INAGAKI Shin’ichi

Scientific Thought and Magic: Comparative Studies of 
The House of the Seven Gables 
and The Undiscovered Country

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables (1851) and William Dean Howells’s The Undiscovered Country (1880) contain two concepts in common. First, in these two novels, several characters espouse the pseudoscientific concepts of either mesmerism or spiritualism, hereafter referred to as magic. Second, communal thoughts or movements are also described or at least alluded to: Fourierism in The House of the Seven Gables\(^1\) and Shakerism in The Undiscovered Country. However, the two novels draw quite different conclusions about these topics. These differences can be explained by the changing meaning of nineteenth century science, which was once closely related to religious thought in Europe and America but later became more separated. The purpose of this paper is to consider what kind of shift was brought to the definition of science and how this shift influenced the authors of these novels, in regard to magical and communal ideas.

I. Mesmerism and Empirical Science

In The House of the Seven Gables, Holgrave employs the magical power of mesmerism and perhaps spiritualism in several scenes and hints that he espouses Fourierism, for example, by saying, “we will be fellow-laborers,
somewhat on the community-system” (Hawthorne 93). Fourierism and spiritualism bear a certain similarity in two primary points.

First, Fourierism and spiritualism shared the millenarian aim of creating their own ideal society. In the 1830s, the Second Great Awakening reached its peak in the United States, causing several religious movements to go into social reform; and revivalism, mysticism, and new millennial sects developed a common “wide expectation of an imminent kingdom of heaven on earth.” As a result, in the 1840s, many communes, based on the theory of a French utopian, Charles Fourier, were established mainly in the north-eastern through midwestern regions of the United States. Brook Farm was the first of these communes espousing social reform ideas and was the place of “the joining of American Transcendentalism and European utopian socialism in a communal venture” (Guarneri 35, 68).

On the other hand, spiritualism had pervaded the United States since the Fox sisters first heard spirit rapping in 1848. Like revivalism and evangelicalism, spiritualism put a premium “on inner spirituality, personal experience, direct contact with the divine” (Carroll 127). “Spiritualists hoped that their spirit guides [...] would usher in the millennium, that perfect social and moral order predicted in the Christian Scriptures and anticipated by religious Americans,” and they participated in a variety of social reform movements in search for such a perfect order (Carroll 39). While American Fourierism tried to build an ideal society upon Fourier’s utopian theory, spiritualism aimed to build society as spiritualists imagined to exist in the other world where spirits of the dead lived. Fourierism and spiritualism not only shared the influence of religious thought and an inclination toward social reform, but the same espousers and members often belonged to both movements. Thus Fourierism and spiritualism became popular in the 1840s, given the religious background at that time. Bret E. Carroll, by citing a passage by Andrew Jackson Davis, an American theorist of spiritualism, points out that American spiritualists expected the United States to become “the new millennial country of peace and abundance,” a true “Spiritual Republic” (39). American Fourierism held similar hopes.

The second primary similarity between Fourierism and spiritualism regards the mid-nineteenth century notion that the world exists in conformity with natural laws designed by God, and that science allowed human beings access
to God's laws by closely observing nature. Although the notion of social science originated in the Enlightenment, the term "social science" emerged with special meaning in the early 1830s, when such utopians as British Owenites, French Saint-Simonians and Fourierists adopted the term to their theories. In the early 1840s, the Fouriests' "social science" was first adopted in the United States as "the idea of science applied to society" by Brook Farmers. Albert Brisbane, an American advocate of Fourierism, claimed that "social science" would reveal "the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of humanity" and find "the laws and organization of a Social Order, which is based upon fixed laws in the moral or intellectual world, and which can be demonstrated with the precision of a mathematical problem" (Guarneri 85–86). Brisbane drew an analogy between "social science" and Newton's laws of gravitation and Copernicus' astronomy. It is clear that Fourierists viewed social science as a type of empirical science in line with Newton's and Copernicus's studies, that is to say, science relying on observation.

Spiritualism in mid-nineteenth century America also inclined toward empirical science. R. Lawrence Moore points out that many spiritualists in this era considered spirit manifestations not "the inward illumination of mystic experience," but "the observable and verifiable objects of empirical science." Therefore, spiritualists "tried to emulate the scientific method" and "copied and helped popularize scientific language." Moore interprets this attitude of the spiritualists as "the right position to gain the attention of an age that wanted to believe that its universe operated like an orderly machine," and attributes it to "their desire to make religion rational" (7). As Carl J. Guarneri observes, unorthodox science including mesmerism, clairvoyance, and spiritualism "offered apparently scientific proof of a benign spiritual universe analogous to earthly existence" (87). Just as Fourierists claimed the validity of their theory in the name of science, spiritualists claimed that they could build such a harmonic society as that of the other world, by trying to prove spiritualistic phenomena true by an inductive method of science, a method of reasoning from particulars to generals, or from the individual to the universal. In other words, spiritualists tried to gain universal truth by drawing conclusions from particular materializations of spirits.

The attraction of spiritualists toward science may have resulted from two trends in science. First, magical thoughts such as mesmerism and spiritualism
became subjects of scientific studies by the professionalization of science. In 1840, William Whewell, in his *Philosophy of the Inductive Science*, first used the word “scientist” instead of “man of science” as a collective name for men of inductive science. According to John Limon, the creation of the word “scientist” shows that “there had emerged a ‘science’ whose success in discovering definite truths could be analyzed across a considerable spectrum of specializations.” “The professional scientists,” as he continues, “were separating themselves once and for all from the amateurs,” while “science, which had shed hermetic magic at around the turn of the seventeenth century, seemed in America in the 1830s and 1840s to be slipping back into magic” (121-22). Whereas science was specialized and professionalized around 1840, a border still existed between science and magic that was uncertain and permeable. This border included the areas of mesmerism and spiritualism.

Second, science, together with technology, was believed to enable the world to make progress and was strongly affecting modern thought with its progressive ideas. The relatively new word “technology,” which means “those arts that particularly involve application of science,” had been popularized since the publication of Jacob Bigelow’s *Elements of Technology* (1829), and there was propaganda “that science and technology progressed together” as exemplified by the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. Limon points out that Nathaniel Hawthorne read a scientific book titled *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832), which “explains the old magic scientifically, and it promotes technology as the new, desacralized magic” (138-39). It is clear that Hawthorne, as a contemporary in the age of scientific progressivism, was conscious of the permeable border between science and magic, and of the progress that science was expected to bring about with technology. Furthermore, Hawthorne dramatizes the relation of science with such magical notions as mesmerism and spiritualism in *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Scientific progressivism and the uncertain and permeable border between science and magic are best expressed through the following remarks by Clifford in his disagreement with another passenger on the train.

“[.. .] even to me, the harbingers of a better era are unmistakeable [*sic*]. Mesmerism, now! Will that effect nothing, think you, towards purging away the grossness out of human life?”

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

“A humbug, again!” cried the old gentleman.

“Then there is electricity; —the demon, the angel, the mighty physical power, the all-pervading intelligence!” exclaimed Clifford. “Is that a humbug, too? Is it a fact—or have I dreamt it—that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time? Rather, the round globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence! Or, shall we say, it is itself a thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it?” (Hawthorne 263–64)

Clifford groups mesmerism and spiritualism with electricity and the telegraph, calling them “the harbingers of a better era.” In Clifford’s mind, mesmerism, spiritualism, and electricity undoubtedly coexist, all within the permeable peripheries of science. Furthermore, he regards them as a means of “purging away the grossness out of human life,” and among them, electricity enables him to identify the earth with “a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence.” It seems reasonable to suppose that Clifford expects the earth to make both material and moral progress by means of the sciences of mesmerism, spiritualism, and technology.

Clifford’s perspective on human progress resembles “the technological utopia of the future” and “the unabashed linking of the scientific and the divine” that E. Michael Jones speaks of when describing views of positive science in mid-nineteenth century America (27). Jones explains such a technological utopia in terms of the dualism of body and soul. Jones observes that “as the body becomes obsolete because the necessity of labor has been taken over by machinery, the soul, gradually disengaged from the ‘gross and unworthy’ body, will rise and take its rightful place among the angels,” and that “the soul achieves its independence of matter not through a weary cycle of moral purification, but through its own efforts at refining the body away by having technology take over its functions.” This belief in this period, as he adds, is just “the ontological correlative to the generally held doctrines of progress and the perfectibility of man” (30). Clifford’s remarks quoted above are another example of what Jones describes as the views of the technological
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utopia, and they can be read as the evidence of his belief in human progress and perfectibility.

Holgrave also shows a belief in human progress and perfectibility, a belief which blurs the border of science and magic as Clifford does. More than anything else, he is characterized by his keenly observant glance, which emulates an empirical scientist.

He was too calm and cool an observer. Phoebe felt his eye, often; his heart, seldom or never. He took a certain kind of interest in Hepzibah and her brother, and Phoebe herself; he studied them attentively, and allowed no slightest circumstance of their individualities to escape him; he was ready to do them whatever good he might; —but, after all, he never exactly made common cause with them, nor gave any reliable evidence that he loved them better, in proportion as he knew them more. (Hawthorne 177-78)

Holgrave’s glance and attitude are like those of an empirical scientist who is observant of nature, trying to interpret God’s design of the world by the inductive method. He is interested in Hepzibah, Clifford, and Phoebe as subjects of observation, allowing “no slightest circumstance of their individualities to escape him,” although he pretends to be coolly detached from them. In this sense, he can be considered to have the character of an empirical scientist.

Holgrave’s scientific attitude corresponds with those of American mesmerists in general in this period. Robert C. Fuller explains that, in the 1840s and 1850s, American mesmerists thought that their observations of mesmeric phenomena, such as direct thought transference and clairvoyance, “could be accounted for within a suitably enlarged science.” They sought to “correlate physiological and psychological perspectives on the nature of consciousness,” although their attempt was not fully successful (212). Holgrave’s observant glance is a close reflection of the scientific attitudes of American mesmerists in general, whose attempt was to verify the connecting link between “the natural and the spiritual” (212), that is, physiology and psychology, by closely observing the mesmeric phenomena and proving the existence of animal magnetism.

Mesmerism also makes it possible to connect Holgrave’s scientific attitude
with his belief in human progress and perfectibility. His inclination for social reform, which was one of the features of American mesmerists and spiritualists, is manifest in his acquaintance with "reformers, temperance-lecturers, and all manner of cross-looking philanthropists; —community men and comeouters," as Hepzibah tells Phoebe sarcastically (Hawthorne 84). American mesmerism in this period had religious import like spiritualism. "The act of entering the mesmeric state," as Fuller puts it, "was thought to be a decidedly numinous experience" (214-15). Many Americans believed "that the mesmerizing process helped them to reestablish inner harmony with the very source of physical and emotional well-being," and "that disease and even moral confusion were but the unfortunate consequences of having fallen out of rapport with the invisible spiritual workings of the universe." As a result, mesmerism had been in vogue in the United States since the mid-1830s "in the wake of the progressivist tendencies unleashed by the Second Great Awakening" (215), just as spiritualism had been since the late 1840s. American mesmerists went toward an "alleviated Calvinism," which attributed sin to "ignorance or faulty social institutions" instead of "mankind's inherent depravity," and claimed that man's nature was "potentially correctable through humanly initiated reforms" (215). Social reform was an important factor of mesmerism as well as of spiritualism, and this was also a great drive to build an ideal society for mesmerism and spiritualism, just as it was for Fourierism as we have seen. Indeed, Holgrave not only holds mesmeric power, but also has experienced a stay in a Fourierist commune in Europe. Holgrave's distinctive character as an observer and his sympathy with social reform show two aspects of mesmerism: trying to explain the nature of consciousness in the name of science, and resorting to social reform movements to regain harmony with the invisible spiritual workings of the universe.

We are now able to see that, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, spiritualism, Fourierism, and mesmerism all occur in close connection with science and social reform. And both Holgrave's social reform ideas and his mesmeric power are represented negatively by the narrator. Holgrave's ideas are viewed critically because of his radicalism "that this age, more than any past or future one, is destined to see the tattered garments of Antiquity exchanged for a new suit, instead of gradually renewing themselves by patchwork" (Hawthorne 180). He thinks that people can reach the ideal society by throwing away the
roten past all at once. Furthermore, his mesmerism is depicted as being as
demonic as that of Matthew Maule, who once mesmerized Alice Pynchon in
search of the lost document relating to the large eastern territory. Phoebe
shows a certain drowsiness or is almost mesmerized when Holgrave is telling
her how Matthew Maule mesmerized Alice so many years ago. Holgrave's
attitude toward Phoebe is described as follows:

To a disposition like Holgrave's, at once speculative and active, there is no
temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the
human spirit; nor any idea more seductive to a young man, than to
come the arbiter of a young girl's destiny. Let us, therefore—whatever
his defects of nature and education, and in spite of his scorn for creeds
and institutions—concede to the Daguerreotypist the rare and high qual-
ity of reverence for another's individuality. (Hawthorne 212)

What is immediately apparent in this extract is that mesmerism can be a means
of "acquiring empire over the human spirit," and that a mesmerist can be "the
arbiter of a young girl's destiny." Undeniably, mesmerism has the morally evil
effect of controlling others' minds. But we are told in this scene that Holgrave,
given "the rare and high quality of reverence for another's individuality," stops
the evil mesmeric effect on Phoebe. The evil dimension of mesmerism is made
conspicuous, first, by the fact that in Holgrave's story, Maule's mesmerism
leads Alice to destruction, and second, that once Holgrave realizes that Phoebe
appears to be mesmerized, he stops reading the story to her.

As he turns away from mesmerism, Holgrave also discards his radicalism,
another aspect of mesmerism that concerns social reform. He, "that sworn foe
of wealth and all manner of conservatism" (Hawthorne 313) as he used to be,
finally admires the old country-house inherited by Hepzibah, Clifford, and
Phoebe at the end of the novel, by speaking of the "venerableness to its original
beauty" and "that impression of permanence" (314-15). His newly acquired
conservatism is no doubt contradictory to the radicalism, by which he previ-
ously espoused the ideas of social reform. Thus, it is safe to say that reform-
oriented and demonic aspects of mesmerism are represented negatively in this
novel in two ways: first, that they are criticized by the narrator and Hepzibah
directly; second, that they are eventually abandoned by Holgrave.

It would be untrue, however, to say that mesmerism is totally refuted by this
novel, because it is mesmeric power that actually brings about a happy ending. Holgrave redeems Clifford from two false suspicions towards him: one is that he murdered Jaffrey Pyncheon, Judge Pyncheon's uncle, 30 or 40 years ago, and the other is that he murdered Judge Pyncheon. Holgrave disproves the first suspicion by means of "one of those mesmeric seers, who, now-a-days, so strangely perplex the aspect of human affairs, and put everybody's natural vision to the blush, by the marvels which they see with their eyes shut" (Hawthorne 311). He also prevents Clifford from incurring the second suspicion by preserving a record of Judge Pyncheon's death through a daguerreotype. Like an empirical scientist, Holgrave's observant attitude toward the dead body of Judge Pyncheon enables him to save Clifford and Hepzibah, who are seen leaving the house of the seven gables just after Judge Pyncheon enters it. Thus the magical and scientific features of mesmerism allow Clifford and Hepzibah to begin life anew at the end of this novel, despite whatever sarcasm or criticism is included in reference to mesmerism. One can also safely state that the vagueness of the border between empirical science and magic in the mid-nineteenth century affects Holgrave's character so that he is both a man of science and a mesmerist.

II The Problem of Materialism

In The Undiscovered Country, we can also observe a relationship between science and spiritualism. The story begins in Boston with a séance by spiritualist Dr. Boynton and his daughter, Egeria. Egeria is virtually forced by her father to play the important role of medium in his spiritualistic search for truth. As the story draws to a close, however, Boynton abandons his belief in spiritualism, and after his death, the story ends with Egeria's marriage to Ford, who is incredulous toward spiritualism.

Shakerism is another element which is crucial to the plot, and a great part of this novel is given to the scenes of a Shaker village, showing the ideas of Shakerism as a counterpart to Fourierism in The House of the Seven Gables. After first emigrating from England, the Shakers reached their peak in the United States by the 1830s, having as many as 4,000 members and forming about 60 semimonastic communities from Maine to Indiana. Celibacy and the emphasis on equality for women are most central to Shaker communes, whose primary millenarian goal was "setting up religious communities that help
achieve the kingdom of heaven on earth.” Shaker communal living offered inspiration to various social theorists of the period including Robert Owen, John Humphrey Noyes and Friedrich Engels (Foster 17-20).

The millenarian and social reform ideas of Shakerism coincide with those of spiritualism. Therefore, Boynton is delighted when he finds himself joined in Shaker communal life. After leaving Boston because of the failure of his séance, the father and his sick daughter are saved by a Shaker in a storm and taken to his village, where they stay for a summer. What Boynton finds in the office on the first night at the village are “periodicals devoted to various social and hygienic reforms,” as well as “historical and doctrinal works relating to Shakerism” and “controversial tracts upon points in dispute between the community and the world” (Howells 163). We can see, from what are listed in this scene, that this Shaker village is permeated with ideas of social reform having arisen in the name of science since the 1840s. On the second night in the village, in his statement to the villagers, Boynton praises the Shakers as “the only people who have conceived of spiritism as a science, and practiced it as a religion” (181). His complimentary remarks about Shakerism reveal that he considers spiritism, which can be interpreted as spiritualism, not only as religion, but also as science in his search for truth.

The scientific aspect of spiritualism is represented further by Boynton, as can be seen in the following quotation:

We shall begin with some simple experiments in biology, or, as it was originally called, mesmerism; and we shall gradually proceed to a combination of this science with spiritism, in a union which it has been the end and aim of all my inquiries to effect, —which I have foreseen from the beginning as the only true development of perfect mediumship. (Howells 232)

What this remark makes clear at once is that Boynton regards both mesmerism and spiritualism as means of scientific inquiries. He uses the word “mesmerism” as a synonym for biology, and refers to a close relation between mesmerism and spiritualism by indicating his wish to combine them for his inquiries. A little earlier in the same remark, Boynton refers to phenomena caused by spiritualism as “certain facts of psychological science,” and he compares these phenomena to “the transmission of the electric current that bears your
messages from Maine to California" (232). It is obvious that Boynton's comparison of mesmerism and spiritualism to the telegraph is virtually identical to Clifford's comparison quoted earlier from *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Just as Boynton shares a technological imagination with Clifford, he also shares with Holgrave the same observatory glance of an empirical scientist. As a physician, Boynton shows a strong inclination toward the inductive method, when he says, "I distrust all special speculation," and "We physicians know what specialism leads to in medicine. I prefer to base my convictions solely upon facts" (Howells 50). His preference, not for speculation, but for facts, seems to give some echo of Holgraves's personality as empirical scientist. Ford, who is engaged in scientific studies, does not believe in spiritualism and calls Boynton "a man of science" (50) after hearing these remarks by Boynton. Given that Ford applies the term "a man of science" to the spiritualist, "science" in his usage possibly means one whose goal is to find, by observation, God's design in making the world, or it may be nearer the truth to say that Boynton's science can be called philosophy. At least, one may say that the religious connotation of Boynton's science is far from the image of science that Ford holds in his own studies.

The difference in their outlook on science leads Boynton to give up his own belief in spiritualism as a result. His belief in spiritualism and inductive science begins to decline after Ford comes to the Shaker village. Boynton has an apoplectic fit when he finds Ford and grabs at him, attributing his own failure to cause a spiritualistic phenomenon the previous night to the presence of Ford at the village. Ford feels a great deal of responsibility for the accident and goes almost everyday to see Boynton, who lies sick in bed. After making peace with each other, they come to be on friendly terms and Boynton confesses his guilt for having sacrificed his daughter for the sake of his research. He denies her power as a medium, saying, "the fact remains that she had never any supernatural power, and I return through all my years of experiment and research to the old ground, —the ground which I once occupied, and which you have never left, —the ground of materialism" (Howells 363). Here, we notice, Boynton renounces spiritualism, by which he had hoped to explain supernatural phenomena as an element of the world in the natural order. He goes on to say: "she had no more supernatural power than you or I, and the whole system of belief which I had built upon the hypothesis of its existence in her lies a heap
of rubbish" (363). What his remarks in the dialogues with Ford show is Boynton's abandonment of his research and his renunciation of materialism as "a heap of rubbish."

Boynton's change of mind regarding spiritualism and materialism can be related to events concerning spiritualism which occurred in transatlantic academia in the 1880s. In Great Britain, Cambridge scholars, such as Henry Sidgwick, F. W. H. Myers, and Edmund Gurney, began to investigate telepathy and other spiritualistic phenomena in 1874, and they founded the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882 to find scientific proof of survival after death, although most scientists and the clergy considered such psychic phenomena fraudulent. The psychical researchers turned their backs on the materialistic tendencies of both scientists and clergymen. For the psychical researchers, the mind was an unexplored region, and they were intensely interested in new psychological phenomena such as hypnotism and hysteria. The SPR desired to "ally the claims of nineteenth-century positivist science with the older claims of religious faith." While he emphasized "the method of modern science" in his investigation of spiritualistic phenomena, Henry Sidgwick, professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge, with other researchers, "turned towards new expansive theories of the mind and consciousness to reconstruct an ordered, ethical universe" that spiritualists also aimed to realize. But the relationship between the SPR and spiritualists in Great Britain did not last long, since the stricter, more scientific methods used by the psychical researchers led them to view spiritualistic phenomena with skepticism. As a result, most of the serious spiritualists had left the SPR by 1886 (Thurschwell 15-17).

Also in the United States, the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) was organized in 1885 by the efforts of William James, but the society was not able to corroborate scientifically such phenomenon as telepathy or spirit communication. Unfortunately, the ASPR did not have sponsors or members so self-sacrificing as Sidgwick, Myers, or Gurney in Great Britain, and most of the experiments by the ASPR produced negative results. In the end, the society was absorbed by the British SPR because of a lack of funds (Moore 142-44). R. Laurence Moore, by citing William James, points out two main reasons why the ASPR could not succeed in its psychical research. The first one is the fact that James did not have great support from his Harvard
colleagues and Cambridge friends, and the second, and more important one, is the biased training of nineteenth century scientists that required "a single fact that can be demonstrated regularly in a laboratory" to prove telepathy and spirit communication to be true (144). The ASPRs and other organizations such as the Seybert Commission of the University of Pennsylvania had difficulty in discovering a single new fact, because in the scientific approach to spiritualism, alleged manifestations such as slate writing and rapping were not enough to prove the validity of "all systems of morals, religion, or philosophy which assume to represent truth, and particularly modern spiritualism" (Delp 111-12). The scholars of these organizations employed scientific methods based on materialism in their investigations, but ironically it was materialism that prevented them from proving the validity of spiritual manifestations and the systems by which spiritualists claimed to represent truth.

The rift between the SPRs and spiritualists in both Great Britain and the United States serves as evidence of a shift that occurred in science from the mid to the late nineteenth century. There was more specialization in science, which had had religious import, as we have seen in mesmerism and Fourierism in *The House of the Seven Gables*, and science was becoming an academic discipline. The difficulties that the transatlantic SPRs experienced in their research occurred, because materialism required that only repeatable physical phenomena could be observed in scientific inquiries. To put it another way, the permeable border between science and metaphysics, or religion, was becoming rigid during this period. This shift from the old scientific view to the new one gives a clear explanation for Boynton's renunciation of materialism. Boynton is forced to recognize both the shift in science, as seen in Ford's materialistic thinking, and the failure of the spiritualistic experiment in the Shaker village, and he is induced to leave materialism and turn to orthodox Christianity and the Bible in his last hour.

Ford's presence in the Shaker village also has some effect on Shakerism. As Ford's relation with Egeria grows closer during his stay in the village, the Shakers are embarrassed by the couple, because celibacy is essential for their millenarian goal of achieving the kingdom of heaven on earth. The Shakers fear that the marriage between Ford and Egeria will have a bad influence on the young villagers, and they do not allow them to marry in their village. But once Ford and Egeria get married, away from the village after Boynton's
death, the Shakers welcome them to stay at the village for a month every summer. By this, the Shakers make a large compromise in their principles due to Ford’s presence in the village. It seems clear, then, that by the end of the story Ford’s materialism prevails over the Shakers’ most radical and conspicuous millenarian principle, celibacy, as well as over Boynton’s spiritualism.

III Conclusion

A comparison of the closings of both novels reveals a difference in the ways they represent what is called pseudoscience today. In The House of the Seven Gables, while the demonic and reform-oriented aspects of mesmerism are described critically, and Holgrave seems to abandon these mesmeric aspects in some scenes, the ideal lives of Hepzibah, Clifford, Phoebe, and Holgrave are realized, at least partly, due to the positive influence of both clairvoyant and scientific functions of mesmerism. One explanation for this mixture of natural and supernatural elements of mesmerism may be that Hawthorne himself assumed an ambiguous attitude toward mesmerism. Although Hawthorne had much experience with mesmerism and spiritualism as his contemporaries like Emerson did, “his attitude toward such materials,” to quote Taylor Stoehr, “remained hesitant and ambiguous to the end, at least so far as formal statements of opinion are concerned” (29-30). Hawthorne’s hesitant and ambiguous attitude may have affected the plot of this novel. On the other hand, in The Undiscovered Country, Dr. Boynton, who had been called a man of science, gives up his experiments in spiritualism which is related to mesmerism, and his daughter marries a materialist after Boynton’s death as if she is liberated from her father’s spiritualism. While the main characters of The House of the Seven Gables realize their happiness through the influences of mesmerism and empirical science, the happy life of the heroine of The Undiscovered Country comes after the failure of both spiritualism and empirical science, and by the success of a new type of science that no longer has religious import.

However, although it is true that Ford’s new science leads to Egeria’s happiness, it should also be added that such science is not necessarily well appreciated in The Undiscovered Country. The secular success brought by the invention of “the Ford Fire Kindler” infers a kind of vulgarity, as can be seen in the following quotation:
One of those ignoble discoveries which chemists sometimes make in their more ambitious experiments has turned itself to profit, almost without his agency, and chiefly at the suggestion of his wife, whose more practical sense perceived its general acceptability; and the sale of an ingenious combination known to all housekeepers now makes life easy to the Fords. (Howells 416)

The word "ignoble" in the first line tells us that such discoveries as bring about economic success to chemists are viewed with distaste. In other words, science which is profitable connotes vulgarity in this novel. Therefore, "chemists" including Ford are quite different from men of science such as Boynton or Holgrave in The House of the Seven Gables, whose science has nothing to do with profit. In addition to the vulgarity of Ford's brand of science, this quotation shows Egeria's secularity since Ford's discovery "has turned itself to profit, almost without his agency, and chiefly at the suggestion of his wife." After her marriage, she enjoys parties, dinners, and theaters as if trying to take back her girlhood that was lost through her involvement in her father's spiritualistic research. Phillips, a man of leisure and a bric-a-brac connoisseur, comments on the couple's change in lifestyle:

Ford was perpetually attractive; but as part of the world's ordinary furniture he can't interest me. When he married the Pythoness [Egeria], I was afraid there was too much bricabrac [sic]; but really, so far as I can hear, they have neutralized each other into the vulgarest [sic] commonplace. (Howells 417)

Phillip's negative comments provide an example of the vulgarity of their success which results from Ford's scientific study. It should be concluded, from what has been said above, that the more crucial a role the new type of science plays in the couple's life, the more distinctive their secularity and vulgarity are made by the success of that science. Spiritualism and inductive science, by which Boynton tries to find truth, are renounced. Instead, a chemical discovery which is applied to the invention of a commodity makes his daughter happy, but at the same time, the new type of technological science is represented critically in The Undiscovered Country.

William Dean Howells's personal encounters with spiritualism helps account for the equivocal description of Ford's science. A biographical study of
Howells reveals that, like Hawthorne, he was interested in spiritualism and utopian thought, both of which aimed at the perfection of human beings. In the 1870s, he had familiar acquaintance with several spiritualists, for example, Tom Appleton and Robert Dale Owen, son of better-known utopian Robert Owen and leading spokesman for spiritualism. As editor of the Atlantic, Howells accepted Owen's offer to contribute some articles on his past occult investigation to the journal. But Howells got into a scrape because, after Owen cited materializations of the medium Katie King as a proof of immortality in his essays in the Atlantic, Owen discovered she was a fraud and made public her deception by a letter to the New York Tribune (Kerr 129-35). Howells' editorial ordeal undoubtedly had some influence on his writing of this novel. As an editor Howells still held sympathy for spiritualism, but as a novelist he had to give the role of making the heroine happy at the end of The Undiscovered Country, not to "a man of science" or a spiritualist like Boynton who is searching for universal truth, but to a chemist who studies in the limited field of research. Howells must have been forced to observe the trend in science and recognize the difficulty of proving the truth of spiritualism as William James was forced to in his activities with the ASPR.

Considering the change in science in the nineteenth century, as we have seen in the failure of the ASPR and the predicament of Howells as an editor, we can say that what made Howells close his story with the triumph of the new science was the specialization of science which happened between the two periods in which each of the two novels was written. While Holgrave is a type of empirical scientist and brings about a happy ending through mesmerism in The House of the Seven Gables, in The Undiscovered Country, Boynton, of a type similar to Holgrave, abandons spiritualism, and Ford, who is a chemist or a scientist in a narrow field of research, compensates Egeria for her childhood lost in the spiritualistic research. The different functions of mesmerism or spiritualism in the plots of these two novels shows the lapse of time in which science was being separated from religion and magical thoughts, and mesmerism, spiritualism, and Fourierism's "social science" began to be regarded as "pseudoscience." The different endings of these two novels with similar social phenomena shows a part of the change in definition or connotation of science in nineteenth century America.
Notes

* An earlier and Japanese version of this paper was read at the 42nd General Meeting of American Literature Society of Japan, October 11, 2003.

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1 Needless to say, Hawthorne gives his most prominent description of a utopian communal life in The Blithedale Romance. But in this paper I limit the discussion to The House of the Seven Gables among his works, because this novel offers a great contrast to Howells's The Undiscovered Country in regard to magical thoughts: spiritualism and mesmerism; and communal thoughts: Fourierism and Shakerism.

2 It is often pointed out that many spiritualists in America were also involved in women's rights movements, which are, of course, the social reform movements. See, for example, Braude.

3 Carl J. Guarneri calls Fourierist phalanxes "incubators of spiritualism" and refers to the fact that spiritualism and Fourierism had close cultural relations with each other especially in the 1840s and 1850s. On this subject, see, in particular, Carl J. Guarneri 348–53.

Works Cited


INAGAKI Shin’ichi


