

Hawthorne's Romance

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In 1851, Hawthorne selects the term *romance* to define his own fiction. An unforeseen result was that definitions of the American novel have been disputed ever since. Lionel Trilling summarizes what was more or less the standard view of American literature in English departments on both sides of the Atlantic: While the European novel traditionally focuses on society and its manners (in the wide sense of the whole array of social relations and its determinants), American writers shy away from this social reality, and, thus, from the complexity and fullness of social life.

William Ellis summarizes as follows this view of Trilling. The European novel is absorbed with society, and by studying manners, tells truths about social life. In contrast, the American romance, at once archaic and proto-modernist, takes the human condition as its subject, and by dramatizing mythic and symbolic situations, tells truths about human nature. The novel is empirical and realistic; the romance metaphysical and often fantastic. The novel is substantial and concrete, with a wealth of detail; the romance, less ballasted by social fact, is more abstract, but more profound. Because all literature refers, although not always directly, to the social conditions that nurture it, the explanation for the alleged differences is sought in the societies that nurtured the two forms. America and Europe, it is claimed, does not really share a common civilization: America is exceptional among the nations of the West. European society is class-based and divided by class conflict; this, with the weight of ancient traditions, rivets the attention of European novelists upon society itself. America, knit by consensus and relatively traditionless, offers little to the social observer. Its social texture is thin, but, to the extent that class and cultural struggle have been avoided, it is happily and harmoniously thin. Precisely because of this, the American novelists look beyond society to existential situations of

metaphysical import (Ellis 1-2).

Although this view was dominant for over thirty years, it is argued that the actual differences between American "romance" and British "novel," have been greatly exaggerated. Russell Reising criticizes the critics in *The Unusable Past* (1986) and Michael Davitt Bell criticizes the theory itself in *The Development of American Romance* (1980). As Bell observes, the "cliche" that the American novel was romance had acquired "plenty of detractors" (Bell xi). Bell goes on to outline their detractions: that the difference between the American romance and British novel had been exaggerated, that Trilling's idea of reality, upon which his definition of the novel depended, was naive, and that the distinctions between the romance and the novel were only spuriously distinctions of genre. As a consequence, Bell acknowledges, "it might appear that a student of nineteenth-century American fiction would be wise to avoid the term 'romance' altogether" (Bell xii).

"When a writer calls his work a Romance," Nathaniel Hawthorne asserts in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), "he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have left himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel" (II. 1)¹. It goes without saying that if one wishes to take Hawthorne's fiction "in precisely the proper point of view" (X. 92), he should scrutinize "its fashion and material."

As Virginia Woolf says, "Until we know how the novelist orders his world, the ornaments of the world, which the critics press upon us, the adventures of the writer, to which biographers draw attention, are superfluous possessions of which we can make no use" (Woolf 52). In terms of this problem, Hawthorne gives us a clue to the question of how he orders his world: he takes up the romance instead of the novel. The romance is the only me-

dium of art for Hawthorne; in this medium he can order the world and present the truth. But we have no right to condemn him for using the romance instead of the novel. The novel, as well as the romance, is a mere style of art. And if we ignore Hawthorne's implications with regard to his use of the romance, Hawthorne's world would disintegrate into nothingness in front of our eyes: "M. de l'Aubépine's [Hawthorn's] productions, if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man; if otherwise, they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense" (X. 92).

To take Hawthorne's works in precisely proper point of view is to read them as romance. Hawthorne points out the distinction between the romance and the novel: "The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former—while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation" (II. 1). This is not, of course, Hawthorne's own original distinction; it is derived from the conflict between the two in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, and more especially from the notion of his life-long favorite romancer, Sir Walter Scott. Scott states, improving upon Dr. Johnson's definition: "We would be rather inclined to describe a *Romance* as 'a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents;' thus being opposed to the kindred term *Novel* [...] which we would rather define as 'a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society'" (Scott 34). Scott's view on the ideal romance, however, is the fusion of the two as defined above, as is suggested in his introduction to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (John Ballantyne's edition of 1811). Walpole's object, Scott says, is "to unite the marvellous turn of incident and imposing tone of chivalry, exhibited in the ancient romance, with that accurate display of human character and contrast of feeling and passions which is, or ought to be, delineated in the modern novel [...]"

(quoted in Beer 64). Thus seen, Hawthorne's definition of the romance is certainly derived from Scott's.

It may safely be said that the impact of Scott directed the course of American fiction in the early half of the nineteenth century.²⁾ The fashion of early nineteenth-century American fiction is borrowed from Europe, through English romancers such as Scott. Although in England, after Scott's death, the novel gained ascendancy over the romance, in America the romance gave birth to such great writers as Hawthorne and Herman Melville.

Before them, James Fenimore Cooper, in the preface to *The Pilot* (1823), writes that the writer of romance is "permitted to garnish a probable fiction, while he is sternly prohibited from dwelling on improbable truths" (Cooper 3). And in 1848 Melville declares, in a letter to John Murray: "My instinct is to out with the Romance, & let me say that instincts are prophetic, & better than acquired wisdom [...]" (Melville 71). In 1853, William Gilmore Simms, in his prefatory letter to *The Yemassee* (1835), defines the romance as the modern version of epic:

The question briefly is—What are the standards of the modern Romance? What is the modern Romance itself? The reply is immediate. The modern Romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic. The form is changed; the matter is very much the same; at all events, it differs much more seriously from the English novel than it does from the epic and the drama, because the difference is one of material, even more than of fabrication. [...]

When I say that our Romance is the substitute of modern times for the epic or the drama, I do not mean to say that they are exactly the same things [...]. These differences [between them] depend upon the material employed, rather than upon the particular mode in which it is used. The Romance is of loftier origin than the Novel. It approximates the poem. It may be described as an amalgam of the two [...]. The standards of the Romance [...] are very much those of the epic. It invests individuals with an absorbing interest—it hurries them rapidly through crowding and exacting events, in a narrow space of time—it requires the same unities of plan, of purpose, and harmony of parts, and it seeks for its adventures among the wild

and wonderful. It does not confine itself to what is known, or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible; and, placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, it exercises its ingenuity in extricating him from them, while describing his feelings and his fortunes in his progress. (Perkins 39-41)

Simms' definition of the American romance is very important. Apart from the question of whether it approximates the epic or not, he points out that the problem of material is the crucial point of the American romance. Generally the greatest problem encountered by the early nineteenth-century American writers is that of poverty of material; both Cooper and Hawthorne grieve at this poverty of material. Under such circumstances, and probably incited by Scott's fashion in dealing with the recent past in Scotland or more directly by Cooper's romances, Simms proposes *The Yemassee* as an "American romance," that is, the "natural romance of our country" (Perkins 41). Simms is not, of course, the first writer who declares the possibilities of the American romance. In his preface to *Edgar Huntly* (1799), for instance, Charles Brockden Brown proposed the same possibility and Cooper was already dealing with the materials that Brown enumerates.

America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldom furnished themes to the moral painter. That new springs of action and new motives to curiosity should operate,—that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe,—may be readily conceived. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart, that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame. (Brown 641)

It might be said that it is Scott himself who provided the matrix for the florescence of the American romance: he had shown American writers both the mode of the romance and the way to make use of their own history and experiences.

Such was the literary climate of the early half of nineteenth-century America in which Hawthorne lived a

great portion of his life. Yet his fiction gives us impressions quite different from those of the romantic tradition of Scott. As Evan Carton points out one of the tensions that generate the American romance is "a pungent philosophical milieu that directly or indirectly affected the major writers of post-revolutionary America and that reinforced the influence of an indigenous Puritan sensibility" (Carton 2). The world of the American romance, in other words, is not a mimetic representation of the physical world, but a metaphorical reflection of the spiritual. Consequently, the romances may be regarded as embodying a philosophy about the construction and operation of the soul or self (Gable xv).

While Hawthorne's famous definition in *The House of the Seven Gables* emphasizes the epistemological dimension, Northrop Frye's approach draws its resonance (and "scientific" authority) from its shift to the level of narrative structure which makes it possible to study the romance as a literary system and in a systematic way. In contrast, Chase, in his focus on the oppositional potential of the romance, anticipates contemporary moves to equate the level of representation with literature's ideological or subversive potential. Gillian Beer, on the other hand, in presenting the romance as a literature of desire, reorients the definition of romance toward questions of aesthetic experience and aesthetic effect. For Hawthorne, as for many other American writers of the nineteenth century, the romance holds an epistemological promise; for Chase, it is primarily an oppositional form, while Frye and Beer consider it a privileged cultural form for providing insight into the nature of myth and desire (Fluck 421).

F. R. Leavis notes with regard to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*: "I have said nothing about *Wuthering Heights* because that astonishing work seems to me a kind of sport [...] she broke completely, and in the most challenging way, both with the Scott tradition that imposed on the novelist a romantic resolution of his themes, and with the tradition coming down from the eighteenth century that demanded a plane-mirror reflection of the source of 'real' life. Out of her a minor tradition comes, to which belongs, moot notably, *The House with the Green Shutters*" (Leavis 39). And Richard Chase states: "Of course Mr. Leavis is right; in relation to the great tradition of the English novel, *Wuthering Heights* is

indeed a sport. But suppose it were discovered that *Wuthering Heights* was written by an American of New England Calvinist or Southern Presbyterian background. The novel would be astonishing and unique no matter who wrote it or where. But if it were an American novel it would not be a sport; it has too close an affinity with too many American novels, and among them some of the best" (Chase 4). Chase goes on to suggest American fiction proceeds from an imagination that is essentially melodramatic, an imagination that operates among radical contradictions and renders reality indirectly or poetically, thus breaking with the traditions that require a surface rendering of real life and a resolution of themes, romantic or otherwise.

Chase's purpose is to define "some of the leading qualities of the American novel" (Chase xii); he assesses the significance of the fact that "since the earliest days" the American novel, in its most original and characteristic form, has worked out its destiny and defined itself by incorporating an element of romance" (Chase viii). And, according to him, the romance may be summarized as follows: "the romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail. It tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel [...]. Human beings will on the whole be shown in ideal relation—that is, they will share emotions only after these have become abstract or symbolic [...]. Astonishing events may occur, and these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological, rather than a realistic, plausibility. Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolic forms" (Chase 13). This is correct, and we must notice the "Manichaeic quality of New England Puritanism" on which Chase comments: "at least as apprehended by the literary imagination, New England Puritanism—with its grand metaphors of election and damnation, its opposition of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, its eternal and autonomous contraries of good and evil—seems to have recaptured the Manichaeic sensibility" (Chase 11). Indeed, Chase's opinion is a useful point of entry into Hawthorne's fiction; yet another view of the romance must be introduced.³⁾

All fiction contains two primary impulses: the impulse

to imitate daily life and the impulse to transcend it. The romance, in a sense, as romanticists recognized, expresses a world permanently within all men: the world of imagination and dream (Beer 7). In this vein, Richard Poirier, in *A World Elsewhere*, sees that authors' aspiration toward "a world elsewhere" is the determining factor in American fiction. Northrop Frye defines the romance by means of the abilities of the characters: "If superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enhanced weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans, of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. Here we have moved from myth, properly so called, into legend, folk tale, *märchen*, and their literary affiliates and derivatives" (*Anatomy* 33). And he stated later: "The Bible is the epic of the creator, with God as its hero. Romance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest" (*Secular Scripture* 15). The area of romance exists between the realm of gods in myth or God in the Bible and the realm of human beings in reality. The romance is the "secular scripture." And in this vein Frye states: "when Hawthorne, in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, insists that his story should be read as romance and not as novel, it is possible that he meant what he said, even though he indicates that the prestige of the rival form has induced the romancer to apologize for not using it" (*Anatomy* 305-306).

No tension is more fundamental to Hawthorne's art than that generated by the opposition between the world of fact and that of fiction, between what he calls "the Actual and the Imaginary" (I. 36). Hawthorne's quest for "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbues itself with the nature of the other" (I. 36) is persistent and single-minded. Hawthorne's romances are created from the mingling of

the actual and the imaginary, that is, from the "neutral territory."

The neutral territory of Hawthorne's romance appears like a mirage in the space which separates the will from its objects and at best is never more than the "semblance of a world" (I. 37). Hawthorne's neutral territory is a world elsewhere. It might be called virtual space, in Susanne K. Langer's terms:

This virtual space is the primary illusion of all plastic art. Every element of design, every use of color and semblance of shape, serves to produce and support and develop the picture space that exists for vision alone. Being only visual, this space has no continuity with space in which we live; it is limited by the frame, or by surrounding blanks, or incongruous other things that cut it off. Yet its limits cannot even be said to *divide* it from practical space; for a boundary that divides things always connects them as well, and between the picture space and any other space there is no connection. The created virtual space is entirely self-contained and independent. (Langer 72)

Hawthorne states in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*:

The Reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative. If permitted by the historical connection, (which, though slight, was essential to his plan,) the Author would very willingly have avoided anything of this nature. Not to speak of other objections, it exposes the Romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment. It has been no part of his object, however, to describe local manners, nor in any way to meddle with the characteristics of a community for whom he cherishes a proper respect and a natural regard. He trusts not to be considered as unpardonably offending, by laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's private rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house, of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air. The personages of the Tale—though they give themselves out to be of ancient stability and considerable prominence—are really of the Author's own making, or, at all events, of his own mixing; their virtues can shed no lustre, nor

their defects redound, in the remotest degree, to the discredit of the venerable town of which they profess to be inhabitants. He would be glad, therefore, if—especially in the quarter to which he alludes—the book may be read strictly as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil of the Country of Essex. (II. 3)

The locus of Hawthorne's romance is a castle in the air. He takes up the Brook Farm episodes in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) because of its "being, certainly, the most romantic episode of his own life—essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact—and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality" (III. 2).

Hawthorne's castle in the air is also, allegorized as a theatre. The poverty of materials impelled him to build a theatre. He states:

In short, his present concern with the Socialist Community is merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives. In the old countries, with which Fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day Probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders painfully discernible. (III. 1-2)

And also he states in the preface to *The Marble Faun* (1860):

Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. No

author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals or our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow. (IV. 3)

Hawthorne's artistic world of romance resembles quite closely to Emersonian world of "The Poet" (1844). Emerson's Poet "turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession" (Emerson 456). He unlocks man's chains and admits him to a new scene. For Emerson, Poets are liberating gods and Emerson gets "a new sense," and finds "within their world another world, or nest of worlds" (Emerson 461) through them. Emerson's glass-world corresponds to Hawthorne's castle in the air, theatre, or neutral territory. There, both can get "a new sense." In Hawthorne's fiction, the imagination turns the world to a neutral territory.

Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and sowing all its figures so distinctly, — making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility, — is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment; the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre-table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the book-case; the picture on the wall; — all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse; — whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore,

the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. Ghosts might enter here, without affrighting us. It would be too much in keeping with the scene to excite surprise, were we to look about us and discover a form, beloved, but gone hence, now sitting quietly in a streak of this magic moonshine, with an aspect that would make us doubt whether it had returned from afar, or had never once stirred from our fireside. (I. 35-36)

In such a world of the neutral territory between the actual and the imaginary, Hawthorne fixes his symbols, which are the very embryo of his art. This symbol is the "mystic symbol" (I. 31). Its "deep meaning" (I. 31) communicates itself subtly to his sensibilities but evades the analysis of his mind. In a sense, Hawthorne's art is the drama of his quest for the deep meaning of the mystic, symbol in a labyrinthine fusion of the actual and the imaginary.

In the neutral territory, as in a moment "on the borders of sleep and wakefulness" (IX. 308), "the mind has passive sensibility, but no active strength" and "the imagination [becomes] a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them" (IX. 306). This is the typical Hawthorne world. Hawthorne's imagination certainly shows us the deep meaning behind the mystic symbol, but the very meaning evades the analysis of our mind. "With an involuntary start, you seize hold on consciousness, and prove yourself but half awake, by running a doubtful parallel between human life and the hour which has now elapsed. In both you emerge from mystery, pass through a vicissitude that you can but imperfectly control, and are borne onward to another mystery" (IX. 309).

Hawthorne finds a meaning in every experience and, probably, he inherits this faculty from his Puritan ancestors. He imprints some meaning on everything because of this faculty, and naturally he lays "very great stress upon some definite moral purpose" (II. 2), at which he professes to aim his works. But he states:

When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The Author

has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod—or rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly—thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude. A high truth, indeed, fairly, finely, and skillfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work of fiction, may add an artistic glory, but is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first. (II. 2-3)

Indeed he turns the world to glass but, at the next moment, he covers it with a veil of mystery; for example, the “Conclusion” of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). On top of all this, he dares to tell us, “Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting? Be it so, if you will” (X. 89). But we must say, as Roy R. Male puts it, the “whole affair, of course, may well have been a dream, but, whether dream or no, the ultimate effect on Brown is the same” (Male 79). No matter how he obscures the meaning, the ultimate moral purpose remains the same.

Judging from the fact that Hawthorne's world is created from the mingling of the actual and the imaginary, the imaginary or dream is, in his world, another actuality. Hawthorne's reality consists of actuality and dream.

As for this dream-reality relationship, a biologist J. Z. Young makes interesting comments.

The visual receiving system in its untrained state has only very limited powers. We are perhaps deceived by the fact that the eye is a sort of camera. Contrary to what we might suppose, the eyes and brain do not simply record in a sort of photographic manner the pictures that pass in front of us. The brain is not by any means a simple recording system like a film [...]. Many of our affairs are conducted on the assumption that our sense organs provide us with an accurate record, independent of ourselves. What we are now beginning to realize is that much of this is an illusion, that we have to learn to see the world as we do. (Young 66)

And he goes on:

In some sense we literally create the world we speak about [...]. The point to grasp is that we cannot speak simply as if there is a world around us of which our senses give true information. In trying to speak about

what the world is like we must remember all the time that what we see and what we say depends on what we have learned; we ourselves come into the process. (Young 108)

Or as Shakespeare puts it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation, and a name. (Shakespeare V, i, 12-17)

The imagination does literally create its own world, and this world is the fictional world.

Hawthorne's world is always made out of this fusion of actuality and dream. Robin, in “My Kinsman Major Molineux” (1832), starts his journey from a village in the wilderness to a town in quest of his kinsman Major Molineux. As soon as he enters the town, “it occurred to him, that he knew not whither to direct his steps” (XI. 210). He becomes entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets, which cross each other, and meander at no great distance from the waterside. In a sense, Robin's quest for Major Molineux is a dramatization of the quest for a deep meaning behind the mystic symbol. Robin sits down upon the steps of the church-door, resolving to wait the appointed time for his kinsman's appearance.

At first he threw his eyes along the street; it was of more respectable appearance than most of those into which he had wandered, and the room, “creating, like the imaginative power, a beautiful strangeness in familiar objects,” gave something of romance to a scene, that might not have possessed it in the light of day [...]. Next he endeavored to define the forms of distant objects, starting away with almost ghostly indistinctness, just as his eye appeared to grasp them [...]. (XI. 221)

This is the dreamlike atmosphere hovering over Hawthorne's fiction. We ought not to distinguish, however, the real world from the unreal world; both make up Hawthorne's reality. The whole affair is real.

This fusion of the real and the unreal causes the at-

mosphere of dread which controls Hawthorne's world.

There were graves around the church, and now an uneasy thought obtruded into Robin's breast. What if the object of his search, which had been so often and so strangely thwarted, were all the time mouldering in his shroud? What if his kinsman should glide through yonder gate, and nod and smile to him in passing dimly by? (XI. 222)

Robin's mind keeps vibrating between fancy and reality, and he cries, "Am I here, or there?" (XI. 223). But in such a dreadful atmosphere made out of the fusion of fancy and reality, a symbol exposes itself. Soon, the sounds of a trumpet in some neighboring street becomes so audible and continual, that Robin's curiosity is strongly excited. Robin rises from the steps, and looks wistfully towards the point at which Major Molineux is to appear.

A mighty stream of people now empties into the street, and comes rolling slowly towards the church. In its train are wild figures in Indian dress and many fantastic shapes without a model, giving the whole march a visionary air, as if a dream has broken forth from some feverish brain, and is sweeping visibly through the midnight streets. A moment later, the leader thunders a command to halt, and right before Robin's eyes is an uncovered cart. On it rides Major Molineux, the symbol now bereft of its mystic veil.

There the torch blazed the brightest, there the moon shone out like day, and there, in tar-and-feathery dignity, sate his kinsman, Major Molineux! (XI. 228)

The symbol which Robin was seeking exposes itself "in tar-and-feathery dignity." Such a disillusionment usually awaits at the end of the quest-journey of Hawthorne's heroes'.

Hawthorne's heroes usually seek the symbol itself, not what the symbol symbolizes. Indeed they take hold of the symbol. However, the symbol, once caught in their hands, only exposes its "tar-and-feathery" quality: "Certainly, there was some meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind" (I. 31). For Emerson, the world is emblematic and nature is the symbol of spirit:

[...] literature has no book in which the symbolism of

things is scientifically opened. One would say that as soon as men had the first hint that every sensible object, — animal, rock, river, air, — nay, space and time, subsists not for itself, nor finally to a material end, but as a picture-language to tell another story of beings and duties, other science would be put by, and a science of such grand presage would ask of all objects what they mean; Why does the horizon hold me fast, with my joy and grief, in this centre? Why hear I the same sense from countless differing voices, and read one never quite expressed fact in endless picture-language? Yet whether it be that these things will not be intellectually learned, or that many centuries must elaborate and compose so rare and opulent a soul, — there is no comet, rock-stratum, fossil, fish, quadruped, spider, or fungus, that, for itself, does not interest more scholars and classifiers than the meaning and upshot of the frame of things. (Emerson 674)

Emerson tries to explain "the moral import of the sensible world" (Emerson 675). But "The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught" (Emerson 676). Any symbol may well change itself into a word as a "fossil poetry" (Emerson 457). For Emerson, symbols, which in themselves are merely fossils of poetry, reveal the Over-soul. Likewise, in Hawthorne's world symbols are symbolic of Truth or God's Reality. Nevertheless, as in the case of "My Kinsman Major Molineux," a symbol may well turn out to be a tar-and-feathery object. Hawthorne's symbol operates on two levels: icon-level and meaning-level. Hawthorne's characters usually pursue the symbol on its icon-level and such a pursuit always results in disillusionment.

The Great Stone Face is one of Hawthorne's symbols: "True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage, and could discern only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen, and the farther he withdrew from them, the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did appear; until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountain clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive" (XI. 27). There is an old prophecy around the Great Stone Face. Its purport is "that, at some future day, a child should

born hereabouts, who was destined to become the greatest and noblest personage of his time, and whose countenance, in manhood, should bear an exact resemblance to the Great Stone Face" (XI. 28).

The hero of "The Great Stone Face" (1850), Ernest waits for the realization of the prophecy. While it is Ernest himself who fulfills the prophecy eventually, before him three persons were rumored as "the Man of Prophecy" (XI. 37). They are Gathergold, Blood-and-Thunder, and Stony Phiz. It is vital to the meaning of the tale that these three characters are called by their nicknames, not by their real names: they represent the symbol on the icon-level. Each represents "a man who might have fulfilled the prophecy, and had not willed to do so" (XI. 41). "Something had been originally left out, or had departed" (XI.41) from all three. This "something" signifies the real weaning of the symbol, which might be called Reality, and it is Ernest, the only one character called by his real name in this story, who incarnates the "something." And it is a poet that discerns the real Man of Prophecy. This is the world of Hawthorne's fiction. Hawthorne often describes his "moral" through his characters' pursuit of the symbol and he, rather ruthlessly, condemns the pursuers on the icon-level.

Hawthorne's world, as can be seen in "Fancy's Show Box" (1837), is created of three crucial elements: fancy, memory, and conscience. Fancy displays pictures painted "by an artist of wondrous power, and terrible acquaintance with the secret soul" (IX. 225). Meanwhile, memory turns over the leaves of her volume until she finds one which has reference to this picture. "She reads it, close to the old gentleman's ear; it is a record merely of sinful thought, which never was embodied in an act; but, while Memory is reading, Conscience unveils her face, and strikes a dagger to the heart of Mr. Smith" (IX. 223). Here Hawthorne summarizes his own process of artistic creation: first, fancy or imagination creates a neutral territory and sketches the story, and then memory gives it a firm existence or meaning, and finally conscience judges it. Major Molineux appears before Robin "in tar-and-feathery dignity." Robin's quest for the symbol results in disillusionment. But this is not the real end of his pursuit.

"Well, Robin, are you dreaming?" inquired the gentleman, laying his hand on the youth's shoulder.

Robin started, and withdrew his arm from the stone post, to which he had instinctively clung, while the living stream rolled by him. His cheek was somewhat pale, and his eye not quite so lively as in the earlier part of the evening.

"Will you be kind enough to show me the way to the ferry?" said he, after a moment's pause.

"You have then adopted a new subject of inquiry?" observed his companion, with a smile.

"Why, yes, Sir," replied Robin, rather dryly. "Thanks to you, and to my other friends, I have at last met my kinsman, and he will scarce desire to see my face again. I begin to grow weary of a town life, Sir. Will you show me the way to the ferry?"

"No, my good friend Robin, not to-night, at least," said the gentleman. "Some few days hence, if you continue to wish it, I will speed you on your journey. Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux." (XI. 230-31) Robin faces the alternative: to go on with his journey or to stay in the town. Hawthorne does not give us any hint as to Robin's decision but the gentleman suggests that if Robin stayed in the town, he would grasp the deep meaning of the mystic symbol. Robin's alternative is to become another Ethan Brand or another Ernest.

Thus the world of Hawthorne's romance might be described as a mystic field where a man can discover the real meaning of the symbol, that is, of reality. Reality is the ultimate goal for Hawthorne's art and most of his characters struggle to grasp it. But reality is beyond man's effort to grasp, or, even worse, "from the very gate of Heaven, there is a by-way to the pit!" (III. 243). And then, in almost all cases, Hawthorne's world assumes a hell-like atmosphere. He summarizes his world in his notebook, in 1842:

[...] at the entrance there is sunshine, and flowers growing about it. You step within, but a short distance, and begin to find yourself surrounded with a terrible gloom, and monsters of divers kinds; it seems like Hell itself. You are bewildered, and wander long without hope. At last a light strikes upon you. You press towards it yon, and find yourself in a region that seems, in some sort, to reproduce the flowers and sunny beauty of the entrance, but all perfect. These

are the depths of the heart, or of human nature, bright and peaceful; the gloom and terror may lie deep; but deeper still is this eternal beauty. (VIII, 237)

Whenever we look into Hawthorne's world we must give attention to the presence of this mystic "eternal beauty," or else we will be encircled by a hell-like chaotic atmosphere.

Notes

- 1) The parenthetically-enclosed volume and page numbers in this way refer to *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*.
- 2) For a study of the impact of Scott on the theory and practice of early American fiction, see George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* and G. Harrison Orians, "The Romance Ferment after Waverly". Cf. Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880*.
- 3) Cf. John Caldwell Stubbs, *The Pursuit of Form*.

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