

Negative microfilm
received from university

63-464

VANCE, William Lynn, 1934-
THE COMIC IN THE WORKS OF HAWTHORNE.

University of Michigan, Ph.D., 1962
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE COMIC IN THE WORKS OF HAWTHORNE

by
William Lynn Vance

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
University of Michigan
1962

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Joe Lee Davis, Chairman
Assistant Professor Charles R. O'Donnell
Professor Howard H. Peckham
Assistant Professor Lyall H. Powers

CONTENTS

Introduction: The Problem and the Terms	1
The Detached View	6
The Satirical View	9
The Ironical View	12
The Humorous View	14
The Tragicomic View	17
PART I: The Materials and the Treatment	
Chapter 1: The Comic in the Notebooks	26
Chapter 2: The Comic in the Sketches	45
Sketches from Everyday Life	49
Sketches of Pure Invention	71
Chapter 3: The Comic Tales	81
Satires	82
Other Comic Tales	95
Chapter 4: The Comic Within the "Forms of Grief"	121
The Historical Sketches	122
The Comic in the Tragic Tales	131
The Humor of Everyday Life	132
Satire	141

The Humor of Ambiguity and Extravagance	145
The Detached Comic View and Irony . . .	157
The Tragicomic	166
PART II: The Novels	
Chapter 5: Tragedy and the "Tragic Power of Laughter": <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> and <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> . . .	183
Chapter 6: <u>The Blithedale Romance</u> : The Double Vision in Life and Art	233
Chapter 7: <u>The Marble Faun</u> : Mythic Masquerade and Carnival	257
CONCLUSION	277
LIST OF WORKS CITED	280

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND THE TERMS

Contemporary readers of Hawthorne recognized and appreciated a comic element in his works. "What a wild moonlight of contemplative humor bathes that Old Manse!" Herman Melville exclaimed in his famous review.¹ Anthony Trollope found "drollery" and "burlesque" even in The Scarlet Letter, and shared Edwin P. Whipple's love for the humor of The House of the Seven Gables.²

Later critics, concerned primarily with Hawthorne's dominant themes of sin, guilt, degeneration, and sorrow, have placed almost exclusive emphasis on his "tragic vision." Among those who have remarked upon the comic, Mark Van Doren goes furthest; he asserts, in relation to Hawthorne's reading of Don Quixote, that he had "half a comic mind."³ Roy R. Male,

¹"Hawthorne and His Mosses," The Literary World, VII (1850), 125-7, 145-7, reprinted in The Apple Tree Table (Princeton, 1922), pp. 53-86. Also see the letter of April (?), 1851, reprinted in The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven, 1960), pp. 123-125.

²Anthony Trollope, "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review, CXXIX (Sept. 1879), 203-222; Edwin P. Whipple, Character and Characteristic Men (Boston, 1866), pp. 222-234, reprinted from Atlantic Monthly (1860). On the contemporary appreciation of Hawthorne's humor, see also Chapter III, below.

³Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1949), p. 32. Cf. p.

in developing his thesis concerning Hawthorne's "tragic vision," implies at times a complementary comic view.⁴ And Constance Rourke, who devotes a short section of her American Humor to Hawthorne, goes so far as to say that "his natural inclinations seem to have been toward comedy," and points to the obvious humor of the notebooks.⁵ What little treatment the subject has received, however, has left the terms undefined and the suggestions unsubstantiated. Hawthorne's "irony" in a general sense,⁶ and his "satire" in a strict sense,⁷ have received some acute analysis, but they have not been placed within a larger conception of the various comic modes in Hawthorne's work as a whole.

To give the comic in the works of Hawthorne an examination

180, on Melville and Hawthorne: ". . . each of them had mingled in him somehow the genius of tragedy and the genius of comedy." See also pp. 33, 58-59, 166, 190.

⁴Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, Texas, 1957), pp. 13, 137, 145.

⁵(New York, 1931), p. 186.

⁶See especially Robert A. Durr, "Hawthorne's Ironic Mode," New England Quarterly, XXX (1957), 486-495, and Richard H. Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, Okla., 1952).

⁷See especially Neal F. Doubleday, "Hawthorne's Satirical Allegory," College English, III (January 1942), 325-337.

both comprehensive and detailed is the object of this study. A greater understanding of both Hawthorne and his works is surely to be gained from a consideration of the comic element in his treatment of his materials, of the variety of the comic modes which occur in his works, and of the ways in which the comic functions in relation to his usually tragic themes.

The term "comic" I use in its broadest sense, in preference to a narrower one frequently given it, most notably by Meredith.⁸ The comic element in literature (or painting, music, or dance) is that which causes laughter. A physical and audible effect I do not take to be necessary; I am concerned with the whole range of emotional and intellectual complexes which we associate with laughter or with a tendency toward it. The studies which have been entirely devoted to

⁸Historically, usage on the whole favors the broad meaning for "comic," and a narrower one for "humor." Cf. Louis Cazamian, The Development of English Humor (Durham, N. C., 1952), pp. 4-6. Cazamian restricts his definition of "humor" ("not every kind and aspect of the comic, but a province within that empire"), and protests against the tendency, as illustrated in Max Eastman's The Sense of Humor (New York, 1921), to define "humor" as "that which causes laughter," since that definition for Cazamian belongs to "comic." I follow Cazamian in this. The chief awkwardness in definition occurs in reference to Meredith's idea of an intellectual comic mode, for which no particularizing term exists, co-ordinate with irony, humor, and satire.

the causes of laughter are lengthy and numerous; I do not mean to add another here. I wish to give merely what is necessary for my study, that is, descriptive definitions of the major modes of the comic as they exist in literature, so that my use of the terms in later chapters will convey as clearly as possible just what elements of emotion and thought I am discovering in Hawthorne at any given place.

The various comic modes may all be defined in terms of the perceiver. The cause of laughter is never in the object laughed at. This is explicitly stated by many of the writers on laughter, comedy, and the comic, and it is implicit in all the major theories.⁹ It is important, because it establishes

⁹E. g.: Charles Baudelaire, "De L'Essence du Rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques," in Curiosités Esthétiques (Paris, 1946), p. 370: "Le comique, la puissance du rire est dans le rieur et nullement dans l'objet du rire." Henri Bergson, Le Rire: Essai sur la Signification du Comique (Paris, 1908), pp. 77-78: The "mécanisme dans du vivant" must be perceived; the quality so seen may in itself be a mere phase of life, and as such is neutral and susceptible to serious treatment. Albert S. Cook, The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean: A Philosophy of Comedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 28: "In the light of this duality [between the probable and the wonderful], there are two basic ways of regarding life; in art this is the great generic duality, comedy versus tragedy"; Cook later sees the plot motifs of Tom Jones and Oedipus Rex as identical (p. 149). Sigmund Freud, Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious, tr. A. A. Brill (New York, 1916), p. 357: "Affects, disposition, and the attitude of the individual in occasional cases make it clear that the comic comes or goes with the viewpoint of the individual person; that only in exceptional cases is there absolute comic." Freud does not tell us what these "exceptional cases" are. George Meredith, "The Idea of Comedy and

the neutrality of the materials of the creative writer. It is he who finds any person, idea, or incident an object of laughter, and it is he who so selects from the materials and so arranges them that a disciplined reader also finds them laughable. The more powerful he is as a writer, the more surely he will control the perceptions of his reader and provoke in him the same response.¹⁰

the Uses of the Comic Spirit," in Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, N. Y., 1956), p. 36: "[The comic idea] is not provoked in the order of nature, until we draw its penetrating attentiveness to some circumstance with which we have been mixing our private interests, or our speculative obfuscation." D. H. Monroe, Argument of Laughter (Melbourne, 1951), p. 20: "Few writers on laughter have made any systematic attempt to list the things we laugh at. The reason is obvious: we laugh at almost everything." Monroe does not say what we (i.e., someone) might not laugh at. L. J. Potts, Comedy (London, 1948), p. 9: ". . . nothing in nature is positively and categorically comic; whether it is so depends on how you look at it, or to be more precise, what you make of it." Obviously, the classic theories based upon surprise, superiority, exaggeration, or incongruity assume the essential quality to be in the perceiver, since it depends on his expectations, egocentricity, sense of proportion, or idea of the congruous.

¹⁰ Monroe, pp. 14-18, cites V. K. Krishna Menon, A Theory of Laughter (London, 1931), against the attempts to find a common factor in the objects, since this ignores the obviously subjective nature of laughter; but Monroe goes on to uphold the method as the only objective and valuable procedure. In defense, he introduces the concept of "mistaken emotions," by which he can eliminate inconvenient cases of laughter. His argument that "mistaken" laughter can be objectively identified is based on an analogy with the feminine fear of mice. The analogy, however, seems fallacious, since mice are demonstrably not dangerous, while in the absence of a universally held set of absolute values and standard of behavior, who can say that anything is not properly laughable when to the laugher--at the moment of laughter--it obviously is? The

What follows is an attempt to delineate the major comic modes under five headings: 1) The Detached View. 2) The Satirical View. 3) The Ironic View. 4) The Humorous View. 5) The Tragicomic View. These will be discussed chiefly with respect to the absence or presence--and degree--of certain emotions and of moral and philosophical beliefs.

1) The Detached View

A kind of laughter becomes possible when the perceiver or observer takes a completely detached view of any event or person or idea. This detachment alone does not cause the laughter; the disposition to laugh must always be first assumed; then there must be some element which seems, from the habits or experience or beliefs of the observer, to be exaggerated, incongruous, inappropriate, ineffectual, or unexpected (whether or not it is so from the points of view of a hypothetical "absolute reality" or the participators makes no difference). Granting these two conditions, which may be elemental to any comic perception, it is the fact of complete disinterestedness which gives this mode of comic perception

subjectivity of the comic, which so complicates the search for a common factor, cannot be eliminated.

The relativity of the comic indicates the necessity of historical perspective in studies of the present kind. Proper interpretation and enjoyment of the comic in a non-contemporary author depends upon the reader's awareness of the stock knowledge, philosophic preconceptions, and automatic associations of the particular time and place.

its peculiar character. A writer establishes the essential detachment through certain techniques: the withholding of information, an externality of analysis, a lack of sympathetic expression, and a crispness of tone. We may then laugh, say, at an instance of inappropriate means applied to a certain end--an end in which we have no interest, and a means employed by persons with whom we have no sympathy or about whom we know little. Any sympathies for like endeavors in real life may, of course, interfere with our response, and to limit our perception to just what is in the story itself is a test both of our ability as readers and of the writer's power.

In its purest state, this view has in it nothing of malice, scorn, regret, or a desire for reform. The objects of the laughter are simply there, they are ludicrous and we laugh. But it is not without effect on the laugher. In exercising and thereby strengthening the faculty of detachment, it may aid in the achievement of a certain healthy perspective on life and society; it may also prolong the "*anesthésie momentanée du coeur*"¹¹ beyond the morally desirable limit. Disinterestedness may easily become indifference. The psychological effects of detachment, and their moral consequences, were among Hawthorne's chief concerns.

¹¹Bergson, p. 6.

Meredith's "Comic Spirit," I take it, is within this view, perhaps the most refined conception of it. The absence of egoism, sentimentality, and contempt, are necessary to the experience of it, and the experience of it further undermines them. Common sense and honesty are the values which are a part of it, and justify it; they are intellectual values, and this mode of the comic is the predominantly intellectual one. It is the view of Walpole's "thinking man," as opposed to his "man of feeling";¹² it awakens Meredith's "thoughtful laughter."¹³

But detachment is also a dominant element of less exalted conceptions of the comic than Meredith's. It is inherent in pure farce, where persons suffer collisions and pratfalls which have no serious causes or--for us--consequences. Since we are not involved, they are meaningless and funny. When they are made to assert meaninglessness, they of course take on philosophical significance and arouse a kind of thoughtful laughter different from Meredith's, as we shall see. But they may also be a kind of nonsensical fun for its own sake. We may, in watching farce, whether it occurs on the stage in Labiche's Un chapeau de Paille d'Italie or on the

¹²Letters of Horace Walpole, ed. Paget Toynbee (London, 1904), VII, 346: "This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel."

¹³Meredith, p. 47.

city street, laugh with a sense of Hobbesian superiority or with an idea of censuring fools who Bergson would have said ought to have had their wits about them. In such cases the detachment takes on a different, an egoistical or judging nature.¹⁴ But detachment is necessary to both these kinds of perception, and in neither case does the additional element alone cause us to take the event seriously. An absence of seriousness is the identifying element of farcical detached comedy; it is diverting, and no one is anxious to condemn the unreal characters of Labiche or the man chasing his hat in the street. They give us delight. Condemnation is pointless.

2) The Satirical View

Detachment is also essential to satire and irony. In purely intellectual comedy and in farce it is the dominant quality; in satire it is mixed equally with a desire for change, or with moral judgment (the qualities of common sense and honesty are more objective and general than the specific ethical principles which become involved in satire); and in irony it is mixed with feeling.

¹⁴Cf. Thomas Hobbes, The English Works, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1839), III, 46; IV, 45-47. Bergson, pp. 9-10. Walter Blair, in tracing the development of American "humor," observes that it began in a detachment "colored with contempt," which can be seen in the writings of Sarah Kemble Knight and William Byrd. "Later, it was to be more tolerant." Native American Humor (1800-1900) (New York, 1937), p. 10.

Purely intellectual comedy, if it laughs at mankind, yet laughs comprehensively, and includes us all. The aspects of man it laughs at are those which, discerned from a distance, can be seen to be unchangeable; they are foolish but tolerable--perhaps must be. The metaphor of shafts and targets is inapplicable. But satire has targets, very specifically set up. It makes use of the fact that no one wishes to be laughed at exclusively. By directing laughter at a type, it stimulates us to eradicate or suppress in ourselves the characteristics of that type, lest we should be laughed at. The laugher at satirical comedy knows what is wrong and what is right, and seeks to reprimand fools, using the weapon of laughter.

L. J. Potts, in setting up an excellent restrictive definition of Comedy as denoting a "mode of thought" which corresponds in many ways to "The Detached View" sketched above, identifies the crucial element:

Comedy accepts life and human nature; sometimes with a light heart, . . . sometimes rather sadly, . . . but always with the good sense that comes from clear vision and understanding. Satire, on the other hand, does not accept. . . .¹⁵

What it does not accept of course varies. It may not accept a bourgeois gentilhomme trying to rise out of his class; it may not accept specialists with an arrogant sureness of the

¹⁵Potts, p. 155.

superiority of their specialty to all others; it may not accept sycophants to fashionable criticism; it may attack the conformer or the non-conformer, whichever it holds to be the fool. But a refusal to accept any part of life, human nature, or society always implies an affirmation of some standard which may or may not be realizable wholly, but is assumed to be realizable to a degree or in a fashion. Satire is not interested in the motives or impulses which cause the behavior it assumes to be aberrant. It does not care to sympathize, and is satisfied with partial knowledge, knowledge of the effects, which, to it, are reprehensible. Satire is mild when the effects it dislikes are trivial or narrow, not greatly upsetting; it is harsh when they are dangerous and unsettling on a wide scale. The satirical view, like the detached view, usually allies itself with common sense, but makes it not merely a measurement for observation, but a standard of judgment. It desires to check those individual tendencies which are foolish, unpleasant, troublesome, or harmful, to establish a secure "golden mean"; it will not "let alone." For instance, common sense tells us that honesty which will not allow compromise even in trivial matters is unpleasant, troublesome, and even harmful, both to a person possessed of such extreme integrity and to those who love him. A man with such a characteristic is a fool. Yet, is

it not regrettable that this should be so? And is it not regrettable that dishonest society will not change so such a man can be at home in it? But this is too much to expect. That society is dishonest in many ways cannot be denied; but considering human nature, we must accept it so, and even hold it as fundamentally good, despite this flaw. Satire does not seek to waste itself on laughing at the unchangeable; it laughs at the misanthrope who will not compromise and accept things as they are, for it is he who can--and should--change.

3) The Ironic View

The detached view discerns folly, understands, and accepts. The satirical view, also detached, discerns folly as judged by a specific standard of behavior, and desires a change; it does not accept. The ironic view also discerns folly with detachment, and judges by some standard; but its laughter does not aim at a change because it profoundly doubts that the objects of its regard can change; in one sense it does not accept, either; in another, it does accept, because it must. To detachment it adds feeling, the feeling of regret, and laughter is its alternative to despair.

Whatever the original views, or the views of other periods, of Alceste and Don Quixote, they are ironic figures to modern eyes. We see how it is; with detachment, we discern their folly in an incorrigibly dishonest society and in

an unidealistic, disenchanted world; but we regret that it is so. We say they are fools, and on the surface our laughter is satirical. But because at the same time we feel that it is not they, but society and the world that are somehow wrong, our laughter is not truly of a satirical character. It is ironic. For the world will not change, and we really do not want Alceste or the Don to change.¹⁶ In this respect, Alceste does not disappoint us. Don Quixote does.

The essence of the ironic view then is its duality. Regret, disillusionment, alone would lead to despair, but when this feeling that no change is possible is combined with a detached intellectual awareness, a sense that it really does not matter, laughter of the ironic kind is provoked. Baudelaire says of the laughing man that he is

la résultante nécessaire de sa double nature contradictoire, qui est infiniment grande relativement à l'homme, infiniment vile et basse relativement au Vrai et au Juste absolus.¹⁷

¹⁶Bergson, p. 13, observes how our laughter at rigidity may be altered by our knowledge of the cause of the rigidity: "Sans doute une chute est toujours une chute; mais autre chose est de se laisser choir dans un puits parce qu'on regardait n'importe où ailleurs, autre chose y tomber parce qu'on visait une étoile. C'est bien une étoile que Don Quichotte contemplait."

Meredith's statements that "Irony is the humor of satire" (Sypher ed., p. 44) and has in it both a "sting" and a "semi-caress" (p. 42) well express the double nature of the ironic view, both judging and loving.

¹⁷Baudelaire, p. 369.

The ironic view uses the eyes of both the gods and men.¹⁸

4) The Humorous View

Like the ironic view, the humorous view sees with feeling, but with a feeling of fondness, not regret. And the humorous view not only does not criticize like the satirical view, it openly embraces. It has just so much detachment, so much sense of proportion and common sense as is necessary to acknowledge that a person or situation is eccentric; but that recognition is a cause not for concern but for approbation, so long as the eccentricity leads to no consequences taken as serious. It places no value on common sense, on the rational mean of behavior, on the society. It loves individuality. And it loves the individual not so much in spite of his laughable oddities, as some would say of Falstaff, Quixote, and Pickwick, as because of them. The humorous and ironic views together comprise the romantic sense of the comic; both involve feeling.

Since Falstaff is a rogue, Quixote a madman, and Pickwick a naive philanthropist, clearly humor may pull us various ways. Its essence lies in inducing us to identify while evoking

¹⁸Monro, p. 247, uses the expression, "the god's-eye view" to describe what is for him an essential of the comic in general. The opposite of this, seeing from the point of view of people, is characteristic of tragedy, he adds. We may say that it is seeing from both points of view at once which constitutes irony.

pleasurable feelings. Its view is uncritical, and from the point of view of the value of individual character. This is, of course, a limited perspective. For one thing, the feelings which are aroused by it must be kept under control, lest the impression become merely sentimental and laughter die. Sterne's *Uncle Toby* is a perfectly conceived humorous character; but the feelings he arouses are exactly those which can lead without hitch but with a gradual dying of laughter into the story of *LeFevre*. Dickens, too, nearly falls into the error in Pickwick to which he succumbed more frequently later, of mistaking what ought to be for what is. Pickwick's philanthropy, verging toward the sentimental, is perhaps just saved by the admission that Jingles' reform may not be permanent.

A second tendency, also apparent in Tristram Shandy, is for minute differences and small concerns to become vastly important. There is an alteration of values. Bergson makes a useful distinction between irony and humor which illuminates this problem, although it makes an unnecessary primary assumption.

On accentue l'ironie en se laissant soulever de plus en plus haut par l'idée du bien qui devrait être. . . . On accentue l'humour, au contraire, en descendant de plus en plus bas à l'intérieur du mal qui est, pour en noter les particularités avec une plus froide indifférence.¹⁹

¹⁹Bergson, p. 130.

Humor, he says in the same place, is a pretense that what is done is what ought to be done. If we are consciously pretending to believe this, then humor may be, as Bergson says, a form of satire. But it is not so clear that the pretense is always in our consciousness; we rather give over and accept the idea, or even begin with it. The things that are real--the limited perspective, the odd, the individual viewpoint and feeling, the daily details, objects and concerns--are right. Evident to us as nothing else is, and occupying our time as nothing else does, they are clearly important. Moreover, if from one point of view all man's concerns are infinitely unimportant, then, as Sterne implies,²⁰ since they are yet our concerns, they become all of equal value--the small is as important as the great when all are equally--i.e., infinitely--insignificant. This, as well as their common appeal to emotions, may explain the easy movement from irony to humor, but surely it is no part of the business of humor to keep in mind the philosophic conception which might justify it intellectually. It makes no pretense. It accepts the conclusion that the individual, the concrete and daily, the small, are delightful, and matter, without worrying about the premises

²⁰For theoretical expositions of this aspect of humor, see Jean-Paul Richter, Vorschule der Aesthetik, sec. 31, Sämmtliche Werke, Part I, Vol. XI, 111-115; and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 118, and Best of Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs (1934), p. 381. I was directed to

which are outside its range of vision.

The immediately foregoing considerations have been noted in discussion of the essays of Charles Lamb;²¹ they should be kept in mind in reading the journals, letters, and sketches of Hawthorne.

5) The Tragicomic View

The last and most difficult comic mode to be defined is the tragicomic. It must be distinguished from the ironic view, which it is like in some respects, and from the tragic view itself.

While ironic laughter is an alternative to despair, it may be said that there is such a thing as the laughter of despair, the laughter of grief and negation, which we may call "tragicomic laughter." The term may be justified if it is granted that pity and fear are the characteristic emotions aroused by tragedy. Since a suppressed pity, but no fear, is involved in the ironic view, we may distinguish it from an attitude in which fear, at least as much as pity, is involved. Such is the view evoked most profoundly by the Fool in the third act of King Lear. It is also the view, as Loewenberg

these passages in Jean-Paul and Coleridge by Stuart Tave, The Amiable Humorists (Chicago, 1960), pp. 174-186, where an illuminating discussion of their subject may be found.

²¹Tave, p. 177.

notes while putting it slightly differently, involved in the Aristophanic laughter at departed values.²² With greater intensity, it is the view of some of Dostoievsky's short stories, and of the modern "tragicomedies" of Beckett and Ionesco (which have, of course, nothing to do with those Jacobean plays which share the name by virtue of being "mixed" forms with happiness ultimately predominating). That life itself, or some element held essential to its being meaningful, is nothing but a shaggy-dog joke, is an element in tragicomic laughter. Bergson writes as follows of what he calls the boule de neige technique of comedy:

Quand on songe à l'intensité et à la fréquence de ce genre de comique, on comprend qu'il ait frappé l'imagination de certains philosophes. Faire beaucoup de chemin pour revenir, sans le savoir, au point de départ, c'est fournir un grand effort pour un résultat nul. On pouvait être tenté de définir le comique de cette dernière manière. Telle paraît être l'idée de Herbert Spencer: le rire serait l'indice d'un effort qui rencontre tout à coup le vide. Kant disait déjà: 'Le rire vient d'une attente qui se résout subitement en rien.'²³

If the expectation is of a meaning in life--of a Godot--and this ends in nothing, is the laughter--the comedy--not in some sense tragic? Camus wrote no comic novels based on his Myth of Sisyphus; others, less anxious to find salvation in it

²²J. Loewenberg, Dialogues from Delphi (Berkeley, 1949), p. 10.

²³Bergson, pp. 86-87.

or less hopeful that they could, might.

Our definitions have been of attitudes, or ways of perceiving, within art forms, particularly those of literature,²⁴ rather than of literary forms themselves, but the present classification may perhaps be clarified if we note that those modern tragicomedies which embody this view must by any criterion of tragedy be excluded from that category, and considered as comedies. Although they may involve the emotions of pity and fear, no catharsis ever occurs; they are rather more likely to be unsettling and depressing. Moreover, they arouse pity and fear (especially the latter) not through identification with any hero, but through a detached, stylized representation of the human race as a stupid joke. There are no redeeming qualities, no meaningful opposition to fate, no nobility or grandness of character, no humanistic awe. And they are fearful for just these reasons. Yet they cause laughter. In that they are absurd, involving stereotyped humanity in a meaningless chain of unforeseen consequences, they are sufficient for this. But in that they go beyond picturing absurdity, foolishness, and meaninglessness, to

²⁴In his Appendix to Comedy (Garden City, New York, 1956), p. 194, Wylie Sypher compares Klee's "little scrawls" and "Perseus, The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering," and Giacometti's sculptures with the tragicomic realizations of Dostoievsky, Kierkegaard, and Kafka.

assert these terms as primary qualities of our existence, they become fearful, and partake of the tragic.²⁵

These five views, of detachment,--satire, irony, humor, and the tragicomic--are the major "ways of looking at things" which can be classed as "comic." Only the response of laughter seems to be common to them all, although characteristic emotions or the lack of emotions, intellectual detachment or awareness, definite purposes, and preconceived beliefs overlap some of the categories. This much would be sufficient if we wished only to discover various examples of these in Hawthorne's writings. But Hawthorne's works hold most often and most profoundly the tragic view. One of the peculiar interests of our approach consequently lies in the problem--which is an aesthetic and also a philosophical one--that arises when the comic view occurs or is taken in the midst of a tragic work, or appears occasionally within a body of works predominantly tragic. It will be useful to take note of the chief elements of the tragic view and its relation to the comic.

The terms "tragedy" and "comedy" denote forms of dramatic writing. We are not concerned here with the effect or end of a form, but desire merely to distinguish between two

²⁵Cf. Sypher, p. 195: "We have . . . been force to admit that the absurd is more than ever inherent in human existence: that is, the irrational, the inexplicable, the surprising, the nonsensical--in other words, the comic."

"modes of thought," as Potts calls them, the "tragic" and the "comic." The first and obvious distinction to make is that laughter has nothing to do with the tragic view. This is not to say that it, as opposed to the comic, sees things "seriously," for obviously many types of the comic are fully serious. But the tragic, unlike the comic views--all of which to some degree "see the funny side of things"--finds cause for grief in man's lot; it is concerned with acts which it sees as crimes and sins, not follies; and it senses a limitation inherent in the nature of man, a limitation that matters. It involves itself with characters of serious intent and grand and deep emotions beside which those daily gentle passions and small concerns of humor seem trifling and trivial, and it takes us into situations of real suffering. A feeling of awe and fear arises from what it sees as the nature of our existence. Yet in the very grandness of the passions, in the reality and depth of the suffering, and in the ultimate preservation of character through the catastrophe, a conception of the potential nobility of man is engendered which refines the essential emotions, pity and fear, into something other than sentiment and sensation. Thus, the tragic view has at its core a steadiness and strength even more evident than the tears and trembling.

There are variations within the tragic view, of course,

and many tragedies which are not, ultimately, projections of this view in its totality and balance. This definition, nevertheless, a deliberately comprehensive and traditional one, given here without particular illustration or authoritative supports which could be enlisted, is adequate for our purpose, which is to discover of what use the comic view and its attendant laughter can be in a tragic tale. It is possible, working theoretically and entirely from the definitions, to discern several possible uses of the comic in the tragic. These will be useful as guides, as means of making us aware of possibilities, but need not determine what is discovered inductively concerning the uses in Hawthorne or any other writer of tragic literature.

Four possible uses can be foreseen. The one most commonly noticed is that of relief. Tragedy requires an intensity of emotional involvement the strain of which may become too great over a relatively long work. Laughter can provide a needed temporary release. Any of the modes of the comic may provide this, except perhaps the tragicomic. The others, except humor, all require a degree of intellectual detachment which, relative to the emotional strain of tragic involvement, is relaxing; and humor, in that it involves gentle, comfortable feelings in contrast to tragedy, has a similar effect. The Porter scene (II, iii) in Macbeth is the classic instance

of comic relief, and is a masterful use of the comic in tragedy: it occurs early in the play following a scene which is hardly equaled for tension in the rest of the drama; the necessity of dropping to a low point, of shaking off the emotional frame of that scene and, to a degree, detaching oneself from the murderers, is clear, if the remaining three acts are to build again to a peak of tension. The Porter's jokes, moreover, provide a thematic bridge even through the comedy, so that they are not felt to be totally irrelevant. Shakespeare seldom uses the comic in his tragedies solely for relief; although it nearly always contributes to a general lowering of tension when it does occur.

A second use would be that of achieving a sense of realism not possible in the exclusively tragic view. Ordinary life is a very neutral affair, in which events sometimes happen which are perceived as comic or tragic, with certainly a greater proportion of the former than the latter for most people. Unalloyed tragic action consequently may seem unreal. The comic, therefore, can help to evoke a sympathetic sense of realism about the characters and action on the level of ordinary life, from which the reader may follow the characters into the unfamiliar and abnormal reaches of passion, and by which the reader may unconsciously measure the depths and heights of the tragic range. This use is a favorite one with

Shakespeare. In contrast to the "consistent"--and therefore unreal--characters of Jonsonian and Drydenesque drama, we have a tragic hero in Hamlet who is witty, a tragic heroine in Cleopatra who laughs, jokes, parodies. Shakespeare's tragic figures live, moreover, in a world filled with sententious old men (Polonius, Nestor, Pandarus, Menenius, Gloucester, Brabantio), clowns, fops, fools, talkative nurses, prattling children, gossiping women; a world, that is, which we recognize, and can laugh at in part.

To force upon the reader some critical awareness of the causes of the action, which too completely sympathetic involvement with the characters might obscure, is a third general use of the comic obviously possible from the nature of the two modes as they have been defined. The Fool's satirical commentary in King Lear is an example of this use. So cruel is the behavior of the King's daughters, so great is the sympathy felt for the old man in the storm on the heath, that, if it were not for the Fool's remarks, we might easily lose sight of the fact that Lear himself first disturbed the order of things and set the first example of insensibility, thereby becoming in large measure responsible for his present circumstances. An element of comic detachment, then may be useful in making the meaning of the tragic action itself more clear. (The Fool, his uses fulfilled, disappears at the end

of Act III).

A fourth and final foreseeable use of the comic in the tragic is restricted to the ironic and tragicomic views. Since these views involve feelings which it is the particular nature of tragedy to arouse, they may be employed in tragedy for just that end. Other elements, however, must finally operate to dispel the laughter and bring about the tragic effect; the ways in which these two comic modes fall short of and differ from the tragic view have already been noticed. Lear again provides an example: The King's idée fixe and the consequent non sequiturs of the third act (Lear assumes that Poor Tom, being mad, must have cruel daughters) combine with the nonsense of Tom and the Fool to cause tragicomic laughter, which augments the pity and fear. A depth of despair is reached in the suffering and insanity, which is appalling, and is therefore something less than the full tragic vision attained in the final act. But the final effect is the greater for having developed from the complex, manifold attitudes of the third act.

With the comic views now defined, and some of the uses of the comic within the tragic suggested, we may turn to Hawthorne's works to see how he used the comic in any of its ~~kinds~~ kinds, in his notebooks, his sketches, his tales, and his novels, and what the effects of his uses of it are.

PART I

THE MATERIALS AND THE TREATMENT: THE NOTEBOOKS, SKETCHES, AND TALES

CHAPTER ONE

THE COMIC IN THE NOTEBOOKS

Hawthorne found the materials for his sketches and tales chiefly in the history and traditions of New England, and in the experiences of his own life. In a strict sense, these histories and experiences as material for fictional treatment were all neutral; they were not comic, tragic, or morally significant. But to say this is to suggest a greater freedom than really exists for the artist. Historical records and traditions come suffused in their own atmosphere and in forms shaped by the preconceptions of their first recorders and successive interpreters. The atmosphere is not easily dispelled and the selective and interpretive principles of the chroniclers are not easily disengaged from the bare facts of character and event. On the other hand, the temperament of the artist and the circumstances and events of his life which determine his own viewpoint affect his perception of these histories as well as of his own experiences.

Affinities are established of their own accord, and out of all the possible materials only some are found to be relevant, out of all the possible treatments only a few are found to be true for him.

For a better understanding of Hawthorne himself, of his creative process, and finally of the comic aspects of his fiction, it will be useful to discover and define the comic elements in his way of regarding life. His letters and notebooks provide the best material for this research.

Hawthorne's earliest extant writing commonly takes the comic view. In the letters and family newspaper of a boy in his teens, this is more to be expected, of course, than anything very somber. But that the style and point of view are markedly comic is significant. A flat and neutral tone would not have shown promise of any kind. The very assumption of the sophisticated reportorial and philosophical air of the original Spectator is in itself comic, and the influence of its style was to be lasting. Together with essays on "Industry," poems on the moon, and advertisements for subscribers, all of which are to some extent parodic, occur reports of the following kind:

We had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Staughton's discourse on Tuesday evening. Although the Eloquence that like a resistless torrent, bears all things before it, is in our opinion far preferable to the slow and almost drawling tones of the Pulpit, yet we

could not but be pleased both with the sentiments contained in this Sermon, and the manner in which they were delivered. We had, before hearing this discourse, a prejudice against Dr. Staughton, owing we believe to the rotundity of his form, but we had listened but a few moments, before this feeling gave way to feelings of respect. The audience was large, and attentive. With the amount of the contribution which was taken after the Sermon, we are unacquainted, as, having no money in our pockets, we departed before it commenced.¹

In a letter to his mother, young Hawthorne describes a trip up Mt. Washington with comic extravagance ("the wind carried me a great distance off my feet");² the same tone recurs many years later in the "General Quattlebum" fantasies Hawthorne invented for his children's delight.³ One hears it, too, when in Scotland Hawthorne remarked in his "American scorn" that he could carry off Lake Rydal "in a porringer."⁴ He left this kind of thing for the writers of frontier humor to exploit in print and on platform,⁵ but it is related to

¹From Spectator No. 2 (Aug. 28, 1820). See Elizabeth L. Chandler, ed., "Hawthorne's Spectator," New England Quarterly, IV (April 1931), 303.

²The letter is quoted in Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), p. 42.

³See Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife: A Biography (Boston, 1885), II, 45-46.

⁴The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), p. 165. All quotations from the English notebooks are from this edition, and are used by permission of the publisher, The Modern Language Association of America.

⁵A contemporary reviewer, Charles Wilkins Webber, in

the more delicate fancies of his own tales and sketches, and certainly to his published stories for children.

The best evidence of the usual cast of Hawthorne's mind and of the comic element in it is neither his letters nor the reminiscences of his family and friends,⁶ but the extensive notebooks he wrote for himself alone. In that they were not written with any self-conscious striving for effect, or in an attitude of self-analysis, but rather simply as a record of things he did and of things he saw, they give us the more faithful idea of his habitual view of life (which is something else, of course, than the artistic and moral vision embodied in his fiction). The remarkable objectivity of these reports gives way as often to a comic as to a tragic perception. Frequently this is merely in an ironic turn of phrase, a satirical thrust, the perception of an incongruity, the observation, with a verbal laugh, of an odd character. At other times fairly extended passages are developed in a comic

fact praised Hawthorne for not following the Jacksonian Democratic backwoodsmen in making extravagance and exaggeration national characteristics. See Bertha Faust, Hawthorne's Contemporaneous Reputation (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 53.

⁶But see further, e.g., Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, Memories of Hawthorne (New York, 1893), pp. 163-167, 213-218; and Horatio Bridge, Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1893), James T. Fields, Yesterdays With Authors (Boston, 1871), Caroline Ticknor, Hawthorne and His Publisher (Boston, 1913), passim.

spirit. The more important of these may be noted and characterized, but extended discussion is reserved for one of the most complex. All of those which have bearing on particular tales will be omitted here.

In the American notebooks there are, for example, the entries concerning Monsieur Schaeffer, a friend of Horatio Bridge and an inmate of his house, with whom Hawthorne became acquainted during his stay in Augusta, Maine. Hawthorne emphasizes the simple and mirthful Schaeffer's ludicrous traits, but has for him, nevertheless, great sympathy: the result is a humorous portrait.⁷ In later entries, a self-caricaturing Surgeon-Dentist-Baptist Preacher is deftly sketched with satirical contempt (p. 39); commencement day at Williamstown is reported with the full-bodied humor of concrete reality, especial delight being taken in the extravagant style of the auctioneer (pp. 47-49); a deaf man's comically tactless address to an opium-eating lady is remembered (pp. 70-71); the men at the Portsmouth Navy Yard are described, again with the humor inevitable in a realistic

⁷See The American Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New Haven, 1932), pp. 3-5, 9, 10-11, 12-13, 17, 21. All references to the American notebooks in this study are to this edition, unless otherwise noted (the exclusion from Stewart's edition of some passages for which the manuscripts are no longer extant occasionally necessitates reference to Mrs. Hawthorne's edition). Page references hereafter within the text are to Stewart's edition.

portrayal of persons with marked individual traits of a harmless sort (pp. 115-116). Dr. Ripley's library in the Old Manse receives a Lamb-like treatment (pp. 157-159), brief excerpts from which may indicate the amusingly detached and good-humored tone:

There are dark old folios, containing a thousand pages apiece, or thereabouts, some of them in Latin by Catholic authors, others demolishing Papistical doctrines with a sledge-hammer, in plain English. A dissertation on the book of Job fills, I should think, some score of small, chunky quartos, proceeding at the rate of a volume to one or two chapters. Job himself, methinks, would have found it the severest trial of his patience to read this immeasurable dissertation. . . . Others, of equal antiquity, are very small volumes . . . [which] always impress me as if they had been intended for very large ones, but had been blighted in an early stage of their growth, and so were stunted and withered.⁸

But by far the greatest number of comic passages in the American notebooks were inspired by the "Old People," Una and little Julian, Hawthorne's children. Their antics were studied with an untiring eye, observant of every grotesque posture or indecorous event. The unconscious humor of their perceptions and comments was relished and recorded, and in one place their father wrote explicitly on the comic element in their natures:

⁸p. 158. This and all other quotations from Stewart's edition of The American Notebooks are used by permission of the present copyright holder, the Harvard University Press.

Julian has a great deal of the comic element in his nature, and delights to cause laughter; he puts himself into the most absurd postures, and makes the queerest grimaces, with no other end; and yet they are not what we can call extravagant--there is still a human nature, a natural warmth and joy in them. Una, I think, does not possess humor, nor anything of the truly comic; she cannot at all bear to be laughed at, for anything funny that she perpetrates unawares; and when she tries to be funny, the result is seldom anything but an eccentricity--a wild grimace--an unnatural tone. Her natural bent is towards the passionate and tragic.

(pp. 199-200)

Their love for impersonation, with its inevitable parody, is reported, even--in fact, most fully--when it is of the persons attendant upon Hawthorne's mother, and of the dying woman herself. Nowhere else does their behavior reach a higher level of fantasy, of blunt and heartless but humorously incongruous dialogue and action; and Hawthorne's counterpointing of all this against and within the meditation on his mother's death adds to its painfulness and to its tragic cast. The following passage was written the day after the well-known one on Hawthorne's visit to his mother's room:

3 O'clock, P.M. Julian is now lying on the couch in the character of sick Grandmamma, while Una waits on him as Mrs. Dike. She prompts him in the performance, showing a quite perfect idea of how it should all be. "Now, stretch out your hands to be held." "Will you have some of this jelly?" Julian starts up to take the imaginary jelly. "No; grandmamma lies still." He smacks his lips. "You must not move your lips so hard." "Do you think Una had better come up?" "No!" "You feel so, don't you?" His round, curly head, and rosy face, with a twinkling smile upon it, do not look the character very well. Now, Una is

transformed into grandmamma, and Julian is mamma, taking care of her. She groans, and speaks with difficulty, and moves herself feebly and wearisomely--then lies perfectly still, as if in an insensible state. Then rouses herself, and calls for wine. Then lies down on her back, with clasped hands--then puts them to her head. It recalls the scene of yesterday to me, with a frightful distinctness; and out of the midst of it, little Una looks at me with a smile of glee. Again, Julian assumes the character. "You're dying now," says Una, "so you must lie still." "I shall walk, if I'm dying," answers Julian; whereupon he gets up, and stamps about the room with heavy steps. (p. 211)

In the English Notebooks, the best-known comic passages are those on the British Dowager (pp. 27-28, 88-89), which gained notoriety through their being used in Our Old Home.⁹ They nearly blinded some English reviewers to anything else in the book,¹⁰ but were sufficiently popular with Americans to warrant inclusion in an anthology of Humorous Masterpieces of American Literature.¹¹ But there are many others, more subtle, and in their different ways as good. The entry concerning the dinner at Town-Hall is filled with self-caricature

⁹See The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston, 1883; Riverside Edition), VII, 66-68, 390-391. In all references to the works of Hawthorne cited hereafter by volume and page number within the text, this edition is intended, with the exception of references to The American Notebooks and The English Notebooks (see notes 4 and 7, above), unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰See Stewart, The English Notebooks, n. 71, p. xlii, and Faust, pp. 132-134.

¹¹Ed. by Edward T. Mason (New York, 1886).

(p. 12);¹² the description of the funeral of a Captain Auld is pervaded with a restrainedly sorrowful humor (pp. 15-16); inherent incongruities are pointed up in the account of Hawthorne's sermon to a dissipated clergyman (pp. 113-114); a Yankee who had come to visit the Queen is laughed at satirically (pp. 154-155); the disastrous launching of a ship which at the height of the ceremony went aground is narrated with comic skill (pp. 187-188); and the entry on a visit to Smithell's Hall (pp. 193-199) gives as truly comic a picture of the English country gentry as occurs in Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, with a similar amused and discerning detachment. Other comic entries concern the monkey at the Zoological Gardens (p. 209), a Captain Devereux and his giantess wife, Oakum (pp. 353-354), the unfortunately laughable Delia Bacon (pp. 386-389),¹³ and the mass marriage of the poor in Manchester Cathedral, which was also used in Our Old Home,¹⁴ and concludes with this significant comment:

I think it was the saddest thing we have seen since leaving home, though funny enough, if one looks at it from the ludicrous point of view.

(p. 456)

¹²Cf. VII, 383-386, where, in Our Old Home, the self-caricature is retained, but occurs in a chapter of general mild caricature of the British banqueting habits.

¹³Cf. VII, 129-143. In Our Old Home the ludicrous aspects of Miss Bacon are apparent and acknowledged, but are less forcefully felt than in the notebooks because the context is one of fulsome tribute to her incidental achievements, and the pathos of her situation and demise is emphasized.

¹⁴Cf. VII, 359-361. The passage is only slightly

Hawthorne's report, characteristically, involves both the ludicrous and the pathetic points of view.

The passages in the English notebooks, however, which show Hawthorne taking the greatest variety of comic viewpoints are those which deal with Martin Farquhar Tupper, author of the phenomenally popular Proverbial Philosophy, to whose home Hawthorne was taken by his friend, Francis Bennoch. The first meeting is described as follows:

When we entered [the] street, the boy [Tupper's son] exclaimed that there was his father. "Yes," said Bennoch, "there he is, as large as life!" "As small as life, you mean!" said the boy; and, indeed, Mr. Martin Farquhar Tupper's size is better expressed so. He soon met us, and extended his arms with affectionate greeting to Bennoch; and then addressing me--"Oh, Great Scarlet Letter!" he cried. I did not know what the devil to say, unless it were, "Oh, wondrous Man of Proverbs!"--or, "Oh, wiser Solomon!"--and as I was afraid to say either of these, I rather think I held my tongue. I felt in an instant that Tupper was a good soul, but a fussy little man, of a kind that always takes me entirely aback. He is a small man, with wonderfully short legs, fat (at least very round) and walks with a kind of waddle, not so much from corpulence of belly as brevity of leg.

(pp. 298-299)

Tupper is further described, with the remark that he was a person for whom Hawthorne "immediately felt a kindness, and instinctively knew to be a bore." (p. 299). On the man's "fussiness," Hawthorne elaborates: "even if he were sitting,

revised, but in the direction of dissociating Hawthorne personally from the ludicrous point of view.

he still had the effect of bustling about. He has no dignity of character, no conception of what it is, nor perception of his deficiency!" (p. 300) .

The man's vanity, however, was his dominant characteristic as Hawthorne saw him. Tupper is described showing his visitor six lithograph prints of Queen Victoria's children,

as large as life, and all taken at the same age; so that they would appear to have been littered at one birth, like kittens. . . . The Queen is a great admirer of the Proverbial Philosophy, and gives it to each of her children as they arrive at a proper age for comprehending the depths of its wisdom. I can conceive that Tupper is the man of all the world to be made most supremely happy by such appreciation as this; for he is the vainest little man of all little men, and his vanity continually effervesces out of him, as naturally as ginger-beer froths. Yet it is the least incommodious vanity I ever witnessed; he does not even seem to wish it, nor hardly to know or care whether you admire him or not. He is so entirely satisfied with himself, that he takes the admiration of all the world for granted, the recognition of his supreme merit being inevitable. I liked him, and laughed in my sleeve at him, and was utterly weary of him; for certainly he is the ass of asses. Not but what he says sensible things, and even humorous ones; not but what he is a writer of strength and power; for surely the "crock of Gold" is a very powerful tale. But, if it were not irreverent, I should say that his Creator, when He made Tupper, intended to show how easily He could turn a gifted, upright, warm-hearted, and many ways respectable person, into a jest and laughing-stock even for persons much inferior to himself.

(p. 300)

The account of the visit is filled with descriptions of incidents and comments on character all tending to confirm every attribute of this last statement. Hawthorne observed

Tupper's tender regard for the garden-grave of a dead daughter, but found it remarkable that he could be merry in the presence of a marble statue of the girl in his study (pp. 301-303). Of the framed certificates of honorary memberships in American literary societies, Hawthorne remarks, "I never heard before of any of these learned bodies" (p. 303). He finds a personal incident in Tupper's life "darkly impressive," but says, "It is queer to think of little Tupper being the prophet of such a doom as this!" (p. 302). The abundant affection in "patriarch" Tupper's large family is noted with the remark: "A very small man seems rather out of place as the head of a large family; the dignity of the position is not in keeping with his figure and demonstrations" (p. 303). All these rather willful discoveries of comic incongruities are modified, however, in Hawthorne's mind by the inference he draws from his observation of spastic behavior in one of Tupper's children and his knowledge that Tupper and his wife are cousins, "a union on which Nature had laid a curse."

It is wonderful what a sadness this one great misery threw over my whole contemplation of Tupper's life and character. I had already made a remark to him about the means of happiness which he had around him, and had noticed, with some surprise, that he did not respond with any heartiness. There was, for that only time, a marked reserve in his manner; a something repining in his tone. I do not see what else can be the skeleton in Tupper's house, unless it be that he has loved too well what was born too near akin.

(p. 303)

Some months later, Hawthorne wrote as follows of one of his two other meetings with Tupper:

Coming out of the picture-gallery, we were re-tracing our steps along Piccadilly, and thinking of getting an ice-cream, when somebody spoke close to my ear. I took no notice, thinking the remark, whatever it might be, was intended for some other person; but again the same voice spoke, and looking around, who should it be but the Great Tupper!--he had been muttering "Scarlet Letter" in my ear. What an absurd little man! . . . [He] really looked like anything but a poet, or a scholar, or a gentleman; a red-faced round little person, with iron-gray curls, and an odd familiarity of aspect and address. He and his wife, like me and mine, were thinking of ices; so we all went into a confectioner's shop, close at hand, and ordered what we liked--Tupper taking care to tell the attendant that we were two distinct parties. . . . Tupper showed his bustling and good-naturedly intrusive characteristics, even in eating ice-creams; for he advised Sophia and me to get them of two different kinds--pine-apple and biscuit--and to mix them together, for the improvement of the flavor; and he even showed us how to make the mixture. He and Mrs. Tupper ate their ice-creams in a most loving and conjugal fashion, putting their spoons, at pleasure, each into the other's glass. Tupper appears to be a most good-natured man; and yet there is an indescribable kind of waywardness and eccentricity about him--or, at least, in his manner--which makes me feel as if he might possibly go mad.

(pp. 393-394)

The humorous aspects of Tupper's behavior here receive emphasis from Hawthorne's own sense of decorum. Yet his final note on Tupper is in quite a different tone:

[Bennoch] told me something about Tupper that gives him an aspect of pathos and heroic endurance, very little in accordance with the ludicrous attitude in which I have sketched him. The thing is not to be recorded; but Tupper is a patient, tender, Christian man.

(p. 398)

Here, in relation to a single case, are most of the modes of comic perception Hawthorne may be found taking at various times throughout his notebooks. Many of Tupper's traits, of course, were extravagant enough to appear comic to most people, and would have been recorded in the most objective journal. But the particular turns which the point of view takes in these passages, and the selectivity and emphases of the observations, are Hawthorne's own, and are for the most part comic. Hawthorne shows that he has a particular eye for incongruities (a small man with a large family, an absurd man as a prophet of doom, etc.), and is more eager to record these, in appreciation of the inappropriate, than any of the "sensible things" Tupper said. Of Tupper's vanity, Hawthorne takes a satirical view, motivated probably not by envy (to which those satirized, like Tupper, frequently attribute satirical writing¹⁵), but by a just estimate of the true "depths" of the philosopher's "wisdom," by a democratic failure to appreciate the homage of a queen whose children he can liken to a litter of kittens, and by a contempt for

¹⁵See n. 309, p. 643, in Stewart's edition of The English Notebooks, for the relevant quotation from Tupper's My Life As An Author (1886), pp. 246-247, written after Julian Hawthorne published some of the passages just cited, which had been excluded from Mrs. Hawthorne's edition of the notebooks. Tupper calls Hawthorne, among other things, "superlatively envious."

unheard-of "learned bodies" which honor mediocre authors. Yet in admitting that Tupper's vanity is completely self-satisfying, and, far from persistently seeking praise, simply "takes the admiration of all the world for granted," Hawthorne regards Tupper more in the light of humor than satire. It is a fairly tolerable kind of vanity; Hawthorne likes him, and laughs at him. Similarly, while Hawthorne implies that self-knowledge and a sense of dignity are criteria by which a man may legitimately be criticized, he finds the lack of these may be forgiven in one who has an abundance of that sine qua non for all appreciators of My Uncle Toby and Samuel Pickwick, "good-nature."

Comic detachment, irony, humor, and satire are all evident here. But there are two further points to notice. In his inferences concerning Tupper's children, Hawthorne finds that "this one great misery" casts a sadness over his "whole contemplation of Tupper's life and character," which up to that point had clearly been of a comic nature. The element of sadness throws into relief, but cannot, of course, efface, Tupper's comic attributes (the entire entry was written in the light of this hypothesis, made on the first visit). The mixed attitude of laughter and tears which results is perfectly in keeping with the taste of the age, and, as we shall see, of Hawthorne himself at times.

The last point concerns Hawthorne's judgment; again, it is characteristic of him. Though saddened by what he infers about the Tuppers, he is here, as always, in sufficient control of his sympathy to prevent its outflow from obscuring the moral facts of the case as he sees them: the Tupper union is one "on which Nature had laid a curse"; Tupper had "loved too well what was born too near akin." Yet, at a later date, when (probably after laughingly relating the ice-cream affair) he learns from Bennoch something about Tupper apparently sadder than the nature of his marriage, and with nothing about it, evidently, to attenuate his sympathy, Tupper merits a whole new set of adjectives: "heroic," "patient, tender, Christian." As Hawthorne knows more of the inner man--and his mind, even in the initial stages of the acquaintance, was directed toward discovery of this--the less is he disposed to laugh. But it is unlikely, even then, that he would have retracted his tragicomic thought (which he wrote out even though it was "irreverent") that God deliberately made Tupper to demonstrate the ease with which he could make a laughing-stock and a jest, even to inferior people, of a "gifted, upright, warm-hearted" person. With his new knowledge, he might only have added: "and of a patient, tender, Christian man." Tragicomedy allows that the sovereignty of God could extend so far.

All the various comic attitudes are apparent now and again in the Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks (Complete Works, X), never in any very extended way, but with sufficient frequency and emphasis to make it clear that they continued to be a part of Hawthorne's way of regarding life. He loved, in his laborious study of Italian art, to find relief in the "unseasonable smile" caused by an occasional absurd painting. Carlo Dolce's portrait of God, for instance, he calls "a miracle and masterpiece of absurdity" (p. 369). But this painting goes beyond the laughter caused by the persistence of St. John in prayer after his decapitation (p. 249), or by the inappropriateness of "an easy, lymphatic, cheerful," "broad, robicund" Judith looking, after slaying Holofernes, "as self-complaisant as if she had been carving a goose" (p. 313). For in Dolce's painting Hawthorne sees satire; but even more, a terrifying idea which is related to his "irreverent" thought about Tupper, since both thoughts presuppose an unreasonable and indifferent Power:

It is the All-powerless, a fair-haired, soft, consumptive deity, with a mouth that has fallen open through very weakness. He holds one hand on his stomach, as if the wickedness and wretchedness of mankind made him qualmish; and he is looking down out of heaven with an expression of pitiable appeal, or as if seeking somewhere for assistance in his heavy task of ruling the universe. . . . No wonder that wrong gets the better of right, and that good and ill are confounded, if the Supreme Head were as here depicted; for I never saw, and nobody else ever

saw, so perfect a representation of a person burdened with a task infinitely above his strength. If Carlo Dolce had been wicked enough to know what he was doing, the picture would have been most blasphemous, --a satire, in the very person of the Almighty, against all incompetent rulers, and against the rickety machine and crazy action of the universe. Heaven forgive me for such thoughts as this picture has suggested! It must be added that the great original defect in the character as here represented is an easy good-nature.

(pp. 369-370)

The "thoughts . . . suggested" are tragicomic. And it is interesting to observe that a human being, otherwise open to satire, becomes exempt if he is sufficiently "good-natured"; he is merely humorous; but excessive good-nature in a ruler--and in The Ruler--would be itself a reason for satire.

Hawthorne's detached observation of people also continued on the continent. His description of two highly remarkable Englishmen in the Uffizi, one of whom pronounced upon the paintings loudly, so as to be heard by Hawthorne's party as well as his friend (pp. 418-420), puts one in mind of similar characters in Smollett's Peregrine Pickle.¹⁶ And the Swiss waiters' "solemn attentiveness" to trivial formalities is laughed at, with this significant addition: "When they are waiting on myself, they do not appear so absurd; it is necessary to stand apart in order to see them properly" (p. 549).

¹⁶See Chapter XLII of Smollett's novel.

The necessity of standing apart, in some degree, is the one consistent essential to all the modes of comedy. Detachment Hawthorne felt and as an artist exploited, sometimes comically. But in his life he likewise feared it, and this fear itself became one of his great themes. For the very faculty which makes laughter possible can become a source of alienation and petrification of the heart. To sympathize with persons in their weakness: that is the important thing. In the ambiguity of life, one cannot trust oneself to laugh. Like fading frescoes in an old church, memories are "the drearier because they once were bright:"

Hope fading into Disappointment, Joy into Grief, and festal splendor passing into funereal duski-ness, and saddening you all the more by the grim identity that you find to exist between gay things and sorrowful ones. Only wait long enough, and they turn out to be the very same.

(X, 343)

There we have Hawthorne's way of regarding life. His detachment and good-humor allowed for tolerant and even warm laughter; his moral strictness made it, at times, satirical; his somber sense of life's frailty and man's weakness made it ironical; and his sense of the mystery--perhaps incoherence--of life led him, at times, toward the tragicomic. In the end, his laughter dies; "funeral duski-ness" descends, and gay things are seen as sorrowful.

CHAPTER TWO

THE COMIC IN THE SKETCHES

Hawthorne's sketches, which made up about half of the three volumes of short works he published, and which proportionately affected the contemporary conception of Hawthorne's work, are almost totally ignored today. Only one or two regularly find their way into Hawthorne anthologies. There are several good reasons for this neglect, but any attempt to understand the whole mind and art of Hawthorne must consider them. In a study of Hawthorne's comic sense, they are particularly important and illuminating.

Contemporary reviews of Twice-Told Tales and Mosses from an Old Manse almost invariably alluded to Hawthorne's humor, apparently with the sketches chiefly in mind. The sketches do contain an abundance and variety of comic viewpoints and techniques. But as they are for the most part remote from modern taste, a few quotations from the reviewers may help us to see in what manner the sketches were found so pleasing.

E. P. Whipple, Hawthorne's favorite critic, wrote in an essay entitled "The Ludicrous Side of Life," that Hawthorne, "whose beautiful depth of cheerful feeling is the

very poetry of mirth," deserved to rank with Goethe, Ben Jonson, Sheridan, Irving, Pope, and Addison in his respect!

He added:

In ease, grace, delicate sharpness of satire--in a felicity of touch which often surpasses the felicity of Addison, in a subtlety of insight which often reaches further than the subtlety of Steele--the humor of Hawthorne presents traits so fine as to be almost too excellent for popularity, as, to everyone who has attempted their criticism, they are too refined for statement.¹

The comparison with the Spectator writers, who had early inspired Hawthorne to emulation, was a frequent one. But a comparison with Charles Lamb (who today is never mentioned in conjunction with Hawthorne) was almost unfailing. H. T. Tuckerman, the most eminent critic of the period, wrote in the Southern Literary Messenger that Hawthorne was sometimes "intent upon the quaint or characteristic in life with a humor as zestful as that of Lamb."² A British critic also found that the sketches suggested the "quaint, still humor of Lamb,"³ and George B. Loring saw that resemblance, and, like Whipple, went further:

It seems useless now to speak of his humor, subtle and delicate as Charles Lamb's; of his pathos, deep

¹Lectures on Subjects Connected with Literature and Life (Boston, 1859), pp. 154-155.

²Faust, p. 92.

³Faust, p. 113.

as Richter's, of his penetration into the human heart, clearer than that of Goldsmith or Crabbe, of his apt and telling words which Pope might have envied, of his descriptions, graphic as Scott's or Dickens'.⁴

In 1847, with all of Twice-Told Tales and Mosses From an Old Manse to draw upon, R. W. Griswold selected for inclusion in his Prose Writers of America these four sketches to represent Hawthorne: "A Rill from the Town Pump," "David Swan," "The Celestial Railroad," and part of "Buds and Bird Voices." He introduced them with the following words, which delineate with repellent accuracy a type of humor then appreciated:

The handkerchief, raised toward the eye to wipe away the blending moisture there, is checked at the lips, to suppress a smile, summoned by some touch of delicate and felicitous humor. . . . His Twice-Told Tales and Mosses from an Old Manse are the perfection of pensive, graceful, humorous writing, quite equal to the finest things of Diedrich Knickerbocker or Geoffrey Crayon, and superior to all else of a similar description in the English language.⁵

The mixed feeling of weeping and smiling so relished is one that undoubtedly can be found in such a sketch as "David Swan"; but it is an insufficient characterization of Hawthorne's humor. Herman Melville would seem to be an unlikely participant in Griswold's handkerchief ritual, yet his praise for Hawthorne's humor is, if less graphic, equally enthusiastic:

⁴Faust, p. 76.

⁵Faust, p. 65.

What a wild moonlight of contemplative humor bathes that Old Manse! . . . No rollicking rudeness, no gross fun fed on fat dinners, and bred in the lees of wine,--but a humor so spiritually gentle, so high, so deep, and yet so richly relishable, that were hardly inappropriate in an angel. It is the very religion of mirth, for nothing so human but it may be advanced to that.⁶

These few quotations alone furnish a mass of adjectives which would seem to be sufficient for any commentary on the comic in the sketches: the humor is "subtle," "refined," "quaint," "zestful," "still," "delicate." "felicitous," "pensive," "graceful," "contemplative," "spiritually gentle," "high," "deep," "richly relishable," "angelic"; and it is allied to pathos. The satire is easy, graceful, and delicate, though sharp. All this is true, and it shows that Hawthorne admirably fulfilled the standards of humor and satire of his time, as he did the conception of romantic irony. It is also true that comparisons can be drawn between aspects of Hawthorne's writing and that of the Germans, British, and Washington Irving. A closer look at the sketches themselves will give substance to all these adjectives and perhaps illuminate some of the comparisons. The sketches may for convenience be divided into two groups, those which are based rather closely on observations of everyday life, and those which

⁶Melville's review in the Literary World, VII (1850), 125-27, 145-47, has been widely reprinted. My quotation is from The Apple-Tree Table (Princeton, 1927), pp. 57-8.

are more completely pure inventions of the imagination and fancy.

I

At the first remove from the notebooks are those sketches which Hawthorne based on observations of the ordinary life of New England as he saw it around him in Salem and Concord and on summer trips to other parts of northeastern United States. Many of these sketches were in fact drawn from the notebooks.

The long introductory sketch to Mosses From an Old Manse, for instance, rephrases, with more decorum but sometimes less force, large portions of the Concord journals.⁷ Most of the essay is pleasant, genteel description. The differences between the journal entries and the essay provide evidence that Hawthorne's public humor was more "spiritually gentle" than his private. The passage on Ripley's library, partially quoted in the preceding chapter, illustrates the differences. Here is the notebook passage, followed by its reworking in "The Old Manse":

Volumes of the Christian Examiner and Liberal Preacher, modern sermons, the controversial works of Unitarian ministers, and all such trash; but which, I suppose, express fairly enough, when compared

⁷Cf. Randall Stewart's "Introduction" to The American Notebooks, xxxv-xxxvi.

with the elder portion of the library, the difference between the cold, lifeless, vaguely liberal clergyman of our own day, and the narrow but earnest cushion-thumper of puritanical times. On the whole, I prefer the last-mentioned variety of the black-coated tribe.⁸

Volumes of the "Liberal Preacher" and "Christian Examiner," occasional sermons, controversial pamphlets, tracts, and other productions of a like fugitive nature took the place of the thick and heavy volumes of past time. In a physical point of view there was much the same difference as between a feather and a lump of lead; but, intellectually regarded, the specific gravity of old and new was about upon a par. Both also were alike frigid. The elder books, nevertheless, seemed to have been earnestly written, and might be conceived to have possessed warmth at some former period. . . .
(II, 29-30)

The contemptuous laugh, the quick caricature of a Puritan divine, and the humorously irreverent epithet for the clergy are all politely omitted. The comic is wholly lost in the indirection of the diction; only a mildly pleasant simile strives to substitute, although there persists a lightness of tone, for which, however, Hawthorne half apologizes shortly afterward (II, 31).

Similarly, the difference between the two presentations of "a gnome, yclept Ellery Channing"--as the poet is called in the notebooks⁹--amounts to a metamorphosis. Here is Ellery on September 1, 1842:

⁸American Notebooks, p. 158.

⁹American Notebooks, p. 145.

Here is one of those queer and clever young men whom Mr. Emerson (that everlasting rejector of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what) is continually picking up by way of a genius. There is nothing very peculiar about him--some originality and self-inspiration in his character, but none, or very little, in his intellect. Nevertheless, the lad himself seems to feel as if he were a genius; and ridiculously enough, looks upon his own verses as too sacred to be sold for money. Prose he will sell to the highest bidder;--but measured feet and jingling lines are not to be exchanged for gold--which, indeed, is not very likely to be offered for them. I like him well enough, however; but after all, these originals in a small way, after one has seen a few of them, become more dull and commonplace than even those who keep the ordinary pathway of life. They have a rule and a routine, which they follow with as little variety as other people do their rule and routine; and when once we have fathomed their mystery, nothing can be more wearisome. An innate perception and reflection of truth gives the only sort of originality that does not finally grow intolerable.¹⁰

If such an "original" is not to be valued and found lovably humorous, then he is subject to caricature and satire, which is certainly the tendency of Hawthorne's comments. But personal satire of Ellery Channing was out of the question; consequently, in public, Hawthorne suppresses laughter of any kind. He writes instead of Ellery's "evanescent spray," and his "lumps of golden thought that lay glimmering in the fountain's bed and brightened both our faces by the reflection. Could he have drawn out that virgin gold and stamped it with the mint mark that alone gives currency, the world might have

¹⁰American Notebooks, p. 168.

had the profit, and he the fame" (II, 35). The "Old Manse" passage is funny to one who knows the notebook entry. The contrast makes clear what Hawthorne meant when he later said that this essay was of "matters entirely upon the surface," adding, "These things hide the man, instead of displaying him" (III, 386). Yet something of the attitude of the notebook passage is evident in another part of the essay, where the criticisms are generalized. No direct antecedents in the journal exist for a few paragraphs near the end of "The Old Manse" sketch, which are the only ones definitely comic in conception. They delight in incongruities which might not have been apparent, say, to Emerson. Hawthorne apologizes for an extravagance of thought in which he had just indulged by reminding the reader of the esoteric atmosphere in which he had lived at Concord, inhabited as the town was with "stranger moral shapes of men than might have been encountered elsewhere in a circuit of a thousand miles" (II, 41). He proceeds to describe those "hobgoblins" who were attracted to Emerson's "earthly abode," and says that Emerson, like a light which illumines much, had also "attracted bats and owls and the whole host of night birds, which flapped their dusky wings against the gazer's eyes, and sometimes were mistaken for fowls of angelic feather" (II, 41-42). A little later he exclaims:

Never was a poor little country village infested with such a variety of queer, strangely-dressed, oddly-behaved mortals, most of whom took upon themselves to be important agents of the world's destiny, yet were simply bores of a very intense water.

(II, 42-43)

This has both the frankness and comic strength of the notebooks.

The two series of "Sketches From Memory" and the sketch, "My Visit to Niagara," resemble reworked notebook entries, but are of a period earlier than those for which notebooks are now extant. They are simply travel memoirs, written with some heightening of effects, many of them of a comic nature. Hawthorne delights in observing the variety of persons and in quickly delineating the more striking attributes of some of them, with the effect of caricature: a green-spectacled mineralogist, "bearing a heavy hammer, with which he did great damage to the precipices, and put the fragments in his pocket"; a "well-dressed young man" with "an opera glass set in gold," who "seemed to be making a quotation from some of Byron's rhapsodies on mountain scenery" (II, 477-478); a Virginia schoolmaster on the canal boat, who, "too intent on a pocket Virgil to heed the helmsman's warning, 'Bridge! bridge!' was saluted by the said bridge on his knowledge box" (II, 488). An extra comic dimension is given to such caricaturing when Hawthorne, in a particularly

amusing passage, tries to imagine what an Englishman "taking notes in a memorandum book, with occasional glances around the cabin," was jotting down. Indulging his "ill humor,"

Hawthorne writes:

He would hold up an imaginary mirror, wherein our reflected faces would appear ugly and ridiculous, yet still retain an undeniable likeness to the originals. Then, with more sweeping malice, he would make these caricatures the representatives of great classes of my countrymen.

(II, 489)

The ill-educated American scholar, the garrulous, illiberal, puritanical, and ignorant New England yeoman, the avaricious capitalist, the hypersensitive American woman--all the established stereotypes--are skillfully and maliciously hit off (II, 489-490). "In this manner," says Hawthorne, "I went through the cabin, hitting everybody as hard a lash as I could, and laying the whole blame on the infernal Englishman" (II, 490). The episode comes to a nice close when he sees the Englishman "intently observing" Hawthorne himself.

Dickens, visiting America about fifteen years after these "Sketches From Memory" were written,¹¹ was more charitable in his rather innocuous American Notes. His description

¹¹The probable date of composition for these sketches is 1829; they were first published in 1835. See Elizabeth Lathrop Chandler, "A Study in the Sources of the Tales and Romances Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne before 1853," Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, VII (July, 1926), 14, 16. I am indebted to Miss Chandler's study wherever references to composition and first publication dates are made.

of conditions on the canal boat itself, however, is similar to Hawthorne's in its exploitation of the realistic humor inevitable in the circumstances, but differences between their comic styles are also apparent. Both make the obvious comparison of the beds to shelves, Dickens, however, exaggerating their smallness at length and dramatizing his difficulties in getting into one, which was "just the width of an ordinary sheet of Bath post letter-paper."¹² Hawthorne, with a characteristic comparison of the berth to a coffin, falls out of his (II, 491). Snoring as a prominent feature of the experience is noted by both, but here it is Hawthorne who becomes humorously fanciful, wishing "it were possible to affix a wind instrument to the nose, and thus make melody of a snore, so that a sleeping lover might serenade his mistress or a congregation snore a psalm tune!" (II, 491) Both Dickens and Hawthorne are very aware of the ladies beyond the crimson dividing curtain. The former, who was a responsible adult and respected reformer as well as a humorist, and whose wife lay beyond the curtain, here is content with neutral statement: ". . . as every cough, or sneeze, or whisper, behind this curtain, was perfectly audible before it, we had still a lively consciousness of their society."¹³ Hawthorne,

¹²Charles Dickens, American Notes (Leipzig, 1842), pp. 177-178.

¹³Ibid., p. 177.

a young bachelor, shows how lively his consciousness was:

My head was close to the crimson curtain,--the sexual division of the boat,--behind which I continually heard whispers and stealthy footsteps; the noise of a comb laid on the table or a slipper dropped on the floor; the twang, like a broken harpstring, caused by loosening a tight belt; the rustling of a gown in its descent; and the unlacing of a pair of stays. My ear seemed to have the properties of an eye; a visible image pestered my fancy in the darkness; the curtain was withdrawn between me and the western lady, who yet disrobed herself without a blush.

(II, 491)

In the American Notes Dickens frequently turns the fun upon himself in order to soften the implied criticisms of irregular manners. But he nowhere caricatures himself more strongly than Hawthorne does when he tells how, having got off the boat "to examine the phosphoric light of an old tree a little within the forest," and "being full of conceits that night," he became so preoccupied with ideas of a "frigid fire, a funeral light, illumining decay and death," and so on, that he was left behind (II, 493).

The attitudes of the two authors toward Niagara Falls, which was in the minds of the nineteenth century romanticists the very spectacle of spectacles, affords a further comparison, and it is here that Hawthorne comes out the humorist while Dickens shows exclusively his talent for the passionately rhetorical. Hawthorne describes his reluctance even to view the scene once he came to it, how he dallied, and

ordered and ate his meal, smoked a cigar, and after further deliberate delays, strolled to Goat Island. His observations of the Falls are rather coldly related, and he admits finally to a disappointment which, though later overcome, never gave way to "the all-absorbing enthusiasms of some more fortunate spectators" (XII, 46-47). He was as much interested in the other viewers--such as the American who "labored earnestly to adjust Niagara" to a guide book description and departed "without one new idea or sensation of his own," the artist who "censured the position of Goat Island, observing that it should have been thrown farther to the right," the two traders who declared "there certainly was an immense water-power here," but who preferred the locks of the Grand Canal (XII, 48-49). He acknowledges that Niagara "is indeed a wonder of the world," which "soothes while it awes the mind" (46, 47), but what is this compared with Dickens, who was surely one of the "more fortunate spectators":

Then, when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing, the first effect, and the enduring one--instant and lasting--of the tremendous spectacle, was Peace. Peace of Mind: Tranquillity: Calm recollections of the Dead: Great Thoughts of Eternal Rest and Happiness: nothing of Gloom or Terror. Niagara was at once stamped upon my heart, an Image of Beauty; to remain there, changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat, forever.¹⁴

¹⁴Dickens, p. 243.

Hawthorne's incapacity for enthusiasm--for either Niagara or Emerson--was in itself a basis for a comic viewpoint.

The nature of the comic in a second group of sketches is determined by the two opposite tendencies in Hawthorne's character already touched upon. A detachment from the concerns and enthusiasms of men can be an avenue to an objective comprehension of them and a foundation for many of the comic modes. It can also be, as Hawthorne incessantly demonstrated, a heart-chilling alienation of the soul, and he felt such alienation must be overcome through sympathy, through a contact with and understanding of one's fellowmen.

In "Sights From a Steeple" and "Sunday at Home" we find Hawthorne viewing the life of Salem from a point of physical as well as psychological detachment. The endeavor in both, however, is to compensate for the remoteness of the physical position by the greatness of the sympathy he feels as he makes guesses about the thoughts, troubles, and bosom secrets of the persons he is spying upon. But the futility of this task is clear from the variety of equally valid guesses based on the same external facts. For instance, a pensive young man, sauntering down the street, elicits these questions: "Is he in doubt, or in debt? Is he, if the question be allowable, in love? Does he strive to be melancholy and gentlemanlike? Or is he merely overcome by the heat?" (I, 223) It is hard

to be serious in such a case, and from such a perspective, and Hawthorne finds it so. "Sunday at Home" is of more sober tone than "Sights," because it can speculate on the central motive of worship common to all the church-goers being observed, and is concerned with the value of religion and the church; the desire to see into the persons is less idle. Only the Sunday stockings of young women and the affected behavior of a young coxcomb temporarily distract Hawthorne from his sober meditations (I, 36, 38-39). In the steeple, however, the detached comic viewpoint is pervasive, since the perspective, not the church, is the unifying theme. The labor of men on the wharf seems petty, a waste of the summer afternoon, and the wealthiest man of commerce, identified by his white wig, is merely an old Vicentio [sic], out of Shakespeare's comedy (I, 223).¹⁵ Further, "as slight differences are scarcely perceptible from a church spire," "a proud array of voluntary soldiers" and a "battalion of school-boys" tempt him to ask, "'Which are the boys?'--or rather, 'Which the men?'" (I, 223). Of a third procession, of a kind which almost always stimulates a melancholy thought in Hawthorne, he writes that "though sadder in outward show," "identical reflections" may be excited:

¹⁵See Taming of the Shrew, I:i:12-13, which Hawthorne closely paraphrases.

It is a funeral. A hearse, drawn by a black and bony steed, and covered with a dusty pall; two or three coaches rumbling over the stones, their drivers half asleep; a dozen couple of careless mourners in their every-day attire; such was not the fashion of our fathers, when they carried a friend to his grave.

(I, 223-224)

There follows an attempt to evoke some dark ideas of "The King of Terrors," the superficial nature of which is apparent from the easy reversion in the same paragraph to the young man, who is now in the company of two girls.

Some generalities about the conditions of those in the houses below him, "over which [his] eyes roam so coldly," "struggle" to "make their way in eloquence," but without success (I, 224-225). What does emerge is the highly comic impression of the effect of a rainstorm on all those in the streets:

The disbanded soldiers fly. . . . the rich old merchant puts himself to the top of his speed, lest the rain should convert his hair powder to paste. Unhappy gentleman! By the slow vehemence and painful moderation wherewith he journeys, it is but too evident that Podagra has left its thrilling tenderness in his great toe.

(I, 225)

The young man and the two girls likewise come racing up the street.

Ah! as they hasten onward, laughing in the angry face of nature, a sudden catastrophe has chanced. At the corner where the narrow lane enters the street, they come plump against the old merchant, whose tortoise motion has just brought him to that

point. He likes not the sweet encounter; the darkness of the whole air gathers speedily upon his visage, and there is a pause on both sides. Finally, he thrusts aside the youth with little courtesy, seizes an arm of each of the two girls, and plods onward, like a magician with a prize of captive fairies. . . . How disconsolate the poor lover stands! . . .

(I, 225-226)

Intermixed with these comic observations are some speculations on guilt, a tender thought for those in the storm without houses to go to, and finally a romantic exultation in the rainbow; but the predominant view is taken with the "god's eye" of comedy in which the loves and commerce of humanity are petty, and their activities often farcical.

The philosophic perspective on man suggested from a height was frequently observed by Hawthorne. In the notebooks he wrote, concerning the view from a hilltop:

It is amusing to see all the distributed property, the aristocracy and commonality, the various and conflicting interests of the town, the loves and hates, compressed into a space which the eye takes in as completely as the arrangement of a tea-table.¹⁶

But against this generalizing tendency of comic detachment, we have what is more in line with the romantic sense of the humorous, a desire frequently expressed to learn every individualizing peculiarity of a man's character and life. This concern is usually, with Hawthorne, not comic in any sense;

¹⁶American Notebooks, p. 42. Cf. similar statements in the American Notebooks, p. 119, and in the sketch, "Browne's Folly," XII, 132.

in the American Notebooks, he records the distress of a man looking in a tavern for his wayward wife, to the amusement of all, except, apparently, Hawthorne, who concludes:

. . . the fellow went off, having heard little but gibes, and not one word of sympathy. I would have given considerable to witness his meeting with his wife. On the whole there was a moral picturesque-ness in the contrasts of this scene--a man moved as deeply as his nature would admit, in the midst of hardened, gibing spectators, heartless toward him. It is worth thinking over and studying out.¹⁷

Similarly Hawthorne wishes he could know the condition of life of the lower class persons at the theatre.¹⁸ Such wishes are indicative of a desire to sympathize, to see life from the point of view of the individuals, from which if there is any laughter, it will be of the humorous kind. Some of the sketches fulfill this aim. In "The Toll-Gatherer's Day," "The Old Apple Dealer," and "The Village Uncle" Hawthorne's endeavors as a "spiritualized Paul Pry" (I, 220) go beyond the superficial guess work of "Sights from a Steeple" and "Sunday at Home," to a conscientious attempt to grasp the reality of life for three old men.

The sketch of "The Old Apple Dealer," presented as a study in the "moral picturesque," is a slight revision of a passage in the notebooks.¹⁹ Neither it nor the original

¹⁷American Notebooks, p. 18.

¹⁸American Notebooks, p. 253.

¹⁹See Stewart, American Notebooks, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv,

version have in them even a touch of humor; the man is admittedly too "negative" and "featureless" (II, 495). Strong traits of individuality are essential to a humorous character; all the external characteristics of this one are conducive to pity, and what inferences Hawthorne makes about his past life and his character are drawn in accordance with these. Unlike the Toll-Gatherer, he does not even participate in the comedy of life which passes by him. But humor is possible in the sketch of the Toll-gatherer, because his nature is more open. Hawthorne attempts to see the world from his point of view.²⁰ On the comic side, he sees the sleepy coach travellers in the early morning bestirring themselves and snuffing the air, a "thin, sour-visaged man, . . . a manufacturer of pickles,"

xxxvii, xxxix for discussion of the revision of the original passage, which is on pp. 90-92.

²⁰The sketches "David Swan" and "Night Sketches" are essentially variations of this one. The technique in "David Swan" is, in a sense, inverted. "The Toll-Gatherer's Day" observes the variety of the passing world from a stationary point; in "David Swan" the varieties of points of view of the passing world toward a neutral object--a boy sleeping by the wayside--are given. In "Night Sketches" we return again to a single consciousness, who in this case makes a peregrination with the result that he sees essentially the same things the Toll-Gatherer sees (which are nearly those Hawthorne saw from the steeple). The veil of night provides the sense of detachment which the height of the steeple provided in "Sights," but in having darker connotations, gives a different tone to the sketch. All these sketches include comic view-points.

and "two wrinkled, withered, witch-looking old gossips, in an antediluvian chaise, drawn by a horse of former generations, and going to peddle out huckleberries" (I, 235, 237). The characterization of the man himself is in the tradition of the humorists: a quiet, lovable soul, a humble philosopher dispensing his maxims while he "administers a cup of cold water" to a hot traveller. His ear "can distinguish the weight of every vehicle" as it approaches. And he is nothing if not sympathetic, for the "meditative smile" on his "broad visage" "transformed to grotesque merriment" at the sight of a matrimonial couple, and faded quickly when there approached a man with his wife, of whom he was clearly soon to be bereaved (I, 237-238). "The Old Apple Dealer" sketch is one of somber and restricted realism; the Toll-gatherer and his day are obviously idealized, with a broader typicality in which more facets of life, including the comic, are necessarily present. Aimiable and philosophic humor pervades the sketch, but mild satire is also present, and at one point, in a detailed description of the chaos which occurs when passage across the bridge is stopped by a passing schooner at the height of the business day, the thought reaches toward a conception of universal absurdity (I, 240).

"The Village Uncle" lies between the realism of "The Old Apple Dealer" and the emblematic tendency of "The Toll-

Gatherer's Day." The old man of this sketch is as real as the Apple Dealer, yet his view of life is as comprehensive as the Toll-Gatherer's, and is presented less mechanically. Hawthorne achieves complete identification with his subject, and uses the first person. The verisimilitude of the sketch probably is owing to its apparent genesis in a strongle felt personal experience. According to Hawthorne's sister Elizabeth, Susan, the pretty shop-keeper of "The Village Uncle," had a prototype in Swampscott, where Hawthorne spent two or three weeks in 1833,²¹ and it is likely that the older of the two "village uncles" in the sketch as well as other characters originated in actual persons.

The village uncle, sitting before his fire on Thanksgiving night, calls his wife and children about him at the opening of the sketch, which is made up of his thoughts and speeches, mostly retrospective, on this occasion. He was once "a hermit in the depths of my own mind; sometimes yawning over the drowsy volumes, and anon a scribbler of wearier trash than what I read" (I, 350). But he had met and courted Susan, the pretty, innocent shop-keeper, and had become a fisherman. The life of the village, the work on the sea, the children growing up, and Susan and he becoming old, are

²¹See Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, (Boston, 1884), I, 127-128.

all described, vividly and at length. Then he pictures himself as he is now, in his "calm old age," the village uncle, giving utterance to much wisdom. Some of his stories are briefly given, both humorous and tragic, adventurous and strange. "Thus do I talk," he says, "and all my auditors grow wise while they deem it pastime" (I, 360). The old man unconsciously reveals himself: full of the wisdom of experience, it is true, but somewhat tedious--though he denies it--in his persistence in putting down the boasting young men with tales of the past. He is on the verge, too, of senility, admitting as he does that "anything that would make an infant smile" will bring "a gleam of mirth over the hoary ruin" of his "visage" (I, 360). And he specifies the sorts of things which make him laugh (I, 361).

Intermittently, the long, balanced sentences with their sharp imagery and sustained tone of the sweet sadness of reminiscence have been broken by a querulousness about the old man's auditors. From the beginning they were but dimly perceived in the firelight, and even the swell of the surf was indistinctly heard. "Ah! the old man's ears are failing him; and so is his eyesight, and perhaps his mind" (I, 349-350). This introduced the strange uncertainty about reality, which becomes a recurrent theme, as the mind alternates between the vividness of things past and the dimness of things

present, and once doubles upon itself when an incident of the past is recalled when he had suffered the "illusion" that Susan and the children vanished. This theme reaches its crisis in the penultimate paragraph of the sketch:

Here I sit among my descendents, in my old arm-chair and immemorial corner, while the firelight throws an appropriate glory round my venerable frame. Susan! My children! Something whispers me that this happiest hour must be the final one, and that nothing remains but to bless you all, and depart with a treasure of recollected joys to heaven. Will you meet me there? Alas! your figures grow indistinct, fading into pictures on the air, and now to fainter outlines, while the fire is glimmering on the walls of a familiar room, and shows the book that I flung down, and the sheet that I left half written, some fifty years ago. I lift my eyes to the looking-glass and perceive myself alone, unless those be the mermaid's features retiring into the depths of the mirror with a tender and melancholy smile.

(I, 362-363)

The complex of qualities in this sketch--the mixture of pathos and humor, the gentle tone, the vivid details, the willingness to indulge the imagination, to present honestly and lovingly the attributes of the assumed character, the flowing, polished, rather rhetorical style--is precisely the complex which would remind readers of Charles Lamb. Undoubtedly Hawthorne knew Lamb's writing,²² and it is difficult to

²²On Aug. 26, 1833, Hawthorne withdrew a volume of the Elia essays from the Salem Atheneum. See Marion L. Kesselring, Hawthorne's Reading, 1828-1850 (New York, 1949), p. 54. "The Village Uncle" was written between September, 1833, and June, 1834. See Chandler, p. 57.

believe that he would have been unconscious of the similarity of this essay to Lamb's famous "Dream-Children." Both are called "reveries" (I, 363), Susan plays the same role as Lamb's Alice, the tone and style are very similar, as is the effect of pathos. Witness Lamb's conclusion:

. . . turning to Alice [his child], the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose bright hair that was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding, till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. . . . We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been. . . ." ²³

The chief difference between the conceptions of the two essays is that while Lamb's is truly the possible imaginings of "what might have been" for him, Hawthorne's is a wholly "imaginary retrospect," as he calls it, a leap of the imagination fifty years into the future, and then, instead of a prognostication of what will be his real recollections, imaginary ones concerning what they might have turned out to be if, that summer at Swampscott, he had successfully courted Susan. The vivid concreteness with which this remarkable project is realized makes it the equal of Lamb's more famous

²³The Essays of Elia and the Last Essays of Elia (Garden City, N. Y., 1960; Dolphin Books ed.), pp. 154-155.

essay, which is imitated, if at all, only in the dream-conception. Lamb's essay is more famous perhaps only because the sketch was his peculiar genre, and he wrote nothing in a greater form.

In two other sketches which use as their material Hawthorne's observations of life around him, the comic differs from that in any considered so far, because each grew out of his joint participation in life with one other person, rather than, as in previous cases, either from a solitary, detached viewpoint or a wholly sympathetic and humorous one. Part of the comedy arises, in fact, from the contrast of viewpoints.

"Little Annie's Ramble" relates the events and observations which occur on a walk Hawthorne takes with a very idealized child. The sketch is full of the sentimental humor concerning the behavior and innocent wisdom of children so dear to the nineteenth century, and in this case highly admired not only by Longfellow, but even by Poe.²⁴ The attitude contrasts strongly with the objective view Hawthorne was later to take of his own children, a view which his wife, in editing the notebooks, tried diligently to suppress.²⁵ There is

²⁴For Longfellow's praise, see The North American Review, LIV (1842), 498. Poe's articles on Hawthorne have been widely reprinted; see Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Prose and Poetry, ed. W. H. Auden (New York, 1955), pp. 447, 455, for the praise of "Little Annie's Ramble."

²⁵See especially the notebook for June 20, 1847 -

a basic incongruity, however, which Hawthorne exploits, between this bright, angelic child and the black-suited, melancholy image he draws of himself. Every object which comes before them--a monkey, an owl, a doll, a pussy-cat, an elephant, a polar bear, etc.--is the occasion for two contrasting reactions, and droll, quietly humorous and often ludicrous pseudo-philosophical and moral comments upon them. The tone is mawkish, and embarrassing for a modern reader.

Of a very different nature, but equally representative of the humor of an age which venerated Hamlet's jesting gravedigger and Yorick's skull²⁶ is "Chippings with a Chisel." The subject is a Mr. Wigglesworth (descendent of the Puritan family), a tombstone maker, who views "mankind in no other relation than as people in want of tombstones" (I, 457). He is shown as a "cheerful old soul," and the sketch is largely

August 16, 1851 in Stewart's edition, pp. 193-242, no part of which did Mrs. Hawthorne include in her edition of the notebooks. Stewart's notations of erasures and obliterations in the manuscript are very numerous, and in one he comments; "It appears probable that these and other obliterated passages expressed judgments upon Una which seemed to Mrs. Hawthorne unduly severe" (p. 326).

²⁶See Alfred H. Marks, "German Romantic Irony in Hawthorne's Tales," Symposium, VII (Nov. 1953), 288. Cf. American Notebooks, p. 88: "In the village grave-yard, . . . I saw a man digging a grave. . . . I heard him laugh, with the hereditary mirthfulness of men of that occupation." Also p. 119: "An article on cemeteries, with fantastic ideas of monuments; . . . between fun and seriousness."

a compilation of his and Hawthorne's comments--pathetic, humorous, and mixed or ironic--on the various aspects of his craft. When one customer wishes to pay "by taking the sculptor to board," there arises in Hawthorne's mind the ludicrous image of "Mr. Wigglesworth sitting down to dinner at a broad, flat tombstone, carving one of his own plump little marble cherubs, gnawing a pair of cross-bones, and drinking out of a hollow death's-head" (I, 463). The old man, being told "this nonsensical picture," "laughed heartily, and pronounced my humor to be of the right sort" (I, 463). The whole essay is, in fact, one of Hawthorne's lighter ones in tone, but its success, given its subject, depends upon its being so. Even at that, it has its share--including a moral--of the pure romantic melancholy unrelieved by the irony of the ludicrous juxtaposition of attitudes.

II

Very different from those sketches based on observations of the external world are those which are chiefly exercises of the imagination or fancy. The dominant comic element in these is undoubtedly to be found in the nature of the exercise itself; the indulgence of fanciful excesses is a Shandean type of humor. How amused one is by it depends on how tolerant one can be of willful playfulness and how fond one

may be of ingenuity for its own sake. Most modern readers are doubtless shorter of patience for this sort of thing than were Hawthorne's first readers. Unless taken in the spirit in which it was written, nothing can be more tedious.

"Monsieur du Miroir," "P's Correspondence," and "Virtuoso's Collection" are the most monotonously structured of this type of sketch. Although each has what may be taken as a "moral excuse" or ulterior interest, the ingenuity essential to the execution of each seems demonstrably the chief appeal for Hawthorne in these pieces. The first works up to what has been taken as a meaningful ambiguity on the nature of reality or of the self,²⁷ and it is certainly Hawthorne's most extended exploitation of his fascination with reflections in mirrors and pools. Hawthorne, sharing the neo-platonic search for symbols in the most apparently trivial aspects of nature, never published anything without some moral significance. But a fanciful exploitation taken as far as possible for its own sake seems clearly the main aim here. After six pages of an almost insane attempt to build a pseudo-mystery out of a common experience, Hawthorne writes:

I have endeavored to pave the way for stranger things to come, which, had they been disclosed at once, Monsieur du Miroir might have been

²⁷See F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 226, 258.

deemed a shadow, and myself a person of no veracity, and this truthful history a fabulous legend. But, now that the reader knows me worthy of his confidence, I will begin to make him stare.

(II, 188)

This promise is really a threat which is maliciously fulfilled in the eight succeeding pages. Since a kind of shadow is precisely what Monsieur du Miroir is, one is inclined to stare at what Hawthorne can do with next to nothing.²⁸ No statement in the entire sketch is more frivolous than the one at the beginning which requests serious attention:

Nor let the reader condemn any part of the narrative as frivolous, since a subject of such grave reflection diffuses its importance through the minutest particulars; and there is no judging beforehand what odd little circumstances may do the office of a blind man's dog among the perplexities of this dark investigation; and however extraordinary, marvellous, preternatural, and utterly incredible some of the meditated disclosures may appear, I pledge my honor to maintain as sacred a regard to fact as if my testimony were given on oath and involved the dearest interests of the personage in question.

(II, 182)

Thus does Hawthorne practice the art of using diction, through pun and overstatement, to contradict the strict meaning of his words. The depth of "Monsieur du Miroir" is as false as

²⁸Cp. Emerson's note: "Ellery [Channing] thinks that he is a lucky man who can write in bulk forty pages on a hiccough, ten pages on a man's sitting down in a chair, like Hawthorne, that will go." Quoted by Stewart, American Note-books, p. xl, from Journals of Emerson, VIII, 257.

that of a mirror, and was so intended.

"P's Correspondence," which is literally presented as the musings of a madman, has as its peculiar interest for us the incidental judgments Hawthorne makes on the historical (chiefly literary) figures whose biographies poor mad P. so jumbles.²⁹ But the original motive for writing and the pleasure in reading are found in the fun of far-fetched, incongruous inventions: Byron fat, wigged, bespectacled, and reformed, expurgating his poems (II, 409-412), Burns senile and wealthy at 87, and so on. The sheer anti-romantic destructiveness is still amusing. As a "sport of the imagination" (II, 407), as Hawthorne himself calls it, this sketch is more viable than "Monsieur du Miroir" because it has a more varied interest and has references external to itself.

In much the same way that "Monsieur du Miroir" makes the reader unbearably conscious of the superficiality of a mirrored reflection, "A Virtuoso's Collection," a wearisome tour de force cataloguing of a museum of all possible and impossible curiosities, clogs the brain sufficiently to make the dead materialism of the Virtuoso convincing. Such is the moral justification tacked on at the conclusion, which

²⁹Cf. Austin Warren, "Hawthorne's Reading," New England Quarterly, VIII (Dec. 1935), 489: "The demented 'P' is simply Hawthorne free to speak with the half-serious, half-jesting latitude of the court fool; the dicta--when dicta emerge from fantasy--one does not doubt to be his own."

discloses that the Virtuoso is the earth-bound Wandering Jew himself. Nevertheless, that the central interest of the sketch was in the curious objects themselves is evident from the facts that their number is more than sufficient for the moral, and that Hawthorne pursued the challenge of ingenuity involved even after the piece had been published, jotting his ideas down.³⁰ According to Lathrop, Hawthorne's object was to outdo all others in what was apparently a fad of the day.³¹

The fun of these sketches, similar to that of nonsense, which, in Schopenhauer's words, gives pleasure because "It is diverting to see that strict, untiring, troublesome, governess, the reason, for once convicted of inadequacy,"³² is present in less strength in a few others. The satire of "A Select Party," featuring such choice personages as Nobody and Monsieur On-Dit, and held by the ~~Man~~ of Fancy in a castle

³⁰The sketch was first printed in May, 1842. For notes on the idea made after this date see American Notebooks, pp. 101, 106-107, and cf. Stewart's note, p. 297.

³¹See his "Introductory Note" to Complete Works, II, 8-9.

³²Quoted by Monro, p. 69. In his chapter on "Nonsense," Monro discusses such examples as Whately's Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte and Ronald Knox's proof that Queen Victoria wrote In Memoriam, although both are admittedly of satiric import; certainly the satire in "P's Correspondence" is even less essential than in these.

in the air, is of a very thin order because the dominant tone is mere playfulness. "The Haunted Mind" makes a great deal out of a moment--the moment between sleep and wakefulness--and adds something of the comic of the rhetorical macabre. A funereal fancy is exploited also in the dream-episode in "The Journal of a Solitary Man," where horror-stricken crowds flee a bewildered man who promenades down Broadway clad, without knowing it, in a shroud (XII, 29-30).³³ Of a wholly different cast is "The Vision of the Fountain," a too-pretty catering to the "sweet ladies" it addresses. It romantically plays at being bewildered by a mystery which is "solved" by the revelation of a not very credible set of chance circumstances. Seymour L. Gross gives a good argument that this sketch was, in its original form, a parody.³⁴ But in its final version in Twice-Told Tales it was admired by Longfellow not as a parody, and as recently as 1935 was evidently capable of pleasing a woman.³⁵ As it now stands, and

³³In the same sketch there is a touch of the tragic-comedy of isolation to be found in a work like Dostoevsky's "Notes from the Underground," and in several Hawthorne tales. See below, Chapter IV.

³⁴"Hawthorne's 'Vision of the Fountain' as a Parody," American Literature, XXVII (March 1955), 101-105.

³⁵Longfellow quoted from and praised it in his indiscriminating review of Twice-Told Tales in the North American Review, XLV (1837), pp. 64-65. Elizabeth L. Chandler, in "A Study in the Sources . . .", p. 18, remarks: "It seems to me as perfect as an exquisite little jewel."

arguing as Gross does chiefly from rhetorical patterns, one could as easily show "The Haunted Mind" to be a work of self-parody.

An undoubted example of parody is to be found near the end of "A Rill From the Town Pump." After the pump has arrogated all the town's honors to himself, and made fun of a drunkard, he launches into a temperance sermon of great extravagance:³⁶

From my spout, and such spouts as mine, must flow
the stream that shall cleanse our earth of the vast
portion of its crime and anguish, which has gushed
from the fiery fountains of the still. In this
mighty enterprise, the cow shall be my great con-
federate. Milk and water! The TOWN PUMP and the
Cow! Such is the glorious copartnership that shall
tear down the distilleries and brewhouses, uproot
the vineyards, shatter the cider presses, ruin the
tea and coffee trade, and, finally, monopolize the
whole business of quenching thirst. Blessed consum-
mation! Then, Poverty shall pass away from the land,
finding no hovel so wretched where her squalid form
may shelter itself. Then Disease, for lack of other
victims, shall gnaw its own heart, and die. Then
Sin, if she do not die, shall lose half her strength.
(I, 170-171)

After the expression of further extreme optimisms, the pump breaks off: "Ahem! Dry work, this speechifying. . . . I never conceived, till now, what toil the temperance lecturers undergo for my sake." He concludes with a request that

³⁶The extravagance, however, was apparently not sufficient to indicate the parodic intent to the temperance leaders who reprinted the sketch as a tract for their cause, and achieved for it a world-wide circulation. See Van Doren, p. 94.

reformers not "get tipsy with zeal for temperance, and take up the honorable cause of the Town Pump in the style of a toper fighting for his brandy bottle" (I, 172).

The interior mockery that comes of the consciousness of overstatement is an element of romantic irony. We have seen it before in "Monsieur du Miroir"; it occurs also in "A Vision of the Fountain," which Alfred H. Marks, in an excellent article on this subject, calls "lyrical romantic irony."³⁷ The peculiar comic effect of this mockery derives from its taking two contradictory attitudes at the same time: its indulgence in extravagant thought and excessive expression is humorous, while the critical disdain--often implied through rhetorical irony, so that a consistency of positive expression is maintained--is that of the detached comic viewpoint. The combination, of course, results in the ironic mode of comedy. Further examples of it in Hawthorne may be found in "Graves and Goblins," in which the ghost-narrator, abjuring earthly fame himself, mocks his amanuensis, thereby closely fulfilling Friedrich Schlegel's definition of "transcendental buffoonery" as "inwardly the humor which sees above everything and lifts itself over all that is conditional and finite, even over its own art, its virtue, or its

³⁷"German Romantic Irony in Hawthorne's Tales," Symposium, VII (November 1953), 274-305.

genius."³⁸ The device of the "editor" is another means for achieving the same end of self-mocking irony which Hawthorne employs, for instance, in "The Journal of a Solitary Man."³⁹

Clearly Hawthorne's sketches provide ample evidence of his sense of the comic; and from the variety we have seen in them it ought also to be clear that one cannot speak of them categorically as though they were somehow all alike, all dull, and all better forgotten. Some of them, it is true, are of interest only because through them we discover more about Hawthorne and his age. Such, for instance, are "Little Annie's Ramble" and "Monsieur du Miroir," different as these are. But the early travel sketches are still amusing; the artistry of them all, and especially such a one as "Sights From a Steeple," still pleases; and "The Village Uncle" is a vivid, imaginative, and still effective piece in the mixed mode of humor and pathos. As providing examples of the comic

³⁸Quoted by Marks, p. 304.

³⁹And, most remarkably, in "Chiefly About War Matters by a Peaceable Man," the late essay for which, at the request of the editor of the Atlantic Monthly, he supplied footnotes contradicting the sentiments of the text. See XII, 315, 328, 332. The man who could take this detached view of his own opinions was a man who frequently attempted to find stability and balance in the ironic view which results; but, in this case, we know that behind the startling detachment of the Civil War essay--and hinted at by the almost flippant readiness with which the footnotes were written--lay an ironic view which, far from allowing him stability, was effecting his disintegration.

in Hawthorne's viewpoint and technique, the sketches are very rich: comic detachment, humor, and irony especially are evident, as in Lamb's essays, and a touch of gentle satire⁴⁰ occurs now and again, as from the pen of Addison or Steele. But what is only hinted at in the sketches--in glances at the dead-weight of materialism, in a momentary vision of chaos near a bridge, and in the loneliness of the detached soul--is the tragicomic, a mode ill suited to the gentility of a sketch, but important in the broader range of fiction.

⁴⁰The thoroughly satiric sketches have been deferred for discussion in conjunction with the satiric tales. The historical sketches will be considered as introductory to the tragic tales.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COMIC TALES

In the bulk of Hawthorne's fiction, the purely comic tales (excepting the satires, because of their particular moral emphasis) have been largely ignored by the critics. They deserve attention for at least four reasons. Their very existence should encourage us to observe more carefully the comic effects in the more famous works; and to discover the nature of Hawthorne's comedy in isolation may help us to understand that which occurs in the tragic writing. Secondly, some of them, being comic treatments of material elsewhere treated tragically, can aid in distinguishing between these two broad approaches, and in clarifying the philosophical implications and artistic essentials of each. The comic tales are, in the third place, parts of the evidence not to be ignored in generalizing about Hawthorne's mind and art. And finally, some of them are notable achievements in the comic, worthwhile in themselves.

The satires have received perhaps sufficient attention from critics because of the moral and philosophical beliefs which are not only made implicitly clear by the nature of the mode, but are very explicitly stated in their most

frequently quoted passages.¹ Some discussion of them must be included here, with the particular aim of defining the nature of Hawthorne's satire. But it is the less well-known comic tales which must be analyzed most fully.

I

In Mosses from an Old Manse, Hawthorne printed eight allegorical satires which take as their material the life and ideas of the contemporary society. Progress, optimism, materialism, Transcendentalism, Unitarianism, socialism, abolition, feminism--Reform in nearly all its species--none of these dominant elements in the spirit of his times could be of any real attraction to a man of critical detachment, whose values were spiritual but whose temper was skeptical, whose mind was intrigued by, if it did not dogmatically affirm, a dark fatalism, and whose most serious and insistent thought was of the inevitably corrupt nature of the human heart.²

¹Harold P. Miller's unpublished dissertation, "Hawthorne as a Satirist" (Yale, 1936), in the Yale University Library, is not available in abstract, on film, or through inter-library loan, and was consequently not accessible. Among published works, Lawrence Sargent Hall's Hawthorne: Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944) and N. F. Doubleday's "Hawthorne's Satirical Allegory," College English, III (Jan. 1942), 325-337, are the best studies of the subject.

²Arlin Turner, in "Hawthorne and Reform," New England Quarterly, XV (Dec. 1942), 700-714, traces Hawthorne's skepticism about reform to his reading of history (p. 705).

If he was to write of these aspects of his time at all, it must have seemed to him that it had to be in such a way as to incite critical laughter at them, a laughter which he felt would be inevitable when he set them one against the other, and all over against his own most profoundly felt truth. But that one truth--the imperfect and imperfectible nature of man--was such that it modified the whole tone of the satire. It is the satire of a man judging his fellow men on the basis of a belief which is in itself of a tragic import, and a potential argument for despair, while the beneficent enthusiasms he criticizes are those in which he might wish he could believe.³ He is, consequently, gentle with those who foolishly look for heaven on earth, and his satire never becomes so embittered and savage as Swift's, because it never is without love.

The best of the satires are "The Celestial Railroad" and "Earth's Holocaust," and these demonstrate more clearly than any others the attitude just described. "The Celestial Railroad," as N. F. Doubleday and Austin Warren have observed,⁴ paraphrases Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress to the end of affirming the essential truth of Bunyan's Puritanism against the

³See Chapter Six, below, on The Blithedale Romance.

⁴Doubleday, pp. 330-332; Austin Warren, "Introduction" to Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections (New York, 1934), pp. xxii-xxiv.

modern liberal theologians and Transcendentalists. Thus, at the very mouth of hell, "a smoky and lurid cavern," "whence ever and anon darted huge tongues of flame," where "strange half-shaped monsters," "faces horribly grotesque" were visible, and "awful murmurs, and shrieks, and deep shuddering whispers" were heard, Mr. Smooth-it-Away could assure Hawthorne that "Tophet has not even a metaphorical existence," and could provide a "comfortable explanation" for the horrible evidence before them (II, 221-222). It was as simple as that to Hawthorne; the kind of persons whom "Mr. Smooth-it-Away" typifies denied the perfectly palpable fact of the existence of evil--which in turn validated Tophet at least metaphorically--and gave "comfortable explanations" which Hawthorne could no more accept than the Dr. Johnson he venerated could accept the philosophy of Soame Jenyns.

"Earth's Holocaust" takes a greater variety of targets. It is directed against reformers of all kinds, and against all the "wornout trumpery" of the world. Thus it is both anti-reform and, for a while, anti-conservative. The destruction of aristocratic distinctions and the royal symbols comes first. Then liquor, tobacco, armaments, paper money, instruments of execution, books, marriage certificates, religious symbols, and--to top the ever-increasing audacity which itself has a comic effect--finally the Bible itself,

are all tossed into the flames, not without a protest on someone's part each time. But running in counterpoint with the comic frenzy of the groups of reformers, each with its own pet project, and with the shocked reactions of those protesting--harangues, fainting fits, screams--is a third line of thought in the form of quiet, skeptical commentary from "a grave man" at Hawthorne's side who had evidently "weighed for himself the true value of life and its circumstances," and therefore felt "little personal interest in whatever judgment the world might form of them" (II, 431). It is he who provides the calm, rational standard as a foil to the reformer's folly, and who finally directs Hawthorne's attention to the "dark-complexioned personage" who is reassuring the last toper, the last thief, and the last hangman that they "shall see good days yet" (II, 454). For, says he, "with a portentous grin," the reformers have forgotten the one object from which all the evils come: "the human heart itself" (II, 455). To this Hawthorne adds these words in his own voice, which imply the essential difference between his satire and others':

How ~~add~~ a truth, if true it were, that man's age-long endeavor for perfection had served only to render him the mockery of the evil principle, from the fatal circumstance of an error at the very root of the matter!

(II, 455)

But Hawthorne himself does not mock, and is not here even ironic, for though he does not believe in the intellectual and material reforms, he believes, at least so far as to assert it, in the reform of the heart, from which basis he can satirize the superficial efforts of others:

Purify that inward sphere, and the many shapes
of evil that haunt the outward, and which now
seem almost our only realities, will turn to
shadowy phantoms and vanish of their own accord. . . .
(II, 455)

This may sound more positive than it is. For the making of that radical reform seemed to Hawthorne elsewhere not within a man's power. Sin is universal, and a man cannot be his own savior.⁵ But so far as partial reform could be effected through the strength of love, even so far would the evil of the world diminish.

A satirical sketch which has as its central point the universality of man's evil and the essential democracy which follows is "The Procession of Life." It strips away the superficial inequalities of mankind--such as wealth and birth--and reclassifies men, first under such categories as Disease,

⁵Dimmesdale's salvation, for instance, is ultimately the work of Providence. The miraculous salvation of Roderick Elliston in "The Bosom Serpent" is effected entirely from the outside. And a part of what Hawthorne found "ridiculous" in the "tragedy" of Margaret Fuller was that she "took credit to herself for having been her own Redeemer." For the last passage, see Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife (Boston, 1885), I, 261.

which can make "the king a brother of the clown," and Intellect, by which "factory girls from Lowell" join company with "the Sapphos of the age" (II, 238, 239). But these are found untrustworthy divisions; Grief is a greater leveller,⁶ but even it cannot form the "strange partnerships" that occur when all the Guilty are called. "A forger from the state prison seizes the arm of a distinguished financier" (II, 242). When "the Good" are called, none answer. And the call for those who love brings the humble nurse as well as the wealthy philanthropist. A rather uncoordinate but Hawthornian category is next called: those who have "lost, or never found, their proper places in the world" or "whose success has been of the wrong kind"--a very large group. Finally, the Grand Marshall of this procession of all mankind is Death. Thus only two categories are universal--all must die, and none are good. Why are not those who love, good? Because "the just, the pure, the true, and all who might most worthily" answer the trumpet heralding the good, "shrink back sadly, as most conscious of error and imperfection." Moreover, "all the truly good," though evidently imperfect, may answer the call of Love. But though "to the credit of our nature" the group of those who love is large, "it is

⁶"The Christmas Banquet," a semi-satirical fantasy, has the effects and kinds of Grief as its theme.

harder to contrive a friendly arrangement of these brethren . . . than to unite even the wicked," because of sectarian divisions (II, 246-247). Then follows a statement which sums up the peculiar tragicomical tone of Hawthorne's satirical mode: "The fact is too preposterous for tears, too lugubrious for laughter" (II, 247). The line is reminiscent of the mixed force of Pope's famous couplet on "Atticus," and like it expresses the difficulty of finding an appropriate response to the fact of the foolish good.

The other satires repeat these points, in different forms. "The Intelligence Office" is filled with the same sadly foolish combination of preposterous and lugubrious persons, discontented with the world and their natures, and radically incapable of the changes they seek. In "The Hall of Fantasy" Speculators with their incredible schemes (incredible in 1840), monomaniac Reformers, and fantastic Inventors⁷ delude themselves, looking down at the world through tinted windows:

In a word, there were a thousand shapes of good and evil, faith and infidelity, wisdom and nonsense--a most incongruous throng.

Yet, withal, the heart of the stanchest conservative, unless he abjured his fellowship with man,

⁷Robert A. Durr, in "Hawthorne's Ironical Mode," New England Quarterly, XXX (1957), 488, has pointed out the resemblance "in situation and particulars" between Hawthorne's satire on the inventors and "Swift's satire on the projectors in the third book of Gulliver's Travels."

could hardly have helped throbbing in sympathy with the spirit that pervaded these innumerable theorists. It was good for the man of unquickened heart to listen even to their folly.

(II, 205)

Hawthorne recognizes "the struggle of the race after a better and purer life," and even acknowledges that it must come; he only asks that they "understand the sphere in which their lot is cast" as it appears in the revealing "whitest sunshine," before they begin (II, 206). The presence in the Hall of Fantasy of Father Miller, who predicted the end of the world,⁸ inspires a remarkable passage which concludes the sketch, and gives the essence of the love Hawthorne felt which served to counterbalance his sense of man's tragic nature:

"The poor old earth! . . . What I should regret in her destruction would be that very earthiness which no state of existence can renew or compensate. The fragrance of flowers and of new-mown hay; the genial warmth of sunshine and the beauty of a sunset among the clouds; the comfort and cheerful glow of the fireside; the deliciousness of fruits and of all good cheer; the magnificence of mountains and seas and cataracts, and the softer charm of rural scenery; even the fast falling snow and the gray atmosphere through which it descends,--all these and innumerable other enjoyable things of earth must perish with her. The country frolics; the homely humor; the broad, open-mouthed roar of laughter, in which body and soul conjoin so heartily! I fear that no other world can show us anything just like this.

.

⁸The same figure is humorously introduced into "The Christmas Banquet," a tale concerning the most grief-stricken persons in the world, and is shown in despair "at the tedious delay of the final conflagration" (II, 342).

Come what may, I never will forget her! Neither will it satisfy me to have her exist merely in idea. I want her great, round, solid self to endure interminably, and still to be peopled with the kindly race of man, whom I uphold to be much better than he thinks himself.

(II, 209, 210)

A similar passage occurs in an essay by Charles Lamb, "New Years Eve," and reinforces the kinship of Hawthorne with the humorist in still another aspect:⁹

I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. . . .

Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and fireside

⁹A paragraph in the "Fragments From the Journal of a Solitary Man" makes the same affirmation, adding cities (XII, 28-29). The content of these passages suggests a more surprising comparison than the one with Lamb. As Matthiessen rightly says of the five writers treated in his American Renaissance, "Hawthorne and Whitman certainly stand farthest apart" (p. 265). Yet compare with these passages from Hawthorne (to which other, briefer ones could be added), the following lines from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me
than mast-hemm'd Manhattan?
River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in
the twilight, and the belated lighter?
What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand,
and with voices I love call me promptly and loudly
by my nighest name as I approach?
. . . .
Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,
You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,
. . . .
Keep your places, objects than which none else is more
lasting.

conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests,
 and irony itself--do these things go out with life?
 Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides, when
 you are pleasant with him?¹⁰

Other of Hawthorne's satires hit at more superficial and ordinary targets than the large one of ideas of man's nature and progress. His own pair of New Year's sketches, "Time's Portraiture" and "The Sister Years" ridicule such things as petty politics and fashions. "The New Adam and Eve" is an imaginative new version of the traditional method, used by Goldsmith, for instance, of criticizing a particular society by introducing a member of another whose failures to understand reveal artificial conventions. By Hawthorne's method, the criticism is somewhat more thorough-going, for the new Adam and Eve, introduced into a depopulated world, are puzzled by everything from corsets to prisons, i.e., both by merely artificial accretions on man's nature, and by objects which are the result of man's fallen nature. The satire thus widens to embrace irony. Hawthorne, however, adopts an almost Rousseauistic sense of the "natural" as the test, and so far forgets himself as to reject wine and meat (II, 293, 299). His conception of woman's nature is made very clear by the natural housewifery which stirs in the bosom of the New Eve at the sight of a broom (II, 291).

¹⁰Lamb, p. 50.

Finally, Hawthorne's purest satire, in the sense that it is unmixed with the strongly ironic and tragic overtones of "Earth's Holocaust," for instance, is "Feathertop: A Moralized Legend," his last short work of fiction. Its conventionality, in certain respects, gives it unique interest, as does the strong possibility that its writing was motivated by the desire to attack a specific man, representative of a type, rather than the generalized "ideas or conditions of men" which are the targets of the other satires.¹¹

"Feathertop" apparently was motivated partly by personal enmity, the object of which appeared to be a characteristic man "of laths and clothes, without heart, soul, or intellect."¹² A letter Hawthorne wrote shortly before his dismissal from the Custom House well expresses his motivations and is as comic as the tale itself. He indulges with obvious glee in hyperbolic threats against his enemies, and concludes:

I have often thought that there must be a good deal

¹¹Doubleday, p. 326. See Alfred A. Kern, "The Sources of Hawthorne's Feathertop," PMIA, XLVI (Dec. 1931), 1253-59, and the same writer's "Hawthorne's Feathertop and 'R.L.R.'," PMIA, LII (Jan. 1937), 503-510. The original version of "The Hall of Fantasy" made gently satirical allusions to contemporaries, but it was their advocacy of foolish ideas, not their personal characters, which Hawthorne wished to criticize. See Harold P. Miller, "Hawthorne Surveys His Contemporaries," American Literature, XII (May 1940), 228-235.

¹²American Notebooks, p. 126.

of enjoyment in writing personal satire; but, never having felt the slightest ill will towards any human being, I have hitherto been debarred from this peculiar source of pleasure. I almost hope I shall be turned out, so as to have an opportunity of trying it. I cannot help smiling in anticipation of the astonishment of some of these local magnates here, who suppose themselves quite out of the reach of any retribution on my part.¹³

The sentiment was not new to him,¹⁴ but it was not the age for a Pope,¹⁵ nor was Hawthorne one; whatever pleasure he may have received privately from associating Feathertop with one Richard S. Rogers as he did Judge Pyncheon with Charles W. Upham, in neither case was the satire so manipulated as to bring any recognition or distress to the persons intended. Hawthorne's "personal" satires, with the exception of the

¹³Quoted by Stewart in American Notebooks, pp. 297-298.

¹⁴Cf. the notebook entry: "A prophecy, somewhat in the style of Swift's about Partridge, but embracing various events and personages." American Notebooks, p. 93. A later entry remarks: "Of a bitter satirist--of Swift, for instance--it might be said, that the person or thing, on which his satire fell, shrivelled up, as if the Devil had spit on it." Ibid., p. 101. His own plan was to "select a victim, and let fall one little drop of venom on his heart" (p. 298). Hawthorne's admiration for the satire of Thomas Green Fessenden is expressed in a biographical sketch (XII, 254-256), although he finds some of it "unpardonably coarse."

¹⁵The changes in the comic from Pope to Dickens are well delineated by Stuart M. Tave in The Amiable Humorist (Chicago, 1960). Sophia Peabody, long before her marriage to Hawthorne, wrote to her sister Elizabeth concerning Hawthorne's sister Elizabeth, "She . . . surprised me by saying she admired Pope." Julian Hawthorne, Hawthorne and His Wife, I, 189.

original "Hall of Fantasy," are even less personal than Thomas Love Peacock's generalized portraits of some of the same types.¹⁶

Certainly none of the pleasure of reading "Feathertop" is dependent upon any knowledge of the original. It opens with the most comic of Hawthorne's many laughing old hags. This "good woman," Mother Rigby, "was one of the most cunning and potent witches in New England" (II, 253). One morning she constructed a scarecrow, and as "she had awakened in an uncommonly pleasant humor, and was further dulcified by her pipe of tobacco, she resolved to produce something fine, beautiful, and splendid, rather than hideous and horrible" (II, 254). Feathertop, the fop, is born of this incongruous impulse. Supplied with money, he goes forth into the world, where only dogs and children see him for the hollow fake he is. The satire is not only of the attributes of a dandy, but of all those who, judging by externals, are willingly taken in by him.

"Feathertop," in its relative lack of the dark side

¹⁶It is clear, however, that he could take pleasure in the assumed effects of his generalized satires on persons who apparently felt themselves attacked. After being snubbed by a clergyman, he wrote: "This is so unlike his deportment in times past, that I suspect the Celestial Railroad must have given him a pique; and if so, I shall feel as if Providence had sufficiently rewarded me for that pious labor." Love Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Chicago, 1907), II, 125.

which in the other satires allies them to the tragicomic, brings us close to the tales in other comic modes.

II

Hawthorne's artistry in telling a wholly comic and non-satiric tale is demonstrated in only six works. These are in several styles and are of varying quality.

The earliest of them is one of the best. "The Seven Vagabonds" was probably written in 1830, following a trip to Connecticut, and doubtless had its genesis in some slight event or observation.¹⁷ Its materials are derived from the same combination of sympathetic observations of reality and inventiveness which was on a later trip to produce "The Village Uncle." The construction of the tale is extremely simple, and far more obvious than that of the sketch; but the clear presence of a plot, though a simple one, provides a sequential, active nature which distinguishes it from the more passive and discursive genre. The action is simply this: The narrator comes to a parting of three ways, where, to avoid a storm, he gains admittance to a house-wagon stationed there. Inside he finds a grave old showman with his mechanical puppets and an (inevitably) green-bespectacled literary gentleman-bookseller. They are then successively

¹⁷See Chandler, pp. 14-15, 56, and George Parsons Lathrop, A Study of Hawthorne (Boston, 1893), p. 143.

joined by a dark and romantic-looking foreigner with a "mirth-inspiring" fiddle and a merry female companion, a fortune teller-beggar, and a red Indian. The seven heterogeneous vagabonds thus brought together agree to join forces for the journey on to the Stamford camp-meeting, the narrator as an itinerant novelist, and they celebrate the union merrily. When the storm is over, they emerge into the sunshine only to be informed by a Methodist minister coming from Stamford that the camp-meeting has broken up. Thereupon the group disperses "to the four winds of heaven" (I, 413).

Hawthorne has fleshed out this simple action with a philosophic and comic suggestiveness of beauty and poignancy. He begins: "Rambling on foot in the spring of my life and the summer of the year, I came one afternoon to a point which gave me the choice of three directions" (I, 392). There is the dusty road straight to Boston, a longer route by the sea, and one over hills and lakes to Canada. Something of both the rich potentialities and the uncertain prospects of life is suggested by this setting; and the chance meetings and partings, determinations and disappointments of life are inherent in the action itself, from the circumstance of the storm on. But an adventurous and comic tone is established by the opening words; by allusions to Gulliver, to Don Quixote, and to Prospero, travellers all in comedies

past, and to Milton's "L'Allegro," (I, 392, 395, 410); by the variety of techniques through which the characters are introduced and speculated upon; by the style; and, most importantly, by the interior setting. In characterizing the individuals beyond the vivid externals which are quickly sketched in, Hawthorne makes use of the faculty which he here boasts of for "throwing myself mentally into situations foreign to my own, and detecting, with a cheerful eye, the desirable circumstances of each" (I, 394). What might have been a mechanical, awkward, and arbitrary series of expositions is made to grow organically from the character of the narrator as an imaginative young man, unsettled in life, and so naturally given to speculations on various modes of livelihood. The device is congruent with the idea of choices to be made inherent in the setting. He can even conceive of the "sort of happiness" enjoyed by the beggar-fortune teller, who mulcts Hawthorne in both his capacities:

As he pretended to familiarity with the Devil, so I fancied that he was fitted to pursue and take delight in his way of life, by possessing some of the mental and moral characteristics, the lighter and more comic ones, of the Devil in popular stories. Among them might be reckoned a love of deception for its own sake, a shrewd eye and keen relish for human weakness and ridiculous infirmity, and the talent of petty fraud.

(I, 405)

The humorous and ironic tones of the style may be illustrated by a single sentence, which follows an offer of charity

dependent upon the beggar's ability to change Hawthorne's five-dollar bill:

The object of my beneficence looked keenly in my face, and discerned that I had none of that abominable spirit, characteristic though it be, of a full-blooded Yankee, which takes pleasure in detecting every little harmless piece of knavery.

(I, 402-403)

The interior setting, in its way, is as important as the outdoor wayside scene with which the tale opens and closes. The central interest of the room in which the vagabonds gather is "a multitude of little people assembled on a miniature stage" (I, 393). The stage, with its laboring artisans, dancing ladies and gentlemen, and marching little soldiers--ludicrously stern in their three-inch height--is representative of the world, the real world which was likened to his own shadowy masque by Prospero, to whom the old showman is compared by Hawthorne. And Hawthorne's exclamation concerning this puppet show is in paraphrase of Hamlet's encomium on man: "What an admirable piece of work is this!" (I, 394). The vagabonds, as they assemble, seem to step upon this symbolic comic puppet stage; indeed at the height of the jollity which follows upon their joining in league, their actions are described successively with those of the puppets, and the dancing girl seems to have been made by Nature, "as the old showman made his puppets, for no earthly

purpose but to dance jigs" (I, 411). Over all, and directing his glance at the persons as well as the puppets, is a Merry Andrew, Shaking his sides, nodding his head, and winking his eyes in as life-like a manner as if he were ridiculing the nonsense of all human affairs, and making fun of the whole multitude beneath him" (I, 394).

The merging of comic detachment and humorous sympathy in this tale achieves the ironic view of Cervantes and of Shakespeare in The Tempest. And when the laughing, incongruous "parliament of free spirits" emerges from the vehicle into an outdoors of sunshine and green, and then sees a dark horseman approaching whose message is to cause their dispersion, the effect is like that of the entrance of the dark figure in Love's Labours Lost at the very height of the thoughtless merriment:

Onward he came, sticking up in his saddle with rigid perpendicularity, a tall, thin figure in rusty black, whom the showman and the conjurer shortly recognized to be, what his aspect sufficiently indicated, a travelling preacher of great fame among the Methodists.
(I, 412)

The final chord is still that of the "free mind," "the open spirit," and "the restless impulse" (I, 409) as the vagabonds go their separate ways, but there is a note of thoughtfulness, even of melancholy, in the closing words:

The fortune-teller . . . departed . . . chuckling.
The old showman and his literary coadjutor [designed]

. . . to peregrinate southwest along the seacoast. The foreigner and the merry damsel took their laughing leave, and pursued the eastern road, . . . and thus, dissolving, as it were, into sunbeams and gay music, departed. . . . Finally, with a pensive shadow thrown across my mind, yet envious of the light philosophy of my late companions, I joined myself to the Penobscot Indian and set forth towards the distant city.

(I, 413)

The theme of this tale is that of choices to be made, and it reaches its culmination when the narrator, to justify his alliance with the travellers going to Stamford, declares himself an itinerant novelist. "'Either this,' said I, 'is my vocation, or I have been born in vain'" (I, 410). The determination then made is specifically cited in "Passages From a Relinquished Work," written "a year or two" later (II, 460), in which Hawthorne adopts the same character. The "Relinquished Work" was to have been The Story-Teller, containing a series of tales "set in frames . . . embossed with groups of characteristic figures, amid the lake and mountain scenery, the villages and fertile fields, of our native land" (II, 461). The four opening sections of this proposed work are given in Mosses. Although together they in no sense comprise a finished tale, they are important for extending our knowledge of Hawthorne's conception of the narrator introduced in "The Seven Vagabonds," and showing him making a deliberate, though ultimately abortive, attempt to develop

the Cervantean side of his genius.¹⁸

The Story-Teller is first defined in contrast with the stern Puritan, "Parson Thumpcushion," who has raised him, and with the parson's three "respectable" and solid sons (II, 457). A lengthy burlesquing of Thumpcushion's preaching style (457-458) is followed by an exposition of his "upright" and "inflexible character" (II, 458). In contrast, the Story-Teller is a mild soul, "of gay and happy temperament, with

¹⁸For expositions of the original scheme, and speculations and arguments concerning the place of extant tales within it, see Chandler first, then N. F. Adkins, "The Early Projected Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne," Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, XXXIX (1945), 119-155, and Seymour L. Gross, "Four Possible Additions to Hawthorne's 'Story-Teller'," PBSA, LI (1957), 90-95. See also Van Doren, pp. 41-42. It is clear from internal evidence that, in addition to those works explicitly indicated by Hawthorne, "Fragments From the Journal of a Solitary Man," at least, was to be included somehow at the conclusion. The "Fragments" certainly draw a "moral, which many a dreaming youth may profit by," which is what Hawthorne promises at the opening of "Passages" (II, 461). Yet the character shown returning "home" to die in "Fragments" bears little resemblance to the one shown running away to live in "Passages"; the middle, which is missing, would have had to be rather horrific to effect such a change convincingly. The fact is that both characters are extreme projections of opposing tendencies already present in Hawthorne himself; the "Passages" persona was more appropriate to the scheme in mind, but the "Fragments" persona was surely gaining the predominance in Hawthorne's own character, and probably caused the failure of the plan. To have shown in the experiences depicted in the "frame" how such a change in character came about seems impossible, even if we assume that Hawthorne was up to inventing experiences "amid the lakes and mountain scenery" which might somehow correspond to whatever experiences had brought about a like development in his own character--if he knew.

an incorrigible levity of spirit, of no vicious propensities, sensible enough, but wayward and fanciful" (II, 459). In consequence of a growing difference over what the youth's profession is to be,¹⁹ the Story Teller leaves home in "light-hearted desperation" (II, 459). His inspiration is Goldsmith's Adventures of a Strolling Player (II, 460), his unsentimental farewell to home is both compared and contrasted with that of Byron's Childe Harold (II, 463), and his first thought on the road is of--Don Quixote:

Recollecting how the knight and Sancho had watched for auguries when they took the road to Toboso, I began, between jest and earnest, to feel a similar anxiety.

(II, 463)

"Between jest and earnest"--the very words ("spass und ernst") with which the romantic theorists, both English and German, described the attitude in which they loved to see the world and interpret Cervantes and Sterne.²⁰

¹⁹The difficulty of choosing a profession is described in terms which parallel those of an early letter from Hawthorne to his mother. Cf. II, 459-460, and the letter, given in Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, I, 107-108. The similarity helps to establish a degree of identity between Hawthorne and his "Story Teller." In the fiction, however, Parson Thumpcushion stands in relation to the Story Teller not in place of Hawthorne's mother, but rather for those Puritan ancestors of whose disapproval Hawthorne the "romancer" felt certain. See "The Custom House," V, 21.

²⁰See Alfred H. Marks, p. 293, and Tave, Part IV, "Jest and Earnest."

The next step, naturally, is to obtain a complementary travelling companion in order to form "a singular couple, strikingly contrasted, yet curiously assimilated, each . . . remarkable enough by himself, and doubly so in the other's company" (II, 468)--the true Cervantean formula. The right one is found, easily enough, under a tree, beside a stream. Nothing complemented this Story Teller quite so well as what he had run away from, so the "slender figure" in "black broadcloth" is found to have his thumb in a Bible (II, 465). The Story Teller "would quite as willingly have found a merrier companion; such, for instance, as the comedian with whom Gil Blas shared his dinner beside a fountain in Spain" (II, 465). No doubt. But the contrast is what is wanted. To make it complete, this budding Puritan differs from Thumpcushion in being melancholy and shy. He is fully capable, however, of providing apparently nonsensical surprise:

"It is very singular," said I,--" . . . that Nature should provide drink so abundantly, . . . but so seldom anything to eat. Why should we not find a loaf of bread on this tree as well as a barrel of good liquor at the foot of it?"

"There is a loaf of bread on the tree," replied the stranger

(II, 465)

The union consecrated by the ensuing feast becomes permanent.

The Story Teller's first attempt at story-telling is

so complete a failure as to be "a thing to make a man shoot himself, or run amuck, or hide himself in caverns" (II, 469). But it only stimulates him, apparently, to open his Cervantes once more for the recipe for a real story:

. . . wide observation, varied knowledge, deep thoughts, and sparkling ones; pathos and levity, and a mixture of both, like sunshine in a raindrop, lofty imagination, veiling itself in the garb of common life; and the practised art which alone could render these gifts, and more than these,, available.

(II, 469)

These criteria are not precisely filled by "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," a comic mystery Hawthorne published at about the same time (1834), which is the only extant tale which we know was to have been included in The Story Teller,²¹ since in the final section of "Passages," entitled "The Village Theatre," the fictional circumstances of its delivery in a country town are given. These are highly comic. The theatre manager's flamboyant promotion of the "celebrated Story Teller" and his "famous tale"--which was still uncomposed--are described in contrast with the modest notices that "with divine permission, Eliakin Abbott would address sinners" that night at the school-house (II, 471). The intimidated townspeople, "knowing that the world contained innumerable persons of celebrity undreamed of by them,"

²¹But see the articles listed in n. 18, above.

give the Story Teller an enthusiastic reception upon his entrance. The story of Mr. Higginbotham--whose name alone was invaluable²²--was then told with "mimicry and buffoonery," and the audience, amused also by a false horse's tail which someone had fastened to the narrator,

were ineffably delighted, and gave way to such a tumult of approbation that, just as the story closed, the benches broke beneath them. . . . Even in that predicament they continued their applause.

(II, 474)

Having with this farce carried the jest far enough, it was time to inject some ernst. Accordingly, upon leaving the stage, the Story Teller is handed a letter from Parson Thumpcushion, who has traced him. He burns it unread, and leaves town:

I seemed to see the Puritanic figure of my guardian standing among the fripperies of the theatre and pointing to the players,--the fantastic and effeminate men, the painted women, the giddy girl in boy's clothes, merrier than modest,--pointing to these with solemn ridicule, and eying me with stern rebuke. His image was a type of the austere duty, and they of the vanities of life.

.

²²Says the Story Teller: "I never knew the "magic of a name" till I used that of Mr. Higginbotham" (II, 473). Such comic names are used in several of Hawthorne's minor tales: e.g. Mr. Pignort, the materialist, and Dr. Caca-phodel, the cynic, in "The Great Carbuncle," where the names help establish the satirical attitude toward the characters. It is questionable, however, whether the two names--"Rose Grafton" and "Widow Toothaker"--for the subject of "Edward Fane's Rosebud," do contribute to a desirable conception of that lady.

It is fixed in my mind, and was so at the time, that he had addressed me in a style of paternal wisdom, and love, and reconciliation, which I could not have resisted had I but risked the trial. The thought still haunts me that then I made my irrevocable choice between good and evil fate.

As we walked onward, following the same road, on two such different errands, Eliakin groaned in spirit, and labored with tears to convince me of the guilt and madness of my life.

(II, 474-475)

So ends the "Passages From a Relinquished Work."

"Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" itself has a plot clever in its very absurdity, but one which is used, as is usual in comedy,²³ chiefly to expose the character. The character in this case is Dominicus Pike, a typical Yankee pedlar, of a kind already well established in American humor:²⁴

The pedlar drove a smart little mare, and was a young man of excellent character, keen at a bargain, but none the worse liked by the Yankees; who, as I have heard them say, would rather be shaved with a sharp razor than a dull one. . . . Moreover, as will be seen in the course of my story, the pedlar was inquisitive, and something of a tattler, always itching to hear the news and anxious to tell it again.

(I, 127)

The use of the idiom of an oral New England narrator,

²³See L. J. Potts, Comedy (London, 1948), Ch. IV.

²⁴See Walter Blair, Native American Humor, Parts II and II of the "Introduction," passim; also Rourke, Chapters I and II.

although refined to a degree, is unique in Hawthorne: "smart little mare," "keen at a bargain," "something of a tattler," "itching to hear." And the characters, contrary to almost all others in Hawthorne of any class whatever, speak idiomatically. "You go a pretty good jog," says Dominicus to the first traveller he meets (I, 128), and later observes, "Ill news flies fast, they say, . . . but this beats railroads" (I, 129).

The news he importunes from the "ill looking fellow" is that

"Old Mr. Higginbotham, of Kimballton, was murdered in his orchard, at eight o'clock last night, by an Irishman and a nigger. They strung him up to the branch of a St. Michael's pear-tree, where nobody will find him till the morning."

(I, 128)

The curious circumstances of the traveller's knowing all the details of a yet undiscovered murder does not escape Dominicus, but so inveterate a gossip is he, and so sensational is this piece of "horrible intelligence," that he tells it at "every tavern and country store . . ., expending a whole bunch of Spanish wrappers among at least twenty horrified audiences" (I, 129). Filling out the story from his own imagination as he travels, Dominicus meets at last his come-uppance, when a farmer declares he drank with Higginbotham that morning. Disgraced, the pedlar retires to bed. But, on the evidence of a negro he meets the next morning, he

revives the story, with the variation that it was an Irishman alone who did the deed, and it had happened a night later than supposed. He also modifies his method of relating the news, being somewhat more indirect. This time the news gets immediately into the Parker's Falls Gazette, in a fashion which satirizes the yellow press of the 1830's:

. . . the printed account described the mark of the cord round the dead man's neck, and stated the number of thousands of dollars of which he had been robbed; there was much pathos also about the affliction of his niece, who had gone from one fainting fit to another. . . .

(I, 133-134)

Dominicus, giving way to the enthusiasm, capitalizes on his importance as the bearer of the news; but again he has a comeuppance, far harsher than previously, for a coach arrives from Kimballton bearing the supposedly prostrate niece, who declares her uncle had seen her off that very morning. The townsfolk, now ludicrously wrathful that the man is alive, threaten Dominicus with all the punishments loved by a democratic mob, but he is saved by the plea of the niece, and leaves town merely besmattered with mud. "Being a funny rogue, his heart soon cheered up," and he has a laugh at the tumult he caused (I, 138). The accumulated circumstantial evidence begins to prey at his mind again, and he becomes quite convinced once more of his tale. Only an indorsed statement from the man himself will convince

him that Higginbotham lives. He arrives that evening in Kimballton, and discovers that the man ahead of him on the road is Higginbotham himself. Following, he hurries to the orchard, leaps from his cart, and, just as the clock strikes eight, runs to the pear-tree in time to save Higginbotham from the murderous attack of his Irish servant. The "mystery" is explained--lamely and undramatically--by the information that the successive withdrawal and disappearance of two who had originally been in on the murder plan had twice caused its delay by one night, and it was these Dominicus had met on the road. He is rewarded disproportionately for his chance act of heroism in true comic fashion with the hand of the niece and, eventually, the entire wealth of Higginbotham, when the old man dies "a Christian death, in bed" (I, 142).

The pleasure of this story is in the very absurdity of its incredible plot, but also and chiefly in the humorous character of Dominicus. Everything rests on his inquisitive and gossiping nature, which the circumstances of the plot are contrived to display. He is not satirized, however, any more than Falstaff is. He is very likable, we sympathize with him on the occasion of his reverses, and we assent to his good fortune despite his comic vice. The elements of satire are aimed at the sensational press and the gullibility

and unintelligence of the democratic mob. There are further pleasures to be had in the comic touches in the style of the story, as when the niece and the lawyer who accompanies her are at first "struck speechless" by the inquiries of the mob, "though one was a lawyer and the other a young lady" (I, 135); as in the way their respective speeches characterize them as lawyer and schoolmistress (I, 135-137); as when Dominicus is compared to "the heroes of old romance," "blindly obeying the call of fate" (I, 142), which incongruously equates an idle curiosity with a sacred quest; and finally, in the conception of the projected murder by hanging from a pear-tree, rather than anything more bloody and likely.

This tale is humorous for its own sake, and has no real moral; yet it was never disowned by Hawthorne, as was "Mrs. Bullfrog," a tale with a moral, but a bad one. The story evidently had its genesis in Hawthorne's thoughts on late marriage, with which frequent notes for stories are concerned,²⁵ and on the inevitable disappearance of or disillusionment with mortal beauty. In 1835 he wrote in his notebook:

To represent the process by which sober truth gradually strips off all the beautiful draperies with which imagination has enveloped a beloved object

²⁵E.g., IX, 22.

till from an angel she turns out to be a merely ordinary woman. This to be done without caricature, perhaps with a quiet humor interfused, but the prevailing impression a ~~bad~~ one.²⁶

In the story as it was written, caricature is strong, the humor is loud, and there is no sadness whatever. The woman is not merely ordinary, but hideously decayed, and-- what is the most important departure from the genuinely Hawthornesque approach--it is not the imagination but cosmetic art which creates the illusion of beauty. The "stripping away" is literal and farcical. To summarize the story with the brevity it deserves, a lady-like bachelor with the inappropriate name of Bullfrog, after long delay marries in haste an apparently lovely Bride, but the overturn of the honeymoon coach reveals her true ugliness, for which, however, Bullfrog decides he is amply compensated by the \$5,000 she has won from another man in an unjust suit for breach of promise. The moral of the story is that one should not be nice in the choice of a wife, for, as against a financial basis for "matrimonial bliss," "personal appearance, habits, disposition," are trifles which concern nobody but the lady herself" (II, 149).

On September 16, 1841, Hawthorne wrote:

²⁶IX, 22. This and the reference in n. 25 are to entries in the "Passages From the American Notebooks" which are not given in Stewart's edition because the mss. are lost.

I do not very well recollect Monsieur du Miroir, but, as to Mrs. Bullfrog, I give her up to the severest reprehension. The story was written as a mere experiment in that style; it did not come from any depth within me,--neither my heart nor mind had anything to do with it.²⁷

All this is perfectly evident from the story itself. But it may be well to observe some elements in Hawthorne's "experiment in that style." The comic effects in diction and sentence structure are frequently successful, as here:

There was every chance of my becoming a most miserable old bachelor, when, by the best luck in the world, I made a journey into another state, and was smitten by, and smote again, and wooed, and won, and married, the present Mrs. Bullfrog, all in the space of a fortnight.

(II, 150)

The comic rapidity of the action, after the long delay elaborately analyzed in the preceding sentences, is well reflected in the style. The catastrophe is hinted at with a comic understatement which by its very peculiarity of diction incites the suspicion that it is ironic: ". . . a few trifling defects . . . glimmered on my perception long before the close of the honeymoon" (II, 150); "The gentle eye of Mrs. Bullfrog scarcely rebuked me" (II, 151). There is some real humor, too, in the incidents which foreshadow the disclosure of the accident: the bride's firm refusal to let Bullfrog play with her hair; the odor of cherry brandy

²⁷From a letter included in Passages From the American Notebooks, IX, 239.

which exudes from what she calls a bottle of Kalydor. The accident itself is described with a vulgarity of detail worthy of Smollett: the coachman's bloody nose, inflicted by Mrs. Bullfrog, and her own "grisly aspect," bald head, sunken cheeks, and toothless mouth (II, 153). Bullfrog's character is comically consistent when, after the overturn, he first "instinctively" straightens his tie, and then gives way to fearful--and somewhat labored--imaginings about who the rough-voiced "ogre" beating his coachman in his wife's clothes may be. His bewilderment then and later when Mrs. Bullfrog has restored herself is overdone, and the comic reversals of the denouement are dampened by the growing discomfort most admirers of Hawthorne must feel. It is the specious moral, and vulgarity of content, rather than an unsuccessful attempt at comic style, which damns this tale.

There are two tales, however, in which Hawthorne does treat favorite themes in a comic fashion without any violation of his true sense of their moral significance. "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment"²⁸ has as its theme the elixir of life, which was to obsess and frustrate Hawthorne in his last phase.²⁹ The folly of desiring to grow young again, and to

²⁸This tale also was included in Mason's Humorous Masterpieces. See above, Ch. I, n. 11.

²⁹See Stewart, American Notebooks, pp. lxxxii-lxxxviii, and Edward Hutchins Davidson, Hawthorne's Last Phase, (New Haven, 1949).

remain eternally so, is illustrated through the device of showing four sad old misfortunates make fools of themselves after drinking water from the Fountain of Youth; the wisdom they may be supposed to have gained from the experience is shown to be useless. Thus viewed, man seems pitiable and his situation frightening, since meaninglessness follows from his apparent incapacity for wisdom. But the view is not tragic; the reader watches the action with the "philosophic coolness" of Dr. Heidegger himself (I, 264), and there is nothing in the four subjects of the experiment which suggests a loss of human nobility as a consequence of their folly. Their behavior upon regaining their youth is ludicrously depicted (I, 265-269), and when age comes upon them again they are essentially unchanged. With the inflexible consistency of comic characters, they learn nothing from their experience, but set off at once for Florida to find the Fountain for themselves. Their folly is contrasted with Dr. Heidegger's wisdom of resignation; but the melancholy of his meditations is kept from dominating the story by the exploitation of every incidental comic possibility, from the ironic nature of the demise of his fiancée years ago ("being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover's prescriptions, and died on the bridal evening" (I, 260)), to the simple, ludicrous incongruity of the old

people's attire in which the renewed youths find themselves dressed. The story is an excellent example of the comic mood "between jest and earnest."

The favorite theme of decayed aristocracy is treated in a similar style in "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure."³⁰ The tale is simply a series of comic scenes and portraits emphasizing the folly rather than the tragedy of family pride. Every standard comic device is used. First, that of simple Dickensian contrast between the antagonists: Mr. Brown, the prosperous merchant who desires to buy Peter's "crazy old house" to build a brick block on the lot, buttons "his sur-tout over the snug rotundity of his person," while "gaunt, grizzled, and threadbare Peter Goldthwaite" tells him to leave his "estate" alone, as he plans to build "a splendid new mansion" on the site (I, 428). The diction, too, is employed for comic effects, as in the passage where the mocking and "plodding" repetition reinforces the idea of a stereotype:

John Brown, with exactly the qualities of a thousand other John Browns, and by just such plodding methods as they used, had prospered wonderfully, and become one of the wealthiest John Browns on earth.

(I, 429)

Against the satirical antagonism inherent in this view of

³⁰On the theme in Hawthorne, see Stewart, American Notebooks, pp. lxxvi-lxxxii.

the materialist, there is the humorous sketch of Peter himself as a "crack-brained simpleton" unfailingly unlucky in his many fantastic projects, with whom we consequently sympathize. He is, after all, "harmless," "honest," and "honorable" (I, 429-431). He lives in the house with an old maid companion, Tabitha Porter, who is in her contentment and simplicity as humorous as he. Hearing him threaten to tear down the house to find the treasure which legend says it hides, "she looked up quietly from her work. 'But leave the kitchen till the last, Mr. Peter,' said she" (I, 432). Dancing with farcical excitement and dreaming fantasies of gold and youth, Peter does set about razing the "cold, dark, wintry, smoky, creaking, groaning, dismal old house" (I, 432), from the inside out, while Tabitha uses the wood for the kitchen fire. The ludicrous picture of Peter the Destroyer tearing down the house while Tabitha burns it up is painted with a full sense of its wonderful absurdity. The fantasies of optimism which grow from sanguine interpretations of slight clues, the deliriously energetic persuance of the project once it has begun, the obsession for privacy and resurgence of haughty pride as he considers the treasure--all these are shown in their full comic eccentricity, relieved by only a touch of pathos when Peter momentarily, in a sense of his isolation, thinks he is deluded. When, in the end,

this proves to be true--for the treasure chest, when found, is filled with worthless paper money--it seems that comic pathos must finally prevail, as Peter sits in the dead of winter with his gutted old house about to fall around him. But pathos is averted; old John Brown has been farcically stumbling through the snow on an errand of mercy, and arriving in time to see and pity Peter's disillusionment, he offers a "pretty handsome price" for the property. Thereupon, with laughable consistency, Peter's spirits revive and he begins at once to speculate on another project (I, 453-454).

Hawthorne's attitude toward aristocratic pretensions where the means are wanting, toward fantastic speculations, and toward disproportionately large mansions, was consistently one of critical detachment, observing the inevitable incongruities which result, the absurd architectural abortions, the revelation of man's smallness in his pretensions to greatness. He believed, too, that only fools sought salvation in material treasures, which to that end would be worthless. All these attitudes are present in "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure," where all these materials are gathered together. The other perception--that aristocratic pride leads to tragic isolation--is only touched upon. In The House of the Seven Gables it is this perception which dominates, but the other strains which we have found in "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" will

be there, too, even with some of the details--the house, the lost fortune, and the crazed old man and woman.

We have now considered the six comic tales of Hawthorne. Two of them--"Mrs. Bullfrog" and "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe"--stand apart from everything else he wrote, the one a vulgar farce in which Hawthorne denies his true sense of values with regard to marriage, beauty, and money in the process of experimenting in low comedy; the other a successful comic tale in which Hawthorne humorously exploits the common material of American humor, which he seldom used. Two tales, "The Seven Vagabonds" and "Passages from a Relinquished Work," show him developing his Cervantean strain with sensitivity and skill, ranging widely from farce to irony. The "Passages" is largely derivative in treatment and even in the large elements of content; the details, however, as in the complementary characteristics of the traveling companions and the descriptions of the village or the theatre, grow out of Hawthorne's own personality or native locale. "The Seven Vagabonds," on the other hand, is an original and poignant tale with a refined sense of comic perception, symbolically suggested in unforced realistic details. Finally, two works, "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" and "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" take meaningful comic

views of two themes, the darker sides of which are not contradicted or obscured, but are even subtly suggested within the comic framework, thereby sometimes uniting the elements of jest and earnest, sometimes suggesting the pathos of humor, sometimes moving toward irony, and even on to the tragicomic.

These six tales, together with the satires and sketches previously discussed, are intermixed in the three volumes of Hawthorne's short works with those somber tales which project the tragic vision that represents Hawthorne at his deepest moral and artistic seriousness, and for which he is justly best known. Within the volumes the sketches and tales so far considered serve, beyond their own differing degrees of merit, in the capacity of comic relief, or in some cases as stabilizing ballast from common life weighting the books more surely toward a balanced view which Hawthorne considered characteristic of his mind. Certainly because of these tales and sketches, the volumes came closer to meeting the desire--even the critical insistence--of the romantic age for a comprehensive, Shakespearean view of life. Modern anthologies of Hawthorne's tales do not achieve this. But even if we were to suppose that Hawthorne himself or his contemporaries valued "Little Annie's Ramble" as little as we do, which was not the case, the presence of a "Mrs.

Bullfrog," which we know he disliked, proves that balance and relief were what he thought necessary and desirable, even if it meant leaving a "Devil in Manuscript" uncollected for twenty years. In Mosses From an Old Manse, "Mrs. Bullfrog" follows, like farce after tragedy,³¹ immediately upon "Rappaccini's Daughter." If it is a knowledge of Hawthorne's mind and art we are after, not simply an exercise of our own taste, we cannot afford to ignore the comic tales and sketches. And if we are interested in neither of those aims, but only in enjoying an effective work of literary art, then "The Village Uncle," "The Seven Vagabonds," and "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure"--these three, at least--merit our attention, and will reward it.

³¹In the "Passages from a Relinquished Work," the Story Teller relates "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" following the performance of "the tragedy of Douglas." (II, 471)

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COMIC WITHIN THE "FORMS OF GRIEF"

Hawthorne found the old Greek legends that he used in Tanglewood Tales "so melancholy and miserable," that he asked himself, "was such material the stuff that children's playthings should be made of!" In them "the Greek tragedians sought their themes, and moulded them into the sternest forms of grief that ever the world saw" (IV, 109). Hawthorne the artist was himself most powerfully engaged when he was seeking his themes in the legends, history, and setting of New England, and molding from them his own stern forms of grief. The tales which resulted have received an abundance of the scholar's form of praise, analysis.

We come upon them in this study from a new approach, from an exploration of the comic, that side of Hawthorne's awareness which in his art received much less, yet significant, expression. The approach leads us to ask what happens to the comic when Hawthorne is developing his tragic inner theme, molding his "forms of grief." Does it become useless, irrelevant, or false? Sometimes; but not usually. For the comic within the tragic can have both philosophical and aesthetic effects of importance.

Hawthorne's historical sketches offer us an illuminating preliminary area of study, for in them we find him somewhat disengaged from the task of creation, contemplating his materials as materials, considering their inherent qualities and taking trial attitudes toward them.

I

The first parts of the sketches "Main Street" and "Old News" attempt to draw pictures of Puritan New England. Both pictures are naturally very gloomy, and in both Hawthorne disclaims responsibility for this fact. In the person of his showman-narrator in "Main Street," he says:

"I perceive in your eyes, my indulgent spectators, the criticisms which you are too kind to utter. These scenes, you think, are all too sombre. So, indeed, they are; but the blame must rest on the sombre spirit of our fore-fathers, who wove this web of life with hardly a single thread of rose-color or gold, and not on me, who have a tropic love of sunshine, and would gladly gild all the world with it, if I knew where to find so much."

(III, 471)

Funerals, he says, were the "only class of scenes" in which the Puritans would "indulge an outbreak of grisly jollity" (III, 471-472).¹ Now insofar as Hawthorne in these sketches was merely the romantic historian, it was his business to

¹See also "Old News," III, 534, 538.

evoke the historically accurate atmosphere. But of none of the tales or sketches he wrote would anyone say that their author evidently had "a tropic love of sunshine." There are four observations to be made here: First, however gloomy the period itself was, Hawthorne deliberately dwelt on this aspect; secondly, even the gloom of the Puritans is liable to comic treatment; third, American history, even if Hawthorne wished to limit himself to that, already offered other periods of a very different character--he himself points out three distinct periods within the eighteenth century in "Old News"; and finally, even when he did choose a non-Puritan setting, he usually injected it with the equivalent of Puritanic gloom. All this is simply to emphasize that the Puritan materials attracted him not alone because they were distant and hazy with legendary character appropriate to romance, but because they came to him imbued with the dark atmosphere appropriate to the tragic themes he wished to embody in fiction, and containing the same tragic idea. The spiritual pride of individual Puritans he could satirize, but the essentials of Puritan theology and morality, not.

Yet it is true that Hawthorne made a deliberate search for humorous characters and flashes of comic light within the Puritan world. The character of Dr. Bullivant, who is shown distastefully in "The Gray Champion," where the

sympathies are wholly with those Bullivant is mocking, is used in the sketch named for him as a foil to the "tone and composition" of Puritan New England society. Hawthorne even admits that

We are perhaps accustomed to employ too sombre a pencil in picturing the earlier times among the Puritans, because, at our cold distance, we form our ideas almost wholly from their severest features.

(XII, 78)

Yet "gloom" still best characterizes them, he says, and "the frolic of the mind was so habitually chastened" that persons like Bullivant gain "a nook in history by the mere possession of animal spirits, too exuberant to be confined within the established bounds" (XII, 79). The man is first humorously portrayed as the "gay apothecary" of 1670, dispensing as many jokes as drugs, and causing in his Puritan customers "twistings of mouths which never lost their gravity before" (XII, 80-81).

Unwonted titterings arise and strengthen into bashful laughter, but are suddenly hushed as some minister, heavy-eyed from his last night's vigil, or magistrate, armed with the terror of the whipping post or pillory, or perhaps the governor himself, goes by like a dark cloud intercepting the sunshine.

(XII, 81)

Then, after an analysis of the general "decline of godliness" in the period, and of the fluid political state which resulted in the downfall in 1688 of the Governor General (Sir

Edmund Andros), Bullivant is shown as one of the "most obnoxious leaders of the court party" (85), now languishing in prison, laughed at by little boys. He is the butt of the sarcasms of passersby, and "all his quips and repartees . . . seem to have been transferred . . . to the sluggish brains of his enemies" (XII, 86). Far from sympathizing, Hawthorne augments the scorn by reducing Bullivant to a farcical figure:

. . . his face has exchanged the glory of wit and humor for a sheepish dulness. At intervals, the Doctor walks the room, with an irregular and shuffling pace; anon he throws himself on the sack of barley straw, muttering very reprehensible expressions between his teeth; then again he starts to his feet, and journeying from corner to corner, finally sinks into the chair, forgetful of its three-legged infirmity till it lets him down upon the floor.

(XII, 86)

The incongruous relationships inherent in such a person in the midst of the Puritans are recognized, and here Hawthorne makes humor and farce out of a situation similar to the one he found in the history of "The New Canaan," from which he wrought a tragic theme in "The Maypole of Merry Mount."

Of Puritan wit and humor, Hawthorne makes an estimate which, judging by that of Cotton Mather and the anagrammatizing clergy, is very accurate:

Every vain jest and unprofitable word was deemed an item in the account of criminality, and whatever

wit, or semblance thereof, came into existence, its birthplace was generally the pulpit, and its parent some sour old Genevan divine. The specimens of humor and satire, preserved in the sermons and controversial tracts of those days, are occasionally the apt expression of pungent thoughts; but oftener they are cruel torturings and twistings of trite ideas, disgusting by the wearisome ingenuity which constitutes their only merit.

(XII, 79)

The Puritans were "a people where . . . few possessed, or were allowed to exercise, the art of extracting the mirth which lies hidden like latent caloric in almost everything," and their humor, as he says elsewhere more briefly, was "laboriously light and lamentably mirthful, as if some very sober person, in his zeal to be merry, were dancing a jig to the tune of a funeral-psalm" (III, 533).

If Hawthorne occasionally made fun of the excessive gloom of the Puritans, and sometimes satirized them on the point of spiritual pride, he never denied the heroism of the first generations. Certainly such tales as "Endicott and the Red Cross" and "The Gray Champion" establish the heroism far more effectively than all of Cotton Mather's factitious classical comparisons in the Magnalia. But when he turned to other, later periods of American history, if he had anything to say at all, it was to diminish the sense of the heroic with which Americans were quickly endowing their past, to look with a critical and sometimes comic eye. This is

partly because the periods themselves do not, as with the Puritans', immediately suggest religious and tragic conceptions; they are brighter, more varied, less religious. In sketching the period of "The Old French War" (Part II of "Old News") he imagined

the travelled American, the petit-maitre of the colonies,--the ape of London foppery, . . . he with his gray powdered periwig, his embroidered coat, lace ruffles, and glossy silk stockings, golden-clocked,--his buckles of glittering paste, at knee-band and shoe-strap,--his scented handkerchief, and chapeau beneath his arm. . . . For his amusement, there were essays of wit and humor, the light literature of the day, which, for breadth and license, might have proceeded from the pen of Fielding or Smollet[sic]. . . .

(III, 542-543)

This creature from London's comic stage strolls the Puritan's "own city of refuge" and feels at home; there is not the degree of contrast Bullivant experienced. With the provincial court as the center, setting the fashions (or importing them regularly), and in the society "distinctions of rank that seemed permanent" (III, 544), Boston seems to have shaped itself into the circumstances which in England produced high stage comedy. If such comedy is never written retrospectively, still, in the wars of the eighteenth century there were possibilities for historical novels, which Hawthorne noticed with some contempt:

One would think that no very wonderful talent

was requisite for an historical novel, when the rough and hurried paragraphs of these newspapers can recall the past so magically. We seem to be waiting in the street. . . .

(III, 545)

And so he goes on to show just how easily the setting and atmosphere and even something of the events can be got up. The possible comic elements in these novels are also observed in such items as the affected letters of the provincial captains (III, 546) and the haggling Yankee yeomen selling their goods at the encampments in the forest (III, 549). But toward the great actions of the wars Hawthorne felt it difficult to take the restrictedly heroic view necessary to that kind of historical romance. In the introduction to "Roger Malvin's Burial" he writes that in the circumstances of "Lovell's Fight" in 1725, "Imagination . . . may see much to admire," but adds the qualification, "by casting certain circumstances judiciously into the shade" (III, 381). This he did not choose to do. Of a largely unsavory character like Sir William Phips, whose life is eulogized in one entire section of Mather's Magnalia, Hawthorne makes a comic figure, showing him in incongruous conjunction with the Salem clergymen, conversing on the question of witchcraft, and engaging in other affairs in a ridiculous fashion (XII, 227-234). For Hawthorne, apparently, so many circumstances of Phips' life would have had to be cast into the

shade that he would have been altogether obscured. But he is almost as hard on Sir William Pepperell, "the mighty man of Kittery," as he calls him, and comes near to making his celebrated seige of Louisburg in 1745 a matter of farce, and the only thing that saved the aging Pepperell from total disappearance from history. Hawthorne sketches Pepperell's provincial army, in all its incongruity and ineptness, on three occasions--the embarkment, the seige, and the triumphal entry into Louisburg (XII, 235-245). Toward such a leader, such an army, and such a conquest--with its lucky circumstances and dubious consequences--Hawthorne could take only a comic attitude, and the sketch's delineations of incongruity and vanity make it indeed very funny; while the style, detached and anti-heroic in its diction, is highly comic.

Clearly Hawthorne could, had he wished, have cast all the circumstances necessary into the shade, and turned out a passable heroic-historical novel, intermixed with comic common characters, in the manner of Scott or Cooper; his historical sketches prove this. But such novels would not have afforded him the "more earnest purpose, a deeper moral, and a closer and homelier truth" than Scott provided, which the "world, nowadays, requires" (II, 416). With his tragic "inner theme," Hawthorne turned most naturally to the Puritan world with its religious sense of dark necessity, not

to the questionable heroics of provincial part-time generals. If he "grasped the truth of life"² in non-Puritan historical sources, it had to be by finding the same tragic inner conflict in the circumstances of particular men (as in "Roger Malvin's Burial," or "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"). If he wished to write of heroism, the Puritans could provide that, too, without falsification. .

These, then, were the primary commitments: to "earnest purpose, deep moral, and close and homely truth," and to either Puritan materials or materials susceptible to a similar infusion of darkness. In becoming a writer with a tragic sense (which is what is claimed of Hawthorne in many of these tales, not that they are necessarily brief tragedies), and choosing materials closely adaptable to tragic treatment, Hawthorne employed the comic differently, of course, than if he had written of the mid-eighteenth century Boston court society in something of its own spirit, or of the warfare of provincial generals in the way Americans liked to see them. Our business now is to trace the kinds and the effects of Hawthorne's uses of the comic within his tragic forms of grief.

²As he said Scott failed to do. English Notebooks, p. 344.

II

Hawthorne's uses of the comic in his tragic tales may, for convenience, be classified under five heads.³ 1) The humor of everyday life establishes an aura of authenticity about the tale and may set off by contrast the intensity of the tragic suffering. 2) Satire, since it by nature involves a standard of behavior, helps in tragedy to clarify the author's understanding of the moral responsibilities involved; and the tragic action itself may have satirical implications. Humor and satire also help to control the reader's sympathies, in opposite directions. 3) The humor of ambiguity and extravagance, already observed in some of Hawthorne's sketches, serves as an avenue through which the reader may enter more readily into the realms of the supernatural or the psychologically and morally symbolic than he would through a coldly literal and arbitrary presentation. 4) As tragedy requires involvement and concern, it implies the opposites of detachment and indifference, and an occasional intimation of this other point of view, if only through a coldness or remoteness of diction, serves to give a wholeness

³Cf. the Introduction, above. The categories here are slightly recast to fit less with theory and more with Hawthorne's practice. Relief, as a distinct use, is omitted because in the brief form of the short story, relief is seldom needed, as it may be argued to be in the drama or novel.

to the vision, possibly also a sense of intellectual control and hardness where the emotional content may otherwise become maudlin, sentimental, or so intense as to blur its moral or philosophical significance. When the point of view of comic detachment is not just momentarily assumed, but is actually fused with the interior consciousness of grief and wrong, the ironic view has of course been adopted and has the controlling uses just described. 5) The tragi-comic viewpoint, which laughs in despair upon finding the world absurd, though never the ultimate effect of a Hawthorne tale, may be involved as a means of showing the horror of the tragic disorientations the subjects of his tales may experience.

An exposition of some details of the stories will clarify and substantiate the conclusions just stated. The uses, of course, sometimes coincide; Hawthorne's ironic attitude toward Puritanism and democracy, for instance, is not always distinguishable from a tragicomic awareness of the consequences of their limitations.

1) The Humor of Everyday Life

Both of the uses mentioned for this mode of the comic are observable in "Ethan Brand." Among the elements of normal life, with regard to character, event, and circumstances,

humor is naturally one--a tolerant amusement in common humanity and variations in individuality. A fully authentic "setting," which may be the more necessary the more immediately incredible the narrative's hero may seem,⁴ includes this humor, and at the same time provides the ground base from which his extraordinary aspirations and deeds may be measured. The driving motive of Ethan Brand's life seems the more intense and terrible when seen in contrast with the relaxed realism of the townsfolk. At the same time it is the more believable because it has points of contact with a world recognizably real; any objections we may have are channeled through the remarks of characters within the story, who are as skeptical as we. Consequently, when they accept, we do, too.

Thus Bartram the lime-burner, an "obtuse, middle-aged clown" (III, 477), sends his boy Joe down to the tavern to "tell the jolly fellows there that Ethan Brand has come back" (III, 482). The "lazy regiment" from the village arrives (III, 485), no more fit to comprehend Ethan's hybris than Bartram. The stage-agent is

a wilted and smoke-dried man, wrinkled and red-nosed, in a smartly cut, brown, bobtailed coat, with brass buttons, who, for a length of time unknown, had kept his desk and corner in the bar-

⁴Cf. Stewart, American Notebooks, xxviii, xxix.

room, and was still puffing what seemed to be the same cigar that he had lighted twenty years before. He had great fame as a dry joker, though, perhaps, less on account of any intrinsic humor than from a certain flavor of brandy-toddy and tobacco-smoke, which impregnated all his ideas and expressions, as well as his person.

(III, 486)

Lawyer Giles is "an elderly ragamuffin," who somehow has a dignity despite the alcoholism which has ruined him (III, 486). A third is an alcoholic doctor. These "three worthies" are lower, of course, even than Bartram, who is on the true level of dull normality. Others in the crowd, most of whom form "a merry scene" by the light of the fire, include curious young men and girls who soon weary of observing the externally unremarkable figure of legend and give their attention to the old German Jew and his diorama, the "abominable deficiency of merit" of which is fully shown (III, 490). Next, a "great, elderly dog," "this grave and venerable quadraped, of his own mere motion, . . . began to run round after his tail, which, to heighten the absurdity of the proceeding, was a great deal shorter than it should have been" (III, 492).

Authenticity and contrast are provided by these humorous elements in the story. But they are so selected and so managed that they do more. The alcoholics, the showman, the dog, all provide occasions for expositions of Ethan's

thoughts, character, and circumstance. Moreover, when the crowd is suddenly dispelled by Brand's tragic laughter, the loneliness of his meditation which immediately follows is intensified by the sudden absence of merry, loud humanity.

Nearly all of the humorous characters used in "Ethan Brand" are rather close adaptations from passages recorded in the journal Hawthorne kept at North Adams in 1838. However, the "quirks and quips and eccentricities" of an "underwitted old man" who appears in the notebooks are entirely eliminated in the story (III, 488-489); the note itself ends with the injunction: "Conceive something tragical. . . ."⁵ Similarly, the more humorous aspects of the originals for the three drunken "worthies" are toned down or eliminated in the tale, in order to emphasize the contrast between their brutishness and Ethan's intellectuality.⁶ And the most humorous character observed in North Adams, a blacksmith, does not appear at all in "Ethan Brand."⁷ From the various comical activities of the numerous dogs in North Adams,⁸ only

⁵American Notebooks, p. 35.

⁶Cf. American Notebooks, pp. 36-39, and III, 486-488.

⁷American Notebooks, p. 38; the character was used in "The Artist of the Beautiful." Other humorous characters in North Adams not used in "Ethan" may be found on pp. 55, 57.

⁸American Notebooks, pp. 37, 40, 57-58, 59.

the last-recorded, the one that ran senselessly in circles, is used in the story, obviously because of the analogy with Ethan. The account of his absurd behavior is even extended, but the detail that he "had been taught this trick" is significantly dropped; it had to be made to seem self-induced. In the tale, little Joe is substituted for the "country boor" who stuck his head into the diorama, and the incident ends with Joe's horror at Ethan's gaze rather than in universal merriment, as originally.⁹ All of these facts indicate ways in which Hawthorne economically drew upon and modified his material to achieve several effects with single items. The realistic humor desired is obtained within elements thematically relevant to the tragedy of the tale, so there is no loss of unity of tone. From a wealth of characters and odd incidents which could have been used, Hawthorne made disciplined choices of only those which would not be entirely tangential or intrusive.¹⁰

In some tales a homely social humor is employed to

⁹Cf. American Notebooks, 59, and III, 491.

¹⁰Several genetic studies of "Ethan Brand," with different aims than mine, have been made. They include: Bliss Perry, The Amateur Spirit (Boston, 1904), pp. 119-139; C. A. Reilly, "On the Dog's Chasing His Own Tale in 'Ethan Brand,'" PMLA, LXVIII (Dec. 1953), 975-981; and R. Stewart, "Ethan Brand," Saturday Review of Literature, V (April 27, 1929), 967. Reilly's detailed comparison relates the original incident to the tale's themes, but mentions the comic use.

contribute to an attractive center of warmth which contrasts with a cold and lonely alternative. Like the bright fire-side circles Hawthorne describes himself as spying in upon in "Night Sketches" (I, 482-483), two families, the one gathered around the hearth in "The Ambitious Guest," and the other seated at the dinner table in "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving," are opposed respectively to the young guest with the driving ambition which sets him apart from others, and to the wayward daughter who has in a life of sin sacrificed her right to normal social comforts. In "The Ambitious Guest" there is also a gentle, natural humor in the self-consciousness of the guest after his ardent declaration of ambition (I, 368) and in the wife's quiet teasing of her husband (I, 369). The humor gives an attractiveness to all the characters which makes the counterpointed dark fore-shadowings of the ultimate catastrophe more disturbing and the denouement itself more appalling. The family circle in "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" is a saddened group when the tale begins, but upon the unexpected appearance of the lost daughter, it gradually warms to a level of merry and even comic behavior: John Inglefield's "rough visage" is described as brightening "with the glow of his heart, as it grew warm and merry within him," and "The grave young minister became as frolicsome as a school-boy" (I, 588-589).

In the stories so far considered, the contrast achieved is integral to the themes of the tales. For the "Legends of the Province House" Hawthorne provided a framework which serves purely as an artistic foil. Mr. Bela Tiffany, a regular at the Province House (I, 292-293), which has degenerated into a tavern, and his friend the venerable loyalist (see especially I, 328-329), are humorous old men whose characters, together with the genial circumstances in which they join Hawthorne in drinking and eating, sharply set off the grim tales they narrate.

Both thematic contrast and verisimilitude are provided by some of the touches of humor in "The Minister's Black Veil" and "The White Old Maid," two of the gloomiest and least realistic of the tales. Both show the natural reactions of common, slightly superstitious people to a single person who has adopted a morbid eccentricity. Father Hooper and the "Old Maid in the Winding Sheet" are made at least to live in worlds where gossip is loved and where reactions to an event vary greatly in accordance with the individuality of each perceiver. This is shown in the first half of "The Minister's Black Veil" (I, 52-61) and in the last half of "The White Old Maid" (I, 418-427). The entire catastrophe of "The White Old Maid" is, in fact, seen through the eyes of the curious but half-frightened

spectators. Following a vivid description of the bustling seaport street with all its signs of normal life, a lounging Liverpool captain makes the incongruous remark in the idiom of all comic seamen, "I espy a strange sail, yonder," referring to the White Old Maid herself (I, 418). From here on, the Old Maid is seen only from such an external point of view, which is like that of Bartram, in Ethan Brand, and never shifts over to the meditations or soliloquies of the main character.

The most effective and remarkable instance of humor in "The Minister's Black Veil," however, is of a different kind. It occurs with this passage:

The children babbled of it on their way to school. One imitative imp covered his face with an old black handkerchief, thereby so affrighting his playmates that the panic seized himself, and he well-nigh lost his wits by his own waggery.

(I, 59-60)

The truthfulness in the comedy of this childish parody and its effect somehow reflects back upon the original black veil. It is an illustration of the principle of fiction and particularly of romance that the credibility of successive consequences will obscure the unbelievability of the original premise.

Finally, a realistic humor for both authenticity and contrast is provided in "Rappaccini's Daughter" by the

character of Baglioni, Rappaccini's rival scientist. He is the only convincingly human person among the four main characters, and he is the only one both humorously portrayed and possessing a sense of humor himself. His love of wine, his professional jealousy, his human concern, even his inefficacious antidote, make him a real person through whom the physically and spiritually noxious and unreal trio maintain an unwilling contact with a normal world by which they can be judged. Of his several traits, his professional jealousy is the most comically conceived, since it is partially on the basis of this irrational motive that Baglioni nevertheless manages to make an accurate estimate of Rappaccini. Edward H. Rosenberry has found Baglioni's personality "jarringly Chaucerian" in a way which he says "has overshadowed the moral importance of two acts his author gave him to perform."¹¹ It is difficult to see why the fact of Baglioni's having some humorous traits should prevent us from taking his actions seriously. There is nothing satirical or farcical in his presentation; his social nature is a consistent element within his larger concern for individuals and society; his professional jealousy, far from detracting seriously from his dignity, indirectly emphasizes the fact

¹¹"Hawthorne's Allegory of Science: 'Rappaccini's Daughter'," American Literature, XXXII (March 1960), 44.

that he is Rappaccini's rival, and second in intellect only to that towering figure. His chief function in the story as a foil to Rappaccini makes it essential that he be the balanced human he is, which means being in some sense humorous and having humor himself.

2) Satire

If humor may be used to ingratiate a character with the reader, satire can serve the opposite purpose. In the tragic Shaker tales Hawthorne effectually prevents any sense of attractiveness in the village, such as he himself had felt,¹² not merely by painting the Shakers coldly, but by satirizing their motives and character:

It required . . . a more than feminine strength of nerve, to sustain the fixed observance of men so exalted and famous throughout the sect as these were. They had overcome their natural sympathy

¹²The Shakers are humorously (and therefore attractively) described by Hawthorne in a letter (reprinted in Lathrop, pp. 144-45) he wrote shortly after his first visit to their village. The humorous point of view, however, would have conflicted with the themes of the tales, and is completely absent. Hyatt H. Waggoner, in Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 29-31, 65, attributes the difference between letter and tales to the selectivity of an artist. But Seymour L. Gross, in "Hawthorne and the Shakers," American Literature, XXIX (Jan. 1958), 457-463, argues convincingly that the selectivity was probably guided by Hawthorne's reading of Thomas Brown's An Account of the People Called Shakers, which he withdrew from the Salem Athanaeum just ten days after his letter to Louisa, and which emphasizes the estrangement, lack of sympathy, and unnatural ways in the Shaker village--the very themes of Hawthorne's tales.

with human frailties and affections. One, when he joined the Society, had brought with him his wife and children, but never, from that hour, had spoken a fond word to the former, or taken his best-loved child upon his knee. Another, whose family refused to follow him, had been enabled--such was his gift of holy fortitude--to leave them to the mercy of the world.

("The Shaker Bridal," I, 474)

It is only a touch in a picture which is generally somber and repellent in its own realism, but it is enough to make very certain Hawthorne's own standards of human relationships, the unnatural violation of which is causing the tragic effect on the Shaker "bride."

Two candidates for equally unattractive status in the village are satirized with as little mercy in "The Canterbury Pilgrims." They are the same types as those who are contrasted with the young couple in "The Great Carbuncle," as these are here with Miriam and Josiah. Malcontents and failures, they hope to find in the Shaker village what their likes had sought of the Great Carbuncle. The vain poetaster is merely absurd, and the speculator is short-sighted and materially ambitious even in his hopes for life among the Shakers; the portraits of both are satirical. This story is prevented from being in essence another "Great Carbuncle," by the presence of two other pilgrims who are very different from the types who were searching for the precious

stone, and are not satirized. They are a middle-aged married couple with their children. They have simply, through no fault of their own and despite hard work, suffered such continual reverses and hardships that their will to begin again has died, while the frustrations have corroded their love. They are, they say, what Miriam and Josiah will become. Such is their verisimilitude and tragic relevance to the hopeful young couple, that the two artificial satirical characters seem out of place, and distinctly mar a tale of moving realism.

In the stories with Puritan settings, as we have already seen in considering the Puritan material, Hawthorne satirizes the religious leaders on the points of pride, narrowness, and excessive gloom. Seymour L. Gross has called attention to an instance of Hawthorne's revising his satire of the Puritans,¹³ which is particularly interesting because it shows Hawthorne's consciousness that even idle satire can tip the balance of moral responsibility when, in a tragic tale, the principals of the conflict must be in some degree beyond human judgment, the victims of their own follies, weaknesses, and crimes. The case in question occurs in "The

¹³"Hawthorne's Revision of 'The Gentle Boy'," American Literature, XXVI (May 1954), 196-208.

Gentle Boy" when the minister, who had once "practically learned the meaning of persecution from Archbishop Laud, and was not now disposed to forget the lesson against which he had murmured then," preaches against the Quakers (I, 98). The simple, factual details of his case against the Quakers alone point out the irony of the situation, just as the setting in "Endicott and the Red Cross" makes the same point. Toward tyrannic but heroic anti-tyrannists of the past, only irony is suitable. A contemptuous characterization of the minister's style, which was what Hawthorne cut out, was irrelevant to the tragic counterpoise between the Puritans and Quakers. It tended to degrade a strong and critical presentation of the Puritans' ironic situation into a trivial personal animosity. As Hawthorne felt this for many of the Puritan divines and for the dissenters--especially female dissenters such as Anne Hutchinson (see XII, 217)--it was necessary, in writing a tragic tale based on the essence of the conflict, not to let these ulterior feelings intrude. In the end, this kind of satire seems to be ill-suited to tragedy, and careful prevision or revision cuts it out.

There is, however, a sense in which the action and characters of a tragedy can have a satirical effect, though they in themselves are not satirized. Consider, for

instance, whether the life and search of Ethan Brand do not in effect satirize the dull normality of a Bartram, or the boorish self-destruction of the alcoholics who offer Ethan a drink as a cure for his intellectual despair. One may wonder, too, whether the positive virtues of a Baglioni do not seem timid and colorless beside the daring freedom and creativity of Rappaccini. The Hamlets and Fausts of literature have always been intimidating.

3) The Humor of Ambiguity and Extravagance

Variations of the type of humor previously observed in the "sketches of pure invention" can be found in many of the tales. This humor, which delights in an ambiguity about the nature of the reality which exists in fiction,¹⁴ and in a deliberately irrational extravagance of thought and

¹⁴Hawthorne's most extravagant and delightful development of this occurs in the final section of the framing action of A Wonder-Book, where the children are discussing authors who live in the neighborhood of Tanglewood with Eustace Bright, their story-teller:

"Have we not an author for our next neighbor?" asked Primrose. "That silent man, who lives in the old red house. . . . I think I have heard of his having written a poem, or a romance, or an arithmetic, or a school-history, or some other kind of book."

"Hush, Primrose, hush!" exclaimed Eustace. . . . "Not a word about that man . . . ! If our babble were to reach his ears, and happen not to please him, he has but to fling a quire or two of paper into the stove. . . . something whispers to me that he has a terrible power over ourselves, extending to nothing short of annihilation" (IV, 196-197).

violation of credibility, is used as an amiable way of introducing supernatural or uncanny effects which might otherwise repel, of heightening atmosphere, and of dealing with excessively unreal types who nevertheless suffer and have allegorical moral significance.

The simplest instance of the first use is in the framework of the "Tales of the Province House." Giving the tales through the medium of memories affected by age and wine is a method of excusing the more incredible aspects of some of them. The ironic attestations to the "truth-telling accents of the elderly gentleman" (I, 289) themselves become a part of the humor of the framework. Hawthorne pokes fun here, as he does throughout "Main Street,"¹⁵ at the pedants and literalists who insist upon strict accuracy and will not accept romantic history in the spirit in which it is written (I, 326-327).

Similarly, "The Wedding Knell" is a grandmother's "favorite narrative" (I, 41), "An Old Woman's Tale" is just that, and many other tales admit some humorous dubiety about the sources.

The romantic and supernatural atmosphere of some tales

¹⁵See the objections to the showman's art, and his replies: III, 442, 447-8, 454-455, 465-466, 476.

is augmented by this kind of humor. In "Ethan Brand," for instance, Bartram's superstitious musings on all the fantastic legends which had grown up about Ethan (III, 483) are humorous in origin and in their own fantastic extremity; yet, concerning Satan as they do, they suggest symbolically the reality of Brand's evil career. The specifics of the superstitious reactions of the people in "The Minister's Black Veil" and "The White Old Maid" are likewise humorous in their extravagance, while in their connotations they add to the darkness or weirdness of the atmosphere. In "Young Goodman Brown," the old man's staff (II, 91, 93), shaped like a snake, is at first said to have seemed alive only as a humorous fancy, caused by "ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light" (II, 91), but its ambiguous nature actually foreshadows a striking instance of what D. H. Monroe, in Argument of Laughter, terms "universe-changing."¹⁶ From the apparently normal universe of predictability Young Goodman Brown walks further into the amorphous world of the demonic. The effects, when sudden, are frequently comic: Goody Cloyse, "a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth," is quietly approached by the old man, while Brown hides in the woods.

¹⁶Monro, p. 46.

She . . . was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and mumbling some indistinct words--a prayer, doubtless--as she went. The traveller put forth his staff and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail.

"The devil!" screamed the pious old lady.

"Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?" observed the traveller, confronting her and leaning on his writhing stick.

"Ah, forsooth, and is it your worship indeed?"

(II, 93-94)

The comic shift turns upon the discovery that a conventional ejaculation has a literal application, with a consequent alteration in assumptions about probability. Humorously, we find that Goody Cloyse's witches' nonsense about the "juice of smallage, and cinquefoil, and wolf's bane," "mingled" (the Devil completing her recipe) "with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe," is no mere foolishness in this world, where one witch can refer to another who has stolen her broomstick as "that unhangd witch, Goody Cory" (II, 94), and the drop of the devil's rod can transport her to her destination (II, 95). For Hawthorne's frame of reference in writing this witches' humor, it is significant to discover that his details are derived, not from Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World, but from Cervantes' "The Conversation of the Dogs."¹⁷

¹⁷See Fannye N. Cherry, "The Sources of Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" American Literature, V (Jan. 1934), 342-348.

A third use of the humor of extravagance is in those tales which deal with decidedly "odd" characters who, though evincing psychological suffering, are clearly types which might easily have been the subjects for comedy. Some of the methods of comedy are in fact employed. Hawthorne's method of character-creation was generally deductive,¹⁸ a method common to comedies such as those of Molière, in which a person is likely to be a monomaniac embodying a single concept, such as avarice. Rigid personalities and people with over-riding obsessions are to be found universally in comic writing, because their consistency of reaction in a variety of circumstances is certain often to be inappropriate and cause laughter. They are necessarily artificial, and must be externally presented. If their behavior is regarded, however, as pathological, and is conducive to irremediable harm either to themselves or others, or if their own point of view is sometimes sympathetically taken, the story is not comic--it does not cause laughter. Unquestionably Molière's miser could not be laughed at so

* ¹⁸Cf. Henry A. Beers, Four Americans (New Haven, 1919), p. 33: ". . . Hawthorne's fiction is almost wholly ideal. He does not copy life like Thackeray, whose procedure is inductive: does not start with observed characters, but with an imagined problem or situation of the soul, inventing characters to fit." Quoted by Stewart, American Notebooks, p. xlii.

easily if there were not benign elders around to abrogate the consequences of his behavior for his children. The fact that we are made to sympathize with Molière's misanthrope alters the nature of our laughter in that play.¹⁹

The kind of Hawthorne tale we are concerned with here emphasizes either the fact of the consequences or of internal suffering to such a degree that it cannot be classified as a "comic" tale. Yet its extravagance of conception and artificiality of execution allow us to approach it in this way. "The Man of Adamant" and "Egotism, or The Bosom Serpent" are hyperbolic expositions of abstract concepts of egotism--spiritual pride, and jealousy, respectively. (The deductive nature is indicated even by the generalized titles, a familiar device of comedy.) Both tales are concerned with the disastrously isolating effects of these qualities. In the details of the hyperbolism and in their abstract conception, they tend toward the comic; in their serious concern for consequences, they counteract that tendency.

Roderick Elliston, of "The Bosom Serpent," is said at once to be "the victim either of a diseased fancy or a horrible physical misfortune" (II, 303), a statement which orients the reader immediately away from comedy's idea of

¹⁹See above, pp. 11-13.

the egotistical and the jealous as simple fools. The point of view, moreover, is that of a concerned friend. In contrast, the opening pages of "The Man of Adamant" (III, 564-566) paint Richard Digby as a plain fool, and the tone is external and contemptuous. Not until Mary Goffe, the self-sacrificing disciple who loves him, appears to be rejected by him and yet to pity him, does the tale involve sufficient particularization and passion to cause the man to seem criminal as well as foolish. Rosina, Roderick's wife, likewise is the center of concern in "Egotism," and she (Love) and Herkimer (Reason) are surprisingly efficacious in the end, where Hawthorne, in a unique "unqualified expression of Christian optimism,"²⁰ effects a denouement as miraculous and incredible as the happiest reunion of any estranged couple of comedy. Upon Richard's rapidly petrifying heart, poor Mary Goffe has no effect whatever; spiritual pride may be less easy to eradicate than simple jealousy.

The morals of both stories are simple, clear, and seriously intended. Yet it is difficult to take either story seriously. This is because no matter how much Hawthorne tries to control the point of view in "Egotism," or

²⁰John W. Shroeder, "Hawthorne's 'Egotism; or The Bosom Serpent' and Its Source," American Literature, XXXI (May 1959), 150.

to infuse gloom into the final pages of "The Man of Adamant," the mechanically literal development of the symbolism is funny. He knew the danger he ran. In the American notebooks he once wrote the following:

To make literal pictures of figurative expressions;--for instance, he burst into tears--a man suddenly turned into a shower of briny drops. An explosion of laughter--a man blowing up, and his fragments flying about on all sides. He cast his eyes upon the ground--a man standing eyeless, with his eyes on the ground, staring up at him in wonderment &c &c &c.²¹

This note cannot have been written without laughter, even though Hawthorne took the first idea seriously as a conception for a fountain-sculpture.²² Both stories were written before this note,²³ but can their literal pictures of the figurative expressions "stony heart" and "snake in the bosom"²⁴ have been drawn without a smile? Certainly the

²¹American Notebooks, p. 107. Written between Oct. 13, 1844, and March 12, 1845.

²²See Passages From the French and Italian Notebooks (Complete Works, X), 217.

²³"Man of Adamant": 1836; "Egotism": 1843. See Chandler, pp. 59; 33, 61.

²⁴In a footnote to his title, Hawthorne makes a further effort to make us suspend disbelief: "The physical fact, to which it is here attempted to give a moral signification, has been known to occur in more than one instance" (II, 303). This is sufficiently vague, and one is tempted to wonder if an "instance" Hawthorne had in mind might not have been one from Cotton Mather, whose reports he elsewhere characterizes

conception of the one in a Puritan context and of the other under the influence of Spencer's moral allegory²⁵ kept them even in their genesis from being the merely idle fancies of the notebook. Yet, intended or not, some of the comedy of taking metaphors literally pervades both stories,²⁶

as "old-wives' tales." Mather's story is of "a young man in High-Holbourn, who being after his death dissected, there was a serpent with divers tails found in the left ventricle of his heart." (Magnalia [Hartford, 1855], I, 35)

²⁵Cf. The Faerie Queene, I, iv, 31, ll. 3-5 (the description of Envy), and Randall Stewart, "Hawthorne and The Faerie Queene," Philological Quarterly, XII (April 1933), 196-206.

²⁶In Sir Walter Scott's Bride of Lammermoor, Ch. 6, the snake metaphor is used:

"Yes, Bucklaw," said the Master, "you have indeed nourished in your bosom the snakes that are now stinging you."

"That's home as well as true, Master," replied his companion; "but, by your leave, you have nursed in your bosom one great goodly snake that has swallowed all the rest. . . ."

. . . "What, to speak without a metaphor, do you call this monstrous passion, which you charge me with fostering?"

"Revenge, my good sir, revenge. . . ."

Somehow in Hawthorne's "Egotism" one keeps waiting for someone to say to Elliston, "What, to speak without a metaphor, do you call this monstrous passion?"

An excellent discussion of Hawthorne's difficulty with this kind of symbol may be found in Rudolph von Abele, The Death of the Artist (The Hague, 1955), Ch. II, "Hawthorne's Bosom Serpent." Hawthorne's inferior technique is skillfully differentiated from that of Kafka in The Metamorphosis.

and is further invited by the lightness of tone which enters through Hawthorne's satirical attitude toward Digby and by the device of Elliston's satirical commentary on other people. "Egotism" has been said to have its source, not only in idea but even in plot and structure, from Book I of The Faerie Queene.²⁷ The parallelisms between the two hardly seem sufficient to warrant a very complete identification. In spirit and plan of development Hawthorne's tale is really much closer to Cervantes' "Man of Glass," which likewise concerns a man with a "diseased fancy"; he conceives himself to be made of glass, which brings upon him great public attention and gives a license for satirical attacks on various representative figures. In both stories a satirical episode dominates a large section and is developed in a catalogue or processional fashion. The tales are by no means consistently parallel, and, although it is possible Hawthorne knew this as well as other tales by Cervantes,²⁸ the purpose of the comparison is to suggest not a source but merely a category of writing to which "Egotism" more surely belongs--a kind of moral-psychological fantasy--than

²⁷See Shroeder, n. 20, above.

²⁸His sister Elizabeth was engaged for some time in translating Cervantes' tales. See American Notebooks, pp. 246, 331-332. It is interesting to note that Cervantes' tale ends unhappily, although the man is cured.

it does with The Faerie Queene, whatever the connection with the latter on the point of allegorical idea.

In "Wakefield" Hawthorne concerns himself with the consequences of another psychological quirk. He is both amused and intrigued by an action which he supposes stemmed from a "morbid vanity" (I, 157), but persists in calling a "freak" (I, 153), a "folly" (154), a "frolic" (157), and a mere "whim-wham" (159). The man who perpetrated the action --which is simply an extreme case of "marital delinquency" in the form of an absence from home at the distance of a city block for a space of some twenty years (I, 153)--is called "foolish" (156), "feeble-minded" (157), and a "nin-compoop" (159). The story is presented in its neutral bare facts in the first paragraph, and Hawthorne acknowledges the variety of possible treatments of it when he invites the reader to give it his own or to follow Hawthorne in his

ramble through the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary, trusting that there will be a pervading spirit and a moral, even should we fail to find them, done up neatly, and condensed in a single sentence.

(I, 154)

The "pervading spirit" tries to be something else than what is suggested by the terms quoted above (the incident is intended to appeal to "the generous sympathies of mankind" (153)), but it does not succeed very well. An occasional

burst of exclamatory prose cannot relieve the monotony and the essentially detached nature of an idle and arbitrary speculation on a mere curiosity. Hawthorne might have done something with the incident if he had presented Wakefield as he had to be, internally conceived, and not as in the first instance a newspaper item whose motives had to be supplied.

A more earnest--and more successful--attempt to wring a tragic moral from an extreme act of eccentricity may be found in "The Wedding Knell." The inappropriateness of romantic love in the aged, and of a woman making a "fool" of herself (I, 42-43) in an attempt to remain young, are favorite themes of comedy--almost, indeed, standard in the Restoration and eighteenth century. But the Mrs. Wishforts never learn. They have comic consistency. Hawthorne's Mrs. Dabney does learn; and it is her growth to wisdom and resignation through the effects of Mr. Ellenwood's act of appearing at his wedding in a shroud which chiefly justifies and makes acceptable the shocking eccentricity of his act. The embarrassing and comic incongruity of the preliminary knelling of the bell as the wedding party gathers is allowed its effect, even as the congregation itself enjoys "a few suppressed titterings" and "ill-natured merriment" (I, 46). But by getting so thoroughly inside Mrs. Dabney, showing her uneasy reminiscences and dark premonitions, Hawthorne manages to

convince us that this is true regret and real grief and, in the denouement, actual resignation. These qualities go a long way toward overcoming the ludicrous aspects of the affair and the rather too explicit and declamatory manner in which the bride and bridegroom reach their final resolution.

None of these stories of eccentrics and madmen are first-rate; none has the power even of "The Minister's Black Veil," which was liable to some of the same dangers. Mechanical structure, lightness of tone, unwarranted extravagance of thought, detachment and externality of approach, abstractness of conception, and half-acknowledged ludicrousness of situation, have been shown to be some of the factors contributing to their relative unsucccess. None of these aspects would matter, indeed some would be essential, if the stories were comic. But these elements of the comic, when merely adjoined to a sober philosophical or psychological concern, cause an ambivalence, a clumsy uncertainty of attitude, an alternation in vision, which is very different from the fused double vision of irony.

4) Detached Comic View and Irony

"Rappaccini's Daughter" is, like The Marble Faun, a variation on the theme of the Fall of Man. When this theme is focussed on the Fall's consequences within the earthly

and social confines of man's existence, it is tragic. All tragedies, in their dual cognizance of the limitations and contingencies of man's nature on the one hand and of his ideal capacity on the other, have this theme implicit within them. The tragic effect of a work with this theme is modified only when the idea of the soul's salvation is forcefully posited in counterpoise with it, as in Paradise Lost or The Divine Comedy. The conception of the felix culpa is significantly but ambiguously present in The Marble Faun; in "Rappaccini's Daughter" there are brief but positive assertions of Beatrice's salvation (II, 145, 147), while the final emphasis is on the consequences of Rappaccini's act within society; in The Scarlet Letter the focus is on the earthly suffering from which Dimmesdale is finally relieved by an act of Grace, not on the joy of the soul's salvation; and a hope of a reunion with Hester, which might compensate for the tragic entanglement of this life, is explicitly discouraged. These represent three different degrees of modification of the tragic effect with religious belief. To the degree that some such mitigating concept is employed, a work becomes in a sense more optimistic. Where there is greater optimism of this kind, the detached comic viewpoint becomes more possible, even more appropriate, because the finite sufferings with which one is involved in tragedy may become

less significant. In the transition, there need be no sense of incongruity, for comedy also acknowledges the fallen state, the smallness, the weakness. But it takes a god's-eye view, not the interior, anguished view of a particular man. To believe in immortality is to an extent to take a god's-eye view of man's span on earth;²⁹ when this view is combined with a laughing, even loving, tolerance, a wholeness of vision is achieved very different from both pure tragedy and pure farce, which are necessarily exclusive forms. If in combining, or alternating points of view, something is lost in aesthetic effect, this would seem to indicate that what is fruitful and good for a philosophy of life may not be so for an aesthetic form. But that is a question which can be answered, not absolutely, but only with reference to particular works, because it involves several variables: the degree of fusion, the nature of the specific material treated, the skill of transitions, and the particular genre--epic, novel, short story, drama.

²⁹To what extent, of course, depends upon other beliefs; if salvation of the individual soul on the basis of life on earth is believed in, a detached view is less possible. On the whole question, see Nathan A. Scott, Jr., ed., The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith (New York, 1957), especially Chapter I, Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, "Biblical Faith and the Idea of Tragedy," Cherbonnier has rather rigid conceptions of what constitutes "Biblical Faith" and what "Tragedy," but his general distinctions seem valid.

The occasional episodes narrated with comic detachment in "Rappaccini's Daughter"--the encounter in the street between Giovanni, Baglioni, and Rappaccini (II, 123-125), the passage on Giovanni in love (II, 132-133)--have a sane, unchanged air about them, as of the spectator simply observing how men are--how the young dislike advice; how the old love to give it; how arrogance and rivalry reduce fellow professionals to cold civilities; how a snub invites revenge; how a young man in love distorts truth and ignores the evidence of his own senses. The implications that people are puppets sometimes controlled by petty vanities and motivated by egotistic self-delusions are not in conflict with the judgments that a man's aspiration--noble as it may be said to be (II, 117)--to forbidden knowledge and to the power of creation (II, 142), can have tragic effects; that the suffering caused by cruel egotism--either Rappaccini's or Giovanni's--must be regretted; that the waste of humanity and beauty, in the figure of Beatrice with her "grief . . . beyond passion" (II, 144), may be legitimately moving. Sentimentality is avoided in the end partly because the total series of events has been seen with a steadiness which did not give way to sympathetic involvement on each slight occasion. The perspective varies judiciously, even to comic detachment when necessary. Because previous occasions for

melodrama were not exploited, the infusion of emotion at the denouement is experienced without reluctance; there is no suspicion of a melodramatic betrayal.

In other tales of the tragic vision brief passages such as those observed in "Rappaccini's Daughter," where the detached comic view suggests momentarily another perspective on the characters, may be found. The view is taken in the presentations of the initial naiveté of Young Goodman Brown and of "shrewd" Robin in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux."³⁰ "Can this be so?" cries Brown "with a stare of amazement," when his "undisturbed companion" informs him of the powerful men who are the "firm supporters" of the Devil's interests (II, 92-93). And the Devil roars with laughter. The stage-like movement of the character throughout this tale has been well observed by R. H. Fogle:

The temptation has at first the stylized and abstract delicacy of Restoration comedy or of the formalized seductions of Moliere's Don Juan. The simple goodman, half-eager and half-reluctant, is wholly at the mercy of Satan, who leads him step by step to the inevitable end.³¹

The comic perspective comes for a moment, too, in the

³⁰On Robin, see below, end of chapter.

³¹Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, 1952), p. 28. See also pp. 31-32, particularly the observation of Satan's incongruous stateliness and decorum at the initiation ceremony itself.

child's parody in "The Minister's Black Veil," an incident already observed in another connection. The symbol is meaningless as the child adopts it, but its inherent power of terrorizing is nevertheless proven. The episode suggests that from a detached point of view Father Hooper's act and the attitude it represents are arbitrary; that the nature and effect of the symbol are more powerful than is consistent with its cause. But it would be wrong to carry this idea so far as to wish the entire story had "a certain dry sparkle and lightness," so that its "moral,"--if its moral is that "the steady view of life" is "the highest good"³²--would be more certain. But the fact that this view is suggested is no argument that it is or should be the predominant one. Fogle's objections to an alternative reading, which makes the tale "a homily on secret sin," do not seem very cogent. An "apparent disproportion between the act and its causes" is no unusual thing in tragic writing; that Hooper "is to outward gaze the gentlest and the least sinful of men" ought to have been of no account to anyone who had read Oedipus Rex or even The Scarlet Letter; and that "we" have "no vivid sense of that presence of Evil which would necessitate so heroic an object lesson"³³ would seem to be the very point

³²Fogle, p. 35.

³³Ibid.

of the tale. "We" are not Father Hoopers, "we" are the congregation:

Each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardened breast, felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought. Many spread their clasped hands on their bosoms.

(I, 55)

Hawthorne almost always backs up his evil-see-ers; the most innocent girl, here, as in "The Bosom Serpent,"³⁴ is tainted, not just in the eyes of the guilty, but absolutely. The extreme consciousness of evil on Father Hooper's part stems precisely from the fact that he is so good:

If he erred at all, it was by so painful a degree of self-distrust, that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent act as a crime.

(I, 60)

He is like "the just, the pure, the true" in "The Procession of Life," who are of all people "most conscious of error and imperfection" (II, 244). A degree of callousness on the part of general mankind makes us fail to see the veils on all our faces (I, 69), or to feel sufficiently motivated by secret sin to emulate Hooper (I, 62). It is ironic

³⁴Roderick "took a fair young girl by the hand, and gazing sadly into her eyes, warned her that she cherished a serpent of the deadliest kind within her gentle breast; and the world found the truth of those ominous words, when, a few months afterwards, the poor girl died of love and shame." (II, 312)

that only an innocent child actually does imitate him. Like it or not, this would seem to be the moral of the story. If Hawthorne hints at another way of taking it, that is at least an admission that truth is dialectical; but both sides need not be stated at once. The child's parody of the minister no more undermines the meaningfulness of Hooper's act than the Pyncheon chickens of The House of the Seven Gables, in suggesting the aristocratic degeneration of Clifford and Hepzibah, make us suppose that the waste of human lives does not matter.

In Hawthorne's ironic voice we do find both sides of truth stated at once. To his detachment he sometimes adds a consciousness of the tragic; or, which is more often the case, to his regret or awareness of evil he sometimes brings a tone of detachment and an air of resignation to the duality of existence. This irony, which is so pervasive in "Young Goodman Brown," seems to be the over-riding criterion by which Fogle praises that story and criticizes others, such as "The Minister's Black Veil." Certainly it is often effective. It was essential to the presentation of the uncertainties of existence which stem from the disparities between appearance and reality, between the ideal and the actual, with which "Young Goodman Brown" (like Melville's "Benito Cereno," in which the experience of evil has a

similar effect) is concerned. In other stories it serves, as Robert A. Durr has observed, as a "structural antithesis" or counterpoise to sentimental tendencies or hyperbolic symbols in the materials. Thus Bartram "saves" "Ethan Brand" by being to its monomaniac hero what Sancho is to Quixote, what Stubb is to Ahab, that is, a counterweight to a character who would have given the work "a singularity of temper."³⁵ So also the mixed attitude of the narrator makes "The Devil in Manuscript" tolerable and effective in a way it could not have been if Oberon had given his own lament directly. And so, for a final example, an "opposing 'voice'"³⁶ is introduced into "Endicott and the Red Cross" by the mere (but emphatic) presence of Roger Williams and by the sharply etched setting with its evidences of tyranny.

It may be that Hawthorne ought to have employed his ironic mode more frequently than he did; Fogle implies that it would have helped one story, and Durr says "The Bosom Serpent" fails for lack of it. But in the modern fondness for irony, for dialectics instead of sermons,³⁷ we ought not to blind ourselves to the strength of a tale told from a frankly partisan view. Perhaps by having both sides of a

³⁵"Hawthorne's Ironic Mode," New England Quarterly, XXX (1957), 493-495.

³⁶Ibid., p. 495.

³⁷Ibid.

truth stated never except through irony, the aesthetic power of presenting the one side alone may be lost.

5) The Tragi-Comic

The basis of Hawthorne's satirical laughter was usually, as we have seen, the comprehensive belief in man's incapacity for perfection, by which all his vast pretensions and efforts at progress are seen to be follies. Taking the thought a step further, he wrote in "Earth's Holocaust":

How sad a truth, if true it were, that man's
agelong endeavor for perfection had served only
to render him the mockery of the evil principle,
from the fatal circumstance of an error at the
very root of the matter!

(II, 455)

The implication is that man's endeavors have not achieved only this; but clearly they have achieved this much. We have been shown the devil laughing in his sleeve, giving his "portentious grin" (II, 455). In "The Birthmark," the same diabolic laughter issues from the mouth of the dark Aminadab when Aylmer, in his noble but mistaken attempt to achieve perfection in his wife, kills her. So laugh Appolyon in "The Celestial Railroad" and the old man in "Young Goodman Brown." So Oberon sees the devil laughing at him from the flames of his burning manuscripts. The laughter is, with modifications, that of Goethe's Mephistopheles and Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger.

Do we share this laughter? It is laughter at us, at our efforts, our achievements, our hopes, our sorrows.³⁸ It comes with the realization of their insignificance and absurdity. This is what the devil's laughter would convince us of; and when the Mysterious Stranger leaves Theodor at the end of Twain's book, he leaves him "appalled." Not so with Hawthorne; he makes us see through the devil's eyes and share in his laughter, but it is to bring us back then to the right perspective on man. He intends a lesson in humility, not an argument in despair. The fullness and beauty of life, the pleasures of common humanity, the democratic brotherhood of sinners, the satisfaction of humble tasks accomplished, the trust in immortality--these things are not laughed at. The laughter of the satires is not finally at man, but at those who forget man's fundamental nature. At his mother's deathbed, Hawthorne could think of the mockery that life would be--if there were no immortality.³⁹ And later he could laugh and be glad at what he

³⁸The witch's laugh at the end of "The Hollow of Three Hills" and the grin of Old Cicero in "The White Old Maid," both being directed wholly at suffering, are not of the satirical kind; they are restricted to an aspect of the diabolical point of view which we are never required to share. Instead their presence deepens the pathos of the contrasting human point of view.

³⁹American Notebooks, p. 210: "But God would not have

saw as Margaret Fuller's downfall, for it brought her back into her proper kinship with womankind..⁴⁰

"Young Goodman Brown" and "The Birthmark" have been mentioned as tragic stories in which the satirical effect of this diabolic laughter is employed. In these cases the devil himself or his representative does the laughing. But the laughter of despair, at a sudden loss of values or disorientation which makes the world and life absurd, is that of humans who have lost perspective, not gained a new one in humility. To identify, to sympathize with them, is to that extent to experience the tragic terror and to feel for them the tragic pathos that accompanies such a view of life.

made the close so dark and wretched, if there were nothing beyond; for then it would have been a fiend that created us, and measured out our existence, and not God. It would be something beyond wrong--it would be insult--to be thrust out of life into annihilation in this miserable way."

⁴⁰"Thus there appears to have been a total collapse in poor Margaret, morally and intellectually; and, tragic as her catastrophe was, Providence was, after all, kind in putting her and her clownish husband and their child on board that fated ship. There never was such a tragedy as her whole story, --the sadder and sterner, because so much of the ridiculous was mixed up with it, and because she could bear anything better than to be ridiculous. It was such an awful joke, that she should have resolved--in all sincerity, no doubt--to make herself the greatest, wisest, best woman of the age. . . . But she was not working on an inanimate substance, like marble or clay; there was something within her that she could not possibly come at, to re-create or refine it; and, by and by, this rude old potency bestirred itself, and undid all her labor in the twinkling of an eye. On the whole, I do not know but I like her the better for it; because she proved herself a very woman after all, and fell as the weakest of her sisters might." Quoted in Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne . . ., I, 261-262.

Ethan Brand and Goodman Brown laugh this laughter of despair. Of course we are seeing them externally as well, through the balanced and irony-tinged medium of Hawthorne's prose, and in the context of setting and contrasting characters he joins with them. But it is their fates which engage our interest--what happens, morally and psychologically, to them. To the end of feeling the depth of their despair, the painful laughter Hawthorne discovers to be an appropriate expression of their state is a contributing element. Goodman Brown, finding suddenly that he lives in a world of moral chaos, where nothing is as it appears to be, where "sin is but a name," loses his faith, and is "maddened with despair." He laughs "loud and long," and rushes onward then through the woods, laughing back at Nature itself, which seems to be laughing him "to scorn" (II, 99). The tale "Ethan Brand" begins with such laughter, heard in the dark night, and it is one of the recurring motifs of the tale. The child Joe senses at once the kind of laughter it is--not that of "a merry fellow," as his father says, for "he does not laugh like a man that is glad" (III, 477). Ethan's laughter is at the "infinite absurdity" of his own life, at having sought everywhere and done everything to discover what lay in his own breast, at having dissipated his character and energy in pursuing a too-high aim. He

laughs again when he tells of it, and Hawthorne here comments on this kind of laughter:

The solitary mountainside was made dismal by it. Laughter, when out of place, mistimed, or bursting forth from a disordered state of feeling, may be the most terrible modulation of the human voice. The laughter of one asleep, even if it be a little child,--the madman's laugh,--the wild, screaming laugh of a born idiot,--are sounds that we sometimes tremble to hear, and would always willingly forget. Poets have imagined no utterance of fiends or hobgoblins so fearfully appropriate as a laugh. And even the obtuse lime-burner felt his nerves shaken, as this strange man looked inward at his own heart, and burst into laughter that rolled away into the night, and was indistinctly reverberated among the hills.

(III, 482)

It is this laugh which later breaks up the party assembled on the hillside (III, 492), and it is with "a fearful peal of laughter" that "the lonely man" leaps to embrace the fire (III, 496). The laugh is consistent with the extremity of Brand's detachment, which is alienation. Mother earth, the brotherhood of man, the guiding stars of heaven--all three distinct sources of love--are successively rejected before the suicide (III, 496). In the meaninglessness of these for him--in his own absurdity--this once high and striving romantic soul finds the source of the tragicomic laughter which deepens the horror of his end.⁴¹

⁴¹The parallels between Ethan and Hawthorne's view of

The tragicomic attitude appears more quietly in the story "The Artist of the Beautiful," and in this case it serves only to convey something of the feeling of the artist in the progressive stages of his work. It fades altogether at the end, not, as in Brand, to give way to a fully tragic denouement ironically filtered through the insensitive point of view of a Bartram, but rather to allow a spiritual triumph for the artist. Before this triumph, however, there are years filled with periods of despair. At times the artist comes to believe that life, on the face of it, is absurd. The unfailingly destructive effects of the people around him, in their frustrating repetitiveness and certainty, become cumulatively comical, even while we pity the artist. When he also fails in his love affair--because his courting ridiculously occurs only in his "artist's imagining" (II, 522)--he becomes that despairing type which leaps not into fires but finds that there is "nothing left . . . but to sit down" (II, 523).

. . . the guise in which his sorrow came to him, the sense that the angel of his life had been snatched away and given to a rude man of earth and iron, and who could neither need nor appreciate her ministrations,--this was the very

Margaret Fuller, given in the preceding note, are worth observing, particularly as many of the tragicomic terms of his analysis of her life apply here. Ethan, of course, achieved a tragic self-awareness.

perversity of fate that makes human existence appear too absurd and contradictory to be the scene of one other hope or one other fear.

(II, 523)

We sympathize with Owen Warland, particularly in his struggle to create the beautiful, less so in his love, in which he is in any case self-deceived--a ludicrous tendency in entirely imaginative persons which Hawthorne does not disguise. This sympathy makes us feel the tragic burden of his laughter on one occasion at his own past high dreams (II, 585).⁴² And the anxious realization of man's frailty, of the apparently absurd indiscrimination of Death, reinforces the thematic undertone of existential tragicomedy:

. . . strong as he felt himself, he was incited to toil the more diligently by an anxiety lest death should surprise him in the midst of his labors. This anxiety, perhaps, is common to all men who set their hearts upon anything so high, in their own view of it, that life becomes of importance only as conditional to its accomplishment. So long as we love life for itself, we seldom dread the losing it. When we desire life for the attainment of an object, we recognize the frailty of its texture. But, side by side with this sense of insecurity, there is a vital faith in our invulnerability to the shaft of death while engaged in any task that seems assigned by Providence as our proper thing to do, and which the world would have cause to mourn for should we leave it unaccomplished. Can the philosopher, big with the inspiration of an idea that is to reform mankind, believe that he is to

⁴²Cf. Chapter Six, below, on the Blithedale Romance.

be beckoned from this sensible existence at the very instant when he is mustering his breath to speak the word of light? Should he perish so, the weary ages may pass away--the world's, whose life sand may fall, drop by drop--before another intellect is prepared to develop the truth that might have been uttered then. But The prophet dies, and the man of torpid heart and sluggish brain lives on.

(II, 525-26)

The attractions of the comedy of frustration--whether of the insensitivities and destructive influences and interruptions of other friends, or the absurd interruption of death itself--are neutralized, however, in the end, by the artist's achievement of the beautiful, the destruction of which is made irrelevant by the positive assertion of the reality of the spiritual ideal (II, 536). Here, as in the satires, the tragicomic viewpoint is employed, only to be counter-weighted in the end by positive values.

A tale which reaches its climax in terrible laughter "bursting forth from a disordered state of feeling" is "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Since this story incorporates many of the other comic elements Hawthorne employed in his shorter "forms of grief" as well, an analysis of it may serve as summary and conclusion.

Comic detachment is evident in the opening of the story in the description of Robin, whom we see from the

point of view of the ferryman waiting for the young man to fish his fare from his pocket:

He was a youth of barely eighteen years, evidently country-bred, and now, as it should seem, upon his first visit to town. He was clad in a coarse grey coat, well worn, but in excellent repair; his undergarments were durably constructed of leather, and fitted tight to a pair of serviceable and well-shaped limbs: his stockings of blue yarn were the incontrovertible work of a mother or a sister; and on his head was a three-cornered hat, which in its better days had perhaps sheltered the graver brow of the lad's father.

(III, 617)

The person and situation belong to comic convention--the country bumpkin on his first visit to the city. But the depiction is realistic, not satirical. When innocent Robin steps forward into the city where he is to witness tragedy and learn the necessity of two faces and many voices in a world of sophistication,⁴³ we begin to take his point of view. Yet an externality, a detached and ironic two-faced view of "shrewd" Robin himself, persists, even while we sympathize with his mixed state of eagerness and bewilderment. There is fun to be had from the inexperience which sees little Boston as though it were London, and the naiveté which approaches city people directly and trustfully.

⁴³I am indebted here to the persuasive interpretation of Thomas E. Connolly in "'My Kinsman, Major Molineux': A Reading," Modern Language Notes, LXXIV (April 1959), 299-302.

The characters Robin meets are one-dimensional; the technique employed in characterizing them is distinctly Dickensian: the notation and exaggeration of one or two chief identifying mannerisms. The first is one who utters, at regular intervals, "two successive hems, of a peculiarly solemn and sepulchral intonation," and makes great pretensions to authority (III, 618-619). In the inn there is the grotesque man of the doubly bulging forehead, huge nose, and shaggy eyebrows. The girl of the scarlet hooped petticoat has sly, sparkling eyes. And, finally, the night watchman, a pure caricature, appears:

A heavy yawn preceded the appearance of a man, who, like the Moonshine of Pyramus and Thisbe, carried a lantern, needlessly aiding his sister luminary in the heavens. As he walked sleepily up the street, he turned his broad, dull face on Robin, and displayed a long staff, spiked at the end.

"Home, vagabond, home!" said the watchman, in accents that seemed to fall asleep as soon as they were uttered.

(III, 627)

Three points of view are operative during this sequence of encounters: that of the narrator, which is one of comic detachment, that of Robin, and that of the persons or groups he meets. From the first point of view, there continues to be amusement in Robin's straight-forward approach to strangers (e.g., he snatches at their skirts to detain them), his confidence, (like that of Karl in Kafka's Amerika, which is

similarly misplaced), his exaggerated notion of his kinsman's importance, which makes him attribute the innkeeper's original friendliness to a family resemblance he has noticed, his bewilderment at discovering that family connections cannot compensate for money, his near-seduction by the prostitute he addresses as "my sweet pretty mistress" (III, 625-627), and in the continual frustration of his search, which drives him finally to cry out to a passerby in simple despair: "Hallo, friend! must I wait here all night for my kinsman, Major Molineux?" (III, 633)

In Robin's innocent point of view the external observer finds amusement; but he is not a booby of whom we are scornful. He is an attractive youth, and our sympathy for him steadily grows. As more emphasis is placed on his loneliness, our detachment from him decreases. The most extensive exposition of this occurs, significantly, rather late in the story with the vision of his home; the pathos of the passage is important for the modulation of feelings to the end. But much earlier the humor of realism has been employed briefly to define the loneliness in the way we have already noticed in other stories ("The Ambitious Guest," "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving," "Ethan Brand"). This occurs in the description of the variety of guests in the cheerful inn (III, 620-621): the lounging, conversing mariners, the

drinking traders, and the "three sheepish countrymen" to whom Robin feels attracted. But from this circle of humanity Robin is ejected with general laughter.

This derisive and excluding laughter expresses the third point of view. Robin is followed by it throughout the story, until finally it overwhelms him.⁴⁴ The men in the barber-shop roar with laughter at his first attempt to get directions to his kinsman, the tavern people laugh again, even the watchman emits "a sound of drowsy laughter" (III, 627), and the prostitute salutes him with "a pleasant titter" (III, 627). The reader laughs at Robin, too, even at his reactions to these laughters. But he never shares the merciless scorn in the laughter of those in the story; on the contrary, the source of the laughter in something about the man Robin is seeking causes apprehension. Our sympathy for Robin increases, and we begin to feel the pathos of his bewilderment and exclusion. The pathos is augmented by the vision of home he has while sitting in the street in the night, waiting. A detached view has thus soon become a humorous one; but humor gives way to irony, and finally irony leads into the tragicomic. The irony emerges when Robin, hearing the approach of the mob, (which, it is clear

⁴⁴See Waggoner, pp. 47-50, for an interesting analysis of the laughter motive in this tale.

to the reader, is being led by the evil-looking figure who has twice appeared, and is undoubtedly connected with Major Monineux's fate), says to a gentleman who has joined him:

"Surely some prodigious merry-making is going on. . . . I have laughed very little since I left home, sir, and should be sorry to lose an opportunity. Shall we step around the corner by that darkish house, and take our share in the fun?"

(III, 636)

The crowd approaches:

The shouts, the laughter, and the tuneless bray, the antipodes of music, came onwards with increasing din.

.
A mighty stream of people now emptied into the street, and came rolling slowly towards the church. A single horseman wheeled the corner in the midst of them, and close behind him came a band of fearful wind-instruments, sending forth a fresher discord. . . .

(III, 637)

The nightmarish quality of Robin's experience that night, in which repeated requests for information and direction have been met with laughter and derision, now reaches its climax in incomprehensible discord. In the glare of torch-lights the weird mob comes on:

. . . wild figures in the Indian dress, many fantastic shapes without a model, . . . as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain, and were sweeping visibly through the midnight streets.

(III, 637-638)

The mob is led by a "single horseman, . . . bearing a sword," who "by his fierce and variegated countenance, appeared like

war personified; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them" (III, 637). Women run by, "piercing the confusion of heavier sounds with their shrill voices of mirth or terror" (III, 638).

The unnatural mixture of mirth and terror--the discordant elements of the tragicomic--moves in upon Robin as the object of the mob's derision, long hid, at last comes near. The horseman turns to fix his eye "full upon the country youth," and Robin begins to have "an indefinite but an uncomfortable idea that he was himself to bear a part in the pageantry" (III, 638). When the center of the procession stops before him, the crowd falls silent, and there, in an uncovered cart, is his kinsman, "in tar-and-feathery dignity" (III, 638).

Major Molineux is drawn as an explicitly tragic figure:

He was an elderly man, of large and majestic person, and strong, square features, betokening a steady soul; but steady as it was, his enemies had found means to shake it. His face was pale as death, and far more ghastly; the broad forehead was contracted in his agony, so that his eyebrows formed one grizzled line; his eyes were red and wild, and the foam hung white upon his quivering lip. His whole frame was agitated by a quick and continual tremor, which his pride strove to quell, even in those circumstances of overwhelming humiliation. But perhaps the bitterest pang of all was when his eyes met those of Robin; for he evidently knew him on the instant,

as the youth stood witnessing the foul disgrace
of a head grown gray in honor.

(III, 639)

As the kinsmen stare at each other in silence, Robin feels the specific emotions of tragedy; his "knees shook, and his hair bristled, with a mixture of pity and terror" (III, 639). But for Robin it cannot have, finally, a tragic effect. To have come at last to the object of his search, the center of his future plans, and to have found this pitiable creature, is to have expectation give way to nothing, to find life at this moment incomprehensible and absurd. His mind is seized by "a bewildering excitement"; he has "a perception of tremendous ridicule in the whole scene," and then he hears distinctly and individually all the laughter that had been directed at him that evening (III, 639-640), including that of the first rude gentleman he had approached, who now stands on a balcony overlooking the scene "in a fit of convulsive merriment, which manifested itself on his solemn old features like a funny inscription on a tombstone" (III, 640). The terrible hilarity of the crowd is contagious, and poor Robin can no longer resist: he laughs the loudest of all. Then the procession moves on.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Even what I have called "the humor of extravagance" gets into this tale, in a brief three sentences: "The cloud-spirits peeped from their silvery islands, as the congregated

On they went, like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony. On they went, in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man's heart. On swept the tumult, and left a silent street behind.

(III, 640)

From this experience Robin emerges pale and with a somewhat less lively eye. Also, there is a dryness in his manner of speaking. And that is about all. But he will not return home. The kind man who has stood by him through the experience will now carry him beyond it. Its shock has perhaps taken away one degree of the irony in the epithet "shrewd" which is attached to him still at the very end; and with the experience of "town life"--its duplicity and evil--he may indeed rise in the world. And unlike Goodman Brown upon his discovery of evil in the world, Robin's vision will not be dark and his life will not be tragic. His laughter was at the sight of tragedy; Brown's was at the experience of it. At the moment of mental collapse, Robin's laughter

mirth went roaring up the sky.' The Man in the Moon heard the far bellow. 'Oho,' quoth he, 'the old earth is frolicsome to-night!'" (III, 640). A sudden soaring away from the earthly point of view might have been effective here at the climax, as in some cases the sudden shift to Olympus is in Homer. But most readers must feel that this bit of fancy and its cute irony are intrusions, misplaced from some sketch. "My Kinsman" is a solidly realistic tale; its most nightmarish and grotesque effects and its most extravagant symbols (e.g., the man with the bulging forehead) are grounded in reality. This is certainly one of the sources of its power.

was defensive, but Brown's was despairing.

"Jollity and gloom were contending for an empire" (I, 70). These are the terms in which Hawthorne sees the conflict between the "gay colony" at Merry Mount and the Puritans. They are the moods which correlate with the polar contrasts between the comic and the tragic. And it is not too much to say that, in drawing with bright sympathy the revelers of Merry Mount, and in delineating with critical respect the stern Endicott and his men, and in showing, finally, the wisdom and maturity of the resignation of the Bridal Couple to the Puritan sobriety, the sense of harsh reality, the seriousness of life, and duty, that in all this Hawthorne drew incidentally an allegory of the struggle within himself for artistic direction. The young man who had attempted, among other things, to cast himself in the fictional role of a merry story-teller with too much levity of heart, capitulated slowly and surely as the Puritan image dominated his mind; and abandoning short tales of any kind, he wrote The Scarlet Letter.

PART II: THE NOVELS

CHAPTER FIVE

TRAGEDY AND "THE TRAGIC POWER OF LAUGHTER": THE SCARLET LETTER AND THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

The Scarlet Letter "is positively a hell-fired story, into which I found it almost impossible to throw any cheering light." It persists in displaying to its readers merely "different sides of the same dark idea."¹

Even yet, though my thoughts were ultimately much absorbed in the task, it wears, to my eye, a stern and sombre aspect; too much ungladdened by genial sunshine; too little revealed by the tender and familiar influences which soften almost every scene of nature and real life, and, undoubtedly, should soften every picture of them.

(V, 64)

Such were Hawthorne's own opinions of The Scarlet Letter. And he believed that in The House of the Seven Gables he had written a book not liable to the same objections.² We may assume that this difference between the two books resulted in part from a deliberate effort to overcome

¹Quoted from letters printed in, respectively, Horatio Bridge, Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1893), pp. 110-113, and James T. Fields, Yesterdays with Authors (Boston, 1884), pp. 51-52.

²See Bridge, p. 126, and Fields, p. 56.

what their author saw as a flaw in the first. The effects of the effort were far-reaching, not resulting simply in the interspersion of comic characters and scenes to supply relief from the tragic tension: garrulous female companions for the heroine, a handyman in the line of Caleb Balderstone for the hero, or jolly gravediggers or a "gay apothecary," such as had interested Hawthorne before,³ for the town. All these might have been included without touching essentially the chief characters themselves and without affecting their destinies, leaving intact the tragic vision projected by their natures and their fates. But the differences are far from being so simple. The House of the Seven Gables is an entirely different kind of tragedy from The Scarlet Letter. And, consequently, its philosophical vision is radically different.

The differences, aesthetic and philosophical, are parallel in some respects to the differences between Sophocles and Euripides, and at the same time to the differences between the neo-classic or Racinian and Shakespearean tragedy, though within Shakespeare the parallel is between Macbeth or Othello and The Winter's Tale. The difficulties in these cases of generalizing about the "vision" the forms contain,

³See above, pp. 70-71, 123-125.

when the forms themselves are at such variance, are immediately apparent. It is therefore remarkable that critics in search of a "tragic vision" for Hawthorne, after noticing what is inescapable, that Seven Gables is different in form from The Scarlet Letter, have yet persisted in finding in it the same vision. The implication seems to be that all the differences are somehow mistakes which do not affect the essence. It may be that the form of Seven Gables is inferior to that of The Scarlet Letter. I believe it is, and that the vision itself is less profound. But these considerations are beside the present purpose. My desire is to show how Hawthorne, in trying to overcome the supposed flaw of The Scarlet Letter, wrote a different kind of work in The House of the Seven Gables, a kind in which the comic serves not merely as an added element interspersed with the tragic, but causes a radical difference in total form and philosophic content. Although Seven Gables may ultimately be characterized as a "tragic" work, I wish to preserve its integrity as a work of art while discussing it, and try not to identify its tragic elements with those of The Scarlet Letter. My aim is not to arrive at a generalization about Hawthorne's "vision," but to compare and contrast ~~two~~ different works of art with respect to the presence or absence of various kinds of the comic within them, and to discover the aesthetic and

philosophic consequences.

I

Hawthorne's misgivings about The Scarlet Letter were shared by his contemporary critics. The attitude of both author and critics reflects one aspect of the complicated critical situation of the time with regard to the novel. The confusion which existed is apparent in all of Hawthorne's prefaces, and some insights into the problem we face in The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables may be gained by looking briefly at the various and often mutually contradictory criteria as they may have affected the place of the comic in fiction.

That fiction was simply to entertain or amuse was an idea to which Sir Walter Scott himself had frequently subscribed, calling the novel an "opiate," a "mere elegance, a luxury."⁴ Such a purpose for his own fiction was one that Hawthorne never for a moment considered. But that to amuse

⁴Quoted by Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870 (New York, 1959), p. 8, from The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott (Boston, 1829), III, 256, 77-78. I am indebted to Stang's study throughout this section of the chapter, and to Bertha Faust, Hawthorne's Contemporaneous Reputation (Philadelphia, 1939). A comparison of the reviews quoted in these two books sufficiently establishes that the critical milieu was essentially the same on both sides of the Atlantic.

in some sense was one of the legitimate functions of fiction he never denied, and this idea of fiction as an "escape" from actual life had its consequences for his theory and sometimes for his practice. For to charge that a book is "too gloomy" is to say it is in that way ungenial and unpleasant, or, as he explicitly says, "uncaptivating" (V, 64). A work ought, then, to be the reverse of these.

An ironic passage on this very subject occurs in The House of the Seven Gables, a book with several chapters of deeply wrought sorrow. Phoebe is reading for Clifford's amusement, and when she is moved to tears by "imaginary woe," Clifford grows peevish and "angrily" makes her close the book. "And wisely, too!" exclaims Hawthorne in his own person. "Is not the world sad enough, in genuine earnest, without making a pastime of mock-sorrows?" (III, 177). The question exactly echoes the complaints of many contemporary corpse-counting critics about the more "painful" works of George Eliot, Thackeray, Dickens, and Trollope.⁵ However ironic Hawthorne's endorsement of this view may be, he took it seriously enough to fear that The Scarlet Letter would go unread because it was "so dark and dismal," and later attributed the success of the volume to the "Custom House" essay.⁶

⁵See Stang, pp. 64-65.

⁶See Fields, p. 57.

The "novelist's true answer" to the escapists, as given by one critic, would be, "I have to paint God's world as I find it. . . . The sadder you say the world is, the sadder I must paint it."⁷ The reply would hardly be relevant to the escapist, since it assumes a totally different function for fiction. The belief that fiction was to be a "picture" or a "mirror" of real life--to use the two most common metaphors--was also one to which Hawthorne implicitly subscribed; and it is one to which the charge "too gloomy" is also relevant, in a different sense. Hawthorne said The Scarlet Letter lacked "the tender and familiar influences which soften almost every scene of nature and real life, and, undoubtedly, should soften every picture of them" (V, 64). Here the crucial problem of distinguishing between the "romance" and the "novel" becomes involved. It seems odd that Hawthorne should thus have invited criticism of The Scarlet Letter as an attempt to draw a "picture" of "nature and real life," that is, as a "novel," when he took pains to forestall any such basis for judgment of Seven Gables, which in some respects passes the test more easily. But in excusing his second "romance" from the necessity of "very minute fidelity" to the actual with respect to probability of event

⁷Quoted by Stang, p. 65, from a review of 1853.

(III, 13), in which Seven Gables is indeed weak, he has not excused himself from this criterion--a just proportion of tears and laughter as these are present in life--which could apply to either the romance or novel. But the question of just proportion--when is a work of fiction a faithful picture of life?--is so incapable of being answered, depending as it does on point of view and social circumstances, that the criterion is nearly worthless when applied with respect not to probability, but to degrees of sorrow and mirth. Even those critics who held out for "novels" as against "romances" frequently saw "real life" romantically, that is, as a nicely balanced blend of cheerful or amusing and sorrowful events; any novelist who saw life as more one than the other was picturing life unfaithfully.⁸ But even if "reality" was seen less sentimentally than this, a comprehensiveness of vision, such as Coleridge celebrated in Shakespeare, was required.

Since, as we have seen, Hawthorne was conscious of this test which The Scarlet Letter did not pass, it seems probable that as he began the second book, he would have desired to include more cheerful elements not only for the

⁸Cf. the criticism that George Eliot's novels gave "an exaggerated representation of the proportion which sorrow bears to happiness in human life." Quoted in Stang, p. 65.

sake of those who read him for mere pleasure, but for those who expected the book to be even in a romantic sense a "picture of real life." The result would be a work not only "more characteristic" of Hawthorne's mind, as he believed it was,⁹ but also a more comprehensive--and hence more faithful--picture of life.

The metaphor of the "picture" which was so common suggests another criterion frequently invoked. This is that whatever faithfulness to life might demand, a work of art (literature being analogous with the fine arts), simply by virtue of an essential harmony, must "contain a balance of light and shade."¹⁰ One of the licenses Hawthorne requires for the romancer is that "If he think fit . . . he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture" (III, 13). From this aesthetic point of view, Jane Austen's criticism of her own Pride and Prejudice may be seen as the reverse of Hawthorne's for his Scarlet Letter: It is "rather too light, and bright, and sparkling," she wrote; "it wants

⁹See Bridge, p. 126.

¹⁰Quoted by Stang, p. 65, from a review which condemned George Geith of Fen Court in words like those which Hawthorne applied to The Scarlett Letter: the book had, said the reviewer, an "extreme and untempered gloom which pervades the whole story."

shade."¹¹ Whatever the validity of the criterion and its analogy with the fine arts, it provided another conception of the function of fiction, simply as a work of art, by which even the world of a "romance"--that "neutral territory . . . where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (V, 55)--ought to contain its share of the "lights" as well as the "shadows" of human thought and emotion. There are, of course, many places where "light" in a strictly aesthetic sense which has nothing to do with the comic operates in both The Scarlet Letter and Seven Gables.¹² But the vague metaphor as it was used by both Hawthorne and the critics of fiction frequently connotes cheerfulness, humorous and good-natured laughter--the whole "brighter" side of life. The light which The Scarlet Letter lacks is that of "genial sunshine" (V, 64). Edwin P. Whipple, the critic Hawthorne most respected, regretted that the pervading gloom of The Scarlet Letter had not been "relieved by touches of that beautiful and peculiar humor" he knew Hawthorne possessed, and which he characterized in other works as "breaking

¹¹Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman (London, 1932), p. 299.

¹²See Walter Blair, "Color, Light, and Shadow in Hawthorne's Fiction," New England Quarterly, XV (March 1942), 74-94, and Leland Schubert, Hawthorne the Artist: Fine-Art Devices in Fiction (Chapel Hill, 1944).

through, or lighting up, a sombre and ominous cloud."¹³

Three of the ways of judging a work of fiction, then, all of which Hawthorne in some sense affirmed, required that it be less dark than The Scarlet Letter was: in order to please or amuse, in order to be a more faithful picture of life, and in order to be aesthetically a more balanced work of art. The inclusion of some kind of the comic would be one way, though not the only one, of achieving these ends; and in any case a more "cheerful" or "happy" or "sunshiny" set of characters and circumstances and events would create a milieu in which humor would be a likely element. But there was one more criterion for fiction much in the critical air which would have had a controlling effect on the introduction of the comic into a book. This was the one which required a moral purpose.¹⁴

Hawthorne explicitly deals with the moral criterion in his preface to The House of the Seven Gables. In an off-hand manner he claims to satisfy those who demand an explicit moral: "Not to be deficient in this particular, the author has provided himself with a moral,--the truth, namely

¹³Quoted by Faust, p. 72, from Graham's Magazine, XXXVI (May 1850), 346; Character and Characteristic Men (Boston, 1866), p. 222.

¹⁴See Stang, pp. 67-72, 75-79.

. . ." (III, 14). But he admits to a doubt that a romance can have any direct moral effect; its operations are much more subtle:

The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod. . . . A high truth, indeed, fairly, finely, and skilfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work of fiction, may add an artistic glory, but it is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first.

(III, 14-15)

The real moral, then, the "high truth" which is embodied in the work as a whole and is evident in all its parts, is valued because it supplies an "artistic glory." Hawthorne was condemned by a British reviewer because, as these words would seem to indicate, he made "the moral subserve the art, instead of the art the moral."¹⁵ But Hawthorne's view was in fact that of the more sophisticated critics who saw that the morality of art¹⁶ was in its fidelity to a "high truth," and that was sufficient.

This moral purpose was, certainly, for Hawthorne a stringent and demanding one. He had written in "P's Correspondence," concerning Scott, that, "The world, nowadays, requires a more earnest purpose, a deeper moral, and a closer

¹⁵Quoted by Stang, p. 69.

¹⁶See Stang, pp. 75-78.

and homelier truth than he was qualified to supply it with" (II, 416). The high truths, earnest purposes, and deep morals of this spiritual heir of the Puritans, this author of "The Maypole of Merry Mount," would surely be such that any introduction of the comic into his romances for the sake of the first three criteria we have discussed, would surely find a strong modifying force in this moral commitment of an artist to his own vision of truth. Comic elements for their own sakes would never be admissible; there could not be the simple calculated aim of the entertainer to "make 'em laugh and make 'em cry"; any faithful picture of life might be in a preponderant degree sorrowful; and the true harmony of the greatest art might be in a minor key. Whatever place the cheerful and the comic could legitimately take would be judged in terms of what the "high truth" in question allowed. Even Whipple had to admit that the gloom of The Scarlet Letter--though a deficiency because it allowed no relief to painful emotions--yet made the moral purpose of the book more definite. And later he was to say that "Geniality in The Scarlet Letter would be like an ice-cream shop in Dante's Inferno."¹⁷

¹⁷Quoted by Faust, pp. 71, 100.

II

As a tragedy The Scarlet Letter seems to have passed the test of tests: it answers to everybody's definition. Malcolm Cowley has perhaps most clearly shown its affinities both with Greek tragedy as interpreted by Aristotle and with Racine,¹⁸ and there are numerous studies of it in terms of its tragic vision by one definition or another.¹⁹ Concerning The Scarlet Letter as a tragedy, then, I wish to emphasize only two points which are important to a consideration of the comic elements within it and to a comparison between it and The House of the Seven Gables.

The first point is its virtual uniqueness, at the time it appeared, as a tragedy in prose narrative whose relentless tone of high seriousness and its focus on the destinies of a darkly fated few made it more akin to the great tragedies of the stage than to either the "epic" novel form of Fielding or the melodramatic tragi-romances of Scott (though these latter had borrowed "theatrical" elements from Shakespeare). Although novelists and critics were eagerly in

¹⁸See "Five Acts of The Scarlet Letter," College English, XIX (October 1957), 11-16. See also the comparisons with Sophocles in Charles Foster, "Hawthorne's Literary Theory," PMLA, LVII (March 1942), 244, and Matthiessen, p. 350.

¹⁹The most completely formulated are those of Matthiessen, pp. 179-180, 275-282, 343-350, and Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, Texas, 1957), pp. 90-118.

search of tragedy in order to establish once and for all the dignity of the novel form,²⁰ it is clear that, while feeling the power, they did not know quite what critical tack to take with regard to either The Scarlet Letter, or, in England, Wuthering Heights (1847). The result was the confusion in the mind of even so astute a man as Whipple, who could regret the lack of something which he admitted would have been both incongruous and an impediment to the moral force of the book. Hawthorne himself felt the novel had taken its own course in respect to its completely tragic cast, and insisted that "The Custom House" be prefixed in compensation. Today The Scarlet Letter is accepted on its own terms as a tragedy, and its unadulterated tone is considered one of its strengths.

Secondly, one needs to recall how deeply tragic the "high truth" of The Scarlet Letter is. It meets even the exacting standard which Prosser Hall Frye found a distinguishing characteristic of Greek tragedy, that is, that the emotions of terror and pity are not excited in merely a general way by the tragic circumstances, as in Hamlet, but both have direct reference to the tragic characters themselves. Antigone, Oedipus, Orestes--each is both shocking

²⁰See Stang, pp. 51-60.

and pitiable, since for the Greek the act is as important as the intent.²¹ In The Scarlet Letter we see nothing whatever of the three main characters, in all the more than seven years the novel covers, except that which will make us sensible either of their moral outrages or of their deep suffering. Until the end, where Dimmesdale defeats Chillingworth and is released from his suffering by death, almost any point in the book will illustrate this. The isolation and psychological torture Hester is undergoing in the second chapter is placed against the fact of her terrible contrast with the Divine Maternity her image alone would suggest:

Here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect, that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant she had borne.

(V, 77)

Similarly, the extreme pity Dimmesdale elicits in his disintegration is no greater than the repugnance caused by his hypocrisy and cowardice. And the demonic Chillingworth himself is allowed to state his case. He says to Hester:

"By thy first step awry thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has all been a dark necessity. Ye that have wronged me are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands. It is our fate. Let the black

²¹See Prosser Hall Frye, "The Idea of Greek Tragedy," in Romance and Tragedy (Boston, 1922), pp. 141-204.

flower blossom as it may!"

(V, 210)

Hester herself pities him "for the hatred that has transformed a wise and just man to a fiend!" (V, 209).

In the end, "the dark problem of this life" (V, 161) is solved in so far as the contingent human existence allows, also in the tragic manner of Sophocles: The "drama of guilt and sorrow" resolves itself in a purgative intensity of woe which gives way to resigned affirmation in Dimmesdale's words, "Is not this better . . . than what we dreamed of in the forest?" (V, 300). One recalls the self-mutilated Oedipus saying,

"I will not believe that this was not the best
That could have been done. Teach me no other
lesson."²²

How, in this tale of "human frailty and sorrow," involving "a question of human guilt, passion, and anguish," (V, 68, 87), is there any place for the comic? The answer is not that there is none, as one might expect simply from a general sense of the tragic burden of the whole, but rather that the comic elements exist only in so far as they can contribute directly to the tragic, and are wholly submerged within its vision and form. This means that the

²²Tr. E. F. Watling, The Theban Plays (London, 1947: Penguin Classics), p. 63.

indirect uses, such as for contrast and relief, are avoided. But satire, irony, and the tragicomic are all employed; these, as we have seen, are those modes of the comic which can clarify the understanding and augment the experience of the tragic. In The Scarlet Letter they are exercised in four areas: in the characterization of the Puritans, in the behavior of Pearl, in Chillingworth, and in the diction and point of view of the author.

A comic, mildly satiric attitude toward the Puritans is taken with respect to their excessive sternness, their simple-mindedness (or simplicity), and their grotesquely superstitious tendencies. On the first score, Hawthorne's attitude is suggested by his initial description of "the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people" on the occasion of the "mildest" as well as the "severest acts of public discipline" (V, 69-70). The description of the incongruous sports of the Puritan children is more openly comic:

Pearl saw the children of the settlement, on the grassy margin of the street, or at the domestic thresholds, disporting themselves in such grim fashion as the Puritanic nature would permit; playing at going to church, perchance; or at scourging Quakers; or taking scalps in a sham-fight with the Indians; or scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft.

(V, 118-119)

And it is said of the "New England Holiday" which provides the setting of the book's catastrophe, that

Into this festal season of the year . . . the Puritans compressed whatever mirth and public joy they deemed allowable to human infirmity; thereby so far dispelling the customary cloud, that, for the space of a single holiday, they appeared scarcely more grave than most other communities at a period of general affliction.²³

(V, 274)

These satiric caricatures apply directly to the tragic theme of the book, for they are but another way of looking at the inhuman, cold, and uncharitable milieu in which the tragedy occurs, and which directly contributes to the intensity, continuation, and peculiarly psychological nature of the suffering, and to the difficulty--really the impossibility--of expiation and resolution in Christian forgiveness.

The same relationship to the tragic exists in the depiction of the simplicity or simple-mindedness of the Puritans. The absolutism of their attitude toward sins of every nature, their inability to discriminate, the intensity of their moral earnestness, could often be ludicrous;

²³Cf. Fogle, p. 120: "In this statement the tone of good-humored mockery is unmistakable. Hawthorne's attacks have something of the quality of a family joke. . . ." In several instances my observations of particular cases of irony will be seen to coincide with those of Fogle, but my ultimate concern is different from his, which is to study the ludidity and ambiguity of Hawthorne.

the most trivial affair was "a question publicly discussed, and on which statesmen of eminence took sides."

At that epoch of pristine simplicity . . . matters of even slighter public interest, and of far less intrinsic weight, than the welfare of Hester and her child, were strangely mixed up with the deliberations of legislators and acts of state. The period was hardly, if at all, earlier than that of our story, when a dispute concerning the right of property in a pig not only caused a fierce and bitter contest in the legislative body of the colony, but resulted in an important modification of the framework itself of the legislature.

(V, 126)

This amused glance back at a simpler, earlier age has, in the context of the novel, tragic strength. For this simplicity, whatever charm it may have after the passing of generations, is of a piece with the sternness which limited the Puritans and was the foundation of their incapacity to deal with a tragic moral situation.

They were, doubtless, good men, just, and sage. But, out of the whole human family, it ~~would~~ not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil, than the sages of rigid aspect towards whom Hester Prynne now turned her face.

(V, 86)

At one point this simplicity as it existed not in the judges but in the crowd is evaluated with irony and ambiguity. At first Hawthorne seems to pass judgment by contrast on modern amoral sophistication, when, in describing the first scene

on the scaffold, he remarks:

The scene was not without a mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guilt and shame in a fellow creature, before society shall have grown corrupt enough to smile, instead of shuddering, at it. The witnesses of Hester Prynne's disgrace had not yet passed beyond their simplicity. They were stern enough to look upon her death, had that been the sentence, without a murmur at its severity, but had none of the heartlessness of another social state, which would find only a theme for jest in an exhibition like the present.

(V, 77)

But the paragraph is developed ironically, another dimension of the situation emerging in the conclusion:

The unhappy culprit sustained herself as best a woman might, under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her, and concentrated at her bosom. It was almost intolerable, to be borne. Of an impulsive and passionate nature, she had fortified herself to encounter the stings and venomous stabs of public contumely, wreaking itself in every variety of insult; but there was a quality so much more terrible in the solemn mood of the popular mind, that she longed rather to behold all those rigid countenances contorted with scornful laughter, and herself the object.

(V, 78)

This "leaden affliction," it is added, was worse than "a roar of laughter" would have been; it has the effect of a more painful "heartlessness," because it leaves its victim without even the defense of reciprocal disdain. The heartlessness of any age contributes to tragedy; but while the Puritans' moral earnestness itself stands in favorable

contrast to later corruption, its lack of any compassionate alloy from the heart makes it terribly incapable of even recognizing that the heart of an errant woman is "a mesh of good and evil," not only evil.

The grotesque imagination of the popular Puritan mind is used occasionally in The Scarlet Letter in the way we have seen it function in such a tale as "Young Goodman Brown." It too is satirized, like the Puritan sternness and simplicity, but it is used significantly for symbolic heightening, and to justify the romantic atmosphere of the demonic supernatural and marvelous appropriate to Puritan tragedy. Both uses involve the ironic implication that the Puritan imagination, however superstitious and literal, discovered a kind of truth lost to modern skepticism. All these ends are achieved, for example, in this paragraph on the scarlet letter itself:

The vulgar, who, in those dreary old times, were always contributing a grotesque horror to what interested their imaginations, had a story about the scarlet letter which might readily work up into a terrific legend. They averred, that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth, tinged in an earthly dye-pot, but was red-hot with infernal fire, and could be seen glowing all alight, whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night-time. And we must needs say, it seared Hester's bosom so deeply, that perhaps there was more truth in the rumor than our modern incredulity may be inclined to admit.

(V, 112)

The comic irony of this is clear: Hawthorne is himself

playing the "terrific legend" for all it is worth, while leaving the matter of credulity ambiguous. And such a paragraph, in its light tone, prepares us for the variations of suggestive points of view which are presented in the last chapter concerning the letter on Dimmesdale's breast (V, 305-7).

The demonic comic element of this imagination centers chiefly on the figure of the witch Mistress Hibbins, who peeps from windows at inopportune moments and drops remarks which suggest her omniscience and her alliance with the Black Man. She could have been merely a cartoon figure of relief,²⁴ but for two reasons she is more than this: She stands, with her constant invitation, for the totally evil life which Hester admits she might have taken if she had lost Pearl (V, 144). Secondly, she is the concrete image of the last part of Dimmesdale's remark, "I have laughed, in bitterness and agony of heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am! And Satan laughs at it!" (V, 229-30). In her talk with Hester near the end of the book (V, 286-288), she mockingly laughs at "Yonder divine man! That saint on earth

²⁴Victor Seastrøm's silent film version uses her only for relief; her supernatural alliance is dropped, but her function as a "meany" is developed. She is involved in several scenes of pure farce, and finally receives her comeuppance. The film also makes much sheer fun out of the stringency of Puritan moral law and the nature of the punishments for minor crimes.

. . . , " and adds:

"Who, now, that saw him pass in the procession, would think how little while it is since he went forth out of his study,--shewing a Hebrew text of Scripture in his mouth, I warrant,--to take an airing in the forest! . . . Many a church-member saw I . . . that has danced in the same measure with me, when Somebody was fiddler. . . . This is but a trifle, when a woman knows the world."

(V, 287)

Some of the same demonic humor enters into the characterization of Chillingworth, as he affects the imagination of the members of the Puritan community. He becomes the greatest sinner in the book, wholly allied with evil purposes; the people constantly associate him with the Black Man, which is forceful as an appropriate figure, even when presented humorously (see, e.g., V, 156). There is a conscious comic element in the literalness with which Chillingworth in his behavior and increasing physical deformity assumes his ultimate allegorical meaning. In the end, he approaches the scaffold with the others as a human being, "as one intimately connected with the drama of guilt and sorrow . . . , and well entitled, therefore, to be present at its closing scene" (V, 300). But he had appeared as though "out of some nether region," (V, 299), and after Dimmesdale's death, which removed his victim, Chillingworth "positively withered up, shrivelled away, and almost

vanished from mortal sight" (V, 307). The comic hyperbolism emphasizes his symbolic meaning.

Another comic element in the characterization of Chillingworth is worth noting: it is the Iago-like quality in his ironic remarks to a neighbor in the crowd as he first witnesses Hester on the scaffold (V, 83-84), and in the cleverness of his torturous questioning of Dimmesdale (Chs. IX-X). The former help to establish him as a defensive human being, and the latter dramatizes the character of his intellect, which, like Iago's though to a lesser degree, fascinates and delights and becomes the more frightening therefore.

The devil is also seen peeping forth in mockery from the eyes of little Pearl (V, 122), but the comic aspects of her bright, flame-light figure contribute to the tragic texture of the book in rather a different way. Some critics, particularly some of the first, have attempted to see in her the "relief" thought to be so necessary.²⁵ And it is true that her grotesque antics are frequently laughable. But they are seen usually as a part of a shocking and perverse nature that makes Hester's only source of joy an equal source of fear and pain. (Virtually all of Chapter VI is an exposition of this idea.) They make Pearl, too, an object

²⁵See Barbara Garlitz, "Pearl: 1850-1955," PMLA, LXXII (Sept. 1957), pp. 689-690.

of pity. We see the tiny girl scaring off "her enemies," the Puritan children, with a "terrific volume of sound, which, doubtless, caused the hearts of the fugitives to quake within them" (V, 128), and on another occasion, while playing with the wild animals, she is cracked on the head by a "last year's nut" flung down by a chattering squirrel (V, 245). Comic as these pictures are, they are further illustrations that Pearl's nature destined her also to a life of grievous isolation (from which she is saved, however, by the traumatic experience of her father's death).

Another comic element in Pearl's behavior is less successfully managed because it is less convincing. This is her gift for making painfully acute comments and connections in apparent perfect innocence. She makes the absolutely right "wrong" remarks to whomever she speaks; Dimmesdale in particular must suffer the barbs of her unconscious irony. In this she has sometimes the effect of Lear's Fool --another "natural"; but too often she seems patently "in" on Hawthorne's whole symbolic plan, and is simply acting out her part like a precocious child star. One must qualify, however. In the scene where she improvises a green "A" for her own breast, she thereby neatly allows Hawthorne to make a significant new variation on his dominant symbol,²⁶ but

²⁶See John C. Gerber, "Form and Content in The Scarlet

her act is convincingly that of an innocently imitative child, and has some of the effects of a similar childish act in "The Minister's Black Veil," discussed in the preceding chapter.

All of these elements--the satire, the irony, the comic characterization--help to make the texture of The Scarlet Letter a varied one within its general tone; linked though they all are to the tragic, they nevertheless provide a relief which is suggestive in itself simply because it is possible. The movement into a comic perspective is a natural one, because there is a "distance" inherent in Hawthorne's style and in his attitude. The style and attitude are inseparable, and so far are they from approaching to either a sordid or a sentimental closeness of feeling that they tend, until the end, where real tragedy is inexorably effected by the action, rather to become tragicomic in their detached yet fearful resignation. Trollope was struck by what he called the seeming "burlesque" in The Scarlet Letter, as though Hawthorne himself were moved to a painful laughter at the poor, trapped, puppet-humans helplessly suffering their tragedy.²⁷ And Prosser Hall Frye, in the best brief Letter," New England Quarterly, XVII (March 1944), 25-55.

²⁷See Anthony Trollope, "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review (Sept. 1879), pp. 212-213. On the "distance" in Hawthorne's style, see Fogle, pp. 120-121.

analysis of Hawthorne's style and its effect that I have read, discusses the "dreamlike ambiguity . . . inherent in his mood and manner," to which is added "a sense of tremendous but paralytic effort" by which "he is able to deepen this elementary impression of dreaming into the very intensity and fascination of a nightmare."²⁸

The "distance" in attitude and style is obvious in the strongly analytical sections of the book, which have been criticized for their undramatic technique. But the tragicomic effect which results seems to me most powerful in those passages in which Hawthorne is directly presenting the thoughts of his characters. Consider, for example, the last three paragraphs of Chapter II, which tell of the "phantasmagoric forms" which rise in Hester's mind as she stands on the scaffold of the pillory, and trace with minute, even trivial, detail, the course of her life, "the entire track along which she had been treading" from her childhood in England even down to this "little town, on the edge of the Western wilderness," finally leaving her facing the reality of the present incredible moment. Standing apart, the author presents for us her thoughts as she experiences them; he has no comment on them (V, 78-80). The mental hell of the

²⁸"Hawthorne's Supernaturalism," In Literary Reviews and Criticisms (New York, 1908), p. 125.

remorse-tortured Dimmesdale is drawn with a similar pitiless strength: ". . . subtle, but remorseful hypocrite that he was!" is the author's only interjection in his description of the minister's agonies (V, 176). The chapters "The Interior of a Heart" and "The Minister's Vigil" (XI and XII) in fact at times become a kind of interplay between author and subject on the theme of Dimmesdale's miserably absurd condition. The minister begins to wonder if he is going mad; he shrieks aloud; his anxiety leads to a "lurid playfulness of the mind," which develops a vivid picture of the astounded Puritans discovering him in the morning, standing stiffly on the scaffold. "Carried away by the grotesque horror of this picture, the minister . . . burst into a great peal of laughter" (V, 180-185). The author, for his part, gives a full exposition of the absurdity of Dimmesdale's supposition that the light in the sky has reference to his petty tragedy: ". . . what shall we say," asks Hawthorne, "when an individual discovers a revelation addressed to himself alone, on the same vast sheet of record!" (i.e., the "cope of heaven") (V, 188). And in a later chapter, "The Minister in a Maze" (XX), Dimmesdale becomes a highly comic figure.²⁹ Under the exhilarating illusion that he is at long

²⁹Cf. Van Doren, p. 156.

last going to escape his fate, he is filled with the most incongruous impulses toward freedom, even license, of thought and action: he wishes to utter blasphemy to the holiest old man; to undermine the faith of the most pious old lady; to corrupt the purest girl; to teach wicked words to little Puritan children.

Denying himself this freak, as unworthy of his cloth, he met a drunken seaman . . . and longed . . . to recreate himself with a few improper jests . . . and a volley of good, round, solid, satisfactory, and heaven-defying oaths!

(V, 263)

Hawthorne's style, in its understatement and its plethora of adjectives, follows the comic movement of Dimmesdale's mind. The whole sequence describing these "strange and wicked eccentricities" is tempered only by Hawthorne's calling him "this lost and desperate man" (V, 262), and by the fact that in its very extravagance it adds to our certainty that the interview in the forest was futile; what we see here is not true release or real regeneration. Nevertheless the extent to which Hawthorne turns the tragic character into a comic one seems to me daring, just as is his earlier suggestion of the triviality of the fate of his characters. That he can turn these tragicomic perspectives ultimately to account within the total force and form of the tragic movement is a testimony to the profundity of the vision

as a whole as it is revealed in character, plot, and symbol, and to the powerful artistry with which he manages the final scenes.

The comic attitudes which are missing in The Scarlet Letter are exactly those which are present in the introductory "Custom House" essay. The volume as a whole thus comes close to achieving the comprehensiveness and balance of vision Hawthorne desired. Yet I believe the frequent characterization of the essay as a comic one is erroneous.³⁰ What is comic in it is there by way of variation from the dominant tone, and the comic elements themselves are employed for serious ends. The essay, it seems to me, is Hawthorne's best, and this is partly because the shallow fancies and trivial details of "The Old Manse" are eschewed. A degree of intimacy is achieved. Certainly Hawthorne keeps "the inmost Me behind its veil" (V, 18), but he uses a less distorting veil than the coy ironies and pretty descriptions of

³⁰Cf. Van Doren, p. 166: "It is the best of his works in the comic kind." Recent critical studies, considering the essay's relationship to the romance proper, have tended to modify this view. See Larzer Ziff, "The Ethical Dimension of 'The Custom House,'" Modern Language Notes, LXXIII (May 1958), 338-344; Charles R. O'Donnell, "Hawthorne and Dimmesdale: The Search for the Realm of Quiet," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XIV (March 1960), 317-332; Samuel S. Baskett, "The (Complete) Scarlet Letter," College English, XXII (Feb. 1961), 321-328.

the earlier introduction. The analytical description of Salem and the exposition of Hawthorne's relationship to it, even though the latter is done with a degree of self-mockery, do clearly reveal to us something important and true about Hawthorne. Similarly, the discussions of the problems of writing a romance, of what it should be, of the sources of a better work in the material of real life, and of his psychological circumstances in the Custom House and while writing The Scarlet Letter, are all composed with evident care and thought, and the personal revelations are convincing. A seriousness of tone and intent is dominant.

The comic elements in the essay are chiefly to be found in the notorious but relatively minor portions which describe Hawthorne's co-workers at the Custom House. Hawthorne claimed that they were written with "frank and genuine good-humor."³¹ They are; but the "frank" quality sometimes is at war with the "good-humor." What tends toward, and seems to try to be, a tolerant description of amusingly comfortable and venerable old men, of the "Inspector" in particular, is nevertheless so thorough in its details, so detached in its civilized evaluation of them, that Hawthorne should hardly have been surprised that he gave offense. The Inspector is

³¹In his "Preface to the Second Edition," V, 15.

drawn as a "character"--for as an animal he is a perfectly satisfactory specimen; a gourmand, he has the amusing trait of total recall with respect to all the good meals he has ever eaten. A purely romantic humorist would have left it at that, and loved him for these individualizing traits. But Hawthorne places him in devastating contrast with the introspective and dignified General Miller, an admirable human being, whose life was in his mind, and whom the varied experiences of battle seemed to have affected deeply. The Inspector, on the other hand, had lost wives and children, had experienced, "one would suppose, . . . sorrow enough to imbue the sunniest disposition, through and through, with a sable tinge" (V, 34). But not so. "The chief tragic event of the old man's life . . . was his mishap with a goose which had lived and died some twenty or forty years ago . . ." (V, 36). The contrast is not only with General Miller, but with the events and circumstances of The Scarlet Letter, in which sorrow's effects are permanent, not "as the passing breeze," and are profoundly typical of "the experience of the race" (V, 36).

If in its broadest viewpoint the comic in "The Custom House" is that of detachment, the critics made the most of the apparently warmly humorous details. Whipple wrote:

These pages, instinct with the vital spirit of

humor, show how rich and exhaustless a fountain of mirth Hawthorne has at his command. The whole representation has the dreamy yet distinct remoteness of the purely comic ideal.³²

And similarly the North American Review:

The delineation of wharf scenery and of the Custom House, with their appropriate figures and personages, are worthy of the pen of Dickens; and really so far as the style is concerned, Mr. Hawthorne has no reason to thank us for the compliment; he has the finer touch, if not the more genial feeling, of the two.³³

"A distinct remoteness," "if not the more genial feeling": the difference was sensed. In any case, humor and mirth were wanted; The Scarlet Letter itself had neither. Duyckinck, in the review in The Literary World, quoted passages from "The Custom House" "as evidence of the possession of a style faithfully and humorously reflective of the scenes of the passing hour, which we earnestly wish he may pursue in future volumes."³⁴ And Whipple concluded:

In his next work, we hope to have a romance equal to The Scarlet Letter in pathos and power, but more relieved by touches of that beautiful and peculiar humor, so serene and searching, in which he excels almost all living writers.³⁵

In The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne tried to oblige.

³²Quoted in Faust, p. 71.

³³Quoted in Faust, p. 75.

³⁴Quoted in Faust, p. 70.

³⁵Quoted in Faust, p. 72.

III

The uses of the comic in The House of the Seven Gables are far more various than in The Scarlet Letter: humor and satire in the characterization, detachment and irony in the style and point of view, and comic action which goes the whole range from farce through realism to romance in the narrative pattern and in the issuance of the plot. Cumulatively, these elements operate with sufficient potency to affect the tragic theme. They help to shape the total meaning of the romance, the view of life it implies.

Guilt inherited and earned anew in the succeeding generations of a family is a theme familiar in tragedy; such had been the fates of the Houses of Atreus and Labdacus. But in this case the setting was to be New England. A family old enough to have such a curse associated with its identity would be aristocratic, and the aggressions of the aristocracy in a democratic society could be the source of the guilt. But in democratic America there was something inevitably ludicrous about the pretensions of aristocracy. Furthermore, if the pretensions were those of a family in decay, the matter became absurd. And if there should be a branch not in decay, but in evident prosperity, that prosperity, in materialistic America, would be financial (wearing a facade of benevolence), and so, for Hawthorne, a

proper object of satire. Thus several elements basic to the conception of The House of the Seven Gables invited comic treatment.

Hepzibah, the first character introduced, makes an elaborately comic entrance. We hear her sighs of "lugubrious depth and volume of sound," and the "creaking joints of her stiffened knees," the opening and shutting of bureau drawers and the rustle of her "stiff silks" as she goes about her devotions and self-adornment (III, 46-47). And the author cannot make her come upon the scene! "Truly! well, indeed!" he cries, "who would have thought it! Is all this precious time to be lavished on the matutinal repair and beautifying of an elderly person . . . ?" (III, 47). After another pause, which indicates a sorrow in her life but not its source or seriousness:

--here comes Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon! Forth she steps into the dusky, time-darkened passage; a tall figure, clad in black silk, with a long and shrunken waist, feeling her way towards the stairs like a near-sighted person, as in truth she is.

(III, 48)

The near-sightedness causes a scowl which disfigures an already homely face and is totally incongruous with Hepzibah's true character. Like the tag-characteristic of a Dickens creation, this scowl is Hepzibah's constant feature: it frightens little children, it deceives the public

and even herself about her character (they claim it sours beer, and she, looking in the mirror, fancies herself doomed to crossness), and, most seriously, it distresses her beauty-loving Clifford.

With her breast heaving sighs "like a very cave of Aeolus," Hepzibah sets to work opening her shop. And in his description of her "overpoweringly ridiculous" deportment on this occasion, Hawthorne's ambivalent attitude toward what she represents becomes clear. He makes much of the ludicrous contrast between the tragic mien of the old dame and the pettiness of her employment; it is a "queer anomaly," a "miserably absurd idea" (III, 54). But he describes in detail her awkward pursuit of "absconding marbles," and her other comic activities. These so heighten the sense of Hepzibah's admitted ludicrousness that the author must ask forgiveness for having begun his tale at this "inauspicious juncture," just "when the patrician lady was to be transformed into the plebeian woman" (III, 55). Conscious of having created a comic figure, the author pleads for a "mood of due solemnity" in the spectators of Hepzibah's fate. (Imagine such a plea in The Scarlet Letter.) Her fate is that "She must earn her own food, or starve!" And throughout the rest of the chapter, Hawthorne pretends that this is her "tragedy," and attempts to transfigure her into "the

immemorial lady," so the tragedy might have some stature.

The pretense and the attempt are themselves comic.

Our miserable old Hepzibah! It is a heavy annoyance to a writer, who endeavors to represent nature, its various attitudes and circumstances, in a reasonably correct outline and true coloring, that so much of the mean and ludicrous should be hopelessly mixed up with the purest pathos which life anywhere supplies to him. What tragic dignity, for example, can be wrought into a scene like this! How can we elevate our history of retribution for the sin of long ago, when, as one of our most prominent figures, we are compelled to introduce--not a young and lovely woman, nor even the stately remains of beauty, storm-shattered by affliction--but a gaunt, sallow, rusty-jointed maiden, in a long-waisted silk gown, and with the strange horror of a turban on her head! Her visage is not even ugly. It is redeemed from insignificance only by the contraction of her eyebrows into a near-sighted scowl. And, finally, her great life-trial seems to be, that, after sixty years of idleness, she finds it convenient to earn comfortable bread by setting up a shop in a small way.

(III, 58-59)

Hawthorne, attempting here to meet the criterion of a faithful reflection of life, finds that he cannot avoid the comic. Hepzibah, in opening her shop, is like Mrs. Gaskell's Miss Matty in Cranford finding herself in the painful necessity of having to sell tea, and is portrayed with the same realistic humor. "Life is made up of marble and mud" (III, 59). But of course Hepzibah's "great life-trial" is not really in the action here depicted; her deepest sorrow lies elsewhere. And Hawthorne's "history of retribution" is to be

elevated by the figure of Clifford, and by Hepzibah's relation to him.

The tragic imagination was even less involved in the creation of the antagonist to this pair, Judge Pyncheon. He is a villain at whom Hawthorne himself both hisses and laughs. Without the awareness or the intellectual value of Chillingworth, he has never been touched by his inherited guilt or struggled to resolve it in his soul; and his own particular guilt in allowing the unjust imprisonment of Clifford was easily rationalized away. It had not been incurred as the consequence of the fateful resolution of a tragic dilemma; he had only to assent to the unjust inferences of others. He is a materialist, a hypocrite, a mere animal; heartless, conscienceless, and proud. But his author presents him not in a spirit of anger or righteous indignation, but with contempt and mockery. He makes fun of him. Introducing the Judge, Hawthorne declares his every sign of benevolence and good humor to be sham, and leads him straight to the farcical action of kissing the air with his protruding lips when Phoebe instinctively draws back. Except in this ironic introductory act (he never mistook air for substance before), Judge Pyncheon is not a comic figure in his actions, except insofar as the flat villain of melodrama is always somewhat comic in the predictable malignity of his

motives and machinations. He is an object of laughter rather because Hawthorne describes him with comic hyperbole and mocking irony. His smile (as misleading as Hepzibah's scowl) is said to have the warmth to ripen a trellis of grapes, to dry up the streets as he passes, and to attract flies to come and buzz at it. The continual mockery reaches its climax in the chapter ironically entitled "Governor Pyncheon." Addressing the bulky dark figure of the dead Judge, who sits in a room where only the ticking of the clock is heard, Hawthorne exhorts him to hurry to his appointments, which one by one are described with chilling minuteness, all their triviality and hollowness made evident.

The merciless satire of the Judge may be contrasted with the gentle satire of Holgrave, the New England jack-of-all-trades who has "a law of his own. (III, 109). The fact that he has never lost his identity, that his conscience and innermost man have never been violated, saves him; it makes him admirable and provides a basis for his ultimate salvation. But his career has so far been unstable and fruitless, the undirected one of a self-reliant and self-made man. At the age of twenty-one, he has already been a school-master, a salesman, a newspaper editor, a pedlar, a dentist, an official on a packet-ship to Europe, a practicing Fourierist, and a lecturer on Mesmerism; he is now a

daguerreotypist. The variety and number of occupations make him, with respect to his career, a comic exaggeration of a familiar New England type.

The world which Hawthorne creates in this romance differs from that of The Scarlet Letter in the same direction and degree that the characters we have been discussing differ from the romantic heroine and more complex villain of that earlier work. The tragic theme has its home in the old house itself, whose interior is filled with the darkness in which the tragic imagination can operate. But this house is opposed to a fully realized world outside, a world very different from the Boston of The Scarlet Letter. It is a world of cheerful and comic actualities. In this world people pass by the house and, from the outside, complacently draw their false conclusions about the occupants within. From this world come Hepzibah's noisy, demanding, and outspoken customers. It is a world of machine-like regularity and predictability. The little boy, Hepzibah's most faithful customer, pops up unfailingly to demand the elephants, camels, and Jim Crows he devours with the insatiability of time itself; the humorous character of Uncle Venner is seen coming down the street just as dependably seeking food for his pig and eternally planning his retirement. Here children follow an itinerant showman and his monkey, and shabby parades

pompously march by. This world of comic realism is there at the beginning when Hepzibah opens her shop, and it is there at the end, after the tragedy is resolved as well as might be, commenting on events with ignorant good humor. It is there all along, contrasting with the world of the house, and with its constant intrusions, relating the house to it, giving the house itself a setting in actuality and giving the house's occupants a constant sign of the sunlit stream of humanity which they needed to have experienced to have been made whole. The nature of the novel itself is of course affected by the inclusion of this world. It becomes comic in technique (in, for example, the repetitive appearances of little "Father Time" and old Uncle Venner), and it necessarily takes on a wholeness of vision which differs from the vision of the tragic protagonists themselves to a far greater degree than the world-view of Hester and Dimmesdale and Chillingworth differs from the vision of The Scarlet Letter. This is because the awareness of the author remains to the end more comprehensive than any his characters ever achieve.

The House of the Seven Gables is, it seems to me, essentially a tragicomedy, not just in the traditional sense of the term, meaning a genre which deals with a tragic situation which has a happy issue because of an arbitrary

manipulation of the plot, but also in the modern sense; it suggests the view that life is tragic because it is absurd. Only twice in the novel do characters take meaningful actions which suggest a kind of dignity in the human being as he confronts a painful test. One is in the chapter with its comically reductive title, "The Smile and the Scowl." Hepzibah, "The Scowl," finds in herself the strength to tell Judge Pyncheon, "The Smile," what he is, as she tries to defend her brother from him. The other is when Holgrave finds the body of Pyncheon and sees the universe as "a scene of guilt and of retribution more dreadful than guilt," but is saved from the desperation in which this realization would seem to place him as a Maule preordained to live within the dark shadow of hereditary hate, saved by his love for Phoebe, who is "hope, warmth, and joy." But the first is infused with the absurdity of the quaking, beturbaned heroine as she berates a conventional villain, and is inconsequential. Hepzibah is unchanged, and the villain dies before he can do his damage anyway. The second, though consequential, is the act (not even presented directly, but in retrospect) of a character not fully realized, and whose salvation is not, in any case, worked out in terms of the tragic perception which momentarily overwhelms him. On the contrary, the perception is wholly effaced, for with the lucky entrance of

Phoebe ("The Flower of Eden"), a totally untragic, prelapsarian world comes into existence.

The character on whom the tragic theme is focused, Clifford, must end his life as meaninglessly as he has had to live it, never having had to make a choice in a time of trial, and by nature incapacitated for meaningful action in any case. Unquestionably there is deep pathos in the seventh chapter, "The Guest," in which the character of Clifford is most fully exposed. But its chief point is that this passive, effete lover of Beauty was of all men the least fitted for a life of strife and sorrow, for a "battle with the world" in which men of heart, will, and conscience can emerge victorious even in martyrdom. It was "not Clifford's fault," says Hawthorne; he was made that way, a selfish aesthete whom the world ought to serve, but does not (III, 134-136). Censure and scorn are not for Clifford, but for the world which, being made up of sorrow and strife, is inhospitable to him and makes his existence in it absurd. ". . . You would have felt tempted to hold an argument with Destiny," Hawthorne writes in another chapter, "and affirm that either this being should not have been made mortal, or mortal existence should have been tempered to his qualities" (III, 169). What has such a view in common with the tragic vision of The Scarlet Letter, a vision in which the universe

in which man exists may be right or wrong, but is what it is, and man, resigning himself to the fact in the awareness of its inexorability, discovers avenues by which he can establish his own dignity in courageous action, even if such action is fatal. Clifford cannot achieve meaningful resignation because he has never been in the active conflict from which awareness comes; he is passive from the beginning. But the real difficulty lies in the fact that for him there are no avenues to be discovered; there can be no escape into meaning.

The tragedy and absurdity of this inability to escape are emphasized several times over. The possible avenue into a common bond with general humanity would have been for a man like Clifford suicidal, as the chapter "The Arched Window" suggests. He and Hepzibah are trapped. The attempt to go to church is equally futile and pathetic. And after the "scene of passion and terror" in which Hepzibah tells the Judge he is repeating the sins of his ancestors, she runs to Clifford's chamber to summon him, and pausing on the way, considers how strange it is that, with all the city around her, she cannot give a cry from her soul which would bring understanding humanity "hastening to the rescue."

But how wild, how almost laughable, the fatality,--

and yet how continually it comes to pass, thought Hepzibah, in this delirium of a world,--that who-soever, and with however kindly a purpose, should come to help, they would be sure to help the strongest side!

(III, 289)

From the house the old couple finally "escape," "two owls," Hawthorne calls them, a "lunatic" and an "imbecile," in a great comic flight that drops them at a deserted railroad siding--nowhere--from which they must make their way back to the fateful house. They have nowhere to go. Clifford's astounding volubility on the train is the expression of his exhilaration; but this regeneration is as false as that of Dimmesdale after his interview with Hester in the forest. And where Dimmesdale had an alternative to the escape which would have left him with his guilt, Clifford has none from the fact of his wasted life or from his absurd nature, nor Hepzibah from hers.

No escape--this is true, too, in the tragedy and the comedy of the final chapter, "The Departure." That a Maule should come to love a Pyncheon (who, it is emphasized again and again, is not really a Pyncheon), and so effect a kind of reconciliation, is merely fortuitous. In "this delirium of a world" it might happen, and then again it might not. There is nothing necessary, or convincing about it. It is merely what romantic comedy, taking over as the form, wishes

to happen. It wishes, too, that Judge Pyncheon's heir might die, and leave the newlyweds all that money to be happy with. And so he does die. Probabilities be damned, and enough of sorrow. Improbabilities may be comic, but they are not therefore impossibilities. And yet, though Holgrave may grow up and become conservative, there is still no real escape, no real change, for Clifford and Hepzibah: that is impossible. Let them live out their days and die on a sunny estate. But let us not suppose "all's well."

After such a wrong as he [Clifford] had suffered, there is no reparation. The pitiable mockery of it, which the world might have been ready enough to offer, coming so long after the bitter agony had done its utmost work, would have been fit only to provoke bitterer laughter than poor Clifford was ever capable of. It is a truth (and it would be a very sad one but for the higher hopes it suggests) that no great mistake, whether acted or endured, in our mortal sphere, is ever really set right. Time, the continual vicissitude of circumstance, and the invariable inopportunities of death, render it impossible.

(III, 371)

We leave them, then, "evidently happy," living in the mirthful company of a young couple, a humorous old man, and the Pyncheon chickens, those wizened old fowls who have all along parodied the pride and the decay of the family to which they belonged, and now, to signify the rebirth, begin laying eggs prodigiously. But we remember what Hawthorne

wrote, when the Italian boy played outside the house in which the Judge lay dead:

This contrast, or intermingling of tragedy with mirth, happens daily, hourly, momentarily. The gloomy and desolate old house, deserted of life, and with awful Death sitting sternly in its solitude, was the emblem of many a human heart, which, nevertheless, is compelled to hear the thrill and echo of the world's gayety around it.

(III, 348)

After The Scarlet Letter, what Hawthorne sought to give was a more amusing, more faithful, and more harmonious representation of life, guided always by his serious moral purpose to combine the Actual and the Imaginary to effect an ideal of beauty and truth. He gave, in The House of the Seven Gables, "a contrast, or intermingling of tragedy with mirth," but in doing so, in creating characters in themselves absurd and in situations of wrong and suffering in which no real meaningful action could be made, in resolving, finally, his theme by using his characters like puppets to make them happy, he created a world not tragic, but tragicomic. It is too like the world of the puppets he describes in the eleventh chapter:

In all their variety of occupation . . . this fortunate little society might truly be said to enjoy a harmonious existence, and to make life literally a dance. . . . Possibly some cynic, at once merry and bitter, had desired to signify, in this pantomimic scene, that we mortals, whatever our business or amusement,--however serious, however trifling,--all dance to one identical

tune, and, in spite of our ridiculous activity, bring nothing finally to pass. For the most remarkable aspect of the affair was, that, at the cessation of the music, everybody was petrified, at once, from the most extravagant life into a dead torpor. . . . All were precisely in the same condition as before they made themselves so ridiculous by their haste to toil, to enjoy, to accumulate gold, and to become wise. Saddest of all, moreover, the lover was none the happier for the maiden's granted kiss! But, rather than swallow this last too acrid ingredient, we reject the whole moral of the show.

(III, 196-197)

Feeble grounds, yet Hawthorne does reject the whole moral; just as he parenthetically insists on "higher hopes" in a quotation already given; just as he says that a "deeper trust in a comprehensive sympathy above us" keeps us from believing that "the insult of a sneer, as well as an immitigable frown" is "on the countenance of fate" (III, 59), although his own story suggests the reality of the sneer; just as in his notebooks (see above, Ch. I), he asks Heaven's pardon for the irreverent and tragicomic meditations he proceeds to develop. He rejects the moral, but the moral remains. It remains because his rejection has only the force of his sentimental disagreement with Hepzibah at another point in the story. She, trying to pray in her extremity, becomes convinced

that Providence intermeddled not in these petty wrongs of one individual to his fellow, nor had any balm for these little agonies of a solitary soul; but shed its justice, and its mercy, in a

broad, sunlike sweep, over half the universe at once. Its vastness made it nothing.

(III, 291)

Hawthorne's correction is that "Hepzibah did not see that, just as there comes a warm sunbeam into every cottage window, so comes a lovebeam of God's care and pity for every separate need" (III, 291). This has all the persuasive-ness of the end of the book itself, where Hawthorne, tardily but true, comes in the guise of Providence with his lovebeams of care and pity.

If "life is marble and mud," that must be true at the end as at the beginning. The "worst and meanest aspects of life" cannot be effaced with the strumming of a harmonious note on Alice Pyncheon's old harpsichord. The old couple lives on; and the materialism, the sordidness, remain, and Holgrave and Phoebe inherit it. One must shed tears, as Clifford does at the sight of the horrible ugliness of the musician's monkey, unless one has "the fiercer, deeper, and more tragic power of laughter" (III, 198).

In contrast with The Scarlet Letter, the only power that the materials, the attitude, the characters and the situation in The House of the Seven Gables left for its theme was that kind of tragicomic power, the fierce, deep power of laughter. The weakness of the end is not that it violates Hawthorne's tragic vision, for the deeper and

narrower vision of tragedy was never present in the book; its weakness is that it violates the tragicomic perception which the book does possess. It tries to persuade both author and reader that the fierceness, the pain in the source of the laughter has disappeared. Hepzibah, kneeling on the platform at the siding in the country, screwed up her old eyes, scowling involuntarily at the overcast sky, and asked, "O God,--Our Father,--are we not thy Children? Have mercy on us!" But it is Hawthorne who answers her prayer.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE: THE DOUBLE VISION IN LIFE AND ART

The House of the Seven Gables, with its "humorous admixture," was well received by critics and the public.¹ Hawthorne followed it promptly with the bright Wonder Book for Girls and Boys, its fanciful versions of the ancient myths linked by humorous scenes set at "Tanglewood." "I don't know what I shall write next," he then wrote to Bridge. "Should it be a romance, I mean to put an extra touch of the devil in it, for I doubt whether the public will stand two quiet books in succession without my losing ground."² A year later, with the next book published, he wrote the same friend:

Perhaps you have seen 'Blithedale' before this time. I doubt whether you will like it very well, but it has met with good success. . . . In a day or two I intend to commence a new romance, which, if possible, I mean to make more genial than the last.³

The two quotations would seem to indicate that The Blithedale

¹See Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), pp. 113-114.

²Quoted in Bridge, p. 127.

³Bridge, pp. 130-131.

Romance must be a very disagreeable work, something like The Scarlet Letter. It is true that it lacks "geniality," and has "an extra touch of the devil." But it is very unlike The Scarlet Letter. It is not tragic, but ironic.

The features which distinguish The Blithedale Romance from Hawthorne's other works all center in the aesthetic and ethical problems which stem from the polar attractions toward involvement and detachment. These tendencies had always been concerns of Hawthorne, in both his life and art, as we have seen. In Blithedale the conflict between them is a major theme. Where before he had shown the danger of detachment and the tragedy of isolation, he now became equally concerned with the dangers of involvement. The strange ironic vision which is the book's dominant characteristic is a result of three elements: the use of a setting and situation in which Hawthorne had been in his own way involved; the conscious creation of two characters of tragic stature or potentiality with whom he could not fully sympathize; and, finally, the deliberate adoption of the first person point of view, that of the involved observer.

I

At the time of Hawthorne's participation in the Brook Farm experiment, he had made two real commitments, and

neither was to the social philosophy which the Farm represented. One was to Sophia Peabody, the other to literature. Brook Farm was to be made subservient to these. Hawthorne could hardly have devoted more money and energy to the Farm if he had believed in it, but his presence there was ironic as long as he continued to be critical of its founders' fundamental beliefs, a devotion to which formed no part of his motivation. He was simultaneously involved and detached. The longer he stayed and the harder he worked, the more critical he became, and the irony increased proportionately.⁴ The farm refused to be the servant of love and literature.

Over ten years later, looking back at his sojourn at the Farm as "certainly the most romantic episode" of his own life, he decided to use the place "merely to establish a

⁴These conclusions are based on the letters reprinted in Henry W. Sams, ed., The Autobiography of Brook Farm (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1958), pp. 12-75, passim, and the relevant sections of The American Notebooks, pp. 75-90. The letters to Sophia are full of love, amusing descriptions of Hawthorne's farm labors, and complaints about the impossibility of literary work. The notebooks describe scenery, animals, and people seen on walks and on a trip to town. The closest Hawthorne comes to discussing the ideals of the Farm is to remark in a letter to David Mack, several months after leaving Roxbury, that "though I have much faith in the general tendency of institutions on this principle, yet I am troubled with many doubts (after my experience of last year) whether I, as an individual, am a proper subject for these beneficial influences." See Sams, p. 74; reprinted from Manning Hawthorne, "Hawthorne and Utopian Socialism," The New England Quarterly, XII (1939), 729-30.

theatre," a "scene . . . in good keeping with the personages whom he desired to introduce" (V, 321-22). Thus Hawthorne finally made the Farm subserve his literary aims. The several ironies behind Brook Farm's ultimate destiny to become the setting in a Hawthorne romance are reflected in his treatment of it. In his "Preface" he denies an intent to criticize socialism (V, 321), and it is true that, to the regret of Henry James and Irving Howe,⁵ Blithedale is not very concerned with the social issues involved. There is little satire. Yet the scene is "in good keeping" not simply because it was a likely place for high-minded eccentrics to foregather, but also because Hawthorne's view of the community, as of the "personages" introduced there, is ironic.

The life of this "new Paradise" begins on a wintry day in mid-April. "Paradise, indeed! Nobody else in the world . . . had dreamed of Paradise that day, except as the pole suggests the tropic" (V, 330-331). The journey to this Paradise chills the narrator, Coverdale. "'How pleasant it is!' remarked I, while the snowflakes flew into my mouth the moment it was opened" (V, 333). The physical incongruity of the scene forms the background for the ironic observations

⁵See Henry James, Hawthorne (Ithaca, N. Y., 1956: Great Seal Books Ed.), pp. 69-70, and Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (New York, 1957), pp. 163-175.

on the little utopia which are interspersed throughout the initial chapters.

Hawthorne gives full value to the heart-felt aspirations of the community, but does not omit the detached, intellectual perceptions of difficulties with the nature of things:

If ever men might lawfully dream awake, and give utterance to their wildest visions without dread of laughter or scorn on the part of the audience, --yes, and speak of earthly happiness, for themselves and mankind, as an object to be hopefully striven for, and probably attained,--we . . . were those very men. . . . It was our purpose,--a generous one, certainly, and absurd, no doubt, in full proportion with its generosity--to give up whatever we had heretofore attained, for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles on which human society has all along been based.

(V, 341-342)

"Selfish competition" is one of those "false and cruel principles." But on the first night, the necessity of beating the neighboring farmers to market is pointed out to the "knot of dreamers" by Silas Foster, the practical manager of the farm. "It struck me as rather odd," remarks Coverdale, "that one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, should relate to the possibility of getting the advantage over the outside barbarians in their own field of labor." "I very soon became sensible," he adds, "that, as

regarded society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood." "We were inevitably estranged from the rest of mankind" (V, 343). The involvement in a minority endeavor necessarily causes a detachment from society at large, and, with further irony, the commitment to nobler ends necessitates, as long as those ideals are held by the minority, a commitment to the contradictory baser means in practice.

As a matter of fact, the "outside barbarians" regard the "Arcadians" as no threat at all, which gives a further twist to the comic tangle of misconceptions. The neighboring farmers see the "Arcadians" as completely incompetent, and tell "slanderous fables," a hyperbolic catalogue of which Coverdale recites (V, 393). Those in the outside world who do sympathize are equally deluded about the reality. They think it is a poetic Arcadia indeed, and on their visits "snatch up a hoe . . . and set to work with a vigor that perhaps lasts through about a dozen ill-directed strokes" (V, 412-413), the effort of which has a disillusioning effect.

But the "first practical trial of our theories of brotherhood" is simply that of eating together: "grisly Silas Foster, his rotund helpmate, and the two bouncing handmaidens," together with the "people of superior culture and refinement" (V, 347). The latter feel "as if something were already

accomplished towards the millenium of love." This close communion at the supper table would seem to show the sincerity of the involvement. But it is rendered false by the fact that the "superior" people are conscious of their condescension, which causes a degree of detachment; they are aware that they share the laborer's bread by choice, and may not so choose at any time. There is no irrevocable bond. Says Coverdale:

If ever I have deserved . . . to be soundly cuffed by a fellow-mortal, . . . it must have been while I was striving to prove myself ostentatiously his equal, and no more. . . . The poor, proud man should look at both sides of sympathy such as this.

(V, 348)

If, then, the situation is ironic--is not what it seems or ought to be--either in the immediate relationships or in the relationship to society at large, is the ideal at least realized in terms of the individual's self-culture? The ideal is the union of the yeoman and the scholar in one individual; the effect was to be "the spiritualization of labor."

In this point of view, matters did not turn out quite so well as we anticipated. . . . The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, in the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish.

(V, 394)

Here again, the nature of involvement is found to have a

surprising effect which defeats the ideal. Of Burns Coverdale says, "He was no poet while a farmer, and no farmer while a poet" (V, 395). The lesson, like the others, was one Hawthorne learned personally while involved in the Brook Farm experiment, in the detached, skeptical, and observant way he was involved.

The themes of the consequences of involvement and detachment, and the defeat of the ideal by the nature of things, are inherent, then, in the setting. It is true, as Henry James says, that Hawthorne merely uses the community as "a perch for starting upon an imaginative flight,"⁶ and does not make it his subject at all. But the ironic details and comments which he does offer are in perfect harmony with the characters and action which make up the "imaginative flight."

II

Zenobia, Hollingsworth, Miles Coverdale, and Priscilla are the four "personages introduced" in the community with whom Hawthorne concerns himself. It is perhaps a tribute to the intelligence of the first three that none of them seems to expect in the least that the community will succeed. (Priscilla, who is there through no action of her

⁶James, p. 108.

own, does not have an opinion, which is only one of her many negative qualities.) But since their presence there is supposed to represent a great commitment which entails sacrifices and single-mindedness, and to show, as Coverdale says, a willingness "to follow out one's daydream to its natural consummation" (V, 332), there is something ludicrous about the way they talk and act. Their behavior helps to confirm their pessimistic assumption. Zenobia talks about the time when "our pastoral shall be quite played out" (V, 408), and speaks contemptuously of those of so "poor and meagre" a nature as to be incapable of dressing up in silks and having a good time in Boston as well as on the farm (V, 508). Hollingsworth walks about openly planning the reformatory he plans to build on the site of the farm, which will necessarily supplant it. Coverdale, feeling "an inexpressible longing for at least a temporary novelty" (V, 479), departs just at harvest-time. "Here ends the reformation of the world, so far as Miles Coverdale has a hand in it!" exclaims Silas Foster. To which Coverdale feebly remonstrates about "dying in the last ditch, for the good of the cause"; but Foster is right.

The incongruity between the fact of their being at Blithedale and their attitude toward it is, however, of relatively minor importance, as their motives are hardly

questioned. (Hawthorne knew well the variety of motivations which might be sufficient.) What we must give attention to is the kinds of characters they are. Like Shakespeare's Coriolanus, Zenobia and Hollingsworth are created explicitly as tragic; they are given stature and a kind of nobility, and the flaws in their characters lead them to unhappy ends. And yet, again like Coriolanus, they are drawn as fools, and their traits are such that it is difficult to sympathize with them. The ironic view which comes from Coverdale's ambivalent tendencies toward the identification of tragedy and the detachment of comedy must be our ultimate concern; but we may first look at Zenobia and Hollingsworth as they exist in themselves, so far as this is discernable apart from Coverdale's point of view.

In the "Preface" Hawthorne refers to his characters as types:

The self-concentrated Philanthropist; the high-minded Woman, bruising herself against the narrow limitations of her sex; the weakly Maiden, whose tremulous nerves endow her with Sibylline attributes; the Minor Poet, beginning life with strenuous aspirations which die out with his youthful fervor. . . .

(V, 323)

With capitalization of the adjectives, they could come from a novel by Meredith.⁷ Zenobia, or the High-Spirited Woman,

⁷Cf., for example, in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,

is an energetic and embittered Feminist, resentful of masculine domination and referring to herself as "an auditor--auditress, I mean," of Hollingsworth's lectures (V, 344). Despite the masculine conception of herself, she is the very woman of women. She is the most sexually "present" of all Hawthorne's characters. And her downfall comes, ironically, because she is blindly in love with a man to whom she is willing to subordinate herself totally. The "tragic-comedy" of her situation⁸ results in outrageous double-talk. For instance, on one occasion she prophesies vehemently what woman will do "when my sex shall achieve its rights." Coverdale happily consents to all she says, adds that he hopes woman will also take over the government and priesthood, and fancifully describes the benefits from such a development. Little Priscilla asks Hollingsworth for the truth, which he gives, emphatically contradicting everything Zenobia and Coverdale have said. Coverdale turns to Zenobia, expecting resentment of this display of "masculine egotism," but he finds her grief-stricken and in tears, and is astounded to hear her say, "Well, be it so. . . . I, at least, have deep cause to think you right. Let man be but

another novel about the defeat of ideal plans: The Scientific Humanist, Wise Youth, The Hero, Beauty, Dyspepsy, etc.

⁸Cf. Howe, p. 172.

manly and godlike, and woman is only too ready to become what you say to him" (V, 456-461). "Manly and godlike" is what she believes Hollingsworth to be; she resents every slighting remark made about him. But, for all her pride in her intellectual powers, she deludes herself. No one can put it better, with all its pathetic and comic force, than she herself finally does:

"I am a woman, with every fault, it may be, that a woman ever had,--weak, vain, unprincipled (like most of my sex; for our virtues, when we have any, are merely impulsive and intuitive), passionate, too, and pursuing my foolish and unattainable ends by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means, as an hereditary bonds slave must; false, moreover, to the whole circle of good, in my reckless truth to the little good I saw before me,--but still a woman!"

(V, 566)

"It is a genuine tragedy, is it not?" she asks a little later, "with a sharp, light laugh" (V, 572-573). One may well ask. The pursuit of "foolish and unattainable ends" by "absurdly chosen means" describes a comedy bordering on farce. But this leaves out the woman. And it is Zenobia the High-Spirited Woman who manages to give a tragic dimension to her foolish history. Simply by her intensity of life she makes those around her seem mere figures in a pastoral (V, 344), and in spite of her queenly affectations, she seems truly to have noble capacities. There is pathos in the genuine suffering she evinces when, after her

rejection, she thinks herself left alone (V, 571-2), and there is terror, though a distortion of truth, in the "moral" she draws from her fate:

"That the whole universe, her own sex and yours, and Providence, or Destiny, to boot, make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair's-breadth, out of the beaten track."

(V, 573)

In detaching herself from the common role of women, Zenobia thought she found an independence and freedom which made her the equal of men, but she meets her personal disaster not because of her freedom, but because of her blind involvement with a cold egoist, a philanthropist (she hates philanthropists), who rejects her when he finds he cannot use her.

Hollingsworth, or The Self-Concentrated Philanthropist (one species of Egoist), has even fewer claims to truly tragic regard, because one cannot believe that any great loss is a consequence of his defeat. Except in the conceptions of him held by Zenobia and, at first, Coverdale, he hardly seems human, let alone a superior human. He is a morose blacksmith who has got hold of a single idea, an exceptionally absurd one, and devotes his whole time to its advancement, without ever coming closer to its fulfillment. His devotion puts him in a false relationship with the community he lives

in, with Coverdale and Zenobia, his two closest friends, with everything, in fact, except the wraithlike and passive Priscilla, whom he absurdly decides he loves. Molière might have made something of him; Meredith would have found his appalling boorishness intractable. Zenobia at one point speaks scornfully of Coverdale's inability to distinguish a hero from a fool (V, 510), but the only question about Hollingsworth seems to be whether he is a fool or a knave. However, he evidently has a masculine forcefulness of personality, and he does come to self-awareness, somewhere between paragraphs in the penultimate chapter. He ends his days ironically, too, a would-be reformer of criminals now concerned only with saving himself, the "murderer" of Zenobia, leaning on the slender Priscilla for support.

These are the two great figures of the book, Zenobia and Hollingsworth. They bring to mind the kind of characters which interested Meredith. Though they are presented without the witty and conscious evocation of Olympian laughter, they, too, suggest the question Meredith asked of his own "tragic comedians": "The laughter of the gods is the lightning of death's irony over mortals. Can they have a finer subject than a giant gone fool?"⁹

⁹George Meredith, The Tragic Comedians (New York, 1910), p. 110.

III

The importance of *Miles Coverdale*, or *The Minor Poet*, in the romance he narrates has been recognized in recent criticism. Frederick C. Crews has seen the basic plot to be, not the melodramatic Zenobia-Hollingsworth-Westervelt-Priscilla entanglement, but simply the effort of Coverdale to write a romance from real life, which creates a struggle between his poetic fancy and the facts of the actual world.¹⁰ The work unquestionably gains much in being read this way (though its stature can never be quite what Crews makes it), for if it is regarded as a tragedy, then it cannot survive the kind of attack Van Doren makes.¹¹ The only attractive element Van Doren finds in Blithedale is an occasional lightness of tone, which, however, he considers to be a fault in the book:

If some of the amusement he [Hawthorne] felt at West Roxbury creeps into this romance, and gives it a beguiling lightness here and there, this very lightness becomes a fault when we remember that we are supposed to be assisting at a tragedy. Coverdale keeps recommending the tragedy, and proving that it is real. But Coverdale is an ass, and tragedy needs no proof.¹²

¹⁰See "A New Reading of The Blithedale Romance," American Literature, XXIX (1957), 147-170.

¹¹See Van Doren, pp. 188-191.

¹²Van Doren, p. 190.

If Coverdale is an ass, then we had better ignore his recommendations, and consider the book in some other light. I prefer to follow the lead of Roy R. Male, who writes:

The Blithedale Romance is Hawthorne's dark comedy. The detachment of comedy, he felt, was necessary for changing men's minds; the involvement of tragedy, however, was necessary for changing their hearts.¹³

Involvement and detachment are controlled by point of view, and in Coverdale, the narrator, Hawthorne created a character who vacillates from sympathetic to critical. His problem, as Crews has shown, is that of the artist who wishes to be involved sympathetically with men, yet wants also to stand apart in such a way that he can analyze and criticize or dream his own romancer's reality. This represents the familiar Hawthornian struggle between the heart and the head, as the artist in particular would experience it.

Miles Coverdale, the Minor Poet, is a detached observer of men who now, with the further detachment of years, looks back on the time when he decided to leave his warm and wine-stocked city apartment to join a band of dreamers in the founding of a modern Arcadia. He wanted to give his life some purpose, to become involved and committed. But he is a singularly unheroic person, and two tendencies, not

¹³Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, p. 13.

quite compatible, interfere with his drive toward involvement. One is a tendency toward cold analysis, the other is toward a fanciful embellishment or romanticization of reality. Both have the effect of detachment and inactivity. He, unlike Zenobia and Hollingsworth, can see the delicate relationship between folly and heroism (V, 331). He defends his own commitment to Blithedale in these words:

Whatever else I may repent of, let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny,--yes!--and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment; even to the extent of quitting a warm fireside, flinging away a freshly lighted cigar, and travelling far beyond the strike of city clocks, through a drifting snow-storm.

(V, 332)

So far as Coverdale's contribution to Blithedale went, that was about the extent of it. Here is his similar characterization of himself at the end of the book:

I by no means wish to die. Yet, were there any cause in this whole chaos of human struggle, worth a man's dying for, and which my death would benefit, ~~then~~--provided, however, the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble--methinks I might be bold to offer up my life. If Kossuth, for example, would pitch the battlefield of Hungarian rights within an easy ride of my abode, and choose a mild, sunny morning, after breakfast, for the conflict, Miles Coverdale would gladly be his man, for one brave rush upon the levelled bayonets. Further than that, I should be loath to pledge myself.

(V, 598-599)

He goes on to say that he exaggerates his own defects, and asks the reader to judge him as "the young man who once hoped strenuously, and struggled not so much amiss" (V, 599). He does exaggerate; that is part of the comedy of it--the older man looking back with detachment on his own brief period of involvement. But his characterization of the young man as one who "hoped strenuously, and struggled not so much amiss" is inaccurate also. The young man was one who was ready to do Old Moody "any amount of kindness involving no special trouble" (V, 327), who departed from Blithedale when things became troublesome, who continually thought of his "duty" to save Priscilla but never asserted himself to that end, who left Blithedale altogether as soon as his particular friends had died or departed, and who, he fatuously reveals in the end, had himself loved Priscilla. This last is detached involvement with a vengeance. It would be preposterous, compounding as it would the basic implausibility of anyone's loving Priscilla, if we did not recall his saying earlier that Priscilla's charm was so negative that she existed for him really as he chose to imagine her (V, 434).

This involvement with the three other chief characters is, however, what matters--not his commitment or lack of it to Blithedale (which, on the first night there, he suggested

be called "Utopia," to the disgust of everyone, who took the suggestion for what it was: "latent satire"--V, 362). The involvement-detachment struggles with regard to Blithedale and friends are perfectly parallel, however. His involvement with the three is usually ignored; Coverdale is taken as a cold and impartial spectator of their actions who tries to shape them into a real-life romance. But he is not impartial; they are all his friends. He is attracted to Zenobia, feels her power, and admires her greatly (V, 337-8, 339-40, 370). He grows to love Hollingsworth (V, 367-8, 399), who gently nurses him back to health (for which he is not entirely grateful, having made up his mind to die). And he loves Priscilla, too, as he decorates her with his fancy. Coverdale's love for these people should not be underestimated, for it is what saves them from comic treatment, from being in fact just the kind of characters I have tried to show that they were, apart from his view of them. Yet he is sufficiently detached and analytical to see them enough in that way to make his attitude ironic. Without the fact of his love, there would be an incongruity between his perception of their follies and the serious tone in which he usually discusses them.

After a scene in which Hollingsworth becomes enraged at Fourier's ideas, Coverdale coldly analyzes him as a

monomaniac, coming to this conclusion:

It is my private opinion that, at this period of his life, Hollingsworth was fast going mad; and, as with other crazy people (among whom I include humorists of every degree), it required all the constancy of friendship to restrain his associates from pronouncing him an intolerable bore. Such prolonged fiddling upon one string,--such multi-form presentation of one idea!

(V, 383)

"The constancy of friendship" is what Coverdale gives, though, as is the case with so many comic would-be do-gooders in fiction, he finds that there is no practical action to be taken. He will not become Hollingsworth's disciple, and when his friend brings that issue to a matter of total involvement or none at all, Coverdale must detach himself completely. This negative action is his greatest act of moral heroism. But on returning to the city, he finds detachment equally impossible. He can think only of his friends. And when he looks out the window, there they are! He has lost himself in them. Zenobia accuses him of prying, and he so accuses himself:

That cold tendency, between instinct and intellect, which made me pry with a speculative interest into people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanizing my heart.

(V, 495)

This admission, so frequently quoted by itself to characterize Coverdale, is too extreme, and Coverdale corrects himself:

But a man cannot always decide for himself whether his own heart is cold or warm. It now impresses me that, if I erred at all in regard to Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, it was through too much sympathy, rather than too little.

(V, 495)

The question need not be settled; the point is simply that this is Coverdale, vacillating between detachment and involvement or hitting an ironic midpoint, and it is his vision which gives the book its character. He is a man who can carry on light banter with Zenobia, and later fully sympathize with her sorrows and powerfully describe the horror of her death. He is a man who can climb up into his tree-top hermitage and laugh aloud at the "scheme of reform" below him which looks so ridiculous from there, and later work with the strength of Samson when under the emotional stress of a personal crisis (V, 434, 475). He can cast himself as the Chorus in the drama (V, 430), and later imagine he might take the role of deus ex machina ("act in the place of destiny and avert misfortune," V, 495). Having fearfully foreseen the catastrophe for so long, he actually becomes impatient for it to occur (V, 499) (and then arrives at the farm half an hour too late to witness it). He viciously attacks Westervelt when the man, at Zenobia's grave, remarks that her suicide was foolish, and in the same breath admits "his reflections possessed their share of truth" (V, 592).

Hawthorne probably in the first instance chose the first person narrative technique simply because he was for once, as he had seen Melville do in Moby Dick and as Twain was later to do in Huckleberry Finn, to employ facts from his own experience as the basis for his creative imagination. But with Hawthorne the technique never, as it does in Melville and Twain, achieves the sense of immediacy in perception and action which is usually its merit. The kind of identification one makes with Ishmael and Huck one never makes with Coverdale. Coverdale himself is too unsympathetic a character for that, and the love he says he felt is not realized again in his reminiscence with much force. Nevertheless, taking the book not as a tragedy, but as an organic study in irony, in which the setting, the characters, and the point of view all represent variations on the themes of involvement and detachment, the first-person technique is successful, for by it the narrator himself can represent degrees of involvement with the material of his story.

Coverdale himself--his ironic vision--is the most interesting thing about The Blithedale Romance. One finishes the book with a peculiar sense of conflicting impressions. The dark and grotesque horror of Zenobia's death is most memorable; but one has had the lighter, self-mocking reflections of Coverdale sounding since then in his own

"confessional" chapter. One remembers scenes of brightness and charm, and is almost persuaded that James was right when he said the book made one "think more agreeably of life";¹⁴ but then one remembers the futility of it all--only Priscilla enjoying "a veiled happiness," (V, 594), Coverdale suspecting his life was "all an emptiness" (V, 598), and Blithedale itself now a home for the "paupers, aged, nerveless, and disconsolate" (V, 598). Among Hawthorne's major works, the book is, as James says, "the lightest, the brightest, the liveliest, of this company of unhumorous fiction."¹⁵ It does not have, as he goes on to say, a point of view "more joyous." There is no joy here at all. There is a detachment which is often comic in its perception, but it is the detachment of a Jaques, which is what Westervelt, in his caricature of Blithedale, calls Coverdale (V, 423). Priscilla is too happy for Coverdale; he advises her to be sober, "beneficently seeking to overshadow her with my own sombre humor" (V, 405). He gives her a sad vision of the world which, not surprisingly, is consistent with the entire romance as he tells it. The book is pervaded with the sombre humor of irony. But it is not morose, because the melancholy itself

¹⁴James, p. 105.

¹⁵James, p. 105.

is viewed with detachment:

It had taken me nearly seven years of worldly life
to hive up the bitter honey which here I offered
to Priscilla. And she rejected it!

(V, 406)

A "dark comedy" is what the book is. Dark because of the melancholy, the sense of regret that the laughter is at the expense of empty lives, wasted powers, and lost ideals. Dark comedies have never fared well critically; one wants to laugh without regret, or else be moved completely. There can be nothing cathartic about irony, which brings neither laughter nor tears unalloyed. Pity, fear, scorn, love--none of these is aroused in a definite way. Irony rests between involvement and detachment; this may not be the place for the greatest art. But it can be, as I think it is in the case of The Blithedale Romance, the place for a valuable art which does not strive for an effect profound or striking, but gives a direct presentation of the struggle to attain the mean which constitutes the ethical life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MARBLE FAUN: MYTHIC MASQUERADE AND CARNIVAL

Two entries in The French and Italian Note-books indicate the genesis of The Marble Faun. The first was written after seeing statues of fauns in the casino of the Villa Borghese:

. . . a Faun, copies from that of Praxiteles, and another who seems to be dancing, were exceedingly pleasant to look at. I like these strange, sweet, playful, rustic creatures, . . . linked so prettily, without monstrosity, to the lower tribes. . . . Their character has never, that I know of, been wrought out in literature; and something quite good, funny, and philosophical, as well as poetic, might very likely be educed from them. . . . The faun is a natural and delightful link betwixt human and brute life, with something of a divine character intermingled.

(X, 167)

The second was written a few days later, after a visit to the Capitol:

We afterwards went into the sculpture-gallery, where I looked at the Faun of Praxiteles, and was sensible of a peculiar charm in it; a sylvan beauty and homeliness, friendly and wild at once. The lengthened, but not preposterous ears, and the little tail, which we infer, have an ~~exquisite~~ effect, and make the spectator smile in his very heart. This race of fauns was the most delightful of all that antiquity imagined. It seems to me that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of their species having become intermingled with the human race. . . .

(X, 172-173)

The poetry, pathos, and philosophy of the book which resulted from these thoughts have been extensively studied. As for the "fun," more critics, one gathers, have been annoyed by Hawthorne's faun than amused by it. But if we can enter sympathetically into Hawthorne's attitude toward it as expressed in these quotations, something ought to be gained in our understanding and appreciation of The Marble Faun through looking for the "fun" in it. This element of Hawthorne's original impression and intent of course might have been obscured or lost in the execution; such tended to be the case when the mature Hawthorne attempted to take a light view of things--the tragic moved only to the tragicomic or ironic. But there is fun in The Marble Faun, in the central figure himself and in the comic view of life he embodies so long as he is a faun. The fun provides delight in itself, and contributes much to the pathos, poetry, and philosophy of The Marble Faun as well.

I

The use of a mythological figure in a modern context or at least with pointed modern relevance is, of course, not new in Hawthorne. We have already seen how the Devil is present in "Young Goodman Brown" and The Scarlet Letter. In both of these cases humor is involved in the double-edged

questioning of his reality: on the one hand there is amusement at the naive and extravagant superstition which imagined him, and on the other an ironic criticism of the modern sophisticated view which discredits his relevance altogether. In the modern setting of The Blithedale Romance, Westervelt's infernal attributes (his glimmering red gem--"like a living tip of fire," and his serpent-headed walking-stick: V, 424) are much less elaborately presented than are those of Chillingworth and Brown's companion, but the humor of the hinted identity is there, and resembles that of Goethe's Mephistopheles dressed as a modern gentleman. Again, in "The Celestial Railroad," Bunyan's characters show through their modern counterparts with humorous effect.

If the appearance of the Devil in the fiction of an age of unbelief is itself a source of amusement, the presence of a Faun in modern Rome is equally "funny." Both are cases of incongruity. But there is a difference. The Devil is found, ironically, not to be so irrelevant to the modern scene after all. In the case of the Faun, an element of pathos is simultaneously present, because he is a sympathetic creature whose innocent antics and childish attitudes are found to be totally out of place in the modern world. Nevertheless, some additional fun is to be had simply from the remarkable fact that he is there, and from speculations

on how he got there. Hawthorne perhaps tries to make too much of this; one gets a little tired of hearing the other three characters, indulging romantically in the mood "between jest and earnest" (VI, 27), exclaim over the similarity between Donatello and the sculpture, and certainly the joke about his ears was only good for one try. Perhaps if Donatello had been a more modern faun, as Henry James wished, claiming the type could be found among contemporary Italians,¹ something would have been gained in a closer psychological relationship between Donatello and innocence in the modern world. But the fun of the incongruity would have been lessened. More importantly, the chapters on "The Pedigree of Monte Beni" and "Myths" would have been less justifiable, and it is they which largely allow the introduction of the comic vision of primitivism which is of great importance to the meaning of the romance.

The Faun is only one of three characters in the book concerning whose identity and origin Hawthorne allows his imagination to play in the humorously extravagant manner we have seen in earlier tales and sketches. The "fancies of the Italian peasants" are used to embellish the lineage of Monte Beni (VI, 274) in a way which allows Hawthorne to

¹James, p. 134.

suggest its symbolic importance without having to vouch for it as history. Similarly, the Spectre of the Catacombs is given a meaningful if incredible history simply through the imaginings of those who heard of him, as the story of his appearance spread

even into Italian circles, where, enhanced by a still potent spirit of superstition, it grew far more wonderful. . . . Thence, it came back among the Anglo-Saxons, and was communicated to the German artists, who so richly supplied it with romantic ornaments and excrescences, after their fashion, that it became a fantasy worthy of Tieck or Hoffmann. For nobody has any conscience about adding to the improbabilities of a marvellous tale.

(VI, 47-48)

"The most reasonable version . . . that could anyway be rendered acceptable to the auditors" was that the Spectre was the legendary Memmius, a "man, or demon, or man-demon" whose fantastic history (one very relevant to the rôle of the Spectre in the novel) is given at length. To this preferred version are added several which come from Miriam's own "melancholy sort of playfulness," and which, in their recurrent "dreary termination," increase the mystery about her (VI, 49-50). Hawthorne then ends the chapter with some exceedingly prosaic alternative possibilities for the benefit of the readers who might prefer not to go "many steps beyond the limits of probability" (VI, 51).

About Miriam herself similar comic speculations occur.

There is "an ambiguity about this young lady" (VI, 35). No one knows anything about her. This allows a convenient freedom for the imagination to create "wild and romantic fables" which are very valuable indices to her character and allegorical meaning. Comic in their number and variety, they all suggest the exotic, mysterious, "large and bounteous impression" necessary to her role (VI, 38).

II

The Faun brings with him into the romance a sense of the Golden Age which embodies essentially a comic vision of life, a vision which is of the utmost importance in providing the basic contrast with the tragic vision of evil in a fallen world. The comic vision emerges in the sequence of chapters early in the book which centers on "The Sylvan Dance" and is relieved only by the darkness latent in Miriam. It is developed a second time in the series of chapters set at Monte Beni, after Donatello's "fall," where it serves to deepen by contrast his present, tragic condition. Finally, it underlies the final chapters, which reach their climax in "A Frolic of the Carnival," where it implicitly compares and contrasts both with the modern carnival and with the suggestion of an ultimate "divine comedy." Its projection in all these ways necessarily serves to lighten the texture of

a generally somber novel, to give the book, in effect, the sense of the mixed nature of life, in which the dark predominates.

The three chapters set in the Borghese Grove, which give the vision of the Golden Age, are prefigured by Donatello's brief dance in Miriam's studio. There he became "an incarnate spirit of jollity," fit to be the model for her painting of a "rustic dance" with its "extravagance of fun" (VI, 64). That afternoon in the Borghese Grove he awaits her. Exhilarated by the "natural influences of the scene," unaware of the "dream-like melancholy that haunts the place," he feels only "the old sylvan peace and freedom."

He ran races with himself along the gleam and shadow of the wood-paths. He leapt to catch the overhanging bough of an ilex, and swinging himself by it alighted far onward, as if he had flown thither through the air. In a sudden rapture he embraced the trunk of a sturdy tree. . . .

(VI, 93)

The lizards crawl over him without fear, and birds alight on the nearest twigs. He is at one with nature, without the estrangement that human existence gives; he knows a natural joy. Miriam enters the garden, which is likened to Eden, and he leaps from a tree to greet her. "He began inevitably, as it were, to dance along the wood-path, flinging himself into attitudes of comic grace" (VI, 97). Miriam asks him

about the world of fauns, dryads, and satyrs, ruled over by Bacchus; he laughs, but does not understand.

He appeared only to know that Miriam was beautiful, and that she smiled graciously upon him, that the present moment was very sweet, and himself most happy.

(VI, 98-99)

He tells her that he loves her.

It was as if they had strayed across the limits of Arcadia, and come under a civil polity where young men might avow their passion with as little restraint as a bird pipes its note to a similar purpose.

(VI, 99)²

When she asks how long his happiness will last, he says, "Forever!" (VI, 102). Naturally melancholy as she is, she decides to give herself for one hour to the world of Donatello, to "sport madly" before the mouth of the dark cave her soul lives in.

So the shadowy Miriam almost outdid Donatello on his own ground. They ran races with each other, side by side, with shouts and laughter; they pelted one another with early flowers. . . . They played together like creatures of immortal youth. . . . they seemed . . . endowed with eternal mirthfulness instead of any deeper joy. It was a glimpse far backward into Arcadian life, or, further still, into the Golden Age, before mankind was burdened with sin and sorrow, and before pleasure had been darkened with those shadows that bring it into high

²Cf., in The Blithedale Romance: "While inclining us to the soft affections of the golden age, it [the situation at Blithedale] seemed to authorize any individual, of either sex, to fall in love with any other, regardless of what would elsewhere be judged suitable and prudent" (V, 401).

relief, and make it happiness.

(VI, 104)

This mirth, thus distinguished from true joy and happiness, reaches its climax in "The Sylvan Dance" of the following chapter. In a glade nearby, musicians are playing for a feast day. Miriam throws herself into "the frolic of the hour" with Donatello, whose dance has the "charm of indescribable grotesqueness hand in hand with grace; sweet, bewitching, most provocative of laughter, and yet akin to pathos, so deeply did it touch the heart" (VI, 106). They are joined by a motley crew "all gone mad with jollity": plebeian damsels, contadinas, French soldiers, German artists, the Pope's Swiss guardsmen, English tourists ("one of them a lord"), herdsmen, and "a shaggy man in goat-skin breeches, who looked like rustic Pan in person, and footed it as merrily as he." It is "the Golden Age come back again." Only a lone American "sneered at the spectacle, and declined to compromise his dignity by making part of it" (VI, 106-9).³

Miriam's sketch had, in this **scene**, come to life. And, as in it, "there was no drawback, except that strange sigh and sadness which always comes when we are merriest" (VI, 64). The sigh and sadness are alluded to occasionally

³The Americans provide another comic moment in the novel when they insist on singing "Hail, Columbia!" in the Forum (VI, 193).

throughout these predominantly bright chapters. There is, to begin with, the interior melancholy of Miriam. Then there are the signs that the "frolic of her spirits" will tire, of which a "dim apprehension" on Donatello's part leads to more frantic dancing (VI, 107). And then the sudden close, when

In the midst of its madness and riot Miriam found herself suddenly confronted by a strange figure that shook its fantastic garments in the air, and pranced before her on its tip-toes. . . . It was the model.

(VI, 110)

He is that "subtile allusion to death" mentioned several chapters earlier which is "forever peeping forth amid emblems of mirth and riot" on the old sarchophagi (VI, 32). The analogy with the burial carvings is here picked up again and developed at length.

Always some tragic incident is shadowed forth or thrust sidelong into the spectacle; and when once it has caught your eye you can look no more at the festal portions of the scene, except with reference to this one slightly suggested doom or sorrow.

(VI, 110)

And so it is. Great Pan, alive for one hour in the Borghese Grove, dies again at the appearance of the Spectre.

III

With the murder of the Spectre, Donatello dies as a representative of the Golden Age: "that simple and joyous creature was gone forever" (VI, 203). Crime and grief

have come to him, "as to other men." The comic world which lacked moral responsibility, in which love was frank and natural, has ceased to be; when Miriam asks him now to be happy, he replies, "never again!" (VI, 231). In the Medici Gardens, he parts from her, transformed into a remorseful man (VI, 234).

We next see him at his native place in the Apennines. The setting and history of his home are so described as to call back the primitivism of the early chapters, to provide a contrast with the present despairing figure of Donatello. Monte Beni has been throughout the ages an isolated link with the Golden Age, the only spot in which the precious wine called "Sunshine" can be made and kept, a wine "such as Bacchus himself first taught mankind to press from the choicest of his grapes" (VI, 259). The "antique saloon" is decorated with frescoes

of a festive and joyous character, representing Arcadian scenes, where nymphs, fauns, and satyrs disported themselves among mortal youths and maidens; and Pan, and the god of wine, and he of sunshine and music, disdained not to brighten some sylvan merry-making with the scarcely veiled glory of their presence.

(VI, 260-261)

The Monte Beni family "had its origin in the sylvan life of Etruria, while Italy was yet guiltless of Rome" (VI, 268). The father of this race of men was himself "not

altogether human," "a sylvan creature," one of the original Arcadians who "enriched the world with dreams, at least, and fables, lovely, if unsubstantial, of a Golden Age" (VI, 269).

Against such poetic images of a "merrier world" a placed the facts that the frescoes now are faded and despoiled, the "sunshine" clouds over quickly, the animals--all but the lizard--refuse to respond to Donatello's call. Donatello has on him the guilt of Rome. The pathos is deepened by his closer relationship to the "dreams, at least," which all men share. These chapters are saturated with the pessimistic philosophy and nostalgia of primitivism.⁴ There was once, says old Tomaso the butler, "a merrier world, and merrier Counts of Monte Beni to live in it!" But, the "world has grown either too evil, or else too wise and sad, for such men as the old Counts of Monte Beni used to be" (VI, 275). Old Tomaso is capable of fairly subtle distinctions. "Either too evil, or else too wise and sad." For the growth of intelligence and wisdom, as well as the possibility of a

⁴See Bernard J. Paris, "Optimism and Pessimism in The Marble Faun," Boston University Studies in English, II (1956), 95-112. See also Herbert Weisinger, Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (London, 1953), p. 92, for an analysis of the nostalgia of primitivism which followed upon the development of the moral sense, as these two phases were expressed in ancient ritual.

deeper joy than that of the Golden Age, which attend the experience of evil, are precisely the points which Hawthorne wishes to make. This becomes clear by the time we reach the third sequence of chapters which employ the imagery and themes of the Golden Age.

IV

The journey of Kenyon and Donatello begins the Faun's second transformation. "The gay spectacle of the market-place" in Perugia has "its suitable effect on a temper naturally prone to be glad" (VI, 361). There, beneath the statue of Pope Julius, he is re-united with Miriam. He has become a "man of feeling and intelligence," "revolving grave and deep thoughts in his breast" (VI, 367, 370). The change to Kenyon "seemed hardly worth the heavy price that it had cost, in the sacrifice of those simple enjoyments which were gone forever" (VI, 448). But the release from the tower and the reunion with Miriam make possible a re-emergence of some of the better qualities of the Faun. We get a brief view of him alone and masked as a "gloomy penitent" in the Corso (VI, 446-7), which appears to be a relapse into the state at Monte Beni. But when we see him again at length, he is with Miriam, masked as a peasant for the Carnival. They are living for a few days "the sweet irresponsible

life" of Donatello's "mythic ancestry" (VI, 484).

It appeared to Kenyon that since he last saw Donatello, some of the sweet and delightful characteristics of the antique Faun had returned to him. There were slight, careless graces, pleasant and simple peculiarities, that had been obliterated by the heavy grief through which he was passing at Monte Beni, and out of which he had hardly emerged, when the sculptor parted with Miriam and him beneath the bronze pontiff's outstretched hand. These happy blossoms had now reappeared. A playfulness came out of his heart, and glimmered like firelight in his actions, alternating, or even closely intermingled, with profound sympathy and serious thought.

(VI, 490-1)

"Is he not beautiful?" asks Miriam.

"So changed, yet still, in a deeper sense, so much the same! He has travelled in a circle, as all things heavenly and earthly do, and now comes back to his original self, with an inestimable treasure of improvement won from an experience of pain."

(VI, 491)

All things "travel in a circle." This is the mythic basis of the ancient ritual pattern⁵ which Hawthorne adopted in this romance. The goddess returns from the grave (VI, 483). And the Carnival, at the coming of the New Year, celebrates the return of the "sweet irresponsible life." Like Miriam and Donatello, the entire populace throws down "the burden of the before and after" and is "happy in the flitting moment." "The youthful and light-hearted . . .

⁵See Weisinger, pp. 31-43.

make the worn-out world as fresh as Adam found it on his first forenoon in Paradise" (VI, 494). Hawthorne describes it vividly: the flowers and confetti, the "gay and gorgeous carpets" hanging from the windows, the women and children with "mirthful expression," and in the street the throng of costumed merry-makers. Like the revelers of Merry-Mount and the masqueraders at Blithedale,⁶ these people adopt the faces and behavior of the people of the Golden Age, where men and animals were not estranged, where there was no darkness, where love was free, where Spring was eternal. They enact anew the traditional combats of the Spring festival (VI, 496) with the decorum within apparent madness (VI, 499) which assured the efficacy of the celebration.⁷

The Carnival is the setting for the reunion of Kenyon and Hilda, which is preceded by the most extended comic passage in all of Hawthorne. Kenyon's presence among the merry-makers is incongruous; he is remembering the felicity

⁶Norris Yates, in "Ritual and Reality: Mask and Dance Motifs in Hawthorne's Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XXXIV (January 1955), 56-70, brings together all Hawthorne's references to and uses of masques and dances, briefly compares Monte Beni, Brook Farm, and Arcadia, and tries to relate the tragedy of Miriam and Donatello and the ritual of the carnival to Aeschylus. Male, p. 145, characterizes the entire Blithedale endeavor as "a misplaced faith in the comic vision of life."

⁷Cf. Weisinger, pp. 210, 38-43.

of his participation in it the year before with his three friends, from all of whom he is now separated. He is "anxious and unquiet." "His sad and contracted brow so ill accorded with the scene" that the revellers use him "as the butt of their idle mirth" (VI, 502-3). Comic creatures of every description harass him with wooden swords, showers of seeds, blown bladders filled with rattling peas, and so on. "Even yet, his merry martyrdom was not half over." "A gigantic female" makes "a ponderous assault upon his heart, throwing amorous glances at him out of her goggle eyes."

Her suit meeting no favor, the rejected Titaness made a gesture of despair and rage; then suddenly drawing a huge pistol, she took aim right at the obdurate sculptor's breast, and pulled the trigger.

(VI, 503-4)

The shot covers Kenyon with a cloud of lime dust.⁸ "Hereupon a host of absurd figures surrounded him pretending to sympathize with his mishap." Clowns, harlequins, orang-outangs --"all . . . imaginable kinds of monstrosity and exaggeration" pretend to be a "coroner's jury," their persistent grins giving "a still more ludicrous effect to the comic alarm and sorrow of their gestures." One announces himself a notary who will write Kenyon's will, another a surgeon who

⁸This incident is characterized by Male, p. 161, as "an exaggerated re-enactment of the Fall of man," "a surrealistic version of Adam's reduction to human clay."

will bleed him. Then they all pass like a dream (VI, 503-505). After a brief meeting with Miriam and Donatello, Kenyon looks desperately at the passing faces, looking for Hilda. Just as Miriam and Donatello are apprehended in the midst of the crowd, Kenyon is struck by two missiles: a cauliflower and a rosebud. The first came from a passing carriage, the other from Hilda, who has stepped onto the balcony above him, to the shock and dismay of the English tourists who possess it. At the sight of her, Kenyon's "own secret sorrow and the obtrusive uproar of the Carnival died away from his perception" (VI, 512).

The comic attributes of the pagan celebration of the Carnival clearly deepen the pathos of the fates of Miriam and Donatello, as they also, by their sheer frantic mirthfulness, heighten by contrast the purer joy of the reunion of Hilda and Kenyon. But there remains to be considered the place of the Carnival in the romance as a whole; its placement and extended development give it especial importance.

In the first place, the Carnival is essential to the circular structure and theme. It reminds one of the earlier scene of "madness and jollity" of the preceding Spring. But it contrasts with it as well. For Hawthorne did not show us the Carnival of the year before, but rather the "sylvan

dance" of a smaller group of merrymakers, who achieved for a time a purer vision of the Golden Age.⁹ During the Carnival, Hawthorne takes advantage of Kenyon's cold and unparticipating mood to provide a criticism of the celebration which alternates with the view of "clear, natural eyesight" which can still find "both merriment and splendor" in the ancient festival (VI, 499). This critical view sees that the carnival is "worn-out." "It is traditionary, not actual." It has not "the old simplicity of real mirth." It chiefly serves the tourists. The flowers, tattered and dirty, are picked up and sold again and again. Evidently, though each Spring seems a new beginning, the added cares and guilt of mankind cannot be cast off, the attainment of the spirit of the Golden Age becomes more and more impossible as the world grows older. The past is indestructable, as the pervasive images of three successive civilizations which make up modern

⁹John W. Bricknell, in "The Marble Faun Reconsidered," University of Kansas City Review, XX (Spring 1954), 193-199, relates the "Sylvan Dance" and the Carnival. His reading of the romance as a whole, however, seems to me very misconceived. He remarks, for instance, that the "reduction" of Miriam and Donatello to "mere gamblers in The Carnival, enjoying a last fling before Donatello goes to prison, seems arbitrary and frivolous." (P. 197) It would be, if this were what Hawthorne had done with them. But they are far from "enjoying a last fling." "There may be a sacred hour, even in carnival time," Miriam says to Kenyon, "a profound sadness in her tone . . . assuring him that a pale, tear-stained face was hidden behind her mask." (VI, 506) The contrast between mask and reality is effectively made.

Rome constantly remind us.

The Carnival, if it is cheaper, less actual, than the original celebration it tries to re-create, is even further below the true joy and happiness which Hawthorne has suggested can come only when the dark shadows of sin and sorrow have been experienced, those shadows which bring pleasure "into high relief, and make it happiness" (VI, 104). The Carnival, after all, in the modern and Christian world, signalizes the beginning of Lent; only after the repentance comes the joy of the Resurrection. And so, though Donatello's experience has changed him from a Faun into a Man, he lies at last in a dungeon; and Miriam, in penitential black, prays in the Pantheon. Hawthorne leaves them even so, but, as the book was originally written, the last words were these:

. . . what was Miriam's life to be? And where was Donatello? But Hilda had a hopeful soul, and saw sunlight on the mountain-tops.

(VI, 522)

The "sunlight on the mountain-tops" is the symbol of the hope that beyond "the dark valley" (VI, 315) is the resurrection that promises a higher happiness than man could have known without the fall, that the full cycle is not an earthly one, but ends, finally, outside of time, in the "comedy" envisioned by Dante and Milton.¹⁰

¹⁰Cf. Weisinger, 135. The paradox of the fortunate

Within time, in this guilty and woeful world, there
is a place for the Carnival:

. . . there is a wisdom that looks grave, and
sneers at merriment; and again a deeper wisdom,
that stoops to be gay as often as occasion serves,
and oftenest avails itself of shallow and trifling
grounds of mirth; because, if we wait for more
substantial ones, we seldom can be gay at all.

(VI, 494)

fall, as Weisinger informs us in his chapters of Hebrew and Christian faith, became increasingly more spiritual in conception than it had been in more ancient myth and ritual. Hyatt H. Waggoner's contention that the plot of The Marble Faun "symbolically rejects" the idea of felix culpa because Miriam ends "in tragic exile" and Donatello in prison, seems odd, as neither of these facts represent the spiritual condition of the characters. On the contrary, the last time Donatello is analyzed he appears as a nearly ideal man (VI, 491), and the last time we see Miriam, she is praying. Is she still, as Waggoner says, an "unregenerate character"? Waggoner's whole discussion of this central problem in the book is very detailed, but I think over-theoretical; he is effectively answered by Male. See Waggoner, pp. 197-200, 218-222, and Male, pp. 174-6. See also Merle E. Brown, "The Structure of The Marble Faun," American Literature, XXVIII (Nov. 1956), 302-313: Brown finds four "transformations" in the book, but thinks the problem of the fall irrelevant, since Donatello's situation differs from Adam's; see Brown's microfilmed dissertation, "The Structure and Significance of The Marble Faun," University of Michigan, 1954, for elaboration of the idea. See also Alfred S. Reid, "The Role of Transformation in Hawthorne's Tragic Vision," Furman Studies, VI (Fall 1958), 9-20, which endorses the felix culpa interpretation and relates The Marble Faun in this respect to four earlier tales.

CONCLUSION

"He did not talk in that way; his moods had not seemed to be of that color,"¹ wrote Hawthorne's son, describing the bewilderment he felt when he first read his father's works. Perhaps more than is always the case, the artist was not the man. That is why the biographies, whether they draw their portrait from the greatest works or from the facts of Hawthorne's life and the testimony of relatives, are unsatisfying. Hawthorne himself begged his readers not to suppose that the cheerlessness of The Scarlet Letter was an indication of the bent of his own mind and character. He claimed he "was happier, while straying through the gloom of these sunless fantasies, than at any other time since he quitted the Old Manse" (V, 64). Evidently a happiness exists in the creative process which may not be expressed on the page. And an artist like Hawthorne is not, when at work, what he might desire to be by intention; else Hawthorne would have been a Trollope.²

Nevertheless, the more comprehensive vision of life

¹Julian Hawthorne, "The Salem of Hawthorne," Century Magazine, XXVIII (May 1884), 6.

²See Fields, p. 63.

which takes in comic perspectives as well as the tragic is in fact reflected in the works of Hawthorne, as this study has attempted to show. The flat, neutral tone of his notebooks gives way to one of comic detachment, humor, satire, irony, or the tragicomic as frequently as it becomes sombrely meditative. And from detachment through irony and the tragicomic to the tragic, the tones modulate without inconsistency or contradiction. The sketches, more often than not, reflect the light, the humorous, and the detached sides of Hawthorne's way of looking at life; and a playful extravagance and an ironic self-mockery extend even into the sketches of a darker concern. In the more formal art of the tale, Hawthorne usually shaped his materials into tragic meaning; but in some of the greatest he used the comic modes, employing humor for contrast or realism or pathos; or moving away in point of view for the controlling comic distance of detachment, satire, or irony; or moving in to present the tragicomic disorientation of a mind in despair or hysteria. Relatively few tales are purely comic, but these are in various modes, and many of them are skillfully done.

As in the tragic tales, the comic in The Scarlet Letter serves the tragic ends directly. But in Hawthorne's other novels the comic significantly affects the total aesthetic form and philosophic vision of each. In approaching

them from a consideration of the comic, I have tried to emphasize their differing characters: The House of the Seven Gables as essentially tragicomic, The Blithedale Romance as ironic, and The Marble Faun as a tragic retelling of a fundamental religious myth which has implicit within it an ultimate comic vision.

Hawthorne's greatest art, in its effect and meaning, is tragic; but the aim of this study has been to show that for an understanding of his work as a whole, and even of the method and variety of that greatest art, one needs to perceive the comic in the works of Hawthorne.

LIST OF WORKS CITED

- Adkins, N. F. "The Early Projected Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne," Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, XXXIX (1945), 119-155.
- Austen, Jane. Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman. Oxford University Press: London, 1932.
- Baskett, Samuel S. "The (Complete) Scarlet Letter," College English, XXII (Feb. 1961), 321-328.
- Baudelaire, Charles. Curiosités Esthétiques. Paris, 1946.
- Bergson, Henri. Le Rire: Essai sur la Signification du Comique. Paris, 1908.
- Blair, Walter. "Color, Light, and Shadow in Hawthorne's Fiction," New England Quarterly, XV (March 1942), 74-94.
- _____. Native American Humor (1800-1900). New York, 1937.
- Bricknell, John W. "The Marble Faun Reconsidered," University of Kansas City Review, XX (Spring 1954), 193-199.
- Bridge, Horatio. Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York, 1893.
- Brown, Merle E. "The Structure and Significance of The Marble Faun," microfilmed dissertation, University of Michigan, 1954.
- _____. "The Structure of The Marble Faun," American Literature, XXVIII (Nov. 1956), 302-313.
- Cameron, Kenneth W. "Background of Hawthorne's 'The Canterbury Pilgrims,'" Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 13 (Fourth Quarter 1958), pp. 41-45.
- Campbell, Oscar James, Shakespeare's Satire. Oxford University Press: New York, 1943.

Cazamian, Louis. The Development of English Humor. Duke University Press: Durham, N. C., 1952.

Chandler, Elizabeth Lathrop. "A Study in the Sources of the Tales and Romances Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne before 1853," Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, VII (July 1926).

_____, ed. "Hawthorne's Spectator," New England Quarterly, IV (April 1931), 289-330.

Cherry, Fannye N. "The Sources of Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" American Literature, V (Jan. 1934), 342-348.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Best of Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. New York, 1934.

_____. Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1936.

Connors, Thomas E. "'My Kinsman, Major Molineux': A Reading," Modern Language Notes, LXXIV (April, 1959), 299-302.

Cook, Albert Spaulding. The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean: A Philosophy of Comedy. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1949.

Cowley, Malcolm. "Five Acts of The Scarlet Letter," College English, XIX (Oct. 1957), 11-16.

Crews, Frederick C. "A New Reading of The Blithedale Romance," American Literature, XXIX (March 1957), 147-170.

Davidson, Edward Hutchins. Hawthorne's Last Phase. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1949.

Dickens, Charles. American Notes. Leipzig, 1842.

Doubleday, Neal F. "Hawthorne's Satirical Allegory," College English, III (Jan. 1942), 325-337.

Durr, Robert A. "Hawthorne's Ironical Mode," New England Quarterly, XXX (Dec. 1957), 486-495.

- Eastman, Max. The Sense of Humor. New York, 1927.
- Faust, Bertha. Hawthorne's Contemporaneous Reputation.
University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, 1939.
- Fields, James T. Yesterdays With Authors. Boston, 1871.
- Fogle, Richard H. Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1952.
- Foster, Charles. "Hawthorne's Literary Theory," PMLA, LVII (March 1942), 241-254.
- Freud, Sigmund. Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious,
trans. A. A. Brill. New York, 1916.
- Frye, Prosser Hall. Literary Reviews and Criticisms. New
York, 1908.
- _____. Romance and Tragedy. Boston, 1922.
- Garlitz, Barbara. "Pearl: 1850-1955," PMLA, LXXII (Sept.
1957), 689-699.
- Gerber, John C. "Form and Content in The Scarlet Letter,"
New England Quarterly, XVII (March 1944), 25-55.
- Gross, Seymour L. "Four Possible Additions to Hawthorne's
'Story-Teller,'" Papers of the Bibliographical Society
of America, LI (First Quarter 1957), 90-95.
- _____. "Hawthorne and the Shakers," American Literature,
XXIX (Jan. 1958), 457-463.
- _____. "Hawthorne's Revision of 'The Gentle Boy,'" American Literature, XXVI (March 1954), 196-208.
- _____. "Hawthorne's 'Vision of the Fountain' as a
Parody," American Literature, XXVII (March 1955), 101-
105.
- Hall, Lawrence Sargent. Hawthorne: Critic of Society. Yale
University Press: New Haven, 1944.
- Hawthorne, Julian. Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife: A
Biography. 2 vols. Boston, 1884.

- Hawthorne, Julian. "The Salem of Hawthorne," Century Magazine, XXVIII (May 1884), 3-17.
- Hawthorne, Manning. "Hawthorne and Utopian Socialism," New England Quarterly, XII (Dec. 1939), 729-730.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The American Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1932.
- _____. The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop. 12 vols. Riverside Edition: Boston, 1883.
- _____. The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart. New York, 1941.
- Hazlitt, William. Lectures on the English Comic Writers. London, 1819.
- Hobbes, Thomas. The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, ed. William Molesworth. London, 1839.
- Howe, Irving. Politics and the Novel. New York, 1957.
- James, Henry. Hawthorne. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, N. Y., 1956.
- Kern, Alfred A. "Hawthorne's 'Feathertop' and 'R. L. R.,'" PMIA, LII (June 1937), 503-510.
- _____. "The Sources of Hawthorne's 'Feathertop,'" PMIA, XLVI (Dec. 1931), 1253-1259.
- Kesselring, Marion L. Hawthorne's Reading, 1828-1850. New York, 1949.
- Lamb, Charles. The Essays of Elia and the Last Essays of Elia. Dolphin Books: Garden City, New York, 1960.
- Lathrop, George Parsons. A Study of Hawthorne. Boston, 1876.
- Loewenberg, J. Dialogues from Delphi. University of California Press: Berkeley, 1949.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. Review of Twice-Told Tales, North American Review, XLV (July 1837), 59-73.

- Male, Roy R. Hawthorne's Tragic Vision. University of Texas Press: Austin, 1957.
- Marks, Alfred H. "German Romantic Irony in Hawthorne's Tales," Symposium, VII (Nov. 1953), 274-305.
- Mason, Edward T., ed. Humorous Masterpieces of American Literature. New York, 1886.
- Mather, Cotton. Magnalia Christi Americana. 2 vols. Hartford, 1855.
- Matthiessen, F. O. American Renaissance. Oxford University Press: New York, 1941.
- Melville, Herman. The Apple-Tree Table. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1927.
- _____. Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1960.
- Meredith, George. "An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit," in Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher. Garden City, N. Y., 1956.
- _____. The Tragic Comedians. New York, 1910.
- Miller, Harold P. "Hawthorne as a Satirist," unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1936.
- _____. "Hawthorne Surveys His Contemporaries," American Literature, XII (May 1940), 228-235.
- Molière. Oeuvres Complètes. Paris, 1854.
- Monro, D. H. Argument of Laughter. University of Melbourne Press: Melbourne, 1951.
- O'Donnell, Charles R. "Hawthorne and Dimmesdale: The Search for the Realm of Quiet," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XIV (March 1960), 317-332.
- Paris, Bernard J. "Optimism and Pessimism in The Marble Faun," Boston University Studies in English, II (Summer 1956), 95-112.
- Perry, Bliss. The Amateur Spirit. Boston, 1904.

- Poe, Edgar Allan. Selected Prose and Poetry, ed. W. H. Auden. New York, 1955.
- Potts, L. J. Comedy. London, 1948.
- Reid, Alfred S. "The Role of Transformation in Hawthorne's Tragic Vision," Furman Studies, VI (Fall 1958), 9-20.
- Reilly, C. A. "On the Dog's Chasing His Own Tail in 'Ethan Brand,'" PMIA, LXVIII (Dec. 1953), 975-981.
- Richter, Jean-Paul. Sämmtliche Werke. Berlin, 1840-1842.
- Rosenberry, Edward H. "Hawthorne's Allegory of Science: 'Rappaccini's Daughter,'" American Literature, XXXII (March 1960), 39-46.
- Rourke, Constance. American Humor: A Study of the National Character. New York, 1931.
- Sams, Henry W., ed. The Autobiography of Brook Farm. Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1958.
- Schneider, Herbert Wallace. The Puritan Mind. London, 1931.
- Schubert, Leland. Hawthorne the Artist: Fine-Art Devices in Fiction. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1944.
- Scott, Nathan A., ed. The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith. New York, 1957.
- Shroeder, John W. "Hawthorne's 'Egotism; or The Bosom Serpent' and Its Source," American Literature, XXXI (May 1959), 150-162.
- Sophocles. The Theban Plays, trans. E. F. Watling. London, 1947.
- Stang, Richard, The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870. Columbia University Press: New York, 1959.
- Stewart, Randall. "Ethan Brand," Saturday Review of Literature, V (April 27, 1929), 976.
- _____. "Hawthorne and The Faerie Queene," Philological Quarterly, XII (April 1933), 196-206.

- Stewart, Randall. Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1948.
- Sypher, Wylie. "Introduction" and "Appendix: The Meanings of Comedy," in Comedy. Garden City, N. Y., 1956.
- Tave, Stuart. The Amiable Humorist. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1960.
- Ticknor, Caroline. Hawthorne and his Publisher. Boston, 1913.
- Trollope, Anthony. "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review, CXXIX (Sept. 1879), 203-222.
- Turner, Arlin. "Hawthorne and Reform," New England Quarterly, XV (Dec. 1942), 700-714.
- Van Doren, Mark. Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York, 1949.
- Von Abele, Rudolph. The Death of the Artist: A Study of Hawthorne's Disintegration. The Hague, 1955.
- Waggoner, Hyatt H. Hawthorne: A Critical Study. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1955.
- Walpole, Horace. Letters of Horace Walpole, ed. Paget Toynbee. London, 1904.
- Warren, Austin. "Hawthorne's Reading," New England Quarterly, VIII (Dec. 1935), 480-497.
- _____. "Introduction" to Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections. New York, 1934.
- Weisinger, Herbert. Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall. London, 1953.
- Whipple, Edwin P. Character and Characteristic Men. Boston, 1866.
- _____. Lectures on Subjects Connected with Literature and Life. Boston, 1849.
- Yates, Norris. "Ritual and Reality: Mask and Dance Motifs

in Hawthorne's Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XXXIV
(Jan. 1955), 56-70.

Ziff, Larzer. "The Ethical Dimension of 'The Custom House,'" Modern Language Notes, LXXIII (May 1958), 338-344.