"THE ACTUAL AND THE IMAGINARY": HAWTHORNE'S CONCEPT OF ART IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Few students of modern fiction—that peculiarly Western evolution—deny Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “absolute greatness as a writer and the centrality of his position in American literature.”1 But too many go on to assert that “allegory is organic” to Hawthorne’s work.2 As a result, the familiar deduction from these casual premises is the widely accepted assumption that Hawthorne wrote great allegory. By such an approach we can prove that every play that Shakespeare wrote was good. However, in point of fact, no one has shown satisfactorily either that Titus Andronicus is a good play or that Hawthorne was a great allegorist. If we are to reach a sound critical understanding of Hawthorne and his place in literature, we must come to grips with the unconscious syllogism which has weakened many of the recent, generally perceptive studies of him.3 What must be decided is how “organic”—or central, to be more exact—to Hawthorne’s artistic purposes and methods was his “inveterate love of allegory.”4

A more helpful hypothesis is that an inveterate love of human life—that odd mixture of body and soul—was central to, and controlled Hawthorne’s philosophy of art. His particular understanding of the nature of man led him to a parallel, but elevated view of the artist as one who lives and works among the Actual and the Imaginary for the purpose of giving the ordinary man a greater appreciation of life. By seeing then, (1) what elements it takes to make an artist and (2) how an artist goes about his work, we can reach (3) an understanding of Hawthorne’s aesthetic of the Actual

3 See, for example, Fogle, Hawthorne’s Fiction, p. 41, for the clearest evidence of the syllogism; Ivor Winters, “Maule’s Curse: or Hawthorne and the Problem of Allegory” (1938), In Defense of Reason (Denver, 1947), pp. 157-175, who assumes the validity of the minor premise in order to deny Hawthorne’s greatness; and Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1894) who reveals that he accepts the syllogism when he is forced to say that “without his allegory Hawthorne would be nothing” (p. 66).
4 Certainly the main line of Hawthorne criticism from Poe and James; down to Newton Arvin, Austin Warren, Randall Stewart, and Leon Howard; and including now H. H. Waggoner and Harry Levin has reflected the idea that Hawthorne was “more than a mere allegorist”; however, the fact that each of these students of Hawthorne has felt he had to make some sort of general qualification with regard to “Hawthorne’s allegory” shows the pervasiveness of the assumption being examined in this article. Only F. O. Mathiessen, to date, has undertaken a similar study.
and the Imaginary. Once we understand Hawthorne’s theory of art we shall be able (4) to see to what degree and how “allegory” and imagination figure in his work, and (5) to come to a more exact estimate of his genius.

Melville long ago warned the “mere critic” of the futility that lies in trying to analyze Hawthorne’s genius, “for it is not the brain that can test such a man; it is only the heart. You cannot come to know greatness by inspecting it; there is no glimpse to be caught of it, except by intuition.” Nevertheless, any intuitive discoveries made by a critic can be reported only in the rhetorical patterns of humble prose. These two observations need not discourage us in our attempt to sound Hawthorne; they should remind us, rather, that the orderly progressions and philosophical schemes that follow are the report of a reader, not the product of an artist. No claim is made for Hawthorne as a logically consistent philosopher; insight and reflection can work together productively in an intelligent, sensitive adult without his knowing how or caring why. And, it should be needless to add, the processes of such cerebral production can be haphazard and apparently confusing without impairing the end result. Let us accept, then, the challenge offered by Hawthorne to “look through the entire range of his characters, good and evil, in order to detect any of his essential traits.”

I

Hawthorne quite rightly placed himself “between the Transcendentalists . . . and the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude.” This could be taken as merely an evasive circumlocution concerning that fictitious alterego, M. de l’Aubépine; however, I find it to be an exact delineation of the area where Hawthorne felt that, as an artist, his creative work would be most effective. He affirms repeatedly that man, above the animals, has soul, intellect, and heart. The Transcendentalists were overly concerned with the soul, while the majority of writers ignored what might be the divine or immortal—“etereal” is Hawthorne’s preference—aspect of man and stayed within the limits of the body’s head (intellect) and heart. But Hawthorne felt that neither the body nor the soul should be neglected in favor of the other; rather, he attempted to formulate his work in such a

5 “Hawthorne and His Moses,” The Apple-tree Table and Other Sketches, ed. Henry Chapin (Princeton, 1922), pp. 63-64.
6 Preface, The Snow Image, III, 285. All references are to the Riverside Edition of The Complete Works, ed. G. P. Lathrop, 13 vols. (Boston, 1883-84). When the general source of a quotation is clear, its exact location will be noted in the text.
way that it would be written from, and addressed to, the total man: soul, intellect, and heart.

At first glance, Hawthorne's view of man appears to follow traditional humanistic thought. However, Hawthorne separated what Shakespeare would have called simply "the rational soul" into intellect and soul; the soul alone remained uncorrupted by Adam's fall, while reason (intelligl) lost its divine efficacy, a view in accord both with Hawthorne's Puritan heritage and with his exposure to Romanticism. The heart, in turn, serves as a kind of middle ground. Bodily and impure, it is "that foul cavern... wherein existed the original wrong of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types." Yet, the two Allegories of the Heart (II, 303-346) remind us that the redeeming power of love also resides within the heart. Thus, although the soul alone is spiritual while the head and the heart are earthly, they must all work in harmony if man is to be happy and at peace with himself.

Basically, the artist is representative of Everyman; however, his innate moral characteristics of intellect, soul, and heart are expanded to "thought, imagination, and keenest sensibility." These three powers must be acute, but also must remain in balance, if they are to produce great art: if they are "to put the very spirit of beauty into form and give it motion."

The first step necessary in artistic creation is the full exercise of intellectual power in the analysis of actual material flux and fact, be it butterflies, a birthmark, or the "varying characteristic traits" of a young couple. This is the step which Hilda could not accomplish; she had the requisite imagination and sensibility (soul and heart) which could re-create some one else's analysis of external reality, but she did not have enough mind to be an original artist. "Instructed by sorrow," however, at the end of The Marble Faun, Hilda had lost her ability to copy, for "she could not yield herself up to the painter so unreservedly as in times past; her character had developed a sturdier quality, which made her less pliable to the influence of other minds... She had known such a reality, that it taught her to distinguish inevitably the large portion that is unreal, in every work of art."

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9 "Earth's Holocaust," II, 445. (On the same page, the intellect alone is shown to be powerless with regard to the heart.)
14 The Marble Faun, VI, 427. This passage is important not only because it reflects Hawthorne's views on aesthetics but also because it gives support to that school which sees the theme of the work as a reaffirmation of felix culpa: Hilda clearly has been educated now that her virtue is no longer fugitive and cloistered. Perhaps the violence of her retort to Kenyon in the next chapter (XLII) is the reflection of her realization of this fact. In any case, the entire present chapter (XLI) should be read, for it supplies a wealth of evidence which supports the thesis being presented in this article.
Once we make this discovery, that appearance is unreal, we fall apart like Feathertop unless our new knowledge leads to a sense of a higher reality. Hence, at this stage, Hawthorne’s conception of the imagination enters into his aesthetic, for the imagination is an “innate tendency of soul” which reaffirms with the new Adam and Eve that ‘heaven is my home.’ It is necessary in art, for “it is only through the medium of the imagination that we can lessen those iron fetters, which we call truth and reality, and make ourselves even partially sensible what prisoners we are” (II, 278). Hawthorne was not a Subjective Idealist—witness the fate of Sylph Etherge who lived entirely within “the haunts of imagination” (III, 510)—, nor was he a Transcendentalist; nevertheless, he did believe that there was a truth and a reality higher than those represented by material flux and fact alone. No weighty metaphysics such as Coleridge’s, nor a well defined theology such as Edwards’ specifically informed his thought; but, brought up in the mixed atmosphere of both philosophies and being a man of sensitive mind and spirit, Hawthorne was conditioned to accept some sort of heaven, absolute, or perfect Idea as an empirical fact. We need look no further than “The Old Manse” to see that, in truth, he did. There, it is clear that the beauties of nature, especially as reflected in the river, informed his soul of an ideal realm; but even at the mundane Salem Custom House, he believed with all his power that there was a “true and indestructible value that lay hidden in ... petty and wearisome incidents, and ordinary characters” (V, 57). It is the function of the imagination to discern “in this sphere of strangely mingled elements, the beauty and the majesty which are compelled to assume a garb so sordid.”

But “the coolness of a meditative habit” and the “glittering icicles of imagination” will remain cold and lifeless “till the heart is touched,” until thought and imagination (mind and soul) are warmed by mixing with the artist’s sensibility or sympathy. The warming, humanizing power of the heart hardly needs to be labored anymore, but it receives an interesting illustration in the Preface to The Scarlet Letter. There, Hawthorne’s innate sympathy was so stirred by the “A” that it scorched him.

———The Artist of the Beautiful,” II, 515.
37 The House of Seven Gables, III, 59.
Yet, he could not write his novel at that time, for even though the story was "subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, ... it was evading the analysis of my mind," and "my imagination was a tarnished mirror" (V, 50, 53). How, then, does the artist combine and mold his creative powers? To answer this question we must delve into the light and shade, and enter the lives of every day affairs and of solitude. When we come out, we should have a clearer idea of Hawthorne's conception of the Actual and the Imaginary, and should be in a better position to interpret his "invertebrate love of allegory."

II

From Hawthorne's Note-books, his Prefaces (especially those to the Twice-told Tales and The Scarlet Letter), the many sketches such as "Snow-flakes" and "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man" [Oberon], the tales "Drown's Wooden Image" and "The Artist of the Beautiful," and some passages in The Marble Faun we get a consistent picture of the artist at work. In all, the artist lives a divided life: half in the sunshine amid nature or the bustle of life, half in the shade and in solitude. The sun is necessary for the studied and passive observation of all the potential materials and subjects later to figure in artistic creations. But the sun shines equally on the just and the unjust, confusing apparent reality with the manifestations of a higher reality. Thus, the artist must retire to a study where daylight does not interfere with the figuring forth of the imagination. Hawthorne's warning to his fiancé could have been addressed as well to a young artist: "Keep thy imagination sane—that is one of the truest conditions of a communion with Heaven."

In solitude, then, surrounded by shade created by fire or some subdued light, an artist can serve his imagination—the shade hiding "whatever was unworthy to be noticed" and the fire picturing forth "golden glimpses of a better world." Thus, the study itself becomes a symbol of the imagination, just as is Miriam's studio in The Marble Faun, which was

one of those delightful spots that hardly seem to belong to the actual world, but rather to be the outward type of the poet's haunted imagination [See "The Haunted Mind"], where there are glimpses, sketches, and

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20 Annette K. Baxter, "Independence vs. Isolation: Hawthorne and James on the Problem of the Artist," Nineteenth Century Fiction, X (December, 1955), 225-231, correctly warns us not to assume that Hawthorne projected himself in the pictures of his own artists, for his total achievement reads otherwise; and Arlin Turner, "Hawthorne as Self-Critic," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXVII (April, 1938), 132-136, points out that Hawthorne purposely underrated himself as a kind of protective device.


22 "A Select Party," II, 71-72; "Fire Worship," II, 162. ("Fire Worship" serves as "Il Penseroso" to his "L'Allegro": "Buds and Bird Voices.")
half-developed hints of beings and objects grander and more beautiful than we can anywhere find in reality. The windows were closed with shutters, or deeply curtained, except one which was partly open to a sunless portion of the sky, admitting only from high upward that partial light which, with its strongly marked contrast of shadow, is the first requisite towards seeing objects pictorially. (VI, 57)

Yet, if the hints of the imagination are to receive full development, the artist even in solitude must somehow keep his heart warm so that his natural sensibility will be communicated to his artifact. As Kenyon fell in love, his “genius unconsciously wrought upon by Hilda’s influence, took a more delicate character than heretofore”; when she is lost, “imagination and the love of art” die within him (VI, 426, 483).

Hawthorne often repeated this conception of how a creative imagination functioned; let us take our summary, then, from *Dr. Grimshawe’s Secret*, in order to show his consistency. In describing Ned, he says, “there were the rudiments of a poetic and imaginative mind within the boy, if its subsequent culture should be such as the growth of that delicate flower requires; a brooding habit taking outward things into itself and imbuing them with its own essence until, after they had lain there awhile, they assumed a relation both to truth and to himself, and became mediums to affect other minds with the magnetism of his own.” Like Hawthorne, Ned grew up in a shadow, “with less sunshine than he needed for a robust and exuberent development, though enough” to cultivate his imagination. Ned, too, lived “an inward life . . ., keeping his imagination always awake and strong.” Although he lived in a “castle in the air” [see *Our Old Home*, VII, 150–51, “A Select Party,” and “The Hall of Fantasy”], Little Elsie was there “to keep life real, and substantial” (XIII, 108–110).

III

A castle in the air, a study, or living an inward life should not be taken as evidence of a denial of actual life. Hawthorne calls the world unreal because it is not complete reality; it has the appearance of reality only when close contact with earthly things successfully masks the higher reality. Since the degrees of reality and unreality which the world offers will vary from person to person, Hawthorne avoids confusion by calling material fact and flux “the Present, the Immediate, the Actual.” In spite of his use of the fiction of Berkeleian psychology, his emphasis was of an opposite nature. The Actual exists and man exists within it.

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28 Dedication *Our Old Home*, VII, 16. The rest of the dedication may be read in support of the present article.
On the other hand, the Ideal may lie “above, below, or beyond the actual.” It matters little, for the Ideal can only be imagined within each person. The Imaginary, then, is just that: a condition of the mind. But the imagination, nevertheless, can have a real effect on man. Having its origin in the soul, it can bring to bear on man’s vision the soul’s knowledge of the Ideal. Through the imagination, a man is given an elevated perception of the material fact and flux which might otherwise cloud his vision of a better life. By exercising the active faculty of his soul he can purge away the petty aspects of earthly life so that life is endowed with a purer meaning.

In spite of my separation of the Actual and the Imaginary for purposes of definition, they play equally important roles in artistic creation, the purpose of which is to “affect other minds with the magnetism” of the artist’s mind. If a work is too imaginary, or exclusively Transcendental, contact cannot be made with other minds. If it is too much a pen-and-ink copy of actual life, there will be no magnetism, no shock of human recognition, no impulse along the magnetic chain of humanity. Effective art lies somewhere in between.

Hawthorne observed in his American Notebooks that “on being transported to strange scenes, we feel as if all were unreal. This is but the perception of the true unreality of earthly things, made evident between ourselves and them. By and by we become mutually adapted, and the perception is lost” (IX, 109). The artist’s retreat to some kind of study is necessary, then, so that the imagination can work to regain that perception.

This idea receives dramatic illustration from an incident reported in Our Old Home. Hawthorne had gone to Uttoxeter because the story of Dr. Johnson’s having done penance there as an old man had always touched him deeply. Once arrived, however, he was surprised to find that he felt no emotional reaction; rather, he walked around the market place quietly bemused, observing and pondering the details of the setting, but careful not to fall into a literal reenactment of the penance. Hawthorne understood that

a sensible man had better not let himself be betrayed into these attempts to realize the things which he has dreamed about, and which, when they cease to be purely ideal in his mind, will have lost the truest of their truth, the loftiest and profoundest part of their power over his sympathies. Facts, as we really find them, whatever poetry they may involve, are covered with a stony excrescence of prose, resembling the crust on a beautiful sea-shell, and they never show their most delicate and divinest colors until we shall have dissolved away their grosser actualities by steeping them long in the powerful menstruum of thought. And seeking to actualize them again, we do but renew the crust. If this were otherwise,—if the moral sublimity of a great fact depended in any degree on its

24 “The Hall of Fantasy,” II, 197.
garb of external circumstance, things which change and decay,—it could not itself be immortal and ubiquitous, and only a brief point of time and a little neighborhood would be spiritually nourished by its grandeur and beauty. (VII, 165–66)

Even though Hawthorne was careful, then, not to stand in the middle of the market place, he felt no grandeur and beauty while visiting Utteroxeter. As soon as he had left the town, however, “this sad and lovely story . . . [became] holy to my contemplation, again. . . . It but confirms what I have been saying, that sublime and beautiful facts are best understood when etherealized by distance” (VII, 16).

It is clear now why an artist needs a study, why he needs to enter “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.” When such a mixture of the Actual and the Imaginary is obtained, the result will be effective art. We get a total view of this aesthetic theory through “The Hall of Fantasy.”

The Hall of Fantasy, like the soul and heaven itself, “is likely to endure longer than the most substantial structure that ever cumbered the earth.” It is important for the artist to visit the hall, for “here the wise head and capacious heart may do their work; and what is good and true becomes gradually hardened into fact.” Yet the hall can not be a home, for “the root of human nature strikes down deep into this earthly soil, and it is but reluctantly that we submit to be transplanted, even for a higher cultivation in heaven.” No, that “allegoric structure,” the Imaginary, is only a “place of refuge from the gloom and chilliness of actual life.” Granted that “there is but half a life—the meaner and earthlier half—for those who never find their way into the hall,” it is equally true that the Imaginary is but half a life, and good art will mix the Actual and the Imaginary to soften the “hard angles” of earthly existence. Hawthorne concludes, “Let us be content, therefore, with merely an occasional visit to the Hall, for the sake of spiritualizing the grossness of this actual life, and prefiguring to ourselves a state in which the Idea shall be all in all” (II, 196–211).

Hawthorne’s mention of ‘prefiguring the Idea’ seems to lay the groundwork for Symbolism and the idea of ‘spiritualizing this life’ could validly lead to Allegory. But symbolism demands a kind of imagination which Hawthorne did not have; moreover, a symbol tends to separate the Actual and the Imaginary, even while yoking them. Allegory, indeed, does mix the Actual and the Imaginary; however, it demands a strict and well-defined philosophy or theology which it wishes to expound. But Hawthorne would join neither the ‘School of Philosophy’ nor any church; they were too narrow.

in their approaches to life. What then of his confessed "love of allegory"? The phrase is a vague expression which described the manner in which Hawthorne's imagination worked—a manner partly symbolical and partly allegorical.

IV

With Hawthorne's constant emphasis on the necessity of the imagination's working hand and glove with the head and the heart, we are reminded of Coleridge's metaphysic of Organic Vitalism. Drowne's repetition of the aesthetic commonplace that a "figures lies hidden within that block of oak, and it is my business to find it" (II, 353) has, in fact, suggested to recent critics that Hawthorne knew Coleridge's theory. But the correspondence between Hawthorne and Coleridge is only a similarity, not an identity, for Hawthorne's conception of the imagination was not so rarefied as the Englishman's. F. O. Matthiessen was quite right when he said that Hawthorne never distinguished between the imagination and fancy, and we can agree with Coleridge that the distinction, in itself, is rather pointless. Nevertheless, his analysis of the imagination does give us a measure which we may use to determine the degree of esemplastic creative power which lies within Hawthorne's conception of the imagination.

Coleridge's primary imagination is "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and is a repetition of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM." This is the power in the theory of Organic Vitalism which can create a world above nature by using its knowledge to postulate the essential creative process of nature. But Hawthorne was mystified by that process. Although he saw that somehow the Gothic represented "the very process of nature", he was equally sure that it "produces an effect we know not of." Because he took the world as he found it and believed that its essential qualities could not be changed, he affirmed that his taste was Gothic, not Platonic as was Coleridge's: "classic statues escape you with their slippery beauty, as if they were made of ice. Rough and ugly things can be clutched." Hence, Hawthorne's reac-

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21 American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 249-250. Matthiessen tends to overrate the archetypal thrust of Hawthorne's imagination; he, like Male, Tragic Vision, pp. 29-32, has to draw heavily from Melville in order to illustrate the esemplastic power of Hawthorne's mind. Hawthorne did not have enough self-reliance, in the Emersonian sense, to be a symbolist.

tion to nature and the Gothic was “moral rather than intellectual”; he needed the Actual “where human feelings may cling and overgrow like ivy.”

The difference between the two men is most clearly seen in “The Artist of the Beautiful” (II, 504–536). Hawthorne’s delineation of Owen Warland’s attempt to create “a beauty that should attain to the ideal which Nature proposed to herself in all her creatures, but has never taken the pains to realize” entails both a Platonic conception of art and the creative process of Organic Vitalism. But what is Hawthorne’s evaluation of Owen’s desire? He suggests ironically that “the chase of butterflies was an apt emblem of the ideal pursuit in which he had spent so many golden hours.” He further implies that had Owen spent his golden hours (hours in which the spirit and imagination are exercised) in courting Annie and had he fallen in love with her, “his lot would have been so rich in beauty that out of its mere redundancy he might have wrought the beautiful in many a worthier type than he had toiled for.” Once Owen’s aim had been realized, the result fell far below any Coleridgean Ideal. Hawthorne keeps reminding us that it was a mechanical butterfly, that it sought humans before heaven, and that when it did attempt heaven, a ceiling—“that earthly medium”—prevented any escape from the world. If we recall that Hawthorne repeatedly symbolized the heart by a house, the implication at the end of “The Owen’s heart so warmed that he could turn his attention to earthly beauty as represented by a mother and child before a domestic fire. Because, as Owen realized, the butterfly contained “the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful,” he had to reject the symbol if he was to affirm his own life and reality. After the butterfly had been exorcised, Owen’s “spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.” He had learned how to perceive beauty on earth and how to bring others closer to a perception.

Coleridge’s primary imagination leads to a symbolism which expands from the material and points to the supernatural, to the realm of archetypes; but Hawthorne was so committed to existence in this world that his imagination could conceive only of symbols which pointed to life itself. His was the imagination which saw a

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29 The French and Italian Note-books, X, 399–400. See also Matthiessen, pp. 269–270, for a discussion of Hawthorne’s Gothic taste.
30 Contrasting readings can be found in Geo. E. Woodberry, Nathaniel Hawthorne: How to Know Him (Indianapolis, 1918), pp. 74–89; R. H. Fogle, Hawthorne’s Fiction, pp. 79–90; and Rudolph Von Abele, “Baby and Butterfly,” Kenyon Review, XV (Spring, 1953), 286–292. Woodberry believed that the story is a perfect illustration of Hawthorne’s artistic aim and method; Fogle believes that Warland’s achievement represents the superior spiritual validity of aesthetic experience; and Von Abele believes that there is a tension in the tale which is a projection of Hawthorne’s inability to reconcile the contradictory allegiances to which he was committed as a man and as an artist.
house not as a type of eternity but as the human heart, which was able to put the music of the spheres into a music box, and which believed that the microscopic techniques of “the old Dutch masters” get “at the soul of common things, and so make them types and interpreters of the spiritual world.” A description of such an imagination can be found in Coleridge on Fancy:

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

If this is a just delineation of Hawthorne’s “imagination,” and if, as Matthiessen says, “allegory deals with fixities and definites which it does not basically modify,” then we should be able to conclude that Hawthorne wrote Allegory. But the essential quality of Allegory is that it has a particular philosophy or theology from which it deduces its particular symbols and to which those symbols must consistently refer. In this respect The Fairie Queen and The Pilgrim’s Progress are allegories, but Gulliver’s Travels is not. And, in spite of Melville and Fogle, I should say that neither “A Select Party” nor “The Celestial Railroad” is, strictly speaking, an allegory. They present us with types, not archetypes; hence, they are quasi-allegorical in that they contain Imaginary figures, which are deduced from Actual life and refer to Actual life, and quasi-symbolical in that they contain Actual symbols which only pass through the Imaginary and refer back to the Actual.

V
Against the background of Hawthorne’s ideas concerning the function of the artist and his theory of the Actual and the Imaginary, I have tried to estimate the nature of his imagination in order to show that neither symbolism nor, more particularly, allegory, considered as genres, plays a central part in his conception of art. Because Hawthorne did work with the Imaginary, however, a tendency towards symbolism and allegory seemed to enter his


29 Biographia Literaria, Ch. XIII (Bate, p. 387).


31 “Hawthorne and His Memoirs,” The Apple-tree Table and Other Sketches, ed. Henry Chapin (Princeton, 1922) pp. 82–83; Hawthorne’s Fiction, p. 13. The ensuing quotations of Melville are from this famous review and will not be noted.

32 H. H. Wagoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge Mass, 1955), p. 58 (et passim) presents the same general conclusion, but without much clarity of definition: “Hawthorne’s best tales exist ... in a realm somewhere between symbolism and allegory, as those terms are used today.”
writing, but the following remarks concerning M. de l'Aubépine in the preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter" show that Hawthorne was not entirely happy with that tendency: "His writings, to do them justice, are not altogether destitute of fancy and originality; they might have won him greater reputation but for an inveterate love of allegory, which is apt to invest his plots and characters with the aspect of scenery and people in the clouds, and to steal away the human warmth out of his conceptions" (II, 107). Hawthorne here apologizes because the "love of allegory" over-balances and has not mixed with "human warmth." The whole context, then, supports his belief that the Actual and the Imaginary must "each imbue itself with the nature of other" in order to create scenes "that seem the reality of a better earth, and yet are the very truth of the scenes around us." 86 Unless the scenes around us can be recognized in an artistic form, their potential spiritual manifestations will not be felt or communicated. The artist must return all the way to earth from the Hall of Fantasy.

A return is necessary because of the simple empirical fact that a man cannot shake the dirt off his feet. Man may have a spirit, but it is a "spirit burdened with clay and working in matter." Even though we must accept the "composite" condition of human life, the soul can permeate the material, enabling man to weave this "mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial." 87

Hawthorne, then, accepted the fact of material human existence, but he did not believe that man was necessarily forced to live a life of materialism. The soul must be given as much freedom as is possible in order that life may be preserved in its purest earthly form. In his 'L'Allegro,'—"Buds and Bird Voices"—he affirms, "There is no decay. Each human soul is the first-created inhabitant of its own Eden" (II, 175). By approaching life through the "renewing power of the spirit" (hence through the imagination) life can be preserved as created, and it is the role of the artistic imagination to save men such as the watchmaker Peter Hovenden from getting so enmeshed in the fact and flux of material decay that they cannot respond to the impulses of the soul. Hawthorne was an existentialist with enough general theology and a large enough heart and mind to see a beauty in life above a hampered existence in time and space. This is the man that Melville recommended to an American audience, for "the smell of your beeches and hemlocks is upon him; your own broad prairies are in his soul; and if you travel inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the roar of his Niagara." This is the man whom Julian Hawthorne knew:

86 The Marble Faun, VI, 160.
Even when we enter the "Hall of Fantasy", or are among the guests at "A Select Party," or try the virtues of "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," still we feel that the "great, round, solid earth" of which Hawthorne speaks so affectionately is beneath our feet. He does not float vaguely in mid-air, but takes his stand somewhere near the center of things, and always knows what he is about. Tracing back his fanciful vagaries, we invariably find them originating in some settled and constant middle ground of belief, from which they are measured and which renders them comprehensible and significant.30

Julian felt the empirical commitment of his father, but Hawthorne would have disagreed when Julian said his father never floated vaguely in mid-air. Hawthorne thought that at times he did get lost in the clouds, and his uncertainty greatly contributed to the shade and gloom in his work.

The major reason for the shadows in Hawthorne is, of course, artistic. His belief that the pervasiveness of variegated, attention-binding fact and flux can negate the power of the soul to see a higher reality led him to create gloomy projections of life. Life lived without relief is painted without relief. In addition, Hawthorne's portrayal of this aspect of life derives a great part of its force, as Melville realized, from its appeal to a "Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin." Still, this "power of blackness" is mainly aesthetic.31 For example, in The Scarlet Letter all the themes and motifs combine in a plea for man to live and act in accordance with the spiritual potential given him at birth. The fact of a 17th century Puritan colony in New England is real, but, at least in 1850, Hawthorne felt that the inherent qualities of men were allowed a freer action and more natural play in 17th century Old England; hence, fair England represented a closer approximation to the "better life." Nevertheless, I suggest that the gloom and shade in Hawthorne is antecedent to his artistic handling of the Actual; it involves the man in relation to his work. By understanding this relationship, we can see why Hawthorne apologized for his so-called "love" of allegory.

Hawthorne held in theory that an artist must visit some Hall of Fantasy in order to get a true perspective of the Actual and that he must descend to earth and "open an intercourse with the world" if his art is to serve its purpose. But at the end of "A Select Party" he says,

How, in the darkness that ensued, the imaginary guests contrived to get back to earth, or whether the greater part of them contrived to get back at all, or are still wandering among clouds, mists, and puffs of tempestuous wind, bruised by the beams and rafters of the overthrown castle in

30 "Hawthorne's Philosophy," The Century Magazine, XXXII (May, 1886), 86.
31 Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York, 1958), p. 40, reminds us that Hawthorne always assumed that aesthetics and ethics were inseparable; for R. H. Fogle, the light and the dark in Hawthorne's fiction are primarily the result of the artist's moral vision.
the air, and deluded by all sorts of unrealities, are points that concern themselves much more than the writer or the public. People should think of these matters before they thrust themselves on a pleasure party into the Realm of Nowhere. (II, 87–88)

This passage can be read as a clear description of what Hawthorne felt was his actual artistic predicament. Realizing that the Imaginary was, in point of fact, an unreality, and that its only purpose was to serve and rescue the soul imprisoned among the temporal and spacial realities of the Actual, Hawthorne knew that he must execute on paper what he could see and feel in his imagination while in his study. The cloudy figures and scenes which he talks about in his discussion of M. de l’Aubépine are not trying to escape the world through allegory or symbolism; rather they are merely trying to get back to earth. He wanted to make his pale flowers and nearly blank pages strong enough not just to withstand, but also to shape and order the Actual. All his ‘Oberon’s,’ ‘P’s,’ and Solitary Men lament that they cannot give material life and warmth to their creatures of imagination, and Melville almost could be quoting Hawthorne in any number of places when he says, “the immediate products of a great mind are not so great as that undeveloped and sometimes undevelopable yet dimly-discernible greatness” which lies within. Melville saw such a greatness in Hawthorne “to which these immediate products [the Mosses] are but the infallible indices.” In spite of Melville’s optimism, Hawthorne always felt that he failed in giving shape and substance to the vision which he saw. Whereas Melville says that the greatness of Shakespeare lies in “those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him,” Hawthorne puts this telling parenthesis into a speech of Holgrave: “A mere observer like myself (who never have intuitions, and am, at best, only subtle and acute), is pretty certain to go astray” (III, 215). Even as late as the second edition of The Marble Faun, Hawthorne confesses,

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 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 why Cuvier would have classified poor Donatello, or to insist on being told, in so many words, whether he had furry ears or no. As respects all who ask such a question, the book is, to that extent, a failure. (VI, 522–23)

Thus we see that, although he followed a consistent conception of the imagination, Hawthorne felt that he never successfully created anything “at once earthly and immortal,”

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Actual and the Imaginary each with the nature of the other. Because he felt frustrated by his own theory, part of the gloom which suffuses his work is subjective. On one hand, he believed that the shadows of half-created figures fluttered about his work, but on the other, Hawthorne himself asked Kenyon at the very end of the Conclusion to The Marble Faun, “Did Donatello’s ears resemble those of the Faun of Praxiteles?” (VI, 527). But does such a question necessarily indicate an artistic weakness in the novel? Is it a revelation of aesthetic insensitivity to ask the question? Or to put your finger into the muzzle of Rob Roy’s pistol to determine its calibre, to imagine the music of the spheres in a music box, to be overcome by the noble proportions of St. Peter’s, or to feel a message in the Swiss Alps but be unable to express it? These human experiences of Hawthorne show an awe for life, an awe so strong and embracing that it cannot fail to engage our hearts and minds. I wonder if indeed he failed in his purpose of exercising the spirit through the material. If we insist on wrestling with Hawthorne’s shadows, we are in great danger of missing the genius of the man that really existed. We would do well to heed this warning from The American Note-books: “It is dangerous to look too minutely at such phenomena [‘lights and shadows’]. It is apt to create a substance where at first there was a mere shadow” (IX, 219).

There is an object lesson in reading Hawthorne to be found in the account of his first view of Litchfield cathedral, “so vast, so intricate, and so profoundly simple, with such strange, delightful recesses in its grand figure, so difficult to comprehend within one idea, and yet all so consonant that it ultimately draws the beholder and his universe into its harmony.” Draw, yes; but not absorb, for Hawthorne remained “a gazer from below, . . . excluded from the interior mystery.” Hence, his rapture waned, he lost “the vision of a spiritual or ideal edifice behind the time-worn and weather-stained front of the actual structure,” and began a “minute investigation of . . . the intricate and multitudinous adornment that was lavished on the exterior wall of this great church.” But Hawthorne turned his attention to material detail neither completely frustrated by, nor happily oblivious of, his just-experienced wonder, for it was something gained, even to have that painful sense of my own limitations, and that half-smothered yearning to soar beyond them. The cathedral showed me how earthly I was, but yet whispered deeply of immortality. After all, this was probably the best lesson that it would bestow, and, taking it as thoroughly as possible home to my heart, I was fain to be content. (VII, 155–54)

Hawthorne should have been content, as well, with his own work, for it reveals that he would have been one of the few people who
could have understood what Howells really meant by ‘the smiling aspects of life.’" Hawthorne, with Ernest, could see in the Great Stone Face the “glow of a vast, warm heart, that embraced all mankind in its affections, and had room for more” (III, 414). Hawthorne says that it took imagination to feel the spirit of the Face, and in Hawthorne imagination is a quality of the soul. Hawthorne’s man of imagination, then, does not have to live in the clouds; rather, he chooses, as the politician did not will to do, to enlarge his spirit by living on this earth by the truths of imagination. Having no strict philosophy of his own, Hawthorne could not say just what those truths might be. Young Goodman Brown could have exercised his spirit equally well either through religion or by an abiding love of his wife. The choice is unimportant to Hawthorne, so long as a choice is made. He implied as much when he had the occupant of the Intelligence Office confess, “I am no minister of action, but the Recording Spirit” (II, 380), for Hawthorne professed no special philosophy, but recorded the truths of men’s successes and failures in choosing to exercise their spiritual potential. Because he sincerely believed that “the deeds of earth, however etherealized by piety or genius, are without value, except as exercises and manifestations of the spirit,” it mattered little to him whether a man should choose to live by a Romantic ideal or by Calvinism or by any other philosophy or religion, for “each human soul is the first-created inhabitant of its own Eden.”

All men have minds, hearts, and souls; therefore, all men can understand, feel, and act upon the imaginative figurings-forth of an artist. Hawthorne ultimately suggests, then, that “he whose genius appears deepest and truest excels his fellows in nothing save the knack of expression; he throws out occasionally a lucky hint at truths of which every human soul is profoundly, though unutterably, conscious.” Hence, “there is no harm, but, on the contrary, good, in arraying some of the ordinary facts of life in a slightly idealized and artistic guise”; so doing affords the reader an opportunity to exercise his spirit, raising him out of time and space to a position where he can better enjoy the potential richness of this life. Hawthorne’s fiction reminds us that, “the great book of Time is still spread before us; and, if we read it aright, it will be to us a volume of eternal truth.”

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41 Although their reports of the human scene differed in tone both writers wrote from a comic point of view. R. R. Male, however, believes that Hawthorne’s was a tragic vision, in spite of the fact that he also believes that “the last four books of Paradise Lost remain the best possible introduction to Hawthorne” (Tragic Vision, p. 162).
45 “Earth’s Holocaus,” II, 449.
Hawthorne is a great writer, great not because he attempted allegory, but because he did not. G. P. Lathrop believed that Hawthorne was a "man of reverie, whose observation of the actual constantly stimulates and brings into play a faculty that perceives more than the actual." He called that faculty "the idealizing, imaginative faculty," and concluded with words which show us where Hawthorne's imaginative genius lay: "capable of extracting the utmost intellectual stimulus from the least of mundane phenomena, he maintained intact a true sense of relativity and a knowledge that the attainable best is, in the final analysis, incomplete." Perhaps we no longer need the subtle corrective at the end of Hawthorne's critique on M. de l'Aubépine:

His fictions are sometimes historical, sometimes of the present day, and sometimes, so far as can be discovered, have little or no reference either to time or space. In any case, he generally contents himself with a very slight embroidery of outward manners,—the faintest possible counterfeit of real life,—and endeavors to create an interest by some less obvious peculiarity of the subject. Occasionally a breath of Nature, a raindrop of pathos and tenderness, or a gleam of humor, will find its way into the midst of his fantastic imagery, and make us feel as if after all, we were yet within the limits of our native earth.
