Virginia Henry Holt

Hawthorne's Theory of Fiction

[1924]

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE ACADEMIC FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
VIRGINIA
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

HAWTHORNE'S THEORY OF FICTION

A study of Hawthorne's series of note books with a view toward his opinions of literary criticism proves disappointing. Evidently he was no great reader, and it seems never to have been his aim to analyze other authors. As a critic of his own work, however, he had remarkable penetration and he held certain definite principles of theory, most of which are found in the prefaces to his works. Other principles of theory may be gathered indirectly as he practices them.

As an approach to his theory we may begin with the attitude he believes an author should assume toward his readers. In this he shows a decided reticence to discuss himself in relation to his work. To understand this, we have only to think of the peculiarly isolated nature of the man. His attitude to his audience is analogous to his attitude toward the world. Again and again Hawthorne reveals his own consciousness of this isolation. All his characters, like himself, live apart.

In a letter to Longfellow* Hawthorne wrote, "I have been carried apart from the main current of life and find it impossible to get back. --- I have made a captive of myself and put me in a dungeon and I cannot find the key to let myself out,--and if the door were open I should be almost afraid to come out. You tell me that you have met with troubles and changes. I know not what these may have been,

---

*See Woodberry's 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', American Men of Letters Series, page 73.

but I can assure you that trouble is the next best thing to enjoyment, and that there is no fate in this world so horrible as to have no share in either its joys or sorrows."

In the same vein he mourned his lack of participation in the world in "The House of Seven Gables." *"Persons who have wandered, or been expelled out of the common track of things, even were it for a better system, desire nothing so much as to be led back."

Again he comforted himself for the loneliness of his life by believing that it had been an excellent apprenticeship for his work. He entered in his note book for October 4, 1840, "Here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all,--at least, till I were in my grave. And sometimes it seemed as if I were already in the grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed. But oftener I was happy,-at least as happy as I then knew how to be, or was aware of the possibility of being.--------And now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolts and bars; for if I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude.-----But living in solitude till the fulness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth and the freshness of my heart."

*See Chap. 'Clifford and Phoebe.'

It is then this same sense of isolation that Hawthorne carries over into his artist's attitude toward his work. According to his theory the author should assume an impersonal point of view, leaving himself, as far as possible, outside his writing. In his note book* he illustrated this opinion when he said, "People who write about themselves and their feelings as Byron did may be said to serve up their own hearts duly spiced and with brain sauce out of their own heads as a repast for the public."

Relative to this attitude toward his work, his son-in-law said of him,** "When he entered upon his work as a writer, he left behind him his other and accustomed personality by which he was known in general discourse."

Again in "The Old Manse" he made the same emphasis on the objectivity of his art. "My conscience, however, does not reproach me with betraying anything too sacredly individual to be revealed by a human spirit to its brother or sister spirit. How narrow--how shallow and scanty, too--is the stream of thought that has been flowing from my pen, compared with the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas and associations which swell around me from that portion of my existence! How little I have told! and of that little, how almost nothing is even tinctured with any quality that makes it exclusively my own! Has the reader gone wandering hand in hand with me through the inner passages of my being and have we groped together

*See "Hawthorne and His Wife", Vol. I, p. 290, J. Hawthorne
**See "Nathaniel Hawthorne" by G.P.L. in "Sketches, Etc. Life" p.481

into all its chambers and examined their treasures or their rubbish? Not so. We have been standing on the greensward, but just within the cavern's mouth, where the common sunshine is free to penetrate and where every footstep is therefore free to come. I have appealed to no sentiment or sensibility save such as are diffused among us all. So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face, nor am I, nor have I ever been one of those supremely hospitable people who serve up their own hearts delicately fried, with brain sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public."

In his introductory sketch to "The Scarlet Letter," "The Custom House", Hawthorne in apologizing for his autobiographical impulse, further illustrated the same principle and defined the extent to which he considered an author justified in coming into personal contact with his readers. "When he casts his leaves forth upon the wind the author addresses not the many who will fling aside his volume, or never take it up, but the few who will understand him better than most of his schoolmates or lifemates. Some authors, indeed, do far more than this, and indulge themselves in such confidential depths of revelation as could fittingly be addressed, only and exclusively, to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy, as if the printed book, thrown at large on the wide world, were certain to find out the divided segment of the writer's own nature, and complete his circle of existence by bringing him into communion with it. It is scarcely decorous, however, to speak all,

even where we speak impersonally. But, as thoughts are frozen and utterances benumbed, unless the speaker stand in some true relation with his audience, it may be pardonable to imagine that a friend, a kind and apprehensive, though not the closest friend, is listening to our talk, and then, a native reserve being thawed by this genial consciousness, we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourself, but still keep the inmost Me behind the veil." It is then this pretended relationship of the story teller that Hawthorne in mind assumes toward his audience. Often he introduces the actual device of a story teller, a Eustace Bright or a Mr.Temple. However firm his intention to "keep the inmost Me behind the veil," no writer more inevitably seems to reflect his personality in his work than does Hawthorne. Certainly he had nothing to conceal if he told little.

Hawthorne speaks of all his longer works as "romances" and in the preface to "The House of Seven Gables" he gives his definition of the term. Here he discusses the "romance" as compared to the "novel", giving as his reason for preference for the former that it gives greater scope for genius, both in fashion and material. Of the novel he says, "It 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." On the other hand, of the advantages of the romance he says, "While, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardon-

ably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--it has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows, of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight delicate and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public." This passage, it seems to me, throws more light on Hawthorne's aims as an author than any other. He has set two chief limits to the range of the romance. It must conform to the laws of art and of truth. As art it must have beauty and proportion in subject matter and in style. It must be true to the human heart. Yet in presenting this truth in its garb of beauty the romanticist lays down or limits the conditions of his story. This view of romance, where the writer presents his material under circumstances of his own choosing, is a rather modern one.

True to his theory, Hawthorne was always sincere in his effort to analyze and present the truth of the human heart. Sincerity seems the keynote of his work. "The Scarlet Letter" itself is a sermon for truth. Hester, pleading with Arthur Dimmesdale, says, *"In all things else, I have striven to be true! Truth was the one virtue which I might

---

*See Chap. "The Pastor and His Parishioner."

ably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--it has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows, of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public." This passage, it seems to me, throws more light on Hawthorne's aims as an author than any other. He has set two chief limits to the range of the romance. It must conform to the laws of art and of truth. As art it must have beauty and proportion in subject matter and in style. It must be true to the human heart. Yet in presenting this truth in its garb of beauty the romanticist lays down or limits the conditions of his story. This view of romance, where the writer presents his material under circumstances of his own choosing, is a rather modern one.

True to his theory, Hawthorne was always sincere in his effort to analyze and present the truth of the human heart. Sincerity seems the keynote of his work. "The Scarlet Letter" itself is a sermon for truth. Hester, pleading with Arthur Dimmesdale, says, "In all things else, I have striven to be true! Truth was the one virtue which I might

---

*See Chap. "The Pastor and His Parishioner."

have held fast, and did hold fast, through all extremity; save when thy good,--thy life,--thy fame--were put in question! Then I consented to a deception. But a lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side!")

Again in the concluding chapter of "The Scarlet Letter" Hawthorne says, "Among many morals which press upon us from the poor minister's experience we put only this into a sentence: 'Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worse may be inferred.'"

A further illustration of his continual emphasis on truth he expressed in his note book. *"An innate perception and reflection of truth give the only originality that does not finally grow intolerable."

Hawthorne was signally successful in his efforts for an "atmospheric medium". With this he veiled his more realistic material. The dust and gloom of a bygone age, symbolized by the old Pyncheon mansion, permeates "The House of Seven Gables"."Legendary mist" clings about it. The introductory chapter in its account of the family history and its description of the old seven gabled house immediately sets the tone for the succeeding narrative. Likewise in "The Scarlet Letter" the tone is set in the opening chapter at the prison door. "The Scarlet Letter" in its effect of a series of striking, beautiful pictures has a shadow hanging over all. Hawthorne's tendency is always to deepen and enrich his atmosphere rather than to

---

* See entry for Sept.2,1842.

lighten it. Yet his efforts to lift the shadow are easily visible. Such is partly the purpose of such characters as Phoebe and little Pearl. Such is partly the mission of the scarlet rose which blossomed outside Hester's prison door. For his atmosphere he aimed at a kind of mirage. So he said in "The Old Manse" of a reflection seen in a slumbering river, "Which after all was the most real--the picture or the original, the objects palpable to our grosser senses or their apotheosis in the stream beneath?" So life often appeared to him.

To Hawthorne the credit is due for discovering the romance of Puritan New England. He opened up its traditions, seen through the veil of the always mysterious past. In this his country furnished a comparatively clear field for his genius. Strange to say, however, he could not use the Indian as romantic material. In his "Sketches from Memory" he remarked, "It has often been a matter of regret to me that I was shut out from the most peculiar field of American fiction by an inability to see any romance or poetry or grandeur or beauty in the Indian character, at least, till such traits are pointed out by others. I do abhor an Indian story, yet no writer can be more secure of a permanent place in our literature than the biographer of the Indian chiefs."

As a background for romance America seemed barren to Hawthorne. In explaining his use of the Brook Farm community as a background for his "Blithedale Romance" he mourned in his preface this lack of romantic atmosphere in his own

land, a deficiency which he was to help through his own creations. He said, "In the old countries with which fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded 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 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 the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible. With the idea of partially obviating this difficulty (the sense of which has always pressed very heavily upon him) the author has ventured to make free with his old and affectionately remembered home at Brook Farm, as 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." In such a background Hawthorne could use the detail of his own minute observation as recorded in his journals.

The same complaint of America as a romantic background for fiction is voiced in Hawthorne's preface to "The Marble Faun". He said, "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 commonplace 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 of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens and wall flowers need ruin to make them grow."

Speaking further of the broader scope allowed the romanticist, Hawthorne wrote to Mr. Bridge regarding notes for his "Journal of an African Cruiser," *"I would advise you not to stick too accurately to the bare facts, either in your descriptions or your narratives, else your hand will be cramped, and the result will be a want of freedom that will deprive you of a higher truth than that which you strive to attain. Allow your fancy pretty free license, and omit no heightening touches merely because they did not

---

*See "Biographical Sketch of Nathaniel Hawthorne", G.P.L. in Vol.XII, Riverside Edition of Hawthorne's Works, p. 493.

chance to happen before your eyes. If they did not happen, they at least ought--which is all that concerns you. This is the secret of all entertaining travellers."]

Hawthorne's groping for the right atmospheric tone for his romantic effect is well illustrated in the outline for an English romance published as "The Ancestral Footstep." Here, as he had done with Salem, Brook Farm, and Italy, he took the material of some familiar background which he intended to make a neutral meeting place for truth and fiction. *"I have not yet struck the true key-note of this romance, and until I do, and unless I do, I shall write nothing but tediousness and nonsense. I do not wish it to be a picture of life, but a Romance, grim, grotesque, quaint, of which the Hospital might be the fitting scene. It might have so much of the hues of life that the reader should sometimes think it was intended for a picture, yet the atmosphere should be such as to excuse all wildness. In the Introduction I might disclaim all intention to draw a real picture, but say that the continual meetings I had with Americans bent on such errands had suggested this wild story. The descriptions of scenery, etc., and of the Hospital might be correct but there should be a tinge of the grotesque given to all the characters and events."

To obtain his romantic atmosphere Hawthorne relied greatly on the mists of the past. In comparing his "House

(*See Riverside Edition Vol.XII,p.491.)

of Seven Gables" to "The Scarlet Letter" he wrote to Mr. Fields, "It has undoubtedly one disadvantage in being brought so close to the present time, whereby its romantic improbabilities become more glaring."

Further emphasis on this same point of view, of the efficacy of the past to secure the romantic atmosphere, is revealed in the preface to "The House of Seven Gables." "The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. It is a legend, prolonging itself from an epoch now gray in the distance, down into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of the legendary mist, which the reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events, for the sake of a picturesque effect. The narrative, it may be, is woven of so humble a texture as to require this advantage and at the same time, to render it the more difficult of attainment."

Although realism was at variance with his own practice, Hawthorne showed a keen appreciation of it in other authors. One of his best bits of literary appreciation is contained in what he wrote of Anthony Trollope's novels. *"They precisely suit my taste, solid and substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump

(*See "Nathaniel Hawthorne" Riverside Edition, Vol.XII, p.539.)

out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business and not suspecting that they were made a show of." Hawthorne declared his own individual taste was for another class of books than those he was able to write.

Hawthorne doubted the efficacy of the novel as a teaching agency. In the preface to "The House of Seven Gables" he said, "When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtile process than the ostensible one." His aim at teaching was to lay before the reader the truth of the human heart, but from this truth he refrained in theory from drawing his own conclusions. In fact his unwillingness to take sides has been called his most un-Puritan trait. He was a moral investigator rather than a preacher.

That Hawthorne was a moralist seems inevitable in view of the soil from which he sprang. He had enormous ingenuity in discovering morals on which his stories could be based. This moralizing tendency was a clog to his genius, hampering to his imagination. Often he was aware that the intrusion of too obvious a moral was a literary flaw, a sign of weakness in the ability of an author to express himself with delicacy and clarity. Therefore he cloaked his moral as subtly as possible. Thus the story of "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" is an artistic dress to the moral truth that it is useless to try to avoid our

lot as human beings. "Drowne's Wooden Image" contains the moral that in our loftiest aspirations we reach our truest and most natural state. This is another working out of the idea embodied in his note: "Our most intimate friend is not he to whom we show the worst but the best of our nature." "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" illustrates the moral truth of the ruin resulting when one withdraws entirely from human sympathies.

On the question of a definite moral purpose for fiction, Hawthorne expressed himself distinctly in the preface to "The House of Seven Gables." "The author has provided himself with a moral;-the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief; and he would feel it a singular gratification, if the romance might effectively convince mankind--or, indeed, any one man--of the folly of tumbling down an avanlanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms." Later he gives his idea of the proper use of a moral. "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 skilfully 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.") Mrs.Hawthorne has mentioned her husband's dissatisfaction with "The Great Stone Face", because he felt the moral contained too evident.

Mingled inextricably with his moralizing tendency was Hawthorne's tendency toward allegory and the use of symbolism. With the symbol often he embodied his moral. It is the physical image which with him gives reality to ideas which otherwise would be too shadowy to reveal themselves. Again it is part of that strange isolation in which he lived. He felt a veil stretched between him and the realities of life. Often it seemed to him a kind of mirage and so he was peculiarly prone to express the world about him in terms of other things. It was another feature of his idea of romance--the veiling of actualities in what appeared a more delicate and striking form. He often spoke in parables. The result seems sometimes circumlocution. On the other hand the symbol is the unifying principle of many of his tales. Thus the "Marble Faun" centers around that symbolof that strange imaginative creature without a soul.

Examples of Hawthorne's use of the physical image to give body to his shadowy ideas are seen in "The Minister's

Black Veil", "The Birth Mark", and "The Artist and the Beautiful". Thus the minister's veil symbolizes not only the secret sin which each man hides, but the invisible veil which divides each soul so completely from the rest of the world. The birthmark is the symbol of the human imperfection in each of us, and the impossibility of eradicating it. The butterfly of "The Artist and the Beautiful" is the symbol of the beautiful, which once achieved becomes of little value in reality. So each of these physical symbols embodies a whole moral. Strange, in view of his own profuse use of allegory, is the dislike he expresses in his notebook for allegory in sculpture.

In choosing the symbol which he was to use, Hawthorne sought always one with a rich decorative quality, appealing both to the eye and the imagination. *Such was the rich embroidered mantle of Lady Eleanore's and the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom.×In the case of Lady Eleanore's mantle, the symbol is purely objective, separate from the character with which it is identified. More enigmatical symbolism is seen in such a tale as "Young Goodman Brown."× Gradually Hawthorne discovered the power of the symbol as a medium of thought and emotion, as well as to convey allegorical meaning. Such is the minister's black veil. "The Scarlet Letter" illustrates his habit of playing with the symbol, multiplying it and representing it in many guises. Now it is suggested in a red rose, now vitalized in little

*See Woodberry's "Hawthorne", p. 190

Pearl herself, now branded over Dimmesdale's heart or emblazoned in the heavens.]

Hawthorne's attitude, that the ostensible aim of fiction cannot be to teach, is one in view of his moralizing not entirely sustained in his practice. In connection with this it is interesting to review his attitude toward social reform as illustrated in his romances. The commonly accepted idea is that toward all social questions and philanthropy Hawthorne was singularly callous and indifferent. I believe that, far from being so, his attitude was one of dissatisfaction with the accepted state of affairs, and sometimes a hopeless feeling toward the practicality of relief by organized methods. That he was not indifferent is proved by his very willingness to enter such a social experiment as Brook Farm. He examined everything that came before him without feeling bound to accept the prescribed opinion. For a man who lived so in the broodings of his own heart, his outlook was necessarily circumscribed. So he wrote once to Bridge, *"New England is quite as large a lump of earth as my heart can really take in." He felt the burden of the past upon the world which idea Holgrave half laughingly expressed, "It lies upon the present like a giant's dead body." The same idea he worked upon in "The New Adam and Eve" and "Earth's Holocaust", when he imagined that "this world had become so over burdened with an accumulation of wornout trumpery that the inhabitants

(* See Woodberry's"Hawthorne", p. 281.)

determined to rid themselves of it by a general bonfire." The past, according to his theory, is valuable in giving explanation to the present, but the present too soon itself becomes the past. Therefore he considered it useless to devote oneself to any cause as though it were a final remedy. True reform as he saw it, must work slowly together with nature. No change must be violent. So he says of Holgrave, * "His error lay in supposing that this age more than any past or future one, is destined to see the tattered garments of antiquity exchanged for a new suit, instead of gradually renewing themselves by patch work."

This relation of past and present time, is an important one to his fancy. In "The Ancestral Footstep", speaking of the repetition of a legendary murder, he said, "This incident is very essential towards bringing together the past time and the present, and the two ends of the story." (See page 515.)

Hawthorne illustrates how quickly the present becomes the past in "Endicott and the Red Cross", when the Puritans having crossed the sea for religious freedom immediately devised punishment for those who disagreed with them in religious beliefs. So when editing for Bridge "The Journal of an African Cruiser", commenting on the strangeness of Defoe having chosen a slave dealer for his hero, Hawthorne said, "The next age may shift the illumination and show us sins as great as that of the slave trade, but which now

*See "House of Seven Gables", Chap."The Deguerreotypist."

enters into the daily practice of men claiming to be just and wise." * Professor Erskine has called attention to the fact that in his dramatic scenes dealing with history, Hawthorne selects for the treatment some critical moment of change when a new era asserts itself perceptibly over the feeble past.

Toward women and their limitations Hawthorne shows always great compassion. He desires for them broader opportunities. Hester, Zenobia and Miriam as women who have sinned are undoubtedly dearer to their creator than such a character as Hilda, who by drawing her skirts aside has managed to escape the contamination of the world. Hester in the opportunity for thought secured her by the isolation consequent on her transgression, was aware that the social scheme must be altered before woman may enjoy true equality. So when women came to her seeking comfort, **"she assured them of her firm belief that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness." She questioned man-made justice at the same time that she submitted to it. *** "The world's law was no law for her, mind.--- Indeed the same dark question often rose into her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among

---

*See "Hawthorne" in Erskine's"Leading American Novelists."
**See "Conclusion".
***See chap."Another View of Hester."

them?---As a first step the whole system of society is to be torn down and built up anew. Then the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position."

The same pity for womankind he expresses in "Septimus Felton" when Sibyl exclaims * "What is the matter that woman gets so large a share of human misery laid on her weak shoulders!"

The question of woman's position is again debated in the "Blithedale Romance" but here Hawthorne fails to commit himself. It is noticeable that with Hester peace and redemption came partly from her social work, from the broadening of her life. It came, too, from her growing self reliance. Likewise Kenyon suggested that Miriam and Donatello regenerate themselves through alleviation of the misery of the world. Hawthorne seems to question the justice in the career of the beautiful woman. **Her beauty becomes a danger to herself and others. Hester, Zenobia, and Miriam all belong to this class. Their unhappiness all came indirectly through their beauty which early drew them into unhappy marriages.

Hawthorne's experiment at Brook Farm is a strong argument in favor of his interest in social ideas. Those who stress his coldness in social ideals declare that he went

---

*See Riverside Edition of Hawthorne, Vol.XI, p.405.

**For discussion see Cambridge History of American Literature.

into this solely as an economic experiment, to provide a home for himself when he should marry and to obtain leisure for his literary work. While doubtless these were partly his motives they were in no wise blameworthy ones, and Hawthorne undoubtedly was actuated by other and higher ones besides. If at the end he deemed the experiment a failure he is not to be blamed for having had courage to try it. Such a life for him was unreal and unnatural. So he said in his note book,* "The real Me was never an associate of the community; there has been a spectral Appearance there, sounding the horn at daybreak, and milking the cows, and hoeing potatoes and raking hay, toiling in the sun, and doing me the honor to assume my name. But this spectre was not myself."

Two years earlier he wrote from the Boston Custom House in a letter reflecting his sympathy with labor,** "From henceforth forever, I shall be entitled to call the sons of toil my brethren and shall know how to sympathize with them, seeing that I likewise have risen at the dawn and borne the fervor of the midday sun, nor turned my heavy footsteps homeward till eventide."

In the"Blithedale Romance" he defends his aims at Brook Farm when Coverdale says, *** "Let us acknowledge it wiser, if not more sagacious, to follow out one's day-dream to its natural consummation, although, if the vision

*See entry for Sept.3, 1841
**See "American Note Books", p.213
***See chap."Blithedale".

into this solely as an economic experiment, to provide a home for himself when he should marry and to obtain leisure for his literary work. While doubtless these were partly his motives they were in no wise blameworthy ones, and Hawthorne undoubtedly was actuated by other and higher ones besides. If at the end he deemed the experiment a failure he is not to be blamed for having had courage to try it. Such a life for him was unreal and unnatural. So he said in his note book,* "The real Me was never an associate of the community; there has been a spectral appearance there, sounding the horn at daybreak, and milking the cows, and hoeing potatoes and raking hay, toiling in the sun, and doing me the honor to assume my name. But this spectre was not myself."

Two years earlier he wrote from the Boston Custom House in a letter reflecting his sympathy with labor.** "From henceforth forever, I shall be entitled to call the sons of toil my brethren and shall know how to sympathise with them, seeing that I likewise have risen at the dawn and borne the fervor of the midday sun, nor turned my heavy footsteps homeward till eventide."

In the"Blithedale Romance" he defends his aims at Brook Farm when Coverdale says, *** "Let us acknowledge it wiser, if not more sagacious, to follow out one's day-dream to its natural consummation, although, if the vision

---

*See entry for Sept.3, 1841
**See "American Note Books". p.215
***See chap."Blithedale".

have been worth the having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure.---Whatever else I may repent of, therefore, let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny,-yes!-and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment!" (Something of the germ idea of "The Birthmark" is contained here.)

Speaking further of the aims of this communistic life he said,* "We had divorced ourselves from pride and were striving to supply its place with familiar love. We meant to lessen the laboring man's great burthen of toil, by performing our due share of it at the cost of our thews and sinews. We sought our profit by mutual aid, instead of wresting it by the strong hand from an enemy, or filching it craftily from those less shrewd than ourselves, or winning it by selfish competition with a neighbor.--- In my own behalf I rejoice that I could once think better of the world's improvability than it deserved."

Admitting the failure of the experiment, he said in conclusion, ** "Often I remember our beautiful scheme for a noble and unselfish life; and how fair, in that first summer, appeared the prospect that it might endure for generations and be perfected as the ages rolled away, into the system of a people and a world! --- More and more I feel that we had struck upon what ought to be a truth.

*See chap. "A Knot of Dreamers".
**See Chap. "Miles Coverdale's Confession".

Posterity may dig it up and prosper by it." The experiment, he believed, died for infidelity to its own spirit.

In his attitude toward war he was not entirely and selfishly indifferent but he loathed it for its horror, waste and uselessness. His principles were for pacifism, but he was capable, against his will, of being roused in sympathy. His patriotism is evident in the very nature of the material of his short historical sketches. Early he expressed his opinion of war in "The Sister Years". "Blood has streamed in the names of Liberty and Patriotism; but it must remain for some future, perhaps far distant year, to tell whether or no those holy names have been rightfully invoked. Nothing so much depresses me, in my view of mortal affairs, as to see high energies wasted, and human life and happiness thrown away, for ends that appear oftentimes unwise, and still oftener remain unaccomplished."

A suggestion of a League of Nations appearing in "Earth's Holocaust" is interesting. A commander asks, "Shall there be no great law court for the settlement of national difficulties? The battlefield is the only court where such suits can be tried."

"You forget", is the reply, "that in this advanced state of civilization Reason and Philanthropy combined will constitute just such a tribunal as is requisite."

In "Septimus Felton" Hawthorne says of the enthusiasm of war,* "The enobling of brute force---Oh, high,

---

*See Riverside Edition of Hawthorne Vol.XI, p.244

heroic, tremulous juncture, when man felt himself almost an angel; on the verge of doing deeds that outwardly look so fiendish!" Yet when war racked his own country he confessed himself a victim to the contagion of patriotic enthusiasm and declared wero it not for his age he would shoulder a musket himself.

His further social interests are shown in his avowed intention to write a volume exposing the horrors of shipping as they had come to his notice during his consulship in England.

Hawthorne had a real horror of professional reformers. In the character of Hollingsworth he drew a picture with a satirical touch of a practical philanthropist and illustrated how in his zeal for his own cause such a person may lose all sense of proportion. From his life he drew this moral,* "that admitting what is called philanthropy, when adopted as a profession, to be often useful by its energetic impulse to society at large, it is perilous to the individual whose ruling passion in one exclusive channel, it thus becomes."

The same distrust of practical philanthropy as too temporary and often impracticable he voiced early in "Fanshawe", speaking of the aborigines' descendants in college,** "to whom an inpracticable philanthropy was endeavoring to impart the benefits of civilization."

[In no point of theory was Hawthorne plainer than in

---

*See chap. "Blithedale Pasture".
**Riverside Edition of Hawthorne, Vol.XI, p.76

his attitude toward mystery in fiction. In his "American Note Books" he said, * "It is not that I have any love of mystery, but because I abhor it, and because I have always felt that words may be a thick and darksome veil of mystery between the soul and the truth it seeks." Mr. Woodberry has said that if there is any mystery in Hawthorne's tales it is in the object, not in the author's breast. This is a further demonstration of his theory of the objectivity of fiction. Mystery as well as wild adventure is not in accord with his style, with its tranquil dignity of repose. In treating mystery, Hawthorne seldom gives an explanation, maintaining the attitude that he is as much in the dark as his readers. Instead his favorite method is to give a variety of possibilities explaining it, offering the reader his choice of the suppositions. For instance, in accounting for the scarlet letter on Mr.Dimmesdale's bosom, he says,** "Some affirmed that the Reverend Mr.Dimmesdale--had begun a course of penance--by inflicting a hideous torture on himself. Others contended that the stigma had not been produced until a long time subsequent, when old Roger Chillingsworth, being a potent necromancer, had caused it to appear, through the agency of magic and poisonous drugs. Others, again,- and those best able to appreciate the minister's peculiar sensibility, and the wonderful operation of his spirit upon the body,- whispered their belief, that the

* See p.219

** See "Conclusion".

awful symbol was the effect of the ever active tooth of remorse, gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly, and at last manifesting Heaven's dreadful judgment by the visible presence of the letter. The reader may choose among these theories. We have thrown all the light we could acquire upon the portent, and would gladly, now that it has done its office, erase its deep print out of our own brain."]

[Likewise in accounting for the mysterious history of Miriam in the "Marble Faun", he said, * "There were many stories about Miriam's origin and previous life, some of which had a very probable air while others were evidently wild and romantic fables. We cite a few, leaving the reader to designate them either under the probable or the romantic head." In the following list of suppositions one is aware that Hawthorne himself feels ignorant of her past.]

[In accord with this theory of mystery in fiction, Hawthorne explained in "The Marble Faun" that he had no intention of explaining Miriam's past or Donatello's future. Such explanations are no part of the story. The author is not in on the secret. His point of view as he explains it is an unusual one. ** "The gentle reader, we trust would not thank us for one of those minute elucidations which are so tedious, and after all so unsatisfactory, in clearing up the romantic mysteries of a story.

---

*See chap. "Subterranean Reminiscences".
**See chap. "Miriam, Hilda, Kenyon, Donatello".

He is too wise to insist upon looking closely at the wrong side of the tapestry, after the right one has been sufficiently displayed to him woven with the best of the artist's skill and cunningly arranged with a view of the harmonious exhibition of its colors. If any brilliant, or beautiful, or even tolerable effect have been produced, this pattenn of kindly readers will accept it at its worth, without tearing its web apart, with the idle purpose of discovering how the threads have been knit together. -- The actual experience of even the most ordinary life is full of events that never explain themselves, either as regards their origin or their tendency."

When his readers, in spite of the flattery to their imagination implied here, clamored for an explanation, Hawthorne supplied it unwillingly in a last chapter. Of this he wrote to his friend, Bright,* "Don't read it; it is good for nothing. The story isn't meant to be explained. It's cloudland."

Such a demand on the part of his audience made him regard the book as a failure since it proved he had failed to achieve the kind of atmosphere essential to his effect. Almost peevishly he says in this supplementary last chapter, "The idea of the modern Faun loses all the poetry and beauty which the Author fancied in it, and becomes nothing better than a grotesque absurdity, if we bring it into the actual light of day. He had hoped to mystify

---

*"Hawthorne and His Wife", J.Hawthorne,Vol.II,p.236.

this anomalous creature between the Real and the Fantastic, in such a manner that the reader's sympathies might be excited to a certain pleasurable degree, without impelling him to ask how Cuvier might have classified poor Donatello, or to insist upon being told, in so many words, whether he had furry ears or no." Then, after a patient explanation of all the mystery he ends with a playful sop to his theory when he replies to the query whether Donatello's ears were really furry, "I know but may not tell. On that point, at all events, there shall be not one word of explanation."

[In spite of all implied disdain of mystery it is an important feature of Hawthorne's work. It is a literary inheritance from the Gothic writers and is prominent in all his novels. Most of his characters come from a mysterious past to vanish unaccounted for into an unexplained future. In "Fanshawe" there is the conventional villain of mystery who attempts the abduction of Ellen. In the "Scarlet Letter" mystery veils the past of all three main characters. The whole atmosphere of "The House of Seven Gables" is pervaded by the sense of a traditional and mysterious past. To achieve this such details of mystery are used as the lost land grant, the witch element, the dreadful prophecy of Maule about "blood to drink", the strange story of the enchantment of Alice Pyncheon and the portrait of the Pyncheon ancestor. In the "Blithedale Romance" Zenobia, Priscilla, Westervelt and old Moodie are all people of mystery. They might have risen from the this anomalous creature between the Real and the Fantastic, in such a manner that the reader's sympathies might be excited to a certain pleasurable degree, without impelling him to ask how Cuvier might have classified poor Donatello, or to insist upon being told, in so many words, whether he had furry ears or not." Then, after a patient explanation of all the mystery he ends with a playful sop to his theory when he replies to the query whether Donatello's ears were really furry, "I know but may not tell. On that point, at all events, there shall be not one word of explanation."

In spite of all implied disdain of mystery it is an important feature of Hawthorne's work. It is a literary in heritance from the Gothic writers and is prominent in all his novels. Most of his characters come from a mysterious past to vanish unaccounted for into an unexplained future. In "Fanshawe" there is the conventional villain of mystery who attempts the abduction of Ellen. In the "Scarlet Letter" mystery veils the past of all three main characters. The whole atmosphere of "The House of Seven Gables" is pervaded by the sense of a traditional and mysterious past. To achieve this such details of mystery are used as the lost land grant, the witch element, the dreadful prophecy of Maule about "blood to drink", the strange story of the enchantment of Alice Pyncheon and the portrait of the Pyncheon ancestor. In the "Blithedale Romance" Zenobia, Priscilla, Westervelt and old Moodie are all people of mystery. They might have risen from the sea. So in "The Marble Faun" Hawthorne uses the spectre in the Catacombs, the disappearance of Hilda, Miriam's past. Mysterious is the horrid symbolic spider conspicuous in "Dr.Grimshawe's Secret" and the identity of the girl haunting her slain lover's grave in "Septimus Felton". "The Ancestral Footstep" is complicated with mystery of a bloody footstep and lost heirs.

Hawthorne is never interested in uncanny atmosphere or morbid nerves. Of his disgust for ghosts in fiction he spoke in "Dr.Grimshawe's Secret". "So far as ever came to the present writer's knowledge, there was no whisper of Doctor Grimshawe's house being haunted; a fact on which both writer and reader may congratulate themselves, the ghostly chord having been played upon in these days until it has become wearisome and nauseous as the familiar tune of a barrel organ." His usual method for obtaining atmosphere from such means was to introduce ghosts or some similar horror, and by scoffing and pretending to disbelieve to create just the right effect upon his reader.

This device he used in "The House of Seven Gables" in describing the ghostly crowd who visit the dead Judge Pyncheon at midnight. *"What sense, meaning, or moral, for example, such as even ghost-stories should be susceptible of, can be traced in the ridiculous legand, that, at midnight, all the dead Pyncheons are bound to assemble in this parlor? --- We are tempted to make a little sport with the idea. Ghost stories are hardly to be treated ser-

* See chap. "Governor Pyncheon".

iously any longer. The family party of the defunct Pyncheons, we presume, goes off in this wise."

Further evidence that in practice Hawthorne considered mystery necessary for the creation of interest is evident in the hint for a Bluebeard story entered in his note book. * "Were I to take up the story I would create an interest by suggesting a secret in the first chamber which would develop itself more and more in every successive hall of the great palace and lead the wife irresistibly to the chamber of horrors."

When it came to the question of material for his fiction Hawthorne complained in a letter to Longfellow,** "I have another great difficulty in the lack of materials for I have seen so little of the world that I have nothing but thin air to concoct my stories of and it is not easy to give a life-like semblance to such shadowy stuff. Sometimes through a peep-hole I have caught a glimpse of the real world and the two or three articles in which I have betrayed these glimpses please me better than the others." He mourned the lack of romantic background in America, but he realized that even romance needed realistic material and experience of life. It was to gain greater reality for the unsubstantial that he employed to such a degree the physical image. In support of the use of realistic material he said, speaking of "Gil Blas", *** "The experience of many individuals among us, who think it hardly worth the telling, would equal the vicissitudes of the

---

*"French and Italian Note Books" p.133

**See Woodberry's "Hawthorne", p.94 ***See "House of Seven Gables", chap. "The Daguerreotypist".

Spaniard's earlier life, while their ultimate success of the point whither they tend may be incomparably higher than any that a novelist would imagine for a hero."

For his realistic material Hawthorne had recourse to the note books which he kept through most of his life. In these he jotted down passing experiences, descriptions of people and of scenery, hints for stories as they occurred to him. To the reader these notes are often disappointing. They seem trivial. They contain few confessions and reveal little deep meditation. Hawthorne never meant them for publication. They were to mirror impressions of the passing world for him while those impressions were fresh and almost all this material he was afterwards able to transfer into his essays, tales and romances. His purpose in his notes he explained to Bridge. * "Begin to write always before the impression of novelty has worn off from your mind; else you will soon begin to think that the peculiarities which at first interested you are not worth recording; yet these slight peculiarities are the very things that make the most vivid impression upon the reader."

The businesslike and often wearied way in which Hawthorne went about his sight-seeing and gathering of possible material is evident in an entry from his Italian note book after he had attended services at which the Pope appeared. "I am very glad to have seen the Pope because

* See Riverside Edition of Hawthorne, Vol.XII, p.493

now he may be crossed out of the list of sights to be seen."

✓ Although he felt the lack of experience of life, Hawthorne at least was confident of his ability to read the human heart. In this he trusted in imagination taking the place of experience. In "My Home Return" as Oberon he said, * "I see deeply into the hearts of mankind, discovering what is hidden from the wisest. The loves of young men and virgins are known to me, before the first kiss, before the whispered word, with the birth of the first sigh. My glance comprehends the crowd and penetrates the breast of the solitary man."

✓ Again he said of his ability to throw himself into situations foreign to his own, ** "I used to think that I could imagine all feelings, all passions and states of the heart and mind; but how little did I know! Indeed we are but shadows---till the heart be touched."

✓ The note books throw light on Hawthorne's manner of character creation. He usually maintained that his characters were creatures of imagination. In his preface to "The House of Seven Gables" he said, "The personages of the tale --- are really of the author's own making, or, at all events, of his own mixing." He claimed that the characters of the "Blithedale Romance" were entirely fictitious and "might have been looked for at Brook Farm, but, by some accident, never made their appearance there."

---

* See Vol. XII, Riverside Edition, p.41

** See "American Note Book" Oct.4, 1840.

Perhaps in the term "mixing" he best described his method. The identity of Hilda has been much conjectured. Some believed her modelled after Miss Shepard, the young American governess with the Hawthorne's in Rome. Julian Hawthorne denied this but declared his belief that she was based on his mother. Mrs.Hawthorne disclaimed that she had been the model. Some have seen in Hilda a prophetic picture of Hawthorne's daughter, Una. What seems probably the truth is that the character was a composite of people he knew even is Hawthorne was unaware of thus combining them.

The note books show that Hawthorne constantly studied human nature and made models of his acquaintances. He was constantly on the lookout for people he might use in his romances. Hundreds of "strange characters" are noted in whom one recognizes character after character as they appear in his subsequent work. He notes in England an old woman with a palsied head and seeing the possibility of symbolizing her, bids his readers watch for her in his romances. Certainly his fellow citizens had no difficulty in recognizing themselves in his unkind portraits in "The Custom House." Among other characters of his romances easy to place from his notes are Priscilla, who seems undeniably the little seamstress he described in his Brook Farm experience. In Donatello with his control over nature resemblance has been traced to Hawthorne's friend, Thoreau. Judge Pyncheon is believed to have been modelled after the man who turned Hawthorne out of the Customs House. In the

old spiritual necromancer, living with the child of his dead mistress, whom Hawthorne met in Rome and described in his notes, appears Dr. Grimshawe and little Elsie. Miriam is modelled from the beautiful Jewess who sat across the table from Hawthorne at the Lord Mayor's dinner in London. In Zenobia many believe Hawthorne was using Margaret Fuller. With scientific curiosity and laborious detail he noted down such "remarkable characters" as a one-armed soap-maker, a group of caravan people, an opium-eater, a giant, a Frenchman, a Baptist preacher, a blind man, innumerable beggars. His English notes are thronged with descriptions of many types of stranded Americans and mistreated sailors with whom his consular duties threw him in contact. In these descriptions it is evident that Hawthorne was trying to put himself into the situation of the person he had noted, and observe his sensations. Yet at the same time we note a curious aloofness, a scientific coldness, a New England reserve. Such a spirit is evident in his matter-of-fact description of his children's play as they acted out the scenes of his mother's death chamber. X

X The use he intended to put his observations of character to is illustrated in his unfinished draft of the "Ancestral Footstep". * "A knot of characters may be introduced as gathering around Middleton, comprising expatriated Americans of all sorts: the wandering printer who came to me so often at the Consulate, who said he was a native of Philadelphia, and could not go home in the thirty

---

*Riverside Edition of Hawthorne Vol.XI,p.490

old spiritual necromancer, living with the child of his dead mistress, whom Hawthorne met in Rome and described in his notes, appears Dr. Grimshawe and little Elsie. Miriam is modelled from the beautiful Jewess who sat across the table from Hawthorne at the Lord Mayor's dinner in London. In Zenobia many believe Hawthorne was using Margaret Fuller. With scientific curiosity and laborious detail he notes down such "remarkable characters" as a one-armed soap-maker, a group of caravan people, an opium-eater, a giant, a Frenchman, a Baptist preacher, a blind man, innumerable beggars. His English notes are thronged with descriptions of many types of stranded Americans and mistreated sailors with whom his consular duties threw him in contact. In these descriptions it is evident that Hawthorne was trying to put himself into the situation of the person he had noted, and observe his sensations. Yet at the same time we note a curious aloofness, a scientific coldness, a New England reserve. Such a spirit is evident in his matter-of-fact description of his children's play as they acted out the scenes of his mother's death chamber.

The use he intended to put his observations of character to is illustrated in his unfinished draft of the "Ancestral Footstep". * "A knot of characters may be introduced as gathering around Middleton, comprising expatriated Americans of all sorts: the wandering printer who came to me so often at the Consulate, who said he was a native of Philadelphia, and could not go home in the thirty

---

*Riverside Edition of Hawthorne Vol.XI,p.490

years that he had been trying to do so, for lack of the money to pay his passage; the large banker; the consul of Leeds; the woman asserting her claims to half Liverpool; the gifted literary lady, maddened by Shakespeare, etc., etc."

✓ In his analysis of states of mind Hawthorne is remarkable as being one of the earliest novelists to use the term "psychological state", which appears in "The Scarlet Letter." * In his use of characters it has been said that "he studied no subtle character nor any character subtly."** He was fond of certain types, the doctor, the minister, the artist, the old maid, the woman with an unhappy past. Few of his characters approach beings of flesh and blood. They are wraiths from shadow land, belonging to a spiritual rather than to a material world. It is as wraiths they often make their first appearance, as did Priscilla, out of the storm. Hester, Zenobia and Miriam all have the strength and dignity of suffering womanhood, which at times vitalizes them. They are different enough to be neither types nor individuals. Their sufferings hardly seem real enough to move us. In Uncle Venner it seems to me Hawthorne gives us his most individual ✓ and life-like figure. Little Pearl is not a child at all. She is a symbol, a device, the scarlet thread of the web. She is the personification of the scarlet letter. She represents her mother's youth. She is music in the darkness. She serves her purpose as contrast, as a chorus. In

---

*See chap."The Minister's Vigil."

**See Cambridge His.of Amer.Lit.

like manner the majority of Hawthorne's characters ✓ are personifications of his ideas rather than actual people. His lack of interest in their past and future is due to this view of them. When they have played their part he is through with them. His aloofness seems to indicate a lack of sympathy. His evident dislike of such characters as Judge Pyncheon is a fault. In gathering his material for characters Hawthorne admitted that he seldom had an impulse to write down a conversation. His characters when they talk speak in Hawthorne's dignified words. They are observers of life rather than actors. ✓

✓ In his use of characters Hawthorne employs a very small group. "The Scarlet Letter" has three main characters, "Blithedale" and "The Marble Faun" have each four, while"The House of Seven Gables" has five, if we exclude Uncle Venner. The characters seldom are used in interplay. They do not mingle but through their isolation they gain dignity and importance. They contribute to the simplicity and singleness of effect which is an essential part of his structure. Practically all are beings profoundly isolated in life, cut off through some chance or mistake from communion with men. Hawthorne as frequently as possible contrasts his characters. In "The House of Seven Gables" he contrasts youth and age, in Blithedale opposite types of womanhood, in "The Marble Faun" the guilty past of Miriam with the spotlessness of Hilda.

X In Hawthorne's note books the most valuable clue

to his method of writing is found in his numerous hunts for stories. These are not plots but striking abstract situations which are to be clothed with flesh. Over these ideas he brooded, turning, shaping them in his mind, fitting to them the externals of plot and character as might best embody his idea. In employing these ideas he found the opportunity to use the characters, scenes and impressions so carefully described in his note books, to give them reality. In the notes we find both the germs of his stories and much of the outside covering in this way. Many of the ideas for stories concern the relation of one character to another or of a character to a situation. Many involve some ethical idea. The same idea he might use several times. It is interesting to note the original idea and the way he sometimes changed it in working out his story.

From this collected store of hints Hawthorne is credited with having given his friend, Longfellow, the idea fof "Evangeline". It is entered thus in his notes: * "H.L.C. heard from a French Canadian a story of a young couple in Arcadie. On their marriage day, all the men of the Province were summoned to assemble in the church to hear a proclamation. When assembled they were all seized and shipped off to be distributed through New England,--among them the new bride-groom. His bride set off in search of him--wandered about New England all her life-time, and at last, when she was old, she found her bride-groom on

*See "American Note Books" p. 208.

his death-bed. The shock was so great that it killed her likewise."

In the hints for stories the germa of almost all Hawthorne's short tales and sketches may be discovered as well as others tempting to the imagination which he never made use of. The peculiar property of most of these is their appeal to an imagination interested in problems of human behavior. Hawthorne liked to set for himself certain circumstances and to work out what a man would do when so placed.

Under the date 1836 he entered in his note book, "A snake taken into a man's stomach and nourished there from fifteen years to thirty-five, tormenting him most horribly. A type of envy or some other evil passion." Six years later there is a somewhat similar entry. "A man to swallow a small snake,--and it to be a symbol of charished sin." It is this idea changed which he worked out in "Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent." He refers again to it in "Dr.Grimshawe's Secret",* using the snake as a symbol of sin, when he says, "some stir and writhe of something in the past that troubles you as if you had kept a snake for many years in your bosom and stupefied it with brandy and now it awakes again and troubles you with bites and stings."

The genesis for "Feather-top" is seen in this entry for 1840. "To make a story out of a scarecrow, giving it odd attributes. From different points of view, it should

---

*See Riverside Edition, Vol.XIII, p.77.

appear to change,- now an old man, now an old woman,- a gunner, a farmer, or the Old Nick."

The idea if more fully developed in this entry.* "A modern magician to make the semblance of a human being, with two laths for legs, a pumpkin for a head, etc.-of the most modest and meagre materials. Then a tailor helps him to finish his work and transforms this scarecrow into quite a fashionable figure. At the end of the story, after deceiving the world for a long time, the spell should be broken, and the gay dandy discovered to be nothing but a suit of clothes, with these few sticks inside it. All through his seeming existence as a human being there shall be some characteristics, some tokens, that, to the man of close observation and insight, betray him to be a mere thing of laths and clothes, without heart, soul, or intellect. And so this wretched old thing shall become the symbol of a large class." In "Feathertop" the scarecrow became a symbol of the charlatanry and coxcombery of human life.

Such a brief entry as, "To make one's own reflection in a mirror the subject of a story"** resulted in the elaboration of the subject in "Monsieur du Miroir".

The genesis of "The Procession of Life" appears in the note, *** "Some common quality or circumstance that should bring together people the most unlike in all other

---

*J.Hawthorne's "Hawthorne and his Wife",Vol.I,p.290
**"American Note Books" p.26
***"American Note Books" p.27

respects, and make a brotherhood and sisterhood of them,- the rich and the proud finding themselves in the same category with the mean and the despised." The same idea is elaborated in this note; "A new classification of society to be instituted. Instead of rich and poor, high and low, they are to be classed,- First, by their sorrows: for instance, whenever there are any, whether in fair mansion or hovel, who are mourning the loss of relations and friends, and who wear black, whether the cloth be coarse or superfine, they are to make one class. Secondly, all those who have the same maladies----Then proceed to generalize and classify the whole world together, as none can claim utter exemption from either sorrow, sin or disease."

The idea of "The Minister's Black Veil" is shadowed here. * "An essay on the misery of being always under a mask. A veil may be needful, but never a mask. Instances of people who wear masks in all classes of society and never take them off even in the most familiar moments, though sometimes they may chance to slip aside."

The idea of a possible change in the natural span of life is one Hawthorne worked over and over in such things as "Dr.Heidegger's Experiment", "Septimus Felton", and "The Dolliver Romance". Among the many notes referring to this half obsession are these. "Follow out the fantasy of a man taking his life by instalments, instead of at one payment,- say ten yearsof life alternately with ten

* "American Note Books," p.35

years of suspended animation." **

"Curious to imagine what murmerings and discontent would be excited if any of the great so-called calamities of human beings were to be abolished,-as, for instance, death." ***

"Nobody will use other people's experience nor have any of his own till it is too late to use it." *****

"The advantage of a longer life than is allotted to mortals: the many things that might then be accomplished, for which one lifetime is inadequate, and for which the time spent is therefore lost; a successor being unable to take up the task where we drop it."*****

The underlying idea of "The Birthmark" appears twice in the note books. As it first occurred to him Hawthorne noted in 1837, ****** "A person to be in the possession of something as perfect as mortal man has a right to demand. He tries to make it better and ruins it entirely." This idea slightly changed is entered again in 1839. ******* "A person to be the death of his beloved in trying to raise her to more than mortal perfection; yet this should be a comfort to him for having aimed so highly and holily." Yet it is rather the first conception of his story which Hawthorne elaborated in "The Birthmark".

**"American Note Books" p.27

*** "Amer.Note Books" p.36

****"Amer.Note Books" p.37

*****"Hawthorne and his Wife," J.Hawthorne, Vol.I,p.291

******"Amer.Note Books" p.106

*******"Amer.Note Books", p.210

The foundation of one of the richest of all his tales, "Rappaccini's Daughter", appears in these two entries. * "'A story there passeth of an Indian king that sent unto Alexander a fair woman, fed with aconite and other poisons, with this intent complexionally to destroy him!'--Sir Thomas Brown."

** "A company of persons to drink a certain medicinal preparation, which would prove a poison, or the contrary, according to their different characters."

The idea of a bloody footstep was one that haunted Hawthorne's imagination. In 1850 he had entered in his note book, *** "The print in blood of a naked foot to be traced through the street of a town." Strange to say five years later he found just such a print on the threshold of Smithell's Hall in Lancashire. The idea of a romance centering about this was one that never left him although he was unable to successfuly formulate his story. As a symbol perhaps it was too crude for his delicate genius. The bloody footstep associated with the idea of an emigrant to America who had carried away some family secret giving his descendants power in England, and the idea of an elixir of life was the basis of his various unfinished romances. The plots of these romances were too complicated for Hawthorne's method to successfully unravel. His ordinary custom seems to have been to plan his story

---

* "American Note Books", p.209
** "American Note Books", p.108
*** "American Note Books", p.395

in mind before transcribing it to paper, but the unfinished forms in which these romances exist show that it was necessary for him to make several drafts of them.

✗ In the Italian note books the entire working out of "The Marble Faun" can be traced. When Hawthorne saw the Faun of Praxiteles in the Capitol at Rome he wrote in his note book, "It seems to me that a story with all sorts of fun and pathos in it might be contrived on the idea of their species having become intermingled with the human race; a family with the faun blood in them having prolonged itself from the classic era till our own day. The tail might have disappeared by dint of constant intermarriages with ordinary mortals, but the pretty hairy ears should occasionally re-appear in members of the family; and the moral instincts and intellectual characteristics of the faun might be most picturesquely brought out, without detriment to the human interest of the story. Fancy this combination in the person of a young lady." *

✗ The strange possibilities of life on which Hawthorne's imagination liked peculiarly to dwell is further illustrated by such hints for stories as these entered in the American notes. ** "Our body to be possessed by two different spirits, so that half of the visage shall express one mood, and the other half another."

---

* "French and Italian Note Books", p.172

** "American Note Books", p.42

* "Dialogues of the unborn."

** "To have ice in one's blood."

*** "All the dead that had ever been drowned in a certain lake to arise."

"A woman to sympathize with all emotions, but to have none of her own."****

Seeing a bust of Nero he wished someone could analyse and develop his character showing how he grew to be such a monster.

✓ The extent to which Hawthorne used his personal experiences, transposing them into the body of his romances, is clearly revealed in his notes. Here he gathered the immense amount of detail with which he decorated his work. The whole background and incident of "The Marble Faun" appears in the Italian notes--the carnival scenes, the dead monk with the blood trickling from his nostrils, the description of Beatrice Cenci's portrait and William Storey's statue of Cleopatra, the shrine of the Virgin and Monte Beni's villa. In his preface, Hawthorne apologized for the extent to which he had thus introduced "Italian objects, antique, pictorial and statuesque", saying that he could not find it in his heart to cancel them.

✓ Nothing in the romances is more moving than the description of Zenobia's death in "The Blithedale Romance".

---

* "Amer.Note Books" p.209

** "Amer.Note Books" p.210

***"Amer.Note Books" p.204

**** "Amer.Note Books" p.109

It is moving because of its realism. Here Zenobia emerges from Hawthorne's company of wraithlike characters. In death she is the girl for whose body Hawthorne dragged the river at Concord on July 9,1845. The extent to which he used the real episode, entrusted while hot to his notes, is seen in a comparison of his journal with the Romance. In the journal Hawthorne wrote,*"If she could have foreseen, while she stood, at five o'clock that morning, on the bank of the river, how her maiden corpse would have looked, eighteen hours afterwards, and how coarse men would strive with hand and foot to reduce it to a decent aspect and all in vain,- it would surely have saved her from the deed."

In the "Blithedale Romance" he wrote, ** "Being the woman that she was, could Zenobia have foreseen all these ugly circumstances of death, - how ill it would become her, the altogether unseemly aspect which she must put on, and especially old Silas Foster's efforts to improve the matter, - she could no more have committed the dreadful act than have exhibited herself to a public assembly in a badly fitting garment!"

✓A field of fiction in which Hawthorne was especially ✓ interested was the juvenile one. His unusual love for children is evident in his tender references to his own in his journals. Writing for them was a pleasanter and

---

* J.Hawthorne's "Hawthorne and his Wife." Vol.I,p.300
** See chap. "Midnight"

lighter duty for him. Many suggestions for children's stories occur in his notes. * "To describe a boyish combat with snow-balls, and the victorious leader to have a statue of snow erected to him. It might be a child's story"; or ** "Pandora's box for a child's story"; or *** "For a child's story,-the voyage of a little boat made of a chip, with a birch-bark sail, down a river."

✓ Hawthorne's attitude toward his juvenile work was one of real moral responsibility. In his preface to "Biographical Stories", regarding the trust he felt he said, "This small volume and others of a similar character, from the same hand, have not been composed without a deep sense of responsibility. The author regards children as sacred, and would not, for the world, cast anything into the fountain of a young heart that might embitter and pollute its waters, and even in point of the reputation to be aimed at, juvenile literature is as well worth cultivating as any other."

✓ In describing his "Tanglewood Tales" he wrote in a letter to R.H.Stoddard that he had "purified them from all moral stains, recreated them as good as new or better, and fully equal in their own way to 'mother Goose'. I never did anything else so well as these old baby stories."

*"Amer.Note Books",p.42 ** "Amer.Note Bks." p.207
*** "Amer.Note Bks." p.403

Hawthorne's purpose and aim in writing the "Wonder Book" he expressed in the preface as being to "substitute a tone in some degree Gothic or romantic, or any such tone as may best please myself, instead of the classic coldness which is as repellant as the touch of marble."

In "Grandfather's Chair" he aimed to make the shadowy outlines of historical people assume the hues of life for his juvenile readers.

Hawthorne's humor has a peculiarly wan, gentle quality. It has been remarked that it is never mirth. Humor seems rather foreign to his spirit. The puns and humorous suggestions entered in his notes give one a slight surprise. Such entries as these occur:

* "Miss Polly Syllable--a schoolmistress."

** "Mankind are earthen jugs with spirits in them."

*** "A scold and a blockhead--brimstone and wood--a good match."

The delicacy of his humor at its best is illustrated in the chapter "The Flight of Two Owls" in "The House of Seven Gables" when the broken old Clifford, feeling himself once more a free man, breaks forth into a garrulous philosophy astounding to his travelling companions. Such humor is deepened by pathos.

Of his early attempts at the grotesquely humorous,

"American Note Books", * p.282, ** p.282, *** p.26.

Hawthorne said in depreciation in his note book, *"As to Mrs.Bullfrog, I give her up to the severest reprehension. The story was written as a mere experiment in that style; it did not come from any depth within me,--neither my heart nor mind had anything to do with it."

✓ In considering the general method of organization of Hawthorne's romances, we may regard his early sketches as experimental in preparing the way for his later work. They may be roughly divided into three groups. First are the dramatic scenes from history, reflecting Scott's influence most strongly. This group is typified by "The Gray Champion". Its pictorial quality is conspicuous. Second are the essay sketches reflecting the wisdom of everyday observation of village life. Such is "Little Annie's Ramble". Third, and perhaps most characteristic, are the tales involving some psychological and allegorical situation, typified by "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment". These forms are expanded and illustrated in the later work.

✓ Hawthorne's plot as illustrated in his four novels is the simplest. He created first, as has been shown in his note books, a situation into which he introduced a small character group, shaping the story around this nucleus and aiming at unity of effect and situation. Professor Erskine has with truth called "The Scarlet

* See entry for Sept.16, 1841.

Letter" the simplest story in American literature. ✓ "The House of Seven Gables" is a succession of stories.* It may be called a three act drama. The first act concerns the origin of the curse on the Pynchson family. The second is the tale of Alice, and the third, the body of the novel, is the working out of the curse. The brooding presence of the old house holds these three sections together.

✓ Detail Hawthorne considered of the greatest importance. Speaking of "The House of Seven Gables" he said, "Many passages of this book ought to be finished with the minuteness of a Dutch picture to give them their proper effect." Instead of too great elaboration of detail, he used suggestion. It is this detail of simple things which perhaps stands out best in memory after reading "The House of Seven Gables"-- the chickens in the garden, the Jim-crow ginger bread, the thin old china, the sights of the street.

✓ Hawthorne's favorite method of presentation, in which the influence of the early sketches is seen, was in a series of brilliant pictures. "The Scarlet Letter" is his best illustration of this. ✓

✓ As the point for beginning his romances he chose "the fifth act", where ordinary stories end. In this he is like Ibsen. All his great stories have as their basis of theme sin, yet Hawthorne chooses to take up the story

---

* See Woodberry's "Hawthorne" p.210 for discussion.

after that sin has been committed. In the causes leading to its commission he is in no way concerned, but the effects of the sin are his stody. So "The Scarlet Letter" begins where Hester assumes the burden of her man-contrived punishment. The passion and weakness that preceded it are hardly touched. Similarly in "The Marble Faun" the real sin which started the chain of the story was hardly Donatello's murder of Miriam's shadow at the Tarpeian Rock, but rather some mysterious blot on Miriam's past, with the details of which we are never acquainted.

Two subjects stand out for Hawthorne's constant treatment--sin and the isolation of every soul. Sin he saw was universal. So Witch Hibbins in "The Scarlet Letter" symbolizing sin, was sheltered under the roof of that stern upholder of justice, the Governor. Sin in his view could be present merely in the mind, even if it bore no visible fruit. In the case of Donatello it became an educating factor. Of him Hawthorne asks * "Is sin then--which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the universe--is it, like a sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his?" Such questions it was Hawthorne's way to suggest, but not to answer.

* See chap."Miriam, Hilda, Kenyon, Donatello."

✓ Since he believed words * "a thick and darksome veil of mystery between the soul and the truth which it seeks" Hawthorne sought in style simplicity, accuracy of description and lucidity. His evident aim for clearness is shown in the preface to "Twice Told Tales". "They never need translation---- Every sentence so far as it embodies thought or sensibility may be understood and felt by anybody who will give himself the trouble to read it, and will take up the book with the proper mood."

✓ In a final view, Hawthorne's keen criticism of his own work throws light on his theory of fiction. In his preface to "Twice Told Tales", relative to self criticism, he says, "If writers were allowed to do so and would perform the task with perfect sincerity and unreserve, their opinions of their own productions would often be more valuable and instructive than the works themselves."

✓ He realized his preference for the vague and undefined, and the resulting lack of force in his work. He saw that the most conspicuously lacking element of his work was power. His own personality, retiring and secluded from the world, reflected his reserve in his work, so he was conscious that he could not arouse emotions of mirth or sorrow in his readers. The veil of romance which he endeavored to throw over his observations of life

---

* "American Note Books" p.219

contribated a kind of chill to his work. In the "Scarlet Letter", in which he comes nearer arousing our tears than perhaps in any of his work, it is because his characters threaten sometimes in their humanness to break the mould he has imposed on them, to emerge from their reserve. In his criticism Hawthorne says of his "Twice Told Tales", "They have the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade,- the coolness of a meditative habit, which diffuses itself through the feeling and observation of every sketch. Instead of passion there is sentiment; and even in what purport to be pictures of actual life, we have allegory, not always so warmly dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood as to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver. Whether from lack of power, or an unconquerable reserve, the Author's touches have often an effect of tameness; the merriest man can hardly contrive to laugh at his broadest humor; the tenderest woman, one would suppose will hardly shed warm tears at his deepest pathos. The book, if you would see anything in it, requires to be read in the clear, brown twilight atmosphere, in which it was written."

To literature Hawthorne brought that delicacy of perception exemplified by his remark on contemplating a rose; "On earth, only a flower is perfect".

*See Riverside Edition, Vol.XII, p.567.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Hawthorne's Works", Riverside Edition 13 Vols.

Brownell, W.C., "American Prose Masters".

"Cambridge History of American Literature", Vol.II, pages 415-424

Canby, "The Short Story in English".

Conway, Moncure D. "Hawthorne".

Erskine, John "Leading American Novelists, 1910.

Hawthorne, Julian "Hawthorne and His Wife", 2 Vols.

Lathrop, G.P. "A Study of Hawthorne".

More, Paul Elmer "The Solitude of Nathaniel Hawthorne" "Atlantic Monthly Nov.1901

Stearns, Frank Preston "The Life and Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne" 1906

Tichnor, Caroline "Hawthorne and His Publisher"

Van Doren, Carl "The American Novel".

Woodberry, George E. "Nathaniel Hawthorne" American Men of Letters Series, 1902