THREE INCONSISTENCIES IN HAWTHORNE'S UNFINISHED ROMANCE SEPTIMIUS FELTON

by

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When Nathaniel Hawthorne died in 1864, his family discovered four unfinished romances among his manuscripts. One of these fragments, Septimius Felton, attracts interest because it is the length of a novel and has a conclusion. The question immediately arises as to why Hawthorne abandoned a romance as near completion as Septimius Felton. Perhaps his advanced age, poor health, and disappointment over the Civil War are secondary reasons for the romance's failure. I believe, however, a better explanation is apparent in the text itself. Since Septimius Felton contains inconsistencies in the development of the theme, in the presentation of the main character, and in the selection of a setting which corresponds to Hawthorne's literary theory and theme, the romance's failure may result from these factors.

The inconsistency in the romance's theme of immortal life is an extension of Hawthorne's indecision about the subject. For twenty years in comments in short stories and notebooks, Hawthorne varies his attitude toward immortality from one of admiration to one of condemnation. In Septimius Felton--his last meditation on the subject yet his first development of the theme in novel form--Hawthorne's uncertainty continues. By contrasting the advantages and disadvantages of eternal life, a notable inconsistency develops in the theme.

This inconsistency also affects the presentation of the main character, for Septimius Felton voices both sides of the situation. To intensify this inconsistency in Septimius' attitude is Hawthorne's method of describing him. When Septimius presents the advantages of a long life, he assumes heroic proportions. Yet, when he voices the opposite position, he appears as a ridiculous villain.

Although these inconsistencies in theme and character are prominent weaknesses, the outstanding inconsistency in Septimius Felton is Hawthorne's failure to relate his setting to his theme. By selecting the Revolutionary War for the setting, Hawthorne was able to reflect the current crisis or the Civil War in his comments. These contemporary remarks, however, conflict with his imaginative theme and illustrate his inability to write a realistic novel. In expressing his literary theory in various prefaces, Hawthorne apparently recognized that his talent lay in romantic writing. Septimius Felton seems to indicate that his perception was correct, for the romance's combination of a realistic setting with a romantic theme does not succeed. This inconsistency, as well as the inconsistency in the development of the theme and character, are shortcomings for the romance and possible explanations for its failure.

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INTRODUCTION

Septimius Felton, one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's unfinished romances, is a very interesting and revealing fragment because of its deceptive appearance. Although it is the length of a novel and has a conclusion, Hawthorne regarded it as incomplete and abandoned it. He realized that the work needed the expansion of several situations and characters and his numerous revisions failed to achieve successful effects. He labored over the manuscript from 1861 until 1863, but his continued failure to transform the romance into a satisfactory work caused him to discontinue Septimius Felton forever.

Hawthorne apparently never intended the public to have access to this fragment, for even his own family was unaware of its existence until after his death. Nevertheless, after Mrs. Hawthorne discovered the romance, she decided it should be published. Although her death occurred before the manuscript was prepared for publication, Hawthorne's daughter Una, with the assistance of Robert Browning, completed the preparations. The book was issued serially in the Atlantic Monthly from January through August, 1872 and published in book form in July, 1872.[1]

[1]Edward H. Davidson, Hawthorne's Last Phase (New Haven, 1949), p. 76.

The critical reaction to Septimius Felton was mixed. Some of the critics were extravagant in their praise of the fragment; for example, the London Times praised its "sensation in super-abundance" which lifted the tale "above the commonplaces of crime and horror;" the Annual Register compared it to the writings of Edgar Poe; and T. W. Higginson in a review for Scribner's Monthly compared Septimius Felton to Goethe's Faust.[2] Because they were concerned with making extravagant comparisons, these favorable reviews failed to provide important insights into the literary value and significance of the work. Critics who were less favorable gave a better evaluation of its importance. In Harper's New Monthly Magazine and the Southern Magazine, two of the earliest reviewers of Septimius Felton criticized the romance severely yet recognized its value as a revelation of Hawthorne's method of writing. The reviewer in Harper's summed the commonly held attitude toward the romance when he stated that "the book will achieve its reputation rather as a literary curiosity than as a popular romance."[3]

The critical attitude toward Septimius Felton established in the early reviews remained permanent, for the romance has been generally ignored by the critics and biographers of Haw-

[2]Davidson, p. 120.

[3]"Editor's Literary Record," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XLV (October, 1872), 784--reprinted in Davidson, Hawthorne's Last Phase, p. 119.

thorne. Yet, the few studies of the fragment as a curiosity note his last meditation on the theme of immortality. Also, studies of Septimius Felton provide an excellent opportunity for discovering the techniques which make many of Hawthorne's romances successful. An investigation of the weaknesses of the fragment makes the latter discovery possible, for Septimius Felton's failures reveal the strength of Hawthorne's successful works.

Since Hawthorne was old, sick, and depressed by financial and political worries during the composition of Septimius Felton, critics often cite these secondary reasons to explain its failure. I believe the answer to this literary problem is apparent in the text itself, for the romance is filled with inconsistencies. This thesis shall aim at an investigation of these various inconsistencies as they appear in the development of the theme, in the presentation of the main character, and in the choice of the setting for the romance. Since Hawthorne failed to maintain a definite approach in developing his theme, characters, and setting, Septimius Felton remained incomplete.

THE INCONSISTENCIES IN HAWTHORNE'S THEME OF IMMORTAL LIFE

Nathaniel Hawthorne's intense interest in immortal life made possible by an elixir of life is apparent from his numerous comments on the subject in notebook entries, short stories, and his unfinished romance Septimius Felton. These comments span a twenty-year period and demonstrate a fundamental inconsistency in his attitude toward the desirability of immortal life. He wavers from criticism to praise, without approaching a resolution to the issue. A study of his comments on the theme exemplifies his unstable reaction to the values of living forever and gives one possible explanation for Septimius Felton's failure.

Hawthorne's reading of William Godwin's St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century was probably the beginning of his interest in the subject of earthly immortality. He read the novel as early as 1820; in a letter to his sister Elizabeth dated October 31, 1820, he said, "I have read Hoggs Tales, Caleb Williams, St. Leon, & Mandeville. I admire Godwin's Novels, and intend to read them all."[4] In Godwin's novel of immortality, the hero takes the elixir at the age of fifty-four and becomes thirty-two years younger. The hero's motive in desiring immor-

[4]Randall Stewart, ed. The American Notebooks, by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1932), p. lxxii--quotes letter now in possession of Miss Rebecca Manning.

tal life is to reform the world and help mankind. Although St. Leon gave Hawthorne an insight into the intriguing quality of the immortality theme, he developed the theme differently.

In his earliest references to the subject, Hawthorne presents an opposite view to the motive in St. Leon. Instead of viewing immortal life as beneficial to mankind, Hawthorne sees extended life as detrimental to society. For example, in a notebook entry for 1836, he says, "Curious to image what murmurings and discontent would be excited, if any of the great so-called calamities of human beings were to be abolished,--as, for instance, death."[5] The following year his first short story dealing with the theme immortal life appeared. Again, his opposition to extended life and his belief that regained youth would have no advantages for man arises. The short story entitled "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" presents four characters, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, Mr. Gascoigne, and the Widow Wycherly, who temporarily regain their youth by drinking Dr. Heidegger's elixir. As he watches them regain their evil habits of early life as well as their youthful appearances, Dr. Heidegger decides, " . . . if the fountain [of youth] gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to bathe my lips in it--no, though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me!"[6]

[5]The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George P. Lathrop (Cambridge, Mass., 1883), VI, 36.

[6]Ibid., I, 270.

Hawthorne's rejection of immortal life continues. In 1840 he points out a specific reason for opposing prolonged life. In his American Notebook he writes, "The love of posterity is a consequence of the necessity of death. If a man were sure of living forever here, he would not care about his offspring."[7] In his short story "A Virtuoso's Collection," written in 1842, Hawthorne again rejects the elixir. The virtuoso offers a draught of an elixir of life to the narrator, but the narrator refuses to drink by stating "I desire not an earthly immortality . . . . Were man to live longer on the earth, the spiritual would die out of him. The spark of ethereal fire would be choked by the material, the sensual. There is a celestial something within us that requires, after a certain time, the atmosphere of heaven to preserve it from decay and ruin. I will have none of this liquid."[8] In the following year in the short story "The Birthmark," Hawthorne's opposition toward an elixir of life appears again. Aylmer believes it is possible to prepare an elixir for immortal life, but the author describes Aylmer's reason for failing to perform the experiment: "He [Aylmer] more than intimated that it was at his option to concoct a liquid that should prolong life for years, perhaps interminable; but that it would produce

[7]The Complete Works, IX, 212.

[8]Ibid., II, 551-552.

a discord in Nature which all the world, and chiefly the quaffer of the immortal nostrum, would find cause to curse."[9]

As this survey of notebook and short story comments reveals, from 1836 until 1843 Hawthorne's opposition to extended life remained consistent. He expounded numerous reasons for opposing immortal life; he believed earthly immortality would upset human society, disrupt family relationships, harm man's character, quench man's spiritual nature, and produce a discord in nature. Yet, in 1843 his attitude suddenly changed. He replaced his criticism of immortal life with praise of the possibilities inherent in an extended life. The best explanation for this sudden reversal in attitude is his reaction to the untimely death of Washington Allston on July 9, 1843. Allston, a well known painter of the period and an encourager of Sophia Hawthorne in her painting, died before completing his painting "Belshazzar's Feast" upon which he had worked for twenty-six years. Evidently, this tragedy convinced Hawthorne that one ordinary lifetime is often too short to accomplish great tasks. Remarks in his notebook and short stories following Allston's death support this hypothesis.[10]

In two notebook entries for 1843, Hawthorne expresses the idea that man's ability to overcome death would be his greatest achievement. In the first entry he writes, "The advantages of a longer life than is allotted to mortals--the many things that

[9]The Complete Works, II, 58.

[10]Stewart, p. lxxxiv.

might then be accomplished;--to which one life-time is inadequate, and for which the time spent is therefore lost; a successor being unable to take up the task when we drop it."[11] The second entry indicates Hawthorne's concern for Allston's untimely death, for it reads, "Allston's picture of Belshazzar's Feast--with reference to the advantages, or otherwise, of having life assured to us, till we could finish important tasks on which we were engaged."[12] Hawthorne exemplifies this new view of immortal life in "The Artist of the Beautiful," written in 1844. He makes the statement that Owen Warland "was incited to toil the more diligently by an anxiety lest death should surprise him in the midst of his labors."[13] He further adds that "This anxiety, perhaps, is common to all men who set their hearts upon anything so high, in their own view of it, that life becomes of importance only as conditional to its accomplishment." That Allston's death influenced this new attitude toward immortal life is apparent from another statement in the paragraph: "The poet leaves his song half sung . . . . The painter--as Allston did--leaves half his conception on the canvas to sadden us with its imperfect beauty."

[11] Hawthorne, The American Notebooks, p. 100.

[12] Ibid., p. 101.

[13] The Complete Works, II, 525-526.

In 1845 another reversal occurs in Hawthorne's response to eternal life. Instead of describing the great works to be achieved in immortal life, he presents various occupations for the Wandering Jew. Since the Wandering Jew is a legendary figure doomed to immortal life as a punishment from Jesus, his occupations indicate Hawthorne's doubts about the desirability of eternal life. The entry states, "A disquisition--or a discussion between two or more persons--on the manner in which the Wandering Jew has spent his life. One period, perhaps, in wild carnal debauchery; then trying, over and over again, to grasp domestic happiness; then a soldier; then a statesman &c--at last, realizing some truth."[14] These occupations describe the selfish use of lengthened life rather than the accomplishment of great tasks.

Hawthorne reverts to his previous praise of immortality in a statement in his English Notebooks for 1855. He writes, "God himself cannot compensate us for being born for any period short of eternity. All the misery endured here constitutes a claim for another life, and still more all the happiness; because all true happiness involves something more than the earth owns, and needs something more than a mortal capacity for the enjoyment of it."[15] Again, he criticizes the briefness of earthly life and the possible happiness in eternal life.

After contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of

[14]Hawthorne, The American Notebooks, p. 117.

[15]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1949), p. 101.

immortal life for twenty years, Hawthorne should have been prepared to write a novel based upon this theme. However, since he failed to establish a definite conviction toward the theme in his notebooks and short story comments, he echoes this inconsistent attitude in Septimius Felton. The romance combines the arguments for and the arguments against immortal life and the controvery continues to exist.

Septimius, the character who desires immortal life, explains his unusual wish in terms which parallel Hawthorne's remarks in his notebook and short story following the death of Allston. Septimius states:

> The whole race of man, living from the beginning of time, have not, in all their number and multiplicity and in all their duration, come in the least to know the world they live in! And how is this rich world thrown away upon us, because we live in it such a moment! What mortal work has ever been done since the world began! Because we have no time. No lesson is taught. We are snatched away from our study before we have learned the alphabet. As the world now exists, I confess . . . it seems to me all a failure, because we do not live long enough.[16]

The minister, saddened by Septimius' strange idea, refutes his statement by saying, "But the lesson is carried on in another state of being!" Septimius does not accept the idea of spiritual immortality; instead, he replies, "Not the lesson that we begin here, ... We might as well train a child in a primeval

[16] The Complete Works, XI, 238.

forest, to teach him how to live in a European court."[17] By emphasizing this point that mortal work is limited "because we have no time," Hawthorne is again presenting his idea that an ordinary lifetime is too brief for accomplishing great works.

Septimius reiterates this attitude in a discussion with Sibyl Dacy, the girl with whom he plans to share his elixir of life. He says, "We would find out a thousand uses of this world, uses and enjoyments which now men never dream of, because the world is just held to their mouths, and then snatched away again, before they have time hardly to taste it."[18] Sibyl is in agreement with Septimius' attitude. In relating an English legend of a gentleman who made an elixir, she states:

> . . . the man of science had great joy in having done this thing, both for the pride of it, and because it was so delightful a thing to have before him the prospect of endless time, which he might spend in adding more and more to his science, and so doing good to the world; for the chief obstruction to the improvement of the world and the growth of knowledge is, that mankind cannot go straightforward in it, but continually there have to be new beginnings, and it takes every new man half his life, if not the whole of it, to come up to the point where his predecessor left off.[19]

In this statement the beneficial aspect of immortal life also arises. The idea of "doing good to the world" recalls Hawthorne's reading of St. Leon forty years earlier.

[17] The Complete Works, XI, 239.

[18] Ibid., p. 385.

[19] Ibid., p. 328.

Although Septimius Felton suggests advantages of immortal life, the arguments against using an elixir balance the scales. For example, Hawthorne restates his belief, which first appeared in a notebook entry, that immortal life might cause the parent not to love his child. In the romance he reverses the change in affection, but the idea is similar. He states if death were eliminated "then the sire would live forever, and the heir never come to his inheritance, and so he would at once hate his own father, from the perception that he would never be out of his way."[20] Another opposition to prolonged life which had appeared in the notebook was the belief that it would produce "discord" in life. A remark concerning government affairs illustrates this belief in Septimius Felton. Eternal life would mean that "the same class of powerful minds would always rule the state, and there would never be a change of policy."[21]

Both of these disadvantages of immortal life arise in the confused mind of Septimius; however, he is usually on the "pro" side of the argument. For that reason, the other characters present the remaining oppositions toward extended life. Aunt Keziah, the old Indian relative of Septimius, relates the story of an Indian king who "had lived very long, longer than anybody knew." Although he was a "wise and good man," his

[20]The Complete Works, XI, 363-364.

[21]Ibid., p. 364.

people were afraid that he would live forever and disturb the whole order of nature. Therefore, they assassinated him. Hawthorne wanted to use this episode to present other arguments against immortal life. He made a note in the margin to enlarge the passage and to include the following disadvantages of a long life:

> Make this legend grotesque, and express the weariness of the tribe at the intolerable control the undying one had of them; his always bringing up precepts from his own experience, never consenting to anything new, and so impeding progress; his habits hardening into him, his ascribing to himself all wisdom, and depriving everybody of his right to successive command; his endless talk, and dwelling on the past, so that the world could not bear him. Describe his ascetic and severe habits, his rigid calmness, etc.[22]

Robert Hagburn, the courageous soldier who is a foil for the studious Septimius, expresses contempt for immortal life. When Septimius states his desire to live forever, Robert replies, "Forever? . . . . And what would the people do who wish to fill our places? You are unfair, Septimius. Live and let live! Turn about! Give me my seventy years, and let me go,--my seventy years of what this life has,--toil, enjoyment, suffering, struggle, fight, rest,--only let me have my share of what's going, and I shall be content."[23] The war does not change Ro-

[22] The Complete Works, XI, 318-319.

[23] Ibid., pp. 234-235.

bert's philosophy. After returning from battle he states, "If I had died, I doubt not my last moments would have been happy. There is no use of life, but just to find out what is fit for us to do; and, doing it, it seems to be little matter whether we live or die in it."[24] Robert accepts death as a necessary and not completely undesirable part of life. He praises the mysterious element which it gives life by stating, "There is something in this uncertainty, this peril, this cloud before us, that makes it sweeter to love and to be loved than amid all seeming quiet and serenity. Really, I think, if there were to be no death, the beauty of life would be all tame."[25]

In a discussion with Septimius, Sibyl presents a similar view of death, for she praises its mysterious element and believes spiritual immortality is a recompensation for loss of material life. She states:

> What a blessing it is to mortals, . . . what a kindness of Providence, that life is made so uncertain; that death is thrown in among the possibilities of our being; that these awful mysteries are thrown around us, into which we may vanish! For, without it, how would it be possible to be heroic, ... For my part, I think man is more favored than the angels, and made capable of higher heroism, greater virtue, and of a more excellent spirit than they, because we

[24] The Complete Works, XI, 390.

[25] Ibid., p. 393.

> have such a mystery of grief and terror around us; . . . . God gave the whole world to man, and if he is left alone with it, it will make a clod of him at last; but, to remedy that, God gave man a grave, and it redeems all, while it seems to destroy all, and makes an immortal spirit of him in the end.[26]

Septimius refutes Sibyl's praise of death in a vindicative attack on death's untimeliness. He states:

> I think you ascribe a great deal too much potency to the grave . . . . The grave seems to me a vile pitfall, put right in our pathway, and catching most of us,--all of us,--causing us to tumble in at the most inconvenient opportunities, so that all human life is a jest and a farce, just for the sake of this inopportune death; for I observe it never waits for us to accomplish anything; . . . I am convinced that dying is a mistake, and that by and by we shall overcome it. I say there is no use in the grave.[27]

This discussion between Sibyl and Septimius is a good illustration of Hawthorne's inconsistent approach in developing the theme of immortality. Throughout the novel he places arguments for and arguments against immortal life side by side; yet, he fails to ally himself with either position. Since both arguments, pro and con, are well constructed, the reader is unable to identify Hawthorne's attitude. Evidently, Hawthorne decides immortal life is not worthwhile because

[26] The Complete Works, XI, 323.

[27] Ibid., p. 324.

Septimius' elixir becomes a destructive force to life rather than its preserver. The conclusion of the novel, at least, makes this interpretation possible. But, if this is Hawthorne's final decision about the question, he certainly avoids expanding his attitude. Previous to the final scene the entire novel contains numerous philosophical speculations on the advantages and disadvantages of extended life. The final scene, however, lacks dramatic comment on either position. Sibyl drinks the elixir, destroys the remaining potion, admits it is poisonous, and explains her role in deceiving Septimius. Septimius, overwhelmed by her revelation, can say only, "Why hast thou spilt the drink? . . . . We might have died together."[28] The dying Sibyl answers, "No, live, Septimius, ... I would not let you have it, not one drop."[29] At this point the reader expects Hawthorne to end the controversy which has raged throughout the novel, but he sidesteps the whole issue. Sibyl laughs and says, "What a penance,-- what months of wearisome labor thou hast had,--and what thoughts, what dreams, and how I laughed in my sleeve at them all the time! Ha, ha, ha!"[30] Her light treatment of the situation makes the conclusion incongruent to the intensely interesting arguments which arose in

[28] The Complete Works, XI, 427.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

the preceding chapters. For that reason, this scene is the final indication of Hawthorne's indecision and lack of consistency in developing the theme of earthly immortality.

THE INCONSISTENCY IN THE CHARACTER OF SEPTIMIUS FELTON

The inconsistency in Septimius Felton is not limited to the theme; the main character also lacks unity. These two inconsistencies are closely related, however, for the inconsistency in the characterization of Septimius is a reflection of Hawthorne's inability to maintain a consistent attitude toward his theme of immortal life. Since he was unable to decide whether immortality has more advantages than disadvantages or vice-versa, he permits this unresolved controversy to continue in his main character. In other words, Septimius' arguments for and against immortal life make him a confusing character. To intensify this confusion is Hawthorne's method of describing Septimius. When Septimius presents worthy uses of extended life or Hawthorne's ideas of the advantages of a long life, he appears as a heroic idealist. Yet, when he assumes selfish motives for desiring immortal life or presents Hawthorne's ideas of the disadvantages of eternal life, Septimius becomes villainous and ridiculous. This variation in the presentation of Septimius which accompanies his dual attitude toward eternal life is an inconsistency in Hawthorne's development of his character and can be traced throughout the romance.

At first, Septimius is an attractive person. He is a young college graduate who has prepared himself for the ministry. This pleasant portrait of Septimius is slightly overshadowed by a description which indicates his unusual personality:

> He was accustomed to spend much of his day in thought and study within doors, and indeed, like most studious young men, was overfond of the fireside, and of making life as artificial as he could, by fireside heat and lamplight, in order to suit it to the artificial, intellectual, and moral atmosphere which he derived from books, instead of living healthfully in the open air, and among his fellow-beings.[1]

Although this passage suggests an unusual individual, the true recognition of Septimius' peculiarity does not occur until his first conversation with his friends Rose Garfield and Robert Hagburn. To them he expresses his deep contempt for death by saying, "I doubt, if it had been left to my choice, whether I should have taken existence on such terms; so much trouble of preparation to live, and then no life at all; a ponderous beginning, and nothing more."[2] And even more shocking is his statement that he wishes to live forever. Yet, Septimius qualifies his unusual and dangerous statement by saying, "Forever . . . is none too long for all I wish to know."[3] He reiterates his association of extended life with

[1] The Complete Works, XI, 235-236.

[2] Ibid., p. 233.

[3] Ibid., p. 234.

increased knowledge when he explains his strange desire to the minister: "What mortal work has ever been done since the world began! Because we have no time. No lesson is taught. We are snatched away from our study before we have learned the alphabet."[4] From these remarks Septimius seems to be a young idealist who wishes he could improve the world by living forever and increasing his knowledge. In other words, he is a spokesman for Hawthorne's conception of the advantages of extended life. He makes another remark which supports this interpretation:

> He suspected that the way truly to live and answer the purposes of life was not to gather up thoughts into books, where they grew so dry, but to live and still be going about, full of green wisdom, ripening ever, not in maxims cut and dry, but a wisdom ready for daily occasions, . . . and that to be this, it was necessary to exist long on earth, drink in all its lessons, and not to die on the attainment of some smattering of truth; but to live all the more for that; and apply it to mankind and increase it thereby.[5]

Nevertheless, Septimius is not completely idealistic in his attitude toward eternal life; he also possesses selfish motives. He cannot accept the fact that death will eventually annihilate him. He questions, "Why should I die? . . . . Let other men die, if they choose, or yield; let him

[4]The Complete Works, XI, 238.

[5]Ibid., p. 241.

that is strong enough live."[6] He also states, "Every living man triumphs over every dead one, as he lies, poor and helpless, under the mound, a pinch of dust, a heap of bones, an evil odor! I hate the thought! It shall not be so!"[7] With the addition of selfish motives, Septimius' villainous nature replaces his idealism. This fact becomes apparent after he finds a possible means of living forever. Quite coincidently, in a duel he slays a British officer who has a recipe for an elixir of life. At least, Septimius assumes the officer's strange manuscript contains such a recipe, for the dying officer says, "It was boy's play, [meaning the duel] and the end of it is that I die a boy, instead of living forever, as perhaps I otherwise might."[8] Septimius attempts to translate the manuscript and assemble the necessary ingredients. The manuscript, however, has a harmful effect on Septimius and increases his progression toward a villainous role. Although he has always been a lover of solitude, his work on the manuscript isolates him even more from the world and places him in close similarity with Ethan Brand, Rappaccini, and Aylmer, other Hawthorne characters whose attempts to go beyond the limits of human nature have disastrous results. Septimius' reaction to the war and love exemplify his changing personality.

[6] The Complete Works, XI, 240.

[7] Ibid., p. 242.

[8] Ibid., p. 255.

Before receiving the manuscript, he wavered between a passive and active role in life. For example, the day on which he killed the soldier "He felt himself strangely ajar with the human race, and would have given much either to be in full accord with it, or to be separated from it forever."[9] That he wishes he were more concerned about the excitement of the war is illustrated by his statement: "I am dissevered from it. It is my doom to be only a spectator of life; to look on as one apart from it . . . . How cold I am now, while this whirlpool of public feeling is eddying around me." Yet, Septimius is not completely out of contact with the world at this point. This is evident from his reaction to the excitement of the situation: "He was restless as a flame . . . . unable, any longer to preserve this unnatural indifference, Septimius snatched his gun, and rushed out of the house." After finding the manuscript, however, his interest in the war no longer exists. "He knew nothing, thought nothing, cared nothing about his country, or his country's battles."[10] In other words, Septimius gradually assumes characteristics of the typical Hawthorne villain.

Septimius' attitude toward love undergoes a similar change. The day of the duel he proposes marriage to Rose Garfield in

[9] The Complete Works, XI, 250.

[10] Ibid., p. 251.

the terms, "I need something to soften and warm my cold, hard life."[11] When she accepts his proposal he realizes that a wife may not fit his life of study.

> The intellect, which was the prominent point in Septimius, stirred and heaved, crying out vaguely that its own claims, perhaps, were ignored in this contract. Septimius had perhaps no right to love at all; if he did, it should have been a woman of another make, who could be his intellectual companion and helper. And then, perchance,--perchance,--there was destined for him some high, lonely path, in which, to make any progress, to come to any end, he must walk unburdened by the affections.[12]

As he deciphers the manuscript, he discovers that his intellect is correct, for he gradually withdraws from Rose. Even Rose realizes their incompatibility, for she says, "I fear . . . that no woman can help you much. You despise woman's thought, and have no need of her affection."[13] Although Septimius does not want complete isolation from mankind, he realizes that the successful transcription of the manuscript will isolate him forever:

> he felt that the solitary pursuit in which he was engaged carried him apart from the sympathy of which he spoke, and that he was concentrating his efforts and interest entirely upon himself, and that the more he succeeded the more remotely he should be carried away, and that his final triumph would be the complete seclusion of himself

[11] The Complete Works, XI, 268-269.

[12] Ibid., p. 270.

[13] Ibid., p. 296.

from all that breathed.[14]

Yet, he continues to brood over the manuscript and the estrangement between Rose and him widens.

The gradual change which accompanies Septimius' isolated delving into knowledge not intended for mankind has other effects on him also. He assumes the physical appearance as well as the personality traits of a villain, for he is described as follows:

> He had a strange, owl-like appearance, uncombed, unbrushed, his hair long and tangled; his face . . . darkened with smoke; his cheeks pale; the indentation of his brow deeper than ever before; an earnest, haggard, sulking look; and so he went hastily along the village street, feeling as if all eyes might find out what he had in his mind from his appearance . . . . He shunned the glances of his fellowmen, probably because he had learnt to consider them not as fellows, because he was seeking to withdraw himself from the common bond.[15]

Although he possesses characteristics of the Hawthorne villain--withdrawal from life--Septimius is somewhat different because he experiences internal conflict. He fights against the manuscript's effect upon him. In fact, since his unusual pursuit threatens to separate him from mankind, Septimius debates whether immortal life is worth complete separation. He believes that he no longer has any contact with

[14] The Complete Works, XI, 297.

[15] Ibid., p. 382.

humanity; nevertheless, he wonders if "he could give them all up."[16] He realizes the rich possibilities of the future, but he wishes for "one unchangeable companion."

Septimius' indecision over this question seems to be an indication of Hawthorne's difficulty in presenting him consistently. Hawthorne is apparently unable to decide whether to make Septimius a villain, who is separated from the world, or an idealist, who wants to help his fellow men. Another indication of Hawthorne's indecision is the abrupt change in the role of the characters. Rose becomes Septimius' half-sister and the British girl Sibyl Dacy replaces her as the object of Septimius' affection. Since she is a better intellectual companion for Septimius, Sibyl's new role gives him a better opportunity to find a partner and not isolate himself completely from the world. However, this change in the role of the characters does not solve the problem.

Davidson comments upon Hawthorne's problem and gives an explanation for the inconsistency. He says, "Although Hawthorne sketched Septimius as a young idealist in the first studies, he grew tired of the absurd youth and began to heap satire on the poor fellow's head. In the writer's own mind a tension was created and Hawthorne was torn between a favorable and a ridiculous portrait. This tension brought the tale tumb-

[16] The Complete Works, XI, 383.

ling about his head."[17] Davidson believes that the first hint of this collapse is Hawthorne's parallel between Septimius and Miss Delia Bacon, a woman who also worked with ciphers and published her delusion in a six hundred page volume entitled The Philosophy of Shakespeare's Plays Solved. By linking Septimius to Miss Bacon, Hawthorne begins his ridicule of the young idealist. The passage appears when Septimius finally penetrates the mystery of the manuscript. Septimius "thought an instant, and was convinced this was the full expression and outwriting of that crabbed little mystery; and that here was part of the secret writing for which, as my poor friend Miss Bacon discovered to her loss, the Age of Elizabeth was so famous and so dexterous."[18] Since Una Hawthorne omitted the passage containing the parallel between Septimius and Miss Bacon from her edition, it probably indicates her awareness that this ridicule of Septimius makes him an inconsistent character. However, the omission of this passage does not eliminate the inconsistency in the presentation of Septimius. Hawthorne continues to waver between a favorable and a ridiculous portrait of Septimius, and when Septimius explains his plans for immortal life, Hawthorne's inconsistency is more pronounced than ever before.

[17]Davidson, p. 102.

[18]Ibid.--Quoted from the original manuscript.

As Septimius discusses the future generations with Sibyl, the person selected to share his elixir, the contrast between his selfish and altruistic motives is apparent. This contrast also brings the conflict between Hawthorne's favorable and his unfavorable descriptions of Septimius into prominence. Septimius' first suggestions are unselfish, for he says that they "will spend a hundred years in examining into the real state of mankind, and another century in devising and putting in execution remedies for his ills."[19] Immediately following this altruistic alliance, he suggests the selfish enjoyment of a century of playtime in which they will search out whatever joy can be had. Even Sibyl questions this idea; she asks, "A hundred years of play . . . . Will not that be tiresome?"[20] Septimius answers that if it is tiresome their next century of contriving deep philosophies will compensate for it. For the fifth century, he suggests another play day followed by a century of rulership. He attempts to make this latter suggestion unselfish by claiming that in ruling a hundred years

> we shall have time to extinguish errors, and make the world see the absurdity of them; to substitute other methods of government for the old, bad ones; to fit

[19] The Complete Works, XI, 406.

[20] Ibid., p. 407.

> the people to govern itself, to do with little government, to do with none; and when this is effected, we will vanish from our loving people, and be seen no more, but be reverenced as gods.[21]

The phrase "reverenced as gods" illustrates, however, that the underlying motive, even in this apparent altruistic suggestion, is selfish. His next plan is to write a history, "such as histories ought to be, and never have been." Again, his selfish desire for fame arises, for he is certain that his history will convince the people that an "undying one" has written it. Even in describing a century as a religious teacher, he is not interested solely in the spiritual welfare of the people; he desires to be a prophet, "a greater than Mahomet." Finally, the evil tendency in his nature completely overshadows his plan. He states:

> I have learned that it is a weary toil for a man to be always good, holy, and upright. In my life as a sainted prophet, I shall have somewhat too much of this; it will be enervating and sickening, and I shall need another kind of diet. So, in the next hundred years, ... --in that one little century,--methinks I would fain be what men call wicked.[22]

This statement climaxes the plan for the successive centuries, but Septimius believes "New vistas will open themselves before us continually, as we go onward."[23] He admits that death might

[21] The Complete Works, XI, 408.

[22] Ibid., p. 409.

[23] Ibid., p. 410.

be welcomed as a friend if they find the world always the same. Yet, he resists accepting death until he has written a poem or other work and lived to see himself famous. As this statement and previous ones reveal, Septimius' selfish desire for fame corrupts every altruistic motive which he expounds. By presenting this dual aspect in Septimius' nature and by permitting the selfish motive to prevail, Hawthorne's ridicule of the young idealist is complete.

Randall Stewart, who believes the plan for successive generations is the final blow to the unity in the development of Septimius' character, gives an explanation for Hawthorne's inconsistency. He believes that Septimius' motives are a combination of suggestions drawn from one of Hawthorne's unpublished memorandums written in 1863 and his notebook entry on the Wandering Jew. The memorandum reads:

> He must have been a man of high purposes, which he hates to leave unaccomplished. This nostrum to bring back his youth is a thing to which he otherwise attaches no importance. He knows that it is inconsistent with the plan of the world, and, if generally adopted, would throw everything into confusion; he therefore considers it justifiable only in his own exceptional case . . . .
>
> It might be a metaphysical discovery that he wishes to complete. Perhaps physical. He might have imagined a way to clear disease out of the world; some great beneficence, at all events. Perhaps the object for which he wants renewed youth may appear to the reader ridiculously trifling compared

> with the means used, as for example, to find out the solution of an algebraic sum. No; better to confer a material benefit on the world, how to get rid of poverty, or slavery, or war . . .[24]

In this memorandum the idealistic use of extended life appears, and to a certain extent Hawthorne develops Septimius with this idea in mind. Septimius' first remarks about immortal life indicate a desire to improve the world, and in his plans for immortal life he suggests remedying the world's ills by improving the government. Nevertheless, his selfish motives dominate his philanthropic aims. In fact, his selfish motives recall Hawthorne's entry on the occupations for the Wandering Jew. The Wandering Jew would spend "One period, perhaps, in wild carnal debauchery; then trying, over and over again, to grasp domestic happiness; then a soldier; then a statesman &c --at last, realizing some truth."[25] Septimius' plan for the unlimited future closely parallels these occupations. The Wandering Jew devotes a portion of his life to "wild carnal debauchery;" Septimius spends one century in being "what men call wicked." He explains this unusual desire in the terms, "How can I know my brethren, unless I do that once? I would experience all. Imagination is only a dream. I can imagine myself a murderer, and all other modes of crime; but it leaves no real impression on the heart. I must live these things."[26] The Wandering Jew's

[24]Stewart, p. lxxxv--Quoted from manuscript in Huntington Library.

[25]Hawthorne, The American Notebooks, p. 117.

[26]The Complete Works, XI, 409.

occupations also include the roles of soldier and statesman; likewise, Septimius would be the ruler of the earth for a century. As the Wandering Jew at last realizes some truth, Septimius also contrives deep philosophies and becomes a religious teacher. At this point, however, the similarities between the two cease. The Wandering Jew is a lost soul who may find redemption; Septimius is a benefactor to man. His apparent benevolent attitude reflects the memorandum. In his attempt to combine in Septimius the altruism and innocence of the memorandum figure to the selfish and evil nature of the Wandering Jew, Hawthorne did not succeed. As Stewart states, "An inescapable dichotomy destroys the consistency and unity of the character of Septimius."[27]

The argument could be raised that the confusion in the characterization of Septimius is an example of Hawthorne's inclination to place his characters in morally ambiguous situations. The short story "Young Goodman Brown" is an illustration of this tendency in Hawthorne's writing. However, this does not seem to be the situation in the confusing descriptions of Septimius Felton. Instead of inspiring individual interpretations by ambiguous remarks as in "Young Goodman Brown," Septimius Felton contains abrupt transitions and conflicting passages which intensify the deterioration of its leading char-

[27]Stewart, p. lxxvi.

acter. These stylistic traits indicate that the inconsistency in Septimius is a weakness in Hawthorne's character development or, at least, a failure to communicate his conception to the reader rather than a planned device. To further support this hypothesis is Hawthorne's realization that he made a mistake in combining contrasting traits in Septimius' personality. Evidence of this recognition is his new approach to the character in some random notes attached to his scenario, an outline of the fifteen prominent scenes in the romance which he wrote after the failure of the first draft, the draft used by Una Hawthorne for her transcription, and before he wrote the final unfinished draft. Evidently, Hawthorne recognized that his ridicule of Septimius, particularly through his use of the Wandering Jew legend, ruined the idealism of Septimius' disire to live forever and without an idealistic approach Septimius' desire for immortal life could not be appropriate. In the note he gives the following plan for developing Septimius:

> Septimius must be endowed with grand and heroic qualities; and must desire long life, not meanly, but for noble ends. No mean dread of death, but an abhorrence of it, as being cloddish, inactive, unsuitable. Make his nobility of character grow upon the reader, in spite of all his defects . . .
>
> One of Septimius's grand objects is to reform the world, which he thinks he can do; if he can only live long to study and understand the nature of man, and get at the proper methods of acting on them. The

> reason why the world has remained dark, ignorant, and miserable is, because the benefactors of the race have been cut off before they more than partially understood their task and the methods of it. This must be broached in his first conversation with the minister; perhaps in reference to the troubles of the country, and the war, then about to begin. When he shall have completed the reformation of the world, seen war, intemperance, slavery, all manner of crime brought to an end; then he will die.[28]

As this note indicates, Hawthorne decided to develop Septimius solely as a benefactor of mankind; yet, he was unsuccessful in his final revision of the romance. Nevertheless, he had learned from his errors. In his final literary attempt, The Dolliver Romance, in which the immortality theme again appears, the character who desires immortal life has one consistent reason for his wish, the care of his great grand-daughter. This approach reveals Hawthorne's awareness that a character must be developed consistently. If he is not, he fails as Septimius failed.

THE INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE SETTING AND THE THEME

Although Hawthorne's inconsistent approach to his theme and main character was a definite shortcoming for the romance, his inconsistency did not cease at this point. He placed his theme of immortality in a war setting and his war comments conflicted with his artistic principles for the romance genre. In the Prefaces to "Rappaccini's Daughter," The Scarlet Letter, The House of Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance, and The Marble Faun, Hawthorne explained characteristics of the romance and distinguished between the romance and the novel as literary genres. A comparison of his literary theory, as he describes it in the Prefaces, with that implied in Septimius Felton reveals the romance's variation from his usual style of writing. Such a comparison also partly accounts for the failure of the romance.

In the Preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter," published in 1844, Hawthorne underscores his use of nonrealistic techniques in writing. He states that the author of this story "contents himself with a very slight embroidery of outward manners,--the faintest possible counterfeit of real life,--and endeavors to create an interest by some less obvious pe-

culiarity of the subject."[1] In other words, Hawthorne is not interested in presenting a real world; instead, he creates a "fantastic imagery . . . yet within the limits of our native earth."

In the Preface to The House of Seven Gables, Hawthorne more definitely states his decision to write in a nonrealistic manner. Perhaps the success of The Scarlet Letter, published a year earlier in 1850, convinced him of his own ability to omit realism from his writing. Whatever the reason, Hawthorne distinguishes between the romance and the novel and again selects the romance for his prose vehicle. He states that the novel must "aim at a very minute fidelity . . . to the ordinary course of man's experience."[2] On the other hand, since the romance is not limited to a faithful presentation of life, it presents the truth according to the imagination and creation of the author. This freedom from fact and external probability was the characteristic of the romance which attracted Hawthorne.

Closely connected with the romance's freedom from facts was its unrealistic, fantastic, and imaginary atmosphere. Even when he selected an actual event for a setting, Hawthorne used this type of atmosphere, as The Blithedale Romance exemplifies.

[1] The Complete Works, II, 108.

[2] The Complete Works, III, 13.

In the Preface to this romance, which is based upon his Brook Farm experience, Hawthorne stresses the romantic treatment which he extends to this setting selected from a real event. He states that "his whole treatment of the affair is altogether incidental to the main purpose of the romance."[3] Although the realism in the characters, incidents, setting, and circumstantial details in The Blithedale Romance brings it closer to the standards which Hawthorne assigns to the novel than any of his previous works, he denies that it is a novel even in his selection of the title. He justifies his selection of the setting within his definition for the romance, for he states that Brook Farm provides a remote setting which is a necessary atmosphere for a successful romance. For Hawthorne, Brook Farm offered "a foothold between fiction and reality," and he was searching for such a middle ground between imagination and actuality in his romances.

Hawthorne did not want a complete separation between the real world and the world presented in his romances; there must be a slight kinship between these two worlds. Nevertheless, to be successful, the romance must be removed from reality. He states this view in the Preface to The Marble Faun, published in 1860. The Italian setting of this romance provides the necessary remote atmosphere and also removes any insistence upon

[3]The Complete Works, V, 321.

actualities which an American setting requires. Italy provides an antique and mysterious situation which makes the writing of a romance much easier than the situation in America. As he states in a passage which illustrates his practice of speaking of himself as a third person author, "Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be in America."[4]

In an article in which Hawthorne's prefaces are examined and related to his concept of the romance, Jesse Bier discusses the significance of the prefaces for determining Hawthorne's opinion of the romance and his use of this genre and reaches several conclusions about Hawthorne's attitude toward realism. According to Bier, Hawthorne was a nonrealist but not an unrealist. To Hawthorne, imagination was a blending of the actual and the idealized, and his nonrealism was an imaginative way to explore true reality. His prose vehicle, the romance, did not attempt to escape reality but aimed for a superreality not confined to time or place. In other words, the romance presented inner life while the novel presented external realities. Although Hawthorne did not completely ignore actu-

[4]The Complete Works, VI, 15.

[5]Jesse Bier, "Hawthorne on the Romance: His Prefaces Related and Examined," MP, LIII (Aug., 1955), 21-22.

alities of human living presented in the novel, his main concern was for the abstract or universal. Therefore, he used the imaginative romance genre in preference to the realistic novel.

Bier, who underscores the link between Hawthorne's use of the past and the moral truth which his romances embody, relates these aspects in Hawthorne's writing to his theory about the romance. Since his prime purpose was to expound moral truth, Hawthorne found a historical sense imperative in his quest for superreality and the understanding of moral laws. Therefore, his preoccupation with the issue of morality is identical with the searching examination in his works for a reality above the realism to which novels give their attention. Hence, in his imaginative attempt to present the reality of moral truth, Hawthorne uses a sense of the past as well as a strange, remote atmosphere.[6]

A comparison of Septimius Felton to Hawthorne's theory about the romance illustrates that Hawthorne succeeded in fulfilling certain requirements; yet, he failed in fulfilling others. For example, Septimius Felton contains the imaginative qualities which Hawthorne assigned to the romance genre. The immortality theme is highly imaginative and fanciful, and Septimius' desire to create an elixir of life is completely isolated from any portrayal of the realism of everyday life. According

[6] Bier, pp. 22-23.

to Hawthorne, however, the main purpose of the romance genre was a description of moral truth; Septimius Felton lacks this quality. This deviation from Hawthorne's principles for romantic writing is apparent in tracing Septimius' character development. Although he does not have an acceptable reason for desiring everlasting life, Septimius' moral weakness is not emphasized. Instead, Hawthorne permits Septimius' humanitarian ideas to prevail for a period and only eventually replaces them with selfish ambition. Even though his selfish motives arise and his concentration on knowledge beyond the human sphere gives him a villainous role, Septimius does not suffer for his obsession. In fact, at the conclusion his future is uncertain and any moral implication is omitted.

In fulfilling the final criterion for the romance genre, the selection of a suitable setting or atmosphere, Hawthorne fails again. Although his choice of the Revolutionary War for the setting fulfills the requirements of a universal, timeless, remote territory separated from the realism of everyday life, Hawthorne's selection was too close in spirit to the Civil War period in which he was writing. Even though Edward Mather in his book Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man recognizes the connection between the setting and the period of composition--both were periods of nationalism and heroism--he perceives Hawthorne's mistake in choosing a war setting.[7]

[7]Edward Mather, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man (New York, 1940), p. 332.

The Revolutionary War setting provided a perfect opportunity for including remarks about the current crisis, and Hawthorne took advantage of this opportunity. Since the immortality theme required the maintenance of a level of fantasy, the insertion of realistic contemporary comments and observations is incongruent. For example, Septimius Felton contains many fanciful passages which are immediately followed by contemporary war comments. One notable example occurs as Septimius searches for an iron chest which contains important information about his family heritage. Hawthorne creates interest by describing at great length the unusual battered box with its elaborate decorations. The chest is "a very rusty old thing . . . looking very much like an ancient alms-box."[8] The description of Septimius' reaction to the box and key intensifies the suspense in the passage. Septimius "felt strongly convinced that inside the old box was something that appertained to his destiny; . . . . He looked at the curious old silver key, too, and . . . this he determined was the key of fate."[9] At this crucial point the narrative is broken by the entrance of Robert Hagburn, a Revolutionary soldier. Following a description of the transforming influence of the war on Hagburn's appearance, Hagburn relates his war philosophy. He states:

[8]The Complete Works, XI, 387-388.

[9]Ibid., pp. 388-389.

> People talk of the hardships of military service, of the miseries that we undergo fighting for our country. I have undergone my share, I believe,--hard toil in the wilderness, hunger, extreme weariness, pinching cold, the torture of a wound, peril of death; and really I have been as happy through it as ever I was at my mother's cosey [sic] fireside of a winter's evening.[10]

What could be more inappropriate than the insertion of this realistic passage about warfare immediately after the fanciful description of the mysterious chest. This passage is one of many which illustrates the inconsistency between the setting, which contains the realistic technique of the novelist, and the theme, which contains a typical fanciful subject of the romance writer.

The question immediately arises as to why Hawthorne suddenly failed to follow his literary theory in writing Septimius Felton. Why did Hawthorne mix current events with his fanciful theme? Previous to that period, any current events which gained his attention were only briefly and satirically alluded to in his fanciful writing. For example, the absurdity of the temperance movement rated a satirical comment in his short story "A Rill From the Town Pump." The spokesman for the story, the caretaker of water, calls himself "the grand reformer of the age." He believes that water shall rid the earth of the crimes which result from liquor: "The cow shall

[10] The Complete Works, XI, 390.

be my great confederate. Milk and water! The TOWNPUMP and the COW! Such is the glorious copartnership that shall tear down the distilleries and brew-houses."[11] Also worthy of a satirical comment in Hawthorne's writing was the feminist movement. In The Blithedale Romance, he reveals his opposition to the movement in Hollingsworth's criticism of Zenobia. Hollingsworth says, "All the separate action of woman is, and ever has been, and always shall be, false, foolish, vain, destructive of her own best and holiest qualities, void of every good effect, and productive of intolerable mischiefs! Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster . . . without man as her acknowledged principal!"[12] Yet, neither of these comments concerning current events upsets the romantic quality of the work containing them. In Septimius Felton, however, the contemporary comments are so numerous that an inconsistency develops.

The most plausible explanation for this variation in technique is Hawthorne's confession of his deep concern for his country's civil strife and his recognition of its influence on his writing ability. In a letter to William Ticknor in May, 1861, he states, "The war continues to interrupt my literary industry; and I am afraid it will be long before Romances are

[11] The Complete Works, I, 170.

[12] The Complete Works, V, 439.

in request again, even if I could write one."[13] In a letter to Horatio Bridge on October 12, 1861, he admits again the disastrous effects of the war on his creative ability: "I have not found it possible to occupy my mind with its usual trash and nonsense during these anxious times."[14] This reaction to the war was not one of brief duration but continued for the remainder of his life. In "Chiefly About War Matters" published in July, 1862, Hawthorne begins the essay by stating, "There is no remoteness of life and thought, no hermetically sealed seclusion, except, possibly, that of the grave, into which the disturbing influences of this war do not penetrate."[15] Even in Our Old Home, published in 1863, he apologizes in the dedication to Franklin Pierce that the volume of sketches is not "worthier." He states that he planned to use the materials composing this book as the background for a work of fiction, but he discarded the idea. That the war influenced this decision is revealed by his statement, "The Present, the Immediate, the Actual, has proved too potent for me. It takes away not only my scanty faculty, but even my desire for imaginative composition, and leaves me sadly content to scatter a thousand peaceful fantasies upon the hurricane that is sweeping us all

[13]Caroline Ticknor, Hawthorne and His Publisher (Boston, 1913), p. 257.

[14]Horatio Bridge, Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1893), pp. 170-171.

[15]The Complete Works, XII, 299.

along with it, possibly, into a Limbo where our nation and its polity may be as literally the fragments of a shattered dream as my unwritten Romance."[16]

Hawthorne's remark to William Ticknor that "I am afraid it will be long before Romances are in request again, even if I could write one" indicates another explanation for his change in technique. Apparently, he recognized that his audience was no longer interested in exotically imaginative art. The overwhelming tragedy of the Civil War, with brother fighting brother, made the present situation the concern of all Americans; therefore, Hawthorne's old settings and moral themes were no longer appropriate. In other words, the war crushed his artistic world. To satisfy the public's interest in contemporary events, as well as to satisfy his own intense concern for his country's welfare, Hawthorne changed his literary techniques. He combined his reflections on the war with his imaginative theme of immortality. Although he attempted to make this combination succeed by selecting the Revolutionary War instead of the Civil War as his setting, an inconsistency developed between the theme and the setting. A study of the war comments in relation to the theme of immortality reveals this lack of integration in Septimius Felton.

After introducing the characters and emphasizing Septi-

[16] The Complete Works, VII, No. 1, 16.

mius' strange desire to live forever, Hawthorne includes a remark which reveals his awareness that the setting should be subordinated to the theme. The paragraph reads:

> Our story is an internal one, dealing as little as possible with outward events, and taking hold of these only where it cannot be helped, in order by means of them to delineate the history of a mind bewildered in certain errors. We would not willingly, if we could, give a lively and picturesque surrounding to this delineation, but it is necessary that we should advert to the circumstances of the time in which this inward history was passing.[17]

Yet, Hawthorne "adverts to the time in which this inward history was passing" in such detail that the realistic statements draw attention away from the level of fantasy and give the work a rough and incomplete effect. For example, throughout the work, realistic comments about war precede and follow Septimius' highly imaginative statements about the elixir. One of numerous examples occurs during Septimius' translation of the manuscript. At first, Hawthorne describes in mysterious and ambiguous terms Septimius' work on the transcription:

> Septimius in vain turned over the yellow pages in quest of the one sentence which he had been able or fancied he had been able, to read yesterday . . . . So much did this affect him, that he had almost a mind to tear it into a thousand fragments, . . . and if, in that summer season, there

[17] The Complete Works, XI, 242-243.

> had been a fire on the hearth, it is possible that easy realization of a destructive impulse might have incited him to fling the accursed scrawl into the hottest of the flames, and thus returned it to the Devil, who, he suspected, was the original author of it.[18]

Immediately following this enticing description, Hawthorne devotes two pages to war comments which have no connection to the fanciful theme of immortal life. An old codger from the village visits Septimius and relates the progress of the war. He discusses "battles . . . heroes . . . shells and mortars, battalions, manoeuvres, angles, fascines, and other items of military art."[19] To explain this interest in war, Hawthorne states that "War had filled the whole brain of the people, and enveloped the whole thought of man in a mist of gunpowder." Hawthorne does not cease with this interruption; the war interlude continues. A disabled soldier appears and Hawthorne uses this opportunity to contrast the soldier's entrance in the war in the "full vigor of rustic health" to his return as a cripple. The soldier is not, however, the last war messenger. Even the minister visits Septimius and suggests that he become a chaplain in the army. He says, "You might go as chaplain to a regiment, and use either hand in battle,--pray for success before a battle, help win it

[18] The Complete Works, XI, 283-284.

[19] Ibid., pp. 284-285.

with sword or gun, and give thanks to God, kneeling on the bloody field at its close."[20] Septimius is amused by this advice, for he smiles and states that he believes "women and clergymen are, in matters of war, the most uncompromising and bloodthirsty of the community."[21] Yet, his impulses do not lead him into that direction. For Septimius "war was a business in which a man could not engage with safety to his conscience, unless his conscience actually drove him into it; and that this made all the difference between heroic battle and murderous strife."[22] Hawthorne apparently realizes the complete break between the discussion of warfare and Septimius' transcription, for he states, "By this time, this thwarting day had gone on through its course of little and great impediments to his pursuit,--the discouragements of trifling and earthly business, of purely impertinent interruption, of severe and disheartening opposition from the powerful counteraction of different kinds of mind."[23] Nevertheless, Hawthorne continues to vary between comments about Septimius' imaginative work and contemporary war comments.

Just as the diverse comments do not fit together in the example cited above, so do the other war comments appear as

[20] The Complete Works, XI, 286.

[21] Ibid., p. 287.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 288.

abrupt transitions in the narrative. Hawthorne never treats the war comments in a fanciful romantic manner; hence, they are never well integrated into the romance. The war comments are always written in realistic, blunt, and straightfoward terms which is in direct contrast to the flowing prose of the fanciful material. To illustrate this assertion, Hawthorne comments on the corrupting influence of warfare on humanity, society, and morality. Criticism of the war's corruption of humanity appears in a conversation between Septimius and Rose in which they condemn the foolish loss of lives during wartime. Rose asks, "Why should we shoot these men, or they us . . . . Each of them has a mother and sister, I suppose, just like our men."[24]

Septimius answers, "It is the strangest thing in the world that we can think of killing them . . . . Human life is so precious."[25] In another statement Septimius echoes this opinion of warfare. He states, "Fools that men are . . . they do not live long enough to know the value and purport of life, else they would combine together to live long, instead of throwing away the lives of thousands as they do."[26] Note the bluntness of these statements and compare them to the descrip-

[24]The Complete Works, XI, 248.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., p. 243.

tion of Septimius' elixir.

> He watched it from day to day, watched the reflections in it, watched its lustre, which seemed to him to grow greater day by day, as if it imbibed the sunlight into it. Never was there anything so bright as this. It changed its hue, too, gradually, being now a rich purple, now a crimson, now a violet, now a blue; going through all these prismatic colors without losing any of its brilliance . . . . And so at last, at the end of the month, it settled into a most deep and brilliant crimson . . . . And by and by he perceived that the deep crimson hue was departing,--not fading; we cannot say that, because of the prodigious lustre which still pervaded it, and was not less strong than ever; but certainly the hue became fainter, now a rose-color, now fainter, fainter still, till there was only left the purest whiteness of the moon itself.[27]

Hawthorne's realistic treatment of war continues in his description of the influence of war on society. He believed war upset the entire social structure of the community and the home and eliminated the values of morality. In fact, he suggests the tremendous influence of war upon morality in the following statement:

> In times of revolution and public disturbances all absurdities are more unrestrained; the measures of calm sense, the habits, the orderly decency, are partially lost. More people become insane . . . offenses

[27] The Complete Works, XI, 400-401.

> against public morality, female license, are more numerous; suicides, murders, all ungovernable outbreaks of men's thoughts, embodying themselves in wild acts, take place more frequently, and with less horror to the lookers-on.[28]

Closely associated with the disturbing influence which war has upon morality is the change in family relationships. For instance, a period of national conflict changes the normal role of women. A remark in Septimius Felton illustrates this idea. Since the appearance of the British troops makes Rose approach Septimius in a more familiar manner, Septimius attributes her action to the fact that "there is nothing truer than that any breaking up of the ordinary state of things is apt to shake women out of their proprieties, break down barriers, and bring them into perilous proximity with the world."[29] Since Hawthorne opposed the feminist movement which gained importance before the outbreak of war as his remarks in The Blithedale Romance indicate, he also veiwed with dismay the changes for women which the war encouraged.

Hawthorne believed the war caused other family disturbances as well. For example, the death of young men in the war eliminated many families which would have been formed. Hawthorne stresses this opinion in the following statement:

> Thousands of young men . . . are going to war. Those young men--

[28]The Complete Works, XI, 299.

[29]Ibid., p. 246.

> many of them at least--will sicken
> and die in camp, or be shot down,
> or struck through with bayonets
> on battle-fields, and turn to
> dust and bones; while the girls
> that would have loved them . . .
> will pine and wither, and tread
> along many sour and discontented
> years, and at last go out of life
> without knowing what life is . . .
> every shot that takes effect kills
> two at least, or kills one and
> worse than kills the other.[30]

These war comments, especially the latter idea, are not limited solely to Septimius Felton. During the period in which he wrote the romance, he also wrote an essay entitled "Chiefly About War Matters," which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in July, 1862. This article contains the same opposition to the war which Hawthorne inserted into his romance of immortality and many of the remarks are synonymous with remarks in Septimius Felton. The similarity of ideas in these two contrasting works is another indication of the inconsistency between the theme and setting in Septimius Felton. Since the war remarks were appropriate for the essay, if is not surprising that they were inappropriate in a romantic study of immortality.

[30]The Complete Works, XI, 278.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion of the theme, main character, and setting in Septimius Felton limit possible explanations for the romance's failure to one word: inconsistency. Hawthorne was inconsistent in developing his attitude toward immortal life, in presenting his main character, and in selecting a setting which corresponded to his literary theory and to his fanciful theme.

The first inconsistency, his approach toward immortal life, is quite evident for he wavered between admiring the possibilities of immortal life to condemning the effects of eternal life on society, family relationships, and spiritual fellowship. Because he failed to decide whether extended life was advantageous or disadvantageous, he failed in presenting his main character, for Septimius presents arguments for and arguments against immortal life. This dual aspect in his character makes him appear inconsistent. For example, when he voices the advantages of immortal life, he assumes heroic proportions. However, when he reflects the disadvantages of extended life, he is a ridiculous figure. Hawthorne's failure to square his theme and main character was fatal for

the romance's successful development.

Although these inconsistencies are prominent weaknesses in the romance, the outstanding inconsistency is Hawthorne's failure to relate his setting to his theme. When he selected a war setting which mirrored the current crisis, flashes of contemporary comments were unavoidable. The comments, however, conflicted with his imaginative theme. This conflict illustrates Hawthorne's inability to combine the realism of the novel with a romantic theme. Perhaps Hawthorne was unable to think or create simultaneously on realistic and mythic levels. Whatever the reason, in deviating from his literary theory and in assuming the realistic technique of the novelist, chaos was inevitable. Hawthorne failed and Septimius Felton remained unfinished and unsuccessful.

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