PSYCHOLOGICAL ALLEGORY IN

THE SCARLET LETTER

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

In Hawthorne criticism there is a tendency to categorize *The Scarlet Letter* as allegory and then fail to distinguish it carefully from traditional forms of this literary mode. Hawthorne is not, in this work, an allegorist of the same ilk as Bunyan or Spenser because his allegory is not a didactic strategy imposed from without, but an emblematic structure that evolves from and is governed by internal necessities of the tale. A failure to understand the nature of these necessities leads us to an overly theologized view of Hawthorne's purposes and achievement in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne's own moralizing editorials tend to complement the brazenly emblematic function of characters such as Pearl and Chillingworth and create the appearance of traditional religious allegory.

Pearl and Chillingworth are punitive, avenging figures and resemble the stock allegorical images of guilt and penitence that afflict Hester and Dimmesdale in the aftermath of their crime. Their distinction lies in that they are not everyman's guilt, as a Bunyan of Spenser might depict them, but they specifically incarnate the self-torment Hester and Dimmesdale are prey to. Their roles fulfill primarily a psycho-allegorical scheme rather than any patently Christian parable of sin and expiation.
The clues to this psychological priority Hawthorne gives his allegory are contained in the author's frequent allusions to the "mutability" of the substantial world and the extent to which the perturbed perceiver may "extend his egotism over the whole expanse of nature", creating events and omens which reflect his internal disorder.

There is evidence that Dimmesdale himself inflicts Chillingworth on his person just as he, miraculously or otherwise, carves an "A" upon his bosom. It is Dimmesdale who consents to being attended by the leech by reason of his "fascination" for this man of science with his probing intellectuality. Dimmesdale's culpability in creating the presence of Chillingworth is further underlined by Hawthorne's observation that the minister's only "real existence on this earth, was the anguish in his inmost soul." Chillingworth's appearance and the increasingly demonic nature of his character is thus an inevitable byproduct of Dimmesdale's increasing introversion into the turmoil of his mind.

Similarly Pearl's emblematic being usurps the humanity of her character as a result of her direct relation to Hester's psyche. Hester dresses Pearl in lavish finery with "morbid purpose" just as she embellishes the appearance of the letter on her dress. These are the superficial clues to the extent to which Hester creates the punishing role Pearl's personality fulfills. Hester's sense of guilt, like Dimmesdale's is sufficiently severe to re-create the realities of the external world and create the embodied phantoms of her inward strife.
Hawthorne's psychological allegory creates a state of sur-reality in the world of *The Scarlet Letter*; a dream state where "the Actual and the Imaginary" do meet and the meeting ground is the interior of the human heart. Our insight into the minds of Hester and Dimmesdale derives from our participation in their anguished distortion of experience and their projected allegory.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF HAWTHORNE'S ALLEGORY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. EMBLEMS AND THE INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. CHILLINGWORTH'S ROLE</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. PEARL'S ROLE</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF HAWTHORNE'S ALLEGORY

The Salem townspeople of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* are not the only ones befuddled in their wildly varying accounts of a single event. Their predicament, their not knowing what is revealed upon the minister's breast or what to make of it, is analogous to the critic's frustration in trying to make absolute sense of *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne's tale abounds with interpreted symbols, commentary, structural devices, editorials and other enticements to a bold critical stance. The frustration comes with one's realization that Hawthorne is quite often affirmative in different directions at the same time. Like Dimmesdale on the scaffold, Hawthorne stands revealed more in demeanor than in reality.

Examples of this rather pronounced ambiguity occur in issues that are at the very heart of the tale's dramatic concern. In his study of conscience Hawthorne's approach seems pre-eminently theological with the presentation of Pearl and Chillingworth as parts of a Divine Plan aimed at the moral regeneration of the story's adulterous pair. But elsewhere Hawthorne undermines such pious assurance with gloomy intimations of the futility of the entire ordeal and the uncertainty of its efficacy in achieving salvation or peace or even regeneration. Is Hester's docile, saintly life after the death
of Dimmesdale the result of moral renewal or the removal of all incentive to sin? Why does it appear that Dimmesdale's surge of moral strength has its beginning in the forest scene when he resolves to escape his guilt with Hester? Hawthorne's study in guilt never quite fuses moral and amoral processes of mind in defining what carries the tale to its tragic conclusion. By turns the source appears to be the conscience-stricken mind reeling from the horror of its sin, and then the mind-stricken mind, tortured by a morbidity of spirit that bears only a shadowy relationship to the exterior event of sin.

There has been a tendency in criticism to underplay this irresolution in Hawthorne. Listening mainly to the clearest voice of the writer, critics tend to see Hawthorne's theology as being more pervasive, more complete and more at the basis of all the tale's phenomena than it really is. One hears the term "Puritan novelist" from such an astute observer as F. O. Matthiessen, and the same critic concludes that Hawthorne was working in "a world of solid moral values." Along similar lines Darrel Abel is led to a blithe interpretation of Pearl as a regenerative symbol denoting "the power or moral thought in man which is never obscured and guides him aright."

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2 Ibid., p. 312.

3 Darrel Abel, "Hawthorne's Pearl; Symbol and Character," *English Literary History*, XVIII (March, 1951), 54.
Likewise Raymond Short concludes that the story's emphasis is on moral issues somewhat at the expense of the naturalism of certain characters and Roy R. Male views Chillingworth as an ingenious allegorical tool—the physician who is a healer in spite of himself.

In *Sins of the Fathers* Frederick Crews cautions against the tendency to over-emphasize Hawthorne's moral posture. Complaining that the artist is given the appearance of a "religious tutor to posterity," Crews uncovers a welter of Freudian themes that give the tale's events a far more consistent reading than that achieved by any theological understanding. The conflicts involved are Oedipal, says Crews, and the guilt that underlies them is a deeply neurotic form, unredeemed by any real relevance to an act of sin. While Crews' well-documented study calls into question much of the orthodox criticism surrounding Hawthorne, it leaves one large stone unturned. Ultimately a rebuttal can be made that Hawthorne is self-confessedly a writer of allegory, a devotee of Bunyan and Spenser. Critics consider *The Scarlet Letter* to be of the same literary mode and therefore principally the vehicle of its author's didactic intention. Pearl and Chillingworth seem to be ultimately authorial abstractions. They

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may possess more sophistication or ambiguity than any of Spenser's creations, but they stand as emblems rather than characters and thus consign the tale to the category of religious allegory.

To overwork a metaphor, Hawthorne's allegory, like Dimmesdale's "revelation" upon the scaffold, has more the appearance than the reality of standing revealed. What it borrows from its literary ancestors is a set of mannerisms. In substance it is a special case in the use of allegory and has features which put Hawthorne as much in the camp of Kafka as Bunyan. The allegory that permeates *The Scarlet Letter* is not a superimposed system of identities but a set of phenomena that grow from internal reference points in the tale, namely the tormented perspectives of Hester and Dimmesdale. The result is a quasi-magical, allegorical world that is simultaneously looking back to the marvel-filled world of Spenser and ahead to the psycho-phenomenology of Kafka.

Allegory's potential for creating a kind of psychological sur-reality is best understood by examining its most fundamental definition and the ways in which this definition distinguishes it from its literary neighbour, symbolism. C. S. Lewis gives the commonly made distinction between allegory and symbolism when he describes allegory as the invention of visibilia to express conscious content of the mind and symbolism as the attempt to see pre-existing forms and qualities as expressions of unconscious content, or the search for the "archetype in the copy." In Hawthorne, we discover a hybrid form of allegory.

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which uses visibilia created by unconscious processes of mind—visibilia such as Pearl and Chillingworth who incarnate the fears of Hester and Dimmesdale. They differ from symbols in that they are conspicuously mutated forms of the external world whereas symbols such as the letter attain a significance that is partly inherent in their physical nature. When Hester encounters the letter it already denotes a meaning that the community has placed on it. Her expansion on this meaning is partly a logical extension of this previously existing significance and partly the result of her own perceptual bias. Thus the sign exists in an intrinsic relationship to its meaning first and then becomes more potently emblematic as an effect of private mental processes. The symbol is not dependent for its existence or all of its meaning solely on the particular mind which perceives it. The rose blossom, presented as symbolic of Nature's sympathy toward wayward souls, is not lost to this significance depending on whether or not someone is there to put this interpretation on it. Part of its meaning is inherent in its beauty, its fragrance and its location in the vicinity of the jailhouse where its appearance is in marked physical contrast with its grim surroundings. The same is true of light and dark images which do not become symbolic of good and evil, truth and falsity in the instant they are given this interpretation but have qualities which mould the thoughts they evoke as much as they themselves are moulded by these thoughts. The mind which perceives something as symbolic is not "extending his egotism over the whole expanse of nature," but merely expressing sensitivity to certain

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8 Nathaniel Hawthorne, Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. William Charvat and Roy Harvey Pearce (Ohio State University Press, 1965), I, p. 155. Hereafter, all page references to The Scarlet Letter shall refer to this edition and will be included in the text within parentheses.
qualities in the thing perceived.

On the other hand, allegory, whether it grows its meanings from pre-existing significances or conjures visibilia for this purpose, has the characteristic of always appearing conspicuously as an invention. In Hawthorne, the process is internal to his characters and unconscious. The allegory is "invention" in the sense that the visibilia's debt to the perceiving intellect for its definition is more apparent and pre-eminent than it is in symbolism. The allegorically perceiving mind is acknowledging its formative role by the elaborateness of the emblems it creates and the exclusiveness with which these emblems operate as a function of the mind from which they emanate. This acknowledgment may appear frankly, as in The Faery Queen when the description of the castle (body) inhabited by Alma (soul) operates with such conspicuous ingenuity; or the acknowledgment may be only implicit, as in the case of Pearl whose ultra-significant mannerisms hint at her intimate relationship with Hester's psyche. Pearl and Chillingworth must tend to have allegorical rather than symbolic meaning for us because they are persons and not things. Whereas the scarlet letter may undergo deepening significance and function as a symbol with expanded dimensions in meaning, Chillingworth and Pearl cannot undergo the same process without appearing as systematic manipulations of natural fact and probability. They lack the protection inscrutability affords Hawthorne's inanimate symbols and must exist and change exclusively in the light of the part of their meaning which is imposed from outside.
This leads to the question of what value psychological allegory has for Hawthorne that cannot be given expression within the symbolic mode. The answer to this lies in the distinction that symbolism implies an awareness of intrinsic qualities in the object being perceived while subconsciously inspired allegory tyrannizes over its visibilia, draining them of their substantiality until they become products of the mind alone rather than the mind and material fact working in conjunction. The allegorical universe is far more egocentric than the symbolic universe. The mind which spawns it through unconscious processes is a mind which has lost its ability to appreciate or respect the independent realities of whatever it perceives. In this sense the allegory of The Scarlet Letter is a psychotic version of symbolism, a surrealistic distortion of experience denoting minds which have gone beyond receptive sensitivity to reach a stage of totally subjective imposition of meanings. This describes the state of Dimmesdale's mind and Hester's as their sense of guilt and fatality grows to tyrannize their senses.

The argument might be raised at this point that Chillingworth and Pearl are perceived as unearthly, emblematic creations by Salem townspeople who do not share in the interior tumult of Hester and Dimmesdale. In governor Bellingham's mansion Mr. Wilson is startled by Pearl's appearance:

"What little bird of scarlet plumage may this be? Methinks I have seen just such figures, when the sun has been shining through a richly painted window, and tracing out the golden and crimson images across the floor. But that was in the old land. Prithee,
young one, who art thou, and what has ailed thy mother to bedizen thee in this strange fashion? Art thou a Christian child,—ha? Dost thou know thy catechism? Or art thou one of those naughty elves or fairies, whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry, in merry old England?" (pp. 109-110)

Mr. Wilson's observation of Pearl is potentially a two-pronged contradiction of her status as the visibilia of Hester's private allegory. Firstly Wilson is quick to incorporate her appearance into a broader allegorical frame of reference and, by regarding her as a gaudy relic of Papistry, render her meaning more patently mythological than psychological. While we might recognize that Mr. Wilson is understanding Pearl in terms that reflect his personal concerns as minister to the fledgling theocracy, he nevertheless is putting her in the light of a public emblem, insinuating a meaning in her that is public domain. Wilson is not drawing upon personal data to give her delination but upon religious and historical tradition. Since this is the starting point of most traditional allegory, it is a tempting convenience to regard Mr. Wilson as a capsule version of Hawthorne, an illustration of the public orientation of the author's own allegorical devices. The argument that Hawthorne insinuates a far broader meaning in Pearl than Wilson can comprehend is not enough to detach her from the class of symbology the minister fastens upon her. This tendency toward rigid associations, toward schematized Bunyanesque meanings is given considerable play by Hawthorne. Chillingworth is well accoutred in clothes and facial expressions that would become any well-dressed devil's emissary. Pearl's nature and appearance heavily
her correspondence with "that wild heathen Nature." A kind of peak is reached, in this tribute to the powers of bare allegory, when Hawthorne discusses the population's response to the increasingly obvious intentions of Chillingworth:

When an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes, it is exceedingly apt to be deceived. When, however, it forms its judgment, as it usually does, on the intuitions of its great and warm heart, the conclusions thus attained are often so profound and so unerring, as to possess the character of truths supernaturally revealed. (p. 127)

What the multitude observes is that "something very ugly and evil" has crept into the appearance of Roger Chillingworth. From this and from the rumor that the "fire in his laboratory had been brought from the lower regions" (p. 127), they are led to their conclusions:

To sum up the matter, it grew to be a widely diffused opinion, that the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, like many other personages of especial sanctity, in all ages of the Christian world, was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan's emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth. This diabolical agent had the Divine permission, for a season, to burrow into the clergyman's intimacy, and plot against his soul. (p. 128)

It is a simplified view of the minister's plight but one which might stand as merely a more graphic version of what Hawthorne is intending by his allegory. Hawthorne's own preface to these truths "so profound and so unerring, as to possess the character of truths supernaturally revealed" tends to affirm the place of classical allegory in his tale and shut off debate at once. But shutting off debate is also an end to exploration and the tale's allegory has permutations in.
psychology that are lost if theological picture-writing is considered its basic aim.

The impasse can be broken neatly by observing, as does Jean Normand's study of Hawthorne, that Hawthorne is really two allegorists—"the allegorist of private realities and the allegorist of surfaces". Still it has been observed that theological and non-ethical concerns fail to coincide in all points of the allegory. If it is to be conceded that Hawthorne is alternately (not simultaneously) both kinds of allegorist then the questions raised by Reverend Wilson et al are not really answered but shifted into matters of ascendency. Is Hawthorne humanizing theology or theologizing humanity? It is less confounding a proposition than it might appear. Again Jean Normand's comments demonstrate his talent for reducing complexities in Hawthorne to their barest elements. Noting Hawthorne's excursions into rigid, sterile tokenism, Normand concludes that this clinging to surfaces is carried on to avoid penetration into the psychological substance of his material. Somewhat harshly but not inaccurately Normand terms this tendency a "cowardice of the imagination." More charitably, Richard H. Fogle finds systematic allegory in The Scarlet Letter the

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10 Ibid., p. 244.
necessary complement to Hawthorne's ambiguity of subject matter (the "classic balance" of the light and the dark)\textsuperscript{11} and Charles Feidelson Jr. considers Hawthorne's allegorizing as intended to keep the lid on the symbolic chaos he penetrates toward almost "in spite of himself."\textsuperscript{12} But charitably or otherwise it still appears that the resorting to public allegory is characteristically a step on the way to something else, something beyond. "Shutting off debate" well describes a number of points in the tale besides the public's "supernatural" intuition regarding Chillingworth's identity. It may be recalled that Dimmesdale, dying, also damns Chillingworth to allegorical petrification in thanking God for sending such a scourge--then bids a hurried adieu to Hester and her disturbing barrage of questions. Not dissimilarly Hawthorne takes his leave of the tale with a piece of moral positivism ("Be true! Be true! Be true'') that is, at least on the moral level, dissatisfying if not downright irrelevant.

Finally it is Hawthorne himself who puts the allegorized morality of Mr. Wilson and company into its place. Hawthorne's desire to abstract an order from his psychological labyrinth leads him to a natural empathy with Puritan mythology and all forms of allegory. But Hawthorne is also a natural skeptic and obsessively


aware of the thin line between coherence of vision and superficiality. The spokesmen for traditional allegory are given a hearing in the story but Hawthorne, even in the midst of appearing to credit them with supernatural insight, cannot refrain from tainting their interpretations with naiveté and dissociating their insights from any penetration into the heart of anything. Mr. Wilson is in possession of a "great and warm heart" of the kind that is supposed to give the multitude their supernatural insights into Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. But his demeanor is also marked by a certain comic myopia. Questioning Pearl he is at a serious disadvantage, and his solemn, plain queries are a bumbling contrast with the fanciful, suggestive replies of the child. (pp. 111-112). The scene and the image we get of the kindly minister are aptly prefaced by the first paragraph of the same chapter when Wilson enters the stage engaged in convincing Bellingham that peaches, pears, and grapes might yet be grown in the climate of New England. Later, when Dimmesdale takes his midnight vigil upon the scaffold, Wilson makes another appearance as he trundles home from the deathbed of Governor Winthrop, wrapt tightly in his cloak, symbolically and literally oblivious to the presence of Dimmesdale on the scaffold and the meaning implied therein.

In this instance Hawthorne's discrediting of systematic allegory is indirect—Mr. Wilson's class of commentary is robbed of its applicability more by its association with him than its intrinsic faults. But elsewhere Hawthorne's attack on this mode of perception is more frontal and occurs even when the author seems most bent on paying his respects. The passage lauding the public's instinctive response to Chillingworth
offers a fine example of this ambivalence in Hawthorne. Hawthorne
characterizes their conclusions as "so profound and so unerring", thus
giving them apparent authority. And since their conclusions are
wrapt in a patently allegorical picture of Chillingworth as the devil's
emissary and Dimmesdale as Job, Hawthorne appears to clinch the role
of formal allegory as a means to spiritual insight. This could be
as damaging to understanding the tale as regarding Mr. Wilson as an
unsophisticated Hawthorne—except that Hawthorne undercuts such
commentary in both cases. After relating the insights of the aware
townspeople, Hawthorne adds a sardonic postscript:

This diabolical agent had the Divine permission,
for a season, to burrow into the clergyman's
intimacy, and plot against his soul. No sensible
man, it was confessed, could doubt on which
side the victory would turn. The people looked,
with an unshaken hope, to see the minister come
forth out of the conflict, transfigured with the
honor which he would unquestionably win. Mean­
while, nevertheless, it was sad to think of the
perchance mortal agony through which he must
struggle towards his triumph.

Alas, to judge from the gloom and terror in
the depths of the poor minister's eyes, the
battle was a sore one, and the victory anything
but secure! (p. 128)

The facile optimism they evince reminds us that their confidence
is heavily premised on Dimmesdale's purity, a mistake that gives
their blithe assurance a doltish quality in the midst of its "profundity".
In truth the outcome of the conflict proves them correct schematically.
Dimmesdale is ennobled, Chillingworth repelled and yet the minister's
gloomy victory hardly presents him as "transfigured with glory." Contrasting
the townspeople's unquestioning, doubt-free attitude toward the struggle
with Dimmesdale's own view from the precipice forces the issue. We must either regard Dimmesdale's terror as a display of comely humility or the townspeople's allegorical faith as unwarranted. Whatever else Hawthorne intends by his tale, it is certain that he begins it with an ambiguity of sin and ends with an ambiguity of salvation and that, within such a world, uncertainty must needs be a kind of bitter realism while certainty possesses an equal measure of faith and shallowness. Hawthorne set out to praise the public heart, its concern and awareness, but somewhere along the line their sympathy is reduced to a kind of tongue clicking and their patent allegorical insights become the perimeters of understanding rather than the gateways.

Mr. Wilson's observations on Pearl raise a second set of questions about the status of psychological allegory in the tale. Simply the fact that he sees the same Pearl Hester sees and Dimmesdale sees might be regarded as giving the lie to her illusory being. Similarly the public's apprehension of Chillingworth's fiendish nature calls into question his status as a privately created apparition. The question is: how can these relatively neutral points of view perceive what is the subjective product of other minds? The answer is that the visual experience is shared simply because Pearl and Chillingworth do have a "real" existence. Chillingworth may be a phantom hatched in the madness of a priest's mind but he is a physically-realized phantom, every bit as fiendish and other-worldly as Dimmesdale imagines him to be. If a mind in turmoil is the window on the universe then this universe has a new frame of reference. If its workings are "miraculous" then they are miracles in the context of a phenomenological
world, in which case they are not illusions but real events of a different reality. Those who perceive the leech's strange and devilish manner do not belie the private allegory out of which he grows but merely show themselves attuned to the realities of the phenomenological world of which they partake. Those who see only a kindly old doctor in the leech, a naughty girl in Pearl and nothing upon Dimmesdale's breast when he reveals the letter are the ones "deluded". While serving to demonstrate the utter subjectivity of all experience, they appear, in the context of the tale, as obtuse, soulless points of view. They are the multitude that "attempts to see with its eyes" solely and consequently is "exceedingly apt to be deceived."

Ironically they also represent purest objectivity by the extremity of their uninvolvment. By undermining their observations Hawthorne is, in effect, undermining the place of established reality in his tale.

Sifting through the various comments that follow the "revelation" of the letter on Dimmesdale, Hawthorne says "the reader may choose among these theories" (p. 259) but only in reference to the opinions of those who saw the letter and questioned only its origin. Their interpretations are different but all accept the real existence of the emblem and all, therefore, are coincident with the tale's own special reality. Hawthorne exercises more caution and editorial prerogative in handling the spectators who insist nothing was revealed upon the scaffold. They regard the minister's character as unblemished and his actions as part of a parable of compassion for sinners. Hawthorne comments:
Without disputing a truth so momentous, we must be allowed to consider this version of Mr. Dimmesdale's story as only an instance of that stubborn fidelity with which a man's friends—and especially a clergyman's—will sometimes uphold his character; when proofs, clear as the mid-day sunshine on the scarlet letter, establish him a false and sin-stained creature of the dust. (p. 259)

As matter and anti-matter tolerate no proximity, reality and counter-reality stir a contradiction that Hawthorne is obliged to deal with. He has so thoroughly built the internal reality the tale manifests that he is now in a position to view as prejudiced the only voice objective reality has!
CHAPTER II
EMBLEMS AND THE INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

To understand Hawthorne's use of what I have termed psychological allegory, we must re-examine the function of characters such as Chillingworth and Pearl. They have the immediate appearance of stock allegorical creations on the same plane as Spenser's Archimago or Duessa or Seven Deadly Sins. They are credited with being more sophisticated creations in a realistic vein, more psychologically rounded out than Spenser's personages, but to most critics they are not of a different class. F. O. Matthiessen, though alert to other distinguishing features of Hawthorne's allegory, concedes that Pearl is "the purest type of Spenserian characterization, which starts with abstract qualities and hunts for their proper embodiment."¹³

Perhaps the best approach to a re-appraisal of these stylized versions of humanity is a slightly roundabout one. Hawthorne's emblematic tendencies are more easily analyzed when they appear in forms less intricate than characters; forms such as objects, colours and other tangibles not subject to the flux of personality. The intense subjectivity of The Scarlet Letter's world is all-pervasive, and the laws that govern the beings of Pearl and Chillingworth apply as forcefully to inanimate matter.

¹³American Renaissance, p. 278.
Hyatt Waggoner partially uncovers the nature of Hawthorne's symbolic method when he observes that colours do not have, initially, a full-blown symbolic value but grow to be more than themselves in stages. These stages he terms "pure", "mixed", and "drained"; a "pure" image being a literal, sensory impression, a "mixed" image one which is both sensory and meaningful, and a "drained" image one which is given over totally to its symbolic import:

Thus on the first page the grayness of the hats and the "weather-stains" of the jail are pure images, sense impressions to be taken quite literally. Only after we have become conscious of the part played by colour in the tale are we apt to be aware of the appropriateness of these colours, though to be sure they may have had their effect on us before we became conscious of that effect.

Waggoner attributes such graduated symbolic growth to Hawthorne's wish to break the reader in gently, cushioning the introduction of symbolic values so they will be felt as appropriate in their ultimate, "drained" form. Although there is indeed a growing "appropriateness" to such images, the reasons behind these changes have a more organic relationship to the tale. What Waggoner is observing is Hawthorne's working from the inside out, evolving values for colours and objects rather than


15 Ibid., p. 123.
affixing them. His characters, Dimmesdale and Hester, grow conscious of various levels of meaning, gradually, as a function of their increasing burden of guilt and secrecy. This relationship between the "draining" of images and the point of view of certain characters is illustrated by Hawthorne in the character of Dimmesdale:

It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment. To the untrue man, the whole universe is false,—it is impalpable, it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist. The only truth, that continued to give Mr. Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth, was the anguish of his inmost soul,... (pp. 145-146)

The passage, in effect, is setting the stage for the changes which material images undergo in the course of the tale. The "falseness" that infects all substantial reality may be partly an authorial index to Dimmesdale's moral state, but it does not stop at this. It is also a description of the mutability of all tangible qualities and, as such, pertains to the larger question of subjective perception and the relativity of experience. The universe that "shrinks to nothing" is not false in the sense that it is an antithesis to the "true" universe; rather it is described in terms of its growing neutrality in the equation of experience. Deprived of its physical, independent existence through Dimmesdale's turning of his senses inwardly, it stands ready to accept a second reality, portentous and "drained" of independent life. Waggoner's view of these changes as
testimony to Hawthorne's craftsmanship has the disadvantage of making the writer appear more ingenious than involved. Moreover such a view tends to short-circuit the psychological bias behind the growth of emblems and thereby links Hawthorne too closely to a Bunyanesque style of writing where symbols operate exclusively in obedience to the pre-conceived scheme of the author.

Hester and Dimmesdale share their sin, guilt and consequently their phenomenological view of the universe as well. The universe they perceive reflects their perturbation and the result is the hyper-significant world of the tale with burning scarlet letters embroidered in gold thread or emblazoned on the sky by meteors. It is a universe explicable only in terms of the psychology which comprehends it. As Frederick Crews observes, the operating principle in *The Scarlet Letter* and some of Hawthorne's best stories is the "ambiguity between literal, outward fact and 'an extension of egotism over the whole expanse of nature.'”

The first chapter springs quickly into emblematic speculation with Hawthorne's reference to the fragile beauty of the rose bush which bloomed outside the prison "in token that the deep heart of nature could pity...." (p. 48) But this is a toying with significance, more a foreshadowing of the tale's emblematic bias than a forerunner of the kind of symbolism that will predominate in the story. After we are made aware of the potential for meaningful

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interpretation through our encounter with the "sweet moral blossom,"
the tale increasingly develops its meanings from internal reference
points and approaches an extremity of kinds during the forest
meeting of the guilt-ridden pair. When Hester flings the letter
away and feels herself free from the stigma associated with it, the
event and ensuing emotions are viable because she has had seven years
of suffering in which to nurture a total identification between her
sin and the sign which denotes it to the world. When Hester openly
re-affirms her love for the minister the event brings on a "flood
of sunshine" suggesting, in part, an acute correlation of inward
state with the appearance as well as the meaning of outward reality:

Such was the sympathy of Nature—that wild,
heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated
by human law, nor illumined by higher truth—
with the bliss of these two spirits! Love,
whether newly born, or aroused from a death-
like slumber, must always create a sunshine,
filling the heart so full of radiance, that it
overflows upon the outward world. Had the
forest still kept its gloom, it would have
been bright in Hester's eyes, and bright in
Arthur Dimmesdale's! (p. 203)

Hawthorne's sense of correspondence is ultimately tentative, even
ambiguous. Almost in the same breath we are invited to draw two
very different conclusions from what occurs. On one hand Hawthorne
invites us to appraise the event as betokening Nature's approval of
such love which, in turn, leads us to a Waggoner-like view that
externals are protagonists in causing the proliferation of symbolic
meaning; that Nature's sympathy is heathenish and betokened by a "flood
of sunshine," that God's interests are represented in the phenomenal properties of the letter and its refusal to depart when it is cast off, and that all tokenism is ultimately part of Hawthorne's invisible commentary on his story. On the other hand, the passage introduces the contradictory notion that "love" is responsible for the "flood of sunshine," that interior feelings, love or guilt, "overflow upon the outward world" with sufficient potency to create omens as well as infer them. By this interpretation, Nature's heathenish quality may be seen less as a moral antithesis to Puritanism than a kind of moral neutrality; the same neutrality that characterizes the "false" universe described in relation to Dimmesdale and symptomizes the gross mutability of the "outward world" that has no identity separable from its perceived identity. The closely parallel intensification of guilt and gothic fantasy is Hawthorne's play upon this natural mutability in order to create the mind's version of the moonlit room where "the Actual and the Imaginary may meet" ("The Custom House," p. 36). While this view of the preternatural events in the tale does not destroy the possibility of a moral construction, it at least poses an alternative understanding. At this stage of the argument it can be said that Hawthorne is dealing in at least two modes of conception.

Waggoner's study of the growth of symbolic meaning tends to neglect this second, interior mode of conception. Moreover he commits a second sin of omission. His study of the growth of images is unnecessarily restricted when he considers only inanimate objects or qualities. The mutability of perceived forms is a property
not only of sub-human matter but pertains to all matter including the
kind which eats with a knife and fork and demands, by reason of this,
a private identity separable from its perceived identity. When Chilling­
worth complains of becoming helplessly submerged in his fiendish
role ("A mortal man with once a human heart, has become a fiend
for his especial torment"), he is not shirking his moral responsibility
so much as recognizing himself as subject to the same process by
which less self-assertive objects come to exist more symbolically
than actually. In his essay "The Scarlet Letter: A Reading",
Rudolphe Von Abele makes an acute observation on his character. Von
Abele first complains that Chillingworth loses effectiveness because
his identity straddles two modes of literary portraiture, the natural­
istic and the allegorical. Then he relents somewhat in his judgment:

We can save him be regarding him as a projection
of mental states, in which case he "fits" his role
almost perfectly.17

Though the complaint of over-ingenuity and consequent dehumanization
of characters is stock critical fare, Von Abele's reference to
Chillingworth as a derivative of Dimmesdale's mental state relates
the leech to what has already been observed regarding alterations in
the material world. Curiously, Von Abele omits a logical corollary
to his suggestion that might have resulted in a kinder appraisal of
the leech's role in the story. If Chillingworth is, in fact, a kind
of psychic mirror to Dimmesdale, then a large part of his justifi­
cation as a character resides in the extent to which Dimmesdale achieves

17 Rudolphe Von Abele, "The Scarlet Letter: A Reading", Accent,
XI (Autumn, 1951), 219.
full dramatic life. Von Abele seems to say that Chillingworth does serve a mirror function and then complain that the mirror is too flat.

Stephen A. Black pursues the correlation between psyche and symbolism at more length than does Von Abele and creditably sees this aspect of the tale as crucial to the understanding of characters as well as all metaphysical meanings in the story:

...a central problem in the action of this novel is that phenomenal reality is usually obscured for the characters by their unflagging efforts to account for every experience as symbolic of a greater reality believed to exist outside the humanly perceivable world. 18

Any understanding of Hester and Dimmesdale, says Black, must take into account "their proclivity—one which they share with the rest of the community—to construct symbolic interpretations of real events, things and people." 19 When this tendency goes amok as in the case of Hester and Dimmesdale the result is "hallucination, total estrangement from reality." 20 The weakness of Black's observation is that he borders on an unnecessary contradiction in discovering the internal perspective behind symbolization, admitting


20 Ibid.
the "total estrangement from reality" experienced by Hester and Dimmesdale, and then postulating the existence of an absolute reality ("phenomenal reality," "real events, things and people") by which degrees of estrangement can be conveniently measured. Black skirts any real contradiction by enlisting Hawthorne on his side when he insists that there is a basic naturalism in the portraiture of Pearl and Chillingworth that the author maintains despite the emblematic distortions imposed by Hester and Dimmesdale.

Black's argument for naturalism in certain characters is a view he shares with a number of other Hawthorne critics and his defense, like theirs, leads to an acrobatic attempt to shift Hawthorne's point of emphasis in characterization. In the case of Chillingworth it is argued that although he may appear as a demonic abstraction of evil, he is also the cuckolded husband seeking revenge, the obsessed man and the curious scientist. These explanations have somewhat the same appearance as Iago's self-justification for the carnage he instigates, namely his suspicion that he has been cuckolded by Othello. In both cases one is left with the feeling that tangible, human motivations are more convenient than satisfying. Black's contention becomes particularly unstuck in dealing with the episode in the tale when Chillingworth secretly observes the minister in his sleep and is struck by what he observes upon his breast:

After a brief pause, the physician turned away. But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what a ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting forth through the whole ugliness
of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself, when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom.

But what distinguished the physician's ecstasy from Satan's was the trait of wonder in it! (p. 138)

Black seizes upon the element of "wonder" in Chillingworth's demeanour as evidence of the old man's basically scientific bias which is touched with a rather persistent curiosity and love of discovery.

In the case of Pearl, the attempt to naturalize her character seems even more the forcing of an issue than in the case of Chillingworth. R. H. Fogle defends Pearl's nature as essentially childlike while conceding she asks "fiendishly apt" questions. Marjorie J. Elder goes one better. After noting that Pearl has a child's capriciousness and that her questions might be seen as "naughty" as well as apt, she extends her sympathy to "the pathetic loneliness of a child cut off from other children." Pearl's character will be discussed at a further point in this work. Meanwhile, by way of some refutation of this "naturalizing" approach among critics, it might be said that Pearl seems to bear a minimum of human qualities and a surfeit of demonic properties. Her behavior


when Hester casts off the scarlet letter is a rebellious tantrum, but it is so highly charged with a significance she can not "naturally" be aware of that her "childishness" imparts a grotesque feeling to the scene rather than any sense of probability. Hawthorne's own acknowledgement that, in the final scaffold scene, "a spell is broken" so that Pearl might "grow up amid human joy and sorrow" (p. 256) makes it plain enough that something in a non-human sphere was intended by her character.
CHAPTER III

CHILLINGWORTH'S ROLE

Chillingworth is both a victimizer and a victim but in a sense less obvious than Hawthorne suggests when he moralizes:

In a word, old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man's faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a devil's office. (p. 170)

When the leech accuses the priest of being responsible for his de-humanization, he may be shirking his moral responsibility as man, but as an allegorism or type (by this time in the story he is more this than a man), he is attributing the causes of his transformation correctly. Like Roderick Elliston's bosom serpent or the witches that appear to Macbeth, Chillingworth's appearance and mettle have no autonomous existence. When Dimmesdale committed sin he violated his conscience and began the process by which his mind would disrupt the outward world to create the embodied phantoms of his inward strife. As many have observed, Chillingworth is a punitive, avenging figure allegorically resembling the guilt-ridden recriminations of an active conscience. However he is not everyman's guilt, as he would be in the hands of Bunyan, but specifically the guilt of Dimmesdale. It is out of the priest's mind that he has his source rather than directly from Hawthorne or God (viewing conscience, for
the moment, in psychological rather than theological terms).

Arthur Dimmesdale's declining health is a physical manifestation of his tortured, declining spirit—a readily understandable psychosomatic effect. Less usual plausibilities must account for the appearance of the "A" on his breast in the final scaffold scene, although only an externally inflicted wound could explain its presence in naturalistic terms. Yet, after many such emblematic wonders have preceded it, the more phenomenal likelihood does not seem improbable. Dimmesdale's own conviction that "the Devil knew it well and fretted it continually with his burning finger" (p. 255) confirms its acute psychological being if not its physical presence. It is not a long step from psychosomaticism to pseudo-miraculism and then to a more ultimate evidence of the extent to which the external world is only a function of the internal one. There is evidence that Dimmesdale inflicts Chillingworth on his person just as he ruins his bodily health and, miraculously or otherwise, carves an "A" on his bosom.

There are many precedents in Hawthorne's tales involving characters with similar, radical morbidity of spirit. It is instructive to digress for a moment and examine the case of "Young Goodman Brown". The tale is a particularly graphic account of the introspective tendency gone amok, pursuing nightmarish adventures wherein the hyper-sensitive spirit confronts its own direst fears. The motivations for Brown's journey into the forest are as vague as the nature of obsession, but there is a "dark necessity" to
"Too far! too far!" exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk.23

The events of Brown's ordeal follow a precisely cumulative pattern beginning with the endurable trials of learning that reputable figures of authority and Brown's own ancestors seemingly had covenants with the Devil. Brown is disturbed but manages to rationalize the evidence of far-reaching corruption. It does not touch him directly:

Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me.24

Brown's fears begin to be more earnestly incarnated when Goody Cloyse affirms her pact with the man of the forest. This touches him more deeply and denotes a sharp progression "deep into the heathen wilderness".25 The final progression is, of course, Brown's realization that the status of his own wife is uncertain.

24 Ibid., p. 93.
25 Ibid., p. 97.
Literally, Faith, being Brown's wife, is his most intimate human relation and hence his chief support in life. Figuratively viewed, faith is the ultimate bulwark against the doubts which assail Brown's piety. Her appearance in the wilderness communion represents the darkest fear that can confront an erstwhile pious man; not the pervasiveness of depravity in mankind but the suspicion concomittant with this—namely that "sin is but a name" and virtue another. Unlike Mr. Evangelist of Pilgrim's Progress, who represents active, practising faith as opposed to complacent piety, Goodman Brown's faith seems to be belief itself struggling against evidence which suggests a God-forsaken reality. Observing the forest company, Brown is shocked by the proximity of the good and the wicked:

Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity. Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and waited at the skirts of that venerable saint, his revered pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered also among their palefaced enemies were the Indian priests or powwows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft.27


27 Ibid., p. 101.
Later in the story Hawthorne makes the suggestion that the virtuous demeanor of these "venerable saints" is a mask, but in the meantime, with the context of the scene unmodified, its import is strangely blasphemous. The interspersing of saints and sinners suggests more the lack of grounds for distinction between the two than a mixture of plain appearances and facades. The pessimism seems almost atheistic, and this vein is reaffirmed when the fiend bids Brown and his wife face one another, and then exults:

"Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now ye are undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race".28

The evil that causes Brown's final despair is negatively defined; not the power of wickedness so much as an absence of any absolute virtue that might give testimony to an ethical universe and the workings of a Providence. Goodman Brown's confusion might require a plea of the kind made by the man viewing his mirror image in "Monsieur du Miroir":

A few words, perhaps, might satisfy the feverish yearning of my soul for some master thought that should guide me through this labyrinth of life, teaching wherefore I was born, and how to do my task on earth, and what is death.29


But Brown can discover no intimation of any "master thought" that will allow him to return to the easy faith which comforted him before he began, metaphorically, the exploration of his darkest doubts. Like other sensitive spirits in Hawthorne's fiction—Roderick Elliston, Reuben Bourne, Robin Molineux, Reverend Hooper, and Dimmesdale—Goodman Brown, through his own compulsion toward psychological self-castigation, is plunged into an irreversibly tragic process.

Just as Goodman Brown is led to face exactly those fears to which he is most susceptible, Dimmesdale, on his own journey into the forest of his heart, finds "a fiend for his especial torment." He finds Chillingworth, whose nature and purpose are not only adverse to Dimmesdale's but the antithesis of all that the priest wishes to believe and hope for. Brown's ordeal is not a random collection of temptations and trials but a highly structured psychological sequence, and similarly the Dimmesdale-Chillingworth framework is not an ingenious, superimposed symmetry but a psychologically evolved apposition.

The minister, whose great fear is the revelation of his secret, is attended by his mortal enemy, the cuckolded husband, whose single purpose is the discovery of that secret. The man of a mind that "impelled itself powerfully along the track of a creed, and wore its passage continually deeper with the lapse of time" (p. 123) is cared for by one possessing an "intellectual cultivation, of no moderate depth or scope; together with a range and freedom of ideas, that he [Dimmesdale] would have vainly looked for among the members
of his own profession" (p. 123). This last antithesis strongly resembles the ordeal of Goodman Brown, particularly when Dimmesdale is described as a man for whom "it would always be essential to his peace to feel the pressure of a faith about him, supporting while it confined him within its iron framework" (p. 123). Just as Brown is compelled to make the journey into the forest of his own anxieties, Dimmesdale is making the same journey in conjuring Roger Chillingworth. Notably it is Dimmesdale himself who consents to being attended by the leech after originally protesting "I need no medicine" (p. 122). Among other things his reasons include a certain "fascination" (p. 123) for this man of science with his probing intellectuality. Chillingworth appears to recognize a certain non-circumstantial quality in his proximity with Dimmesdale when he gives a rather ambiguous appraisal of the success of his disguise:

"He has been conscious of me. He has felt an influence dwelling always upon him like a curse. He knew, by some spiritual sense,—for the Creator never made another being so sensitive as this,—he knew that no friendly hand was pulling at his heart strings, and that an eye was looking curiously into him, which sought only evil, and found it. But he knew not that the eye and hand were mine! With the superstition common to his brotherhood, he fancied himself given over to a fiend,...Yea, indeed!—and he did not err!—there was a fiend at his elbow! A mortal man, with once a human heart, has become a fiend for his especial torment!" (pp. 171-172)

Later, when Hester "reveals" the doctor's true identity, Dimmesdale's comment dispels finally the notion that intrigue or circumstance has
any bearing on his intimacy with the leech:

"I might have known it!" murmured he. "I did know it! Was not the secret told me in the natural recoil of my heart, at the first sight of him, and as often as I have seen him since?" (p. 194)

When Hawthorne describes the minister's state of mind as having for its only reality "the anguish in his inmost soul", he is doing more than making emphatic the priest's ordeal; he is stating an amoral psychological fact. Dimmesdale has begun to lose his power to distinguish a sane from a neurotic perception of the world. The "real" world becomes the inner world translated into exterior objects and a drama of obsession begins. The portentous fiends which once haunted Dimmesdale's nightmarish dreams, incessantly reminding him of his guilt and hypocrisy, become the single fact of his existence, finally erupting into a world which has become illusory in its vagueness and finding an embodiment in Chillingworth, "a fiend for his especial torment."

As at the waving of a magician's wand, uprose a grisly phantom--uprose a thousand phantoms--in many shapes, of death or more awful shame, all flocking round about the clergyman, and pointing with their fingers at his breast! (p. 140)

The vital question that grows out of this process is whether or not Dimmesdale can withstand Chillingworth's domination, or, in other words, whether the priest will succumb to his increasing alienation from the real, literal world. When Dimmesdale is referred to as a "conscience-stricken priest," the observation has strong
non-religious connotations related intimately to the fact that there was "never made a being so sensitive as this." The correlation between sin and guilt appears to wane in its relation to the tale while the correlation between morbidity and suffering looms increasingly large. It is noteworthy that the scarlet "A" is not a talisman of moral transgression only; it also has a significance that is less facile. Hawthorne speaks of it after Hester flings it from her:

But there lay the embroidered letter, glittering like a lost jewel, which some ill-fated wanderer might pick up, and thenceforth be haunted by strange phantoms of evil, sinkings of the heart, and unaccountable misfortune. (p. 202)

Significantly Hawthorne does not imply that the letter would effect only sinners in this way, but anyone who happened upon it. Here is the talisman apart from Hester; the symptoms are apart from their moral frame of reference and yet the effects do not change. The sinkings of the heart recur even when the source is "unaccountable" in terms of crime and punishment, suggesting causes which must be sought within the predilections of the personality rather than the exterior event of sin. In his analysis of a passage in the chapter "A Flood of Sunshine", Frederick Crews shrewdly observes that Hawthorne momentarily substitutes guilt for sin in discussing the source of the tale's sorrow:

And be the stern and sad truth spoken, that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state, repaired. It may be watched and guarded; so that the enemy shall not force his way again into the citadel,
and might even, in his subsequent assaults, select some other avenue, in preference to that where he had formerly succeeded. But there is still the ruined wall, and, near it, the stealthy tread of the foe that would win over again his unfor-
gotten triumph. (pp. 200-201)

One must deduce, says Crews, that the actual state of Christian guilt is not to be confused with feelings of guilt, which in themselves possess the power to induce suffering and re-create the realities of the outward world.³⁰

As Chillingworth probes more deeply, Dimmesdale's struggle becomes more explicitly a struggle to withstand an assault upon his sanity. The capture of the priest's soul, the destruction of his moral fibre, is a figurative representation of Chillingworth's attempt to gain ascendency and make the illusory world he represented Dimmesdale's only reality. The deterrent to such a breakdown has, like the cause, both a figurative and a working representation. Figuratively, it is penance; in practise it is an immersion in the physical, sensory world whether through flagellation or any other substantial distraction, even death, that will have the effect of dispelling hallucinatory phantasms:

He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness; sometimes with a glimmering lamp; and sometimes, viewing his own face in a looking-glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. He thus typified

³⁰ Crews, *Sins of the Fathers*, p. 137. Crews analyzes: "Does Hawthorne mean to describe the soul's precautions against the repetition of overt sin? Apparently not, since the 'stealthy foe' is identified as guilt rather than as the forbidden urge to sin....It is plainly inappropriate to see 'guilt' as the original assailant of the citadel, for feelings of guilt arise only in reaction against condemned acts of thoughts."
the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify, himself. In these lengthened vigils, his brain often reeled, and visions seemed to flit before him;...Now it was a herd of diabolic shapes, that grinned and mocked at the pale minister, and beckoned him away with them; now a group of shining angels, who flew upward heavily, as sorrow laden, but grew more ethereal as they rose....

None of these visions ever quite deluded him. At any moment, by an effort of his will, he could discern substances through their misty lack of substance, and convince himself that they were not solid in their nature, like yonder table of carved oak, or that big, square, leather-bound and brazen-clasped volume of divinity. (pp. 144-145)

But these visions of "diabolic shapes" are merely dreams within a dream. The phantom which is Chillingworth is an encroachment into substantial reality of a more sinister, all-pervading dream which cannot be so easily dispelled.

Hester makes the significant observation that Dimmesdale's suffering seems an "unwholesome" form of strife with dubious regenerative value:

She doubted not, that the continual presence of Roger Chillingworth,—the secret poison of his malignity, infecting all the air about him,—and his authorized interference; as a physician, with the minister's spiritual and physical infirmities,—that these had opportunities had been turned into a cruel purpose. By means of them, the sufferer's conscience had been kept in an irritated state, the tendency of which was, not to cure by wholesome pain, but to disorganize and corrupt his spiritual being. Its result, on earth, could hardly fail to be insanity, and hereafter that eternal alienation from the Good and True, of which madness is perhaps the earthly type. (p. 193)
The "Good" connotes happiness or a state of harmonious existence. "At peace with oneself" is a cliche which has peculiar relevance to
the minister. The "True" has the familiar moral connotations of
unhypocritical existence, but Hawthorne uses "true" and "false" a
number of times in the tale and they have an alternate meaning.
"True", as has been shown, is sometimes equated with "real", meaning
the world of literal fact where people and things possess an unportentous
reality that is not ever-reflecting the terrors of the perceiving
mind. Hester's fear that Chillingworth will triumph and alienate Dimmesdale's
from the "Good and True" is therefore partly an amoral concern for
the minister's sanity and a wish for respite and returned normalcy
more than moral correctness. She consciously recognizes Chillingworth
as a source of the untrue, in a moral sense, and she intuitively
recognizes the growing hallucinatory world he incarnates. Chilling-
worth is evil but the evil he represents is more peculiarly a
psychological threat than a moral one. This "evil" is the opposite
of the "good" God intended when he gave man the "pith and substance"
of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by
Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment" (p. 145).

Chillingworth's growth in fiendish stature is unchecked
until the forest meeting between Hester and Dimmesdale. This episode
marks the beginning of the end for Chillingworth because it reverses
the process of Dimmesdale's alienation from the "Good and True." Hester
offers the prospect of a life unburdened of the past, full of everyday
domestic realities which deter the delusory world by providing a sense
of the immediate, the tangible and the sensory. The solace of such a
life is referred to by Hawthorne in his notebook entry of August 15, 1842.

It was a pleasant sensation when the coach rumbled up our avenue, and wheeled round at the door; for then I felt I was regarded as a man with a wife and a household—a man having a tangible existence and locality in the world—when friends came to avail themselves of our hospitality.  

Hester's exhortation to Dimmesdale to escape Salem is an exhortation to exchange realities, to re-establish a literal reality.

Immediately after his meeting with Hester, Dimmesdale finds himself able to practise directly what Hester had suggested indirectly and figuratively in her escape proposal: he begins a re-immersion in the substantial world. He begins to discover anew people beyond the claustrophobic confines of the self-Chillingworth-Hester-Pearl grouping. And, most importantly, he begins to re-orient himself. That is, he recognizes more clearly the extent to which his own mind is responsible for the creation of a hitherto adverse universe:

As he drew near the town, he took an impression of change from the series of familiar objects that presented themselves...The same was true as regarded the acquaintances whom he met, and all the well-known shapes of human life, about the little town. They looked neither older nor younger, now; the beards of the aged were no whiter, nor could the creeping babe of yesterday walk on his feet to-day; it was impossible to describe in

what respect they differed from the individuals on whom he had so recently bestowed a parting glance; and yet the minister's deepest sense seemed to inform him of their mutability. A similar impression struck him most remarkably, as he passed under the walls of his own church. The edifice was so very strange, and yet so familiar, an aspect, that Mr. Dimmesdale's mind vibrated between two ideas; either he had seen it only in a dream hitherto, or that he was merely dreaming about it now. (pp. 216-217)

Dimmesdale's awareness of the "mutability" of those he now perceives is a tacit awareness of the falsity in himself which Chillingworth embodies and foreshadows the leech's failure to regain his ascendency over Dimmesdale's "soul."

To this point in the tale the theological and psychological constructions that can be put on the events coincide fairly amicably; but from the time Chillingworth's power is broken, the causes of this alteration and the events which follow lend themselves more exclusively to a psychological interpretation. There is no break in continuity between the time of Dimmesdale's impious impulses, upon his return to the town, and the time of his preparation of the election-day sermon. A sudden change in mood outside of the reader's knowledge cannot be hypothesized because Hawthorne does not work in such a random fashion. It must be assumed, therefore, that the minister's moral salvation is effected by his re-affirmation of an immoral act and a continuation of the untoward impulses which proceed from this re-affirmation. While this sequence of events and emotions has never received a satisfying theological explanation a psychological view offers more cohesion.

Dimmesdale's urge to do "some strange, wild, wicked thing" in connection with members of his parish is, in fact, an extension of
the new existence Hester proposes as a means to resisting the dangers to his mental balance. Dimmesdale's spirit of impiety still denotes a radical impulse to make contact with the substantial world. It also denotes an inclination to reject the past that is even more harsh than Hester's plan of action. Above all, Dimmesdale's feelings are an approach toward a resolution of his inward strife. Says Crews, Hester's proposed escape renews his libidinal energy and he returns to town renewed but on the verge of losing his powers to repress. And simultaneously he is on the verge of annihilating Chillingworth, whose power waxes and wanes in inverse proportion to the minister's externalization of conflicts. Significantly, Dimmesdale's urge to whisper to the widowed lady "a brief, pithy, and, as it then appeared to him, unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul" (p. 219) is a nearly open expression of the religious doubts he tacitly embraces in the form of Chillingworth. S. A. Black makes the noteworthy observation that the tone of Dimmesdale's relationship with Chillingworth is already drastically changed in their first meeting after the forest scene. The demise of Chillingworth's power is foreshadowed in the encounter when Dimmesdale deftly parries the physician's queries and counters the probe with a brazen charade of his own. Wryly he thanks his "kind physician" for his "friendly" ministrations and deigns to offer good prayers as recompense for the leech's services. As Black observes:

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32 *Sins of the Fathers*, p. 146.
Dimmesdale's mind is now filled with the politics of the situation rather than the metaphysics or guilt...The bogey of the old man has been repudiated.

With the revelation of the letter on Dimmesdale's breast, the story's ethical and psychological levels are belatedly consummated, though the latter conclusion is represented only figuratively by the minister's act. Repression is solved—not technically since Dimmesdale's "confession" has a powerful metaphoric relevance to the real needs of his spirit. Crews notes that Hawthorne has Pearl leave Salem in the end and takes this as evidence that the author's commitment has been to the nature of obsession rather than the moral perspective of Calvinist Puritanism. Applying this principle to Dimmesdale, Crews observes:

From the distance we look back to Dimmesdale's egocentric confession, not as a moral example which Hawthorne would like us to follow, but as the last link in a chain of compulsion that has now been relaxed.

Inevitably the tale's final scene bears strong resemblance to the waking from a dream. Here, as in much of his writing, Hawthorne demonstrates his interest in postulating a place "where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet;" a meeting ground frequently depicted by Hawthorne as a dream-world. Observing that the dream apparatus is a favorite device of the allegorist, Edwin Honig analyzes this affinity

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34 Sins of the Fathers, p. 152.
and finds that dreams have the value of making "oppositional relationships much more distinct for the individual while dreaming than they appear when he is awake." Clearly, the very process by which Chillingworth becomes more graphically entrenched in his role, more hyper-significant, more two-dimensionally allegorical, is the same process by which the dream grows and Dimmesdale's mind increasingly extends its egotism "over the whole expanse of nature."

Walking in the shadow of a dream, as it were, and perhaps actually under the influence of a species of somnambulism, Mr. Dimmesdale reached the spot, where, not so long since, Hester Prynne had lived through her first hours of public ignomy. (p. 147)

The holiday scene in the market place has an intense naturalism that is antithetical to the oppressive impalpability of all that has preceded it. The description of the swashbuckling sailors, the Indians in their savage finery and other participants in the celebration is highly detailed, visual and "pure" in its imagery. It is a sensory immediate world such as that perceived by the waking dreamer of "The Haunted Mind", who finds his thoughts of death and woe too disturbing to endure and fixes his sights on objects in his room as a means of rescue from his troubled slumberings.

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CHAPTER IV

PEARL'S ROLE

To those critics who consider Hawthorne's allegorical bias to be usurping the credibility of his story, Pearl is an even more problematical creation than Chillingworth. Hawthorne patterned her on his daughter Una and said of the prototype:

To return to Una, there is something that almost frightens me about the child—I know not whether elfish or angelic, but, at all events, supernatural.... In short, I now and then catch an aspect of her, in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil, haunting the house where I dwell.36

Of course, Pearl's similarity to a real child does not make her any the less fantastical. Considering the almost mystical treatment that Una receives, all that can be said is that Hawthorne's imaginative transformation of reality seems to occur as readily in his way of seeing the world as his way of reproducing it fictionally. His description of Una necessitates a simultaneous awareness of the daughter's nature and the perceptual eccentricities of her father. Similarly, understanding the nature of Pearl is inseparable from an understanding of Hester's viewing perspective. Like Hawthorne,

in his description of Una, Hester also demonstrates a persistent vulnerability to quasi-mystical contemplation. Watching Chillingworth she wonders:

Would he not suddenly sink into the earth, leaving a barren and blasted spot, where, in due course of time, would be seen deadly nighshade, dogwood, henbane, and whatever else of vegetable wickedness the climate could produce, all flourishing with hideous luxurience? Or would he spread bat's wings and flee away, looking so much the uglier, the higher he rose towards heaven? (p. 175)

Clearly, Hester's way of seeing is a quality she shares with Dimmesdale as well as with Hawthorne, just as surely as she shares the minister's guilt and secret. By extension it can be inferred that the growth of Pearl's emblematic being is bound partly by the same rules that govern Chillingworth's increasingly allegorical stature.

Like Chillingworth, Pearl is not an affixed emblem dropped as a signpost from heaven. Her nature derives from psychological processes in the mind of Hester Prynne. Hester's first appearance on the scaffold, her exposure to public shame, has a traumatic impact on her:

Could it be true? She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast, that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real. Yes!--these were her realities,—all else had vanished! (p. 59)
Shortly after, she undergoes a similar experience in discovering the presence of Roger Chillingworth among the onlookers:

While this passed, Hester Prynne had been standing on her pedestal, still with a fixed gaze towards the stranger; so fixed a gaze, that, at moments of intense absorption, all other objects in the visible world seemed to vanish, leaving only him and her. (p. 63)

The distinction between what is actual and what is real only in the mind already begins to blur. Although, in these first moments of the story, the visible world's vanishing is simply a matter of traumatic emphasis, this characterizes the process by which the interior world begins to predominate and transfigure outer reality. As in Dimmesdale's re-making of reality, Hester's self-inquiry follows a pattern of guilt and self torment.

Hester's mood on the scaffold is often mistaken by readers to be one of defiance, epitomized by the gaudy stitching with which she embroidered the "A" on her dress. But Hester's demeanor is more dignified than rebellious. She is aware of her shame and little else at this point—certainly not able to luxuriate in speculations about any hypocrisy in the fervor of her persecutors. Hester concurs with others in their judgment of her guilt and the intensity with which she feels her own depravity ("all else had vanished") indicates that, like Dimmesdale's, her violated conscience reinforces rather than minimizes her torment. One member of the crowd, whose sympathy for Hester lends weight to his observations, replies to the affront others feel at the sight of the lavishly embroidered "A": 
"O, peace, neighbours, peace!" whispered their youngest companion. "Do not let her hear you! Not a stitch in that embroidered letter, but she has felt it in her heart." (p. 154)

This appraisal of Hester's motives links her to the same morbidity of spirit which led Dimmesdale to dwell upon the fact of his crime and create his own direst torments. Following this, it is not surprising that Hester chooses to remain in Salem rather than begin anew elsewhere. She stays partly because of her emotional ties to Dimmesdale, but partly her residence is another instance of self affliction, for Hawthorne pointedly glosses this decision:

...—it may seem marvellous, that this woman should still call that place her home, where, and where only, she must needs be the type of shame. But there is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghost-like, the spot where some great and marked event has given the colour to their lifetime; and still the more irresistibly, the darker the tinge that saddens it. Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil. (pp. 79-80)

This manner, this morbidity of spirit which Hester shares with the minister needs to be prominent in our understanding of her character. It is one of the fundamental ways in which she is linked with Dimmesdale psychologically, and too often this common ground is overlooked by critics. Darrel Abel sees Hester as the typification of romantic individualism. 37 Marius Bewley also gives

37 Darrel Abel, "Hawthorne's Hester", College English, XIII (March 1952), pp. 303-309.
prominence to her feminist appearance as does Charles Feidelson, Jr. who admires the proud defiance she expresses in her needlework and judges her humble appearance on the scaffold as an affectation to disguise her rebellious spirit. Such cursory interpretations of Hester give to her role the quality of a splendid isolation and hopelessly detach Pearl from her psychic relevance so that she becomes what Chillingworth seems to be if judged separately; an authorial signpost.

Hester's "freedom of speculation" and her belief that "the world's law was no law to her" must not be confused with the operation of personal guilt. There is no doubt of the torment Hester experiences her first time on the scaffold, and there is no evidence that this sense of guilt is ever successfully abandoned--only that Hester grows increasingly skeptical of the community's right or power to inflict, from without, any punishment comparable to the action of the individual's own remorse. The paradox of public discipline is capsulized early in the story when a stern woman in the crowd about the scaffold complains of the lightness of Hester's sentence and warns that it will lead to a spread of debauchery among others:

"Mercy on us, goodwife," exclaimed a man in the crowd, "is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows?" (p. 52)


Hawthorne seems to suggest thereby that the ultimate arbiter of justice is the individual's own sensitivity to the fact of his "crime". For, if such sensitivity exists (I prefer not to call it "conscience" since this implies exclusively a reaction to a tangible immoral act) then the individual suffers more severely by this than from any public chastisement, as witness the minister. If no sense of guilt inhabits the individual the threat of public punishment is only an external deterrent, its execution only a form of vengeance such as that wished by the woman who complains of the magistrates' leniency. The presumptuousness of such a role for the community is compounded by the inevitable near-sightedness of such a conglomerate mind in matters relating to the individual soul. This results in huge ironies such as the public's degradation of Hester and veneration of Dimmesdale. It is this communal morality which Hester rebels against when she tells Chillingworth "it lies not within the pleasure of the magistrates to take off this badge, ... Were I worthy to be quit of it, it would fall away of its own nature, or be transformed into something that should speak a different purport." (p. 67)

Thus Hester continues to nurture her own suffering in wearing the letter, in remaining in Salem, and in clinging to Pearl. Romantic individualism would imply a release from all standards of good and evil that are not privately intuited. Hester approaches this extremity in the forest scene when she regards her sin as having a "consecration of its own," but she is ignoring the realities of her own inward moral climate in this declaration. She ignores the fact of the seven years during which she nurtured the guilt of this "consecrated"
act in the form of Pearl, and she ignores the innate hopelessness of finding in another land while remaining undetached from her guilt (Pearl). In fact, Hester's impulsive declaration seems less the battle cry of a feminist than a sentiment parallel to Dimmesdale's own toying with the spiritual void in a more covert form, when he cultivates the presence of Chillingworth.

In the tradition of Goodman Brown's own excursion into faithlessness, Hester also is drawn to wonder if depravity is not the general case of mankind and an indication of an indifferent Providence. It is said her scarlet letter glows with sympathy at the approach of "earthly saints", suggesting Goodman Brown's discovery of the village elders' communion with the devil. One must be cautious not to overestimate Hawthorne's interest in this phenomenon as a revelation of hypocrisy in the community. Hester does display a comely humility in considering herself the worst sinner of all and Hawthorne does intimate that her fate is avoided by others more by secrecy than virtue; but, recalling the correlation between inner experience and outward signs, we may identify the response of the letter so near her heart with a part of Hester's interior response to those she encounters. In this light Hester appears to be tempted to the same extremity as Goodman Brown is in his vision of widespread depravity. For Hester as for Brown it results in a "loss of faith that is one of the saddest results of sin" (p. 87). Hester's response is to struggle to believe "that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself." The pattern of her conflict is entirely akin to Dimmesdale's.
Faced with the choice between amoral speculation as to the graceless, Godless state of man or complete, unquestioning faith in a moral universe, Hester strives to follow the example of Dimmesdale who manages to reaffirm his piety. This triumph is the Christ-like assertion that he is "the one sinner of the world," and with this dubious truth (but religious positivism), he crushed his own doubts as they are embodied in Chillingworth. Hester's success is left more in doubt, but the conflict exists, closely resembles Dimmesdale's, and gives grounds for noticing similar patterns in the growth of her phenomenological world.

Hester indulges in a form of self-castigation which follows the pattern of Dimmesdale's creation of a "fiend for his especial torment." The obsessive fatalism which prompted her decision to remain in Salem and her ostentatious decoration of Pearl begins to evolve from such direct manipulation of the material world (Pearl's attire) toward the less conscious distortions that are a preamble to delusion:

She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no faith, therefore, that its result would be for good. Day after day, she looked fearfully into the child's expanding nature; ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity, that should correspond with the guiltiness to which she owed her being. (pp. 89-90)

Predictably Pearl's identity caters itself to Hester's grimmest apprehensions, and the tensions which evolve are characterized by an exactness of symmetry such as that present in the Chillingworth-Dimmesdale juxtaposition.
Hester dresses somberly; Pearl's apparel is gaudy in the extreme. Hester's demeanor is heavily controlled and joyless; Pearl is spontaneous and wildly impulsive. Hester struggles to believe that "no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself," to put the world in a moral context; Pearl is shockingly amoral in her "heathen" affinity with nature. Hester entertains hopes that Pearl will prove to be a normal offspring "to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals" (p. 89); Pearl's nature is found to lack "reference and adaptation to the world into which she was born" (p. 91). Hester wishes respite from the torment of her stigma; Pearl is preoccupied with the presence of the letter and delights in toying with it. Hester seeks a final escape from the land and, by implication, the morbidly moral frame of reference of her interior country; Pearl's natural connection with her mother implies the inescapable quality of her preternatural connection. In all things relating to Hester's hopes Pearl is an adversary spirit rather than an independent one——offsetting so exactly the anxious wishes of her mother that she can be no less than a product of that same mind. As with Dimmesdale, Hester's sense of tragic adversity projects itself into a vanishing, increasingly malleable world, creating Pearl as well as other remonstrative phenomena not unfamiliar to the minister.

Hester's feeling that she has "evoked a spirit" is the same combination of metaphor and truth that Chillingworth asserts in blaming Dimmesdale for his demonic alteration. The literal truth of the metaphor is verified in both cases in a moment of recog-
nition. With Dimmesdale, who is more immersed in his internal reality, the recognition is slower and takes the form of the epiphany he experiences when Hester "reveals" Chillingworth's identity and Dimmesdale recognizes his own culpability in his proximity with the leech ("I did know it! Was not the secret told me in the natural recoil of my heart, at the first sight of him, and as often as I have seen him since?"). Hester's recognition of her part in the formation of Pearl's nature and being is more direct and reveals her ability to cut through the fabric of her dream-allegory on occasion. Watching Pearl, Hester considers the source of the child's nature:

Hester could only account for the child's character—and even then, most vaguely and imperfectly—by recalling what she herself had been, during that momentous period while Pearl was imbibing her soul from the spiritual world, and her bodily frame from its material of earth. The mother's impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow, and the untempered light, of the intervening substance. Above all, the warfare of Hester's spirit, at that epoch, was perpetuated in Pearl. She could recognize her wild, desperate, defiant mood, the flightiness of her temper, and even some of the very cloud-shapes of gloom and despondency that had brooded in her heart. (p. 91)

This awareness on Hester's part might be regarded in either a moral or amoral light. Noticing Pearl's resemblance to her own untoward passions, Hester could be testifying to the existence of a closely ordered world of divine retribution that she inhabits—a system which punished Hester's violation of its moral order and simultaneously
supplies the means to regeneration by presenting the mother with an incarnation of her error in Pearl. On the other hand the discussion of Pearl could be a study in paranoid creation that has more bearing on Hester's character than on any Divine or authorial scheme. Hawthorne's love of providing insight through innuendo poses problems for any attempt at a conclusion, and frequently evidence must be gleaned by inference. At one point in the tale Hester attempts to catechize Pearl with ill effect:

"Thy Heavenly Father sent thee!" answered Hester Prynne. But she said it with a hesitation that did not escape the acuteness of the child. Whether moved only by her ordinary freakishness, or because an evil spirit prompted her, she put up her small forefinger, and touched the scarlet letter.
"He did not send me!" cried she, positively.
"I have no Heavenly Father!"
"Hush Pearl, hush! Thou must not talk so!" answered the mother, suppressing a groan. "He sent us all into this world. He sent even me, thy mother. Then, much more, thee! Or, if not, thou strange and elfish child, whence didst thou come?"
"Tell me! Tell me!" repeated Pearl, no longer seriously, but laughing, and capering about the floor. "It is thou that must tell me!"
But Hester could not resolve the query, being herself in a dismal labyrinth of doubt. (pp. 98-99)

Again Pearl is in perfect resonance with her mother's spirit, and her mischievous replies hint at a sub-ethical universe and the continuing difficulty Hester has in trying to impose a moral rationale on everything and making it stick.

As in the case of Chillingworth, Pearl's theologized identity works compatibly with her psychological status only up to a point. Defending Hester's right to the child, Dimmesdale asserts that Pearl
is Heaven-sent to keep her mother in the path of righteousness and perhaps effect her moral regeneration. A rather stagey example occurs when Hester is permitted to retain custody of the child and is then confronted by Mistress Hibbens:

"Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book too, and that with my own blood!" (p. 117)

Yet Pearl's regenerative function seems rather too easily overthrown to provide an exclusive interpretation of her role. Were such the case, seven years of her presence should have steadily increased Hester's ability to withstand the exact temptation to which she had first succumbed. But the forest meeting with Dimmesdale nullifies in a moment whatever moral influence Pearl may have had on her mother and Hester re-creates the mood and almost the physical appearance of her original transgression. Hester again wears the letter at the insistence of Pearl but there is no evidence that she simultaneously gives over all hope of escape from her moral responsibility. She resumes her "virtue" only when material events deny her the possibility or incentive to be free, as when Dimmesdale resolves to meet his fate in Salem. Clearly Pearl is more consistently explainable in other than theologically symbolic terms.

We have seen that Dimmesdale's exclamation, "...—behold me here, the one sinner of the world," is simultaneously a triumph of faith and a logical fallacy. It is Dimmesdale's attempt to shut out the faint-hearted faith which disturbs him and plunge into radical piety. The minister is on the same track in praising God's
wisdom for sending Chillingworth to be his scourge and minister. This also is an attempt to account for "unaccountable woe", to relieve the suffering he undergoes by believing in a Providence which creates no unhappiness without purpose and no suffering without regeneration.

In his final moments Dimmesdale is earnestly questioned by Hester, who seeks to understand and borrow some of his assurance, but the minister seems agitated by this renewal of the kind of questioning which formed part of his torment in the first place:

"...Thou lookest far into eternity, with those bright dying eyes! Tell me what thou seest?"

"Hush, Hester, hush!" said he, with tremulous solemnity. "The law we broke!—the sin here so awfully revealed!—let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be, that, when we forgot our God,—when we violated our reverence for each other's soul,—it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions, By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be his name! His will be done! Farewell!"

(pp. 256-257)

Dimmesdale's answers are vague and abruptly hasty, almost as if, having achieved a victory of emotion over intellect, he is anxious to get on with the business of dying before his hard-won faith could be again tested.

Also hotly in pursuit of an explanation, Hawthorne adds his own sermon to Dimmesdale's:
"Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!" (p. 260)

It is an earnest attempt to come to the point, but it leaves too much of the story unaccounted for to be taken to heart any more seriously than Dimmesdale's last ditch sermonizing. Its application to the minister's case is brazenly obvious but it neglects Hester. Hester wears her token openly, showing publicly her worst but she suffers torments similar in nature to Dimmesdale's, though to a far lesser degree. Supposedly, the lesson that applies to Dimmesdale should be no less relevant to Hester. Since this is not the case, it follows that their common denominator is not their open or secret guilt but their tendency to experience guilt so deeply, their self-chastising morbidity of spirit. This comes more clearly to light when Hawthorne relents somewhat from his moral frame of reference to examine character in purely psychological terms:

...She had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, oriental characteristic,—a taste for the gorgeously beautiful, which, save in the exquisite productions of her needle, found nothing else, in all the possibilities of her life, to exercise itself upon. Women derive a pleasure, incomprehensible to the other sex, from the delicate toil of the needle. To Hester Prynne it might have been a mode of expressing, and therefore soothing, the passion of her life. Like all other joys she rejected it as sin. This morbid meddling of conscience with an immaterial matter betokened, it is to be feared, no genuine and steadfast penitence, but something doubtful, something that might be deeply wrong beneath. (pp. 83-84)

This comment on Hester's nature has reverberations which reach far to include in their relevance Reverend Hooper, Reuben Bourne, Goodman
Brown, Dimmesdale and many others. All have the same predisposition
to wage continual war on their own peace of mind and, in all, the
suffering is related to sin by an illogical but emotionally necessary
process. Just as Dimmesdale insists on viewing his torture as expiation
and Hawthorne attempts to legitimatize the unrelieved gloom of his
tale by footnoting it with a reference to adultery, Hester attempts
to wrap her over-sensitivities in a moral cloak. The fallacy of
her equating suffering with penance applies equally to Dimmesdale and,
ultimately, to Hawthorne who, refusing to acknowledge the moral
vacuum his gloom inhabits, defies his psychology as religious parable
to the everlasting confusion of too many critics. Dimmesdale almost
wilfully refuses to recognize Chillingworth through his disguise just
as he refuses to recognize his torture as self-inflicted. Similarly
Hawthorne owns up only indirectly to the amoral basis of his vision
of experience by making his artistic vision more cohesive than his
moral vision.

The description of Pearl's manner of playing offers a
striking metaphor both of the nature of her parents and the organic
design by which the tale's tragedy grows:

...Pearl, in the dearth of human playmates, was
thrown more upon the visionary throng which she
created. The singularity lay in the hostile
feelings with which the child regarded all these
offspring of her own heart and mind. She never
created a friend, but seemed always to be sowing
broadcast the dragon's teeth, whence sprung a
harvest of armed enemies, against whom she rushed
to do battle. It was inexpressibly sad—then
what depth of sorrow to a mother, who felt in her
own heart the cause!--to observe, in one so young,
this constant recognition of an adverse world, and so fierce a training of the energies that were to make good her cause, in the contest that must ensue. (pp. 95-96)

It is apparent that Hester's painful familiarity with the contest in store for Pearl derives from having undergone the same process in the formulation of her own adverse world, full of human and sub-human emblems of remorse. At the same time, this likeness of Pearl and Hester does not detract from Pearl's emblematic status or elevate her to Hester's level of characterization. Were such the case, the tale's allegory would vanish and with it our sense of the intensity of Hester's interior strife. Pearl's capriciousness preserves her totally extroverted, unintrospective state of being and, lacking this interior life, there can be no correspondence between inner and outer experience. Pearl's conflict is totally external and physical as it is described in the passage and represents a caricature rather than a copy of the turmoil that effects her parents.

Hester and Dimmesdale consider an escape from their adversities but the hope of achieving an ultimate freedom through a simple change of geography is doomed to failure. Again it is the psycho-allegorical nature of the "role" characters which illustrates the futility of such a venture. In the event of such a voyage Pearl would inevitably accompany her mother and guardian, and Chillingworth, displaying an intuition psychologically inevitable, however improbable, in realistic terms, would also book passage. These mentors are so
integrally a part of the minds which spawned them that they cannot be left behind any more than Hester and Dimmesdale can alter their mode of perception without altering their personalities. Chillingworth, Pearl and Salem are merely the outward shadows or dream images of a disturbance lodged deeply in the minds of Hester and Dimmesdale and no change in location can alter the tale's central, motivating principle that reality is in the eye of the beholder. If the eye perceives tragically and morbidly it will sow anew its "dragon's teeth" wherever it may be.

It is most often considered a weakness of Hawthorne's tale that it becomes unfaithful to its creations in its final moments, soon after the death of Dimmesdale. The changes that occur in Pearl, Chillingworth and Hester can be explained in naturalistic terms, with a certain filling in of gaps by conjecture, but the rapidity with which these transformations occur leaves some critics with the feeling Hawthorne is wrapping up the plot in order to achieve a hurried conclusion. Again, this complaint is a failure to appreciate the internal necessities that govern all events in *The Scarlet Letter*. The changes that occur are indeed profound, but the tale's allegorical world, after all, is not Hawthorne's so much as Hester's and Dimmesdale's. It is their minds which give it its tinge and their conflicts which inspire the character traits of Chillingworth and Pearl. With the revelation of the letter Dimmesdale metaphorically externalizes his turmoil and seals his victory over the illusory world by embracing the ultimate physical reality, death. Hester's conflict ceases with the minister's death and the removal of
all incentive to sin. The internal tensions which were the hub of a Copernican universe are gone and consequently the outward shadows dissolve as well. Chillingworth becomes a mindless husk, Pearl a tearful "natural" girl, and the rabble observing Dimmesdale's "revelation" disintegrates into gabbling speculations as to what "really" happened.
SOURCES CONSULTED


MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES


