characteristics which ensure a life of prosperity.

While critics such as Sacvan Bercovitch and Brook Thomas have worked on politicizing the novel before, they have mainly dealt with the character Hester Prynne, relying upon her novel-long transformation from ostracized sinner to redeemed citizen to offer their political critiques. Besides situating both this transformation and the entire novel within the larger filial rhetoric of the Democratic Party, I focus more heavily on Pearl, whose ultimate redemption, I argue, allows her to transcend the past sins and transgressions of her parents. Through Pearl’s rebirth, she comes to enjoy a prosperity which Hawthorne longed for throughout his life; by doing this, Hawthorne argues for the necessity of a restored, national domestic sphere, in able to ensure the national prosperity of both the nation’s children as well as the nation itself.

Thus, this project discusses throughout how Hawthorne uses the romance genre in particular—acting as a metaphysical medium between the real and the imaginary—through its creating, questioning, and distorting of domestic relations, to serve as a way for Hawthorne to crystallize the values of the Democratic Party. Through these distortions, Hawthorne is able to reify Democratic values relating to the domestic sphere, grounding his ideology in the re-creation and sustenance of the family unit.
Throughout his life, Hawthorne worked as an operative of the Democratic Party, most prominently through his regular submission of stories to the newspaper The U.S. Democratic Magazine and Review, his official positions at the Boston and Salem Custom-Houses (given him by the Democratic Party), his writing of Franklin Pierce’s campaign biography, and his position as Pierce’s appointee to the English consulate. Consistently throughout his literary career, however, Hawthorne sought to downplay his involvement with the party, or to reject his own influence upon the Democratic Party. Indeed, particularly before his removal from the Salem Custom-House, Hawthorne often offered scathing remarks about politicians, often denying or deriding his position within the Party, longing for an escape from party ties despite clandestinely maintaining them. In his notebook on March 15th, 1840, Hawthorne “pray[ed] that in one year more I may find some way of escaping from this unblest Custom House; for it is a very grievous thralldom. I do detest all offices, — all, at least, that are held on a political tenure. And I want nothing to do with politicians” (Hawthorne 215-16). While these lines from his private notebook seemingly reveal his “detest[ation]” of political office, they were written at a time when the prospect of his removal from office loomed as a very distinct possibility; much as he denies his political prowess to his readers, when faced with realities of his position within the Party, Hawthorne denies to himself his political influence.

Hawthorne’s interest in politics can be traced to his time at Bowdoin, where he held a certain level of idealism about the Democratic Party, and “served on the
[Athenaean] society's standing committee,” a society also consisting of friends and future notable Democrats Franklin Pierce and Jonathon Cilley, “a pack of ‘Young Bowdoin’ Jeffersonians who in 1824 backed Andrew Jackson for president” (Wineapple 48). Then, in 1836, Hawthorne would begin submitting over the next eight years to The Democratic Review, the flagship magazine of the Democratic Party, whose editor and founder, John O'Sullivan, hoped “to integrate literature into the political life of the country” (Wineapple 107). Hawthorne and O'Sullivan greatly admired each other, and it is largely through the exposure Hawthorne’s stories received within The Democratic Review that his career grew as much as it did.

Upon his appointment to the Boston Custom House by the Democrats in 1839 – largely through the efforts of Elizabeth Peabody, who wrote friends with ties to the Party asking for support of Hawthorne’s case – Hawthorne “accepted his government appointment ‘with as much confidence in my suitableness for it, as Sancho Panza had in his gubernatorial qualifications’” (Wineapple 132). In 1846 Hawthorne was appointed to another sought-after government position – though he originally desired a position at the Post Office – the Salem Custom House.

Kenneth S. Greenberg illustrates how the Custom House was very important to the maintenance, growth, and success of political parties, that

It was no coincidence that New York and Pennsylvania had the most highly developed political parties and that New York City and Philadelphia had large customhouses. As Cornelius P. Van Ness, collector of the port of New York, wrote Secretary of War William Marcy in 1845:

’I am sure you perfectly understand the bearing which the management of
the Custom House has had, for the last 10 or 15 years, upon our city elections; which is, that when well managed, we have gained, otherwise lost.' (Greenberg 63)

The Custom House allowed political parties in power to give appointments to loyal party members, thereby strengthening their numbers in office. Yet despite receiving this position himself – twice no less – Hawthorne would write in “The Custom-House” that he was only “a faithful Democrat in principle” (Hawthorne 13).¹ Indeed, when attempting to gain an office leading up to the Salem Custom-House, “though he contributed what few reviews he wrote mainly to the Salem Advertiser, the Democratic paper, Hawthorne billed himself as 'high & dry out of the slough of political warfare,' or so Sophia alleged to Mary Mann. ‘... He took his office because it was presented to him, but not a word or look would he be persuaded to give for it as a pledge of action’” (Wineapple 198).

In 1852, when Hawthorne wrote the presidential campaign biography for his lifelong friend and future Democratic President Franklin Pierce, he remarked in the preface that he was so “little of a politician that he scarcely feels entitled to call himself a member of any” (Hawthorne 1). Then, in Our Old Home, his 1863 memoir detailing his time as American consulate at Liverpool – again given him by the Democrats – he would claim that “I never in my life desired to be burdened with public influence. I disliked my office from the first, and never came into any good accordance with it. Its dignity, so far as it had any, was an encumbrance” (54-55). But Hawthorne definitely liked the perks that came with the job, enjoying his time abroad in Europe and in England, feeling what

he calls throughout *Our Old Home* as satiating a longing to visit the home of his ancestors.

Others, though, were not as willing to denounce Hawthorne’s influence and the importance of his role within the Party. Indeed, Hawthorne’s association with the Democratic Party was in some ways celebrated, as when the *Boston Post* proclaimed “‘It is a fact well known [...] that with few exceptions, our first literary men belong to the democratic party. Almost every man of note in letters, – historians, poets, and indeed nearly all who have acquired fame as writers and authors are, as might be expected, favorable to democracy’” (Schlesinger 370). Hawthorne’s own position as renowned writer made it harder for Hawthorne to remove himself from the Democratic Party, as Schlesinger maintains that many of Hawthorne’s contemporaries were also associated with the Party.

Hawthorne’s involvement with the Party cannot be completely dismissed upon his own personal disownments, for his positions in the government were several times sought after, and each of them proved to be the most financially lucrative positions of his life. Beyond providing financial stability – which Hawthorne, several times throughout his life bordering on real poverty, desperately needed – the jobs were also enjoyable to Hawthorne; as Wineapple explains “Hawthorne held onto his government job [at the Boston Custom-House] not just because he needed the money or because the country ignored its artists—though both were true—but because he liked it. He felt rejuvenated at the docks […] close to the young clerks and laborers who sweated at real jobs for quantifiable results” (Wineapple 133). His enjoyment of his political labor serves as a
stark contrast to Hawthorne’s time spent laboring at Brook Farm, a financial investment and moral experiment that utterly failed.

For this reason, when Hawthorne was fired from the Salem Custom House, he desperately tried to keep the job, enlisting the aid of prominent Democrat friends, as well as using his own authorial influence. As Wineapple demonstrates, Hawthorne argued that “he had never written political articles, nor had he undertaken any overtly political action except voting […]. He did not pay Democrats in the Custom House more than Whigs, he said. As for the allegation that he had actively sought office, he denied that too” (Wineapple 204). His attempts at maintaining the office were obviously unsuccessful, and local opposing Party members were quick to respond, particularly “Local Whigs” who “argued that Hawthorne’s apolitical posture was a charade ‘supported by all the talent which Mr. Hawthorne may have possessed’” (Wineapple 204). Hawthorne could deny his political influence all he wanted, but he was not fooling anyone.

Why, then, would Hawthorne continually disavow his political influence and positions, despite their resonance within the Party? This strategy was not altogether uncommon for politicians to employ, particularly in the South, as politicians would often try to seem uncaring or unvested in positions of office, so their appointment would appear as the will of the people, not as the result of their hard labors and political aspirations. As Kenneth S. Greenberg points out, “The worst enemy of the statesman, the enemy that might cloud the reason of any leader, was ambition” (Greenberg 5). “The ideal of statesmanship,” Greenberg continues, “required independence from popular influence as well as independence from personal ambition” (6). This strategy produced “a distinct style of political behavior,” which maintained that
Statesmen [...] were never supposed to seek office, for to search for power was to evidence selfish ambition. Moreover, even in office, one had to demonstrate independent behavior, for to be a member of an organization or group (with the exception of family membership) or to become a victim of routine was to cast suspicion on one’s devotion to the common good and to imply devotion to oneself or to friends or to power. (7)

Despite Hawthorne’s continued insistence that he was not more than simply “a faithful Democrat in principle” (SL 13), and despite his denials of a more serious entrenchment in Party politics, his behavior echoes with common political strategies employed by his contemporary office-seekers.

It is tempting to draw other connections that better explain away Hawthorne’s quirk of dismissing his involvement with politics as participating in a common strategy employed when seeking higher positions of office, but Hawthorne never intended on seeking higher offices than the ones he currently occupied and strategized to maintain them because they provided financial stability for him and his growing family. Rather, I suggest that Hawthorne’s ambivalences about the Party and his involvement with it are reflective of how, during the 1840’s and 50’s, many Democrats felt who often sought to distance themselves from the toxic issues which plagued the Party in the years leading to the Civil War: slavery and abolition.

Abolitionism had decisively changed the Democratic Party’s political platform, and conversations about the issue of slavery within the Democratic Party focused upon its poisonous nature. Indeed, slavery had not only infected the Democratic Party, but was toxic to the very morals of the Union. *The Religious Intelligencer*, in 1837, printed an
"Extract of a Letter From J.Q. Adams," which stated "Slavery has already had too deep and too baleful an influence upon the affairs and upon the history of this Union. It can never operate but as a slow poison to the morals of any community affected with it. Ours is infected with it to the vitals" ("Extract" 1837). The National Era, in 1848, published an article titled "Abolition Proofs! Strong as Poison!" which attempted to display Martin Van Buren and the Democratic Party as working in a pro-abolitionist manner, asserting "That the boasted doctrine asserted by the Democratic Review in 1840 [...] that 'Democracy puts forth principles which must in the end free the slave,' is fast approaching fulfillment, as is shown by the open fraternization of the old leaders and the masses of the Northern Democracy, headed by a late Democratic President—Martin Van Buren—with the Abolitionists and the enemies of the South" ("Abolition" 168). John G. Whittier would even go so far, in 1847, to invoke "the language of the late Theodore Segwick [...] a true and consistent Democrat of the old school" to discuss Slavery's poisonous nature: "'Slavery, in all its forms, is Anti-Democratic—an old poison left in the veins, fostering the worst principles of aristocracy, pride, and aversion to labor—the natural enemy of the poor man, the laboring man, the oppressed man. The question is, [...] whether this is a school in which to train the young Republican mind; whether slave blood and free blood can course healthily together in the same body politic'" (Whittier 1). For Whittier, the current state of the Democratic Party, in 1847, is particularly affected by this poison, and "As far as Massachusetts is concerned, we fear little is to be hoped at present from the Democratic Party, managed as it is by men who are entirely willing to see its vote rapidly and yearly diminish" (1). Whittier then goes on to call for the need "to convince the party managers at Washington of the necessity of choosing
between an absolute abandonment of their scheme of slavery-propagandism, and the
dissolution of the Democratic party as at present organized in the free States” (Whittier
1). For Democrats like Whittier, the question of abolitionism had the potential to
completely dissolve the Party.

Perhaps most interesting, though, is an 1838 article printed in the _Philanthropist_,
titled “Memoir on Slavery,” which draws an analogy between slavery and poison:

> In moral investigations, ambiguity is often occasioned by confounding the
> intrinsic nature of an action, as determined by its consequences, with the
> motives of the actor, involving moral guilt or innocence. If poison be
> given with a view to poison another, and it cures him of disease, the
> poisoner is guilty, but the act is beneficent in its results. If medicine be
> given with a view to heal, and it happens to kill, he who administered it is
> innocent, but the act is a noxious one. If they who begin and prosecuted
> the slave trade, practiced horrible cruelties and inflicted much suffering
> [...] for merely selfish purposes, and with no view to future good, they
> were morally most guilty. (Harper 1)

For Harper, the use of poison is noteworthy because despite whatever end result it
reveals, the act of poisoning reveals the moral nature of the person administering the
poison. The act of poisoning is significant because it reveals the moral nature of both
parties involved, judging the crime’s severity based upon the action and the result.

A similar sentiment can be seen within Hawthorne’s personal notebook, where he
noted, in 1837, “A company of persons to drink a certain medicinal preparation, which
would prove a poison, or the contrary, according to their different characters”
Indeed, Hawthorne’s canon contains many instances of experiments with poisons or elixirs, with varying results. In his early career though, the use of poison centralized upon the exposure of one’s moral character, the most obvious result being “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment.”

Published in 1837, the story tells of four individuals who, subjects to a proposed experiment by their friend, Dr. Heidegger, drink a liquid taken from the fabled fountain of youth. Dr. Heidegger suggests laying down rules for the experiment, telling the elder subjects to “Think what a sin and shame it would be, if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!” (Hawthorne 474). While the elixir does return the subjects to their youthful states, the transformation gives way to vane egotism on the part of the woman, who “stood before the mirror, curtseying and simpering to her own image, and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world beside” (476), and to malice on the part of the male subjects, who, “Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the prize, they grappled fiercely at one another’s throats” (478). The elixir managed to alter the outward appearances of the characters, thereby exposing their true moral characters. Indeed, at one point a mirror manages to reflect the images of the new youths contesting over the woman, yet instead of showing a “picture of youthful rivalship, with bewitching beauty for the prize,” the mirror reflected “the figures of the three old, gray, withered grand-sires, ridiculously contending for the skinny

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2 This edition of “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” comes from Tales and Sketches. New York: The Library of America. 470-479. 1982. Print. All works which come from this collection will hereafter be designated by “TS”.

ugliness of a shriveled grand-dam” (478). Reflected in the mirror, the characters seem even more decrepit, with their newly exposed moral depravity.

But if Hawthorne’s use of poison within his stories truly echoes the poison rhetoric used to describe a larger Party-wide concern over the Democrats’ response to abolitionism and slavery, concern over the longevity of the Party, why not just abandon his Party affiliation? While this seems to be the simplest choice today, “For many antebellum Americans a party identity, once formed, proved a lifelong commitment” (Gienapp 54). It was even remarked by “an English clergyman, who was traveling in the United States during a presidential campaign” that ‘Unflinching adherence to party is principle with them,’ he commented, ‘and to forsake a party is regarded as an act of the greatest dishonour’” (54). In antebellum America, Party ties were a central part not just of an individual’s political life, but of their very identity, since “Even men disgruntled with their party’s principles or nominees found it difficult to change their affiliations” (Gienapp 58). Indeed, Hawthorne remained a life-long Democrat.

As growing tensions within the Democratic Party paralleled Hawthorne’s own involvement, Hawthorne found it increasingly hard to maintain his original political idealism. How can one maintain a sought after position as a Democrat when Party principles are no longer clear and become nationally challenged? Particularly when it came to the question of slavery, the Party was torn between Northern and Southern Democrats, as well as smaller sub-Parties such as the Free Soil Party, which fractured the Party’s moral solidarity. The question was a very genuine problem for Hawthorne, one which would affect him very deeply.
The question of the Party’s stance upon slavery soon came to fragment the party, with John C. Calhoun, the figure-head of Southern Democrats, defending the institution, shoving the party in a pro-slavery position. Andrew Jackson, the icon of Northern Democrats, who was himself a slaveholder, did not want to make slavery a prominent issue within his administration or within the Party. However, “In 1834 and 1835, abolitionists began to bombard Congress with petitions to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and to inundate the South with antislavery material, and Jackson and Van Buren could no longer suppress the slave issue” (Holt 57). “As abolitionists stepped up agitation against slavery,” David Lindsey asserts, “President Jackson reproached them as ‘monsters’ seeking ‘to stir up amongst the South the horror of a servile war’” (Lindsey 235), leading to his eventual denouncement of abolitionists and their pamphleteering in “his December 1835 message,” in which he “condemned the ‘unconstitutional and wicked attempts’ of ‘misguided persons’ to circulate inflammatory appeals ‘calculated to produce all the horrors of a servile war’” (235). Jackson knew the threats abolitionism posed to the maintenance of the Union, and to his own Party, which became further divided with the new poster-child of Southern rights and slavery, John Calhoun.

“Particularly threatening to the Democrats” Holt tells us, “was the effort of Calhoun to unite southerners of all political persuasions behind himself” (Holt 57). Calhoun, though having had his presidential aspirations previously thwarted by Jackson and Van Buren, sought once more the nomination of the Democratic Party, relying upon strong Southern support, as he “hoped again to gain control of the Democratic party to use it to protect southern rights” (52). Confronted simultaneously with Jackson’s founding platform of Unionism at any cost; Calhoun’s protection of Southern rights, and
therefore slavery; and the wedging force of abolitionism; Jackson and Van Buren sought a compromise to the issue, electing to deal with the question of slavery by not talking about it, whereby

Steering a middle course between the extremes of antislavery men and Calhoun, Jackson and especially Van Buren sought compromise positions to keep their southern support. In doing so, however, they risked the anger of northern Democrats as they swung the party more and more toward a prosouthern position on the slavery issue. [...] Resisting Calhoun's demand that the North disavow the right to abolish slavery in the District, he [Van Buren] arranged the introduction of the famous 'gag rule' that automatically tabled antislavery petitions in the House of Representatives but called emancipation only inexpedient, not unconstitutional. (Holt 57-58)

The result of the “gag rule” was that the Democratic Party lost much of its Northern support, having “already made concessions to southern pressure on the slavery question, and Calhoun’s conversion hastened the process by which the Democracy became an open defender of southern interests” (Holt 52). This does not mean, though, that the Democratic Party had crumbled in defeat. As Alexander illustrates, “It is notable that over the years from 1840 to 1860, both years of Democratic defeat, the Democrats’ percentage of the total national vote changed by less than 1 percent. [...] The most northeastern part of the country veered more away from the Democrats, while the southwestern part gradually became more Democratic” (Alexander 76). The Democratic Party was increasingly becoming a Southern party, which would lead to the continual
need of Northern Democrats to carry compromise positions to maintain favor from both Northern and Southern Democrats. The question of slavery had pressured the Democratic Party to take a stance, to announce a side and to expose its moral policies.

For Hawthorne, this paradigm of an outside agent(s) exposing moral natures can be found throughout his writings, beyond the short story “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment,” particularly through the medium of alchemy. Characters such as Dr. Heidegger, Aylmer, Rappacinni, Chillingworth, Eldredge and Grimshawe, alchemists all, often rely on special vials, elixirs, or poisons, to provide for their own motives. Through the creation and administration of these toxins, their own moral natures are often exposed as evil and malicious, typically proving the destruction of their own lives or their subjects, often both.

“Egotism, or, the Bosom-Serpent” particularly exemplifies the use of poison to expose moral failings, as in this story the poison and moral failings continually feed and sustain each other. First published in 1843 in The Democratic Review, the story tells of a literal snake which inhabits the heart of Roderick Elliston, a man consumed by egotism. The snake’s venom continually courses throughout his body, and Elliston continually cries out about the snake gnawing at his heart. The venom secreted by the snake is tremendously strong, rendering other poisons impotent, as once “he privily took a dose of active poison, imagining that it would not fail to kill either himself, or the devil that possessed him, or both together. Another mistake; for if Roderick had not yet been destroyed by his own poisoned heart, nor the snake by gnawing it, they had little to fear from arsenic or corrosive sublimate. Indeed, the venomous pest appeared to operate as an antidote against all other poisons” (TS 790). It is through Roderick’s moral short-
comings that the snake is continually fed; his "diseased self-contemplation [...] has engendered and nourished" the snake (793). Eventually, Roderick is shunned and detested by the town, as he seeks to expose the moral failings of all the local residents, searching for the snakes inside their own bosoms.

Most prominently, though, Hawthorne’s use of poison is most dramatically displayed in “Rappacinni’s Daughter,” where there is, quite literally, a poisonous person. While the story uses a poisonous agent to expose the moral natures and short-comings of all parties involved, the story also most exemplifies Hawthorne’s Party ambivalence, questioning the very relation between his morals and those of the Democratic Party, and the result of any possible intermingling.

The story tells of a young man, Giovanni, who travels to Padua to study at the university. Upon his arrival, he is captivated by a young lady, Beatrice, who tends a garden located beneath the window of the room he rents. The plants in the garden, unbeknownst to Giovanni, are unnatural and poisonous in nature, scientific creations and experiments of Dr. Rappaccini; Beatrice turns out to be no different, having poison imbued within her very nature. While a love grows between Giovanni and Beatrice, so too does Beatrice’s poison within Giovanni, until by the end of the story, he is just as deadly as she. Through the aid of Signor Baglioni – Dr. Rappaccini’s rival colleague – Giovanni seeks to cure both Beatrice and himself from their poisoned natures, only to end up killing her when she takes the supposed antidote. Here as well, the true moral character of Giovanni is revealed through the poisonous “antidote” he gives to Beatrice, who, with her dying words, asks Giovanni, “was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?” (TS 1005).
“Rappacinni’s Daughter,” originally published in the *United States Democratic Review*, in November, 1844, was written in the same period as the Congressional “gag rule,” and shortly before Hawthorne’s appointment to the Salem Custom House in March, 1846. The story was written at a time when suspicions about the Democratic Party’s Northern and Southern sympathies, agitated by slavery, were higher than ever before. Indeed, the story is reflective of the turmoil within the Democratic Party, and of Hawthorne’s own ambivalence towards Slavery.

“According to Sophia,” Wineapple tells us, “Hawthorne didn’t—couldn’t—approve of slavery in America, but he didn’t think annexation a ‘calamity,’ believing or hoping that slavery would wither on the vine when it inched into the far reaches of Mexico, where it wouldn’t last, or where its existence didn’t bother him” (Wineapple 187). Beatrice, in the story (set in Italy), although not black or imprisoned by literal chains of bondage, is enslaved to her Father. Indeed, she is isolated solely to the house or the agrarian garden, where she cares for the flowers and performs other tasks for Dr. Rappacinni, which he is often unable to do himself, lest he expose himself to the base poison which so characterizes his daughter.

Dr. Rappacinni himself, though, does not appear as some malicious master and is, in fact, a very skilled physician. His rival, Baglioni, admits that “Ill would it become a teacher of the divine art of medicine […] to withhold due and well-considered praise of a physician so eminently skilled as Rappaccini” (TS 981), that “The truth is, our worshipful Doctor Rappaccini has as much science as any member of the faculty—with perhaps one single exception—in Padua, or all Italy” (982). The “one single exception” is Dr. Baglioni himself, as “there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him
and Doctor Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage" (983). The two doctors, Rappaccini and Baglioni, each belonging to the school of science, could just as easily represent Jackson and Calhoun, respectively, both belonging to the Democratic Party.

Indeed, it is the poisonous agency of Beatrice and her death that expose the true moral natures of both Baglioni and Rappaccini. Just as Jackson cared nothing for abolitionism or for slavery, addressing them only in degrees sufficient enough to further strengthen the Union, so does Dr. Rappaccini care not for the life of his daughter, beyond strengthening his own knowledge of Science, and “was not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child, in this horrible manner, as the victim of his insane zeal for science. For—let us do him justice—he is as true a man of science as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic” (TS 998). Baglioni, on the other hand, similarly cares not for the life of Beatrice, but only for discrediting Rappaccini and furthering himself professionally, reclaiming control of the field as leading physician. Thus, it is Baglioni who provides the elixir which kills Beatrice, since “as poison had been life, so the powerful antidote was death” (1005), and after her death, he emerges from his hiding place in the shadows of Giovanni’s room “and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror” (1005). Having administered the poison, Baglioni is judged equally as morally decrepit as Rappaccini, through the agency of the poisonous Beatrice.

As in the Petticoat War, the Democratic Party previously had its strengths tested through the agency of a woman. In one of his attempts to clear the name of Mrs. Eaton, Jackson had written to a Rev. Dr. Ely, one of her slanderers, on March 23rd, 1829, that

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3 The Petticoat War was the term coined for the social disaster which wrecked Andrew Jackson’s Cabinet during his first term of President. His appointed Secretary of War, John Eaton, married a woman named
Whilst on the one hand we should shun base women as a pestilence of the worst and most dangerous kind to society, we ought, on the other, to guard virtuous female character with vestal vigilance. Female virtue is like a tender & delicate flower; let but the breath of suspicion rest upon it, and it withers & perhaps perishes forever. When it shall be assailed by envy & malice, the good & the pious will maintain its purity & innocence, until guilt is made manifest [...] Truth shuns not the light; but falsehood deals in sly and dark insinuations, and prefers darkness, because its deeds are evil. (Eaton 125-6)

While the chastity of Beatrice has been maintained throughout her life – she touched Giovanni but once throughout their relationship, in order to prevent him from touching a poisonous flower – Rappaccini seeks to provide her with a husband, delighting in the poisoning of Giovanni, and the supposed forthcoming union of Giovanni and Beatrice. Beatrice, being the personification of “a pestilence of the worst and most dangerous kind to society,” had indeed been kept isolated, yet when her poisoned nature has completely embedded itself within Giovanni, he responds with “venomous scorn and anger,” cursing Beatrice and exclaiming “Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself,—a world’s wonder of hideous monstrosity!” (TS 1002). Beatrice dies, Rappaccini loses a daughter, Baglioni becomes a murderer, and Giovanni is socially

Margaret (“Peggy”) O’Neal, a local Washington bar-maid. Jackson upheld the marriage and the good character of the lady, while the wives of his Cabinet members detested her, refusing to let her into the Washington social society. Jackson largely blamed Calhoun.
ostracized, poisonous to all members of society; Beatrice is an equally destructive force to everyone she interacts with.

The end result, in each case, is disastrous for all parties involved. As Beatrice operates as a poisonous entity within the story, exposing the moral failings of each individual she interacts with, so does she represent the poisonous issue of slavery within the Democratic Party. Indeed, not only had the issue of slavery begged for the party to expose its true nature and character, but divided that nature into two different selves, Northern Democracy and Southern Democracy. Additionally, the appearance of the issue created some of the most harmful legislature to slaves, sponsored by Democrats, in an attempt to maintain party in all regions, while simultaneously maintaining the Union at any cost. Thus, for Hawthorne – as for most Democrats – to declare oneself a Democrat was to inextricably wrap oneself up with various connotations and party positions, varying from year to year. Declaring oneself as a Democrat, essentially, begged the question of where one’s moral standings lay, particularly in response to slavery. It is not altogether surprising when, at various times throughout his career, Hawthorne would attempt to downplay his role as Democratic Party operative, as the role opened up a set of ambivalences and contradictions with which he cared not to associate.
Chapter 2: Blood Tropes: Bloody Politics, Bloody Romances, Nathaniel Hawthorne

If there is a single, irreducible paradigm for the romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne, surely it is to be found in his abiding concerns over lineage. The influence of hereditary ties upon both living and deceased kindred, as well as upon wider communities, pervade Hawthorne’s writings, producing repeated motifs of a haunted past. Indeed, as Brenda Wineapple points out, “For Salem—for Nathaniel—the past was never dead” (Wineapple 15). Perhaps, as many Hawthorne scholars from Frederick Crews through Wineapple and up to Gordon Tapper have argued, Hawthorne’s conception of an irrepressible familial past was stoked by his own family’s involvement in the Salem witchcraft trials, since, as Wineapple recounts, Hawthorne family lore had it that Hawthorne’s great-grandfather John Hathorne had “brought down a curse on subsequent Hathornes, hurled at him by one of the dying witches” of the Salem witchcraft trials, over which John Hathorne had ruled as Salem magistrate (16). In Hawthorne, questions over whether one can truly escape one’s familial past, over the extent to which a person’s individuality and prosperity depend upon their filial relations, are often typified by symbols of blood: images of bloody handprints, throats, footsteps, and letters. Indeed, the fates of Hawthorne’s main characters often hinge upon their relationship with some bloody trope, and as Hawthorne’s literary career progressed, these blood tropes came to indicate trajectories extending further and further back through familial history, eventually drawing Hawthorne’s characters not only across generational gulfs but also across the Atlantic itself.
In light of this developing motif in Hawthorne’s work, it is suggestive that the political machine that absorbed all of Hawthorne’s career not defined by his work as an author of romance—that is, the Democratic Party, through which Hawthorne achieved a series of high-level appointments and on behalf of which he worked as a political operative for decades—developed over the same period of time during which Democratic politicians forged a public rhetoric in which national ties were conceived through the trope of familial relations. In various national addresses by several Democratic presidents, for instance, the Union often correlated to a filial bond; and accordingly, questions over how to preserve the national polity were asked, increasingly, in terms of how to honor associations between kindred and brethren. As the sectional crisis deepened, this rhetoric used triumphal praise of the strength and prosperity of the Union to register deeper anxieties over how that Union could be held together despite various challenges and altercations; in other words, Democratic presidents began to question how a distorted “political family” could continue to thrive.

Hawthorne—like virtually all other northern Democrats, a Unionist—came to explore similar anxieties over the survival of the Union in his work as a romancer. As an extensively-connected operative of the Democratic Party—and as one who, indeed, helped to shape his Party’s platform rhetoric at certain moments—Hawthorne became not only engrossed in the current state of various national trials, but also invested in exploring the trials of the present as if they were shaped by some long-standing curse or legacy. As his career progressed, so did the influence of the past become more inexorable in Hawthorne’s work; and with this development, so did Hawthorne’s main characters’ interest in the past become more all-absorbing and thus a more prominent theme.
Blood—both a symbol for kinship and a warm, literal presence—became a more ubiquitous term in Hawthorne’s work as the national polity progressively fractured, until finally, in *The American Claimant* manuscripts, the narrative comes to revolve around the blood trope that specifically draws Hawthorne’s protagonist out of the national sphere altogether. Through such symbols, Hawthorne seeks to both crystallize and to unsettle the filial rhetoric of his own Democratic party, eventually working through his own mixed responses to what Wineapple calls “a bloody, fratricidal American revolution that pitted not just governments but family members against one another” (Wineapple 262).

The representation of the Civil War as a fratricidal conflict became the culmination of rhetoric used consistently by Democratic presidents across the antebellum period, statesmen who imagined the nation as an enlargement of the domestic sphere. President Andrew Jackson, in his Farewell Address of March 4, 1837, argued that the “foundations” necessary to maintain the Constitution and preserve the Union “must be laid in the affections of the people, in the security it gives to life, liberty, character, and property in every quarter of the country, and in the fraternal attachment which the citizens of the several States bear to one another as members of one political family, mutually contributing to promote the happiness of each other” (Jackson para. 13). Though in his speech Jackson tapped a widely used republican rhetoric concerning the relationship between the domestic sphere and the public sphere, his remarks did not merely recapitulate that rhetoric according to which domestic values and morals found within the Christian home come to shape the public sphere—or in which, as Sarah Robbins argues, “the responsibility of preparing young males for their future duties as citizens in the new republic” fell upon Republican mothers (Robbins 564). The “future
duties” which children, particularly boys, would come to have “as citizens in the new republic” were in the prior republican conception replicated through the family structure and derived from republican mothers, whose “motherhood helped reunite the ‘state and family’” (564-565). Indeed, “Women fulfilling the culturally sanctioned role of Republican Mother,” Angela Vietto reminds us, “were expected to instill civic interest and virtue in their children” (Vietto 7). For Jackson, though, the transference of ethics from the domestic sphere to the public assumed by the prior republican ideology may produce a tranquil politics, but this tranquility was not the point he emphasized. Jackson’s transformation of the republican model emphasized a metaphor through which the preservation of domestic harmony becomes synonymous with political and national placidity; a metaphor that would be extended and developed by Democratic Presidents throughout the antebellum era.

By 1845, when James Polk gave his Inaugural Address, the rhetoric shifted from Jackson’s more optimistic tones to an acknowledgement of various threats to the nation: “Well may the boldest fear and the wisest tremble when incurring responsibilities on which may depend our country’s peace and prosperity, and in some degree the hopes and happiness of the whole human family” (Polk para. 2). In order to safeguard this national family, Polk explained that “The Constitution,” which “bind[s] together in the bonds of peace and union this great and increasing family of free and independent states, will be the chart by which I shall be directed” (para. 5). Describing the Constitution as the chart to avoiding sectional conflicts, Polk goes on to depict that document as a series of “compromises” whose preservation would quell “sectional jealousies and heartburnings,” causing citizens to “remember that they are members of the same political family, having
a common destiny” (para. 14). “With these views of the nature, character, and objects of the government and the value of the Union” Polk continues, “I shall steadily oppose the creation of those institutions and systems which in their nature tend to pervert it from its legitimate purposes and make it the instrument of sections, classes, and individuals” (para. 15).

Polk’s filial rhetoric constituted a strain Millard Fillmore would also sound in his First Annual Message to Congress in 1850: “I can not doubt that the American people bound together by kindred blood and common traditions, still cherish a paramount regard for the Union of their fathers, and that they are ready to rebuke any attempt to violate its integrity, to disturb the compromises on which it is based, or to resist the laws which have been enacted under its authority” (Fillmore para. 60). By uniting in fraternal relations, the people are able to avoid threats to the Union. Given the context of Fillmore’s speech, a Congress formulating the Compromise of 1850 and Fugitive Slave Law, the Compromise shakily maintained the Union, delaying fratricidal civil war for another decade.

In 1853, when Hawthorne’s friend Franklin Pierce gave his presidency’s First Annual Message to Congress, Pierce spoke of the power of familial relations to overcome threats to the Union, particularly in regard to the exchange of sympathies cementing all bodies politic at moments of threat or anxiety. Recalling that “at one time the characteristics of a widespread and devastating pestilence, had left its sad traces upon some portions of our country” (Pierce para. 4), Pierce relates that

In the midst of our sorrow for the afflicted and suffering, it has been consoling to see how promptly disaster made true neighbors of districts and cities separated
widely from each other, and cheering to watch the strength of that common bond of brotherhood which unites all hearts, in all parts of this Union, when danger threatens from abroad or calamity impends over us at home. (para 5.)

Pierce thus envisions challenges to the nation as providing avenues to strengthen the Union, through the opportunity which the challenges present to strengthen “that common bond of brotherhood which unites all hearts.” National bonds of affiliation are thus akin to familial allegiances; in this extension of the logic that had developed over the course of two decades of Democratic national political discourse, the family unit becomes the trope through which it becomes plausible to imagine a national future even at times, like those that characterized the Pierce presidency, defined by deepening sectional conflict.

As the Democratic Party reified its discourse of filial relations as a trope for an abiding national unity, so did Hawthorne’s writings deepen his investments in familial relations as a trope for other sorts of community affiliation. Moving from plotlines that concerned immediate families toward questions bound to more extended conceptions of lineage, Hawthorne’s interest in filial connection eventually drew his romances across the Atlantic, where they continued to be symbolized by images and tropes of blood.

For instance, in “Roger Malvin’s Burial”—which Hawthorne published in an 1831 issue of The Token before including the story in his 1846 Mosses from an Old Manse—two survivors of Lovewell’s Fight (a skirmish of the Fourth Indian War of the early 1720s) form a pact which, once broken, apparently haunts the familial line of both men. The eponymous Roger Malvin is mortally wounded at the story’s opening, and after his comrade, Rueben Bourne, vows on a blood-stained kerchief to return and bury Malvin, he simply fails to do so. His neglect causes Bourne intense guilt throughout his
future marriage to Malvin’s daughter, Dorcas. Ultimately—and in the kind of coincidental dénouement that typifies Hawthorne’s early work—Bourne accidentally shoots his own son, Cyrus, on the very spot where Malvin’s body had been left.

In certain obvious ways, the story presents an early rendition of what would become one of Hawthorne’s favorite devices. A family secret returns, wreaking havoc upon latter-day descendents. In its conception of a family unit that is wracked by a destructive secret, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” may seem a counterpoint to the antebellum Democratic Party discourse of familial relations that both represent and reify the placid national community. But in more topical ways the story engages more specific renditions of that form of Party discourse. In his second annual message to Congress of December 6, 1830, Andrew Jackson extended the trope of a national family to the native tribes whose removal he advocated. Jackson acknowledged that “Doubtless it will be painful to leave the graves of their fathers; but what do they more than our ancestors did or than are children are now doing?” (Jackson para. 92). Like the national family of which he was head, native tribes would now face the challenge of “better[ing] their condition in an unknown land.” Like “our forefathers” who “left all that was dear,” native people of the eastern tribes would now venture forth. “Does humanity weep at these painful separations from every thing, animate and inanimate, with which the young heart has become entwined?” Jackson asks. “Far from it. It is rather a source of joy that our country affords scope where our young population may range unconstrained in body or in mind, developing the power and faculties of man in their highest perfection” (para. 92).

Reuben’s departure from Roger Malvin’s body approximates the departure from “the graves of their forefathers” over which Jackson—ostensibly—sympathized with
Native Americans. Fresh from the turmoil of a battle with an Indian tribe, Reuben displays the pains of leaving a symbolic father’s grave: Roger repeatedly calls Rueben “son” and explains that “I have loved you like a father” (a sentiment Rueben returns) (Hawthorne 62). And eventually Roger becomes Rueben’s father-in-law. But before departing, to better find his father’s location upon his return, Rueben ties to a tree a handkerchief which “had been the bandage of a wound upon Reuben’s arm; and, as he bound it to the tree, he vowed by the blood that stained it that he would return, either to save his companion’s life, or to lay his body in the grave” (64). Years later, upon his return to the spot, Rueben finds “The sapling to which he had bound the blood-stained symbol of his vow,” only that, where he had tied his handkerchief, “a blight had apparently stricken the upper part of the oak, and the very topmost bough was withered, sapless, and utterly dead” (73). Just as the traumatic incident of Roger Malvin’s death seems somehow to eventuate in Cyrus’s death, the kerchief that represents that incident cuts the oak from further growth—it is a symbol of the stunted family tree that may remind us of Hawthorne’s later rendition in “The Custom House,” where Hawthorne imagines his own life as a withered twig on the more stately tree of the Hawthorne family. But in “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” Rueben can’t help but feel that the following death of his son, Cyrus—who possesses noble and enviable qualities—is in some way due to his failure to honor his blood vow to Roger.

Juxtaposed with Jackson’s speech, the story seems to contradict Jackson’s message: Rueben and his wife Dorcas weep for their father and son; Cyrus’s “power and

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faculties” are never given a chance of “developing [...] in their highest perfection” (Jackson para. 92). Nothing good comes from the loss of the forefather’s grave, in other words, and in fact disaster attends the refinding of the spot of that would-be grave. However, a previous part of Jackson’s speech states that, when considering the death of the aborigine, “To follow to the tomb the last of his race and to tread on the graves of extinct nations excite melancholy reflections. But true philanthropy reconciles the mind to these vicissitudes as it does to the extinction of one generation to make room for another” (Jackson para. 90). “Nor is there anything in this which,” Jackson continues, “upon a comprehensive view of the general interests of the human race, is to be regretted. Philanthropy could not wish to see this continent restored to the condition in which it was found by our forefathers” (para. 90). By the end of his second message to Congress, Jackson had retooled his familial metaphors to a conception of generational displacement, wherein later generations replace prior ones in a successive progression toward advancement. The trope is certainly self-serving, a rationale for Indian removal that asked its audience, strangely, to consider displaced natives themselves as akin to “forefathers,” whose displacement was necessary to “make room” for the next generation. In Hawthorne’s writings, of course, the generations of the past often refuse to accommodate the inhabitants of the present—secrets from the familial past very often return to haunt those who have inherited those secrets through familial descent: Pearl Prynne, Beatrice Rappaccini, Young Goodman Brown. Later in the antebellum period, Hawthorne’s interest in such dynamics would acquire new resonance against a changed national situation.
In 1849, Hawthorne was fired from his position at the Salem Custom House, which he had gained through his connections in the Democratic Polk administration. By 1850, Polk’s invocation of the “compromises of the Constitution,” as well as Fillmore’s belief “that the American people […] still cherish a paramount regard for the Union of their fathers, and that they are ready to rebuke any attempt to violate its integrity, to disturb the compromises on which it is based” (Fillmore para. 60), would be tested by the Compromise of 1850. By this time, the Democratic Party’s familial metaphors had begun to inform popular discourse. The National Era, in a review of a speech Daniel Webster gave in Buffalo on May 22nd, 1851, explained that for Webster, the Compromise was a way to quell rising thoughts of civil war, that “to save fraternal blood, the question was settled by Compromise, and [Webster] rejoiced at it. It was the only means, he verily believed, by which civil war could be prevented” (“Speech of Daniel” 86). Later in the decade, in 1856, the United States Democratic Review—the Party’s highest-profile organ, and in which Hawthorne would often publish—would explain the Democratic Party’s thoughts on maintaining the Union by “proclaim[ing] its inflexible and determined purpose of defending, protecting, and preserving the Constitution, the Union, and the right of self-government, cost what it may of place, of treasure, or of blood” (“The Union” 443). Even in the more Whiggish press, however, such rhetoric attended discussions of the 1850 Compromise. For instance, an article in The Liberator criticized “The framers of the Constitution” as being “not worth of reverence,” for “They deliberately sacrificed—to subserve their own purposes—the rights and liberties of half a million of the people, now multiplied to three millions; and on the necks of this immense mass they based their ‘glorious Union,’ cementing it with the blood of their victims!”
(“Mr. Hillard’s” 39). On the Democratic side, James K. Paulding, in an April 1850 item in The United States Magazine and Democratic Review maintained that “The Union is now really in danger—in imminent danger. Not the rattling of the throat or the collapse in the frame of the dying patient is more significant of approaching dissolution, than the indications I now see multiplying in every direction” (Paulding 374-5). Questions of compromise, the strength of old paternal documents, and images of blood would arise for Hawthorne in The House of the Seven Gables.

Like Daniel Webster, Hawthorne considered the Compromise of 1850 a deft bargain between northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders, and, Wineapple points out, “regarded himself as well-intentioned and fair-minded, a neo-Jeffersonian patriot devoted to ‘preserving our sacred Union, as the immovable basis from which the destinies, not of America alone, but of mankind at large, may be carried upward and consummated’” (Wineapple 264). He re-imagined the Compromise on a smaller scale in The House of the Seven Gables, and particularly in the chapter “Alice Pyncheon,” which details the enactment and results of a different sort of compromise within the domestic sphere between two families. The legacy upon which the chapter depends tells of a land dispute between Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew Maule, which led to the execution of Old Matthew Maule and, at that event, his prescient curse that “God will give [Colonel Pyncheon] blood to drink!” (Hawthorne 12), resulting in the death of Colonel Pyncheon.5 Pyncheon “asserted plausible claims to the proprietorship of [Maule’s land], and a large adjacent tract of land, on the strength of a grant from the legislature” (10), while Maule sought to defend the smaller tract of land which he occupies, being “stubborn in the

5 This manuscript of The House of the Seven Gables is from The House of the Seven Gables. 1851. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2007. Print. All references to this manuscript will hereafter be labeled as SG.
defense of what he considered his right; and, for several years, he succeeded in protecting the acre or two of earth which, for his own toil, he had hen out of the primeval forest, to be his garden-ground and homestead” (10). The death of Colonel Pyncheon, who is found with “blood on his ruff, and that his hoary beard was saturated with it” (18), fulfills Maule’s promise.

Because of the deaths of Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon, the progeny of both families are thrust into ruin. Maule’s “humble homestead had fallen an easy spoil into Colonel Pyncheon’s grasp” (SG 12), and the successive generations “were generally poverty-stricken; always plebian and obscure” and eventually came “to the alms house, as the natural home of their old age. At last, after creeping, as it were, for such a length of time, along the utmost verge of the opaque puddle of obscurity, they had taken the downright plunge” (26). As for the Pyncheons, they lose the land claim which the Colonel would have secured, and Maule’s curse carries on in successive generations, as “If one of the family did but gurgle in his throat, a bystander would be likely enough to whisper, between jest and earnest – ‘He has Maule’s blood to drink!’” (22). The unsettled dispute between the Maules and the Pyncheons prevents their progeny’s prosperity.

With aspirations of reclaiming his Grandfather’s missing land deed, which would greatly profit the Pyncheons, Gervayse Pyncheon attempts to compromise with Matthew Maule (the grandson of the fabled wizard). At the basest level, Gervayse and Matthew construct a contract concerning the expansion of land; Pyncheon will acquire the ancient land claim, Maule will gain his ancient homestead. To reveal the location of the land claim, Maule uses Alice as a clairvoyant medium, during the process of which she conjures up the image of Colonel Pyncheon, with “the blood-stain on his band,” which,
after his attempt to give over the claim, becomes renewed, showing “a fresh flow of blood” (SG 181). Maule refuses to reveal the location of the claim, and maintains his supernatural power over Alice, who becomes “Maule’s slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand-fold, than that which binds its chain around the body” (182). The failure of the compromise leads to disastrous results: Maule keeps hidden the secret location of the document, Pyncheon doesn’t gain any land, and Alice eventually dies due to humiliation over being Maule’s slave.

Pyncheon knows that by using the document he ensures his prosperity, and Maule knows that by concealing the document he can prevent Pyncheon’s prosperity. When the document is eventually rediscovered, it is only able to bring domestic prosperity to a unionized relationship between the Pyncheons and the Maules: the impending marriage of Holgrave Maule and Alice Pyncheon. Not only does this claim bring financial prosperity—as Hepzibah “rides off in her carriage with a couple of hundred thousand — reckoning her share, and Clifford’s, and Phoebe’s — and some say twice as much!” (SG 276)—but also spiritual prosperity—as displayed by the ghost of Alice, who “floated heavenward” (276).

By engaging with—romancing—the Compromise of 1850 in a familial setting, and also through the imagery of blood, Hawthorne’s writings do not merely reflect Democratic political discourse, but also registers his deepening involvement with the Democratic Party. While he was a regular contributor to the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, starting with his first entry in 1837, Hawthorne would often attempt to distance his work as an author of fiction from his work as a Democratic Party operative. Hawthorne particularly attempted to create this distance when his political
involvement seemed most obvious, such as after his dismissal from the Salem Custom
House, when, outraged by the loss of Hawthorne’s job, “Democratic firebrand John
O’Sullivan testified ‘I should as soon have dreamed of applying to a nightingale to
scream like a vulture as of asking Hawthorne to write politics’” and Hawthorne claimed
“that he had never written political articles, nor had he undertaken any overtly political
action except voting” (Wineapple 204). In opposition to this, the Whig party was not
fooled by Hawthorne’s apolitical façade, “declaring Hawthorne a two-bit politician and
party hack who screamed nonpartisanship when his job was threatened” and “Local
Whigs argued that Hawthorne’s apolitical posture was a charade ‘supported by all the
talent which Mr. Hawthorne possessed’” (204). The Whig criticism would follow
Hawthorne to his most glaring political penmanship, the work the Whig Press referred to
as “‘Mr. Hawthorne’s latest romance’” (Robey vi), the campaign biography of his close
friend, fellow Bowdoin alumnus, and Democratic Presidential nominee, Franklin Pierce.

Upon Pierce’s assumption of the Presidency, it was once again through the
agency of the Democratic Party that Hawthorne would assume his final and most high-
level political appointment, as American Consulate in Liverpool. But prior to Pierce’s
victory, Hawthorne aimed in his biography to make Pierce (as Richard Robey puts it) “‘a
man for the whole country’” by, in part, “presenting Pierce’s familial ties to the
Revolutionary War” (Robey iv).

Though in the preface of The Life of Franklin Pierce (1852), Hawthorne describes
himself as “being so little of a politician that he scarcely feels entitled to call himself a
member of any party” (Hawthorne 3), the biography was despised by his Whig brother-
in-law Horace Mann, and “Reviews of Hawthorne’s book split along party lines. The
Springfield Republican dubbed it fiction; the Democratic Review liked it, and Harper's New Monthly Magazine deftly sidestepped politics to speak of literary form. The New York Herald called Hawthorne a hack, and the New York Times, a Whig paper, dismissed Hawthorne as a partisan still harboring a grudge against the village custom house” (Wineapple 264-5). 6 Indeed, few scholars treat the biography today; as a piece of contracted political literature, it barely seems to merit attention as a piece of Hawthorne’s literary canon. But when viewed as a piece of official Party literature, the biography announces more striking intersections within Hawthorne’s career. The biography afforded Hawthorne with a chance to bridge intersections between the domestic and public spheres, allowing him to wrap together concerns over lineage, blood, and liberty, as when Hawthorne recounts one of the trials during the Revolution:

The aged father and mother underwent not less than the son, who would have been the comfort and stay of their declining years, now called to perform a yet higher duty — to follow the standard of his bleeding country [...] Sir, I never think of that patient, enduring, self-sacrificing army, which crossed the Delaware in December, 1777, marching barefooted upon frozen ground to encounter the foe, and leaving bloody footprints for miles behind them — I never think of their sufferings during that terrible winter without involuntarily inquiring, Where then were their families? Who lit up the cheerful fire upon hearths at home. (LP 37)

The imagery of “bloody footprints” extending “for miles behind them” forms a particularly striking image through which Hawthorne both pays homage to the nation’s revolutionary sires and offers a symbol of lineage itself—what is ancestry, after all, but a

6 Life of Franklin Pierce. 1852. New York: Garret Press, 1970. Print. All references to this manuscript will hereafter be labeled as LP.
trail of blood extending behind the individual? In this way the image captured an abiding interest not only of Hawthorne’s canon but also of one of the Democratic Party’s favorite conceits. But the image of a bloody footprint would resonate more profoundly in the final manuscripts Hawthorne would produce as a romancer. Such imagery would form, moreover, one of the final blood tropes Hawthorne drew upon in his unfinished attempt at an English Romance, influenced by his time as a political appointee in Liverpool.

In 1858, while abroad in Europe, Hawthorne began his first attempt at an English Romance, which, published in 1882 by his daughter Rose and her husband, and given the name The Ancestral Footstep, contained only “eighty-eight pages from a copybook, with some missing leaves” (Wineapple 304). The idea for the romance would undergo two attempts at revision: Etherege in 1860, and, the most drastically changed revision in 1861, Grimshawe. In The Ancestral Footstep, Hawthorne once again draws on the familial blood trope, delving further back than ever before into questions of lineage, but pulling these blood ties across the Atlantic, ultimately urging us to leave the familial past alone.

As he did with most of his novels, Hawthorne began The Ancestral Footstep by constructing the story around one central image, in this case a bloody footstep. The manuscript describes an American, Middleton, who travels to England in pursuit of a legend passed down through his family for generations past, detailing a fight between two brothers in England, the result of which exiled one brother—Middleton’s forefather—to America, leaving a bloody footprint on the threshold of their family estate. The legend claims that the Americanized brother is the rightful heir of the family estate, and thus Middleton attempts finally to claim his familial title. Throughout the manuscript, various
characters die only to be resurrected pages later, the symbolism of the bloody footstep alternates between the crux of the novel and a peripheral detail, and Hawthorne repeatedly interjects his authorial voice in apparent notes to himself summing up where the story stands, and constantly grasping for the "central moral" of the Romance.

At the outset of the manuscript, Middleton seeks out his ancestral claim as a means of restoring his family name and title. In an early section, Hawthorne has "the Master" comment how

This decay of old families [...] is much greater than would appear on the surface of things. We have such a reluctance to part with them, that we are content to see them continued by any fiction, through any indirections, rather than to dispense with old names. In your country, I suppose, there is no such reluctance; you are willing that one generation should blot out all that preceded it, and be itself the newest and only age of the world. (Hawthorne 7)  

Middleton replies "not quite so" (7), and the ensuing manuscript is then a quest for Middleton to restore his family name and lineage. Or at least, that’s what the reader would be led to believe by these opening notions of the Master’s, whose concern over the “decay of old families” might seem so perfectly Hawthornian. But as the manuscript progresses, the process whereby one generation “blot[s] out all that preceded it,” though initially despicable, becomes something of a good thing. Indeed, in one of the most striking authorial notations of the manuscript, Hawthorne explains that he has finally found the key to his novel, that

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7 This manuscript of *The Ancestral Footstep* is from *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, vol. 12. ed. William Charvat. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977. Print. All references to this manuscript will hereafter be labeled as AF.
The moral, if any moral were to be gathered from these paltry and wretched circumstances, was, ‘Let the past alone; do not seek to renew it; press on to higher and better things—at all events to other things; and be assured that the right way can never be that which leads you back to the identical shapes that you long ago left behind. Onward, onward, onward!’ (56)

Returning to the narrative, Hawthorne then attempts to vocalize this sentiment through Alice, who tells Middleton,

Your lot is in another land. You have seen the birthplace of your forefathers, and have gratified your natural yearning for it; now return, and cast in your lot with your own people, let it be what it will. I fully believe that it is such a lot as the world has never yet seen, and that the faults, the weaknesses, the errors of your countrymen will vanish away, like morning-mists before the rising sun. You can do nothing better than to go back. (56)

For Alice to tell Middleton to return home to America, for him to accept that “the faults, the weaknesses, the errors of your countrymen will vanish away,” is the only possible way for Middleton to progress. But it was advice that Hawthorne himself was only reluctant to follow. With all of the national turmoil and strife occurring in America, it was enough for Hawthorne to say to William Pike in 1856 “To say the truth […] there is no inducement to return to our own country, where you seem to be on the point of beating one another’s brains out” (Wineapple 289). But by seeking out one’s lineage abroad, one was, rather than restoring their domestic relations, ignoring them. Indeed, Middleton, in his quest to restore his family name, “can do nothing better than to go back.” At the end of *The Ancestral Footstep*, then, it is through the nurturance of filial relations with Alice
that not only is Eldredge’s attempt to murder Middleton prevented, but Middleton himself is led home. And that return home, for Hawthorne, represents a kind of national redemption, or at least affirmation. In another note, Hawthorne explains that

It shall be partly due to [Alice’s] high counsel that Middleton forgoes his claim to the estate, and prefers the life of an American, with its lofty possibilities for himself and his race, to the position of an Englishman of property and title; and she, for her part, shall choose the condition and prospects of woman in America, to the emptiness of the life of a woman of rank in England. So they shall depart, lofty and poor, out of the home which might be their own, if they would stoop to make it so. (AF 85)

Individual prosperity need no longer rely on the documents from one’s forefathers, but rather upon the strength of one’s own filial relations. Indeed, rather than attempting to restore one’s lost claims, it is better, particularly in the years preceding the Civil War, to restore what James Polk called “the hopes and happiness of the whole human family” (Polk para. 2), by, as Franklin Pierce remarked in 1853, exulting in “that common bond of brotherhood which unites all hearts, in all parts of this Union, when danger threatens from abroad or calamity impends over us at home” (Pierce para. 5).
Chapter 3: Scarlet Selfhoods: Domestic & Democratic Threats in *The Scarlet Letter*

Hawthorne’s most canonical work, *The Scarlet Letter*, is fundamental to understanding fully Hawthorne’s position as a Democrat, as a father, and as a citizen at a point in his life where each of those roles held uncertain relations to Hawthorne himself. Throughout his life, Hawthorne witnessed first-hand the ill effects of a ruined domestic sphere, having lost his father when he was very young, the effects of which lent reclusive behaviors to his mother, and to some extent to his sisters as well as himself. These reasons helped draw Hawthorne to the Democratic Party, whose filial rhetoric emphasized restoring the domestic sphere, and through that the nation. Though in 1849, with his recent dismissal from the Salem Custom House, Hawthorne was left wondering where, or even if, a political position could exist for a person like him. Particularly within his own Party, Hawthorne seemed to find himself without a home. Contributing to his anxiety was the fact that Sophia had just given birth to their daughter, Una, and Hawthorne was once again plagued with financial concerns. Wondering how he would be able to support his growing family, finding himself ousted from his long-sought political position, Hawthorne would write his most successful novel. Questions that have long plagued Hawthorne over how one can restore the domestic sphere, of whether or not it was possible to establish a successful individuality despite the influence of the resurging past, had drawn him to the Democratic Party before and would now intersect in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The novel begs the question of whether or not the Democratic Party’s ideal of national placidity arising from filial prosperity truly can prosper when the familial unit is
disrupted. Much as Democratic Party rhetoric recognized the need to restore relations within the national political family, to quell rising tensions both within the Party and between the North and South, Hawthorne here presents a broken family, a single mother with a child who has no proclaimed father. Framed within this broken family are motifs of poison, which resonate with poison metaphors used to describe the state of the Democratic Party and which questioned its survivability. Chillingworth is an alchemist, and numerous characters throughout the novel are referred to as “poisoned” or “diseased.” The novel repeatedly attempts to restore a broken, distorted domestic sphere by revealing the true and necessary members of one familial unit – namely, who is Pearl’s father? – but also by attempting to substitute, variously, the Church, the community, and the State for the paternal unit of the Prynne family.

With the Democratic ideal of a prosperous family unit, Hawthorne draws much upon America’s traditional reverence for Republican Motherhood. Domestic advice literature, which advocated the proper role for wives and mothers in marriage, was a popular form of literature. But beyond being responsible for the education and well-being of their children, mothers carried with them the responsibility of shaping their child's destiny; as Sarah Robbins puts it, Republican mothers bore “the responsibility of preparing young males for their future duties as citizens in the new republic” (Robbins 564). Robbins explains that the “future duties,” which children would come to assume, “as citizens in the new republic,” were replicated through the family structure, stemming from the mother, whose “motherhood helped reunite the ‘state and family’” (564-565).

With so much of the nation’s future resting on mothers, it comes as no surprise that women’s rights groups actively sought policy change within the law and the culture,
for if the well-being of mothers could not be guaranteed, than neither could a prosperous
future. One issue in particular for which early feminists argued concerned the issue of
maternal consent within domestic relationships, focusing on the issue of spousal rape.

Maternal consent, meaning that a woman’s consent was needed before entering into a
state of pregnancy, was necessary so that the mother could best develop the child’s well-
being and destiny before and after childbirth, for the child’s future citizenship was not
only dependent upon the mother, but the very health, temperament, and character of the
child could become tainted by the mother’s disposition both at time of conception and
throughout the pregnancy; consensual and happy sexual, domestic relations ensured
prosperous progeny.

One women’s rights advocate, Henry C. Wright,—also an Abolitionist—explains
that maternal consent is necessary so that a woman’s conscience and disposition would
not greatly affect the child, whose well-being is dependent on the mother, since
“Whatever temporarily affects the maternal blood, must permanently affect the organic
conditions and constitutional tendencies, and of course the post-natal character and
destiny, of the child” (18). What “affects the maternal blood” stems from a woman’s
“nervous system,” which is affected not only by various foods and drinks, but by feelings
“of anger, grief, revenge, fear, love, hate, &c” (19). The effect the mother’s blood has on
the child goes beyond pre-natal stages into post-natal stages, when the mother nurses the
child. The act of nursing, beyond transferring the vital life nutrients needed for growth
and development, also transfers to the child dispositions held by the mother, and, if these
dispositions are unhealthy, they have the potential for devastation. Wright explains this
potential for ruin by referencing William Carpenter, who says
‘The sexual secretions [...] are strongly influenced by the conditions of the mind;' instancing the effects of a ‘fitful temper,’ ‘fits of anger,’ ‘grief,’ ‘anxiety of mind,’ ‘fear,’ ‘terror,’ on the mammary secretions, and showing that these emotions often so poison the mother’s milk as permanently to affect the health, and sometimes destroy the life of the nursing child. (19) 8

A similar “poisoning” occurs in The Scarlet Letter, as Pearl contracts Hester Prynne’s maternal poison, created by her social ostracism and display of sin. This motif of poison is made explicit in the chapter “The Interview,” where Hester fears that Chillingworth has concocted a poisonous draught to administer to Pearl, with intentions of killing her after learning of Hester’s sin. Indeed, the “poison” being passed down along blood-lines is nothing new in Hawthorne’s writings, and here the tainted blood which Pearl comes to imbibe becomes displayed through her “imp-like” ways.

Throughout The Scarlet Letter, Pearl is unruly and distraught. In no small way, Pearl is obviously a product of Hester Prynne, displaying the ill-feelings which Hester has had throughout her pregnancy. Franny Nudelman describes the bodily transference of Hester’s ostracized and demonized character to Pearl on the first scaffold scene, when “After spending the day with Hester on the scaffold, the infant Pearl becomes ill. Hawthorne explains that the child, having drawn ‘its sustenance from the maternal bosom, seemed to have drank in with it all the turmoil, the anguish, and despair, which pervaded the mother’s system’ (64)” (Nudelman 193). Indeed, as Nudelman states, “Poisoned by her mother’s feelings, Pearl expresses, indeed typifies, Hester’s moral

8 William Benjamin Carpenter, M.D. The book Wright cites for Carpenter, “The Principles of Human Physiology,” does make mention of the impact that the mind has on sexual secretions, though Wright misquotes him. Wright also references Section 946, which, in this version, makes no mention of sexual secretions. It is possible that Wright simply misquotes Carpenter, or that Wright had access to a manuscript which is no longer available.
state” (193). Hester involuntarily transferred to Pearl all of her inner turmoil, and “in the nature of the child seemed to be perpetuated those unquiet elements that had distracted Hester Prynne before Pearl’s birth” (Hawthorne 202); specifically, Hester has transferred to Pearl the shame and guilt not only of wronging her husband, but of bringing into the world a child who does no have a stable family, since she refuses to betray Dimmesdale’s secret.9

For Nudelman, Pearl represents not only a more powerful double to the scarlet A Hester wears, but Hester’s interior moral character. Particularly, Nudelman argues that Pearl continually urges self-reform within Hester – reflective of domestic advice literature of the time, as she points out – because not only does Pearl continually remind Hester of her sin, but Pearl is a living display of Hester’s inner moral self. Ultimately, having revealed her inner secret, Hester’s inner character is no longer of any consequence, Nudelman claims, because Pearl’s fate is now held in control of Dimmesdale and the community; communal values can finally be instilled within Pearl because she is receiving no poisonous transference from her mother. But this poison which Pearl receives from Hester – and others – continually throughout the novel – as Nudelman only hints at – has political ramifications. The fact that Pearl is poisoned posits the battle throughout the novel for her custody as an allegory for the Democratic Party’s internal schism concerning abolition, namely whether or not it is the responsibility of a larger political body (the community / nation), to intercede in deciding the fate of Pearl.

Indeed, Hawthorne himself believed that slavery would eventually die away if left alone,

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and within *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl comes to be cured of her poison through the restoration of the familial unit.

Beyond absorbing a malformed disposition from Hester, Pearl, as if contaminated, shares in Hester's societal ostracism, as Pearl and Hester together are shunned, being "together in the same circle of seclusion from human society" (SL 202). The children of the town "had got a vague idea of something outlandish, unearthly, or at variance with ordinary fashions, in the mother and child; and therefore scorned them in their hearts, and not unfrequently reviled them with their tongues" (201-202). As Pearl has already received a poisonous influence from Hester, and is therefore disqualified from fulfilling her proper role in society, the Puritan community responds by socially exiling Pearl from the outset of her very birth, removing any chance for integration into the community. Thus, Hester is unable to fulfill her maternal responsibility of preparing Pearl "for [her] future duties as [a] citizen in the new republic" (Robbins 564), since, as Robbins states, republican motherhood sought to "reunite the 'state and family'" (565). Indeed, through the society's ostracism of Hester, and thereby Pearl, a disunion between state and family is created, wherein Pearl is taught she has no place within the society.

This failure of republican motherhood has been commented upon by Brook Thomas, who discusses the ways in which Hester Prynne explores, redefines, and comes to citizenship throughout the novel. In regards to Hester's citizenship in relation to Pearl, though, Thomas argues that "It would, nonetheless, be a mistake to assume that Hester becomes a model citizen by the end of *The Scarlet Letter* through her role as a mother. If republican mothers were supposed to raise citizens for the nation, Pearl does not become a 'citizen' of Boston" (Thomas 194). For Thomas, it is Pearl's misplaced citizenship
which leads Hester to fail as a republican mother, to fail at being a successful citizen, for
"Rather than raise a child inculcated in proper values to serve the nation/commonwealth,
Hester raises a child who finds 'a home and comfort' in an 'unknown region' [...]...], just as
Hawthorne ends 'The Custom-House' imagining himself a 'citizen of somewhere else'
(195).

Thomas is right to point out that Pearl eventually moves from Boston, and,
despite Hester's best efforts to instill citizenship within her daughter, Pearl comes to
reside in some distant, unnamed land. Thomas goes on to portray Hester's removal from
and eventual return to Salem as "provid[ing] us paradoxically with a model of good
citizenship that no liberal democracy can afford to do without" (Thomas 196), as Hester's
free return demonstrates her desire for citizenship within Salem. That Pearl does not
return to North America does not mean that Hester has failed in her role of Republican
mother, but rather that the nation at the time has lost sight of the very values it seeks to
cultivate. Indeed, Pearl inherits values from Hester which make her sympathetic, wealthy,
happy, and possessive of her own family. Hester receives, from Pearl, "articles of
comfort and luxury, such as Hester never cared to use, but which only wealth could have
purchased, and affection have imagined for her" (SL 294), which convinces "the gossips"
and a lineage of Custom-House surveyors "that Pearl was not only alive, but married, and
happy, and mindful of her mother; and that she would most joyfully have entertained that
sad and lonely mother at her fireside" (294). Even though Pearl becomes a "citizen of
somewhere else," as Hawthorne thought of himself in "The Custom-House," she has still
inherited the qualities and virtues which Republican Motherhood advocated, and which
Thomas argues come to be developed within Hester in order to display a successful
model of citizenship. Pearl speaks more by not returning to North America. Although she is possessive of the qualities of good citizenship, by having Pearl not return, Hawthorne emphasizes that in order for the nation to create and cultivate good citizens, more stable filial and domestic relations must be restored. Indeed, Hester's return isn't so grand because it emphasizes a new form of citizenship, but because it reinforces the necessity of stronger filial relations, as she comes to comfort and counsel “Women, more especially,—in the continually recurring trials of wounded, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion,—or with the dreary burden of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and unsought” (SL 295). Pearl eventually transcends her past, finds herself happily married, possesses a home, and supports her family, enjoying a living which Hawthorne longed for throughout his life. For Hawthorne, Hester's own citizenship is not as important as is her ability to allow Pearl to transcend her past transgressions, for Pearl to provide a successful home and future for her children, despite Hester's past mistakes and misgivings.

While Pearl's chances for successful citizenship are diminished from the time of her conception, the society completely eliminates any creation of a successful citizen; however, that is not to say it didn't try. As Wright comments in his book, while the mother's body is responsible for the bodily and moral well-being of the child, the father plays an integral part in the relationship as well, as he is the cause of whatever the mother's disposition is during the pregnancy. Particularly if the mother gave no maternal consent to the father, then the ensuing dissonances within the mother are caused by the father and his actions. Thus, a healthy domestic relationship must exist between mother and father in order to create proper citizens. While Dimmesdale and Hester's sexual act
was consensual – Hester saying it “had a consecration of its own” (SL 218) – the act ruined the Prynne family. Despite the consent, the moral, social, and cultural values which the act violated is enough for the community to ostracize Hester from the community. Concerned over further violations in these regards, the community becomes increasingly concerned about the well-being of Pearl. Rather than attempting to act with filial relations towards Hester, though, the community attempts to usurp Hester’s motherhood, without her consent.

In the chapters “The Governor’s Hall” and “The Elf-Child and the Minister,” the Governor – the Puritan patriarchal head of the community – along with Mr. Wilson, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, debate the community’s responsibility over the fate of Pearl:

On the supposition that Pearl, as already hinted, was of demon origin, these good people not unreasonably argued that a Christian interest in the mother’s soul required them to remove such a stumbling-block from her path. If the child, on the other hand, were really capable of moral and religious growth, and possessed the elements of ultimate salvation, then, surely, it would enjoy all the fairer prospect of these advantages by being transferred to wiser and better guardianship than Hester Prynne’s. (SL 109-110)

Hester, of course, does not consent to this agreement and argues about her capabilities and responsibilities as a mother, particularly her ability to teach Pearl, as she says the scarlet letter “‘hath taught me,—it daily teaches me,—it is teaching me at this moment,—lessons whereby my child may be the wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself’” (216). Attempting to usurp Hester’s motherhood, to instill in Pearl “moral and
religious growth," leading to her "ultimate salvation," to essentially create a new child, without maternal consent, would not be in the best interests of Pearl or Hester. Dimmesdale argues this position after Hester pleads with him, concluding that "For Hester Prynne’s sake, then, and no less for the poor child’s sake, let us leave them as Providence hath seen fit to place them!” (220).

That Dimmesdale is the one who argues on Hester’s behalf, ensuring Hester’s continued charge of Pearl, is significant because his is the only voice which holds the final authority on the matter. Wright comments on the question of whether the child is best left within the mother’s care, remarking “that whatever power the mother has for evil, she has the same for good; and that the question whether she shall use that power for good or evil over her child is one which may be settled mainly, if not solely, by the father” (Wright 21). Although Dimmesdale’s paternal identity is, at least to the community, held secret for the majority of the novel, it is ultimately only within his power to change the fate of Pearl, to instill proper citizenship within her. For Hawthorne, Republican Motherhood was indeed useful and essential, but it was only truly possible if there was a stable domestic family with both a mother and a father. Indeed, the group decides to allow Hester to maintain charge of Pearl, based on Dimmesdale’s recommendation. After this speech, temporarily being influenced by a joint-parental decision, “Pearl, that wild and flighty elf, stole softly towards [Dimmesdale], and, taking his hand in the grasp of both her own, laid her cheek against it; a caress so tender, and withal so unobtrusive, that her mother, who was looking on, asked herself,—‘Is that my Pearl?’” (221). Pearl is temporarily transformed into the image of a proper child through the father’s agency and temporary assumption of fatherly duties. Throughout the novel,
Pearl is continually seeking this transformation, continually asking Hester who her father is or asking Dimmesdale when he will show affection towards her. When Dimmesdale finally does admit his paternity, Pearl is reborn.

In the final scaffold scene, as Dimmesdale ascends the scaffold, he calls for Hester and Pearl to join him. Finally admitting to the audience his share of Hester's sin, the family unit is, for the first time, publicly displayed, and, quite literally, looked up to. This scene, besides serving as the novel's dénouement, intersects with numerous aspects of Democratic Party rhetoric, as Pearl is poisoned, fatherless, and socially exiled. The scaffold scene here gives one final chance for Dimmesdale and Chillingworth to admit, respectively, their roles as father and husband before Pearl leaves the continent; the community is given one last chance to instill citizenship within Pearl. It is her citizenship which holds the redemption of the familial unit, the chance for her parents to transcend their past sins.

The reliance upon children to redeem the sins of the parents was echoed within Democratic Party rhetoric. An article published in *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* in August, 1832, about Alexander Hamilton and the U.S. Treasury, posits Hamilton as having poisoned the nation. Despite having been "a great and good man [...] so fatal has been the influence of the poison which his hand unconsciously infused into our political system, at its very source" ("Independent" 99-100). "The diseased blood," the article continues, describing the national currency, "can but impair or destroy the physical life; the diseased currency saps with its subtle poison not less fatally the moral health than the material prosperity of a people. Its reform is not more a problem of Political Economy, than a question of Morals—and a question, according to
our apprehension of it, second in magnitude and interest to no other” (101). Again, for the Democrats, poison is inextricably connected with questions of morality, and here the removal of poison is the morally right thing to do. The past transgressions, however destructive, are resolved by the children, as

> A tyranny may indulge an all but omnipotent malignity in sweeping away half a generation with sword, fire, and famine—but when the term of years allotted to [Hamilton’s] guilty career, by a higher omnipotence than his own, shall have been attained, the ranks of population that he has thinned are speedily refilled, and the sufferings of the fathers are soon forgotten in the revived prosperity and happiness of the children. (100)

The future prosperity of the nation comes to rely on the restored future of the children.

Thus, when Dimmesdale does admit his paternity, it is the ensuring reunion of the family unit that forever transforms Pearl from her “imp-like” ways to a citizen of the community, as after

> Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell down upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. (SL 287)

Despite Hester’s numerous, failed attempts to discipline Pearl, “The work of revelation, reformation, and unification […] is finally done by the father’s, rather than the mother’s, body” (Nudelman 209). Through the reunion of the family unit, placid and beneficial relations ensue for Pearl and Hester as well as for the larger community. Pearl becomes a
new-born citizen, who – evidence suggests – finds wealth and a notable marriage, Hester returns to Salem with a useful and revered position in the community as counselor, and the elders of the Community no longer insist that the scarlet A connote Hester’s sin and punishment, allowing her to take it off if she so wishes, “for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it” (294).

While Governor Bellingham and his counsel debate replacing Hester as parent with the community, it is no less significant that when Dimmesdale temporarily assumes his paternal role, he is, no less, acting from his religious position as Father, or, as he is often referred to throughout the novel, “Master Dimmesdale.” Indeed, as much as Pearl’s paternity is repeatedly questioned, religion often attempts to take up the role of missing father. In response to one of Pearl’s many attempts of ascertaining who her father is, Hester tells her “The Heavenly Father sent thee!” (SL 107), to which Pearl replies, “He did not send me! […] I have no Heavenly Father!” (108). Indeed, the main test for whether Pearl should be removed from Hester’s care hinges upon Pearl’s answer to the question of whether or not she can recite the catechism, particularly being questioned by the Reverend Mr. Wilson, “Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?” (122). Despite being questioned by the community’s most revered clergyman, who, assuming the collective tone of religion, refers to Pearl as “my child,” Pearl once more refuses to accept a Heavenly Father as a suitable substitution for her real father, refuses to let religion restore the domestic family unit, telling Mr. Wilson “that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew in the prison-door” (122).
The need for both a mother and a father within the domestic household was not just a subject of Hawthorne’s fiction, but was echoed in Hawthorne’s own life, as his father died when he was very young. After the death of Hawthorne’s father, his mother “shut herself away from the world, seldom leaving the house, taking most of her meals in her room. Her neighbors did not begin to whisper about her until it became obvious that she would never stop mourning” (Gaeddert 12). Elizabeth Peabody, a friend of Nathaniel’s, “insisted the Widow Hathorne ‘made it the habit of her life never to sit down at a table but always eat her meals above in the chamber she never left. For this, she was constantly criticized & condemned by the neighbours, including connections of the family’” (Wineapple 32). The mother’s already reclusive nature, brought about by the death of her husband, and the lack of a father within the home, is magnified because it becomes the talk of the neighbors, as she is “criticized & condemned” by them.

The reclusive nature of the mother contaminated her children, and it came to pass that “like an insidious disease, Madame Hathorne’s isolation had infected her daughters” and Ebe, being “still in her early twenties […] too led a cloistered life, seldom leaving her room,” (Gaeddert 23). For several years, Hawthorne “saw his younger sister, Louisa, most days at tea, and his mother occasionally afterward, but the Hawthornes ate their meals alone in their rooms. Three months might pass before he encountered Ebe” (Marshall 42). Madame Hathorne’s own reclusive nature came to manifest itself in her daughters, poisoning their very natures in that their involvement with society became limited, as they were temporarily disabled from fulfilling their roles as citizens, or their roles as mothers.
The seclusion of the Hawthorne women from society, caused by the break-up of the family unit, and the lack of a father within the home, strips the women of their citizenship, of their societal involvement. The community itself, mainly the neighbors, through their criticism and condemnation, disavows its children – the women – as they no longer hold a proper role in the society. As women who do not enter into domestic relationships, who fail to utilize their maternal capabilities, they are poisonous to the society. Failing to produce “citizens [for] the future republic” (Robbins 564), the reclusive Hawthorne women lower the chances for prosperity of the nation, and as such, are ostracized from the community, isolated so that their poisonous nature does not infect any proper citizens. Hawthorne saw first-hand, through his experiences with his mother and his sister, the ill effects of an unstable, incomplete family unit.

Clearly, Hawthorne was concerned throughout his life with the creation and maintenance of a stable domestic sphere. His own fatherlessness, combined with his repeated financial problems, which affected his ability to properly provide for his own wife and children, were issues which drew him to the rhetoric of the Democratic Party. The party rhetoric, which concerned itself over issues of how to maintain national prosperity in light of domestic turmoil, advocated the need for stable and concrete domestic relations in order to ensure national prosperity, often using metaphors of poison to convey the danger of failing to do so. The politics of the Democratic Party particularly resonated with Hawthorne, as he, too, wanted to provide a stable domestic sphere for his family, to ensure a successful future for his children; the ramifications of a failed domestic sphere echoed very much with Hawthorne, and he could see, as did the Democrats, the same failure happening on a national scale.
Thus, in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne emphasizes the dangerous ramifications of the ruined family, the poison it imbibles, and the poison it spreads to the children and the larger community. With the poisoned nature of Pearl cured by restoring and rectifying filial relations, Hawthorne ultimately reifies the Democratic Party’s ideal of domestic prosperity and national placidity. While familial relations are to be replicated on a national scale, treating all members of the nation as part of one political family, the Democratic Party cannot serve as a substituting force for relations which must be restored willingly by the family itself. By individuals willingly restoring filial relations within their home and within the nation, not only is national prosperity ensured, but so is the prosperity of the domestic, and national, progeny.
Works Cited


