ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

Redemption in Liminality: The "Intermediate Landscape" and Its Cultural Mirror in Hawthorne's Works

Guo Liyun*

School of Arts, Hengyang Normal University, Hengyang, China
guoliyun2022@163.com
**Corresponding author*

Abstract: *The "intermediate landscape" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary world carries multiple implications and cultural significances. This concept refers to liminal spaces situated between civilization and wilderness, reality and the transcendental, such as the forest in The Scarlet Letter and the suburban farm in The Blithedale Romance. Examining these spaces through dimensions like spatial narrative, moral ambiguity, psychological conflict, and social regulation reveals that the "intermediate landscape" is not only a site for characters' identity reconstruction and redemption but also a profound metaphor for issues such as the disintegration of religious authority and the alienation of industrial civilization during the transformative period of 19th-century American society. Through symbolism and fluid narrative, Hawthorne constructs a poetic model of redemption that transcends binary oppositions, offering significant literary references and critical resources for contemporary ecological criticism, postcolonial studies, and spatial theory.*

Keywords: *Nathaniel Hawthorne; Intermediate Landscape; Liminal Space; Redemptive Poetics*

1. Introduction

In the literary world of the 19th-century American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), the "Intermediate Landscape" consistently constitutes a charged "Liminal Space". Examples include the "forest" between the scaffold and the wilderness in *The Scarlet Letter* (1851) and the utopian "farm" in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). These static spaces effectively form dynamic fields of meaning—they are both boundaries of civil order and breeding grounds for transgressive desires; both courts of moral judgment and channels for human redemption. This intermediary zone, situated between reality and the transcendental, the individual and the community, civilization and wilderness, bears both the collective unconscious of American Puritan ethics and exposes the modern predicament of human alienation. As one of the most philosophically profound symbolic systems in 19th-century American literature, the "intermediate landscape" is not only a crucial dimension of Hawthorne's aesthetic construction but also a key code for interpreting his social critique. This construction of "intermediary" boundaries is essentially Hawthorne's metaphorical inscription of the value dilemmas during America's period of social transformation. Caught between Puritan theocracy and capitalist progressivism, the individual could neither fully integrate into the community nor completely escape its discipline. The black veil in "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836) obscures not merely the clergyman's face but the eternal fissure between public morality and private desire. This article aims to distill the writer's unique literary philosophy by exploring the spatial category of "intermediate landscape" in Hawthorne's works: constructing a cognitive paradigm characterised by "intermediacy" through emphasising the significance of "liminal state". This paradigm is applicable to analysing the tensions between nature and civilisation, the individual and the collective, and reality and the transcendental, and can also extend to understanding the "transitional spaces" commonly found in literary works, such as "heterotopias" and "hybridity" spaces[1], providing a literary prelude for interpreting themes such as marginal writing, cultural conflict, and identity fluidity. Hawthorne profoundly reveals the poetic value and ethical significance of the "intermediate landscape" long before the rise of contemporary theoretical trends: only in the gaps of contradiction and ambiguity can one accurately capture the true texture of human nature and society, thereby seeking the opportunity for redemption.

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

2. The Theoretical Framework of the "Intermediate Landscape"

The "intermediate landscape" in Hawthorne's writing is not merely a physical space, but a symbolic realm that carries moral, psychological, and social contradictions. Its theoretical framework mainly includes: (1) The non-typical field of physical space, that is, the marginal space between an ordered society and the natural wilderness. This space is neither completely disciplined by civilisation nor an absolute natural wilderness, but rather a "third space" imbued with moral ambiguity. For instance, the "forest" in *The Scarlet Letter*, as the intermediate zone between the Puritan society and the primeval wilderness, is the place where Hester Prynne and Dimmesdale briefly escape the shackles of morality. The "old house" in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) is a typical space that carries historical thresholds, with attics, cellars, and other enclosed areas creating a "middle ground of memory" that both preserves family secrets and collective unconscious, and serves as a field for the new generation to deconstruct the curse of history. Through the materiality of marginal spaces, Hawthorne transforms abstract moral dilemmas into perceivable spatial experiences, making the "interstitial landscape" a prism for insight into human nature.

(2) The "undecided zone" of the power struggle between good and evil on the moral dimension, where characters experience the fluidity of moral identity and the fragmentation of self-awareness. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the symbol "A" undergoes a transformation from a mark of shame (Adultery) to meanings of "Able" and "Angel", and the evolution of its symbolic meaning itself forms a metaphor for a moral intermediate state. Hester's redemption does not rely on conformity to norms, but rather, in the social margins, through relentless moral practice, she gradually reconstructs her self-image.

(3) The intersection of consciousness and the subconscious, reason and desire in the psychological dimension. Beatrice in "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1850) is portrayed as a "poisoned angel", whose body suffers the pain of poisoning while also becoming a medium for transmitting toxins, symbolising the psychological split of individuals during the process of alienation. Hawthorne transforms the individual's moral dilemmas into the eternal conflict between the ego and the id, reason and desire through the psychological "interior landscape".

(4) The buffer zone between individual resistance and collective discipline on a social level. The marketplace and the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* serve as the core of public space, being both a site for the display of power and the public presentation of evidence, as well as a "counter-space" where Hester reconstructs her discourse through "silence" and "embroidery". The three appearances of the scaffold (Hester's trial, Dimmesdale's nocturnal walk, and the final confession) mark the transformation of the individual from being disciplined to actively exposing themselves. Hawthorne profoundly critiques the homogenising pressure imposed by the Puritanical society through the depiction of conflicts in social spaces, while also revealing the survival dilemmas faced by individuals under the constraints of social norms.

The "intermediate landscape" in Hawthorne's works is a crossroads of multiple conflicts. Through the construction of this multi-layered symbolic space, Hawthorne successfully transforms abstract ethical dilemmas, psychological splits, and social oppression into tangible spatial experiences. Its significance lies in suspending and deconstructing the rigid good-and-evil dichotomy of Puritan society, refusing to provide simple moral answers, and instead presenting the struggles of humanity under normative pressure, the fluidity of identity, and the ambiguous state of existence. Combining spatial narrative with liminality theory provides a more comprehensive and in-depth perspective for studying Hawthorne's works. By analysing the spatial imagery and threshold states in the works, we can explore in more detail the characters' transformations of identity, moral choices, and journeys of redemption in different spaces, delving into the cultural tensions and spiritual mappings contained in the works.

3. Between the Countryside and the City: The Spatial Thresholds and Identity Shifts in Hawthorne's Novels

Hawthorne's writing on the "intermediate landscape" captures not only the disappearance of pastoral ideals under the assault of industrial civilisation but also profoundly reveals the dual predicament of space and identity faced by individuals in the process of modernity. On this basis, the author further focuses the narrative on the physical movement and psychological changes of individuals between urban and rural areas, particularly reflected in the identity shocks and reconstruction processes experienced by youth as they transition from the countryside to the city. The short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832) is a quintessential exemplar of this typical meaning,

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

as it vividly illustrates through the city journey of the rural youth Robin how social mobility between the countryside and the city becomes a threshold experience of identity recognition, leading to Hawthorne's profound reflection on individual fate and collective ideals in the process of modernisation.

3.1 Social Mobility and Identity Reconstruction between Country and City

The rural youth Robin first stepped into the city at night in "My Cousin, Colonel Molina". He was filled with hope, expecting that after finding his uncle Colonel Molina, he could rely on his reputation to establish himself in the town. In his imagination, the countryside and the city were naturally united. However, various characters in the city came alive in the streets at midnight, each warning the young man in different ways, such as the seductive charm of beautiful women, the sinister smirks in narrow streets, and the ominous appearance of the black-and-red double-faced people. Even as the youth encouraged himself with optimistic intelligence, fear still took root within him. When the moonlight shone into the pulpit, lingering on the open Bible, he could not help but tremble inside, "This sense of loneliness was even stronger than what he had felt deep in the forests of his hometown"[2]. He felt that the city was chaotic and frightening, until Major Molina made a dishevelled entrance at midnight, gradually revealing the true nature of the city: Major Molina, the central figure in Robin's ideal of nobility and urban fantasy, had become the target of public condemnation. When he learned of his uncle's true situation, his urban fantasy shattered in an instant, and his feelings of compassion and resilience were completely overshadowed by the "carnival on earth". In the end, he mockingly joined in the crowd's revelry, and his "laughter was the loudest"[2].

Hawthorne also provided an opposing version while laying out Robin's pastoral-city plan. The major, as a representative of old-fashioned European despotism, was an obstacle that the marching crowd must eliminate to realise their urban ideal. In other words, "the rebels are formulating a version that conflicts with Robin's pastoral-city"[3]. The procession was dressed in "Indian costumes", appearing in bizarre forms, using bands and torches to create momentum, covering their "enemy" (Major Molina) in tar and sticking feathers all over him. They attempted to restore pastoral life and construct a "new, purer indigenous urban society"[3]. Behind this seemingly absurd behaviour lies a yearning for the traditional pastoral order and a resistance to urban alienation. They long to break the constraints of the existing urban structure by eliminating the representatives of the old order (the major) and return to a societal state deemed more natural and harmonious. However, this attempt is merely a distorted projection of pastoral ideals within the urban space; it cannot truly recreate the innocence of the countryside nor construct the ideal urban society, but instead exposes the confusion and struggles of individuals in the processes of social mobility and identity reconstruction.

From knowing nothing about the world to initially experiencing the trials and tribulations of the city, Hawthorne's arrangement of Robin's fate is quite ingenious: when he intended to abandon the city and return to his hometown, his companion advised him to at least stay in the city for a few days, "because you are a clever young man, I think without the help of your relative, Colonel Molina, you might still get ahead in life"[2]. Should Robin go or stay? The author left his final choice in an open ending, sparking deep contemplation among countless individuals who oscillate between the countryside and the city, attempting to explore their personal destinies. Through Robin's story, Hawthorne reveals how people search for self-identity and a sense of belonging within the wave of modernisation, as well as the conflicts and struggles faced in this process; by employing different versions of the urban-rural model, he hints at the complexity and diversity of individual identity reconstruction in the process of modernisation.

3.2 Structural Tensions and Alienated Reproduction in the Pastoral Ideal

"The Blithedale farm" in *The Blithedale Romance* is a concrete representation of the "intermediate landscape" in the urban suburbs. In the novel, a group of reformers fled the city and established a utopian farm in the suburbs. The Blithedale farm had a beautiful natural environment, "the snow-cellar-like thatched cottages were like Eve's boudoir"[4]. The stoves made the rooms warm and comfortable, and under the sunlight, the Blithedale farm appeared to be "a modern Arcadia"[4]: the land was rationally developed, virtue was revered, men were strong and dignified, women were beautiful and passionate, and the whole of The Blithedale Farm resembled a green garden. However, in this pastoral life, "the typical urban class order and gender division of labour were not altered in the Blithedale Farm"[5]. The Blithedale farmer Silas Foster was well aware of this. When he suggested getting up early to compete with the market gardeners around Boston, the poet Cavadel finally realised

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

that even far from the city, they were still facing a competitive and alienating capitalist world. Leaving the city was originally to seek an ideal pastoral life, but the harsh realities of the Blithedale farm enterprise mercilessly shattered people's beautiful illusions of a pastoral utopia. For the poet Cavadel, the collectivist lifestyle in the Blithedale farm deprived him of his private space, and the heavy labour prevented him from reflective thought, causing the "joyful singing shepherd" to lose both his inspiration and his voice.

After the disillusionment of his pastoral ideals, Cavader chose to return to the city. As he left the suburbs, his consciousness gradually revived, and the Blithedale seemed strangely distant. The tension between the city and the countryside made the "new and old strangely combine, creating an impression that made me distinctly feel how a piece of mosaic has recently played such a peculiar role in my life"[4]. In this spatial displacement from the city to the suburbs, and then back from the suburbs to the city, Cavader completed the sorting out of his self-identity. He realised that whether in the city or the countryside, he could not completely escape the infiltration of capital and the market. This "round-trip cycle" is not only a crossing of physical spaces but also a combing through the world of the mind. In the final chapter "The Confession of Miles Coverdale", the poet frankly stated he is "pitiful and vague": a person must retain their own considerations, yet, "what exactly am I supposed to say? There is nothing, nothing, nothing"[4]. The struggle and confusion in his words revealed the profound pain the poet endures in the fierce clash between ideal and reality. In Hawthorne's writing, the suburban countryside was not a refuge from reality but a complex space filled with structural tension and alienated reproduction.

3.3 The disenchanted encoding of pastoral redemption and the polyphonic narrative of sin

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the imagery of the "forest" is not only a symbol of the protagonists' resistance against Puritan ethics, but also a spiritual refuge for their return to humanity. According to Henri Lefebvre's three-dimensional space model, the "forest", as a "perceived space", is a physical domain where the Puritan disciplinary system fails. In the "sacred space" formed by the church square and the gallows in Boston, the scaffold publicly displays the shame of Hester's "original sin" as a moral order of the colonies. However, when Hester walked into the forest with Pearl, she actively withdrew from this power network: "The trees tightly encased the narrow path, towering on either side, their density blocking out the sky. To Hester, this perfectly reflected the moral wilderness she had wandered for years"[6]. The wildness of the "forest" constitutes a counterpoint to the Puritan "constructed space", and the characters' "spatial practices"[7]directly challenge Lefebvre's assertion that space is a material vehicle of power relations.

The "forest", as a "conceptual space", serves as a spiritual domain for the characters to reconstruct their identity through self-technology. Dimmesdale tore open his cassock in the forest, exposing his chest, and through physical suffering completed a public trial of the inner evil. As Foucault believed, the operation of power is not only realised through external coercion, but also through the individual's internalisation of self-discipline. "The forest", as a "counter-panorama prison", allowed Dimmesdale to temporarily escape the gaze of the minister and achieve a certain twisted freedom through self-punishment. However, this freedom was still controlled by the discourse of power, and his confession ultimately led to death. Hawthorne suggests the difficulties and complexities of character identity reconstruction through the Gothic atmosphere of the forest.

The third attribute of the "forest", as a "living space", becomes an ideological battleground for the deconstruction of the pastoral ideal. Through the indigenous relics in the forest, such as the tribal sacred sites destroyed by the Puritans and the paths where runaway slaves hid, Hawthorne alludes to the unwritten history of colonial violence, piercing through the mystical veil of the New England pastoral myth. In doing so, Hawthorne reveals the violent nature underlying the so-called progress of civilization.

From this, it can be understood that the writer, through the imagery of the "forest", not only pierces through the hypocritical veil of colonial modernity but also touches upon the contradictions and struggles deep within human nature. Hester and Dimmesdale's road to redemption is filled with hardship and choices, offering a profound analysis of sin and punishment in human nature. Hawthorne, with delicate brushstrokes, portrays the couple's wavering and struggle between morality and desire, love and punishment, revealing the true face of humanity in extreme circumstances. This is not only an insight into individual fate but also a reflection on human society as a whole. Every breath, every birdcall in the "forest" seems to narrate the suffering of the natives and the atrocities of the colonisers, while simultaneously conveying the power of hope and rebirth. Hawthorne cleverly combines the

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

demystification of pastoral redemption with a polyphonic narrative of sin through the threshold space of the "forest", allowing readers to not only grasp the tragic fate of the characters but also to contemplate the brilliance and darkness of human nature, as well as how to seek self-redemption in the shadow of colonialism.

3.4 Historical threshold of pastoral shaping and post-pastoral fantasy

Terry Gifford classifies pastoral poetry into three categories in his book Pastoral (1999): firstly, the traditional genre of "pastoral poetry" and other pastoral forms found in legends, dramas, novels, etc., which are usually associated with a celebratory attitude towards what they describe; secondly, the "anti-pastoral" or Counter-Pastoral, which questions and opposes the idealised vision of traditional pastoral poetry using realist methods to counter romanticised pastoral poetry; thirdly, the "post-pastoral", which seeks to reconstruct the relationship between humans and nature[9], viewing humanity as part of nature as a whole, and aims to "find a sincere discourse that both celebrates nature and dares to take responsibility for it"[8]. In Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, the old mansion served as a typical space bearing the threshold of history, weathered by the passage of time. It was not only the place where several generations of a family have lived, but also a symbol intertwining the evils of colonial history with contemporary moral dilemmas. The attic and cellar, as hidden spaces within the old mansion, concealed the family's secrets and collective unconscious. Within these spaces, the characters' identities and fates were closely linked to the family's history; as they explored these secret spaces, they gradually uncovered the family's sins and also face the challenge of self-redemption. Hawthorne, through the crossing of classes in this space via Phoebe Pyncheon (noble) and Holgrave Moore (commoner)[9] , wrote a "post-pastoral" poem that blends history and modernity, nobility and common people.

Holgrave was a typical reformist of the 19th century. He dabbled in multiple professional fields, was rational and radical, and believed that "today more than any other time we ought to overthrow the moss-covered, decayed past... and start everything anew"[11]. However, when he truly abandoned the past and moved towards a new life, that lofty belief became much more modest, "for he ultimately realised that even when people exerted the most direct efforts, they only achieved illusory results"[10]. The writer used this to illustrate that without noble beliefs and morality, all progress became meaningless as it produces more problems. Holgrave needed to absorb the essence of "times past"—the beautiful experiences and simple emotions of the past—and seriously consider the cost and significance behind radicalism.

Phoebe Pynchon, as a descendant of the Pynchon family, inherited her mother's rural charm. She grew up in the countryside of England and did not acquire the aristocratic habits of her family. She was like "a spark in the tea", bright and full of vitality, exuding nearly all the characteristics of "New England—the persistent old qualities of the Puritans, yet woven with golden threads"[10]. The nature, emotions, and fulfilling life she represented had a strong appeal to Holgrave. The latter emphasised knowledge and reform, driven by family hatred, making his life"strange, savage, evil, and hostile"; Phoebe, however, crossed the threshold, bringing him warmth and joy. In Chapter Twenty, "The Flower of Eden", Holgrave proposed to Phoebe in a house full of Alice flowers. The Alice flowers were an embodiment of the god of love, symbolising Phoebe's emotional and historical completion for Holgrave. Hawthorne firmly believed that the union of Phoebe and Holgrave could make human existence "real, good, and happy", "turning the world back into Eden"[10].

Ending the story with a return to a pastoral married life had been criticised by some critics as resolving conflicts through "farce-like plots" or a "pastoral mode"[11]. Marriages crossing social classes were merely "an illusion of peaceful coexistence between different classes" and "a social ideal of class integration"[12]. In this regard, the author believes that Phoebe's pastoral sentiment intertwines with Holgrave's progressive ideals, serving both as Hawthorne's pastoral shaping of historical trauma and as an expression of the writer's "post-pastoral" fantasy: an ideal model transcending class, integrating urban and rural life, and bridging history and modernity. In this model, the pastoral is no longer a refuge from reality but a reinterpretation and sublimation of the pastoral spirit based on reality.

Hawthorne's multiple depictions of the relationship between the pastoral and the urban not only reveals the structural dilemmas of 19th-century American social transformation but also constructs a complex poetic system regarding the experience of modernity. Through Robin's urban disillusionment, the alienated reproduction at The Blithedale farm, the demystifying coding of "forest" spaces, and the post-pastoral fantasies of the Pyncheon residence, Hawthorne demonstrats the dialectical reconstruction of pastoral ideals when confronted with urbanisation, capitalist expansion, and colonial violence.

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

Hawthorne's profundity lies in his consistent placement of the pastoral ideal within the "crucible" of modernisation, allowing it to emerge in a polyphonic narrative of disillusionment and regeneration, sin and redemption, as a dynamic cultural diagnosis. His works are both a literary reflection of the social contradictions of Jacksonian America and a pioneering allegorical model for contemporary spatial critique: when the "pastoral" ceases to be a geographical concept and transforms into a mental apparatus, humanity should explore the threshold states of the "intermediate landscape" to rediscover a poetics of habitation within the labyrinth of modernity.

4. The polysemy of symbols and the transformation of time and space: the redemptive implications of Hawthorne's "intermediate landscape"

Hawthorne's literary world is constructed between the tension of Puritan tradition and Romantic imagination. The "intermediate landscape" serves as the central image of his narrative aesthetics, primarily exhibiting two poetic characteristics and redemptive implications: firstly, a symbolist polyphonic narrative, which creates a text space of multiple meanings through the layering of symbols, requiring the reader to grasp the ambiguity of morality and the complexity of human nature amidst the drift of the "signifier". In *The Scarlet Letter*, the "forest" is a "threshold space" between the Puritan settlement and the primeval wilderness, possessing the dual attributes of "both protection and exposure"[13]. It serves both as a refuge for Hester and Dimmesdale's secret rendezvous and as a breeding ground for their sins. Hawthorne transformes this natural space into a testing ground for moral experience. The Blithedale farm in *The Blithedale Romance*, as a transitional zone between urban and rural areas, embodies the idealism of intellectuals while exposing the fragility of social reform. Hawthorne depicted the farm as a "semi-cultivated nature", hinting at the eternal tension between ideal and reality[14]. In "Rappaccini's Daughter", the "poison garden" was filled with deadly exotic flowers while also nurturing the flowers of the spirit that transcend worldly beauty. In "Wakefield" (1837), the protagonist chosed to retreat into an apartment just across the street from his home. Hawthorne, through this spatial allegory, hinted at the disarray of individual moral coordinates under the impact of industrial civilisation[15]. In "Major Molina", the "Indianised" costumes of the parade alongside the indigenous remnants in the forest of *The Scarlet Letter* together deconstructed the myth of pastoral purity, exposing the violent nature inherent in colonial spatial production.

Next is the feature of the liquidity of space and time[16], which is manifested in three interwoven dimensions: (1) The fluid transformation of spatial semantics. In *The House with Seven Gables*, the old colonial house accumulated new building layers over the course of time, with each extension becoming a slice of historical memory. When the protagonist Clifford discovered ancestral portraits in the dust of the attic, the gaze in the portraits gradually shifted from judgement to understanding, and the oppressive nature of space was dissolved by the fluidity of memory. This fluidity of spatial semantics is reflected in *The marble faun* through the dialogue between ancient Roman sculptures and American tourists. When Hilda copied the statues under the moonlight, the coldness of the marble was gradually permeated by human warmth, achieving a dynamic balance between the eternity of classical art and the immediacy of modern perception in the act of copying.(2)The fluid generation of subject identity. In the forest journey in "Young Goodman Brown", the young believer's boundaries of faith continuously dissolved in the darkness. When he saw the church elders dancing with the Indian sorcerers, the identity labels of "devout" and "heretic" fluctuated constantly under the campfire's glow. This fluid process is manifested as the dissolution of bodily boundaries in "Rappaccini's Daughter". After Beatrice drank the juice of the poisonous flowers cultivated by her father, her blood became both poison and the fountain of life, where the biological and artificial engaged in a dynamic struggle within her body. Hawthorne used this fluidity in his writing to deconstruct the traditional moral identity paradigm;(3) The folding of temporal fluidity. In the narrative structure of "The Custom-House", Hawthorne juxtaposed personal memory with colonial history within the customs archive. When the narrator touched fabric marked with a red letter, the disgrace of the seventeenth century collided with the literary imagination of the nineteenth century in an instant of tactile time overlap. This fluid temporal experience is manifested in "Wakefield" as spatialised temporal stasis. The protagonist exiled himself in an apartment for twenty years, creating a tension between the extended time of the outside world and the eternal moment within the apartment, transforming time from a unidimensional measure into an elastic medium reshaped by subjective perception.

Overall, the "intermediate landscape" in Hawthorne's work is like liquid crystal, reflecting the intertwining of multiple realities and illusions. Through the construction of the "intermediate landscape", he cleverly blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, good and evil, past and present, allowing readers to experience the charm and depth of literary art in the midst of flow and change. The

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

revelatory aspect of this "intermediate landscape" lies in the fact that true spiritual redemption does not exist on a fixed other shore, but in a continuously flowing liminal state—just like the scarlet letter "A" on Hester's chest, whose meaning is eternally being rewritten.

5. The contemporary dimension and poetic implications of Hawthorne's "intermediate landscape"

In Hawthorne's literary universe, the "intermediate landscape", as a trans-temporal spiritual archetype, is increasingly revealing its contemporary implications with the evolution of postmodern civilisation. This critical space between dualistic opposites is neither a simple form of compromise nor a static transitional zone, but a generative cultural apparatus, whose underlying operational mechanisms can be examined from the following dimensions:

First is the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity on the ontological level. In *The House with Seven Gables*, the architectural space of the Pyncheon family's ancestral home presents a Baroque-like folded structure—the wooden trusses from the colonial period interweave with the Gothic spires of the Victorian era. This layering of space is precisely Hawthorne's metaphor for identity politics. When modern individuals are torn between digital and physical identities, cultural affiliation and global citizenship, the layered identity revelation of the "old house" suggests that true identity should not be an essentialist monologue but a dynamic process of dialogue. Just as Clifford in the novel reconstructs fragments of memory in the attic of the ancestral home through a kaleidoscope, modern people can construct a resilient identity spectrum through the intersection of multimedia and real-world social interactions, and through the dialectic of cultural roots and global mobility. This "intermediate landscape" is neither rootless drift nor doctrinal rigidity but the integrity of existence realised through continuous self-iteration.

Secondly, there is the embodied cognition revolution from the perspective of the philosophy of technology. The "poison garden" in "Lapiacini's Daughter" has gained new interpretive dimensions in contemporary times. When gene editing technology (Crispr) attempts to rewrite the code of life, and the Metaverse claims to reconstruct the way humans exist, this space, alienated by scientific rationality, warns us that technological development must re-establish an ethical framework of "embodiment", where the human body is not a passive tool but an active participant in cognition. Just as Beatrice maintains human warmth amidst the poisonous flowers, modern people also need to maintain necessary tension between the algorithmic cocoon and the real world. Hawthorne's "intermediate landscape" is enlightening in that technology should not be abstract code detached from the body, but should become a medium that extends embodied experience. For example, if virtual reality technology can incorporate physical feedback of bodily perception, and if artificial intelligence can retain the "irrational" dimension of human emotions, it could open up a new middle ground between technological alienation and humanistic steadfastness.

Third is the construction of symbiotic aesthetics in the dimension of ecocriticism. In the current context of the climate crisis, the "forest" in *The Scarlet Letter* acquires the significance of ecopolitics. When urban green spaces are alienated into landscape symbols by capitalist logic, and rural revitalisation falls into the trap of over-commercialisation, Hawthorne's imagery of the "forest" suggests that true ecological restoration should be based on the concept of the "Third Nature"—neither a romanticised imagination of primeval wilderness nor a wholly artificial environmental reconstruction, but a 'intermediate landscape' created through ongoing interactions between human and non-human entities, imbued with ecological wisdom. This landscape is like the wildflower necklace pearl weaved in the forest in the novel, an organic blend of natural elements and human care.

Finally, there is the poetics of redemption in aesthetic modernity. In Hawthorne's utopian experiment in *The Blithedale Romance*, he foresaw the inherent paradox of modernity's redemptive schemes: absolute perfectionism inevitably leads to violence, while complete compromise signifies the dissolution of ideals. This dilemma continues to recur in contemporary social movements, such as environmentalists swinging between radical protests and gradual reforms, and leftist politics torn between identity politics and class politics. Hawthorne reveals to us that redemption should not be entrusted to any ultimate solution, but should exist in the process of ongoing dialogue. Unlike Zenobia's tragic departure from the Blithedale farm, modern people need to maintain mental resilience amidst the tension between hope and despair. This poetics of redemption rejects definitive answers while leaving room for possibilities. This modernist transformation of a "intermediate landscape" is, in essence, a transcendence of the dualism of Enlightenment reason. It refuses to regard tradition and

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.8, Issue 11: 158-165, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2025.081123

modernity, nature and civilisation, East and West as mutually exclusive opposites, instead seeing them as mutually permeating dynamic systems. In today's burgeoning field of digital humanities, Hawthorne's literary wisdom reminds us that a true spiritual home is not found in the extreme pursuit of any single dimension, but in continuous dialogue and creative friction across different dimensions. This liminal state is both a predicament of existence and an opportunity for transcendence.

6. Conclusion

In summary, as a threshold space between natural wilderness and industrial civilisation, and between religious ideals and social reality, the “intermediate landscape” can be considered a central image in Hawthorne’s narrative aesthetics. This confluence of geographical and psychological space not only carries the intense collision between Puritan traditions and capitalist values but also reflects the fragmentation and reconstruction of individual identity in the process of modernization. Through allegorical depictions of nature, the “intermediate landscapes” constructed by Hawthorne in works such as *The Scarlet Letter* and “The Minister’s Black Veil” transcend the mere scope of scene description and become pathological slices dissecting the moral dilemmas during 19th-century American social transformation. What the writer reveals through symbolist techniques is not merely the loss of humanity under environmental alienation, but also a profound warning of the encroachment of technical rationality and the disintegration of communal ethics. This poetic translation of spiritual predicament reflects the romantic writer’s dialectical contemplation of Enlightenment modernity and provides a unique historical note for interpreting the germination of ecological awareness in American literature.

Acknowledgements

This work is sponsored by the Research Initiation Project of Hengyang Normal University (Grant#2024QD35).

References

[1] Bhabha, Homi K., The Location of Culture[M]. London: Routledge, 1994:112.
[2] Hawthorne, Nathaniel, The Hawthorne Collection: Stories and Essays[M]. Translated by Yao Naiqiang (et al). Beijing: Life, Reading, New Knowledge Sanlian Bookstore, 1997:93.
[3] Machor, James L., Pastoralism and the American Urban Ideal: Hawthorne, Whitman, and the Literary Pattern[J]. American Literature, 1982(3):329-353.
[4] Hawthorne, Nathaniel, The Blithedale Romance[M]. Translated by Hu Yunhuan. Hefei:Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House, 2000.
[5] Guan Haoyue, The Suburban Pastoral Ideal in The Blithedale Romance[D]. Master's thesis. Beijing: Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2019.
[6] Hawthorne, Nathaniel, The Scarlet Letter[M]. Translated by Hu Yunhuan. Hefei:Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House, 2000.
[7] Lefebvre, Henri, The Production of Space[M]. Translated by Liu Huaiyu(et al). Shanghai: Commercial Press, 2021:51.
[8] Gifford, Terry, Pastoral[M]. London: Routledge, 1999: 1-3.
[9] Matthiessen, F.O., American Renaissance[M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941:351.
[10] Hawthorne, Nathaniel, The House of the Seven Gables[M]. Translated by Hu Yunhuan. Hefei: Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House, 2000.
[11] Brook,Thomas, The House of Seven Gables: Reading the Romance of America[J]. Modern Language Association, PMLA, 1982(2):195-211.
[12] Shang Xiaojin, The Era of Reform and the Pastoral: On the Historical Context of The House of Seven Gables[J]. Journal of Shanghai University, 2009(6):131-142.
[13] Bachelard, Gaston, The Poetics of Space[M]. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958:62.
[14] Millington, Richard H., The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne[M]. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004:121.
[15] Bercovitch, Sacvan, The Office of The Scarlet Letter[M]. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991:89.
[16] Bauman, Zygmunt, Liquid Modernity[M]. Translated by Ouyang Jinggen. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018:33.