

A WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

—A STUDY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (I)—*

To make one's own reflection in a
mirror the subject of a story.

—*The American Notebooks*

By TARO SHIMADA**

I

When we look over Nathaniel Hawthorne's works chronologically, we cannot fail to notice the fact that there were periods when his creative power was strangely inactive; that is, roughly speaking, 1839-41, 1846-49, 1854-58, and after the completion of *The Marble Faun* in 1860. These intervals except the last one correspond to the periods when he was in a public office,¹ and was what he himself called "a business machine."²

* I do not know how to express my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Norman Holmes Pearson of Yale University. He gave me not only invaluable advice in my research but also financial assistance in those happy days when I was studying under him. He kindly read my manuscript and gave me encouraging comments. I should like further to add that Professor Pearson allowed me to freely use his library, to read and make extracts from Hawthorne's letters and *French and Italian Notebooks* he is preparing for publication. I am also grateful to the Institute of International Education and Yale University for giving me scholarship and the chance to make research on Hawthorne.

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¹ The list below will make clear the relationship between Hawthorne's inactive periods and those when he was an officeholder.

1820.....	<i>The Spectator</i>
1824-25.....	3
1826-27.....	<i>Fanshawe</i>
1828-29.....	7
1829.....	8
1830.....	5
1831.....	4
1832.....	6
1832-33.....	2
1833.....	1
1834.....	10
1835.....	3
1835-36.....	7
1836.....	3+more than 140 sketches in <i>The American Magazine</i> .
1837.....	10+ <i>Peter Parley's Universal History</i> with Elizabeth's help.
1838.....	9

Whenever he obtained an official position, he was full of hope for a new, financially secure life and was firmly convinced of the possibility of devoting no small part of it to his story-writing, as can be seen in the following comment from a letter written just before he took employment for the first time in his life.

It has pleased Mr. Bancroft (knowing what little ability I have is altogether adapted for active life) to offer me the post of Inspector in the Boston Custom-House; and I am going to accept it, with as much confidence in my suitableness for it, as Sancho Panza had in his gubernatorial qualifications. I have no reason to doubt my capacity to fulfil the duties; for I don't know what they are; but as nearly as I can understand, I shall be a sort

Jan. 1839-Jan. 1841, Measurer in the Boston Custom House. Apr. 1841, joined the Brook Farm Community but before the end of the year withdrew.

1839*.... 1

1840*.... *Grandfather's Chair*, pts. I & II.

1841*.... *Idem*, pt. III+1.

1842..... 5+ *Biographical Stories*

1843..... 8

1844..... 6

1845..... 1+Editing *Journal of an African Cruiser*.

Apr. 1846-June 1849, Surveyor in the Salem Custom House.

1846*.... 1

1847*.... 1

1848*.... 4

1849-50..... *The Scarlet Letter*

1850-51..... *The House of the Seven Gables*

1851..... *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*

1851-52..... *The Blithedale Romance*

1852..... *The Life of Franklin Pierce*

July 1853-Aug. 1857, United States Consul at Liverpool.

1853..... *The Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys*

1854*.... 0

1855*.... 0

1856*.... 1

1857*.... 1

1858*.... *The Ancestral Footstep* (abortive).

1859..... *The Marble Faun*

1860*.... 2

1861*.... 2+*Septimius Felton* and *Doctor Grimsawe's Secret* (both abortive).

1862*.... 5

1863*.... 4

1863-64..... *The Dolliver Romance* (abortive).

The number in the list shows that of the short stories and sketches supposed to be written the year indicated in the left column. As to the probable date of composition, I mainly depend on E. L. Chandler's "A Study of the Sources of the Tales and Romances Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne before 1853" (*Smith College Studies in Modern Language*, VII). The problem whether some sketches such as "The New England Village" should be regarded as Hawthorne canon or not is more than I can solve now. Therefore I decided to count all the sketches included in *The Autograph Edition* (22 vols., Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1900). Anyway their number is so small that whether to count them or not makes no great difference. It is obvious that the years asterisked are singularly sterile.

² Cf. His letter to Sophia Peabody, dated on July 22, 1840. These words are omitted in Julian Hawthorne's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*, vol. I, pp. 218-21. Hawthorne letters are all quoted from transcriptions by Professor Pearson and used with his permission.

of Port-Admiral, and take command of vessels after they enter the harbor, and have control of their cargoes. Pray Heaven I may have opportunities to make defalcation! They tell me that a considerable portion of my time will be unoccupied; the which I mean to employ in sketches of my new experience, under some such titles as follows:—"Passages in the Life of a Custom-House Officer"—"Scenes in Dock"—"Voyages at Anchor"—"Nibblings of a Warf-Rat"—"Trials of a Tide-Water"—"Romance of the Revenue Service"—together with an ethical work in two volumes on the subject of Duties—the first Duties imposed by the Revenue Laws, which I already begin to consider as much the most important class.

Thus you see I have abundance of literary labor in prospect; and this makes it more tolerable that you refuse to let me blow a blast upon the "Wonder-Horn."³

But his expectation was always miserably belied. Only four months after he had written the letter quoted above, he confessed that "as a literary man, my new occupations entirely break me up."⁴ Looking back over the days at the Salem Custom House, he writes:

So little adapted is the atmosphere of a Custom-House to the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility, that, had I remained there through ten Presidencies yet to come, I doubt whether the tale of "The Scarlet Letter" would ever have been brought before the public eye. My imagination was a tarnished mirror. It would not reflect, or only with miserable dimness, the figures with which I did my best to people it. The characters of the narrative would not be warmed and rendered malleable, by any heat that I could kindle at my intellectual forge. They would take neither the glow of passion nor the tenderness of sentiment, but retained all the rigidity of dead corpses, and stared me in the face with a fixed and ghastly grin of contemptuous defiance. "What have you to do with us?" that expression seemed to say. "The little power you might once have possessed over the tribe of unrealities is gone! You have bartered it for a pittance of the public gold. Go, then, and earn your wages!" In short, the almost torpid creatures of my own fancy twitted me with imbecility, and not without fair occasion.⁵

Why was his imagination "a tarnished mirror" as long as he "had a part to act in the material and tangible business of life?"⁶ And what was the reason that he could not complete any romance except *The Marble Faun* after 1852, even though he made twenty-two preparatory sketches for four romances?⁷

An answer to the first question may be found in the fact that the time he could spare for the writing during those periods was limited. As for the second, the recurrent attacks of the Roman fever on his oldest daughter Una, his own declining health, and the Civil War which deprived him of the quiet he so urgently needed may be counted among the answers. They all are right. In Hawthorne's case, however, who at once lived an "external life" and

³ To Longfellow, Jan. 12, 1839.

⁴ To Longfellow, May 15, 1839. He also wrote to Benjamin Thatcher on the same day: "My present occupations, though not very irksome in themselves, entirely break me up as a literary man."

⁵ *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 34-35. My quotations from *The Scarlet Letter* are from The Centenary Edition (The Ohio State University Press). *American* and *English Notebooks* quotations are from those edited by Randall Stewart. Quotations cited only by volume and page refer to the Autograph Edition.

⁶ Hawthorne's letter to Sophia, dated on April 13, 1840.

⁷ Cf. E. H. Davidson, *Hawthorne's Last Phase* (Anchor Book, 1967), pp. vii-xi.

an "inward" one as he stated in a letter to Sophia,⁸ those external explanations are not sufficient.

"Nathaniel Hawthorne proposes to publish by Subscription a New Edition of the Miseries of Authors, to which will be added a Sequel containing [sic] Facts [sic] and Remarks drawn from his own experience,"⁹ wrote Hawthorne in his handwritten journal, *The Spectator*. The tone was facetious. Undoubtedly it was impossible for a boy of sixteen to grasp the full meaning of what he was saying. And yet there was something of which young Hawthorne had a presage. When he wrote that famous imaginary conversation bandied between his great-grandfathers and himself in the introductory essay to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), he thoroughly understood what he had not been able to about thirty years before. It was the precarious position of the artist in New England in the first half of the nineteenth century where there still inveterately remained what Max Weber called "the Puritan Ethos" in its rather degenerate form combined with materialism. We may safely believe the following comment on the artist's position at that time by Henry James Jr., who had once been a member of much the same community himself.

[Hawthorne] was poor, he was solitary, and he undertook to devote himself to literature in a community in which the interest in literature was as yet of the smallest. It is not too much to say that even to the present day it is a considerable discomfort in the United States not to be "in business." The young man who attempts to launch himself in a career that does not belong to the so-called practical order; the young man who has not, in a word, an office in the business quarter of the town, with his name painted on the door, has but a limited place in the social system, finds no particular bough to perch upon.¹⁰

Hawthorne himself writes to the same purpose in one of his semi-autobiographical stories:

[My stepfather] insisted on my adopting a particular profession; while I... had avowed my purpose of keeping aloof from the regular business of life. This would have been a dangerous resolution anywhere in the world; it was fatal in New England. There is a grossness in the conception of my countrymen; they will not be convinced that any good thing may consist with what they call idleness; they can anticipate nothing but evil of a young man who neither studies physics, law, nor gospel, nor opens a store, nor takes to farming, but manifests an incomprehensible disposition to be satisfied with what his father left him. The principle is excellent in its general influence, but most miserable in its effect on the few that violate it.¹¹

Here I want to make it clear that I propose to proceed in this essay upon these two premises: first, Hawthorne was a Romantic artist, and second, in him there was the coexistence of the artist, the Puritan and the democrat. Of course it is not my contention that the inside of a man can be thus neatly divided into three parts, but this must be allowed here to distinguish the conflicting elements in Hawthorne whose character was so complicated.

⁸ A letter dated on Jan. 1, 1840.

⁹ Quoted from "Hawthorne's Spectator" edited by E. L. Chandler (*New England Quarterly*, April, 1931). The "w" in the spelling of the name was added after his graduation from Bowdoin College.

¹⁰ Henry James, *Hawthorne* (Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 24.

¹¹ "Passages from a Relinquished Work," IV, p. 125.

In order to have a clean conscience before devoting himself to literature in such a community as James and Hawthorne himself described with little exaggeration, the artist in Hawthorne had to persuade the Puritan and the democrat in him of the positive function of the literature. It is this trebel nature of his temperament and its tension as revealed in his works that makes Hawthorne so interesting to us. So let us consider the inner conflicts between the artist and the Puritan, and between the artist and the democrat more fully. Of course the two conflicts are interrelated, but for convenience' sake I shall treat them separately.

First, in order to silence the Puritan in him who was persistently asking, "A writer of story-books! What kind of a business in life,—what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation,—may that be?"¹² he "resolved at least to achieve a novel that should evolve some deep lesson."¹³ As he had been a lover of Spenser and Bunyan from his boyhood, it is quite natural that his work should have shown some inclination to allegory when he resolved thus.

The second problem is more complex. Hawthorne was one of those Romantics, poètes maudits, the possessors of "the imaginative faith," who can see what the ordinary cannot and to whom what is not real to the common is real. The surrogate of Hawthorne named P. in "P.'s Correspondence" says, "More and more I recognize that we dwell in a world of shadows; and, for my part, I hold it hardly worth the trouble to attempt a distinction between shadows in the mind and shadows out of it. If there be any difference, the former are rather the more substantial."¹⁴ But in the world full of evils and falsehoods, of materialists and skeptics such as Peter Hovenden in "The Artist of the Beautiful", those who are seers and seek after the truth which is so terrific to the common and a threat to the corrupted social order must necessarily be isolated from the society of which he is a part. That is one of the Romantic agonies almost all the contemporary artists experienced. Herman Melville wrote in his essay on Hawthorne:

Through the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, [Shakespeare] craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter or even hint of them....For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,—even though it be covertly and by snatches.¹⁵

It goes without saying that by Melville Hawthorne was counted among "other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth." Happy is he who is content to live in the lonely tower. Hawthorne was not, who was an earnest democrat and had a strong belief that man is a social being, as can be guessed from the following passage from *The Spectator*:

Man is naturally a sociable being; not formed for himself alone, but designed to bear a part in the great scheme of nature. All his pleasures are heightened, and all his griefs are lessened, by participation. It is only in Society that the full energy of his mind is

¹² *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 10.

¹³ "The Old Manse," IV, p. 4.

¹⁴ V, p. 174.

¹⁵ Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," *Complete Works* (Russell & Russell), XIII, pp. 130-31.

aroused, and all its powers drawn forth.¹⁶

He could not bear the stigmata of isolation on him. The democrat in Hawthorne ordered him to "address the intellect and sympathies of multitude."¹⁷ And when he tried to communicate to the world something—in most cases the ambiguity of good and evil—which he could not analyze but could grasp only the shadow of, he had recourse to the symbol which was the only possible expression of what he wanted to impart, as Charles Feidelson truly points out in his *Symbolism and American Literature*.¹⁸ Thus his works tend not only towards allegory but also towards symbolism. Most of his best works maintain the subtle equilibrium of symbolism and allegory, the loss of which led him to the disintegration as an artist in his last years.

To Hawthorne the fear of loneliness was a lifelong obsession. Even after he had established worldly fame, he was haunted by a strange dream.

"December 28th [1854].....I think I have been happier, this Christmas, than ever before—by our own fireside, and with my wife and children about me....For a long, long while, I have occasionally been visited with a singular dream; and I have an impression that I have dreamed it, even since I have been in England. It is, that I am still at college—or, sometimes, even at school—and there is a sense that I have been there unconscionably long, and have quite failed to make such progress in life as my contemporaries have; and I seem to meet some of them with a feeling of shame and depression that broods over me, when I think of it, even at this moment. This dream, recurring all through these twenty or thirty years, must be one of the effects of that heavy seclusion in which I shut myself up, for twelve years, after leaving college, when everybody moved onward and left me behind. How strange that it should come now, when I may call myself famous, and prosperous!—When I am happy, too!—still that same dream of life hopelessly a failure!¹⁹

In spite of its length I quote the passage for the sake of its importance. It clearly shows us that Hawthorne's loneliness-obsession was caused by his ambition as well as his democratic conscience. "P. had always had a hankering after literary reputation," says Hawthorne of one of his heroes and it was also true with the author himself. Of course an unruly ambition is dangerous because it is liable to make its possessor proud and the pride leads him to isolation. His reason telling him the danger, he repeatedly preached the vanity of worldly fame and earthly immortality, and praised the pastoral life integrated with his neighbors, with the masses, in such tales as "The Ambitious Guests" (1835), "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man" (1837), "The Threefold Destiny" (1838) and "The Great Stone Face" (1850). In spite of his head, his heart would still yearn after the fame. This ambivalence was made more complex by the Puritan strain in him. Puritans, whose sole destination was heaven, earnestly courted wealth and sought happiness in this world.²⁰ It was, as Perry Miller says, "a razor's edge, and the true Puritan was required to walk it. No wonder that some Puritan fell off

¹⁶ E. L. Chandler (ed.), "Hawthorne's Spectator."

¹⁷ "Rappaccini's Daughter," IV, p. 125.

¹⁸ Cf. Charles Feidelson Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature*, p. 9.

¹⁹ *English Notebooks*, p. 98.

²⁰ Cf. H. W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (Henry Holt, 1930), pp. 99-101.

to one side, becoming visionary idealists, while some fell to the other side, becoming hypocrites. Ultimately, another group gave up the struggle entirely, and become either John Wise or Benjamin Franklin."²¹ It may be worth remembering that Franklin was one of Hawthorne's favorites.²²

Enough has been said here of the paradoxes which form the central conflicts of Hawthorne's works. His tales were a secluded man's "attempts, and very imperfectly successful ones, to open an intercourse with the world,"²³ born of such a complex mental attitude. In present essay a couple of his stories are going to be discussed so that a light should be thrown on his ambivalence towards the artist's vision with reference to the symbolic use of the mirror-images.

II

Even though *A Wonder-Book* supplies us with an important clue to the central problem of Hawthorne, it seems to have been unduly neglected, perhaps because it was written for children only in a half month. But when Hawthorne wrote it in 1851, he was at the apex of his creative power and he was careful to the minutest detail. Before he set on it, he wrote to Fields, his publisher, that he meant to write a book of stories made up of classical myths, the subject of which would be "The Story of Mydas, with his Golden Touch; Pandora's Box; The Adventure of Hercules in Quest of the Golden Apples; Bellerophon and the Chimera; Baucis and Philemon; Perseus and Medusa."²⁴ When he published the book, he intentionally rearranged the order of the stories, putting "The Gorgon's Head" at the top, which he mentioned last and ending with "The Chimaera." The reason of the rearrangement will be touched upon later.

Even as early as in 1830, Hawthorne tried to write a series of stories, including such as "The Seven Vagabonds," "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," and "Passages from a Relinquished Work," told by an itinerant story-teller, "whose shiftings of fortune were to form the interludes and links between the separate stories."²⁵ The project could not gain full success partly because he could not find any publisher of such a group of tales and partly because his immaturity prevented him from giving the series an organic unity. But here in *A Wonder-Book* he introduced a student who "had won great fame among the children, as a narrator of wonderful stories" with a felicitous effect. The frame of the book, which consists of the sketches of merrymaking children with Eustace Bright in their center, is one of Hawthorne's best. It not only reproduces the happy atmosphere of the daily life of his own family at Lenox splendidly, but it explains the moral of the stories, and by that means the stories themselves are kept from being too didactic. The best example is "The Chimaera." The story is simple enough. *Tooke's Pantheon of the Heathen Gods and Illustrious Heroes*, which might be one of the sources for Hawthorne's knowledge of Greek mythology as a copy of it was in the Library of Athenaeum Society of which Hawthorne was a member in his Bow-

²¹ Peyry Miller, *The American Puritans* (Doubleday Anchor Book, 1956), p. 172.

²² Cf. "Benjamin Franklin" in his *Biographical Stories*.

²³ "Preface" to *Twice Told Tales*, I, p. iv.

²⁴ His letter dated on May 23, 1852.

²⁵ G. P. Lathrop, *A Study of Hawthorne* (J. R. Osgood, 1876), pp. 173-74.

doin College days,²⁶ states the myth as follows:

Bellerophon's first name was Hipponus; because he first taught the art of governing horses with a bridle: but when he had killed Bellerus, a king of Corinth, he was afterward called Bellerophontes. This Bellerophone, the son of Glaucus, king of Ephyra, was equally beautiful and virtuous: he resisted all the temptations by which Sthenobae, the wife of Praetus, enticed him to love her; and his repulses provoked her so, that in revenge she accused the innocent stranger to her husband. Praetus, however, would not violate the laws of hospitality with the blood of Bellerephon [*sic.*], but sent him into Lycia, to his father-in-law Jobates, with letters, which desired him to punish Bellerophon, as his crime deserved. Jobates read the letters, and sent him to fight against the Solymi, that he might be killed in the battle: but he easily vanquished them, and in many other dangers, to which he was exposed, he always came off conqueror. At last he was sent to kill the Chimaera: which he undertook, and performed, when he had procured the horse Pegasus, by the help of Neptune. Therefore Jobates, admiring the bravery of the youth, gave him also a part of his kingdom. Sthenobae killed herself when she heard this.

What a great difference there is between the above curt, unemotional, matter-of-fact statement and Hawthorne's emotive story! First of all he omitted Sthenobae's guilty love of his hero, so that children can read without suspicion of the dark side of the adult world. Second, he omitted classical names unfamiliar to children's ears except such indispensable ones as Bellerophon, Pegasus and Iobates. Instead he introduced the rustic people as a sort of chorus and a little boy who was the only person sympathetic with the hero. The introduction of the common people as chorus is a technique he had already used with success in "Ethan Brand," in *The Scarlet Letter* and in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).

[They] would often laugh at poor Bellerophon, and sometimes take him pretty severely to task. They told him that an able-bodied young man, like himself, ought to have better business than to be wasting his time in such an idle pursuit.²⁷

The hero was hardly understood by the world, as is usual in Hawthorne's work. Bellerophone did not give up the hope of catching Pegasus, though he

feared that he might grow an old man, and have no strength left in his arms nor courage in his heart, before the winged horse would appear. O, how heavily passes the time, while an adventurous youth is yearning to do his part in life, and to gather in the harvest of his renown! *How hard a lesson it is to wait! Our life is brief, and how much of it is spent in teaching us only this!*²⁸

²⁶ Cf. Norman Holmes Pearson, *The College Years of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, (an unpublished monograph which won H. H. Strong Prize at Yale University, 1932), Appendix D, "A Catalogue of Books in the Library of the Athenaeum Society of Bowdoin College." The next quotation is from *Tooke's Pantheon* (Maryland, 1820), pp. 253-4.

After I had written this article, I had a chance to read Hugo McPherson's *Hawthorne as Myth Maker* (University of Toronto Press, 1969). He mentions Charles Anthon's *Classical Dictionary* as a probable source. Though his argument is convincing, I do not think Anthon and Tooke are mutually contradictory but that they both can be the sources.

²⁷ XIII, p. 201.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205. Italics are mine.

Can't we read in the statement Hawthorne's own agonies of the days when he was waiting in the dismal, haunted chamber for the world to come to know him, since the last sentences are given in the present tense and the pronoun "our" is used? Or at least we may regard him as one of Hawthorne's artist heroes. To confirm our conviction, Hawthorne adds at the end of the tale: "In after years, that child took higher flights upon the aerial steed than ever did Bellerophone, and achieved more honorable deeds than his friend's victory over the Chimaera. For, gentle and tender as he was, he grew to be a mighty poet!"²⁹ Of course it is to preserve the integrity of the plot that he made the child a poet. Otherwise he must have called Bellerophon a poet. If so, the celestial horse he was trying to catch stands for the poet's soaring imagination. It is worth noticing here that he first caught sight of Pegasus on "the dimpling mirror of the fountain." As we shall see later again, in Hawthorne's context the mirror and fountain images are closely related to the function of imagination.³⁰ After taming the horse with the help of the enchanted bridle, he went to fight with the terrible Chimaera. Needless it is to follow the story any further. But I want to make only one point. Hawthorne more than once uses the epithet "the earth-born" for the monster. Thus the fight of Bellerophon on an airy steed against the Chimaera is interpreted to be symbolic of (1) the fight of the poet's heavenly imagination against worldliness and (2) heavenliness in man against earthliness. Both interpretations are right. In this tale the first elements gained a dramatic victory over the second. It was, however, a tentative one. The struggle between these elements went on in Hawthorne to the end of his life.

Another tale in *A Wonder-Book* which uses the mirror quite effectively is "The Gorgon's Head." This may be regarded as a variation of initiation stories which Hawthorne had used, for instance, in "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux" (1832), and was to adopt again in his last romance, *The Marble Faun*. The plot is simplified but does not deviate from the frame of the well-known myth.³¹ The hero Perseus was ordered by the wicked King Polydectes to bring Medusa's head, which nobody could see directly without being transformed into a stone. When he was at a loss how to carry out the order, Mercury, whom Hawthorne prefers to call Quicksilver, appeared as the initiator and gave him advice to "polish the shield till he could see his own face in it as distinctly as in a mirror." It will not be necessary to follow the famous story. At the climax Perseus looked at the reflection of Medusa's face in the mirror-like shield.

And there it was,—that terrible countenance,—mirrored in the brightness of the shield, with the moonlight falling over it, and displaying all its horror. The snakes, whose venomous natures could not altogether sleep, kept twisting themselves over the forehead.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

³⁰ As for the interpretation of Hawthorne's use of the mirror images, I owe much to Malcolm Cowley, "Hawthorne in the Looking Glass" (*Sewanee Review*, LVI, pp. 545-63.)

³¹ About Gorgons, *Tooke's Pantheon* gives the following comment:

To the three Harpies add the three Gorgons, Medusa, Stheno, and Euryale, who were the daughters of Phorcus and Cete. Instead of hair, their heads were covered with vipers, which so terrified the beholder, that they turned him presently into a stone... There were other Gorgons beside, born of the same parents, who were called Latiae, or Empusae. They had only one eye and one tooth, common to them all: they kept this tooth and eye at home in a little vessel, and whichever of them went abroad, she used them. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 247-48).

This description of Latiae or Empusae seems to contribute much to Hawthorne's invention of Three Gray Women in "The Gorgon's Head" and to afford the proof that the book was one of his sources.

It was the fiercest and most horrible face that ever was seen or imagined, *and yet with a strange, fearful, and savage kind of beauty in it.*³²

If we remember Hawthorne's characteristic use of mirror as a symbol of imagination in "The Chimaera," the Gorgon's head necessarily means ambiguous—at once ugly and yet beautiful—realities, which without the help of imagination no artist can cope with.

To Hawthorne what is real to others is often unreal and vice versa. The quicksilvered mirror often reveals him the hidden reality. The simplest example can be found in "Feathertop; A Moralized Legend" (1852). The titular hero was in reality nothing but a scarecrow given life by magic. He forgot what he was. Everybody took him for a fine gentleman. But when he looked at himself in the mirror, there was "not the glittering mockery of his outside show, but a picture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stripped of all witchcraft." Another example is in "Doctor Heidegger's Experiment" (1837). Three elderly gentlemen and an aged widow agreed to drink a magic potion prepared by their medical friend, Dr. Heidegger. They were seemingly restored to youth, and the three men, in wooing the widow whose beauty had been regained to their eyes, reacted all the foolishness of their youth, while the mirror in the room "reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grand-sires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam." The river seemed to have the same magical power to Hawthorne. He made the following entry in his *American Notebooks*:

[Sept 18th, 1842] ...I have never elsewhere had such an opportunity to observe how much more beautiful reflection is than what we call reality. The sky, and the clustering foliage on either hand, and the effect of sunlight as it found its way through the shade, giving lightsome hues in contrast with when beheld in upper air. But, on gazing downward, there they were, the same even to the minutest particular, yet arrayed in ideal beauty, which satisfied the spirit incomparably more than the actual scene. I am half convinced that the reflection is indeed reality,—the real thing which Nature imperfectly images to our grosser sense.

The use of mirror as a symbol of imagination is still more effective in the introductory essay in *The Scarlet Letter*:

Glancing at the looking-glass, we behold—deep within its haunted verge—the smouldering glow of the half-extinguished anthracite, the white moonbeams on the floor, and a repetition of all the gleam and shadow of the picture, with one remove further from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative.

The mirror sometimes serves even "as a kind of window or doorway into the spiritual world."³³ In Hawthorne's context, both dream and half-waking condition "when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; *when the imagination is a mirror*, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them"³⁴ also reveal the hidden truth. Therefore in Hawthorne the mirror and the dream have close relationship with each other. It is to be noted that Hermes, who taught the use of mirror to Perseus, is the god of dreams.

³² XIII, p. 36. Italics are mine.

³³ *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chap. XVIII.

³⁴ "The Haunted Mind" II, p. 96. Italics mine.

His name also reminds us of Hermes Trismegistus. Though Hermes in Greek mythology and Hermes Trismegistus called Thoth by Egyptians were different in their origin, they were confused later as Joseph Campbell explains:

During Hellenistic times an amalgamation of Hermes and Thoth was effected in the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, "Hermes Thrice Greatest," *who was regarded as the patron and teacher of all the arts and especially of alchemy*. The "hermetically" sealed retort, in which was placed the mystical metals, was regarded as a realm apart—a special region of heightened forces comparable to the mythological realm; and therein the metals underwent strange metamorphoses and transmutations, symbolical of the transfigurations of the soul under the tutelage of the supernatural. *Hermes was the master of the ancient mysteries of initiation*, and represented that coming-down of divine wisdom into the world which is represented also in the incarnations of divine saviors....³⁵

Considering the fact that many of Hawthorne's so-called artist heroes are, like Aylmer in "The Birthmark" (1843) and Rappaccini in "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844), the alchemists or the students of some magical power, the choice of Quicksilver-Hermes Trismegistus as the initiator seems the more reasonable. There is still another important point, of which Hawthorne might not be aware. He was one of those Romantics who unfortunately,—or I should rather say fortunately since the defiance against the age was the main spring of their artistic energy,—lived in the age of reason when science was regarded as superior to literature and even the *raison d'être* of literature itself was seriously doubted. As only one example among the many who, announcing the arrival of the age of reason, denied the value of literature, let us cite from Hobbes:

The world (I mean not the earth only, that dominates the lovers of it worldly men, but the "universe," that is, the whole mass of all things that are), is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions: and consequently every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is "nothing;" and consequently "nowhere."³⁶

Hobbes did not believe in anything but "the material and tangible" world. And so he always placed "judgement" above "fancy." His account of the creative process is as follows:

Time and Education begets Experience; Experience begets memory; Memory begets Judgement and Fancy: Judgement begets the strength and structure, and Fancy begets the ornaments of a Poem. The Ancients therefore fabled not absurdly in making memory the Mother of the Muses. For memory is the World (*though not really, yet so as in a looking glass*) in which the Judgement, the severer Sister, busieth her self in a grave and rigid examination of all the parts of Nature, and in registering by Letters their order, causes, uses, differences, and resemblances; Whereby the Fancy, when any work of Art is to be performed, finds her materials at hand and prepared for use, and needs no more

³⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Pantheon Book, 1949), p. 73, n. 31. Italics are mine.

³⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1837), chap. XLVI, p. 302.

than a swift motion over them, that what she wants, and is there to be hand, may not lie too long unespied.³⁷

Therefore "Fancy, without help of judgement" is dangerous and misleading, while judgement is commended for its own sake. Incidentally, it is worth remembering that his use of the word "looking-glass" is radically different from Hawthorne's. This difference indicates that of their sensibility. According to Hobbes:

To conclude, the light of human minds is perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; "reason" is the "pace;" increase of "science" the "way;" and the benefit of mankind, the "end." And, on the contrary, metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*; and reasoning upon them is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention and sedition, or contempt.³⁸

He stood on the same ground with Hawthorne's Puritan ancestors in that they both considered literature for literature's sake to be vain. What his cold mechanico-materialism destroyed was the organic union of head and heart, the unified sensibility, which the Romantics desperately tried to regain. When science was predominant over literature, men of letters were naturally inclined to resort to mysticism, occultism or even black magic, which they expected might reveal the hidden mysteries beyond the reach of science. One of Melville's heroes, Pierre, defied "the coarse materialism of Hobbes." Another hero, Captain Ahab, fought to the last against Leviathan. He frantically cried, when he tempered the harpoon for the White Whale, "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" and threw away the quadrant, the symbol of science. It goes without saying that one of the important schools of mysticism is the Hermetic tradition named after Hermes Trismegistus. Thus in many respects is it natural that Hawthorne should choose Hermes as the initiator in his stories dealing with the problem of the artist, which he consciously put at the beginning and the end so as to give a sort of frame to the book.

III

If we call "The Gorgon's Head" an initiation story, "Young Goodman Brown" written more than twenty years before may be termed an anti-initiation story. It begins with the scene where the titular hero left his pretty young wife symbolically named Faith, in spite of her petition to put off his journey until sunrise, thinking:

"What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done to-night. But no, no; 't would kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."³⁹

³⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Answer to Davenant* (London, 1650), quoted from Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background* (London, 1962), p. 195. Italics mine.

³⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. V, p. 30.

³⁹ IV, p. 103.

This paragraph decides the whole tone of the story; the nightmarish atmosphere and Brown's guilty feeling towards his errand. As for the last sentence, if we read the story only on the level of allegory, clinging to his faith is surely the best way to heaven. She is, however, not a mere symbol for faith but a real woman with the pink ribbons. On this level, the image evoked by the expression "cling to her skirts to heaven" is stragely sexual, for "heaven" traditionally means the ecstasy of physical union. The author's reference to the fact that Brown and Faith had been married only three months strengthens the impression. "With this excellent resolves for the future," continues Hawthorne, "Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose." Apparently the word "excellent" is used ironically. Noticing this irony, we cannot help suspecting many layers of meaning in the appellation "Goodman," too: (1) it is ironically applied to a man who is hastening on an evil errand, and (2) according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word is a title added to the surname of yeoman "amongst their neighbours,...not in matters of importance or in law," as well as (3) it meant, in its archaic sense, "the master of household."⁴⁰ The total implication may, together with the facts that his first name is never mentioned and that he was newly wedded, be as follows; Goodman Brown stands for the Puritan Every Man who will have to go through his initiation into community through marriage and who has his own share of the original sin. This appellation is repeatedly used in order to intensify the ironical tone.

Incidentally, it may be worth noting here that after the first description of Brown's state of mind quoted above, Hawthorne freely goes inside and outside of his mind, achieving a double vision, namely, the Puritanical seventeenth-century point of view and that of nineteenth century. He intentionally made the distinction of these two views ambiguous, because if he had adopted only the first one, the nineteenth-century readers would not have been convinced of the reality of the story. Daniel G. Hoffman explains thus:

The source of that balance between Hawthorne's clarity of design and ambiguity of meaning...lies in his capacity to present the world of his Puritan forebears through a simultaneous double-exposure. We see old Salem both as they saw it, accepting their values, and as it appears from Hawthorne's very different view. Thus the Puritan values function both as absolutes (to the characters) and as one of several possible choices offered to the reader.⁴¹

Owing to this double vision, it is not certain who judged Brown's present purpose evil. Was it Hawthorne or Brown? I should like to read that it was wrong from the hero's point of view. If the author gave his judgement here, the central ambiguity of the tale would be half lost. To the Puritans of the seventeenth century, the forest was a dangerous place which the devil and the Indians haunted. It was a great sin for them to go to "the heathen wilderness" at night. What was it, then, that induced Brown to dare the dangers? It can be inferred that he had not intended to see the devil, for he said to himself, glancing fearfully behind him, "What if the devil himself should be at my elbow!" Talk of the devil and he will appear. He found a man in grave and decent attire under an old tree. When he was

⁴⁰ Cf. E. A. Robinson, "The Vision of Goodman Brown: A Source and Interpretation," *American Literature*, XXXV (May 1963), p. 219.

⁴¹ Daniel G. Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Literature*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 153.

spoken to by this stranger,

"Faith kept me back a while," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, *though not wholly unexpected*.⁴²

His answer should be interpreted allegorically as well as literally. The italicized part indicates that Brown came here to see the stranger, though he did not know his identity. Nor does Hawthorne make it clear who the stranger was. He has been interpreted as the devil and there are quite a few evidences to support the interpretation. I will quote here only two of them.

So saying, he threw [his staff] down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian magi.⁴³

"Lo, there ye stand, my children," said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race.⁴⁴

It seems to me, however, that another figure is found in the stranger. Let us closely examine the description when Brown first saw him.

As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveller was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger, as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world...But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light.⁴⁵

Nobody seems to have paid due attention to the stranger's staff, except Fogle, who comments as follows:

Hawthorne may have taken this suggestion from the serpent-staff of Mercury. He later uses it for lighter purposes on at least two occasions in *A Wonder-Book*. Mercury's staff is described by Epimetheus as "like two serpents twisting around a stick, and...carved so naturally that I, at first, thought the serpent were alive" ("The paradise of Children"). Again, in "The Miraculous Pitcher," "Two snakes, carved in the wood, were represented as twining themselves about the staff, and were so very skilfully executed that old Philemon (whose eyes, you know, were getting rather dim) almost thought them alive, and that he could see them wriggling and twisting."⁴⁶

Fogle is, I believe, right in his suggestion. What strengthens our conviction is the fact that

⁴² IV, p. 105. Italics are mine.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 110. Cf. *Exodus*, vii, 10-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

⁴⁶ R. H. Fogle, "Ambiguity and Clarity in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown'," *New England Quarterly*, XVIII (Dec., 1943), p. 449, n. 4.

the description of "he evidently knew the world" is also applied to Quicksilver in "The Gorgon's Head." It is true that the most well-known shape of the caduceus or the kerukeion is a stick with two serpents twining each other, while the staff carried by the stranger had only one black snake. According to the study of F.J.M. de Waele,⁴⁷ however, it is of no importance whether the number of the serpent is one or two. What matters is that the magical power has been traditionally attached to the staffs of some special shapes. Hermes is a god of dream, whose caduceus has a somniferous force. It may not be impossible to find in this fact the answer to the question at the end of the story: "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting?" But it is not necessary to limit the range of our interpretation.

Hermes is, according to Waele, also regarded as a ruler of the necromancers or the conjurers of the spirits,⁴⁸ since one of his functions is to carry the soul away to Hades. So we need not be surprised when we find him at the center of the sabbath where there were the dead such as Brown's own parents. What was the purpose of this sabbath? The answer can be found at the least in the two different contexts, that is, in the context of the folk rituals and in that of the story dealing with Puritan Every Man's initiation. These two are at their deep level closely interrelated. The initiation ceremony consisted of the participation in the ritual held by the members of the community and directed by the priests or witches who were supposed to have magical power. The most important ritual was more often than not the one praying for fertility, and so was linked with sexuality.

The association of witchcraft itself with sexuality, debauchery, and carnal abandon is an aspect of popular tradition of which Hawthorne shows his empathetic understanding. The evidence of modern anthropological scholarship strongly suggests that witchcraft perpetuated the same fertility cult religion which survived also in the folk ritual observing the seasonal festivals.⁴⁹

Brown and Faith had to take part in the ritual, in order that they might be admitted as members, now that they had newly got married and won the qualification as such. Goody Cloyse's words "they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion to-night," and Deacon Gookin's "there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion" suggest that the ritual of the night was solely intended for this newly wedded couple, and in this respect was radically different from the traditionally believed witches' sabbath such as Walpurgisnacht. Hermes-the devil was the initiator. The fact that Hermes was worshipped as a god of fertility may be worth remembering here.⁵⁰

It is interesting that we can find a figure reminding us of Hermes in "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux" (1832), another tale of nightmarish atmosphere. He is an initiator of the hero named Robin, for he gave the hint by which Robin could find the identity of Major Molineaux and won his spiritual independence. He said to the hero:

"Watch here an hour, and Major Molineaux will pass by"....Robin gazed with dismay and astonishment on the unprecedented physiognomy of the speaker. The forehead with

⁴⁷ Cf. F. J. M. de Wael, *The Magic Staff or Rod in Graeco-Italian Antiquity* (The Hague, 1927), pp. 33-38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁹ Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁵⁰ Waele, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

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 midnight, the division line being in the broad bridge of the nose....⁶¹

Hawthorne may have taken this description from the following portrayal of Hermes in *Tooke's Pantheon*:

His face is partly black and dark, and partly clear and bright; because sometimes he converses with the celestial, and sometimes with the infernal gods.⁶²

I am not insisting that the mysterious stranger should be solely interpreted as Hermes. What I want to say is that in Hawthorne's fiction there always is the possibility of more than one interpretations.

Shakespeare has surface beneath surface, to an immeasurable depth, adapted to the plummetline of every reader; his works present many phases of truth, each with scope large enough to fill a contemplative mind. Whatever you seek in him you will surely discover, provided you seek truth. There is no exhausting the various interpretation of his symbols....⁶³

The above remark of his about Shakespeare is the best comment upon his own work.

We shall meet with a person with a serpent-staff once more in the forest near the Blithedale. The narrator Coverdale saw Professor Westervelt. "He carried a stick with a wooden head, carved in vivid imitation of a serpent." Obviously Westervelt has no association with Hermes. He stands closer to the devil.

Now to return to Goodman Brown. As we have seen, he had had an evil purpose in his mind before he met with the stranger. He tried to resist what he thought was the temptation to evil. But his effort was in vain. He was gradually tempted deeper and deeper into the forest by the cunning arguments of the stranger, which "seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor than to be suggested by himself." Hawthorne intentionally equivocates here by the use of the verb "seemed", leaving it uncertain whether it was the stranger or the evil in Brown that led him to the sabbath, because, if we were assured that it was the stranger that took him into the heart of darkness, there would be no moral responsibility on Brown's part and this would be a mere story of an unfortunate youth defeated by the devil's trick, while if it were nothing but the evilness originally existent in him, the scene where there is depicted his shock of recognition of the prevalent evil among mankind would completely lose its power. If the stranger was Hermes and all that Brown saw was nothing but a dream, there still remains the possibility of two interpretations. He may have dreamed "a wild dream of witch-meeting" because of the destructive element in him. Or Hermes may have shown him the dark truth in the dream. Or the stranger may have been—we may go even thus far—Brown's id. Metaphorically speaking, Brown may have been just looking at himself in the mirror. The facts that the stranger bore a considerable resemblance

⁶¹ III, p. 310.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶³ *Our Old Home*, XI, p. 152.

to Brown and that the stranger's arguments seemed rather to spring up in his bosom support this interpretation. Whoever the stranger may have been, he gradually took Brown's faith away from him. The process requires close examination. When the hero tried to resist the temptation, mentioning his pious father and grandfather, the stranger answered:

"Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake."⁵⁴

Thus Brown was deprived of his belief in the righteousness of his family. A second step was to make him lose his faith in those whom he had respected, Goody Cloyse, Deacon Gookin and the minister. It is not necessary to discuss here whether Brown really saw them or they were mere spectral evidences as David Levin insists.⁵⁵ Brown barely resisted by crying, "With heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" No sooner had he shouted thus; he heard a confused and doubtful sound of voices among which it seemed to him that he heard the sound of his wife's voice, and he found the crushing evidence of the pink ribbon on the branch of a tree. Faith had been his last resource. Now crying, "My Faith is gone,"—this should again be interpreted on two levels—he rushed onward "with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil." Hawthorne never forgets to point out the evil lurking in Brown's heart. The final and fatal stroke for him was to attend the sabbath and realize that evil was the nature of mankind. Among the congregation he found a veiled woman whom he dimly discerned to be his wife. The two were welcomed by the dark and ambiguous leader, the devil-Hermes, into the fraternity of Evil.

A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own.

And then he saw a strange sight that "the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints." He himself felt "a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart." After this sad experience he was ruined. He became "a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man." The story is concluded with the gloomy death of the hero.

It has often been said about this story that its moral is the danger of believing in the universality of evil.⁵⁶ It must be admitted that the author preaches the danger of such a belief in *The Scarlet Letter*. The Puritans' mercilessness, together with the solitary anguish

⁵⁴ IV, p. 106.

⁵⁵ David Levin, "Shadows of Doubt: Specter Evidence in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown'," *American Literature*, XXIV (Nov. 1962), pp. 344-352.

⁵⁶ For example, W. B. Stein, *Hawthorne's Faust: A Study of the Devil Archetype* (University of Florida Press, 1953), pp. 61-63.

of Hester's life and the sympathetic power of the scarlet talisman, drove her so far as to believe that those who looked pure and innocent were as sinful as herself. After describing this miserable state of mind, Hawthorne explains:

O Fiend, whose talisman was that fatal symbol, wouldst thou leave nothing, whether in youth or age, for this poor sinner to revere?—Such loss of faith is ever one of the saddest results of sin. Be it accepted as a proof that all was not corrupt in this poor victim of her own frailty, and man's hard law, that Hester Prynne yet struggled to believe that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself.⁵⁷

And yet the concept of innate depravity was what Hawthorne inherited from his Puritan ancestors. Though he sometimes intentionally refuted the idea, it was too deeply rooted in his unconscious to eradicate. At the end of a sketch titled "Fancy's Show Box" (1837), he writes:

Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest, since, though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity.⁵⁸

Therefore the sabbath was a happy chance given to Brown to acquire the vision and to realize the reality, sad as it is, of human nature. The basin in the rock was not only the baptistery but the symbol of imagination, just as the Fountain of Pirene was in "Chimaera." Hawthorne himself must have been as shocked as Brown when he knew the fact that his ancestors, William and John Hathorne, committed the sins as hideous as Brown's forefathers'. But he did not flinch from the truth. He willingly acknowledged it and wrote those famous passages in "The Custom House" essay. Or I should rather say that he acknowledged the sinfulness of mankind, including his Puritan ancestors, and wrote for the expiation of their sins and his own, for he could not deny his kinship with them. In the sketch titled "Main Street" (1849), he again described the sin of the founder of his family against the Quakers.

[The constable] loves his business, faithful officer that he is, and puts his soul into every stroke, zealous to fulfil the injunction of Major Hawthorne's warrant, in the spirit and the letter. There came down a stroke that has drawn blood!... The crimson trail goes wavering along the Main Street; but Heaven grant that, as the rain of so many years has wept upon it, time after time, and washed it all away, so there may have been a dew of mercy to cleanse this cruel blood-stain out of the record of the persecutor's life!⁵⁹

The name is intentionally spelled as Hawthorne with "w" here so as to acknowledge his own concern with the sin, for he used the historically correct "Hathorne" when he referred to the fact in *American Notebooks*.⁶⁰

Now we must answer the question why Brown failed while Hawthorne did not. The experience of the night was indeed a rare opportunity for initiation into the mystery of sin. Brown stumbled upon it because he could not admit his own sinfulness nor accept his brotherhood with other sinners, just like Richard Digby in "The Man of Adamant" (1837). Brown's self-justification is repeatedly suggested. At the start of his journey into the forest, he said

⁵⁷ *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 87.

⁵⁸ I, p. 306.

⁵⁹ III, p. 94.

⁶⁰ Cf. *American Notebooks*, pp. 26-27.

to himself that he would not make such an errand again, and "felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose." When he tried to resist the stranger's argument, he answered, "We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness." After the stranger disappeared into the gloom, he sat "a few moments by the roadside, applauding himself greatly" for his resistance against the temptation. Even after he was forced to recognize at the sabbath his brotherhood with the sinners in wickedness, the existence of which in himself he had vaguely noticed at the beginning of the journey, he did not throw his self-righteousness away. The next morning when he saw Goody Cloyse catechising a little girl, he snatched the child away. From the bosom of his Faith he often shrank at midnight, which means he could not believe the dearest any longer and that he had lost his faith in humanity.

What is the purpose of evil in this world was a lifelong problem to Hawthorne. In his last romance he would develop the theory of *felix culpa* in a more elaborate form. At this stage of the development of his speculation on the subject, he seemed to get his answer from St. Paul's text: "There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (*Romans*, III, 22-23). Therefore it was a crucial point to him whether one could get the power of sympathy for the sinners and acknowledge one's own brotherhood with them through the agonies of sin, or shrank from the hideousness of one's own sin projected upon others and became isolated from the community. Goodman Brown failed in the test. Though he thought at the beginning of the tale that he would cling to Faith's skirts and follow her to heaven, at the end he shrank from her bosom as we have seen.

We have examined the relationship between Hawthorne's view of vision and his isolation-obsession. Before we leave "Young Goodman Brown," we had better cast a glance at another phase of his work. In Hawthorne the artist's imaginative power is quite subtly but indissolubly associated with sexuality. Brown's initiation into the mystery of evil was done through his knowledge of flesh. Every man must know what woman is before he attains true maturity. When he has carnal knowledge for the first time, he realizes that everybody has the same secret and that he was born as the result of his own parents' sin. This is a shock of recognition. It is the very reason why Brown saw his parents at the sabbath. D.G. Hoffman's following explanation is convincing.

Young Goodman's bitter rejection of Faith after his return to the "real" world supports the inference that it was through his knowledge of her that he made acquaintance with the Black Man in the first place. He is reliving the Puritan allegory of the Fall, in which woman...is "that sex which requireth the stricter discipline." But if woman is the agent of the Fall, for Young Goodman Brown that Fall is anything but fortunate, for it fails to prepare the way for his salvation.

The forbidden knowledge, then, is sexual knowledge and its attendant guilt. Its possession forces Brown to recognize that all the antecedent generation of his name have also sinned as he has sinned. If the procreative act is sinful, then all mankind is indeed knit together in the Devil's skein: "Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness."⁶¹

All mankind is unhelpfully sinful on condition that *all* the procreative act is sinful. The act is, however, not sinful when it is accompanied with the faith and real love. I used the

⁶¹ D.G. Hogman, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

words "his own parents' sin" but they were used from Brown's point of view. What is sexual does not necessarily mean sinfulness, nor woman should always be regarded as a daughter of Eve, the agent of the Fall. To know what woman is means the understanding of the complexity of woman who is sinful—for nobody is immune from the evil because of the original sin from Hawthorne's view point—and at the same time blessed. Aylmer in "The Birthmark" and Giovanni in "The Rappaccini's Daughter" are, among others, brothers of Brown. The complexity of woman is symbolical of the complexity of experience. They failed to apprehend the one as well as the other. How to evaluate the actual complexity of experience and how to comprehend the various aspects of it in terms of the power of imagination and the plight of isolation is Hawthorne's recurrent theme, which shall be examined in my future essay.

V

Hawthorne wrote not a few other stories whose subject is in a broad sense the problem of artist. To make my argument clearer, I want to skim over some of them within the space permitted.

It is in "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1844) that Hawthorne most clearly expounds his fundamental belief in the so-called art for art's sake. The protagonist is Owen Warland, the watchmaker. Since his childhood he had been remarkable for a most delicate ingenuity which he would not exercise for anything but satisfying his sense of beauty. His relatives bound him apprentice to a watchmaker Peter Hovenden in order to put his strange ingenuity to "utilitarian purpose." But he disappointed all including his master, for he despised his profession. He believed in the beautiful and wished to embody the pure idea of it in the form of an artificial butterfly. His aspiration was understood by nobody. Thus he necessarily became an isolato in Melville's word.

He must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against mankind and be his own sole disciple, both as respects his genius and the objects to which it is directed.⁶²

It is a hard lot to be a seer, to possess the perception uncredited by the masses. Owen had to undergo various ordeals before he finally realized his desire. He was forced to combat first with Robert Danforth the blacksmith, warm-hearted but representing the earthly, utilitarian spirit and commonsense, and then with his old master, Peter Hovenden, standing for materialism, the disbelief in the beautiful and "cold unimaginative sagacity, by contact with which everything [is] converted into a dream except the densest matter of the physical world." Owen was defeated by each of them, and was thrown into despair twice, for whenever he met them his passion for the beautiful suddenly seemed vain and idle to him. When he recovered his spirits and resumed his task, there came a third trial. This time the cause of his depression was in himself, as it was his self-delusion that plunged him into the deepest despair. He had deceived himself, dreaming that Annie, Peter's daughter, would be his companion and give him sympathy he had been yearning so much for. She disappointed him for she lacked the talisman to share his vision with him. He forgot the stern truth that the

⁶² V, pp. 299-300.

genuine artist must be an isolato so long as he remains as such, and that the only way of communication with the world left to him is through his work. Each time he failed, he collapsed into depression, losing "his faith in the invisible." It is ironically depicted that people acknowledged his merits when he applied himself to his trade. But the innate tendency of his soul drove him the other way. In the end he overcame all the trials and accomplished the task he was created for. It was a butterfly in whose beauty was represented "the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful!" Was it understood by others? Watching it, Danforth said, "That goes beyond me, I confess. But what then? There is more real use in one down-right blow of my sledge hammer than in the whole five years' labor that our friend Owen has wasted on this butterfly." With all her sympathy with Warland, Annie betrayed a secret scorn. It is no wonder that she, who had chosen the blacksmith for her husband, should have put the practical above the beautiful. Even their child, the representative of the generations to come, grasped at the butterfly and crushed it in his hand. But this time Owen was not distressed at all. The story ends with the eulogy of what Owen achieved.

And as for Owen Warland, he looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life's labor, and which was yet no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.⁶⁸

Hawthorne apparently sets art for art's sake before the utilitarianism or, I should say, art for life's sake. But it turns out not to be so simple when we remember such remarks of his as "On this theme methinks I could frame a tale with a deep moral,"⁶⁴ or "I write the book for the sake of its moral."⁶⁵ Cannot we hear the curse of his Puritan ancestors there? Even in this very tale the theme of which is the affirmation of art for art's sake, is he not didactic enough to state the moral in the above quotation? If we remark the fact that he never makes little of the utility of his art, how we should evaluate Robert Danforth comes into question. Of the two who were opposed to Owen, Hawthorne is severely critical of Peter Hovenden who not only showed utter disbelief in the beautiful but always exerted a destructive influence upon the artist's efforts. Of course it is not my contention to say Hawthorne has nothing of Peter Hovenden. He is symbolical of understanding without humanity in Hawthorne, which aspect he consciously wants to suppress. As regards Danforth, it is without doubt that the author feels good-will toward this hearty fellow. Owen's high aspiration was beyond him, but he was not inimical to the artist unlike his father-in-law. As a blacksmith he contributed to the society of which he was a respectable member, and would live happy ever after with his family. Seeing that this tale was published hardly more than two years after the author had entered into happy matrimony, we may safely conclude that Danforth is Hawthorne's alter ego as well as Hovenden. The hero's struggle with them is that which was being fought in Hawthorne about at that time.

To return to Owen, it is to be noted that he "altogether forgot or despised the grand object of a watchmaker's business, and cared no more for the measurement of time than if

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁶⁴ "Sketches from Memory," V, p. 262.

⁶⁵ "Passages from a Relinquished Work," V, p. 234.

it had been merged into eternity." To be an artist is to see eternity and to symbolize or to solidify it in the form of the work of art. Thus he is a rebel against Father Time, which means that he revolts against history which is the accumulation of time, and against society which is the shadow of history cast upon the present. No wonder that Owen seemed morbid to the world,⁶⁶ and that he became an isolato when he ceased to be a watchmaker.

Almost all the artist-heroes in Hawthorne are inheritors of the occult tradition. What they create—the symbols by means of which they express their ideal—have some magical power. The butterfly Owen created seemed magical to the common. Owen's was white magic. But in the case of the painter of "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837), his art seems much more sinister. In this tale the problem of the utility of the artist does not come to the front, because the hero was highly estimated and his pictures were much in demand. In spite of his popularity, he was not happy. He was cursed by his own vision.

Like all other men around whom an engrossing purpose wreathes itself, he was insulated from the mass of human kind. He had no aim—no pleasure—no sympathies—but what were ultimately connected with his art. Though gentle in manner and upright in intent and action, he did not possess kindly feelings; his heart was cold; no living creature could be brought near enough to keep him warm....It is not good for man to cherish a solitary ambition. Unless there be those around him by whose example he may regulate himself, his thoughts, desires, and hopes will become extravagant, and he the semblance, perhaps the reality, of a madman.⁶⁷

The above passage offers the best approach to this tale. The painter devoted himself to the art, which was magical. His pictures were transformed mirrors that prophesied the fates of the sitters.⁶⁸ He was endowed with vision which was not only a blessing, enabling him to perceive the discrepancy between appearance and reality, but also a curse making him cold-hearted enough to regard others as the mere objects of his art. He confessed to Elinor, one of his sitters:

"Madam...in both these pictures, I have painted what I saw. The artist—the true artist—must look beneath the exterior. It is his gift—his proudest, but often a melancholy one—to see the inmost soul, and, by a power indefinable even to himself, to make it glow or darken upon the canvas, in glances that express the thought and sentiment of years.

Though he was cursed, he was unpunished, because he recognized the fact that his vision was "a melancholy" gift.

⁶⁶ The genius seems, or rather I should say *is*, morbid to the common. Hawthorne knew it well when he wrote in *Our Old Home*:

[He] was a man of genius; and genius...is usually a symptom of a lack of balance in the general making-up of the character... how often [great poets'] lives have been darkened by insanity. (XI, p. 340)

⁶⁷ I, pp. 240-43.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

Nothing, in the whole circle of human vanities, takes stronger hold of the imagination than this affair of having a portrait painted. Yet why should it be so? The looking-glass, the polished globes of the andirons, the mirror-like water, and all other reflecting surfaces, continually present us with portraits, or rather ghosts of ourselves, which we glance at, and straightway forget them.

The next quotation is from the same story, p. 202.

"The Prophetic Pictures" falls far short of "The Artist of the Beautiful." While in the latter the thematic unity is complete, in the former the author's interest is divided into two; the artist's isolation and the realization of what the pictures prophesied. This shortcoming is due to the author's immaturity. "The Prophetic Pictures" was published seven years before "The Artist of the Beautiful."

Hawthorne who calls himself "a student of human nature" finds in himself the morbid interest in looking into others' heart. That interest may more and more dehumanize him and drive him into isolation. To dissuade himself from that danger he writes "Ethan Brand" (1851). Though the hero is not called an artist anywhere in the tale, it is obvious that he belongs to the genealogy of Hawthorne's cursed artists. His surname suggests the fact that he bears the stigmata of vision. He left his limekiln eighteen years ago, with "love and sympathy for mankind," looking for the Unpardonable Sin so as to make mankind happier. His intention was apparently good. But let us look into a little lower layer and his fatal flaw will be revealed. It was his pride that urged him into the search after the Unpardonable Sin. He had been, therefore, seeking for what in reality was in himself just like the dog chasing after his own tail. Meantime the idea that possessed him had operated as a means of education, developing his intellect vastly, so that the counterpoise between his mind and heart was lost.⁶⁹ He had been too earnest in the search of the Sin. This overruling purpose, together with his pride, had thoroughly dehumanized him when he returned to his limekiln.

He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study.⁷⁰

It cannot be denied that Ethan was a villain. That he had committed abominable crimes is darkly hinted at. But he was, on the other hand, a Marlovian hero driven by his *libido sciendi*. Standing alone on a starlit eminence, he could not bear contact with low and vulgar modes of thought and feeling. He was quite beyond other villagers except little Joe, who is, like the little boy in "The Chimaera," Hawthorne's ideal. While Brand is a cold observer, violating the sanctity of human heart, Joe apprehends it "as well by tact of sympathy as by the light of observation."

Taking up "The Prophetic Pictures" and "Ethan Brand", we have taken into consideration the fate of the perverted artist whose objects of observation are other than himself. Another danger awaits him when he is too introversive. Shutting himself off from the world, he

⁶⁹ I have received some hints for this interpretation from Fogle, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark*. Hawthorne always insists upon the necessity for us to keep a proper balance between intellect and feeling. Though he warns us against the danger of the lack of personal sympathy in "Ethan Brand" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," he considers it a risky thing as well to lose our reason and place too much confidence in our heart, as can be inferred from the following statement.

The heart, the heart,—there was the little yet boundless sphere wherein existed the original wrong of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types. ("Earth's Holocaust," V, pp. 227-8).

⁷⁰ III, p. 135.

dwells so long among what are fantasies to the common that the relation between appearance and reality is often inverted. It may be happy for the artist to be able to look beneath the exterior with the help of his vision, but when he forgets what he sees is *beneath* the surface, when he insists that what seems real to others is only appearance, not reality, he will never be understood. (I used the expression "what seems real" but maybe I should have said "what *is* real" instead.) What is still worse, he often loses confidence in his own ability to distinguish what is real and unreal, since he is isolated from others by whose example he may regulate himself. The hero in "The Devil in Manuscript" (1835) cries, burning his age-long works:

"You cannot conceive what an effect the composition of these tales had had on me.... I am surrounding myself with shadows, which bewilder me, by aping the realities of life. They have drawn me aside from the beaten path of the world, and led me into a strange sort of solitude,—solitude in the midst of men,—where nobody wishes for what I do, nor thinks nor feels as I do. The tales have done all this."⁷¹

The tone of his words is complex, with self-mockery, attachment to what his imagination has produced, and the longing for the communication. There is a world of meaning in such an expression as "solid reputation."

The devil in the manuscript is nothing but the symbol of his vision and so is the devil-Hermes in "Young Goodman Brown." He stands for the power of imagination which is a bliss as we have seen in "The Gorgon's Head" and "Chimaera" and yet is threatening to destroy the happiness of the artist as is the case with Goodman Brown. When we try to understand Hawthorne's romances, we are to be reminded of the fact that Hermes' "face is partly black and dark, and partly clear and bright." The very fact that Hawthorne saw the dark face of Hermes was in a sense ominous to him. It indicates that he was afraid of the vision even though he was enchanted by it, and foretells that the democrat and the artist would conquer the artist in him in the future.

To escape the danger of being too fantastic or too shadowy, the artist must reflect on himself objectively. Hawthorne writes in his *American Notebooks*:

[July 13, 1838] A perception, for a moment, of one's eventual and moral self, as if it were another person,—the observant faculty being separated, and looking intently at the qualities of the character. There is a surprise when this happens,—this getting out of one's self—and then the observer sees how queer a fellow he is.

The best way to find one's own identity is to look into the glass. In Hawthorne even "the polished globes of the andirons, the mirror-like water, and all other reflecting surfaces"⁷² present us our portraits. Thus mirrors again play a crucial symbolic rôle and it is a dangerous one, for although they multiply vision and drive it inward, they are inclined to shut it off from the outside. Hawthorne was always haunted with the image of Narcissus. Living in isolation, the artist must ever face with the peril of becoming an egotist. In order to objectify and exorcise it, Hawthorne wrote "Egotism, or, the Bosom Serpent" (1843), which deals with Roderick Elliston, the snake-possessed. He became an egotist because he had always been made conscious of his self by the torture of the serpent

⁷¹ III, pp. 241-2.

⁷² "Monsieur du Mirroir," I, pp. 232-3.

in his bosom. The serpent had come from an innocent-looking *mirror-like fountain*. In course of time he came to take ambivalent attitude toward the world. On the one hand, priding himself on being marked out from the ordinary people by the possession of the snake, he became an isolato. On the other hand human nature in him still yearned for fellowship, and this yearning urged him to seek out his own disease in every breast. Unsparingly exposing the sins hidden in others' breast, he violated the customs and prejudices of the society. What was the result of it?

Strange spectacle in human life where it is the instinctive effort of one and all to hide those sad realities, and leave them undisturbed beneath a heap of superficial topics which constitute the materials of intercourse between man and man! It was not to be tolerated that Roderick Elliston should break through the tacit compact by which the world has done its best to secure repose without relinquishing evil.⁷³

He was regarded as a dangerous person and was compulsorily sent into a lunatic asylum, only to be released again, for his confinement operated so unfavorably upon him.

When he was asked whether there was any remedy for his illness by his only one loyal friend, Roderick answered with anguish, "Could I for one instant forget myself, the serpent might not abide within me. It is my diseased self-contemplation that has engendered and nourished him." The serpent of egotism had almost completely transformed him into its own shape, when he was released from the hell of egocentricity by the love of his wife Rosina. To Hawthorne who himself had once been an isolato and gone through all sorts of agonies and dangers incident to the solitary life before his marriage with Sophia in 1842, and who once wrote to Longfellow, "I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing, nor dreamed what sort of life I was going to lead. I have made a captive of myself and put me into a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out,"⁷⁴ love was the key at last he could find to let himself out from the dungeon of egotism. It was his firm belief that we all were but shadows to others till we ceased to be egocentric and could feel selfless love.⁷⁵ His famous letter to Sophia should be read in this connection:

Thou only hast revealed me to myself; for without thy aid, my best knowledge of myself would have been merely to know my own shadow—to watch it flickering on the wall, and mistake its fantasies for my own real actions. Indeed, we are but shadows—we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream—till the heart is touched. That touch creates us—then we begin to be—thereby we are beings of reality, and inheritors of eternity.⁷⁶

⁷³ V, p. 46.

⁷⁴ To Longfellow, June 4, 1837.

⁷⁵ "The Christmas Banquet" deals with the same theme and is given the same subtitle "From the Unpublished 'Allegories of the Heart'" as the "Egotism." So we may safely identify the story-teller called Roderick in this tale with the hero whose agonies we have just seen. He is now happy with Rosina and tells her a story with a moral which his "former sad experience" has taught him. The hero of the story Gervase Hastings is, though apparently happy, the most miserable in the world, for he can never feel sympathy with others. He cries with sorrow: "Men pass before me like shadows on the wall; their actions, passions, feelings are flickerings of the light, and then they vanish! Neither the corpse, nor yonder skelton, nor this old woman's everlasting tremor, can give me what I seek." (V, pp. 76-77).

⁷⁶ To Sophia Peabody, Oct., 4, 1840.

He thus chanted hymns to love, going so far as to compare himself and Sophia to Adam and Eve.⁷⁷ The conjugal affection is indeed the first step and necessary condition for us to live a real life. Can we, however, live by love of each other alone? We might if we should be able to return to the prelapsarian condition. But we cannot return, as "In Adam's fall/ We sinned all" says *The New England Primer* which must have been deeply impressed on Hawthorne's mind.⁷⁸ Even when we could return or believed we could, such a state is transient. We are not alone in the Garden of Eden. We cannot remain amoral forever. Sooner or later we unavoidably confront the community, which provides experience. The democrat in Hawthorne asserted that we should participate in the world's joys and sorrows of our own accord. But the deeper was he immersed in the community, the more dangerous the vision seemed to him, while his desire to have communication with the world was satisfied even though he did not use the pen. This is the reason why there were such periods of inactivity as I mentioned in page 24. In the end he would dispose of the vision, not knowing what result its disposal would bring about. The process of his disintegration as an artist shall be examined in the next essay.

⁷⁷ "The Old Manse," IV, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Cf. "The Seven Vagabonds," II, p. 162.

I was glad to find that dear little venerable volume, the *New England Primer*, looking as antique as ever, though in its thousandth new edition...

Harry Levin touches on the influence of *The New England Primer* on Hawthorne in his *Power of Blackness*, p. 23.