I

Psychological Romance

"Hawthorne appalls—entices."
—EMILY DICKINSON

Two curious and seemingly unconnected things have been happening to our image of Nathaniel Hawthorne over the past fifteen years. Hawthorne is now regarded as "better adjusted and more in tune with fellow human beings and the life of his period" [1] than was previously thought. It is no longer fashionable to say, as Van Wyck Brooks once did, that the real Hawthorne was a "phantom" who "had lived too long in this border-region, these polar solitudes where the spirit shivered, so that the substance of the world about him hung before his eyes like a thing of vapour." [2] Such impressionism elicits only a condescending smile from the biographer of today, whose respect for circumstantial facts prevents him from mistaking Hawthorne's literary manner for the tone of his life. The Hawthorne whom Brooks dismissed as misleading and irrelevant—the work-aday Hawthorne of the Liverpool consulship, for example —is now given priority over the less easily witnessed Haw-

1. Walter Blair, "Hawthorne," *Eight American Authors: A Review of Research and Criticism,* ed. Floyd Stovall (New York, 1963), p. 108.

2. *The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865* (New York, 1936), pp. 225, 224. See also Herbert Gorman, *Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude* (New York, 1927); Lloyd Morris, *The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne* (New York, 1927); and Newton Arvin, *Hawthorne* (Boston, 1929).

thorne of the "haunted" years after his graduation from Bowdoin. Indeed, it is the presumption of recent biographers that there is nothing haunted about Hawthorne at all. His very essence, we are told, is repose.[3]

The other main development is one of literary criticism. Unlike the critics of an earlier generation, who strove to recapture Hawthorne's gentle melancholy and antiquarian charm, critics since the 1950's have insisted upon his *symbolism* and his *didacticism*. They have credited Hawthorne with the complexity of image-patterns and the steadiness of moral purpose that characterize a great allegorical poet. His works, we now learn, came directly out of his "philosophy," which is said to be "a broadly Christian scheme which contains heaven, earth, and hell." His true subject is Man's Fall and subsequent growth toward redemption —a redemption occurring "in a series of communions in which the bread and wine of the past vitalizes the present." And Hawthorne himself, far from being guilt-ridden, is said to have dealt with sin and perversion only in order to demonstrate his magnanimity. "Hawthorne never sought to demean man, but to love him as Christ loved man—especially the outcast and the sinner." [4]

3. Hubert H. Hoeltje, *Inward Sky: The Mind and Heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Durham, North Carolina, 1962), Preface, p. [xii]. See also Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New Haven, 1948); and Edward Wagenknecht, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer* (New York, 1961).

4. The three quotations are from Richard Harter Fogle, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1952, revised ed., 1964), p. 5; Roy R. Male, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (Austin, Texas, 1957), p. 54; and Henry G. Fairbanks, "Sin, Free Will, and 'Pessimism' in Hawthorne," *PMLA,* LXXI (December 1956), 987. See also Hyatt H. Waggoner, *Hawthorne: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955; revised ed., 1963); and Leonard J. Fick, *The Light Beyond: A Study of Hawthorne's Theology* (Westminster, Maryland, 1955).

I would like to suggest that these two developments are not only unfortunate and misleading but also closely related; they are expressions of the same cultural phenomenon. For in different ways both the biographers and the critics have been anxious to depart from the emotional texture of Hawthorne's imagination. The religious-didactic Hawthorne of the symbolic critics is already implicit in the biographies, which—having disposed of psychological speculation by declaring it unscientific—deftly skip from a sober and debunking rehearsal of evidence to awe at Hawthorne's inspirational value.[5] Hawthorne is important because he offers us "an admonition and a gift which are timeless" [6]—meaning that he enables us to see how our technological society falls short of the Christian ideal. Naturally, then, the positivistic-theological biographers feel themselves to be in harmony with their sometime foes, the analysts of symbols. As Hawthorne's "definitive" biographer has explained, our "Golden Age of Hawthorne Criticism" coincides with the Christian revival of the 1950's. "The new symbolical approach to the reading of Hawthorne, as well as Melville, James, and Faulkner, has after a fashion allied itself with this same neo-orthodoxy, so that we have been witnessing a revolution not only in criticism but in religious thought." [7] It is my hope that this timid little revolution has now run its course.

Although I am writing a book of criticism, it will be hard to refrain from chiding Hawthorne's biographers from time to time. Their normalization of Hawthorne springs not from "evidence which can be checked by other investigators" [8] but from a failure of intuition. Their belief

5. See especially Wagenknecht's and Hoeltje's final chapters, significantly titled "God's Child" and "To Gladden the World."

6. Stewart, p. 265.

7. Randall Stewart, quoted on dust jacket of Male, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision.*

8. Wagenknecht, Preface, p. viii.

that the "man and writer were one" [9]—healthy, pedestrian, moral—is the sign of a simplistic psychology that looks only at surfaces—an especially drastic weakness in approaching Hawthorne. When Julian Hawthorne, after his father's death, finally read the famous tales and romances, he found himself "constantly unable to comprehend how a man such as I knew my father to be could have written such books." For Julian "the man and the writer were, in Hawthorne's case, as different as a mountain from a cloud." [10] There was evidently a side to his father that was never turned toward the family, much less toward the public—a Hawthorne who can be obscurely glimpsed behind the atmosphere of his fiction. Of this Hawthorne our recent authorities say nothing; or worse, they deny his existence.

The traces of this elusive Hawthorne, however, are much more abundant than the "evidence" that turns him into an odd combination of plodding democrat and religious tutor to posterity. How plausible is it to make a saintly allegorist of a man who almost never went to church, who described his masterpiece as a "hell-fired story," and who confessed to his journal, "We certainly do need a new revelation—a new system—for there seems to be no life in the old one"? [11] Such passages can, it is true, be overmatched by others that express what might be called a rudimentary Christianity; but the biographer is responsible for his subject's contradictions as well as his uplifting statements. Was Hawthorne's temperament that of a dogmatic moralist? Everything we hear about him suggests the opposite: he was peculiarly diffident, and rarely held to the same opinion

9. Hoeltje, p. 555. For an identical principle see Wagenknecht, Preface, p. vii; and the same assumption is implied throughout Stewart's book.

10. Julian Hawthorne, "The Salem of Hawthorne," *The Century Magazine,* XXVIII (May 1884), 6.

11. See Horatio Bridge, *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York, 1893), p. 112; and *Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American Notebooks,* ed. Randall Stewart (New Haven, 1932), p. 165.

for very long. Presumably, then, the doubting habit itself might be given prominence in a fair account of Hawthorne's mind. And indeed, once we have ceased trying to make him into a source of oracular wisdom, we perceive that Hawthorne's keynote was neither piety nor impiety, but ambivalence. There is in his writings, as Philip Rahv observed long ago, "a submerged intensity and passion—a tangled imagery of unrest and longing for experience and regret at its loss . . . He was haunted not only by the guilt of his desires but also by the guilt of his denial of them." [12] In short, Hawthorne was emotionally engaged in his fiction, and the emotions he displays are those of a self-divided, self-tormented man.

When his "submerged intensity and passion" are ignored Hawthorne becomes, I fear, a very boring writer. The moralistic element prized by his recent critics is the least original thing about his work; it is what he shared with nearly all his lesser contemporaries in the sentimental vein. Nor is this fact much mitigated by our insisting that Hawthorne was more ingenious in symbolism and more orthodox in doctrine than his fellow purveyors of ladies' fiction. Image-patterns that are assumed to originate in a consciously instructive balancing of "light" and "dark" elements end by implying a coldly smug creator; and this in fact is the impression of Hawthorne that prevails in academe. As for his orthodoxy, it can be upheld only at the price of refusing to examine the psychological implications of his plots. In the typical Hawthorne tale there is a jarring dissonance between the "sweet moral blossom" that is served up with an obliging flourish and the "human frailty and sorrow" that compose the story.[13] Hawthorne's ambiguity—to which every critic pays lip-service before going

12. "The Dark Lady of Salem," *Image and Idea: Fourteen Essays on Literary Themes* (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1949), p.23.

13. These words are from the last sentence of Chapter 1, *The Scarlet Letter, C*, I, 48.

on to build a tower of allegory—is not a didactic strategy but a sign of powerful tension between his attraction to and his fear of his deepest themes. For behind his moralism, and often directly contradicting it, lies a sure insight into everything that is terrible, uncontrollable, and therefore *demoralizing* in human nature. Hawthorne himself, like his latest admirers, wanted to be spared this insight, but beneath layers of rationalization and euphemism it asserts its right to expression.

Far from being a novelty, this view of Hawthorne was taken in one of the earliest essays about him, Melville's response to *Mosses from an Old Manse:*

> Still more: this black conceit [of human depravity] pervades him through and through. You may be witched by his sunlight,—transported by the bright gildings in the skies he builds over you; but there is the blackness of darkness beyond; and even his bright gildings but fringe and play upon the edges of thunder-clouds. In one word, the world is mistaken in this Nathaniel Hawthorne. He himself must often have smiled at its absurd misconception of him. He is immeasurably deeper than the plummet of the mere critic.[14]

It is customary to say that Melville was here talking about himself. Yes; but he was also faithfully describing Hawthorne's sense of reality. Yet very few critics since Melville have seen fit to repeat his distinction between the initial appearance and the ultimate nature of Hawthorne's fictional world. In the 'twenties there was D. H. Lawrence; in our own time, Leslie Fiedler and the authors of miscellaneous perceptive articles; but on the whole we have been witnessing a process of canonization, and like all saints Hawthorne has ascended to dullness.[15]

14. "Hawthorne and His Mosses," *The Literary World,* VII (August 17, 1850), 126.

15. See D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York, 1923), and Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the*

If Hawthorne criticism has become a sterile academic pastime, and Hawthorne himself an object of tiresome study and faint praise, the blame cannot be laid entirely upon neo-Christianity. The theological critics share with many others a search for some overriding thematic idea which, once abstracted from the texture of Hawthorne's ambivalent plots, can be treated as an independent controlling principle. One critic is looking only for mythic patterns that will put Hawthorne in the mainstream of American culture. Another tells us that "five major arcs of Faustian definition" suffice to describe Hawthorne's entire literary achievement. Another, concluding regretfully that Hawthorne considers Oneness inscrutable, claims that the concept of "multiplicity" governs the tales and romances. And still another, in a book whose title *The Power of Blackness* might suggest a Melvillian approach, turns out to be primarily interested in "the possibility of a literary iconology." He claims to have "respected the integrity of the symbols," meaning that he has "not attempted to reduce them to the literal plane." Thus the immediate emotional force of Hawthorne's symbols must give way before the iconologist's consistent theorem. These are, one and all, subtle and intelligent men; it is their very ingenuity of method that leads them to smooth out Hawthorne's contradictions, slight his characteristic air of anxious brooding, and—occasionally—misrepresent the literal course of his plots.[16]

American Novel (New York, 1960). Both these books may be said to err by exaggerating Hawthorne's "inner diabolism" (Lawrence, p. 122) at the expense of his sincere wish to be conventional. In the tradition of Hawthorne criticism, however, such exaggeration has been highly salutary.

16. The allusions in this paragraph are, consecutively, to Daniel G. Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York, 1961); William Bysshe Stein, *Hawthorne's Faust: A Study of the Devil Archetype* (Gainesville, Florida, 1953), p. 142; James K. Folsom,

Hawthorne's ambivalence, whatever its emotional sources, is most strikingly discernible in his stated views about the nature and quality of his art. Certain passages can be used to show that he thought of himself as a genteel trifler, wistfully aware that his works "afford no solid basis for a literary reputation" (II, 45). He assures us that they are not intended to be profound, and still less are they "the talk of a secluded man with his own mind and heart" (I, 17). Again and again Hawthorne announces that his fiction has neither outward reality nor inward depth. Where it is allegorical, the allegory is merely a vice of temperament; where it attempts some picture of society, the picture is said to be faded and blurred. Judging only from such statements we might well conclude that Hawthorne's art resulted from an unhappy compromise between harmless, irresponsible fantasy and an effort to please readers accustomed to plain sense and moralism.

Certainly it would be wrong to dismiss this self-estimate as sheer false modesty; anyone who reads completely through Hawthorne's tales and sketches must be struck by the superficiality and imperfection of many pieces.[17] Still, it is clear from many rival passages that Hawthorne had some understanding of his special province as a writer. Perhaps most notably, in his Preface to *The Snow-Image* he described himself as a man "who has been burrowing, to his utmost ability, into the depths of our common

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Man's Accidents and God's Purposes: Multiplicity in Hawthorne's Fiction (New Haven, 1963); and Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (New York, 1958), pp. xf.

17. See, as representative samples, "Little Annie's Ramble," "Snowflakes," and "The Lily's Quest," from *Twice-Told Tales;* "Fire Worship" and "Buds and Bird Voices," from *Mosses from an Old Manse;* and "A Bell's Biography" and "Little Daffydowndilly," from *The Snow-Image.* I feel justified in leaving such trivia out of account, for they show us a Hawthorne who is scarcely distinguishable from his fellow gift-book contributors.

nature, for the purposes of psychological romance" (III, 386). Unlike some of his biographers, Hawthorne does not suppose that this buried "common nature" is either very accessible or very dignified. "In the depths of every heart," he says in "The Haunted Mind," "there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners, whom they hide" (I, 345). The business of psychological romance is not to make fanciful efforts at picturesqueness but to penetrate the deceptive, congenial surface and reach the terrible core of man's being.

Yet this exaggerates the forthrightness of Hawthorne's purpose. As we shall discover, his penetration into secret guilt is compromised not only by his celebrated ambiguities of technique but by reluctance and distaste. He was aware that in exposing our common nature he was drawing largely upon his own nature, and he was disturbed by what he found. Many of his self-deprecatory passages have the function of protesting overmuch that the author's deepest self has been kept inviolate. Thus, for example, he presents us with an equivocal rebuff in "The Old Manse":

> Has the reader gone wandering, hand in hand with me, through the inner passages of my being? and have we groped together 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 sensibilities 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. (II, 43f.)

Here we see an ill-concealed animosity toward those who would presume to know the author through his works; yet the very expression of immunity begs us to guess at what we have not been told. If we are standing just within a cavern, and if the author's face is veiled (both images recur insistently in Hawthorne's fiction), then surely he has something worth hiding from us. Elsewhere he indicates that a writer's deeper self *can* be known, though not by his external habits or casual associates. "These things hide the man, instead of displaying him. You must make quite another kind of inquest, and look through the whole range of his fictitious characters, good and evil, in order to detect any of his essential traits" (III, 386). With one arm Hawthorne strikes a pose of cold dignity and holds us at bay, but with the other he beckons us forward into the cavern of his deepest soul. And the more he speaks of his intention to "keep the inmost Me behind its veil" (*C*, I, 4), the more certain we may be that he is uneasy with the self-revelatory aspect of his work.

Hawthorne's balance between confession and evasion is reflected in his style, whose distance and abstraction are often confused with Augustan serenity. The meditative poise, the polite irony, the antitheses, the formal diction, and the continual appeal to sentiments that are generally shared, all serve to neutralize the dangerous knowledge that lies at the bottom of his plots. For Hawthorne regards language as a fearful thing. "Words," he reminds himself in his notebook, "—so innocent and powerless as they are, standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become, in the hands of one who knows how to combine them!" (*American Notebooks*, p. 122). Hawthorne is by no means certain that he can exercise this potency without falling victim to it.

To Hawthorne's own uneasiness we must add that of his "belovedest" Sophia, whose taste he did not care to offend. Mrs. Hawthorne, with her neurasthenic headaches, her vaporous Transcendentalism combined with churchgoing

piety, her taste for moral rhetoric, and above all her easily shocked sensibility, had much to do with domesticating Hawthorne's interests after 1838. The Hawthorne who wrote to Sophia about his recently forsworn habit of smoking in the house, "Thou wast very sweet not to scold me fiercely, for allowing myself to be so impregnated," [18] was rather different from the one who called man's heart a "foul cavern" (II, 455) and sneered at the prospect of its ever being purified.[19] His Phoebe, as he named her, held out to him a blissful release from his years of brooding,[20] but the price was high. Though the ending to *The Scarlet Letter* gave Sophia a bad headache, when she finished *The House of the Seven Gables* she knew that her husband had reached the summit of art. "There is unspeakable grace and beauty in the conclusion," she observed, "throwing back upon the sterner tragedy of the commence-

18. *Love Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne,* 2 vols. (Chicago [1907]), II, 93.

19. On the other hand, note Hawthorne's image of impregnation —a fine example of the charged language discussed in the next paragraph.

20. That Hawthorne declared himself ideally happy in marriage and was relieved to move from private phantasms to a common, solidly "real" tranquility with Sophia is a fact that has been much sentimentalized by his biographers. His extraordinary dependence on Sophia and his tendency to immerse himself in recording the trivia of their family life show that Hawthorne approached marriage almost as a therapeutic program, a means of getting a firm hold on reality at last. Even Randall Stewart suggests that this meant a betrayal of his deepest interests as a writer: "It is significant that during the courtship of nearly four years his productivity fell off sharply. There were other reasons to be sure, . . . but the free play of personal emotion seems to have been incompatible with artistic creation" (*Nathaniel Hawthorne,* p. 49). To a less indulgent biographer this might indicate that Hawthorne's prior emotional life had found an outlet, however unsatisfactory, in his fiction; but of this Professor Stewart gives no further hint.

ment an ethereal light, and a dear home-loveliness and satisfaction." [21]

Randall Stewart's study of Mrs. Hawthorne's tampering with the notebooks after Hawthorne's death provides an invaluable guide to the nature of her moral influence. Wherever Hawthorne had expressed skepticism about marriage, womanhood, America, or Christianity, Sophia improved the text by deletion or revision. References to smoking and drinking were generally suppressed, as were, of course, all passages of sexual interest. She could not admit the comparison of some pond lilies to "virgins of tainted fame," and still less could she allow posterity to learn of her forty-six-year-old husband's fancy, which had struck him while he was peering into the lighted window of a Boston boarding house, that a beautiful damsel might be disrobing within. Of greater interest, because of greater imaginative subtlety, are many of Sophia's apparently trivial revisions of phrasing. For Hawthorne's "animal desires" she substituted "temperament"; for "baggage," "luggage"; for "itch," "fancy"; for "vent," "utterance"; and for "caught an idea by the tail," "caught an idea by the skirts." [22] This, I submit, is the work of a dirty mind. The revisions have the effect of charging the original words with double meanings that would not have consciously occurred to us otherwise. Yet this talent for risqué puns—that is, for perceiving and then suppressing them—was shared by Hawthorne himself and by the whole culture in which he and Sophia moved. In the age of the draped piano leg, even furniture was covertly sexualized.

Compromise, euphemism, and innuendo, then, were encouraged not only by Hawthorne's temperament but by his personal and social milieu. These characteristics, however limiting they may have been in their final effect upon

21. See Stewart, *ibid.*, pp. 95, 113.

22. *American Notebooks,* Introduction, pp. xv-xvii.

his art, happened to be excellently suited to his chosen literary genre. Sentimental fiction from Richardson onward employed an intricately developed vocabulary of high motives and moral comforts to clothe latently titillating situations. In one sense the writer's task consisted of manipulating the clichés of the form in such a way that neither the titillation nor the uplift would be sacrificed. Rape, prostitution, and even incest could be treated if only the right moral tone were sustained. Failure to sustain it, as Melville discovered in the reception of *Pierre,* would produce shock and outrage; failure to provide the innuendo would produce boredom.[23] Unlike his impulsive friend, Hawthorne was shamelessly adept at keeping the rival elements in balance, and some of his finest tales look curiously at home in the pages of the sentimental gift-book, *The Token.* It is wrong, therefore, to draw too sharp a distinction between "popular" and "profound" works in his canon. One of his subtlest tales of depravity, "The Gentle Boy," was so admired by subscribers to *The Token* that it was reprinted as a separate volume and became his passport to success.

Yet the reader may accept all this without agreeing that Hawthorne deserves to be called a psychologically profound writer. Only a few characters in all his fiction have the solidity we think of as novelistic, and the world in which they act is so purposefully concentrated on thematic questions, so cluttered with symbolism, that little room is left for individual minds to exist. If we locate Hawthorne's psychology merely in what is openly stated about his heroes and heroines, we must agree with Marius Bewley that this psychology is based on "some disturbingly simple formulae" and is "often undistinguished, and sometimes

23. See Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (Durham, North Carolina, 1940), and William Wasserstrom, *Heiress of All the Ages: Sex and Sentiment in the Genteel Tradition* (Minneapolis, 1959).

crass." [24] For Bewley, as for most other critics, Hawthorne's art appears to turn outward toward moral simplicity rather than inward toward psychological complexity.

I would insist, however, that Henry James was originally right in saying that Hawthorne "cared for the deeper psychology," and that his works offer glimpses of "the whole deep mystery of man's soul and conscience." [25] The majority view, I feel, rests on both a misapprehension of "deep psychology" and an inattentive habit of reading Hawthorne. We must, in the first place, question the popular notion that *individuality* and *detail* are the key virtues of psychological portraiture.[26] A richly particular character, such as James's Isabel Archer, may be represented as living almost entirely in the realm of conscious moral choice, while her instinctual nature and her conflicts of feeling are hidden under an abundance of surface strokes. Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, in contrast, is rendered in terms of struggle between feelings that she neither controls nor perfectly understands. Her remorse toward her husband versus her sympathy for her lover, her desire to flee versus her compulsion to remain, her maternal instinct versus her shame at what Pearl represents, her voluptuousness versus her effort to repent and conform—these tensions are the very essence of our idea of Hester. If she is a more schematic figure than Isabel, her motives are deeper and are better known to us. It is precisely because Hawthorne is not afraid to schematize, to stress underlying patterns of

24. "Hawthorne and 'The Deeper Psychology,'" *Mandrake,* II (Autumn and Winter 1955-56), 366-73; the quoted phrases are from pp. 367 and 366.

25. *Hawthorne* (New York, 1879), p. 63.

26. Bewley, for instance, says that the deeper psychology should deal with "the shadowy subconscious world of the uniquely private, where hidden motivations and all the 'secrets' of the inmost self swim fortuitously about" (*Mandrake,* II, 366). No one who takes modern psychological theories seriously could have written these careless words.

compulsion rather than superficial eccentricities, that he is able to explore "the depths of our *common* nature." [27]

The power of Hawthorne's best fiction comes largely from a sense that nothing in human behavior is as free or fortuitous as it appears. Even with characters much less fully observed than Hester, the emphasis falls on buried motives which are absolutely binding because they are unavailable to conscious criticism. Furthermore, even the most wooden heroes bear witness to a psychological preoccupation. Whatever is subtracted from overt psychology tends to reappear in imagery, even in the physical setting itself. It is as if there were a law of the conservation of psychic energy in Hawthorne's world; as the characters approach sentimental stereotypes, the author's language becomes correspondingly more suggestive of unconscious obsession. And, in fact, one of the abiding themes of Hawthorne's work is the fruitless effort of people to deny the existence of their "lower" motives. The form of his plots often constitutes a return of the repressed—a vengeance of the denied element against an impossible ideal of purity or spirituality. Thus it is not enough, in order to speak of Hawthorne's power as a psychologist, merely to look at his characters' stated motives. We must take into account the total, always intricate dialogue between statement and implication, observing how Hawthorne—whether or not he consciously means to—invariably measures the displacements and sublimations that have left his characters two-dimensional.

Let us test this expectation on one of Hawthorne's most familiar and seemingly shallow tales. "The Maypole of Merry Mount" offers us, in Edith and Edgar, two of the

27. In the words of Thomas Mann, "Much that is extrapersonal, much unconscious identification, much that is conventional and schematic, is nonetheless decisive for the experience not only of the artist but of the human being in general." ("Freud and the Future," reprinted in *Art and Psychoanalysis,* ed. William Phillips [Cleveland, 1963], p. 381.)

most vacant sentimental characters imaginable, and its apparent theme is of no great interest: "earth's doom of care and sorrow" (I, 75) must be accepted both by the young lovers and by pleasure-seekers in general. The moral conflict between the hedonists of Merry Mount and the Puritans who finally destroy the colony is made highly obvious, both through direct debate and through such typically Hawthornian contrasts of image as sunshine versus shadow, rainbow colors versus somber black, and smiles and sighs versus disapproving frowns. The tale's conclusion, with the chastened Lord and Lady of the May heading "heavenward" (I, 84) with a just commixture of sobriety and affection, resolves this conflict so agreeably that few readers have felt impelled to ask whether anything underlies the patent banalities of theme.

Hawthorne's "philosophic romance" (I, 70) begins to seem less banal when we realize that it has more to do with the emotional qualities of Puritanism and hedonism than with the didactic example of Edith and Edgar. To the May couple the rigors of Puritanism finally appear commensurate with the hard realities of life, and are therefore morally preferable to "the vanities of Merry Mount" (I, 84). Yet everything we learn about the Puritans in the story shows that their "reality" is highly subjective and suspect. They are "dismal wretches" (I, 77) who, when not punishing themselves with toil, prayers, and fast days, are busy punishing others—slaughtering wolves and Indians, placing lighthearted colonists in the stocks, and observing the functions of "the whipping-post, which might be termed the Puritan Maypole" (I, 77). This last phrase strongly suggests an element of pleasure in legalized violence—and this is in fact the essence of the Puritan mentality as Hawthorne portrays it. Endicott, the most tolerant of the invaders, metes out penalties with great zeal, promises further "branding and cropping of ears" (I, 81), and permits himself the following significant fantasy: "I thought not to repent me of cutting down a May-

pole . . . yet now I could find in my heart to plant it again, and give each of these bestial pagans one other dance round their idol. It would have served rarely for a whipping-post!" (I, 81). It is not quite correct, in view of such evidence, to say that Edith and Edgar are simply renouncing pleasure at the end of the tale. To the modest degree that they will blend into the Puritan community, they will be exchanging the overt gratifications of hedonism for the more furtive gratifications of an ascetic sadism.

It is especially ironical that Hawthorne's May couple is said to outgrow the "fantasy" and "delusion" that reign in the "magic," "airy," and "unreal" colony of Merry Mount (I, 73, 71, 74). There is less delusion at Merry Mount than meets the eye. Only the youngest colonists are taken in by the daydream of eternal play; the guiding spirits are motivated by the "gay despair" (I, 76) of middle-aged cynicism. The Puritans, in contrast, are truly victims of collective delusion. In their fanatical wish to exclude sin they have "peopled the black wilderness" with "devils and ruined souls" (I, 72)—which is to say that they have projected all their secular impulses onto imaginary foes. Their demonic view of Merry Mount in particular is contradicted by the observed facts. Which group is more enslaved to fantasy: the "sworn triflers" who "followed the false shadow [of mirth] wilfully" (I, 76), or the zealots who shoot a dancing bear because they suspect it of witchcraft?

Once we have discredited the Puritan analysis of Merry Mount, we may begin to wonder what we really know about the colony. An acquaintance with Hawthorne's sources leaves no doubt that he was aware that the chief moral complaint against Merry Mount and against May ceremonies generally was that they encouraged sexual license.[28] Yet the Puritans in the story do not raise this

28. See G. Harrison Orians, "Hawthorne and 'The Maypole of Merry Mount,'" *Modern Language Notes,* LIII (March 1938), 159-67. In Baylies's *Memoir of New Plymouth* Hawthorne must have read not only that Thomas Morton, the founder of Merry Mount, wrote

charge. We are left to suppose that they see dancing, gay costumes, and picnicking as inherently devilish without ever thinking of sex. It was Hawthorne's age, however, not that of the Puritans, which felt embarrassment at calling things by their right names; we can be sure that the historical enemies of Merry Mount did not mince their words. Though Edith and Edgar are about to begin their wedding night, and though their hearts are said to glow "with real passion" (I, 75) shortly before the Puritans intervene, the sexual aspect of hedonism is never directly mentioned. Skillful sentimentalist that he is, Hawthorne has maintained a euphemistic aloofness from themes that are inherent both in his historical sources and in the situation of his hero and heroine.

In Hawthorne's fiction, however, *suppression* always has the psychological consequences of *repression:* the denied element surreptitiously reappears in imagery and innuendo. To a modern reader, of course, the plot itself seems intrinsically symbolic in this case; its main deed is the severing of a pole which the hedonists call "their religion" (I, 77), and which is the focal object of a nuptial ceremony. We may reasonably doubt that the immemorial phallic meaning of maypoles, which was thoroughly understood in the seventeenth century, was altogether lost upon the nineteenth. But there is no need to argue on these grounds. Hawthorne's description of the costumed revelers as resembling "the crew of Comus, some already transformed

obscene satires and affixed them to the pole, but that the colonists performed drunken dances with Indian women and "fell into all kinds of licentiousness and profanity . . ." Prince's *Annals* made the same point. And in the book he openly acknowledges as a source—Joseph Strutt's *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*—Hawthorne found a compilation of Puritan diatribes against the "lewd men, light women . . . and abusers of the creature" (London, 1898, p. 46) who participated in May games. Another of Strutt's sources speaks of mass deflowerings of virgins in the branch-gathering expeditions of May Day (*ibid.*, p. 455).

to brutes, some midway between man and beast" (I, 72) obliges us to be alert to the theme of enslavement to lust that is found in Milton's masque. And here is the scene itself:

> But what was the wild throng that stood hand in hand about the Maypole? It could not be that the fauns and nymphs, when driven from their classic groves and homes of ancient fable, had sought refuge, as all the persecuted did, in the fresh woods of the West. These were Gothic monsters, though perhaps of Grecian ancestry. On the shoulders of a comely youth uprose the head and branching antlers of a stag; a second, human in all other points, had the grim visage of a wolf; a third, still with the trunk and limbs of a mortal man, showed the beard and horns of a venerable he-goat. There was the likeness of a bear erect, brute in all but his hind legs, which were adorned with pink silk stockings. And here again, almost as wondrous, stood a real bear of the dark forest, lending each of his fore paws to the grasp of a human hand, and as ready for the dance as any in that circle. His inferior nature rose half way, to meet his companions as they stooped. Other faces wore the similitude of a man or woman, but distorted or extragavant, with red noses pendulous before their mouths, which seemed of awful depth, and stretched from ear to ear in an eternal fit of laughter.... (I, 71f.)

Anyone who regards these sentences as a dispassionate and straightforward picture of traditional May dancers is not likely to find Hawthorne a very interesting writer. Though most of the details appear in his sources, Hawthorne uses them with emphatic suggestiveness. The turning of classical fauns and nymphs into "Gothic monsters" who are sporting articles of blatant symbolism indicates, not passion, but an excessive, grotesque effort of self-conscious sophisticates to be "natural." The stag, the wolf, the goat, and the "bear erect" have a lecherous iconographic

value, but in every description Hawthorne is careful to compromise the iconography with persisting human features. The revelers are trying with dubious success to submerge their humanity in natural power—to "stoop" to freedom. The true result is an effect of decadence. Thus the man-goat appears merely "venerable," and the man-bear with his pink silk stockings is scarcely masculine at all. I suggest that the urgency of sexual symbolism in this scene is directly proportional to the sense of sexual inhibition. Nothing could be less faunlike than the "distorted," "extravagant" faces which differ from normal ones in having "red noses pendulous before their mouths, which seemed of awful depth . . ." This is eroticism tainted with anxiety.

Now, however, we face a problem that will prove troublesome throughout this study. Assuming that the author has displaced much of his psychological interest from character onto language, are we entitled to reverse the process—to read motivation from imagery? Any answer will be an arbitrary axiom of method rather than a demonstrable inference. Yet not entirely arbitrary; one method is better than another if it can incorporate more evidence and follow the logic of plot-structure more closely. We shall find that Hawthorne's works always *take their images seriously*—that the characters behave *as if* they were disturbed by the motives we glimpse in narrative emphasis. What matters is that we too take this evidence seriously, whether we attribute it to the characters or to the author's dialogue with himself. Let it be understood, then, that in calling the Merry Mount hedonists "decadent" and "inhibited" we are making a debatable, but practically useful, choice to regard Hawthorne's descriptive nuances as psychologically pertinent. At worst we are mistaking as characterization the author's own unformulated misgivings about the freedom he has tried to depict; and we shall see, curiously, that such a confusion makes no real difference

for an understanding of the total psychological atmosphere of his plots.

In the present case our analysis is strengthened by various indications that the Merry Mounters are engaged in organized, frantic striving to negate the encroachments of time. The maypole dancing takes place not on May Day but on Midsummer Eve, which has brought "deep verdure to the forest, and roses in her lap, of a more vivid hue than the tender buds of Spring" (I, 70).[29] The hour is sunset, and the bleak surrounding woods, which literally contain the Puritan forces that will sever the pole and crop the May Lord's "lovelock and long glossy curls" (I, 83), are full of implicit menace. Even the maypole itself, in combining "the slender grace of youth" with "the loftiest heights of the old wood monarchs" (I, 70), conveys an ambiguity appropriate to people who have come to their philosophy of pleasure only "after losing the heart's fresh gayety" (I, 75). Thus there is an inherent melancholy at Merry Mount that anticipates the suppression to be imposed from outside. It is little wonder that Edith and Edgar perceive that "these shapes of our jovial friends are visionary, and their mirth unreal" (I, 74) *before* Endicott arrives to put the matter more strongly.

Everything we have seen in this tale urges us to conclude that the Puritans and hedonists are less different from one another than they seem. If the Puritans, in trying to exclude sensual pleasure, nevertheless readmit it in the form of sadism, the Merry Mounters are just as unsuccessful in trying to exclude conscience. The whole plot tends toward reconciliation. Thus, for example, Endicott shows a surprising sympathy with the May couple; he recognizes in them a latent sobriety, while he in turn is "softened" by "the fair spectacle of early love" (I, 83).

29. The Shakespearian echo is significant: "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, / And summer's lease hath all too short a date." (Sonnet 18)

More strikingly, when the Puritans attack, "their darksome figures were intermixed with the wild shapes of their foes, and made the scene a picture of the moment, when waking thoughts start up amid the scattered fantasies of a dream" (I, 79). Here the Puritans represent, not reality, but "waking thoughts" which dispel fantasy; they are inhibition or censorship personified. Thus it is appropriate that their intervention automatically produces a symbolic impotence: "the stag lowered his antlers in dismay; the wolf grew weaker than a lamb . . ." (I, 79). The motive force in this scene is not realistic but allegorical: Inhibition has mastered Instinct. And we can, I think, take the entire tale as a psychological allegory in which the general mind of man has been fractured into two imperfect tyrannies of indulgence and conscience, neither of which can entirely suppress the other. The conclusion of the tale is a symbolic amnesty, although, as will always be the case in Hawthorne, the party of restraint has gained the upper hand.

Yet "The Maypole of Merry Mount" is not *entirely* allegorical, for we are still left with the individual plight of Edith and Edgar. But that plight now seems less euphemistic than before: "No sooner had their hearts glowed with real passion than they were sensible of something vague and unsubstantial in their former pleasures . . ." (I, 75). The childlike lovers, who would like to conceive of life as an endless game, feel sexual desire and realize at once that they are surrounded by evidence of the undignified vicissitudes of Eros in middle age. Awakening to sexual self-consciousness, the new Adam and Eve are not unwilling to join the community of severity and shame.

We can say, therefore, that all the allegorical emphasis of "The Maypole of Merry Mount" serves to enrich a literal situation—a crisis of maturity. The insistent suggestions of impotence and castration define this crisis for us, even while the surface narrative remains conventionally "pure." And the resolution of the plot, in which a for-

bidding but secretly benevolent figure of authority intermixes "the moral gloom of the world" (I, 84) with the lovers' joys, amounts to a welcome psychological strategy. In its barest logic Hawthorne's tale informs us that if young lovers must sooner or later understand that unchecked fantasy leads to decadence, then the only recourse for those lovers is to a measure of asceticism. Curiously enough, the genuine love that would have been impossible at Merry Mount is assured of survival by the Puritan censorship of fantasy.[30]

Perhaps we have said enough about "The Maypole of Merry Mount" to show how, in its very schematism, it illustrates Hawthorne's "burrowing . . . into the depths of our common nature, for the purposes of psychological romance." Yet much remains unsaid and, at this point, undemonstrable. What happens in this tale, whether through exact intention or through psychic necessity, is profoundly typical of Hawthorne's plots throughout his career: inadmissible fantasies are unleashed in an inhibited, decadent form and then further checked by a resurgence of authority. This authority, furthermore, always takes a more or less openly paternal form, and Hawthorne's Ediths and Edgars always seem as much like siblings as lovers. If this is so, his Endicotts must be seen as preventing, not simply disillusion, but a symbolic incest from which Hawthorne's imagination recoils—and to which it regularly returns. "The Maypole of Merry Mount" is, to be sure, a paltry and dubious example of this pattern; until we have examined much corroborative evidence the reader may feel unchallenged in regarding Hawthorne as a moralist or an antiquarian or both. In the next few chapters, however, we shall investigate the nature of Hawthorne's antiquar-

30. Which is not to say that the Puritans, after all, represent an ideal of mental economy. Edith and Edgar will survive because they can *reconcile* the instinct and conscience that tyrannize the respective colonies. Extremes are invariably destructive in Hawthorne's fiction.

ianism; ask whether his historical themes are really separable from his psychological ones; study the nature of family relationships, both literal and symbolic, in certain early plots; and begin to prove that a definable, indeed classic, conflict of wishes lies at the heart of Hawthorne's ambivalence and provides the inmost configuration of his plots.