

Man tends to behave in cycles. The great sociological phenomenon of action and reaction is really quite unassailable. The Roman excesses dissolved into the humility and denial of early Christianity. Soon Christianity itself became ~~the~~^a top-heavy and gouty ~~Red~~^{like that} type of machine, which it had been trying originally to counteract. As an antidote the humanism and learning of the Renaissance developed. Puritanism was a reaction against this final movement, and, in the English-speaking world, has had perhaps a greater psychological effect than any previous movement~~s~~.

Puritanism appealed to the bourgeois classes which developed after the Middle Ages because, for one thing, it allied financial success with spiritual

success. The maxim that "God helps those who help themselves" was to Puritanism what the Cult of the Virgin was to the Medieval Church. And any religion which can relate the divine to the monetary is destined for acceptance, particularly in an age when, for the first time, commerce and individual enterprise were really beginning to have some definitive meaning.

The British Puritans were unquestionably bourgeois. Those who remained in England became the wealthy merchants who were later knighted and returned to the Anglican fold when they were unquestionably respectable. Their brothers who came to the United States developed the caricatures of Yankee thrift and shrewdness.

But this is only one facet of Puritanism. It is one of the more important because it was the greatest aid in spreading the ideology of the faith. The other facets of Puritanism require psychological rather than historical or sociological study. Ostensibly, they, too, are financial in their bases. Church attendance rather than theatre-going or entertaining is certainly financially wise, for instance. But the importance and horror

of ^{le} SIN assumed unnaturally large proportions in Puritanism. The old ^{Red} ~~Christian~~ Catholic concept of Original Sin was and is an integral part of the Roman religion. But the quick and formal Catholic infant baptism removes this trauma from the mind. To the Puritan, however, this was an almost permanent trauma. If it were not Original Sin the Puritan was worrying about, it was some personally conceived sin. But the concept of SIN constantly plagued the Puritan, culminating in a chronic frustration which relieved itself in the hysteria of events like the Salem witch trials in America, or, in England, the wild intensity of anti-Popery as outlined in Dickens' Barnaby Rudge.

When Norman Vincent Peale says prosperity is directly proportional to spirituality or some state passes a new dry law or a revival meeting in Mississippi degenerates into hysterical rioting, the truth about the current existence of Puritanism in America emerges. But these are just examples of the sort of refinement of Puritanism which is, in some cases, even more severe than the Puritanism of the seventeenth century. Those early American Puritans had emerged ultimately from the color of Elizabethan England. Many of their customs were

really more Elizabethan than Puritan. Only in the isolation of New England did Puritanism really crystallize. Later forces had even more strength in implementing this ideology.

One of these forces was ~~Romanticism~~. It lent a sort of aesthetic gloss to Puritanism, a polish which allowed Puritanism to enter the drawing room in the form of another force, Victorianism. Hawthorne entered the American scene at a period when these three forces, Puritanism, ~~Romanticism~~, and Victorianism, were beginning to form their strange~~x~~ but effective~~x~~ alliance.

Each of these forces was, in itself, a movement away from reality. Each, also, developed its own set of unreal conventions. From an artistic standpoint, ~~Romanticism~~ was the most worthwhile. It added a new dimension to literature and emphasized an imaginative quality which had been missing from the neo-classicism of eighteenth century models. But from a social standpoint, the value of each of these forces is questionable. Each was socially stifling because each denied, in some degree, man's more natural self. When the three of these join, moreover, the result is a rather false social state.

Whatever else he may be, the writer is a mirror of the temper of his times. If he does not capture his age in directly writing of it, he captures the mood of the period. No ambitious American writer today would attempt to create a serious novel ~~in~~ in which the cast of characters included vague, beautiful, and consumptive nineteenth century prototypes of women with heart-shaped faces any more than the nineteenth century writer would write of sex with the realism of Hemingway or the almost pornographic glee of Algren.

Writers like Hemingway and Algren reflect an American scene which is trying to revolt against the bourgeois Puritanism in which it was reared. Even today, many Americans feel that incest and rape and perversion can exist "only in books." Many Americans are still living in their self-constructed shell of social vestiges from the nineteenth century, putting down writers who come too close to reality and grabbing the latest issue of Good Housekeeping.

Hawthorne, however, was living in a period when conscious revolt against Puritanism had not begun. Rather, Romanticism and Victorianism were helping to make Puritanism more socially acceptable than it had ever been before. As a writer of such a period, ~~he~~

Hawthorne wrote what he thought would be acceptable and, ultimately, successful. His "Custom House" prologue to The Scarlet Letter shows that Hawthorne was always cognizant of the sales of his works, and his output reflects this even more.

Particularly representative of his times is Hawthorne's sexual attitude. However basically moral it may be, The Scarlet Letter has a basis that is potentially "sexy." It is closely related to such Biblical stories as David and Bathsheba which teach a moral, but succeed in stimulating the audience at the same time. Where the Biblical story and The Scarlet Letter differ, however, is in the characters of the lovers. Hester Prynne and Dimmesdale are two of the most sexless literary characters ever created. At times the reader wonders how they ever got through the mechanics of conceiving Pearl. Here Hawthorne has taken the loaded subject of promiscuity and adultery and made it into a symbolically effective but sexually neuter novel. Very few writers could probably handle the basic story so inoffensively.

This sexlessness is one of Hawthorne's predominant characteristics. The sexless facet of Puritanism is one that American Puritanism refined and which Romanticism

strengthened. The Romantic concept of "ideal love" and a sort of worship-from-afar rather than sex per se tied in perfectly with the development of the American Puritan bias against sex. This was the climate in which Hawthorne developed his art and the climate which he represented. In "The Artist of the Beautiful" Owen Warland's affection for Annie is completely lacking in any suggestion of the carnal. Warland is, in many respects, a prototype of the artist, but Hawthorne seems to go so far as to make him appear almost effeminate, particularly in the suggestion of his "diminutive frame" and, again, in the "marvellous smallness and delicate powers of his fingers."

In "Rappaccini's Daughter" the suggestion of Eden and Adam and Eve is particularly strong, and with it the suggestion of sin as linked with sensuality. One senses the sensual in Beatrice and the lushness of the garden. But here we see that both are poisonous, and Baglioni, the "father figure", (saves Giovanni from Beatrice.) This leads to another important element in Hawthorne which seems related to Puritanism. The "father figure" is crucially important in Hawthorne, but exactly what does it represent? Might it not be the Puritanical conscience

Is this a fair statement of Baglioni's function?

which was part of Hawthorne's heredity and environment? It seems to function as such in the stories in which it appears. This is particularly suggestive in "Rappaccini's Daughter."

What Hawthorne couldn't overtly present in his stories because of the social pressure which he seemed to feel more than his readers possibly ever would, he seems to have found a chance for expressing through a system of some of the most marvellous symbolism ever conceived. The symbolic quality of a story like "The Maypole of Merry Mount" is particularly high. Here Hawthorne seems to be criticizing the Puritanical atmosphere which he ~~was~~ himself was forced to breathe. The meaning implicit in the symbol of the maypole is clear to anyone with a knowledge of ancient fertility rites, and Hawthorne juxtaposes this tellingly with the denial of Puritanism.

Again, in "Young Goodman Brown" Hawthorne is forced to revert to symbolism to say what social and literary convention prevented. No symbol has more meaning than the symbol of the hollowed rock filled with red liquid:

"Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery

of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him."

In (the context of Faith and Goodman Brown) ^{Cwick} this passage becomes important. Having been relatively recently married, they "had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream." The symbol of the rock suggests strongly the consummation of the marriage vividly and boldly in the most candid physical sense. No nineteenth century writer could be more eloquently sexually than Hawthorne has been in this symbol; no one could suspect that the physical reality of initial intercourse would be presented in such bare (yet symbolic) terms.

Beneath this Puritan-Romantic surface which Hawthorne cultivated there lay an intensity which, and this is the only really applicable term, Hawthorne "sublimated" in an intricate system of symbols destined to escape the average reader. Because the Puritan-Romantic (and ultimately Victorian) social system was not (and is not) in touch with reality, Hawthorne had to escape to a reality which he could only present symbolically. The reality of Puritanism and the social system which he felt emerged symbolically as the "father figure" of his

stories. The literary and social conventions which forced him to create sexless characters ultimately forced him to seek to create the reality of sex symbolically.

It can be said that Poe retreated into the Gothic, into that curious literary tradition of darkness, horror, and, often, degeneracy. The unreal of the Gothic tradition went surprisingly well with the unreal of the Puritan-Romantic tradition. But Hawthorne's retreat was not so marked and overtly dramatic. It was more refined, more subtle. Certainly it was a retreat through the imagination as was Poe's, but through the imagination and imaginative symbolism Hawthorne achieved *Ref* that touch with reality while Poe's stories tend to remain on the level of the supernatural..

It is a strange thing that reality is achieved through imagination. When, however, it is impossible for the artist to be overtly realistic, he must find some other basis for relating his work to life. To Hawthorne the only outlet was imaginative symbols which presented the sensual and the secret of life in a manner which would not be generally offensive. The Puritan-Romantic tradition forms the surface of Hawthorne's

Note:

The mental climate of the period in which Hawthorne wrote still exists in its same force in many sections of the United States. The conscious revolt against this climate so evident in modern American literature is not nearly so evident in Hawthorne's time - principally because the reaction against (Puritanism-Romanticism-Victorianism) had not yet begun. Vestiges of these movements linger strongly in the United States in society, if not in literature.

Therefore, Hawthorne's period is not really too remote from our own; yet Hawthorne research is often conducted as if he had lived in Medieval times. This has, in turn, tended to create an archaic atmosphere in Hawthorne scholarship culminating in a number of forced and unconvincing publications, many attempting to link Hawthorne to certain European traditions when such a link does not really exist (in the majority of cases.)

What "cases"?

Note, continued.

Certainly, Hawthorne reflects the influence of the ~~Romantic~~ movement. Basically, however, he reflects the atmosphere of nineteenth century America. Superficially, this atmosphere has changed. But it appears to be fundamentally similar. National characteristics do not change radically in the course of one hundred years.

Taking ~~this~~ into consideration, I have attempted some original work in the field of Hawthorne. It is an attempt to find Hawthorne's representation of the reality he might not have found apparent in his society, a reality from which Americans might be hiding even today.