

## Revising Pandora (and Rewriting Eve) in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wonder Book*

“In Adam’s fall we sinned all.” So begins the alphabetic inventory of *The New England Primer*, a text which arguably marks the start of “children’s literature” in America.<sup>1</sup> In use from the late 1600s through the middle of the nineteenth century, this book—with its Puritan orientation—would have been familiar to Nathaniel Hawthorne as well as to generations of children before and after him. Hawthorne had a complicated relationship to the Puritan past.<sup>2</sup> While it provided a fruitful background for much of his writing, it was also a source of guilt and a focus of criticism. Hawthorne’s Puritan ancestors had participated in the persecution of Quakers and witches,<sup>3</sup> and the adult Hawthorne seems critical of Puritan practices that prioritize rules and institutions over the dictates of the heart and imagination. In *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*, Hawthorne relates six Classical myths, including one entitled “The Paradise of Children” which tells the tale of Pandora. Although this story is seemingly removed from the Puritan context which informs much of Hawthorne’s other writing, Hawthorne uses his rendition to reshape Christian doctrine in a way that partially affirms and partially denies the Puritan

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<sup>1</sup> The original alphabet was written in Britain and published in *A Guide for the Child and Youth* (London, 1667); the author is identified as “T. H.” Printer Benjamin Harris included the alphabet in *The New England Primer* and changed some of the letters (J, K, and O) to accommodate Puritan sentiments. Establishing the importance of the *Primer* in the history of American children’s literature, Anne Scott MacLeod states, “The story of children’s reading in America begins with the Puritans,” and *The New England Primer* was “the most famous of all seventeenth-century books for American children” (102-103). Also see Seth Lerer’s discussion of *The New England Primer* and the Puritan influence on children’s literature.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh McPherson notes the “celebrated ambivalence of Hawthorne’s attitude toward the past” (8).

<sup>3</sup> William Hathorne issued an order for the public whipping of Quaker Ann Coleman (c. 1662), and John Hathorne was one of the magistrates in Salem at the time of the Witch Trials (1692). Hawthorne writes of *The Scarlet Letter* as a kind of atonement for these family actions, as if the guilt has been inherited; see discussion in Leland S. Person (17).

*Primer*'s assertion, "In Adam's fall we sinned all." Hawthorne's revision of Pandora thus becomes a mixture of new and old, tradition and subversion.

Hawthorne had studied Classics in college, and he seems to have enjoyed working with the ancient languages.<sup>4</sup> But the *Wonder Book* was written in 1851—more than 25 years after his undergraduate days.<sup>5</sup> So although Hawthorne may have had particular ancient texts somewhat in mind as he wrote *A Wonder Book*, he enlisted a specific aid to his memory: the *Classical Dictionary* published in 1841 by Charles Anthon, a professor of Classics at Columbia.<sup>6</sup> (Anthon seems to have copied much of it from other scholars, but I'll refer to it here as "Anthon's dictionary.") For the dictionary's entry on Pandora, the primary ancient source is Hesiod's *Works and Days* (lines 42-105).

According to Hesiod, Pandora is created as the result of divine rivalry between Zeus and Prometheus. Prometheus had deceived Zeus, and in retaliation Zeus withdrew fire from humans. When Prometheus steals it back, Zeus conceives of a woman who will counterbalance the boon of fire. Various gods participate in Pandora's creation, giving her a beautiful form, assorted adornments, and a lying, deceitful nature. At Zeus' behest, Hermes takes her to Epimetheus, who had been warned by Prometheus not to accept any gifts from Zeus—but Epimetheus takes Pandora nevertheless. Pandora then opens a jar containing various Banes and Ills. They scatter among humans, but Hope remains in the jar, in accordance with Zeus' will.

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<sup>4</sup> See the testimony of Horatio Bridge, a college friend quoted in Brenda Wineapple (52).

<sup>5</sup> Hawthorne graduated from Bowdoin in 1825.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Hawthorne mentions the debt to Anthon explicitly in the introduction to the first story of the *Wonder Book*. Hugh McPherson has demonstrated Hawthorne's reliance on the dictionary. Though Anthon is credited as the author on the title page of the dictionary, many of the entries—including the one on Pandora—repeat almost verbatim information from an earlier reference work by Thomas Keightley.

Hesiod purports to tell this story to his troublesome brother as one explanation for why life is hard, and he concludes the story with the statement that it is impossible to escape the will of Zeus. The story is thus enclosed in a didactic framework. The story also encodes dangers associated with women: the deceptive difference between their attractive exteriors and tricky interiors, their potentially problematic control over household stores, and even their potentially problematic control over their own bodies. Despite this pessimistic paradigm of womankind, Hesiod leaves his audience with a kernel of Hope that the troubles of women don't *have* to play out in the worst possible way.

The entry in Anthon's dictionary (1828-1829) recapitulates this Hesiodic account, but with two major differences. Anthon mentions that Epimetheus had been forbidden to open the jar, while no such injunction is given in *Works and Days*. The *Classical Dictionary* also asserts that Pandora opened the jar "under the influence of female curiosity," though curiosity is not mentioned as a motivation by Hesiod. Both of these glosses are retained by Hawthorne (in whole or in part) as important narrative elements.<sup>7</sup>

Hawthorne's version of the story is set in a Golden Age, a paradise of parentless children who spend their days in play. Pandora is sent to Epimetheus as a "playfellow" and "helpmate." Upon arriving at Epimetheus' house, she is intrigued by a decorated box. But Epimetheus does not know what it contains: he was simply told to keep it safe by Quicksilver (Hawthorne's calque for Mercury). Pandora's vexation about the box escalates and casts a shadow over her life with Epimetheus. One day Epimetheus can't stand to listen to her talk about the box any longer, and he goes outside on his own. Pandora fixates on the box, tantalized by it and the

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<sup>7</sup> The injunction against opening the jar is in Origen, who makes the analogy between Eden's forbidden fruit and the forbidden jar; see Dora and Erwin Panofsky (12). According to the Panofskys, no ancient non-Christian writer mentions curiosity (8).

intricate knot which holds it together. The knot magically undoes itself, and Pandora is on the verge of opening the box when Epimetheus returns home. Entering the house, he sees what Pandora is about to do, but he does not stop her. When she raises the lid of the box, Troubles—like bat-winged mosquitoes—fly out. Pandora and Epimetheus open the windows of their house, and the Troubles escape into the world. After that, both children and nature begin to age. But Hope was left in the box, and she now calls to Pandora to let her out. Pandora is wary, but she and Epimetheus open the box, and the fairy-like figure of Hope vows to stay with them always. She also gives them the promise of a wonderful hereafter.

Unlike Hesiod (or Anthon), Hawthorne does not use Pandora as a means of illustrating divine retribution or the ineluctability of divine will. Indeed, there is no mention of a governing divinity at all. Even the god who is mentioned in the story—Quicksilver—is not explicitly identified as divine. The story's point thus shifts: it no longer illustrates the consequences of a power-struggle in a higher order, but it explores human nature in its most basic form, as exemplified by children.<sup>8</sup>

Although Hawthorne's text tells us that Pandora was sent to Epimetheus to be his "playfellow" and "helpmate," we are told nothing else about the circumstances or process of her creation. In *Works and Days*, the description of Pandora's creation takes pride of place, emphasizing the wondrous *thing* that is her body, with its lovely outside and tricky inside. Hawthorne transfers the wondrous quality from Pandora's body to the box which intrigues her. This reflects Hawthorne's tendency throughout the *Wonder Book* to present in vivid detail a variety of magical or marvellous objects.<sup>9</sup> The box is made of highly polished dark wood, and it

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<sup>8</sup> Hawthorne seems to share with the Romantics the idea that children represent humanity in an undiluted, even unadulterated, state.

<sup>9</sup> See Nina Baym's 1973 essay (39).

is decorated with figures of men, women, and children. But the feature of the box which draws Pandora's attention the most is a face on the center of the lid. She imagines that it could smile or frown, and it seems about to burst into speech. Hawthorne almost animates the box which entices Pandora.

While Hawthorne focuses on Pandora's increasing attraction to the box,<sup>10</sup> he does not let us forget that the box arouses Epimetheus' interest, as well. In fact, it is because of Epimetheus' own, unexpressed curiosity that he does not stop Pandora from opening it—and thus he shares responsibility for the entrance of Troubles into the world. Hawthorne's narrator, Eustace Bright, makes this into a lesson of sorts: "So, whenever we blame Pandora for what happened, we must not forget to shake our heads at Epimetheus likewise." The equality and shared responsibility of Epimetheus and Pandora is also demonstrated in other ways. Both characters open the windows of their house, allowing the Troubles to fly outside, and both have their curiosity re-piqued when Hope calls to them from the closed box. Together they open the lid to let her out, and together—"in one breath," the text says—they exclaim their trust in Hope's promise. In the *Wonder Book* Pandora and Epimetheus end the story as partners, as the playfellows and helpmates they were intended to be. Their partnership contrasts sharply with the Hesiodic Pandora and Epimetheus, whose story emphasizes the ways in which male and female interests are abidingly different and even fundamentally opposed.

Like the Pandora story in *Works and Days*, Hawthorne's tale explains why life is be hard. But unlike Hesiod's account, Hawthorne's "Paradise of Children" neither demonstrates the power of Zeus nor symbolically expresses the dangers which women pose to men. Hawthorne

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<sup>10</sup> In focusing on Pandora's psychology, Hawthorne perhaps departs from a trend traced by Helen Collins in the *Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*—that is, the use of female characters to represent a "set moral code" and to help male characters remember that code (19).

focuses instead on the passing of a Golden Age, a passing which he depicts as eminently natural. For even in paradise there are hints that the world of childhood should not be an end in itself: for instance, we've already seen that the wondrous box was covered with pictures of *men and women* in addition to children—even though adult men and women did not exist at the time of the box's decoration. And as amazing as an everlasting spring might seem, its stasis is contrary to natural law. By populating a perpetual spring solely with unaging children Hawthorne imparts an aberrational, frozen quality to his Golden Age. Thus, when the flowers begin to fade and the children start to grow up, it isn't exactly that things get worse. Rather, with the passing of paradise, things start to move along the trajectory that they should have been moving along all the time. In fact, in a fit of circularity, Hawthorne has Eustace Bright suggest that if any labors of the post-paradise period had existed earlier, Pandora's energies might have been otherwise engaged and she might not have fixated on the box in the first place! Hawthorne emphasizes the Romantic contrast between two states: that of innocence, childhood, paradise, and play on the one hand, and that of experience, adulthood, trouble, and work on the other. At the same time, Hawthorne joins together these contrasting states in a natural, and even desirable, progression from one to the other. The Hesiodic inevitability of Zeus' will is replaced in Hawthorne's text by the natural passing of spring and the equally natural movement from childhood to adulthood. Elsewhere in *Works and Days* Hesiod tells his own tale of the passing of the Golden Age (109-126), but while Hesiod's story of the Ages uses a paradigm of decline, Hawthorne uses one of growth.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> While we cannot be sure that Hawthorne consulted *Works and Days* directly while writing the *Wonder Book*, it is worth pointing out that in *Works and Days* the discussion of the Ages directly follows the story of Pandora. Hesiod offers the tale of the Ages as a second account of why life is hard for humans. By using Golden Age imagery within the story of Pandora, Hawthorne (wittingly or unwittingly) combines Hesiod's two mythological explanations for life's

In *Works and Days* Hesiod connects various stories and lessons by addressing them all to his brother who needs to learn the value of work; in the *Wonder Book*, Hawthorne is faced with a similar connective challenge, and in order to create continuity among the myths he relates, Hawthorne enlists a framing device. As Hawthorne presents it, the myths of the *Wonder Book* are not narrated directly by him; rather, they are the spontaneous efforts of Eustace Bright, a New England college student, who tells them to a group of his young relatives. Each myth is surrounded by a few pages in which we visit Eustace and his young friends, learn about the circumstances in which he tells a particular tale, and see the response which it receives. In the introduction to “The Paradise of Children,” we find that Eustace tells the story of Pandora at Christmas-time; snow-bound, the children are occupying themselves in their playroom. Eustace also refers to this Christmas context in the middle of his mythological narrative. Describing Pandora’s fascination with the box, he says:

Just imagine, my little hearers, how busy your wits would be, if there were a great box in the house, which, as you might have reason to suppose, contained something new and pretty for your Christmas or New Year’s gifts. Do you think that you should be less curious than Pandora?

These mentions of Christmas are the most explicit references to Christianity in the *Wonder Book*, but an implicit Christian strain runs through “The Paradise of Children.”

The very word *paradise* is likely to conjure an image of Eden, and Christian authors from late antiquity on saw parallels between the stories of Adam and Eve and Pandora and Epimetheus.<sup>12</sup> Hawthorne cultivates similarities between the tales.<sup>13</sup> Like Eve, Hawthorne’s

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difficulties. It may also be worth mentioning that the Tanglewood children all receive floral names: Hawthorne connects childhood and springtime flowers even in historical time. The Tanglewood children will grow up just as certainly as flowers fade.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Tertullian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Origen; according to Dora and Erwin Panofsky, the theme seems to disappear in the Middle Ages, but returns in the Renaissance, with a number of Renaissance artworks emphasizing the parallels (14ff.).

Pandora is intended as a companion and a helpmate. Both figures are also faced with an injunction not to do something, and that injunction conflicts with their desire to know. Pandora's almost animate, tantalizing box becomes analogous to the snake who tempts Eve. And as the result of their actions, life becomes harder for humans. While all this is stuff of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, Hawthorne ends his story on a New Testament note, with Hope's promise of something better in the "hereafter."

Partly because of these Biblical resonances and partly because of the misogyny of the Greek myth, some readers see Hawthorne's story as delivering a very traditional and conservative message.<sup>14</sup> Hawthorne could be viewed as harnessing the authority of two traditions to reinforce a masculinist, Christian status quo. It's certainly true that although Hawthorne tempers the misogyny of Hesiod (and Genesis), he maintains traditional views of gendered behavior.<sup>15</sup> At one point he presents Pandora as a miniature version of a nagging

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<sup>13</sup> Hugh McPherson takes issue with Hawthorne's assimilation of the tales to one another, and he finds the result to be "a somewhat artificial but quite innocuous parable" (113-114).

<sup>14</sup> John Stephens and Robyn McCallum maintain that retellings of traditional stories are likely "to reproduce conservative outcomes" (x, also 21). They are not optimistic about myth's capacity to do otherwise (10), and they are critical of "The Paradise of Children" particularly in this regard. They maintain that "Hawthorne's 'Pandora' has entirely assimilated the antifeminist fable to Christian eschatology" (81). In some ways, yes, but Stephens and McCallum do not note the ways in which Hawthorne tempers both Hesiod's "antifeminist fable" and Christianity. Carol Billman's general verdict is: "Moralizing aside, then, it must also be recognized that there was nothing revolutionary in the vision of the world of childhood depicted in *A Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*" (112). Nina Baym sees in Hawthorne's myths for children "conventional socializing didacticism inculcating feminine and masculine virtues appropriate to the places assigned to the sexes in society" (1973, 39). Lesley Ginsberg believes that the *Wonder Book* attempted to stabilize the cultural status quo during a time of great changes in America (255-256).

<sup>15</sup> Ellen Butler Donovan sees the stories as upholding traditional "gender assumptions," even though she also sees them as offering an unconventional space for play in other regards (33). Laura Laffrado points out that though Epimetheus and Pandora are desexualized in Hawthorne, they are not degendered (84).



housewife, and Epimetheus becomes the hectored husband who escapes outdoors.<sup>16</sup> Although Hawthorne's Epimetheus isn't shown to be superior to Pandora morally or otherwise, a different gendered hierarchy is implicitly operative by the end of the tale: the fairy-like Hope is female, and she points toward the salvation and reward made possible by the Christian, male God. Christianity surpasses mythology as male surpasses female.<sup>17</sup>

But I think there's a danger in focusing exclusively on the conservative elements of Hawthorne's story. For Hawthorne does not merely enlist Classical and Biblical traditions in the *Wonder Book*; he also engages and reshapes them, and so we can see a revisionary or subversive agenda working on and against the text's traditional base. We've already noted how the text explicitly recommends that any blame is to be shared between Epimetheus and Pandora; neither Pandora nor womankind is singly scapegoated.<sup>18</sup> And the curiosity which prompts Pandora to look in the box is present in Epimetheus, as well. Epimetheus' continued curiosity is emphasized by Hope who is able to read Epimetheus' mind and reveal that, though he feigns indifference, he is keen to open the box a second time. The curiosity which is often ascribed specifically to women (and which is pointedly described as "female" in Anthon's dictionary) becomes a shared characteristic, and its consequences become a shared responsibility.

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<sup>16</sup> And there are other examples; for instance, Epimetheus comes to Pandora's rescue as she is beset by the stinging Troubles. We might play such stereotypical gender roles off and against the portrayal of the Tanglewood children: Sarah A. Wadsworth notes that Hawthorne generally avoids "stereotypical boy and girl characters" in the book (11), and Elizabeth Peck finds remarkable the nonsexist language of the frame stories and the gender-neutral depiction of the Tanglewood children (116).

<sup>17</sup> See quotation from Stephens and McCallum on Christian eschatology (above).

<sup>18</sup> Nina Baym finds in Hawthorne a general awareness of the "deeply warped" nature of "traditional patriarchal politics" (1982, 61). She also notes: "Ultimately, [Hawthorne] holds men and the society that men have created responsible for mistaking neurosis for truth, and elevating error into law, custom, and morality" (61-62). Hugh McPherson finds "The Paradise of Children" lacking in "artistic coherence," but he underscores the way in which Hawthorne does not blame Pandora in it, (115).

Despite the lasting nature of these consequences, Hawthorne's story works to mitigate the blame or shame that accrues from them.<sup>19</sup> Because the characters are children, their transgression becomes more innocent than calculated, and their curiosity is presented as natural rather than abnormal.<sup>20</sup> And no sense of shame results from their actions—by way of contrast, think of Adam and Eve who clothe their nakedness and hide from God after they eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Because of its sweetened Edenic undercurrents, Hawthorne's story has been seen as a particularly benign version of the Fortunate Fall,<sup>21</sup> and Hawthorne thus finds himself in the company of religious thinkers and artists ranging from Augustine to Milton.<sup>22</sup> But I would like to stress the degree to which Hawthorne makes the end of the Golden Age *not a fall at all*. Pandora and Epimetheus are not banished from the garden; they (and the Earth) simply start to grow up. Eden was the aberration.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Readers might rightly point out that the adjective *naughty* is applied to Pandora in Hawthorne's story. Although it's difficult to assert a definitive interpretation of *tone*, I think that the description of Pandora as naughty is meant to echo an earlier, teasingly affectionate description of Primrose as naughty: in Primrose's case, *naughty* jokingly signifies her sauciness or mischievousness rather than anything blame-worthy she has done.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah A. Wadsworth notes the "positive portrayal of childhood mischievousness" in the *Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales* (11), and this creates an additional context in which Pandora's opening of the box might not be seen as *so bad*.

<sup>21</sup> John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (80-81). Hugh McPherson finds "The Paradise of Children" flawed, in part because of its introduction of the Fortunate Fall theme (62). Richard D. Hathaway writes: "The idea which R. W. B. Lewis finds at the heart of Hawthorne's mature thought, that of the Fortunate Fall, the Return into Time, finds in the Pandora story an expression which, although disturbingly colloquial in its language, is at once simple and profound.... Theologians had tried for centuries to make emotionally convincing the idea that man's fall from innocence had been both a great sin and a good thing" (171). Laura Laffrado quotes Pearce as saying that Hawthorne's story of Pandora is "a child's version of the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall" (83-84).

<sup>22</sup> We might especially want to consider Hawthorne's relationship to Milton, whom Hawthorne admired: while Milton injects Classical allusions into his story of a Biblical paradise lost, Hawthorne writes Edenic overtones into a Classical tale.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Hoffman notes that because salvation would not be possible without the Fall, Hawthorne often depicts "prelapsarian characters as incomplete," not quite human (201).

Hawthorne uses Classical myth as an indirect means of addressing Christian doctrine,<sup>24</sup> but he also contends with the Classical tradition itself. In that contest, Hawthorne has new trump old, with artistic vision taking precedence over Classical scholarship. This is apparent even in Hawthorne's presentation of the myth as an analogue to the story of Adam and Eve, for Anthon's dictionary argues at length *against* such a conflation. The dictionary also decries the general shift from "Pandora's jar" to "Pandora's box," but Hawthorne prefers this Renaissance "innovation" (Anthon would rather call it a "mistake") to the Hesiodic "truth."<sup>25</sup> In ignoring the Classical caveats contained in Anthon's dictionary, Hawthorne stakes a claim for who gets to authorize encounters with the ancient world.

Different attitudes toward Classics are dramatized in the frame story of the myth following "The Paradise of Children."<sup>26</sup> Mr. Pringle, father to some members of Eustace's audience, summons Eustace into the drawing room to hear one of his stories and "judge whether

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Richard D. Hathaway remarks that "Hawthorne's mature work rejected the great American myth, the dream of Edenic bliss" (162).

<sup>24</sup> John Stephens and Robyn McCallum mention that there is "one-way traffic" between myth and Christianity, with Christianity always reframing myth rather than the other way around (62). I propose that in "The Paradise of Children" we might be able to detect some sort of two-way traffic.

<sup>25</sup> Dora and Erwin Panofsky identify Erasmus as the source of the box, and they assert that wherever Renaissance artists depict Pandora with a box rather than a jar, "art...retained its independence" from "erudition" (27). Hawthorne can be seen as continuing that trend.

<sup>26</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce has a different interpretation of the encounter; he sees Eustace Bright and Mr. Pringle as two aspects of Hawthorne himself—"eternally young father figure" and "aging skeptic" (305). Caroline Winterer discusses changing approaches to Classics in antebellum America, and I think we might be able to map the "new" and "old" views on to Eustace Bright and Mr. Pringle: the old view of Classics is language-based and literal, while the new view looks at the ancient world as a cultural whole and sees in antiquity a kind of purity that could be an antidote to modern materialism. Nina Baym remarks that the Pringle/Bright encounter represents the typical struggle between Neo-Classicism and Romanticism and hence isn't anything remarkable or new (1973, 40)—I would suggest that what is new is the conflict over who gets to authorize what counts as the truth in relation to Classical material as well as the staging of such a conflict in a children's book.

they are likely to do any mischief.”<sup>27</sup> Eustace is apprehensive about Mr. Pringle’s reaction, for he knows that Mr. Pringle had studied Classics back in the day. When the story is over, Eustace’s fears are borne out: Mr. Pringle is skeptical of Eustace’s “Gothic” meddling and advises him against further efforts. But Eustace counters:

These fables...are the common property of the world, and of all time. The ancient poets remodelled them at pleasure, and held them plastic in their hands; and why should they not be plastic in my hands as well? [...] My own opinion is, that the Greeks, by taking possession of these legends (which were the immemorial birthright of mankind), and putting them in shapes of indestructible beauty, indeed, but cold and heartless, have done all subsequent ages an incalculable injury.

Eustace aims to inject the appropriate warmth and heart back into the myths, making his “copies” more authentic than the Greek “originals.” Mr. Pringle likens the effect of Eustace’s narrative touch to “bedaubing a marble statue with paint.” It is plausible that Hawthorne himself knew that the ancients painted their statuary, and thus Hawthorne could be orchestrating an irony in which Mr. Pringle’s analogy backfires and inadvertently validates Eustace’s youthful, colorful “restorations” of myth.

Taking on Classics and the Bible is no small task, but Hawthorne assumes the guise of play for his creative, revisionary engagement with tradition.<sup>28</sup> Eustace tells his stories during breaks from college, while he and the children are playing.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the *Wonder Book* was

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<sup>27</sup> Ellen Butler Donovan reads this comment as an indication that Mr. Pringle puts Eustace’s stories in the category of fairy stories and so reflects contemporary concerns about children’s leisure reading (23). I might interpret Mr. Pringle’s comment differently, coming as it does after Eustace has implicitly reshaped Christianity: perhaps Hawthorne puts Mr. Pringle’s reaction where he does in order to underscore the way in which Eustace has just challenged religious tradition.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen Butler Donovan focuses on reading as play in the *Wonder Book*.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Peck points out the rare depiction of “rowdy play” (especially involving girls) in children’s literature at the time (117). Ellen Butler Donovan suggests that at the start of the *Wonder Book* Eustace himself is malingering and playing hooky from school (27); even if we

not intended as literature for the schoolroom but as leisure-reading for a young audience.<sup>30</sup>

While “The Paradise of Children” intimates the utility of work, the *Wonder Book* as a whole makes a bid for the importance of play. The consistent emphasis on playfulness contributes to the subversive spirit of the text<sup>31</sup> and provides a salutary complement to the Protestant work ethic, part of America’s Puritan legacy.

And so to end, let us return to the *New England Primer*: “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.” Hawthorne says yes, and no. Hawthorne’s “Paradise of Children” underscores that the *Primer*’s “we” is indeed plural and gender-inclusive. But he cushions the fall into a natural bump and makes curiosity stop well short of sin.<sup>32</sup> Hawthorne finds in myth a mental playroom in which serious work can be done.<sup>33</sup> By revising the myth of Pandora and rewriting the story of Eve, Hawthorne provides his readers with a less guilt-burdened, blame-filled heritage<sup>34</sup>—and so he gently opens the door to a reconsideration of the present and the imagination of a different future.

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don’t go this far, we can say that Eustace, in delaying his return to college, is preferring his playful engagement with Classical myth to his academic study of Classical material.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah A. Wadsworth discusses the “radical” transformation of children’s literature at this time, as it moved from didactic works to texts for pleasure reading (2, 14). Of the *Wonder Book* specifically she notes that it is “revolutionary” because it focused on fantasy, which was not as popular among American authors as it was among British ones (9). See too Ellen Butler Donovan (20).

<sup>31</sup> Robert D. Richardson discusses another way in which Hawthorne could be seen as subversive in this text: he recasts (high) myth into (low) fairy-tale (343). The very fact that Hawthorne (an older, established author) relegates some narrative authority to the younger Eustace Bright is seen as subversive by Ellen Butler Donovan (38).

<sup>32</sup> That Hawthorne felt that these modifications were crucially necessary might be indicated by the fact that he makes similar ones in a story for adults, “The New Adam and Eve” (1843).

<sup>33</sup> Leland S. Person discusses the way in which Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* uses historical distance to weigh in on contemporary issues (16); I would say that the mental “playroom” of myth provides a similarly productive distance.

<sup>34</sup> Gillian Brown discusses the importance of inheritance in Hawthorne’s work: “The condition of children is inheritance...” (328). Hugh McPherson writes: “Certainly Hawthorne hated the past for its inexorable influence on the present; but at the same time he longed for a legacy of humane traditions...” (9).

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