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Throughout the course of Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing one notes an extensive use of mirrors and other reflecting objects--brooks, lakes, fountains, pools, suits of armor, soap bubbles, the pupils of people's eyes, and others. Surprisingly enough, few scholars and critics have had much to say about this significant mirror symbolism; perhaps Hawthorne succeeded so well in concealing these images that they express meaning without directing attention to their presence. Nevertheless, they are very much in evidence and for a very definite purpose. Hawthorne, whose works cover the problem of moral growth in man, was attempting to show mankind that only through an intense self-introspection and self-examination of the interior of his innermost being--his heart--would he be able to live in an external world which often appeared unintelligible to him; and through the utilization of mirror images, Hawthorne could often reveal truths hidden from the outer eyes of man.

Hawthorne's interest in mirrors is manifest from his earliest attempts in writing; indeed, he spoke of his imagination as a mirror--it could reflect the fantasies from his haunted mind or the creations from his own heart. More importantly, the mirror came to be for Hawthorne a kind of "magic" looking glass in which he could depict settings, portray character, emphasize important moments, lend an air of the mysterious and the supernatural, and disclose the

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meaning beneath the surface.

Hawthorne's predominating moral, which remains as timely today as it was a century ago, is the necessity for man to understand himself and to be sympathetic with his fellow man because he recognizes that mankind has a mixture of good and evil within its nature. This thesis attempts to show that Hawthorne found in the mirror and reflecting objects a handy, representational, fictional symbol integral to his way of thinking and writing, and vital to his strong central moral.

John Chester Miller

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HAWTHORNE'S USE OF MIRROR SYMBOLISM IN HIS WRITINGS

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

by

Jane Whicker Kellett

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Robert O. Stephens
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis
Adviser

Robert D. Stephens

Oral Examination
Committee Members

Robert D. Stephens

Donald G. Darnell

James D. Winstall

Andrew Smith

April 26, 1968
Date of Examination

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INTRODUCTION

The close students of Nathaniel Hawthorne's works cannot fail to notice the multiplicity of mirrors which the author interspersed throughout his short stories and novels. Indeed, it seems as if Hawthorne had an overwhelming compulsion to use a mirror and its reflections. For example, in "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" the narrator says: "Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward."¹ And later in the story, when the four venerable friends have quaffed the wonderful water and, young again, are dancing around the room, he says: "Yet by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old gray withered grandsires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam."²

¹Norman Holmes Pearson, ed. The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1957), p. 945.

²Pearson, p. 950.

In "The New Adam and Eve," Hawthorne has his characters look for the first time into a mirror; they are puzzled for a moment when they see the reflections, but, the narrator explains: "This miracle is wrought by a tall looking-glass the mystery of which they soon fathom, because Nature creates a mirror for the human face in every pool of water, and for her own great features in waveless lakes."³

In view of all the explication and criticism of Hawthorne's writings it is surprising that this question of mirror images has received so little attention. However, there may be a reason for this; Arlin Turner suggests that readers who lack Hawthorne's symbolic method of thought are not usually conscious of the "metaphorical and symbolic density" which students of figures and imagery are fond of pointing out in his works. Turner thinks this is due to a statement Hawthorne once made that "he had never striven for excellence in style but had been content to have the writing disappear into the thought."⁴ And because it was natural for him to think and express himself through symbols, Hawthorne was able to conceal these symbols so effectively that they often "convey meaning without calling attention to their presence."⁵

³Nathaniel Hawthorne, Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. III, Mosses from the Old Manse (New York, 1923), 283.

⁴Arlin Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1961), p. 124.

⁵Turner, p. 125.

Hawthorne's biographers, for example, have little to say about his interest in reflected images. They acknowledge his use of mirrors and reflections, but do so in a sentence or two. Only Edward Mather states that the looking-glass in the "haunted chamber" of Hawthorne's secluded years is of "serious importance in the biography of the man."⁶ Mather describes Hawthorne as "part Paul Pry, part peeping Tom" spying on the lives of others from behind the curtains of his window in the upper room of his Herbert Street house, for he believed that through this "unabashed spying" he could understand the pattern of people's lives far better than they could ever come to understand it. Mather points out that Hawthorne's autobiographical character, "Monsieur du Mirior" was the lonely, frightened counterpart of Paul Pry who turned from his spying and sat himself down before the looking-glass. "He examined himself in the glass. It was something of a comfort to find himself not quite alone, for though M. du Mirior seemed to do everything that he did, it was done looking-glass wise, in reverse order; and it was a subject of play for his overstimulated imagination to suppose that the man in the glass might be thinking other thoughts than those that Hawthorne was thinking and might even get bored with mimicry and behave independently."⁷

⁶Edward Mather, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man (New York, 1940), p. 53.

⁷Mather, p. 53.

Mather adds that from the looking-glass Hawthorne, though not a philosopher, evolved his one and only philosophical theory: that "what appeared to us as Reality, was not even simply a looking-glass reflection of it but probably a reflection of a reflection, each mirror being slightly distorting, so that we might have to be born again many times before it was granted unto us that we should comprehend Reality."⁸ It is important to note here that "Reality" to Hawthorne meant a kind of "Ideal World," a "World of Perfection" which was unknowable to man, and he must look at image after image and perhaps even wait until a future life before he would come to understand true Reality. Mather says that Hawthorne best expressed this looking glass philosophy upon the occasion of his mother's death in July, 1849. After the death of her husband, Madame Hawthorne had gone into seclusion and had rarely left her room. Even though Hawthorne loved his mother there was a sort of coldness between them, and as she was about to die, he was reminded of the sort of useless life she had lived. He wrote:

I kept filling up, till, for a few moments I shook with sobs And then I looked at my poor dying mother; and seemed to see the whole of human existence at once, standing in the dusty midst of it. Oh what a mockery, if what I saw were all--let the interval between extreme youth and dying age be filled up with what happiness it might! But God would not have 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

⁸Mather, p. 54.

in this miserable way. So, out of the very bitterness of death, I gather the sweet assurance of a better state of being.⁹

Thus, Mather sees Hawthorne's "looking-glass philosophy" sustaining him in moments of despair.

Hawthorne's critics have had more to say about his mirror symbolism, though at best it is not extensive. In his chapter discussing Hawthorne's theory in allegory and symbolism, F. O. Matthiessen devotes several pages to "The Imagination as Mirror." Matthiessen sees the mirror as representing the transcendental strain in Hawthorne's writings; through his reflecting images, the artist imagines he sees the realm of the ideal.¹⁰ Millicent Bell's book Hawthorne's View of the Artist, in a few pages of discussion on "The Symbolic Mirror of Art," agrees with Matthiessen, stating that Hawthorne was likely to look at mirrored scenes with "transcendental rapture." She adds that these images came to represent "symbolic apertures into the universal mind of which the Romantics were so fond of talking" and that they were "appropriate symbols of the poetic imagination which has unique access to a vision of eternity, of past and future."¹¹

⁹Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne A Biography (New Haven, 1948), p. 90.

¹⁰F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York, 1941), pp. 253-264.

¹¹Millicent Bell, Hawthorne's View of the Artist (New York, 1962), pp. 59-62.

Arlin Turner points out that there was much in transcendentalism which attracted Hawthorne, especially that transcendentalism questioned the nature of reality and concerned itself greatly with such concepts as symbol, shadow, and substance.¹² For example, that Hawthorne gave much thought to the transcendental attitude is indicated in an entry in his notebook dated September 18, 1842. After observing a reflection in the water of the Concord River, he wrote: "I am half convinced that the reflection is indeed the reality, the real thing which Nature imperfectly images to our grosser sense. At any rate, the disembodied shadow is nearest to the soul."¹³ Turner says that "the extent of Hawthorne's puzzling over illusion and reality is suggested by the attention he gives to tests for distinguishing between the two. Most frequent of the tests is the mirror or pool of water in which reflections appear."¹⁴ In his story "The Vision of the Fountain" (1835), Hawthorne showed his usual questioning attitude by treating a reflection as an illusion. A young boy, looking into the fountain, beheld a face reflected there: "I breathed, and there was the face! I held my breath, and it was gone! Had it passed away, or faded into nothing? I doubted whether it had ever been."¹⁵ The idealized and

¹²Turner, p. 86.

¹³Works, Vol. IV, Mosses, 32.

¹⁴Turner, p. 116.

¹⁵Works, Vol. I, Twice-Told Tales, 206.

ethereal vision remained with the youth until months later Rachel, daughter of the village squire, appeared and turned out to be the vision who had happened to look over his shoulder at the fountain before leaving for boarding school. Thus the vision was not illusion but reality, but it had transformed a simple maid into an angel.

Richard J. Jacobson in his essay on Hawthorne's Conception of the Creative Process, includes a section on the mirror as Hawthorne's "most persistent metaphor of imagination."¹⁶ Richard Chase states that Hawthorne used the mirror "to suggest that which gives frame, depth, and otherness to reality" and that his fictions are "mirror-like."¹⁷

Jane Lundblad discusses the mirrors as a part of the Gothicism of Hawthorne. She affirms that the Gothic Romance formed an "important sub-stratum" of Hawthorne's writing and even though it was probably not consciously employed by him, it was ever present and used for certain artistic purposes. Listing twelve principal traits of the Gothic Romances, Miss Lundblad includes mirrors under number eleven, entitled "Works of Art." She singles out several mirrors in Hawthorne's works and cites how they are used to create illusions or to make revelations, all in the Gothic tradition.¹⁸

¹⁶Richard J. Jacobson, Hawthorne's Conception of the Creative Process (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 31.

¹⁷Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York, 1957), p. 71

¹⁸Jane Lundblad, Hawthorne and the Tradition of Gothic Romance (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), pp. 22-23.

Malcolm Cowley, the only critic who has considered the question of mirror images at any length, concludes that the chief significance of Hawthorne's interest is biographically psychological. He feels that the images are revelations of Hawthorne's "doubleness" and stem from a strain of narcissism that caused him to develop from a beautiful petted youth into a morbidly self-absorbed man. Furthermore, according to Cowley, Hawthorne was searching for a bridge between his two worlds--the outer world of reality and the inner world of imagination--and for a method of writing by which he could encompass them both. Therefore, by comparing objects with their reflections, Hawthorne found a "symbolic bridge" he could use over and over again; a mirror could serve for Hawthorne as "a kind of window or doorway into the spiritual world."¹⁹

Thus, Hawthorne's reflections have been noted as a philosophical element, a transcendental trait, an outlet for the imagination, a Gothic device, and a connecting bridge between two worlds. However, it seems that a great deal has been omitted from these explanations; one finds himself, much as Hawthorne did in the works of his later years, wanting to pencil into the margin, "What meaning?"²⁰ or "What is the

¹⁹Malcolm Cowley, "Hawthorne in the Looking Glass," SR, LVI (Aut., 1948), 546.

²⁰Hyatt H. Waggoner, Nathaniel Hawthorne (Minneapolis, 1962) Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 23, p. 9.

mirror trying to tell?" Hawthorne, being the conscientious and deliberate artist that he was, found the mirror of greater significance to himself than these critics would have us believe; thus, its use should not be minimized.

Consequently, the question looms: what was Hawthorne's overall purpose in using the mirror and other objects which have the ability to reflect? What was Hawthorne, with his keen perception of human nature and his deep knowledge of the complexity of man's inner life, trying to say to his readers? It would seem that Hawthorne was seeking to show his fellow man that only through self-knowledge, self-introspection, and self-examination of the interior of his innermost being--his heart--would he be able to live in an external world which many times seemed unintelligible to him; and through the use of mirror images, Hawthorne could often uncover truths hidden from the outer eyes of man. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to point out the biographical origin of these looking glass reflections through a contemplation of events in Hawthorne's life; to discuss the close relationship of reflections to Hawthorne's literary theory through a consideration of his idea of the creative process; to examine closely the mirror images in such stories as "Monsieur du Mirior," "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," "Endicott and the Red Cross," "The Minister's Black Veil," "Egotism and the Bosom Serpent," "Feathertop," and others, and in three novels, The Scarlet Letter, The Marble Faun, and The House of the Seven Gables; and finally, to attempt to prove that Hawthorne, by the use

of mirror symbolism, was trying to teach mankind to recognize the mixture of good and evil within himself, and by such recognition come to terms with life, so that he might learn "to live throughout the whole range of his faculties and sensibilities."²¹

²¹Pearson, p. 108.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF HAWTHORNE'S MIRROR SYMBOLISM

Malcolm Cowley has pointed out that no other author in America or abroad ever filled his works with such a glimmering array of mirrors as did Hawthorne.¹ Nor was he content to use merely the looking glass; rather he utilized any object which had the ability to reflect--brooks, lakes, fountains, pots and pans, kettles, suits of armor, andirons, soap bubbles, window panes, and the pupils of a person's eyes, to name a few. Indeed, he did not stop with objects; in one of his stories, "The Prophetic Pictures," he insinuated that the artist himself was a mirror in that he reflected what he saw onto the canvases that he painted.

In tracing Hawthorne's interest in mirror images, it is necessary not only to look into the events of his life but also so consider other sources, including external records consisting of reports by family and friends; Hawthorne's own remarks in his diaries, letters, and prefaces; and his revelations as they can be found in his literary works. One must always be aware, however, that there were several Hawthornes, and "all of them are to some degree masks."² First, there

¹Malcolm Cowley, "Hawthorne in the Looking Glass," SR, LVI (Aut., 1948), 544.

²Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne A Critical Study (Cambridge, 1967), p. 3.

was the "man of sensibility," the "man of feeling," contemporary with Irving and Longfellow; this was the Hawthorne of "tender fancies" and "whimsical sentiments" who wrote "The Snow Image" and "Little Daffydowndilly." Another Hawthorne was "cold, isolated, detached, watchful, skeptical," and this one is the "most persistent shape of the self-portrayal in all of Hawthorne's writings, both fiction and non-fiction," for he was the cold observer, Coverdale scrutinizing others' lives in The Blithedale Romance, Paul Pry, Ethan Brand searching in every heart for the unpardonable sin, and the man in the steeple observing passers-by in the street. Frequently this Hawthorne appeared in the Notebooks, and he was so detached that it is easy to imagine him as using people merely as objects of study. Then there was the high-minded Hawthorne who joined the Brook Farm Community; who helped Miss Delia Bacon publish a book on Shakespeare; and who stood by his friend Franklin Pierce, when to do so amounted almost to being judged guilty of treason. Finally, after 1850, there was the famous "man of letters" who found it difficult to write anything which he considered worthwhile.³ Keeping in mind these various Hawthornes, then, one is ready to begin.

Perhaps a good starting place is the following entry in his American notebooks, dated 1835: "To make one's own

³Waggoner, pp. 3-4.

reflection in a mirror the subject of a story."⁴ Hawthorne took this idea and came up with a most unusual story, "Monsieur du Miroir," which was first published in The Token in 1837. In this amusing account Hawthorne treated the reflected image as a sort of hero and described his every thought and action. Upon first glance, one might well think that this story is nothing more than a flimsy variation on the romantic theme of the double nature of reflections, those of the mirror's surface and those of the person peering into it. However, upon closer inspection, one can gain insights as to what went on in Hawthorne's mind as he studied himself in the mirror.

Matthiessen says that Herman Melville gave "fascinated attention" to this story, heavily underlining and adding such comments as "What a revelation," and "This trenches upon the uncertain and the terrible."⁵ To what depths Hawthorne had reached in the sketch, for example, is a sentence which describes how the author sat alone in his chamber as the evening deepened into night. Melville underlined the phrase "the key turned and withdrawn from the lock," which emphasized the complete isolation of the individual. Later, as Hawthorne's character lighted a lamp, he had the strange sensation that the "tranquil Gloom" of his reflection in the looking glass

⁴Newton Arvin, ed. The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals (Boston, 1929), p. 7.

⁵F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), p. 226.

was that of "a fated man" whose youth "has been wasted in sluggishness, for lack of hope and impulse, or equally thrown away in toil, that had no wise motive, and has accomplished no good end."⁶

That Hawthorne was expressing his own dilemma, his concern that he had isolated himself from society, is shown in a letter he wrote to Longfellow, in gratitude for his praise of Twice-Told Tales. "By some witchcraft or other-- for I really cannot assign any reasonable why and wherefore-- I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again." He went on ". . . I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing, nor dreamed what sort of life I was going to lead. I have made a captive of myself, and put me into a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out,-- and if the door were open, I should be almost afraid to come out."⁷ Here Hawthorne judged that his dim existence was worse than any pain for he added: ". . . there is no fate in the world so horrible as to have no share in either its joys or sorrows. For the last ten years, I have not lived but only dreamed of living."⁸

Austin Warren says that Hawthorne's isolation had

⁶Nathaniel Hawthorne, Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. III, Mosses from the Old Manse (New York, 1923), p. 167.

⁷Matthiessen, p. 227.

⁸Matthiessen, p. 227.

"proceeded partly from his temperamental shyness, partly from an early lameness which precluded games with his playmates, but chiefly, no doubt, from the circumstances of his family and their way of living."⁹ Although Hawthorne had no reputation of being a recluse while at Bowdoin College, his life changed drastically when he returned home to Salem. Since his mother's early widowhood had withdrawn her into solitude, he found his sisters had followed her example; thus, for twelve years, he lived in a "dismal chamber," shutting himself away from the world. Studying himself in the mirror, he was horrified to think that he might have lost his place in the world. Consequently one of the obsessive themes that ran through his works was the danger of isolation. Such a story is "Wakefield," the man who, through a perverse act, detached himself from his family and for twenty years watched his life instead of being a part of it. Hawthorne concluded in this story that "By stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever."¹⁰

Matthiessen says that what terrified Hawthorne even more about the isolated individual was his "cold inability" to respond to ordinary life, "whether, as in the case of Gervayse Hasting in 'The Christmas Banquet' it was owing to

⁹Austin Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections (New York, 1934), p. xii.

¹⁰Norman Holmes Pearson, ed. The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1957), p. 926.

the fact that since he had never suffered, other people seemed to him only shadows; or whether, as with an unscrupulous scientist like Rappacini or a self-centered reformer like Hollingsworth, it was because their minds had lost touch with 'the magnetic chain of humanity.'¹¹

Hawthorne expressed a most profound thought in "Monsieur du Mirior" when he had his narrator say: "I could almost doubt which of us is the visionary form, or whether each be not the other's mystery and both twin brethren of one fate in mutually reflected spheres."¹² This statement suggests the idea of a spectral double who forever accompanies one in the mirrors of the world. Jac Tharpe says that Hawthorne used the Doppelganger motif to allow a man to view his other self.

Ignorance in the search for the self creates the double, the shadow, the ancestor, the self of the dreams or the memories, the seeming, the other, what one was yesterday when he was simple and foolish, or what inconceivable personality he may have on another day when he has a moment of awareness. It also indicates a desire of the introvert and the sensitive, lonely person for a companion who will receive his confession and know him as well as he knows himself. Perhaps, if the analogy is illuminating, the desire should be stated in terms of the myth recorded in Plato of the individual's need to be round and whole In its simplest form the double is the companion of one's dream.¹³

Tharpe singles out "Alice Doane's Appeal" as Hawthorne's

¹¹Matthiessen, p. 228.

¹²Works, Vol. III, Mosses, 169.

¹³Jac Tharpe, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Identity and Knowledge (Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 20.

most "intense and serious treatment" of the double theme; other variants of double figures are the fellow traveler in "Passages from a Relinquished Work," Robert Hagburn in Septimus Felton, Robin in "My Kinsman, Major Molyneux," Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter, Clifford in The House of the Seven Gables, and Wakefield in the story by the same name.¹⁴

And as Hawthorne looked further into the mirror, he revealed his tendency to be too self-absorbed, as he wrote in "Monsieur du Mirior," "In early years, when my affections were warm and free, I loved him [Monsieur du Mirior] well and could always spend a pleasant hour in his society, chiefly because it gave me an excellent opinion of myself. Speechless as he was, M. du Mirior had then a most agreeable way of calling me a handsome fellow; and I of course, returned the compliment; so that, the more we kept each other's company, the greater coxcombs we mutually grew!"¹⁵ At another point in the story, Hawthorne related that the Monsieur is so close to him that the events in their lives "remind me of those doubtful legends of lovers, or twin-children, twins of fate, who have lived, enjoyed, suffered and died, in unison, each faithfully repeating the least tremor of the other's breath, though separated by tracts of sea and land."¹⁶

¹⁴Tharpe, pp. 26, 102, 117.

¹⁵Works, Vol. III, Mosses, 166.

¹⁶Works, Vol. III, Mosses, 159.

Hawthorne took this idea and came up with a story "The Vision of the Fountain," first published in June of 1835. This narrative has curious overtones of both self-love and incest, for the narrator as he watches his reflection in a spring says: ". . . lo, another face, deeper in the fountain than my own image, more distinct in all the features yet faint as thought. The vision had the aspect of a fair young girl, with locks of paly gold."¹⁷ Instantly one is reminded of the Narcissus legend, one version of which has Narcissus falling in love with his twin sister. As the young man gazes into the pool, he substitutes a girl's face for his own, fancying that his own mirrored features are hers.

Malcolm Cowley has said that in the life and stories of Hawthorne there are curious suggestions of the Narcissus legend.¹⁸ As a child Hawthorne was very beautiful, spoiled by his relatives and admired by strangers. His sister Elizabeth described him as "beautiful and bright," and said that he was "particularly petted the more because his health was then delicate and he had frequent illnesses."¹⁹ Later in life, during the years when he was shut up in his "haunted chamber," Elizabeth remarked "we were in those days almost absolutely obedient to him." Van Doren states that Hawthorne

¹⁷Works, Vol. I, Twice Told Tales, 205.

¹⁸Cowley, p. 546.

¹⁹Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1949), p. 8.

was "always to be skillful in making others contribute to his comfort, and this without losing any of their love."²⁰

Hawthorne was not unaware of his preoccupation with himself, for in one story, "Mrs. Bullfrog," he wrote: "So painfully acute was my sense of female imperfection, and such varied excellence did I require in the woman whom I could love, that there was an awful risk of my getting no wife at all, or of being driven to perpetrate matrimony with my own image in the looking-glass."²¹

Cowley states that during the time Hawthorne secluded himself without other companions, "in a sense he did marry his own image" and that many of his tales read like "confessions of a self-love that was physical as well as moral." Cowley thinks that as a result of the self-love in which Hawthorne indulged himself for a time, his stories dealt with "self-absorption, self-delusion, self-condemnation, a whole series of reflexive emotions."²²

Because of this self-introspection, Hawthorne had feelings of guilt, and his "haunted mind" dwelled on all sorts of depravity in human nature. Frequently, these sins in humanity were sexual ones--incest, lust, and adultery. One of Hawthorne's earliest tales, "Alice Doane's Appeal," condemns Leonard Doane for his unnatural love of his sister

²⁰Van Doren, p. 28.

²¹Pearson, p. 945.

²²Cowley, pp. 546-547.

Alice, and Miriam in The Marble Faun is suspected of the same crime of incest as Beatrice Cenci. Lust and sensuality are present in many of his works; in his first novel, Fanshawe, the hero rescues Ellen just as Butler is attempting to commit sexual violence against her; young Robin in "My Kinsman Major Molineux" is tempted by a woman in scarlet petticoats; the daughter in "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" is wayward and fallen, and Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance is a woman with a past. Many of Hawthorne's characters are guilty of adultery, most notably Hester Prynne who wears the symbol of her crime, the scarlet letter. Thus, Hawthorne's narcissistic tendencies caused him to contemplate not only the sense of guilt in himself, but to suspect that all men were guilty. This is not surprising when one recalls his New England heritage, his legacy of guilt from his Puritan ancestors who had persecuted many of the Salem people convicted of witchcraft. Pearson says that the Puritan instinct in Hawthorne was one of honest and sober introspection and "penetrated the sham of the man's exterior to his more animal nature beneath. It knew that man's heart is better to be trusted than his lips, and this duplicity it attempted to lay bare."²³

Finally, as Hawthorne further studied his image in the mirror, he was taunted by the ontological mystery of existence. He confessed that the confused inconsistencies of man's spiritual life must remain unsolved unless he could fathom

²³Pearson, p. x.

the secret motivations of his own being: "I will be self-contemplative, as Nature bids me, and make him M. du Mirior the picture or visible type of what I muse upon, that my mind may not wander so vaguely as heretofore, chasing its own shadow through a chaos and catching only the monsters that abide there. Then will we turn our thoughts to the spiritual world"24

William Bysshe Stein states that here Hawthorne is saying if the image in the mirror will "deign to commit himself," than he "may legitimately probe into the multifarious expressions of human nature." Hawthorne is not content to accept the limitations that God has imposed upon his knowledge; he longs to "lift the veil that divine intelligence has dropped before his eyes."²⁵ The narrator implores the reflection to speak to him: "A few words, perhaps, might satisfy the feverish yearning of my soul for some master thought, that should guide me through this labyrinth of life, teaching wherefore I was born, and how to do my task on earth, and what is Death."²⁶

Stein interprets this statement as Hawthorne's thesis that "man's spiritual unrest derives from his Faustian desire to apprehend the eternal truths of the universe," and although

²⁴Works, Vol. III, Mosses, 168.

²⁵William Bysshe Stein, Hawthorne's Faust: A Study of the Devil Archetype (Gainesville, 1953), p. 68.

²⁶Works, Vol III, Mosses, 169.

they forever "elude the grasp of his intelligence, nevertheless they retain the ambiguous reality of the fleeting reflections that haunt the face of a mirror."²⁷ The Faustian curiosity about oneself is a prerequisite to a consuming interest in the lives of others, and many of Hawthorne's characters are the cold, detached observers, sinning by violating the "sanctity of the human heart." In addition, the evil of the Faustian desire for knowledge, the "libido sciendi," is a major theme in many of Hawthorne's stories, most notably in "The Birthmark," "Ethan Brand," and "Rappacini's Garden."

Thus, Hawthorne used the mirror to discover several unwelcome truths about himself--tendencies toward isolating egotism, doubleness, narcissism, incest, autoerotism, and a Faustian lust for knowledge--and used these insights to inform himself of the world's flaws as well. Therefore, turning from himself to others, he could show their moral dislocations too and turn from self-absorption to objectified art.

When Hawthorne fell in love with Sophia Peabody in 1838, it seemed to him that he had been rescued from the shadows and made real, so intense was his love for her. "Indeed, we are but shadows," he wrote in a letter to her, "we are not endowed with real life, all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream--till the

²⁷Stein, p. 68.

heart be touched. That touch creates us--then we begin to be."²⁸ And so he believed that man's redemption might be achieved by his love for another fellow being.

Perhaps no other story that Hawthorne wrote parallels this particular period in his life any better than "Egotism; or The Bosom Serpent" in which he used extensive mirror symbolism. The hero, Roderick Elliston, is tormented by a snake that lives in his own breast. Interestingly enough, the serpent is supposed to have come from an innocent-looking fountain (a mirror) where it had lurked since the time of the first settlers. Roderick "spent whole miserable days before a looking glass, with his mouth wide open, watching, in hope and horror, to catch a glimpse of the snake's head far down within his throat."²⁹ Just when it seemed that his mind was totally deranged and that he was doomed forever, his salvation came in the person of his wife, Rosina. When she told him to forget himself in the idea of another, the hateful serpent left his bosom: "At that moment, if report be trustworthy, the sculptor beheld a waving motion through the the grass, and heard a tinkling sound as if something had plunged into the fountain."³⁰

Hawthorne wrote this story in 1843 when he and Sophia were living happily together in wedded bliss at the Old Manse.

²⁸Malcolm Cowley, The Portable Hawthorne (New York, 1948), p. 14.

²⁹Pearson, p. 1113.

³⁰Pearson, p. 1115.

Probably it was easy for him by that time, to look back objectively at his autoeroticism and to express it in allegorical terms. Hawthorne did become cured somewhat of his self-centeredness; he became active in the world, a highly respected citizen and the head of a family. But one must keep in mind that the books he continued to write still depended on his self-discoveries he had made during those formative years of his retirement from the world.

Thus, though these examples, one can see that certain events in Hawthorne's life are interwoven in his fanaticism in the use of mirror symbols, and that the reflected image became a very definite part of Hawthorne's idea of his creative process.

CHAPTER II
HAWTHORNE'S MIRROR SYMBOLISM AS
RELATED TO HIS LITERARY THEORY

An examination of one of the early works of Hawthorne reveals the importance of the mirror in his conception of his own creative process. In "The Haunted Mind" (1835), a sketch in which Hawthorne provides an unique glimpse of his characteristically romantic approach to life and to art, he asks his reader to consider the thoughts which come to the mind halfway between sleeping and waking when one suddenly starts up from midnight slumber.

At this time the mind is passive, dreams are close by, and the thoughts which tumble in one's brain may be truer than those which come to the controlled intelligence of daylight hours. When one first awakens, Hawthorne relates, he is very close to his dream and for a short time, its vivid illusions are present. However, then one begins to think, but not in a rational way. He thinks of such things as "how the dead are lying in their cold shrouds and narrow coffins A funeral train comes gliding by your bed, in which Passion and Feeling assume bodily shape, and things of the mind become dim spectres to the eye." Then after other thoughts of death and frustration, Hawthorne says, "this nightmare of the soul" is an indication that "in the depths

of every heart there is a tomb and dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones or prisoners, whom they hide. But sometimes and oftenest at midnight, these dark receptacles are flung open." Hawthorne then points out: "In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas without the power of selecting or controlling them; then pray that your griefs may slumber, and the brotherhood of remorse not break their chain."¹

F. O. Matthiessen says that in this sketch one shares in Hawthorne's creative process, in his understanding of the "fertile state" that Keats describes as "negative capability" which is the "relaxed indolence that alone is receptive to the inwilling of fresh impressions."² Matthiessen adds that the traits of Sorrow, Hope, Disappointment, iron Fatality, and Shame which troop by in this sketch, dominate all of Hawthorne's work. He insists that these half-waking sensations so possessed Hawthorne "that he could not help 'running a doubtful parallel' between them and the rest of human life, for 'in both you emerge from mystery, pass through a vicissitude that you can but imperfectly control, and are borne onward to another mystery.'" In much of

¹Hyatt H. Waggoner, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches (New York, 1964), p. 323.

²F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), p. 232.

Hawthorne's writing, there is a certain amount of mystery, but this is not because Hawthorne had any love for mystery itself; the author declared that he "abhorred it" and that he "dreaded any 'unintelligible expression' as a clouding veil 'between the soul and the truth which it seeks.'"³ But his haunted mind caused him to write what he must. E. P. Whipple, the critic for whom Hawthorne had the greatest respect, made the statement that "his great books appear not so much created by him as through him. They have the character of revelation,--he, the instrument, being often troubled with the burden they impose upon his mind."⁴ One is reminded here of Ralph Waldo Emerson's channel theory of creativity; the poet abandons his conscious intellect to the "nature of things;" he unlocks "at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him; then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals." Then the poet know that he speaks adequately when he speaks "wildly" or "with the flower of the mind;" he does not use his intellect as an organ, but "with the intellect realeased from all service, and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life; or as the ancients were wont to express them-

³Matthiessen, p. 234.

⁴Matthiessen, p. 234.

selves, not with intellect alone, but with the intellect inebriated by nectar."⁵

Terence Martin calls attention to the fact that "The Haunted Mind" describes the nature of the "neutral ground" which Hawthorne insisted upon in his writings. Although the subject of the sketch is the "haunted mind," the setting is "a kind of neutral ground, a stage for creation, out of time, between yesterday and tomorrow," or as Hawthorne put it, "an intermediate space where the business of life does not intrude." As the unselected and uncontrolled images float into the haunted mind and "emerge onto the neutral ground, they are met by already existent actual being which swims into cognition; and the meeting of the two provides the potential instant of imaginative creation."⁶

Martin reiterates that Hawthorne's final statement aids in clarifying what one has learned from the author's musing dramatization of the creative process. "When 'indistinct horror' rises from within, one leaves a state of 'conscious sleep' and searches wildly for concrete external reality--in this case, embers on the hearth. Having brought something existing within to something existing without, one achieves a balanced enjoyment "on the borders of sleep and wakefulness." The neutral ground has been given a reality of its own--the

⁵Franklyn B. Snyder, ed. A Book of American Literature (New York, 1935), p. 314.

⁶Terence Martin, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1965), p. 46.

imaginary and the actual have met and mingled.⁷

Turner points out that although Hawthorne does not assign these experiences of the person in the sketch to himself, the quality of mind, "the haunted mind" is certainly Hawthorne's. He calls attention to the image of the human heart as a tomb, a dungeon, or a cavern, and Hawthorne's assumptions that "guilt and shame are common human experiences;" in addition, the sketch deals with inner experiences which are "physical and psychological combined" and yet have "moral and spiritual implications!"⁸ But most importantly of all, for this discussion, Hawthorne establishes his imagination as a mirror.

Hawthorne places great emphasis on his looking glass again when he sets forth the ideal situation for the working imagination in "The Custon House," the introductory sketch for The Scarlet Letter. Sitting in a deserted parlor by the light of the "glimmering coal fire" and the moon, he strives to "picture forth imaginary scenes." "Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly--making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility--is a medium the most suitable for a romance writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests."⁹

⁷Martin, p. 46.

⁸Arlin Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1961), p. 24.

⁹Norman Holmes Pearson, The Complete Novels . . . (New

After describing the familiar objects in the room-- the chairs, lamp, sofa, book-case, and picture which have been changed or "spiritualized by the unusual light," he notes that they have lost their "actual substance" and have "become things of intellect;" they have been invested with a "quality of strangeness and remoteness," even though it is nearly as light as daylight. The floor of the room is now a neutral territory" located between "the real world and fairyland, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other." At this time, ghosts might come into the room without frightening one. The warm light of the fire mingled with the "cold spirituality of the moonbeams communicates . . . a heart and sensibilities of human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up." Hawthorne concludes his discussion of romance with the mirror: "Glancing at the looking-glass, we behold--deep within its haunted verge--the smouldering glow of the half-extinguished anthracite, the white moonbeams on the floor, and a repetition of all the gleam and shadow of the picture, with one removed further from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative. Then at such an hour, and with this scene before him, if a man, sitting all alone, cannot dream strange things, and make them look like truth, he need never try to write romances."¹⁰

York, 1937), p. 105.

¹⁰Pearson, pp. 105-106.

It may be noted here that Hawthorn'e metaphor of the mirror as imagination can be traced to his attachment to the writers of the eighteenth century who believed in the old conception of the mimetic theory; imitation was the inevitable term to describe and to approve the artist's function. It was the duty of the poet to hold the mirror up to nature.¹¹ Meyer Abrams, however, has demonstrated that with the romantic movement "the basic metaphor shifted from that of reflection to that of projection: the underlying analogy shifted from the mirror to the lamp. This change in poetic theory was part of a contemporary change in the prevailing concepts of the mind."¹²

In this same sketch Hawthorne refers to his imagination as a "tarnished mirror." Requiring a secluded place in which to practice his art of creativity, he complained that the cares of his work of measuring coal in the Custom House prevented him from exercising his "delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility." He stated: "My imagination was a tarnished mirror. It would not reflect, or only with miserable dimness the figures with which I did my best to people it."¹³ In connection with his need for monotony, "an eventless exterior life" before he could "live in the world within," Hawthorne while

¹¹Matthiessen, p. 261.

¹²Matthiessen, p. 261.

¹³Pearson, p. 104.

working at the custom house once wrote to Sophia that he would like someday to send her a journal of his activities of the entire day from morning until night. "What a dry, dull history would it be! But then apart from this, I would write another journal of my inward life throughout the same day Nobody would think that the same man could live two such different lives simultaneously. But then the grosser life is a dream, and the spiritual life is a reality."¹⁴

Hawthorne gave some insight into how his own imagination worked when he had one of his characters say, "Everything, you know, has its spiritual meaning, which to the literal meaning is what the soul is to the body."¹⁵ This statement expressed an approach to reality which many other writers of the age made; they took for granted the pre-eminence of spirit over matter.¹⁶ It seems important that one know something of Hawthorne's comprehension of the nature of reality if one is to understand the purpose of his writings, his search for a "truth" for men to live by.

Hawthorne once used the maxim "Man's accidents are God's purposes" when he was writing "Chiefly About War Matters," a sketch expressing his serious opinions about the Civil War and the slavery problem. This axiom represents a

¹⁴Matthiessen, p. 241.

¹⁵Matthiessen, p. 242.

¹⁶Matthiessen, p. 242.

commonplace of nineteenth-century metaphysical thought "expressed in terms of some type of divine Providence, namely that God is in his nature unknowable to man, although man's actions reflect, in some mysterious way, His purposes."¹⁷ James K. Folsom states that this short statement sums up "Hawthorne's own attitude toward the relation between God and man, or to expand the definition, between ultimate Reality and reality as it is knowable in its finite, experiential forms." Leonard J. Fick has surmised that "the keystone . . . of Hawthorne's theology is an unshakable belief in an inscrutable Providence."¹⁸ And B. Bernard Cohen has pointed out "Hawthorne's God is Inscrutable. Man must not attempt to fathom the mysteries of His actions but instead must trust to His kindness."¹⁹ This trust, for Hawthorne "takes the form of blind reliance on a providence whose workings man is unable to comprehend." This position, a loosely Platonic one, assumes two worlds, that of Man's accidents and some "ultimate Real World, that of God's purposes, which is inscrutable in itself but upon which the former world depends." But where the Platonist was always concerned with "the World of Purpose, the World of God, and the World of

¹⁷James K. Folsom, Man's Accidents and God's Purposes (New Haven, 1963), p. 13.

¹⁸Leonard J. Fick, The Light Beyond (Westminister, Maryland, 1955), p. 173.

¹⁹Folsom, P. 13. His footnote reads "Eternal Truth: A Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Philosophy (Unpublished doctoral dissertation in the Indiana University Library), p. 48.

Reality," Hawthorne was interested in "the World of Accident, of Man, of Appearance," although he admitted the dependence of his world of Experience upon some transcendental Reality. Thus Hawthorne believed that the ultimate Reality could not be known except as it is "manifest in the everyday world of Appearance."²⁰

In his stories treating the problem of artistic creation, Hawthorne discussed the relation of the two worlds by emphasizing two themes: first, the artist "creates his work of art from some Ideal form which only he can see and understand," and second, "the idea that the work of art as it is created is in its nature an imperfect copy of the Ideal form."²¹

Folsom's discussion of Hawthorne's conception of the nature of Reality parallels Millicent Bell's statement that in Hawthorne's aesthetic theory he imagined that in mirrors and reflections he saw the realm of the Ideal. After taking a trip down the Assabet River with Ellery Channing, Hawthorne wrote: "The slumbering river had a dream picture in its bosom. Which after all was the most real--the picture or the original?--the objects palpable to our grosser senses, or their apotheosis in the stream beneath? Surely the disembodied images stand in closer relation to the soul."²²

²⁰Folsom, pp. 14-15.

²¹Folsom, p. 157.

²²Nathaniel Hawthorne, Works of . . . Vol. III Mosses from the old Manse (New York, 1923), 21-22.

And again, after boating along the North Branch of the Concord River with the same friend he elaborated in his notebooks:

I have never elsewhere had such an opportunity to observe how much more beautiful reflection is than what we call reality. The sky and the clustering foliage on either hand, and the effect of sunlight as it found its way through the shade, giving light-some hues in contrast with the quiet depth of the prevailing tints--all these seemed unsurpassably beautiful, when beheld in the upper air. But, on gazing downward, there they were, the same even to the minutest particular, yet arrayed in ideal beauty, which satisfied the spirit incomparably more than the actual scene. I am half convinced that the reflection is indeed the reality--the real thing which Nature imperfectly images to our grosser sense. At all events, the disembodied shadow is nearest to the soul.²³

Millicent Bell says that the mirror image in the water at which Hawthorne gazed with "transcendental rapture" may also be his symbol for the imagination which does more than reflect nature--it "opens like a window into the invisible world of real forms."²⁴ Hawthorne says "the reflection is indeed the reality" or conversely, "the actual scene is but a reflection of an invisible reality." Miss Bell calls attention to Blake's statement: "There exist in that Eternal world the Permanent Realities of Everything which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature."²⁵ But if the artist's purpose is simply to copy or to reflect the image he

²³Works, Vol. IV, Mosses, 32.

²⁴Millicent Bell, Hawthorne's View of the Artist (New York, 1962), p. 59.

²⁵Bell, p. 59.

sees in Blake's Vegetable Glass of Nature, "he is producing merely a poor thing, 'Plato's third bed'--the dim copy of the carpenter's shadow of that Eternal Bed which is the Divine Idea."²⁶ With other philosophers such as Aristotle, however, "imitation became the term to describe the artist's function, and the mirror became the constant symbol."²⁷ And although neo-classic aesthetics granted that the artist "selected the typical and true from the spectacle of the natural and human world, the aesthetic image was still described as a kind of reflection; it took its qualities and forms from the reality known to the senses."²⁸

But Matthiessen points out that when Hawthorne spoke of the imagination as mirror he did not agree completely with classical or neo-classical theory. The ultimate function of the imagination, as conceived by Hawthorne, was not primarily to reflect external reality, but to reflect "the fantasies that welled up in his Haunted mind" or, in other words, the creations of his own heart, "imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them."²⁹

Miss Bell explains that the mirror image used by

²⁶Bell, p. 59.

²⁷Bell, p. 59.

²⁸Bell, p. 60.

²⁹Richard J. Jacobson, Hawthorne's Conception of the Creative Process, (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 34.

Hawthorne represented the mind as a looking glass "which one could both see into and go through like Alice." What Hawthorne saw in this mirror was not the "sensible world," but the "Ideas residing in that Heaven of Pure Forms from which the physical world also more imperfectly derives." And Hawthorne's "magic" mirror could reveal the truth otherwise hidden from men; "one could see through it into a sacred and eternal Nature. It became a precious entrance, Keat's 'magic casement.' Such is the mirror of art in Hawthorne's aesthetics."³⁰

¹⁰Bell, p. 60.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTION OF MIRRORS IN HAWTHORNE'S WORKS

Once Hawthorne had grasped an idea which derived from his "mirror of imagination," he set about finding symbols which would expand or modify the initial thought. Arlin Turner says that Hawthorne's usual starting point in planning a work of fiction was an idea which he developed by accretion, "frequently in the manner of a catalogue or a procession," and that the manifestations which he piled up to reiterate the original idea were symbolic in their nature.¹ For Hawthorne both saw and revealed through symbols.

Often he spoke on the side, as the author, to explain to his reader, how far his knowledge went and to speculate on what the real situation might be or what was said by a character who stood, supposedly, out of earshot. Taking the role thus of knowing only portions of the story he was narrating, he was in a position as a result to reveal the souls of his characters only through the outward evidence and regularly invited the reader to help him decide what actually lay beneath the surface. Since his method was eclectic, however, and thoroughly elastic, he might reveal a character from within whenever he wished and stand outside as an observer at other times. Most often he made the revelations through hints and external signs, for thus he could remain comfortably within his symbolic approach and also gain the interest which lies in the concrete, suggestive manifestations of inward qualities and inward conflicts.²

¹Arlin Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1961), p. 122.

²Turner, p. 122.

Looking for symbols in the everyday world about him, Hawthorne found them in the commonplace objects of life and nature. Turner states that he would have felt uncomfortable to "search out remote images" and that when he did use literary, historical, Biblical or mythological sources, he restricted them to those commonly known. And since he was most concerned in his writings with the psychological and moral aspects of human character, he "found his most useful symbols in the appearance and actions of individual characters."³ Indeed, nothing could be more commonplace than the looking glass (or fountains, pools, and other reflecting objects) which came to be, for the most part, symbols of self-contemplation and self-knowledge. But they could serve other functions as well; Hawthorne artistically used the mirror images for several purposes: to provide settings; to portray character; to emphasize an important moment; to suggest forthcoming events in the plot; to imply a sense of the mysterious or supernatural; and finally, to make revelations.

Consequently, through his fascinated use of fountains and mirrors, he was able "to bring his materials to artistic concentration as well as to endow his scenes with depth and liquidity."⁴ For example, in "Endicott and the Red Cross," Hawthorne set the stage for Endicott's act of cutting the red cross from the English banner to show that neither the pope

³Turner, p. 125.

⁴F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), p. 27 4.

nor the tyrant had any further part in the colony, by describing the surroundings scene of the Salem green as it was mirrored in the highly polished breastplate of the famous Endicott. "The central object in the mirrored picture was an edifice of humble architecture with neither steeple nor bell to proclaim it--which nevertheless it was--the house of prayer. A token of the perils of the wilderness was seen in the grim head of a wolf, which had just been slain within the precincts of the town, and according to the regular mode of claiming the bounty, was nailed on the porch of the meeting house. The blood was still plashing on the doorstep. There happened to be visible, at the same noontide hour, so many other characteristics of the times and manners of the Puritans, that we must endeavor to represent them in a sketch, though far less vividly than they were reflected in the polished breastplate of John Endicott."⁵

Endicott's breastplate becomes a suit of mail in Governor Bellingham's palace in The Scarlet Letter. When Hester learned that the magistrates and clergy were considering whether or not her child Pearl was to be separated from her, she waited to plead her case in the grand hall where a highly polished suit of mail was suspended. Little Pearl, greatly pleased with the gleaming armor and the reflections of the breastplate, called to her mother to look.

⁵Norman Holmes Pearson, ed. The Complete Novels (New York, 1957), p. 1014. (Subsequent references to this source will be cited by parenthesized (p.) immediately following the quotation.)

Hester looked, by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar effect of this convex mirror, the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it. Pearl pointed upward, also, at a similar picture in the headpiece; smiling at her mother, with the elfish intelligence that was so familiar an expression on her small physiognomy. That look of naughty merriment was likewise reflected in the mirror, with so much breadth and intensity of effect, that it made Hester Pymme feel as if it could not be the image of her own child, but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl's shape (p. 146).

One senses here that Hawthorne is doing something more than establishing the setting with his mirrored images in the suits of armor; he is using the reflection to depict a microcosm of the Puritan world with all its distortions and severities.

Again, in "Fancy's Show Box," Hawthorne set the scene for his coming drama by letting his venerable gentleman, Mr. Smith, behold through the "brilliant medium of his glass of old madeira," the three figures of Fancy, Memory, and Conscience.

Hawthorne's mirror gave him excellent opportunities to symbolize the secret workings in men's souls for he was aware of the mixture of good and evil in humanity. Matthiesen states that what moved Herman Melville (probably Hawthorne's greatest admirer) in "Monsieur du Mirior" was "the related contrast between superficial appearance and hidden truth, between the pale features of the man reflected in the mirror and the tormented life that was locked up in

his heart."⁶ And seeking to look beneath the pasteboard masks which men hide behind, Hawthorne frequently had his characters to catch a glimpse of themselves in a looking glass. For example, Mr. Hooper, the devout minister sees himself in the mirror as his congregation has seen him:

" . . . the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil" (p. 876). That Hooper felt great antipathy to his veil is further repeated in the legend that "he never willingly passed before a mirror, nor stooped to drink at a still fountain, lest, in its peaceful bosom, he should be affrighted by himself. This gave plausibility to the whispers that Mr. Hooper's conscience tortured him for some great crime too horrible to be entirely concealed" (p. 878).

Likewise, Hawthorne's other minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, could not escape the anguish in his soul resulting from his hidden sin. Night after night Arthur viewed his face in a looking glass by the strongest light he could throw upon it and "thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify, himself." His brain "reeled" and "herds of diabolic shapes" grinned and mocked him.

⁶Matthiessen, p. 258.

Although he tried to convince himself that these images were not solid in their nature, in one sense they were "the truest and most substantial things which the poor minister now dealt with," for "it is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment. To the untrue man, the whole universe is false,--it is impalpable,--it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist " (p. 170).

Hawthorne created a variant of this same powerful image when he dramatized Chillingworth's admission to himself that he, "a mortal man, with once a human heart," had become diabolically transformed into a fiend through his merciless persecution of the minister. When he admitted this to Hester, Chillingworth "lifted his hands with a look of horror, as if he had beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognize, usurping the place of his own image in a glass. It was one of those moments--which sometimes occur only at the interval of years--when a man's aspect is faithfully revealed to his mind's eye" (p. 186).

Hawthorne's feminine characters also are revealed through this glass of introspection. As Hester Prynne stood on the scaffold in the opening scene of The Scarlet Letter, she let her spirit relieve itself from the pressure of the crowd's curious eyes by summoning an exhibition of

"phantasmagoric forms" from her happier past into a "dusky mirror." At another time, Hester saw a "shadowy reflection of the evil . . . in herself" in the eyes of her daughter Pearl; indeed, "she fancied she beheld, not her own miniature portrait, but another face, in the small black mirror of Pearl's eye. It was a face, fiend-like, full of smiling malice, yet bearing the semblance of features she had known full well, though seldom with a smile, and never with malice in them. It was as if an evil spirit possessed the child, and had just then peeped forth in mockery" (p. 144)

Hawthorne emphasized the different aspects and prankish nature of Pearl's character by allowing a brook in the forest to serve as a mirror. In the chapter "Hester and the Physician," Pearl "peeped curiously into a pool left by the retiring tide . . . to see her face in. Forth peeped at her, out of the pool, with dark, glistening curls around her head, and an elf-smile in her eyes, the image of a little maid, whom Pearl . . . invited to take her hand, and run a race with her" (p. 183). Later she "flirted fancifully with her own image . . . beckoning the phantom forth," but finding that "either she or the image was unreal she turned elsewhere for better pastime" (p. 189). These scenes serve to accent Pearl's selfish personality and self-absorption.

Hawthorne noted the reflection of Pearl's contrary and accusing attitude toward her mother in "The Child at the Brookside." As Pearl stood "gazing silently at Hester and the clergyman sitting together on the mossy tree-trunk

waiting to receive her," her reflection was imaged in the pool, "a perfect image of her little figure, with all the picturesqueness of her beauty, in its adornment of flowers and wreathed foliage, but more refined and spiritualized than the reality. This image, so nearly identical with the living Pearl, seemed to communicate somewhat of its own shadowy and intangible quality to the child itself" (p. 207). Hester and Dimmesdale sensed a quality of unreality in the character of Pearl as they gazed at their daughter who refused to obey her mother's request to cross the brook: "Pearl stood . . . all glorified with a ray of sunshine In the brook beneath stood another child,--another and the same,--with likewise its ray of golden light" (p. 207). At that moment Hester felt estranged from Pearl as if the child had "strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together " Pearl's rebellion and jealousy led the minister to observe that he had a "strange fancy" that the brook was "the boundary between two worlds" and that Hester could never meet Pearl again. In his nervousness, Dimmesdale implored Hester to hasten Pearl back to her side.

When Hester encouraged the child with "honey-sweet expressions" to return, Pearl pointed her finger accusingly toward her mother's breast, temporarily devoid of the scarlet letter. "And beneath, in the mirror of the brook, there was the flower-girdled and sunny image of little Pearl, pointing her small forefinger, too" (p. 208). As Hester continued to persuade Pearl to come across the stream, Pearl became

unusually angered and irritated by her mother's threats and flew into a fit of rage, "stamping her foot with a yet more imperious look and gesture. In the brook, again, was the fantastic beauty of the image, with its reflected frown, its pointed finger, and imperious gesture, giving emphasis to the aspect of little Pearl" (p. 208). Not until Hester took up the scarlet letter and pinned it into the accustomed place, would Pearl willingly return to her mother's side. The reader feels here that Pearl herself is a mirror reflecting the traits of her parents; on the one hand she is the passionate, willful Hester, while on the other, she possesses the Puritan conscience of her father.

In The Marble Faun, Hawthorne used a water mirror image to characterize Miriam, the dark, mysterious beauty who was to be the cause of the "fall" of Donatello. Upon showing Donatello a painting of herself, Miriam asked him if he recognized the likeness; he replied that "the resemblance is as little to be mistaken as if you had bent over the smooth surface of a fountain, and possessed the witchcraft to call forth the image that you made there" (p. 618). Hawthorne added that artists, fond of painting their own portraits included autobiographical characteristics of themselves, "traits, expressions, loftiness, and amenities, which would have been invisible, had they not been painted from within. Yet their reality and truth are none the less. Miriam . . . had doubtless conveyed some of the intimate results of her heart knowledge into her own portrait, and perhaps wished to

try whether they would be perceptible to so simple and natural an observer as Donatello" (p. 618).

In like manner, Hawthorne portrayed the character of Hilda through a mirror image. After Donatello had killed the Monk, Hilda sat in her painting-room near to her copy of the portrait of Beatrice Cenci. "It is a peculiarity of this picture, that its profoundest expression eludes a straightforward glance, and can only be caught by side glimpses, or when the eye falls casually upon it; even as if the painted face had a life and consciousness of its own, and resolving not to betray its secret of grief or guilt, permitted the true tokens to come forth only when it imagined itself unseen. . . .Opposite the easel hung a looking-glass, in which Beatrice's face and Hilda's were both reflected." Hilda threw her eyes on the mirror and took in the images at "one unmediated glance." In one moment of horror she fancied that Beatrice's expression "had been depicted in her own face." Aware of the implications of the Beatrice Cenci story, Hilda thought, "Am I, too, stained with guilt?" (p. 707). Then Hilda moved her chair so that the "images in the glass should be no longer visible."

In his theory of romance, Hawthorne reiterated that the writer had the right to present truth under circumstances of his own choosing or creation so long as he did not "swerve aside from the truth of the human heart." If the author thought fit, he might "so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the

shadows of the picture" (p. 243). In addition, he might make some use of the strange and marvelous, even though he had best handle these ingredients sparingly. But even if he disregarded this caution, he could hardly be said to commit a literary crime. Consequently, Hawthorne created many a magic mirror with wondrous qualities to imply a sense of the mysterious on certain occasions.

Old Esther Dudley who persisted in living in the shadows of a bygone day, possessed a tall antique mirror with a tarnished gold frame; the surface of the glass was so blurred that the old woman's figure, whenever she looked into it, was indistinct and ghost-like. But it was generally believed that Esther could cause figures of the past--Governors, beautiful ladies, Indian chiefs, Provincial warriors, severe clergymen--"in short, all the pageantry of gone days--all the figures that ever swept across the broad plate of glass in former times--she could cause the whole to reappear, and people the inner world of the mirror with shadows of old life" (p. 985). And Esther's mirror was rumored to keep her from being lonely. "Whenever her chill and withered heart desired warmth, she was wont to summon a black slave of Governor Shirley's from the blurred mirror, and send him in search of guests who had long ago been familiar in those deserted chambers" (p. 985).

In Dr. Heidegger's study, there was "a looking-glass presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wondrous stories related of this mirror,

it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward" (p. 945). Once, when a chambermaid lifted Dr. Heidegger's book of magic to brush away the dust, several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror. This selfsame mirror comes to play a more important part in the story, as will be shown a little later.

The Virtuoso had in his collection of marvels Cornelius Agrippa's enchanted mirror which would reflect for any person looking into it any human form within his mind. But the viewer refused to look, because, as he reasoned, "it is enough if I can picture it within my mind. Why should I wish it to be repeated in the mirror?"⁷ This supports Hawthorne's belief that there were certain secrets that man could never know; thus he should be content to let them alone.

A water image in The Marble Faun served a double purpose: it created an air of mystery to the occasion and also foreshadowed a coming calamity. As Miriam and her friends approached the Fountain of Trevi, she remarked that she had always wanted to visit this fountain by moonlight, for it was here that Corinne and Lord Neville had met after after their estrangement. "Corinne . . . knew Lord Neville by the reflection of his face in the water." Miriam asked one of her friends to stand behind her as she peered over the

⁷Nathaniel Hawthorne, Works of . . ., Vol. IV, Mosses from the Old Manse (New York, 1923), 45.

stone brim of the fountain. "In Miriam's case, however, (owing to the agitation of the water, its transparency, and the angle at which she was compelled to lean over), no reflected image appeared" (p. 674). Instead, the moon had "flung Miriam's shadow at the bottom of the basin, as well as two more shadows of persons who had followed her, on either side" (p. 674). One shadow, Miriam recognized as Donatello, and upon turning around, she saw the dreaded "model," who had been tormenting her. At this point, the reader is reminded of the old superstition that the devil and evil spirits reflect no images in a mirror; furthermore, a sense of impending doom is connected with Miriam's recognition of the evil man.

Another "magic" mirror was the fountain at Monte Beni which Hawthorne used to connect Donatello's tales to Kenyon concerning his mythological ancestors. A knight loved a fair maiden "belonging" to this fountain. "She taught him to call her from its pebbly source . . . and they spent many a happy hour together . . . when he knelt down to drink out of the spring, nothing was more common than for a pair of rosy lips to come up out of its little depths, and touch his mouth with the thrill of a sweet, cool, dewy kiss!" (p. 731).

Hawthorne once again conjured up a magic mirror in an unique way in his story "The Prophetic Pictures." This time, the talented painter, a man of learning and science, representing Hawthorne's conception of the ideal artist, became a

mirror himself. Mary E. Dichmann says:

Because his "vast acquirements" have equipped the painter with tools for universal communication and understanding, he transcends the individual being and becomes a representation of the universal; he is a microcosm of the macrocosm, or--to use a juster image, and one that is a favorite with Hawthorne himself-- a mirror in which all men and all women will find themselves reflected. Like a mirror, the artist "catches the secret sentiments and passions" of those whose portraits he paints; however, because of his power to strip the spirit of its physical mask and his ability to transfer to canvas the spiritual truth which he perceives, he also gives to them a "duration," an "earthly immortality," which a mirror does not achieve.⁸

Hawthorne noted, also, that the painter was a mirror for natural objects as well as for human beings for "he had . . . lain in a canoe on the bosom of Lake George, making his soul the mirror of its loveliness and grandeur, till not a picture in the Vatican was more vivid than his recollection."⁹

Hawthorne presented his mirror-painter as a Faustian figure, an artist who let his evil instincts overrule his responsibility, for his portraits of Walter and Elinor revealing their flaws of character brought destruction into their lives and caused a near fatality to Elinor. By his cold intellectualization of emotion and by "reading other bosoms with an acuteness almost preternatural, the painter failed to see the disorder of his own."¹⁰

⁸Mary E. Dichmann, "Hawthorne's Prophetic Pictures," AL (May, 1961), p. 190.

⁹Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Prophetic Pictures" in Prose and Criticism, ed. John H. McCallum (New York, 1966), p. 10.

¹⁰Hawthorne, "The Prophetic Pictures," p. 19.

Thus, Hawthorne, through the use of magic and the supernatural in his reflecting objects, added rich and varied layers of meaning to the romantic actions, characters, and scenes of his stories.

Finally, Hawthorne's mirrors reflected the truth often hidden from the eyes of the external world and often the characters themselves. In "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," the story of the search for the fountain of youth is dramatized by three elderly men and a withered gentlewoman who, upon drinking a liquid which sparkles like champagne, suddenly become young again; "yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiess of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray withered grandsires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled gramdam" (p. 950). The reflection in the mirror had "kept the truth that had been lost by the characters' delusion."

In "Feathertop: A Moralized Legend," the story of a broomstick scarecrow with a pumpkin head turned into a dapper gentleman by a witch of "singular power and dexterity," Mother Rigby, the mirror plays a significant part. Once the old crone had breathed life into Lord Feathertop, she exhorted him to go forth into the world and seek the hand of a beautiful maiden, Polly Gookin.

On the journey to Polly's house, the townspeople admired the fine figure of the gentleman in his elegant clother. However, there were two "dissenting voices" who

were not deluded. An impertinent dog, a mere cur, after "sniffing at the heels of the glistening figure" tucked its tail between its legs and "skulked into its master's back yard, vociferating an execrable yell." The other dissenter was a child who "squalled at the fullest stretch of his lungs, and babbled some unintelligible nonsense about a pumpkin" (p. 1101).

The mirror, located in Justice Gookin's parlor, afforded an excellent means for pretty Polly Gookin to practice "pretty airs" with which to entice Lord Feathertop. Before he entered the house, she viewed herself in the looking glass, practicing "now a smile, now a ceremonious dignity of aspect, and now a softer smile than the former, kissing her hand likewise, tossing her head, and managing her fan; where within the mirror an unsubstantial little maid repeated every gesture and did all the foolish things Polly did In short, it was the fault of pretty Polly's ability rather than her will if she failed to be as complete an artifice as the illustrious Feathertop himself; and when she thus tampered with her own simplicity, the witch's phantom might well hope to win her " (p. 1102). Here the reader wonders if Polly, hidden under the mask of her assumed "pretty airs," will fathom the true identity of Feathertop, and somehow the mirror seems to be connected.

After Feathertop and Polly had met and become enamored of each other, Polly cast a glance toward the full-length looking glass to judge "what value her own simple comeliness

might have side by side with so much brilliancy," for the mirror "was one of the truest plates in the world and incapable of flattery" (p. 1105). When she saw their images reflected, she "shrieked, shrank from the stranger's side, gazed at him for a moment in wildest dismay, and sank insensible upon the floor" (p. 1105). Feathertop then looked toward the mirror and "there beheld, not the glittering mockery of his outside show, but a picture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stripped of all witchcraft" (p. 1105). The truth-telling mirror had let Feathertop see himself for the "wretched, ragged empty thing" that he was, and he had no desire to live longer.

Perhaps the most extensive use of mirror imagery is found in The House of the Seven Gables, the novel Hawthorne considered most "characteristic" of his mind and "proper and natural" for him to write. The first of the mirrors mentioned is the most important one for it helps to establish the history of the Pyncheon family in its "unbroken connection" with the House of the Seven Gables.

A large, dim looking-glass used to hang in one of the rooms, and was fabled to contain within its depths all the shapes that had ever been reflected there,-- the old Colonel himself, and his many descendants, some in the garb of antique babyhood, and others in the bloom of feminine beauty or manly prime, or saddened with the wrinkles of frosty age. Had we the secret of this mirror, we would gladly sit down before it, and transfer its revelations to our page. But there was a story, for which it is difficult to conceive any foundation, that the posterity of Matthew Maule had some connection with the mystery of the looking-glass, and that, by what appears to have been a sort of mesmeric process, they could make its inner region all alive with the departed Pyncheons, nor as

they had shown themselves to the world, nor in their better and happier hours, but as doing over again some deed of sin, or in the crisis of life's bitterest sorrow" (p. 254).

This mirror never comes to play as important a role as the reader is led to believe by this description. One is reminded here of the red rose at the beginning of The Scarlet Letter with which Hawthorne hoped to lighten his tale, but actually never did. Perhaps Hawthorne thought that he never did learn the secret of the mirror; or it may be, that he felt as if he had revealed enough about the Pyncheons and the Maules without going back to the mirror again.

Another mirror appears in the story when Gervayse Pyncheon, at the insistence of young Matthew Maule, agreed to let his daughter Alice be the instrument to reveal the whereabouts of the Pyncheons' long-lost claim to a large extent of territory in the East. As Maule talked with Alice, Gervayse turned his back and appeared to study a picture on the wall, but, in reality, he was pondering the tales he had heard of the mysterious and supernatural endowments of the Maule family. "Turning half around, he caught a glimpse of Maule's figure in the looking-glass. At some paces from Alice, with his arms uplifted in the air, the carpenter made a gesture as if directing downward a slow, ponderous, and invisible weight upon the maiden (p. 365). As the mirror revealed, Matthew Maule was indeed placing the fair Alice under his evil spell.

In the second chapter of the story, Hepzibah Pyncheon

is seen giving "heedful regard to her appearance on all sides, and at full length, in the oval, dingy-framed toilet-glass, that hangs above her table" (p. 261). One assumes that she is preparing herself for some special day. She studied the Malbone miniature of a delicate face (it turns out to be her brother, Clifford), and then stood before the toilet-glass, where she saw on her face "tears to be wiped off." The constant scowl on Hepzibah's face had led the world to characterize her as an ill-tempered old maid, "nor does it appear improbable that, by often gazing at herself in a dim looking-glass, and perpetually encountering her own frown within its ghostly sphere, she had been led to interpret the expression almost as unjustly as the world did. 'How miserably cross I look!' she must often have whispered to herself" (p. 263) but despite what the mirror showed, "her heart never frowned" for it was tender and sensitive.

The child-like Clifford, who had been alienated from the world for so many years, amused himself by blowing soap bubbles in the arched window of the old house. "Little impalpable worlds were those soap bubbles, with the big world depicted, in hues bright as imagination, on the nothing of their surface" (p. 346). Passers-by destroyed each "bubble, with all its pictured earth and sky scene" Thus Hawthorne let the mirrors of the surrounding world, reflected from soap bubbles represent suitably and symbolically the lack of permanence and stability of Clifford's mind and world.

References to mirrors are used frequently to characterize Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, the "villain" of Hawthorne's romance. The "admirably arranged" life of the Judge caused him to wear a countenance of "broad benevolence" and "this proper face was what he beheld in the looking-glass" (p. 382). He was aware of only what other people thought of him when he observed himself in the mirror. "A hard, cold man, thus unfortunately situated, seldom or never looking inward, and resolutely taking his idea of himself from what purports to be his image as reflected in the mirror of public opinion, can scarcely arrive at true self-knowledge, except through loss of property and reputation" (p. 382). Since the Judge lacked the attributes of a sensitive person, he had no sense of true introspection or self-appraisal; he gladly accepted the mirrored good opinion of the world. But at the Judge's death, Hawthorne saw fit "to probe deeper into what had been the realities of this man's character, which had been masked so carefully from others"¹¹ and to say that a mirror "is always a kind of window or doorway into the spiritual world" (p. 412). Such a passage as this is what led Melville to pronounce Hawthorne's processional sketches as "a wondrous symbolizing of the secret workings in men's souls."¹²

By far the most outstanding reflecting object in this work is Maule's well, the spring in the Pyncheon's garden,

¹¹Matthiessen, p. 259.

¹²Matthiessen, p. 258.

the name of which is a reminder that the land on which the seven-gabled mansion stands had once belonged to the Maule family. Interestingly enough, Hawthorne thought at one time of naming his novel, Maule's Well; this discussion seeks to reveal the great significance the well held for him.

The first mention of this spring is made in the opening chapter when the reader is told that Matthew Maule had selected this particular site for his home because of a "natural spring of soft and pleasant water" However, Maule did not enjoy the pure water long, for Colonel Pyncheon connived to take from him this desirable tract of land. Strangely enough, after the workmen had begun construction on the Colonel's fine new home, "The spring of water . . . lost the deliciousness of its pristine quality" and "grew hard and brackish."

Matthiessen states that the function of Maule's well (and other fountains in Hawthorne's stories) was "to break through the restrictions of the given moment, by projecting into their bubbling life imaginative hints of both the past and future."¹³ Hyatt Waggoner adds that "in the waters of this spring past and present are somehow one."¹⁴ Hawthorne stressed the importance of the well when he wrote: "The play and slight agitation of the water, in its upward gush, wrought

¹³Matthiessen, p. 260.

¹⁴Hyatt Waggoner, Nathaniel Hawthorne (Cambridge, 1967), p. 167.

magically with these variegated pebbles, and made a continually shifting apparition of quaint figures, vanishing too suddenly to be definable" (p. 296). It comes as no surprise to the reader when later Hawthorne utilizes reflections from the well to reveal the character of Clifford Pyncheon.

As Clifford hung over the water looking at the "constantly shifting phantasmagoria of figures produced by the agitation of the water" he imagined that he saw faces, "beautiful faces, arrayed in bewitching smiles." But the images were not always pleasant ones, for sometimes he would cry, "The dark face gazes at me!" (p. 335) and be unhappy the rest of the day. Matter-of-fact Phoebe could see nothing except the colored pebbles, and the "dark face" to her was merely the shadow of a branch from the damson tree. Thus while being informed of the unhealthy state of Clifford's mind, at the same time the reader also associates a certain mystery with the well.

This air of mystery is developed further when Holgrave and Phoebe talked in the garden. The daguerrotypist interrupted his conversation to say "(hark, how Maule's well is murmuring!--. . . I cannot help fancying that Destiny is arranging its fifth act for a catastrophe" (p. 374). The predicted catastrophe here turns out to be the death of Judge Pyncheon.

The next reference to Maule's well is in the description of the garden the morning after the storm when Judge Pyncheon is dead inside the house. As Phoebe surveyed the

damage done by the storm she saw that "Maule's well had overflowed its stone border, and made a pool of formidable breadth in that corner of the garden" (p. 423). Once again, the reader has been reminded of the family curse.

The final paragraph of the book alludes to the supernatural power of being able to look into the future by observing the continuous movements in the bottom of the well. Hawthorne carefully pointed out, however, that the reader must have a "gifted eye" to interpret the prophecy. "Maule's well, all this time, though left in solitude, was throwing up a succession of kaleidoscopic pictures, in which a gifted eye might have seen foreshadowed the coming fortunes of Hepzibah and Clifford, and the descendant of the legendary wizard, and the village maiden, over whom he had thrown Love's web of sorcery" (pp. 435-436).

Matthiessen's explanation of this passage says that "thus the imagination, by merging itself with 'the universal memory' of events, can perform its function of projecting the past into the future." He adds that here he is deliberately repeating Yeats' term and that though there were many differences between Yeat's and Hawthorne's account of the imagination, they both believed that "the individual imagination, like the disembodied reflections in the stream, is part of the Divine Mind."¹⁵

¹⁵Matthiessen, p. 261.

Thus, it may be noted that Maule's well offers a chance to relate the history of the house, to reveal the character of Clifford, to foreshadow the death of Judge Pyncheon, to convey a sense of mystery to the romance, and finally to stimulate the reader's imagination to wonder about the future of the various characters after the story ends.

By way of summary, one can see that mirror imagery may be found in many of Hawthorne's sketches and short stories as well as in three of his novels, most prominently in The House of the Seven Gables. Because Hawthorne thought of his imagination as a mirror, he was able to reflect ideas, to give them substance on the written page. And his looking glass gave him an opportunity to fulfil the major obligation of the artist--"to confront actual life and to make his art 'an act of possession' in André Malraux's phrase, not one of oblique evasion."¹⁶ By focusing on his reflections, Hawthorne could emphasize the importance of the backgrounds for his stories and romances; he could probe deeply into the innermost beings of his characters; and perhaps best of all, he could uncover the "usable truth" defined by Melville as "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not."¹⁷ Matthiessen says that "such steady introspection of life,

¹⁶Matthiessen, p. 192.

¹⁷Matthiessen, p. 192.

which does not flinch from probing sinister recesses and is determined to make articulate the whole range of what it finds, is indispensable for the great artist."¹⁸ Certainly Hawthorne's mirror, for him, was a most valuable instrument of introspection.

¹⁸Matthiessen, pp. 192-193.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a conscientious, imaginative artist who spent many years "burrowing, to his utmost ability, into the depths of our common nature, for the purposes of psychological romance" as he himself put it in the preface to The Snow Image, and as a result of this concentrated study of man and his problems, his works are a mirror of his age. Roy Male says that "Hawthorne possessed what one of his friends called 'the awful power of insight' and his fiction remains valuable chiefly because of its penetration into the essential truths of the human heart. His one fruitful subject was the problem of moral growth."¹

During an apprenticeship of twelve secluded years in a "haunted chamber," practicing his craft of writing, Hawthorne early discovered that the vicinity for his art was not the world of actuality in which he lived and moved, but rather the world of his imagination, of his deepest sensibility, of what he called "the interior of the heart." "It was that region within the human heart and consciousness where sin and guilt reside, where dark secrets are hidden from the peering eyes of men, where the deep festerings of remorse and

¹Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (New York, 1957), p. 6.

conscience work to destroy, and where the eternal questions of men never quite find the answers which comfort and satisfy."²

As Hawthorne studied and read and looked into his mirror, he became aware of the extent of the world's moral tragedy. He became conscious of "the isolation of man in the universe and the ring of darkness which encircles all joy and the need of men to see into their own souls" He came to accept the existence of good and evil residing in all men; the world was inhabited by the sin-sick and guilty who might find peace "not in illumination or redemption, but in the awareness of their suffering."³ Thus he wrote stories and novels which focused upon the "inner disorders of feeling which brought his characters into conflict not only with the external world, but with their own innate predispositions."⁴

As Hawthorne struggled with his literary attempts, he began to think of his imagination as a mirror, reflecting the fantasies of his haunted mind. He decided upon the romance as his vehicle, for in this medium he could find a neutral ground where the actual and imaginary might meet, and where actualities would not be so "terribly insisted on."

Once he had hit upon an idea, he sought for appropriate

²Edward H. Davidson, ed. "Nathaniel Hawthorne" in Major Writers of America (New York, 1966), p. 362.

³Davidson, p. 365.

⁴William Bysse Stein, Hawthorne's Faust (Gainesville, 1953), p. 5.

symbols to reiterate, expand and modify the initial thought.⁵ Pearson says "Hawthorne's use of symbols is like Wagner's use of 'leifmotif' to recall what has come before, and to bring to mind a greater consciousness than the ear alone can comprehend Symbolism is like a curl of wind that lifts three leaves to play, or for a moment bends a flower aside. Nothing essential there is changed, but things are seen in new dimensions and new beauty. Touched by one of Hawthorne's symbols, thought spreads outward farther and farther until it embraces the whole book, then recedes to concentrate once more upon the particular object, before the eye goes on."⁶ Perhaps the most notable of all Hawthorne's symbols is the scarlet letter; however, one also remembers vividly the black veil of the minister, the great stone face on the mountain, the birthmark on Georgiana's face, and the exotic flower of Zenobia.

Likewise, mirrors, pools, fountains, and other reflecting objects came to be favorite symbols of Hawthorne. To him, the mirror became a magic looking glass, a device through which he could picture settings; he could strip off the masks of his characters thereby seeing the meaning beneath the surface; he could lend an air of mystery and of the

⁵Arlin Turner, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1961), p. 122.

⁶Norman Holmes Pearson, The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1957), p. XIII.

supernatural to ordinary things of the physical world; and perhaps, best of all, he could disclose the truth otherwise hidden from men. For it was Hawthorne's highest purpose in his art to help men in their search for a meaning to life; he cared about the souls of men, the states of their hearts, and their ideals. Randall Stewart has said "No one is likely to impugn Hawthorne's central moral--the importance of understanding mankind in whole, and the need of man's sympathy with man based upon the honest recognition of the good and evil in our common nature."⁷ Hawthorne knew how to distinguish the false from the true and how to value and emphasize the little circle of light in the darkness of human life. Thus, through his extensive use of mirrors and reflecting objects, he found a handy, fictional representational symbol integral to his way of thinking and writing.

⁷Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1948), p. 265.

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