

HAWTHORNE'S ART IN HIS SHORT STORIES

Between the appearance, in 1828, of Hawthorne's first novel, *Fanshawe* and that of his second novel *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, he served what was in effect a long apprenticeship. Most of the stories collected as *Twice-Told Tales* (1837-1842), *Mosses from an old Manse* (1846) and *The Snow Image* (1851) were written for various magazines and annuals between 1828 and 1850. It is important to appreciate the nature of the problems which faced him. To his habit of introspection and detachment, and the social poverty which encouraged it, must be added his isolation as an artist in a new country which was directing its resources towards material development. Hawthorne was perhaps one of the first dozen men to try and live by their pen in America. He was faced not only with the dearth of material but with the absence of any coherent tradition to work in. He wrote, of course, for the magazines and annuals which were then the main support of the American writer, and this probably encouraged the less satisfactory features of some of his stories — the readiness to point a moral, the homiletic manner, the tedious reiterations (of title phrases for instance) and the instances of homely sentimentality. No doubt the absence of a critical audience was responsible for the strange lack of direction that he showed in his work, following up often one of his maturest stories with one of his trite and trivial. But when we detect something of value in Hawthorne's work these influences have generally little to do with it.

Though he was not free from literary influence, having learned a lot from Bunyan, Spenser, Milton and eighteenth century writers, he was essentially isolated in his creative endeavour, and used what he learned in his own way. The pathetic side of this isolation and the deprivation that went with

it can be seen in such famous passages in his notebooks as this idea for a possible sketch:

Meditations about the main gas pipe of a great city... If the supply were to be stopped what would happen?... It might be made emblematic of something.

And certainly many of the tales suffer from the sort of poverty and crudity that this outline suggests. However, one can see in a comparative study of the notebooks and the stories like that of Miss E. L. Chandler¹ how every grain of living experience was assiduously recorded and transmuted into art. And, bearing in mind his limitations, the remarkable thing about Hawthorne's short stories is the extent and variety of experimentation in the use of materials and the improvisation of modes and techniques, through which he probes his own strengths and weaknesses, and tries to achieve original and significant expression. The stories fall fairly naturally into five groups, sketches of everyday life, tales based on contemporary anecdotes, romances and fantasies, allegories and historic tales. I hope to show in an examination of the more important stories in which directions he is most successful, and suggest from time to time how his discoveries contribute to the greatness of *The Scarlet Letter*, which was originally intended, it is clear from the introduction, to be a short story.

Of most of the sketches of everyday life in the first of these groups James has said something so exactly right that I shall quote it in full. He is speaking of the essay called *Night Sketches*:

This small dissertation is about nothing at all, and to call attention to it is almost to overrate its importance. This fact is equally true, indeed, of a great many of its companions, which give even the most appreciative critic a singular feeling of his own indiscretion, almost of his own cruelty. They are so light, so slight, so tenderly trivial, that

¹ E. L. CHANDLER, *Sources of the Tales and Romances written by Nathaniel Hawthorne before 1853*, *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, Vol. 7, No. 4, July 1926.

simply to mention them is to put them in a false position. The author's claim for them is barely audible, even to the most acute listener. They are things to take or to leave — to enjoy, but not to talk about. Not to read them would be to do them an injustice (to read them is essentially to relish them), but to bring the machinery of criticism to bear upon them would be to do them a still greater wrong².

His sympathy, and his mastery of style make James the best writer on Hawthorne. The sensitivity with which he can communicate his enjoyment as well as his judgment provides in fact a most delicate and balanced critical account, and apart from noting how many of this first group take the form of a monologue or meditation, I shall leave them in James's hands.

Perhaps the most straightforward, as well as the most successful of the second group (tales based on contemporary anecdotes), is *Wakefield*. The simplicity of the method is apparent with the opening. « In some old magazine or newspaper I recollect a story, told as truth, of a man — let us call him Wakefield — who absented himself for a long time from his wife ». The first paragraph outlines the story, which is already given a measure of life by the gratuitous introduction of the name, Wakefield, and the force and rhythm of the prose:

And after so great a gap in his matrimonial felicity — when his death was reckoned certain, his estate settled his name dismissed from memory, and his wife, long, long ago, resigned to her autumnal widowhood — he entered the door one evening, quietly, as from a day's absence, and became a loving spouse till death³.

The balance of phrase reminds us of Hawthorne's predilection for the eighteenth century essayists but a new feeling for the strangeness of the situation is evoked through the slower rhythm and greater intensity of « long, long ago resigned to her autumnal widowhood » and the contrast of the second half of the sentence — « he entered the door one evening quietly... ». The form of the piece, we gather from the

² H. JAMES, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, London, 1879, p. 39.

³ *Twice Told Tales*, in *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Riverside Edition, 1883, Vol. I, p. 153.

second paragraph, is that of a meditation (again reminiscent of the eighteenth century), and we are to expect a moral, « even should we fail to find [it] done up neatly and condensed in the final sentence ».

The form of the meditation provides a loose framework within which to bring the story to life: « What sort of a man is Wakefield? » — « Let us now imagine Wakefield bidding adieu to his wife ». — « Now for a scene! » The first of these enables Hawthorne to introduce an analysis of the character of Wakefield *through the eyes of other people* in terms of past action:

Had his acquaintances been asked, who was the man in London the surest to perform nothing today which should be remembered on the morrow, they would have thought of Wakefield. Only the wife of his bosom might have hesitated. She, without having analysed his character, was partly aware of a quiet selfishness, that had rusted into his inactive mind; of a peculiar sort of vanity, the most uneasy attribute about him; of a disposition to craft, which had seldom produced more positive effects than the keeping of petty secrets, hardly worth revealing; and lastly of what she called a little strangeness, sometimes, in the good man⁴.

This analysis, in spite of its economy and the occasional metaphor like "rusted", displays those aspects of the short story technique which ally it to that of the novel, as does the ensuing scene which is concretely evoked although direct speech is not used:

Let us now imagine Wakefield bidding adieu to his wife. It is the dusk of an October evening. His equipment is a drab great-coat, a hat covered with an oil cloth, top boots, an umbrella in one hand and a small portmanteau in the other. He has informed Mrs. Wakefield that he is to take the night coach into the country. She would fain inquire the length of his journey, its object, and the probable time of his return; but, indulgent to his harmless love of mystery, interrogates him only by a look. He tells her not to expect him positively by the return coach, nor to be alarmed should he tarry three or four days;

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

but, at all events, to look for him at supper on Friday evening. Wakefield himself, be it considered, has no suspicion of what is before him. He holds out his hand, she gives her own, and meets his parting kiss in the matter-of-course way of a ten years' matrimony; and forth goes the middle aged Mr. Wakefield, almost resolved to perplex his good lady by a whole week's absence. After the door has closed behind him, she perceives it thrust partly open, and a vision of her husband's face, through the aperture, smiling on her, and gone in a moment⁵.

There is a strange horror about this last picture: we know already what he is going to do, and feel its consistency with the character presented earlier. But Hawthorne intensifies the horror by a little technical trick for using a poetic method in a prose tale which Yvor Winters, in his essay "Maule's Curse", calls « the formula of alternative possibilities »⁶. The succession of different images with one constant feature has perhaps something of the effect of a seventeenth century conceit:

For the time, this little incident is dismissed without a thought. But long afterwards, when she has been more years a widow than a wife, that smile recurs, and flickers across all her reminiscences of Wakefield's visage. In her many musings, she surrounds the original smile with a multitude of fantasies, which make it strange and awful: as for instance, if she imagines him in a coffin, that parting look is frozen on his pale features; or, if she dreams of him in heaven still his blessed spirit wears a quiet and crafty smile⁷.

This device in some tales, and sometimes in *The Scarlet Letter*, can become irritating. It is most successful when as here it is presented through a « centre of consciousness ».

The « meditation » proceeds, but in spite of occasional intimations of the moral (« It is perilous to make a chasm in human affections; not that they gape so long and wide — but so quickly close again »), it increasingly concerns itself with realising the crucial scenes of the story, Wakefield's procrastination, his wife's mourning, and the climax, in which Wake-

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-6.

⁶ YVOR WINTERS, *In Defense of Reason*, London, 1960, p. 170.

⁷ *Twice-Told Tales*, ed. cit., p. 156.

field much changed meets his « widow » face to face in the street and momentarily aroused accuses himself of madness. The insight of this portrayal is so true that we understand the psychological territory between the conscious quirk of a selfish mind tired by the habitual, and real mental unbalance, where Wakefield belongs. But the story has a further dimension beyond naturalism. In the figure of Wakefield the momentary inclination of many men in an urbanised habit-bound society, to "disturb the universe" is projected into reality, with the twist of irony that takes him no further than the next street.

The final scene is vitally conceived with a concreteness and economy that sometimes approaches that of poetry: there is again a device — the shadow — to reconcile a poetic image of the intensity of pleasure and comfort involved in domestic existence with the realistic method:

One evening, in the twentieth year since he vanished Wakefield is taking his customary walk towards the dwelling which he still calls his own. It is a gusty night of autumn, with frequent showers that patter down upon the pavement, and are gone before a man can put up his umbrella. Pausing near the house, Wakefield discerns through the parlor windows of the second floor, the red glow, and the glimmer and fitful flash of a comfortable fire. On the ceiling appears a grotesque shadow of good Mrs. Wakefield. The cap, the nose and chin, and the broad waist, form an admirable caricature which dances, moreover, with the up-flickering and down-sinking blaze, almost too merrily for the shade of an elderly widow. At this instant a shower chances to fall, and is driven, by the unmannerly gust, full into Wakefield's face and bosom. He is quite penetrated with its autumnal chill. Shall he stand, wet and shivering here, when his own hearth has a good fire to warm him, and his own wife will run to fetch the grey coat and small-clothes, which, doubtless, she has kept carefully in the closet of their bed-chamber? No! Wakefield is no such fool. He ascends the steps — heavily! — for twenty years have stiffened his legs since he came down — but he knows it not. Stay Wakefield. Would you go to the sole home that is left you? Then step into your grave! The door opens. As he passes in we have a parting glimpse of his visage, and recognise the crafty smile which was the predecessor of the little joke that he has ever since been praying off at his wife's expense⁸.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4.

The repetition of the crafty smile rounds off the story at the door where it began, but its selfish confidence is now thrown *against* the force of the story's moral, as is the projected consciousness of the urban everyman: « Stay Wakefield! Would you go to the sole home that is left you? Then step into your grave ». The moral emerges in the last paragraph as:

Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another and to a whole, that by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever.

This, unlike the moral of many of Hawthorne's stories is not a platitude, although the first half of the sentence expresses a commonplace idea of the time. The whole sentence presents a quite profound generalisation drawn from experience akin to those we might find in one of Johnson's essays perhaps. But the generalisation only has its full meaning in its particular story. It is the story of Wakefield that gives *intense* meaning to that last phrase, and embodies a feeling for strange states of isolation and alienation utterly foreign to the eighteenth century.

Interests and techniques peculiar to the novelist are certainly present in this story. But because of the limits of Hawthorne's range we are only really interested in one strangely isolated character and there is no use of the dramatic technique of the novelist — allowing characters to live and talk as they do in reality. Instead significance and life are given to the story by an intensification at key points with something approaching a poetic use of language and imagery.

The Minister's Black Veil is an attempt at something more complex; less successful than *Wakefield*, but with greater possibilities in its method it at least transcends the « meditation » technique. On the level of narrative it presents quite pleasantly with a more direct dramatic treatment, though without any remarkable vivacity or insight, the life of a New England

congregation, and the disruption and conjecture which is caused when its minister dons a black veil: it was probably founded on the story of Mr. Joseph Moody of York, Maine, who, Hawthorne says in a footnote, «made himself remarkable by the same eccentricity». On another level, however, it introduces the problems of what Hawthorne called, «an inveterate love of allegory». Allegory comes to mean several different procedures in Hawthorne's work. Applied to this story it refers to the two methods of working which F. O. Matthiessen distinguishes⁹, that in which the story is «made emblematic of something» and the method of starting from a physical object and worrying it for implications. The first of these methods, that of the moral tale, is used in conjunction with a mystery story technique to give the story structure; the mystery throughout is *why does the minister wear the veil*, and the climax comes with his dying words:

«...What, but the mystery which it obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and lo! on every visage, a Black Veil!»

While his auditors shrank from one another in mutual affright Father Hooper fell back on his pillow...¹⁰

Now this moment lacks emotional truth — the rhetoric rings hollow; the stilted conventional phrases and the melodramatic attitude of the listeners strike one as cold and intellectually contrived. But the story has certainly more depth and significance than its ostensible "moral" would suggest, and this is the result of the second technique I mention, of "worrying" the physical object.

⁹ F. O. MATTHIESSEN, *The American Renaissance*, New York, 1941, p. 244.

¹⁰ *Twice-Told Tales*, ed. cit., p. 69.

It is true of course that this method of probing the symbol of the Black Veil occasions some tedious labouring of correspondences, for instance in such a passage as this:

At that instant catching a glimpse of his figure in the looking glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil¹¹.

One is reminded of the tediously insistent overelaboration of the scarlet A in *The Scarlet Letter*. The method here is more successful in its suggestion of « alternative possibilities » to add mystery and depth, but the main value of this "worrying" lies in its extension of the significance of the story, by the elaboration of word and image in Hawthorne's careful and intensive treatment. Two elements of this exploration can be traced through the intensely felt moments in the story. One is found in the successive descriptions of the veiled minister with their variations and repetitions, evoking a mild horror:

...it shook with his measured breath, as he gave out the psalm...
 ...while he prayed, the veil lay heavily on his uplifted countenance.
 ... A sad smile gleamed faintly from beneath the black veil, and flickered about his mouth, glimmering as he disappeared. ...the black veil swathed round Mr. Hooper's forehead, and concealing every feature above his placid mouth, on which at times they could perceive the glimmering of a melancholy smile. ...it was but a double fold of crape, hanging down from his forehead to his mouth, and slightly stirring with his breath. ...Mr. Hooper's smile glimmered faintly. ...that same sad smile which always appeared like a faint glimmering of light...¹².

The other powerful moments emerge from the story in trying to understand in images the minister's situation:

Thus from beneath the Black Veil there rolled a cloud into the sunshine, an ambiguity of sin or sorrow, which enveloped the poor minister, so that love or sympathy could never reach him. ... With self shudderings and outward terrors, he walked continually in its shadow,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 56, 60, 61, 62.

groping darkly within his own soul, or gazing through a medium that saddened the whole world. ... All through life that piece of crape had hung between him and the world: it had separated him from cheerful brotherhood and woman's love, and kept him in that saddest of prisons, his own heart...¹³

The power of this story results from more than Hawthorne's feeling of his own emotional isolation, and is, at least partially, something artistically valid. The feeling of emotional isolation and sterility is realised not only subjectively in Hawthorne's identification with the minister, but objectively in the horror evoked by the symbolic and dramatic treatment of the veiled minister. It thus informs with emotion the moral framework of the story. Both aspects are visible in the visit to Mr. Hooper of his betrothed Elizabeth, for instance. Her attitude to him is unaltered until he finally refuses to remove the veil; she begins to regard it as a symptom of mental illness, then, « her eyes were fixed insensibly on the black veil, when, like a sudden twilight in the air, its terrors fell around her ». As she turns to leave the room he pleads with her not to leave him: « you know not how lonely I am, and how frightened, to be alone, behind my black veil »¹⁴. And both aspects of emotional isolation cast in the same symbolic terms which have been used throughout contribute to the sombre power of the conclusion, with its combination of horror and poignancy:

Father Hooper fell back on his pillow a veiled corpse, with a faint smile lingering on the lips. Still veiled, they laid him in his coffin, and a veiled corpse they bore him to the grave. The grass of many years has sprung up and withered on that grave, the burial stone is moss-grown, and good Mr. Hooper's face is dust; but awful is still the thought that it mouldered beneath the Black Veil.¹⁵

The critical distinction between allegory which is "spoken consciously", as Coleridge says and symbolism, in which the

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

meaning is *discovered* and explored partly unconsciously through the symbols clearly applies here.

A comparison of *The Minister's Black Veil*, with *The Bosom Serpent*, confirms that it is the realistic if prosaic observation of life, and the genuine symbolic significance that are valuable in the former story. *The Bosom Serpent* is meant to exemplify the same sort of moral lesson as *The Minister's Black Veil*, but it lacks the other elements and is a comparative failure. Hawthorne drew his material from the Romances and the popular science of his time. The plot is the commonplace sentimental one of the forsaken wife who forgives the now penitent husband; the predicament of Elliston, « the man with a snake in his bosom », remains completely unconvincing as a psychological curiosity, for which, it is apparent from his corroborative note, Hawthorne hoped it would be taken. The trite serpent idea is insistently and tediously decorated and played with throughout.

The Bosom Serpent introduces conveniently the third group of stories, in which Hawthorne drew most directly upon the various sorts of romance material, macabre, fantastic and exotic, which had emanated from the Gothic tales of Tieck and Hoffmann in Germany into the British and American magazines. This element permeates many of the tales, but is primary in a few, the most successful of which are probably *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, and *Rappaccini's Daughter*, and the extent of their success seems to me directly related to their transcendence of the magazine methods and attitudes.

The idea of *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment* — the magic elixir under the influence of which the Doctor's sage old guests grow young, and repeat the follies of their youth — is a didactic rejoinder to such phrases as : « if I had my time over I'd do it better ». Its charm (no more serious word can be used) rests on a conscious, but apt and attractive use of symbols, like the rose, which Dr. Heidegger's fiancée had given him many years before, through which his acceptance of the present moment, in age, as in youth, is expressed. The story is interest-

ing in that it comes closer to success in identifying strange happenings with possible psychological disturbance; this was a constant preoccupation of Hawthorne's which we have already seen traces of in *The Minister's Black Veil* and *The Bosom Serpent*. At the very beginning of the story we are told that «Dr. Heidegger and all his four guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves». Thus Hawthorne introduces the "alternative possibility" that the whole story is an account of a senile drinking spree, in which subjective and objective phenomena are inextricably confused. This possibility is only *realised* in the story once but the force with which it is done makes it worth a quotation (The three rejuvenated old men are contending for the rejuvenated widow):

They all gathered around her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp — another threw his arm about her waist — the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalry, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, grey, withered grandsires ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam¹⁶.

The increased complexity of awareness suggested by this passage reminds us of the handling of possible hallucination in *Young Goodman Brown* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, a story with the conventional elements of romance and mystery is beautifully decorated in fine prose. The static decorative patterns into which Hawthorne arranges his natural imagery sometimes in *The Scarlet Letter* can be seen here:

In the midst, by the shattered fountain, grew the magnificent shrub, with its purple gems clustering all over it: they glowed in

¹⁶ *Twice-Told Tales*, ed. cit., p. 268.

the air, and gleamed back again out of the depths of the pool, which seemed thus to overflow with coloured radiance from the rich reflection that was steeped in it¹⁷.

As Philip Rahv points out¹⁸ in his essay «The Dark Lady of Salem», the flower imagery and the whole treatment of the garden are redolent of erotic feeling and are certainly symbolic, in the way of dreams, not merely consciously, of the rich life of experience, beautiful and yet deadly, which Hawthorne desired yet feared. The achieved dreamlike quality of texture and incident often here is something we are to find important in some of the other stories.

The simplicity of the scene, where the story takes place — the garden with an over-looking window where the characters can be variously positioned almost resembles a convenient stage-setting — as do several of the backgrounds in *The Scarlet Letter*, the scaffold for instance of the three crucial scenes. The other interesting thing about the story however is its moral balance. Dr. Rappaccini, although he is a fanatical scientist, is not allowed to fall into the villain's role as conveniently as pure romance allows. When Baglioni, the other doctor in the story, warns Giovanni about him, we are told that «the youth might have taken Baglioni's opinions with many grains of allowance had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him and Dr. Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage»¹⁹. This prepares us for the moral equivalence of the conclusion where Beatrice drinks Baglioni's antidote and dies:

Just at that moment Professor Pietro Baglioni looked forth from the window, and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror, to the thunderstricken man of science.

«Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is this the upshot of your experiment!»²⁰.

¹⁷ *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Riverside Edition, 1883, Vol. II, p. 118.

¹⁸ PHILIP RAHV, *Image and Idea*, Revised Edition, 1957, p. 39.

¹⁹ *Mosses from an Old Manse*, ed. cit. p. 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.

The *triumph* of Baglioni — and the fact that he blames on « the thunderstricken scientist » what was *directly* at least due to a mistaken diagnosis of his own (that the antidote would cure Beatrice) — partially reverses the moral roles of the two doctors, and throws the critical force of the conclusion on to the lack of humane scruple fostered by competitive science.

In classifying one group of stories as *Allegories* I am not ignoring the extent to which allegory in one form or another enters into so many of the stories. The aim is rather to isolate some of the stories in which allegory is the main element, and also to see what use Hawthorne makes of the allegorical precedents of Bunyan and Spenser.

The Celestial Railroad combines Hawthorne's most direct use of Bunyan with his most incisive and vital criticism of the American ideology and society of his time. This is certainly no accident. It is rarely that one can use words like "incisive" and "vital" about Hawthorne, alike because of the uncertainties of his forms, and the dry agnosticism of his moral attitudes. But in *The Pilgrim's Progress* he finds for himself a moral position diametrically opposed to the facile optimism of the Transcendentalists, and the «Progress» that *they* indirectly advertised — a moral position moreover which clothed powerfully in concrete symbols Hawthorne's own intuitions about the complex depths of the human material, and the slowness with which it is really changed — and provided the shaping idea of the journey for the story. However, the vitality and point are given by Hawthorne's own addition of the Transcendentalist Railroad, and all the twists and turns of fancy which elaborate the incongruity and yet the aptness of this image of progress in Bunyan's setting:

Our enormous burdens, instead of being carried on our shoulders as had been the custom of old, were all snugly deposited in the baggage car, and, as I was assured, would be delivered to their respective owners at the journey's end²¹.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

One can see how its foundation in the powerful symbols of Bunyan's work gives this image of the Transcendentalist ideology its ironic force.

Similarly Bunyan's *Vanity Fair* permits a neat delineation of the relationship of Transcendentalist ideas to American society:

On the contrary, as the new railroad brings with it great trade, and a constant influx of strangers, the lord of *Vanity Fair* is its chief patron, and the capitalists of the city are among the largest stock-holders²².

The influence of Bunyan is in one respect too extensive however. In all of Hawthorne's successful work there is apparent in his attitude to his very limited experience, to his subject, and to his material, a capacity for self-immersion. We have seen this faculty teasing out the reality of *Wakefield* from the bare lines of the newspaper account, and we will see it in Hawthorne's identification with the Puritan spirit of New England which produced his best work. But when this self-immersion is an engagement within the whole literary framework of another writer as it is here, the effect gained can be of little value in any other work. Although *The Celestial Railroad* is a pleasant tour de force, its main method and insights contribute little to Hawthorne's development of his own art. The one thing in it which shows Hawthorne as assimilating Bunyan, and putting him to new use, is the character presentation of Mr. Smooth-it-away. The allegorical character here (who illustrates his name as do Bunyan's characters) is given a further dimension in the reversal of the conclusion:

And then did my excellent friend Mr. Smooth-it-away laugh out right, in the midst of which cachinnation a smoke-wreath issued from his mouth and nostrils, while a twinkle of lurid flame darted out of each eye, proving indubitably that his heart was all of a red blaze²³.

This infusion, though used lightly here is drawn partly from the same witch-lore material as the imagery of *Young*

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

Goodman Brown and partly from the conventional melodramatic villain and gives Mr. Smooth-it-away a more complicated character than his name suggests. It is worth comparing this passage with the treatment of Roger Chillingworth throughout *The Scarlet Letter*. The fact that the simplification of devilry and of melodrama as well as the allegorical idea *his* name suggest have gone into Chillingworth's making is important: it helps to explain why although Hawthorne's characters give a sense of representative or allegorical status, any attempt to attach an allegorical meaning to them is unsatisfactory.

Two stories which are generally allegorical in the Bunyan way are *The Great Carbuncle* and *The Great Stone Face*. They have the same theme — the quest for the Ideal and its eventual discovery in rustic anonymity — and are so related to Transcendalist and Democratic thought: the character of Ernest in *The Great Stone Face* bears some resemblance to the untutored philosopher Farmer Hosmer whom Emerson commended in *The Dial*. The characters and the allegorical pattern of *The Great Carbuncle* are of the same sort as those of Bunyan. The characters however lack the sort of link with real people which Bunyan's dialogue usually makes and all of them — the Seeker, the Poet, the Scientist etc. — are bookish, generalised and uninteresting; Mr. Pig-snort caught wallowing naked among his pineshillings, and the pantomime figure of the Cynic with his great spectacles are perhaps the best. The idea of the story is too abstract, and the symbols used to present it — the shining rock, the mountains, etc. — are ill-assorted, and have little power or depth.

It is perhaps significant that in the far more successful story *The Great Stone Face*, Hawthorne goes back beyond the Transcendentalist formulation of his theme to its deeper Christian symbolisation. Although the Great Stone Face becomes at times the sentimentalised kindly white bearded old God of popular religion and the idea of his coming Incarnation is generalised from the Unitarian interpretation of the Bible story, it still has some of the symbolic power of its sources; and the

three mistaken identifications of the Great Stone Face in capitalist, soldier and politician bear vague overtones of Christ's three temptations. The main reason for the superiority of *The Great Stone Face* however is the amount of "felt life" which has gone into it: for instance, the valley, with its « famous natural curiosity » is an attractive symbol, which is close enough to the quirks of nature to be believable for the purpose of the story, even if it does rather resemble a sculptured stage-setting or back-cloth for the action. There is a fine dramatic contrast between the expected image, and the economically and realistically described Mr. Gathergold, and Hawthorne's ironic sense of crowd psychology — one of his strong points — cements this contrast into Ernest's puzzlement:

He had a low forehead, small, sharp eyes, puckered about with innumerable wrinkles, and very thin lips, which he made still thinner by pressing them forcibly together.

« The very image of the Great Stone Face! » shouted the people. « Sure enough, the old prophesy is true; and here we have the great man come, at last! ».

And, what greatly perplexed Ernest, they seemed actually to believe that here was the likeness which they spoke of²⁴.

The other two candidates for the Messiah-ship of the valley — the soldier and the politician — are also generalised « types », into whose making (though without quite such *concentration*) has gone some shrewd observation. And the organisation of the story, with its well defined centre of consciousness (whose mind is always a little behind that of the reader), and the slow masque-like, almost ritual movement, continually mingles the expected with pleasant variation and elaboration, until the increasingly expected reversal of the conclusion. It is a formula which Hawthorne is to use again for one of his best stories, *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, and it contributes to the structure of *The Scarlet Letter*. Though not as directly visible as that of Bunyan sometimes is, one suspects

²⁴ *The Snow Image and Other Twice - Told Tales*, Riverside Edition, 1883, Vol. III, p. 420.

the influence of Spenser in this masque-like movement of the story.

Spenser's influence is harder to pin down than Bunyan's, as his idea of allegory was more subtle and varied. It is present often in the quality of Hawthorne's descriptive passage and imagery, and in the matter of allegory in the greater delicacy and detail of *The Snow Image*. The idea — of the destructive impact of insensitive « common sense » upon the fantasies of childhood, or the intuitions of poetry — is lightly and pleasantly, if sometimes sentimentally, dramatised. The presence of other elements in Hawthorne's successful writing — the balanced judgment, and realistic sense of mundane everyday life — can be seen in the description of the returning hardware merchant:

the street gate was thrown open, and the father of Violet and Peony appeared, wrapped in a pilot cloth sack, with a fur cap drawn down over his ears, and the thickest of gloves upon his hands. Mr. Lindsey was a middle aged man, with a weary and yet a happy look in his wind-flushed and frost-pinched face, as if he had been busy all the day long, and was glad to get back to his quiet home ²⁵.

Mr. Lindsey has the same sort of role in this story as do Mr. Smooth-it-away and The Cynic in *The Celestial Railroad* and *The Great Carbuncle*, but the grotesque elements of these characters (equally necessary here to image Mr. Lindsey's destructive capacity) are externalised here *within* the realistic setting of the story (the same technique that we saw in *Wakefield*), in the fearsome Heidenberg stove which melts the snow image:

And the Heidenberg stove, through the isinglass of its door, seemed to glare at good Mr. Lindsey like a red-eyed demon, triumphing in the mischief which it had done ²⁶.

We are close to the methods of *The Scarlet Letter* in this story — the way Chillingworth's characteristic activity of grub-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 403-4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

bing up weeds mirrors his preying on Dimmesdale for instance. And the projection of the children's fantasy into the dancing creature of new snow — which becomes another character in the story — is a very similar process to that whereby Hester's sense of guilt is embodied in the mocking figure of Pearl. One must agree with James that allegory on its own is « quite one of the lighter exercises of the imagination »²⁷, and that the greater power of the later work is due to the psychological and moral insight, and the reality of Pearl, but one can see more clearly from the comparison how this insight is translated into dramatic terms. One can see too how the primary meaning of a symbol is half consciously extended and elaborated, and how the figure of Pearl comes to take on further overtones as a symbol of the poetic imagination.

Almost all of Hawthorne's best short stories fall into the last group of my classification — that of historical tales. There are several reasons for this. Yvor Winters has suggested that Puritan New England supplied the only ordered system of values to be found in American cultural history²⁸; perhaps it is true that by immersing himself in that age Hawthorne avoided some of the difficulties which face American writers. It was certainly the source of richer and more picturesque material than he could find among the « commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight »²⁹ of his own time. Moreover, Hawthorne had a profound historical sense — a capacity for understanding and re-valuing the past to bring out those features directly related to his own time and to the particular problems of the American situation, as Mrs. Leavis's essay on Hawthorne usefully demonstrates³⁰. Hawthorne was aware of the Puritan past in its continued existence in the present, both in nineteenth century American society and in his own nature, but his instinctive sympathy and identifica-

²⁷ H. JAMES, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

²⁸ YVOR WINTERS, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

²⁹ Preface to *The Marble Faun* (Riverside Edition, Vol. VI, p. 15).

³⁰ Q. D. LEAVIS, « Hawthorne as Poet », *Sewanee Review*, Spring 1951, pp. 179-205.

tion with Puritanism was qualified by his wider awareness of human possibilities. Because of this deep-rooted sympathy, the past was a field which minimised Hawthorne's own limitations and intensified his strengths. « Let them scorn me as they will », he says of his Puritan ancestors in the Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, « strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine »³¹. He understood thoroughly his own inner gloom and neuroticism, and could express the results of his introversion (fused of course with his observation of others) in art of the quality of *Wakefield*. One can understand therefore the power and understanding that result when he projects himself into the far more effectual (and therefore more dramatic) gloom and neuroticism of Puritan times.

In the pageant of New England history that Hawthorne called *Main Street* there is an extremely perceptive analysis of the psychological characteristics of the early settlers:

In truth, when the first novelty and stir of spirit had subsided, when the new settlement, between the forest-border and the sea, had become actually a little town, — its daily life must have trudged onward with hardly anything to diversify and enliven it, while also its rigidity could not fail to cause miserable distortions of the moral nature. Such a life was sinister to the intellect and sinister to the heart; especially when one generation had bequeathed its religious gloom, and the counterfeit of its religious ardor, to the next; for these characteristics, as was inevitable, assumed the form both of hypocrisy and exaggeration, by being inherited from the example and precept of other human beings, and not from an original and spiritual source. The sons and grandchildren of the first settlers were a race of lower and narrower souls than their progenitors had been. The latter were stern, severe, intolerant, but not superstitious, not even fanatical³².

The distinction between the first settlers and their descendants here is important to Hawthorne. In his reevaluation of New England history, the first generation — Endicott, Bellingham, Wilson — although critically seen, symbolises too the

³¹ *The Scarlet Letter*, Riverside Edition, Vol. V, p. 25.

³² *The Snow Image*, ed. cit., pp. 459-60.

dignity and moral stability of Puritanism, while the later generations represent its worse features. In the rest of *Main Street* Hawthorne recounts some of the manifestations of these « distortions of the moral nature » — the correction of transgressors in wooden cages or at the whipping post, the flogging of Quakers, the strange confessions of the Salem witches and their horrid execution. Two of these crises in New England history — the persecution of the Quakers, and the era of the witches — inspired two of Hawthorne's better short stories, *The Gentle Boy*, and *Young Goodman Brown*.

In *The Gentle Boy*, Hawthorne's art in no way crosses the boundaries of a story involving not only a group of leading characters, but a whole society in its scope and extending over quite a long period of time. It has several good qualities: the psychological insight for instance with which are portrayed the over-sensitive Quaker child Ibrahim, and the malignant hypocrisy of the righteous society which had martyred his father; or the moral balance, which while critical of the Puritans and their iniquities sees the fanaticism of the Quakers as also to be condemned when it points away from human duties like motherhood. Hawthorne's antipathy towards the Puritan intolerance through this more detailed realistic treatment achieves its *fullest* and most direct dramatic expression until *The Scarlet Letter* in the scene where Ibrahim, seeing the crippled boy he had befriended among the other Puritan children, comes up to them trustingly:

In an instant he was the centre of a brood of baby-friends, who lifted sticks against him, pelted him with stones, and displayed an instinct of destruction far more loathsome than the bloodthirstiness of manhood.

The invalid, in the meanwhile, stood apart from the tumult, crying out with a loud voice, « Fear not, Ibrahim, come hither and take my hand »; and his unhappy friend endeavoured to obey him. After watching the victim's struggling approach with a calm smile and unabashed eye, the foul-hearted little villain lifted his staff and struck Ibrahim on the mouth, so forcibly that the blood issued in a stream³³.

³³ *Twice Told Tales*, ed. cit., p. 112.

In the re-enactment by the children of their parents' persecution Hawthorne expresses his sense of the continuity of human evil, and deliberately repudiates all romantic notions of childish innocence: («the bliss of childhood gushes from its innocence» the passers by had commented earlier on the Puritan children at play).

Apart from this one scene the story is too slow moving and lacks tension and excitement. This is partly because the society he was depicting was like his own and so lacks these qualities too, even when his own art is faultless:

When Pearson and his wife had thus acquired all the rights over Ilbrahim that could be delegated, their affection for him became like the memory of their native land, or their mild sorrow for the dead, a piece of the immoveable furniture of their hearts³⁴.

But there are other reasons: a great deal of space is devoted to descriptions of events, and conventional rather lifeless speeches, and too little to bringing them to life. Too many characters are introduced for them to be more than ciphers in a short story, and one surmises that Hawthorne had not the experience to make them into people. One tends to feel that Hawthorne's narrow range of interests and awareness, and his lack of social material could not along these lines have produced a great novel.

In *Young Goodman Brown* we find several of the artistic techniques and modes which we have been discussing, through which Hawthorne «endeavours to create an interest by some less obvious peculiarity of the subject», as he puts it in the opening of *Rappaccini's Daughter*. Hawthorne's interest in a link of supernatural and psychological finds its finest expression in the witch-lore material of New England history. The alternative possibilities — was this hallucination or reality — are introduced with a very skillful transitional passage:

«There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree», said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him as he added, «What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow».

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree³⁵.

During Goodman Brown's progressive disillusionment about human goodness there is a modulation upwards in the dramatic intensity of the story to the point where its allegorical significance becomes explicit:

He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it³⁶.

But suddenly a great black cloud sweeps across the sky bearing the witch horde, he hears his wife's voice in the midst, and her ribbon is left as the cloud vanishes:

« My Faith is gone! » cried he after one stupefied moment. « There is no good on earth and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given »³⁷.

The whole story is an allegorical dramatisation of this theme, for Goodman Brown is Everyman, and New England is « this world », which gathers saints and sinners alike at the devil's altar in the deepest forest. On the allegorical level it is a theme of the age, which Melville is to express more intensely though far less cogently in *Pierre*, a doubt of that Transcendent which assured the optimism of Emerson and his followers. And as, in Emerson's theory the Transcendent manifests itself in the goodness of the human spirit, so in *Young Goodman Brown* the doubt is a doubt of Man's goodness cast in the shape of his vision. Thus the wood through which he is rushing is similar to that in *The Scarlet Letter*, which, « to Hester's mind imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering »³⁸. And beyond the conscious meaning through the concrete evocation of the powerful

³⁵ *Moses from an Old Manse*, ed. cit., p. 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁸ *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. cit., p. 220.

symbol of the wood it becomes an image of Man's whole unconscious nature, that great submerged area which the dictates and assumptions of social morality leave untouched. Mrs. Leavis points out in her essay³⁹ how the possibility is raised by Faith's opening words « a lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afraid of herself sometimes »⁴⁰, and her husband's « She talks of dreams, too »⁴¹, that the journey he takes is into the subconscious realm in sleep. Certainly the experience has the emotional quality of a dream, and such symbolic significances are certainly set free during the course of the story by the elements of Hawthorne's art we have mentioned. One must agree with Mrs. Leavis too about the *dramatic* intensity of the latter part of the tale, and the poetic means whereby it is achieved are plainly drawing on the Puritan mythology which associated the forest and its trees, and animals, with the devil:

...with the final peal of that dreadful anthem there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconcerted wilderness were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man in homage to the prince of all⁴².

The total experience of the story has a felt correspondence to psychological experience, and represents perhaps as forcibly as Hawthorne's limitations allow the reverse side of the coin of New England righteousness. But the psychological experience concerned is not as centrally significant as that in *The Ancient Mariner* (to which Mrs. Leavis claims it is superior), and the images are not as universal or consistently potent. Its whole pattern and field of insight correspond to the narrower range of awareness of Hawthorne, and one is conscious sometimes in its make up of the elaboration of the idea, at a lighter level than its profound symbolic insights. For instance

³⁹ Q. D. LEAVIS, *art. cit.*, p. 195.

⁴⁰ *Mosses from an Old Manse*, *ed. cit.*, p. 89.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

the whole process of disillusionment about people culminates in the words of the ruined archangel:

This night it shall be granted to you to know their secret deeds: how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows' weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth, and how fair damsels — blush not, sweet ones — have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest, to an infant's funeral⁴³.

Despite the witchy horror of the last phrase here, this is very melodramatic and conventional stuff to be the climatic revelation of *evil* — it has very little awareness of evil about it compared, say, to the passage from *The Gentle Boy* discussed earlier. And in its relationship to the next sequence where the changed Goodman Brown shrinks from the venerable minister in the morning street, reviles the deacon and repels his wife's glad greeting one can see that the alternative possibilities — dream or reality — are being lightly played on to give an equivocal significance:

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting? Be it so if you will; but alas it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath day, when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen because an anthem of sin rustled loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit with power and fervid eloquence, and, with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives, and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down on the grey blasphemer and his hearers⁴⁴.

The gloom and isolation intensely portrayed at the end of the story are protectively ambiguous: they are the result of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

the experience of the story which may be either profound intuition, or psychological malady; both alternatives are poetic ingredients of the story.

Hawthorne was not of course alone in his return to the past for material. At a time when American Nationalism was still seeking articulate expression literary men were divided into two camps: those who like Emerson and Thoreau rejected the past, Europe and tradition, and men like Irving, Cooper and Hawthorne who were still conservative and European in their ideas. This latter group saw their patriotic duty as including the establishment of historic traditions for the American nation. This at times in Irving's stories becomes a mere trick of using language to make the first settlements seem much longer ago than they really were. Hawthorne however is sober and accurate in his accounts of New England history, and even when the position of ideologist for the new society is taken up it never excludes his balanced writer's vision. *The Grey Champion* for instance is one of the simplest and most straight-forward of the tales, and the figure of the patriarchal ghost who opposed the tyrannical governors and turned them back is used to draw a perspective of national history before the final patriotic invocation:

When eighty years had passed, he walked once more in King Street. Five years later, in the twilight of an April morning, he stood on the green beside the meeting house, at Lexington, where now the obelisk of granite, with a slab of slate inlaid, commemorates the first fallen of the Revolution. And when our fathers were toiling at the breastwork on Bunker's hill, all through that night the old warrior walked his rounds. Long, long may it be, ere he comes again! His hour is one of darkness, and adversity, and peril. But should domestic tyranny oppress us, or the invader's step pollute our soil, still may the Grey Champion come, for he is the type of New England's hereditary spirit: and his shadowy march, on the eve of danger, must ever be the pledge, that New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ *Twice-Told Tales, ed. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

But even in this story the ironies implicit in the historic situation are seen and noted in concise antithetic terms. He says of the crowd of Puritans, « Here, also, were the veterans of King Philip's war who had burned villages and slaughtered young and old, with pious fierceness, while the godly souls throughout the land were helping them with prayer »⁴⁶. And there is already a seminal hint of Hawthorne's measured contrast between old world and new:

On one side the religious multitude, with their sad visages and dark attire, and on the other, the group of despotic rulers, with the high churchman in the midst, and here and there a crucifix at their bosoms, all magnificently clad...⁴⁷.

In *Endicott and the Red Cross* this balanced attitude to the past is more forcibly touched in. Although the story is celebrating Endicott's assault on the British flag as an omen of Independence, a great deal of attention and careful irony is given to the place of correction where the cruelty and intolerance of the Puritan regime were demonstrated. At the height of Endicott's rhetoric he is interrupted from the stocks by the Wanton Gospeller — one who had wished to interpret the Scriptures in his own way:

« ...Wherefore, I say again, have we sought this country of a rugged soil and wintry sky? Was it not for the enjoyment of our civil rights? Was it not for liberty to worship God according to our conscience? ».

« Call you this liberty of conscience? » interrupted a voice from the steps of the meeting house⁴⁸.

These stories built about one incident with carefully grouped characters have a simple dramatic quality — like a scene in a pageant or a masque. They bring to mind Mrs. Leavis's suggestion that, « a series of works, *The Maypole of Merry Mount*, *My Kinsman*, *Major Molineux*, *Blithedale Romance*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

among others... together form something that it would not be fanciful to describe as a ritual drama, reminding us of, for instance, the Norse Edda »⁴⁹. She sees the theme of this cycle to be « the conflict between the Puritans who became New England, and thus America, and the non-Puritans, who were to [Hawthorne]merely the English in America, and whom he, partly with triumph, but partly also with anguish, sees as being cast out »⁵⁰.

The extravagance of Mrs. Leavis's terms must be treated with a certain amount of suspicion, but as an expression of a quality certainly present in all these works her statement is very valuable. The implications of the conflict are stated quite early in *The Maypole of Merry Mount*:

The future complexion of New England was involved in this important quarrel. Should the grizzly saints establish their jurisdiction over the gay sinners, then would their spirits darken all the clime, and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm forever. But should the banner staff of Merry Mount be fortunate, sunshine would break upon the hills, and flowers would beautify the forest, and late posterity do homage to the Maypole⁵¹.

Mrs. Leavis illustrates in detail that Hawthorne is rendering two « partial truths, or qualified goods set in opposition » in the irresponsible gaiety of Merry Mount, and the rigid morality of the Puritans, and comments on Hawthorne's irony in such passages as that where the Puritans « proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves, and the scalps of Indians ». She points out too the characteristic use of recurrent conscious symbolism, and the deliberate parallel to Milton's *Comus*. But while all that Mrs. Leavis mentions is certainly there in the light play of Hawthorne's intelligence and fancy over the subject, her treatment continually exaggerates the depth and seriousness of tone of the story, for instance, when she says: « The practices of the Puritan are described as being a horrible parody of

⁴⁹ Q. D. LEAVIS, *art. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁵¹ *Twice-Told Tales*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

those of the Maypole worshippers, a deliberate offense against the spirit of Life »⁵². It seems to me that Hawthorne is not nearly as deeply involved in the situation as this would suggest. He is fairly distant emotionally from the historic change the story symbolises, and is wryly indicating the contradictions involved in the Puritan position, and weighing his gentle nostalgia for the more picturesque and colourful cultural roots of Europe against his quiet satisfaction at the moral stability that New England allows (and the lightness of touch can be seen in the conclusion, which decorates the moral it draws with symbolic roses).

The story which justifies Mrs. Leavis's claims for a ritual drama in Hawthorne's work is certainly *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*. Her sensitive detailed discussion of it widens and deepens our response to what is certainly Hawthorne's best short story, and I shall rely on her account a good deal in what follows. The dramatic immediacy of Hawthorne's treatment is the first thing to notice — the way we are immediately drawn into an identification with Robin, and experience his bewilderment and irritation as each of his enquiries for the home of his kinsman Major Molineux is met with contempt, suspicion, or anger. The experience in the still moonlit street has all the bewildering strangeness of a dream with the same sense of some inexorable logic which would explain all the incidents if it could be grasped. Through this accurately and intensely conveyed psychological region move the other characters — the simplified « type » characters of Hawthorne here perfectly justified in the sitting. One of them passes and repasses with the slow clockwork regularity of some dream figure:

As Robin drew nigh, he saw that the passenger was a man in years, with a full periwig of grey hair, a wire skirted coat of dark cloth, and silk stockings rolled above his knees. He carried a long and polished cane, which he struck down perpendicularly before him at every

⁵² Q. D. LEAVIS, *art. cit.*, p. 191.

step; and at regular intervals he uttered two successive hems of a peculiarly solemn and sepulchral intonation..

... [Robin] had arrived about midway towards the lower end, from which his course began, when he overheard the approach of someone who struck down a cane on the flagstones at every step, uttering, at regular intervals, two sepulchral hems⁵³.

Or a character reappears with the horrific shock of a nightmare transformation:

The stranger, instead of attempting to force his passage, stepped back into the moonlight, unmuffled his face, and stared full into that of Robin.

« Watch here an hour, and Major Molineux will pass by », said he.

Robin gazed with dismay and astonishment on the unprecedented physiognomy of the speaker. The forehead with its double prominence, the broad hooked nose, the shaggy eyebrows and fiery eyes were those which he had noticed at the inn, but the man's complexion had undergone a singular, or more properly a twofold change. One side of the face blazed an intense red while the other was black as midnight⁵⁴.

Robin, having consumed a few moments in « philosophical speculations upon the species of man who has just left him » is able to « settle this point shrewdly, rationally and satisfactorily », but there is an increasing irony deployed upon the « shrewdness », of Robin, which allies it with his callow confidence about the influence of « his kinsman, Major Molineux ».

If we have fully grasped the historic setting of the story in the first paragraph, a suspicion that Major Molineux is one of the unfortunate governors of Massachusetts concerned, an unpopular representative of England, will now be entering our understanding of the mysterious events. So that with the height of the nightmare, the approach of the weird crowd led by « War personified » we are half ready to experience with Robin an enactment of America's casting off of Old World

⁵³ *The Snow Image, ed. cit.*, pp. 618. 624.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 629.

authority similar to the primitive ritual drama of the conquest of the old King by the new:

A moment more, and the leader thundered a command to halt: the trumpets vomited a horrid breath and then held their peace; the shouts and laughter of the people died away and there remained only a universal hum, allied to silence. Right before Robin's eyes was an uncovered cart. There the torches blazed the brightest, there the moon shone out like day, and there, in tar and feathery dignity, sat his kinsman Major Molineux!

He was an elderly man of large and majestic person, and strong square features, betokening a steady soul; but steady as it was his enemies had found means to shake it. His face was pale as death, and far more ghastly; the broad forehead was contracted in his agony, so that his eyebrows formed one grizzled line; his eyes were red and wild, and the foam hung upon his quivering lip. His whole frame was agitated by a quick and continual tremor which his pride strove to quell, even in those circumstances of overwhelming humiliation. But his eyes met those of Robin; for he evidently knew him on the instant as the youth stood witnessing the foul disgrace of a head grown gray in honor. They stared at each other in silence, and Robin's knees shook, and his hair bristled with a mixture of pity and terror⁵⁵.

With Robin we are suddenly involved in the Reversal inducing pity and horror, characteristic of Tragedy (which has its roots in this very ritual), a reversal not only of Major Molineux' previous high estate, but also of all Robin's shallow assumptions about power and rank; but then gradually (and the transition is superbly managed in terms of the illogical compulsions we experience in dreams) we are carried with him into a momentary identification with the jubilant victors:

The contagion was spreading among the multitude when all at once it seized upon Robin, and he sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street, — every man shook his sides, every man emptied his lungs, but Robin's laugh was the loudest there⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 638-639.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

In a movement away from the tragic insight, laughter is the opposite attitude to indignity fostered by the surrender of the ego to a group spirit. When Robin has experienced both the anguish and the triumph of the conflict between old and new, in a sudden quiet the revellers move off:

like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate, mighty no more but majestic still in his agony⁵⁷.

Robin is left in the calm of the close, now recollected, and with the responsibility of choice. Against the violation of human dignity and tradition and the horror of mob violence are balanced the necessity for a new beginning and the stability of social commitment. He is a fully realisted symbol, the boy from the country being inseparable from the protagonist of the American situation.

At a second reading, with our sights more securely fixed, we can appreciate the subtlety of the moral delineation of Robin's character: the lordly confidence and assurance with which he misunderstands everything that happens to him, but retains the certainty that he is a « shrewd youth ». From the stage of adolescence at which he knows everything he is gradually prepared by his confusion for an experience of the real irreconcilable conflicts which do make life a painful and a difficult business, and is left in a more sober and humble mind to face the problems of adult living.

It requires several readings to appreciate the full symbolic significance of this story. Only in *The Scarlet Letter* among all of Hawthorne's work do we find the same unconscious depth and penetration of the symbolic imagination beyond the conscious framework. The difficulties of adolescence both face the individual and the young society; the problems of the urban life for a young man (and a society) accustomed to agrarian ways⁵⁸; the failure of organised religion to provide an

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

⁵⁸ I am indebted here and in the previous paragraph to an unpublished lecture by Dr. D.S.R. Welland.

answer; the choice which faced Robin, and faces every American mind, between conformism to Democracy and urban life and an attempt to return to Nature and the country — while economically the latter alternative becomes increasingly difficult: all this is reflected in the various moods, and movements of Robin's mind and the events in which he is caught up. And it is interesting to see how this imaginative range is released by a combination of many of the qualities and techniques I have been discussing. An experience is presented dramatically through a centre of consciousness who is himself objectively seen and judged, but the further detailed accuracy of the realistic masque-like technique is made acceptable through the writer's ability to understand and project the quirks of strange psychological states. This whole experience is allegorically juxtaposed against a profoundly understood historic situation, thus throwing open the area between for the symbolic interaction I have been discussing. This formula compounded in greater complexity with other elements already discussed produced *The Scarlet Letter*.

M. L. ALLEN