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Myth,
Romance,
and the
Childhood of Man

No epoch of the time can claim a copyright in these immortal fables. . . . Certainly, so long as man exists, they can never perish; but, by their indestructibility itself, they are legitimate subjects for every age to clothe with its own garniture of manners and sentiment, and to imbue with its own morality.” So Hawthorne confidently introduced his A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys in 1851, a redaction of myths so popular that he offered a sequel, Tanglewood Tales, two years later. Hawthorne had timed his myth books shrewdly, for the romantic revival of
myth reached its height in America in the 1850's. As Douglas Bush has said, speaking of English poetry, "The fundamental impulse of the mythological renascence was contained in the romantic protest against a mechanical world . . . stripped, as it seemed, of imagination and emotion, of beauty and mystery. . . . The old allegorical tradition, which had never quite died, took fresh root in romantic idealism and flowered again in rich mythological symbols." Hawthorne in his own tales combines myth with the allegorical tradition; in his children's books he allegorizes myths and substitutes "a tone in some degree Gothic or romantic" for what seemed to him "the classic coldness . . . as repellant as the touch of marble," Toward his young readers, Hawthorne professed little condescension, saying that "children possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling, so long as it is simple likewise." Yet sometimes he treats them with such ponderous coyness as, "The king's palace attained to the stupendous magnificence of Periwinkle's baby-house." Nonetheless, these tales still have power to hold children from play, if not the old from the chimney corner. The trials, conflicts, and triumphs of myths are indeed indestructible.

Hawthorne's statement on the imperishability of myths may serve as one wedge by which to split apart some of his other works to observe the grain to which their narratives conform. Like his Yankee woodcarver in "Drowne's Wooden Image"—a tale that garnishes the myth of Pygmalion—Hawthorne is likely to try to liberate the form he finds inherent in his materials. The narrative structures provided by myths were a source of strength in his best writings. As his fables of artists alone would show, his is a mythopoetic art: an art precariously poised between the opposing claims of allegory, romance, and realism, between the "morality" and the "manners" of the age. A Wonder-Book and Tanglewood Tales engaged Hawthorne's fancy rather than his
imagination; for in them, he undertook only to garnish, not to remake as his own, the stories he chose from Homer or Ovid or Anthon’s *Classical Dictionary*. Yet some of the important themes and sources of the imagery in his fiction are sketched in these books of myths for children.

Take, for instance, his attitude toward childhood and toward the Age of Myth as the childhood of man. The latter notion is, of course, a commonplace made attractive both by Romantic idealization of the child and by progressive theories of cultural evolution. A confusion of myth with childhood seems a boon to the redactor of ancient legends: Kingsley, whose version for children, *The Heroes*, appeared only two years after *Tanglewood Tales*, wrote of the Greeks, “While they were young and simple they loved fairy tales as you do now. All nations do so when they are young.” The United States, barely three score and ten, was a young country, too; and, as we shall see, Hawthorne in his early tales was consciously attempting to provide his native land with a moralized mythology. To retell Greek myths to American children would seem a blessing of the youth of one nation with the fruits of the youth of another. Yet Hawthorne, speaking of stories similar to Kingsley’s, finds them “brimming with everything that is most abhorrent to our Christianized moral sense.” Some are “hideous,” others “melancholy” and “miserable”; among these the Greek tragedians “sought their themes, and moulded them into the sternest griefs that ever the world saw; was such materials the stuff that children’s playthings should be made of?”

But Hawthorne makes these objections only to refute them. One notes, however, that the objections are made in his own voice, the rebuttals by his auctorial persona, Eustace Bright. This fictive narrator of *Tanglewood Tales* answers Hawthorne,

The objectionable characteristics seem to be a parasitical growth, having no essential connection with the original fable.
They fall away, and are thought of no more, the instant he puts his imagination in sympathy with the innocent little circle, whose wide-open eyes are fixed so eagerly upon him. Thus the stories (not by any strained effort of the narrator's but in harmony with their inherent germ) transform themselves, and reassume the shapes which they might be supposed to possess in the pure childhood of the world.

Even at this level of discourse, however, Hawthorne cannot refrain from a gentle ironic peroration, casting doubt on what had seemed as clear as an article of belief:

When the first poet or romancer told these marvellous legends (such is Eustace Bright's opinion), it was still the Golden Age. Evil had never yet existed; and sorrow, misfortune, crime, were mere shadows which the mind fancifully created for itself, as a shelter against too sunny realities; or, at most, but prophetic dreams, to which the dreamer himself did not yield a waking credence. Children are now the only representatives of the men and women of that happy era; and therefore it is that we must raise the intellect and fancy to the level of childhood, in order to re-create the original myths.

In addition to the sinister suggestion that the mind even then created evil, his praise of childhood must be qualified by the inexperience of the youthful Eustace. A mere college student, he has not yet crossed the threshold of his own life into the realm of responsible action. Whether for better or for worse, this is the progress all of Hawthorne's heroes must make. That Eustace Bright's romantic views of both childhood and prehistory are sentimental illusions, we may infer from the way he himself tells the story of Pandora's Box. Characteristically, in A Wonder-Book, Hawthorne has Eustace give his tale of the coming of woes into the world an optimistic title, "The Paradise of Children." We find the infantine Pandora with idle hands and, consequently, about to get into mischief:
But children led so easy a life, before any Troubles came into the world, that they had really a great deal too much leisure. They could not be forever playing at hide-and-seek among the flower-shrubs, or at blind-man's-buff with garlands over their eyes, or at whatever other games had been found out, while Mother Earth was in her babyhood. When life is all sport, toil is the real play. There was absolutely nothing to do. A little sweeping and dusting about the cottage, I suppose, and the gathering of fresh flowers (which were only too abundant everywhere), and arranging them in vases,—and poor little Pandora's day's work was over. And then, for the rest of the day, there was the box!

Hawthorne cannot conceive of the Golden Age without foreboding. In "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," much more powerfully than here, it is a reproach to say, "O, people of the Golden Age, the chief of your husbandry was to raise flowers!" There, too, "the whole colony were playing at blindman's buff, except a single scapegoat, whom the blinded sinners pursued by the tinkling bells at his garments." A paradise of children indeed. In few authors is the longing for paradise as poignant as in Hawthorne. He dramatizes his conviction that the nature of man must have been different before the Fall. Aware that salvation would have been impossible without the commission of sin, he always renders prelapsarian characters as incomplete, wanting in the fatal knowledge whose lack denies them full humanity. This is plain in Hawthorne's treatment of Pearl and of Donatello; both are children of nature and bring into The Scarlet Letter and The Marble Faun (subtitled The Romance of Monte Beni) the equivocal values of Merry Mount. What further makes impossible Hawthorne's unqualified approval of a Golden Age is its very essence, so clearly dramatized in the Maypole story. A Golden Age is, of course, a time outside of time, a living eternity, such as Heaven is and Eden once was, but not a life like ours. In his fiction, Hawthorne's characters
must live in our life; and therefore, the maypole is hewn down by iron Puritans, Pearl is received into society at her father's confession of guilt, and Donatello can be transformed from fauna to humanity after his commission of an original sin.

Yet Hawthorne does uphold the purity of childhood in which Eustace Bright believes. This quality is crucial to Bellerophon's pursuit of Pegasus. In "The Chimaera," the hero must bridle the winged horse in order to conquer the monster. Inquiring at the Fountain of Pirene, fortunately "Bellerophon put his faith in the child, who had seen the image of Pegasus in the water, and in the maiden who had heard him neigh so melodiously, rather than in the middle-aged clown, who believed only in cart-horses, or in the old man who had forgotten the beautiful things of his youth."

Again the legend merely imitates what Hawthorne had already expressed with deeper resonance in his own fiction. Yet in his tales the power resides in myths adapted to his needs. In "The Snow Image" (1848), he had offered with sustained charm the fancy of having children named for flowers (as are Eustace Bright's "little auditors") create an imaginary playmate of snow, who lives only as long as her life is believed in. The tale is subtitled "A Childish Miracle," and this indeed it is; for Violet and Peony bring their playmate to life by the power of faith—a faith in the reality of the imagination. Thus far Hawthorne has invented something midway between a Concord fairy tale and a transcendental saint's legend. By placing the imaginative purity and faith of the children against the blundering skepticism of their father, the hardware merchant, he turns his "legend" into a delicate yet dramatic statement of the difficulty of artistic creation in a society ruled by rationalism and materialism.

As was true of the Lindsey children's snow-sister, Owen Warland's butterfly soared or drooped according to the obser-
ver’s desire to believe in it. But in “The Artist of the Beautiful,” it is Baby Danforth who smashes to pieces the artist’s supersensual mechanism. There the child is not the possessor of imagination but the inheritor, from his Grandfather Time, of enmity toward the creations that seek to live in eternity. The eternity toward which Owen Warland aspires is indeed as remote from our sufferings as was the Golden Age, but the artist can triumph where the revelers at Merry Mount failed. He does not achieve eternity in life as they thought to do; his transfiguration of time is imaginative and endows his spirit with imperishable blessings. How else could Owen endure such isolation, being left with but a handful of broken spangles?

“The Artist of the Beautiful” well illustrates how Hawthorne made his narrative and its supporting metaphors from mythic prototypes of action and image. As was true in “Drowne’s Wooden Image,” the origin of artistic creation is the artist’s love of beauty. Although Owen Warland does not, like Drowne, try to reproduce the beauty of the woman he loves, the other alternative suggested for Shem Drowne’s success is true of Warland: his passion brings to life the image he has made. In Owen’s image, however, Hawthorne substitutes for the Pygmalion legend a suggestion from the story of Psyche, that the soul is bodied forth as a butterfly. The life cycle of the insect provides organic imagery in the descriptions of Owen’s appearance: his sinking into a stuporous fatness after his setback, and his bursting forth in the glory of his successful achievement. Yet the underlying structure of the story is borrowed from, or rather dramatizes, still another myth, Diotima’s account in The Symposium of the ladder of love. When we follow the course of Owen’s devotion from Annie Hovenden, his chosen muse, to love of all beautiful things, thence to love of the idea of beauty, we are reconciled, as Owen is, to his losing the hand of the girl to a bluff, simple blacksmith. Annie, the daughter of
Father Time, could not have understood what Owen was up to; but by the time he knows this, he no longer needs her. Owen's progress is philosophically consistent, although, like transcendental theory, a little cold on the human side.

Although much of this tale is based upon classical myths, the story is unmistakably localized in New England. This is only partly due to its circumstantial atmosphere, almost local color. Hovenden's is an actual shop with real clocks, Annie a believably flirty village girl, Danforth a stout-hearted blacksmith. Yet these realistic persons are fairly allegorized. Hovenden is called Father Time, and his role surely suggests Hawthorne's aversion to the Newtonian conception of God as the Watchmaker in a mechanistic universe. Annie, the artist's muse, is inescapably Father Time's daughter, while her successful suitor is, like the unsuccessful Owen, an artisan of sorts—a fellow metal-worker at that. These relationships go far toward humanizing and localizing, as well as making allegorical, Hawthorne's fable of the artist's lonely pursuit in opposition to all of society's expectations for him. Imprisoning the artist in a clockshop is one of Hawthorne's happiest inventions, a beautifully complete image of the time-serving, spirit-killing, machine-mastered non-life that is taken as the norm by a materialistic culture. How can the artist escape his servitude to time? Hawthorne's answer, while illustrating Platonic and transcendental aesthetics, also takes advantage of those energies of the local scene that might be pressed into the service of a native myth or an analogue of myth. The industrial revolution of course made fascination with machinery as common an attitude as repulsion by it, and Owen Warland shows both feelings. He is repelled by naked power—his fear of the steam engine perhaps anticipates Henry Adams' recognition of the dynamo as the centrifugal image of the age. Yet Warland is a master mechanician on a scale his feelings and senses can control. He is a sort of Yankee inventor par excel-
lence; though to escape from the prison of time he foregoes all Down-East shrewdness and works with no thought of gain other than that spiritual gain for which one must renounce the goods of this world. And that, too, is a strain that runs deep in the native character. Inventing a mechanical butterfly more perfect than any natural creature—a machine, yet alive—Owen completes this image for the spiritualization of matter. His gadget is perfectly adapted to his purpose, and the artist's pride in outvying the hand of nature—so like that of Dr. Rappaccini or Aylmer, in whom heart and head are fatally separated—is hardly perceptible. For Owen has not worked his will at anyone else's expense; and in the end he can accept the destruction of his handiwork because his joy was in the process of creating perfection, not in possessing it.

In his prefaces to his longer works Hawthorne is at pains to distinguish between the novel and the romance. He clearly conceives realism to be the domain of the novel, which aims to conform “not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience.” But the romance, he remarks in his Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, must “as a work of art . . . rigidly subject itself to laws,” and it must be faithful to “the truth of the human heart.” The author of a romance, unlike the novelist, has the freedom “to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent of [his] own choosing or creation.” When he adds the auctorial privilege of using “the Marvellous,” we may infer why Hawthorne found so congenial the mythical elements he used in so many of his tales.

Marius Bewley has noticed that Hawthorne tried to analyze the writer's problems “not in terms of the relation of the artist to his art, but in terms of his relation to society.” To this critic, Hawthorne seems ultimately unable “to reconcile the roles of
artist and citizen in the context of American society, or to make a workable creative marriage between solitude and society. Yet the dissociation of the ideal from the real in "The Artist of the Beautiful" succeeds in making artistic capital of a cultural situation which many another observer found typified in American life. We soon shall see how Hawthorne could mythologize reality and so use it in his fables, if not make it ideal. But though he protests perhaps too much the difficulties that American life put in the artist's way, it does not follow that these difficulties were illusory. Visiting America during the same years when Hawthorne was writing *Twice-Told Tales*, Tocqueville outlined the radical effects of a broad egalitarian commitment upon the writer's relation to the past and to his public.

Aristocracy naturally leads the human mind to the contemplation of the past, and fixes it there. Democracy, on the contrary, gives men a sort of instinctive distaste for what is ancient. Among a democratic people poetry will not be fed with legendary lays or the memories of old traditions. The poet will not attempt to people the universe with supernatural beings in whom his readers and his own fancy have ceased to believe; nor will he present virtues and vices under the mask of frigid personifications, which are better received under their own features.

Little comfort to Hawthorne that Tocqueville can add, "But Man remains, and the poet needs no more." This would be Whitman's opportunity, not Hawthorne's. For Hawthorne, egalitarian life seemed remorselessly hostile to the artist, a man innately superior to plebeian mediocrity. In "The Custom-House," he demonstrates the very thinness of texture in American life which Henry James would so eloquently arraign in a study of his work. The sensualists, office politicians, and time-servers in the Custom House had no contact with any past
further back than their last dinner; scant material their lives seemed to offer for an art that aimed to reveal the eternal truths of the human heart. Only the unacknowledged artist in their midst could transform a packet of fusty papers into a legend disclosing a truth. And he can do so only when thrown out of office by a new administration; for, he tells us, as long as he remained in the Custom House, his imagination was "a tarnished mirror."

On one side of his imagination Hawthorne was deeply committed to what R. W. B. Lewis has called "the party of Memory," the values held by conservators of tradition in American culture. The effect of the egalitarian temper, as Tocqueville diagnosed it, is not only felt to produce an environment hostile to art, it further specifically denies to literature four of the resources on which Hawthorne most depended: the past, myths, the marvelous, and allegory. These attributes are inherent in the very form of fiction which Hawthorne recognized it was his gift to write. A fuller definition than his own is Northrop Frye's synoptic description of that form:

The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romances that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is always creeping in around its fringes. . . . The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society. . . . The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages.8
Hawthorne, a divided man on every subject that claimed his deepest energies, equivocates in his definition of romance. Advocating introduction of "the Marvellous," he then advises its "very moderate use" as rather "a slight, delicate, evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public." In other words, he will follow a mixed recipe, combining the realistic observation of detail found in the novel with the traditional patterns of action that present enduring truths, for whose revelation the supernatural may be invoked. Such a mixed form as Hawthorne devised, a romance-novel or novelistic romance, is not a compromise but the successful enactment in art of the conflicts of conviction which divided his mind. The tensions between the artist and his culture, between aristocratic values and egalitarian hopes, are also, for Hawthorne, tensions between two conceptions of destiny held with divided fervor. His dilemma may be epitomized by a quotation from Coleridge used by Bulfinch to introduce The Age of Fable:

The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
The fair humanities of old religion . . .
They live no longer in the faith of reason;
But still the heart doth need a language; still
Doth the old instinct bring back the old names;
Spirits or gods that used to share the earth
With man as with their friend. . . .

For Hawthorne, too, the faith of reason seemed to deny the language of the heart. This is the imbalance of the persons in his stories. Because Hawthorne is so divided, his best tales and romances are both ambiguous and sinewed with contradictions. Because he was a great writer, he could dramatize both sides of his nature and of his quandary. It is in the dramatic ordering of these contrasts that his authority as an artist resides.
If conservative values could be served by reiterating mythic actions as old as humanity, what forms of character or action could serve the progressive, rationalistic, and millennial energies of contemporary life which Hawthorne had to represent with equal imaginative force? Such synoptic and eclectic combinations as we have seen in “The Artist of the Beautiful” are typical of Hawthorne’s way. He took his types and archetypes not only from Greek myths but from all the other important cultural legacies he lived by. These included Puritanism; the popular antiquities of Old World tradition; the Gothic mode; the materials of colonial history; and the emergent American folklore and popular culture of which Hawthorne was among the earliest major writers to avail himself. These categories at many points overlap, and in his most successful work he draws on several simultaneously. Further, several of these legacies offered the materials of novelistic verisimilitude as well as types of myth, allegory, or the marvelous. Such eclecticism is of course characteristic of any author who uses ancient forms to express contemporary modes and themes. Among Hawthorne’s favorite models—Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton—may be found similar combinations of classical myths with Christian themes, of figures drawn from pagan rituals and used to dramatize contemporary political, religious, and psychological conflicts. Hawthorne mythologizes actual history and makes mythic actions appear historical. His repertoire is rich, for he draws on all the strains of legend and fable his culture provided.

We may take first a simple instance of his mythologizing New England’s annals. Hawthorne’s interest in the Puritan past is intrinsic with his impulse to view history as fabulous. The impulse is plain in such titles as “Legends of the Province House,” or “Old-Time Legends,” of which he at first conceived The Scarlet Letter to be one. He based the opening story in
Twice-Told Tales upon an episode, or anecdote, recorded in Thomas Hutchinson’s History of the Province and Colony of Massachusetts-Bay: the mysterious appearance at Hadley of “a grave elderly person” who rallied the settlers against an Indian attack. The colonists’ savior was said to be Goffe, the regicide, a fugitive in the New World from the vengeance of the Crown. Scott, in Peveril of the Peak, greatly expanded the tale, changing the identity of the Angel of Hadley from Goffe to Whalley, another Puritan signatory of King Charles’s death warrant. In “The Gray Champion” Hawthorne takes this legendary motif, a local variant of the theme in world folklore of the ancient hero (originally a god) returned to deliver his people, and turns it to a different use from what his sources made of it. In “The Gray Champion” the conflict is not between whites and Indians but between New England’s “religious multitude, with their sad visages . . . ” and their “despotic rulers, with the high churchman in the midst . . . all magnificently clad, flushed with wine, proud of unjust authority.” The scene represents “the condition of New England, and its moral, the deformity of any government that does not grow out of the nature of things and the character of the people.” Clearly the miraculous appearance of the Gray Champion is Hawthorne’s invocation of a Divine Providence on the side of the oppressed. Faith in the Providence, or wonder, which inspired Hutchinson’s original version, not only domesticated to New England an ancient folk belief, but is, for Hawthorne’s purposes, a specifically Puritan expression of God’s intervention on the side of righteous men in their rebellion against arbitrary power.

The unconditional approval of rebellion in “The Gray Champion”—obviously a “type” or analogue of the Revolution—is greatly qualified in a later tale on a similar theme. “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” is a much more complex dramatization of the conflict between an aristocratic past and a demotic future,
and its dependencies in myth are accordingly richer. Inextricably welded to the political conflict (the plot of rebellious colonists against their royal governor) is the psychological conflict of young Robin’s coming of age. The action conforms doubly to ancient patterns of ritual: the ceremony of a youth’s initiation into knowledge, and the expunging of evil through the sacrifice of a scapegoat king. That the youth is a Yankee bumpkin, callow and unillumined by a full recognition of the tragedy of which he is witness and participant; that the scapegoat is both his uncle (an obvious displacement of the father) and an inoffensive, dignified aristocrat, makes this tale particularly suggestive of the consequences for America of both personal and national independence. Use of the pattern derived from scapegoat ritual gives the tale a further suggestion of the renewal of fertility with the supercession of the old, exhausted ruler by the vigorous revolutionaries. At the same time, Robin learns that he must come to terms with his father’s original sin (presented in sexual terms—the prostitute is familiar with his kinsman); his assumption of adult independence means also his assuming responsibility for sin. A further qualification of rebellion is that the conspiracy against the governor is led, not by a divinely ordained ghostly champion, but by a conspiratorial ruffian disguised as a devil with a double mask, the Lord of Misrule in the Saturnalia. Insofar as Hawthorne proffers any consolation, it is in that his misrule is succeeded by the calm wisdom of the stranger who befriends Robin at the end. And he represents the wise, loving, but unpossessive elements in the paternal figure whose other aspects appear, as in a dream, split among Robin’s sinful, absurd, and threatening interlocutors—as well as in the victim kinsman.

Another source of “the Marvellous” appears in his “Legends of the Province House,” which like the foregoing tales mythologize New England history. “Howe’s Masquerade” and
"Edward Randolph's Portrait" are Gothic allegories of the fall of tyrants, and "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" displays the sins of a proud aristocrat. These "legends" are told in a mansion, once resplendent with "vice-regal pomp" but in the present democratic era a dilapidated tavern, which somewhat qualifies the author's endorsement of the allegories. The Province House not only represents the unfortunate leveling effects of democracy, it actually is the haunted house of the ensuing legends. Hawthorne takes over the stock machinery of Gothic fiction—besides the haunted house, there are supernally prophetic pictures, allusions to witchcraft, a retributive curse. Such properties, devised to reveal the demonic, libidinous, and anarchic energies of the unconscious of which rationalism took no account, were all too readily used in the service of mere sensation. But Hawthorne presses them into the service of morality, makes them function in allegories expressing serious political ideas and psychological conceptions. In the fourth legend, "Old Esther Dudley," we see again the predicament of his imagination, committed to overthrowing the past whose values he would cherish in an age of change. He has Governor Hancock (in fact a firebrand of the Revolution) treat the slightly demented and pathetic old Loyalist with dignity: "We represent a new race of men—living no longer in the past, scarcely in the present—but projecting ourselves into the future," he says in a passage prophetic of Holgrave's millennial politics. "We will follow her reverently to the tomb of her ancestors; and then, my fellow-citizens, onward—onward! We are no longer children of the Past!"

The Gothic mode proved more resonant still when used to explore the psychology of the Puritan character. Taking superstition as seriously, for imaginative purposes, as he took religion, Hawthorne based "Young Goodman Brown" on a similar ritualistic structure to that of "My Kinsman," the initiation of a
youth into the meaning of his life. In Young Goodman Brown's journey through the dark wood toward the culminating orgy of the Witches' Sabbath, Hawthorne brings powerfully together masterful images of witchcraft, a conception at once historical, theological, folkloric, and literary. Hawthorne had read with fascination and, he tells us, guilt in the trial proceedings of 1692, when an ancestor had been an unrepenting judge of those accused. Through the writings of Increase and Cotton Mather, Hawthorne became familiar with theological interpretations of witchcraft from the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1489) down to their day. Further, Hawthorne knew, and used in his tale, folk beliefs common in New England. Witchcraft thus provided a widely accepted, fully developed set of metaphors for a rebellious, parodic inversion of Christianity—a form of forbidden knowledge into which an acolyte seeks initiation. Traditionally, witchcraft meant sexual abandon, demonism, the Devil's Compact. In Goethe's *Faust* and in Cervantes' *El colloquio de los perros* (both of which Hawthorne had read with care), witchcraft is specifically allied both to sexuality and to nightmare. Hawthorne restores to this superstition its mythic grandeur as a religion that rivals the true faith. Young Goodman Brown's unhappy pilgrimage is a compelling study of what seemed to Hawthorne the least admirable aspects of the Puritan mind, its repression of instinct and the consequent risk of the denial of both faith and love. For Faith, Young Goodman's bride, was also at the orgiastic black mass. Unlike her husband, she can accept man in his fallen state and love him still. He who loves perfection only must have a chilly heart. Others of Hawthorne's Puritan characters are ennobled by their knowledge of personal guilt as a part of the general guilt of mankind. Such is the case for Mr. Hooper, for Dimmesdale, for Hester. But Brown is isolated by his fellowship with the fallen.
Clearly, witchcraft provided Hawthorne with the obverse of the unfallen Eden of Merry Mount. Mythic action requires the plausibility of the supernatural. The cosmology of Hawthorne’s antique New World includes the unattainable and undepicted Heaven of which the Puritans strove to be worthy in the harsh discipline of their Earthly City; the orgiastic image of the Devil’s Font, where the generations of men repeat their original sin and find a fellowship that mocks both the Heavenly and the Earthly City; and the Arcadian alternative, a chimaera of Heaven since salvation is not possible without knowledge of sin.

In writings set in contemporary time, the claims of realism require that the use of such mythic properties be more covert. But, as was true of his tales of artists, Hawthorne found the native analogues of myths in the revolutionary and millennial energies of his time. As Mr. Lewis has noted, in so rudimentary a sketch as “Earth’s Holocaust” Hawthorne had “articulated the need he detected in the atmosphere of the day for a purgatorial action,” a ritualistic purification making possible a life of unexampled virtue. This is but a modern myth of the Golden Age, the attempt to live as though man could make himself unfallen by an act of will. No doubt the paradigms of “Earth’s Holocaust” appeared among the eccentric Millerites, but the energies they so vehemently expressed were as much a part of America’s secular, political inheritance as of sectarian zeal. Hawthorne seems instinctively to have embodied this energy in his fiction in a ritualistic structure, associating it with actions that resemble those in myths by their cosmological scope and by their articulation of communally shared emotions.

IV

In the two romances set in contemporary New England the foregoing patterns of mythic action are combined with a careful
delineation of actuality. Myths provide thematic structures; the characters are partly romance figures, numinous and abstract, the creatures of myth and allegory, and partly the individualized characters of the novel. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, conflicts between past and present, between a proud aristocracy and an equally proud plebeian class, are drawn from the matter of Puritanism, combined with colonial history, Gothicism, superstition, contemporary folklore, and popular culture. The setting, like the Province House, is the American equivalent of the haunted castle of Gothic romance. The house is haunted by the inherited guilt of both the Pyncheons and the Maules. The conflict is in part political, the oppression of the humble, honest, and unoffending by the rich, privileged, and powerful. Pyncheon prosecutes Maule for witchcraft to defraud him of the land on which to build the house. In their schemes to found a dynastic line of nobles, the Pyncheons reiterate their original sin of prideful alienation from mankind, and merit the curse upon them of the first Maule's dying words. Subsequently, popular belief in the guilt of the Maules encourages the victim's descendants to practice such black arts as the evil eye and hypnotism against the Pynchons. Because they remain unforgiving, the Maules become witches in fact, and so contribute to the double descent of original sin in the two families. The motifs are thus political, psychological, and theological. The garden of the haunted house is an Eden defiled, and a return to primal innocence is possible only in the present generation, when a country cousin of the Pyncheons, reared in innocence of the family guilt, moves into the house. Phoebe's counterpart among the Maules is Holgrave, an apostle of the latest philosophies of progress who would cast off the dead hand of the past and live as though he were the self-begotten master of his own fate. Holgrave is both a modern Representative Man and the up-to-date version of the Yankee character, delineated in
his earlier stages as the resilient peddler in "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," the naïvely self-reliant bumpkin in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," and the sententious sage, Uncle Venner. Holgrave seems a more widely experienced cousin of Eustace Bright. Where his proud forebear had driven an earlier Pyncheon lady to madness, Holgrave instead marries Phoebe. As easily as that may ghosts be exorcised in mid-century New England.

The Blithedale Romance takes a much less sanguine view of the possibility of reforming society than even the equivocal ending of Seven Gables suggests. The settlement at Blithedale is an attempt by city dwellers to escape from the corruption of the grimy metropolis and begin life anew, a reconstitution of the unfallen life, as at Merry Mount. Imagery of the Golden Age abounds; arriving in a snowstorm, Coverdale, the ironic narrator, observes, before catching pneumonia, "How cold an Arcadia was this!" The book is his story, an anti-Arcadia chronicling the communitarians' failure to replace pride with "familiar love." The themes explored in The Blithedale Romance are the essentials of life: man's knowledge of himself, of his relationships to others, of his place in time and in nature. None of the communitarians came to Blithedale aware of the truth of any of these. What partial discoveries are made by the principal characters are painful and lead to the abandonment of the communal ideal, the humbling of Hollingsworth's pride, and the suicide of Zenobia. The ironical use of the Golden Age is emphasized by manifold references to seasonal rituals, particularly—as at Merry Mount—May Day, which Zenobia and Priscilla regard as a "movable festival." The voluptuous Zenobia of course is Queen of the May, but what chance of harvest when there is no king? May Day itself is but one of a cluster of images of rebirth; these include Coverdale's recovery from sickness; the illusory rebirth of the topers in the grog
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shop; Old Moodie's assumption of his present, pauperish personality after the "death" of his former opulent and profligate phase; and of course the very purpose of the Blithedale colony is to bring on the rebirth of society. These psychological, socio-political, and ritual processes support one another. But most of the rebirths in the romance are attempted without the requisite "deaths" or renunciations, and so are doomed to failure. A further current of mythic metaphors appears in the suggestion that Zenobia (the daughter of Old Moodie when he was princely Fauntleroy) and Priscilla (her half-sister, and daughter of Moodie in his poverty) are associated with Aphrodite and Persephone, both the daughters of Zeus. Priscilla is sent to Blithedale, where her arrival unleashes subsequent troubles, by Moodie, the Zeus-like father figure. Old Moodie has a patch over one eye; if he suggests a deity it will be not only Zeus but Odin, also the father god and deity of wisdom and poetry.

Where The House of the Seven Gables used mainly Puritan, Gothic, and contemporary materials, The Blithedale Romance is built on contemporary experience ironically interpreted against classical parallels and prototypes. Puritanism contributes the iron rigidity of Hollingsworth's character, the repressed skirting of passion in Coverdale's, and the characteristic division of feminine personality into the dark luxuriance of Zenobia and the pale passivity of Priscilla. Gothicism in Blithedale is less a matter of setting or of magic than of the manner of telling the tale: Coverdale's story is involuted, complex, mysterious, but the mysteries prove functionally necessary to a romance that demonstrates the difficulties of knowing the primal facts about ourselves.

Although a stylistically distinguished, urbane study of the intelligentsia, The Blithedale Romance seems a much less novelistic work than any of Hawthorne's other books. Its complicated structure has been protested by many readers. Yet if we approach
it in terms of its own form, *The Blithedale Romance* proves a coherent and effective work. "Myth . . . is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other," writes Mr. Frye, "and in between lies the whole area of romance," which tends "to displace myth in a human direction and yet, in contrast to 'realism,' to conventionalize content in an idealized direction." It was by such symbolic architecture, building verisimilitude upon a structure of myth, that Hawthorne dramatized the conflicts in the present between the values of an aristocratic past and an egalitarian future.

Thus Hawthorne could be faithful both to the truth of the human heart and to the laws of art. The ideality of his solution to the problem in "The Artist of the Beautiful" seemed to propose an art so subjective that its only function is the self-realization of its creator. In these other tales and romances, however, Hawthorne achieves an imaginative transfiguration of nature. In such ways as we have seen, he moves us from the domain of necessity to the reality of the understanding. When the materials of this art are not merely the mechanical parts of a toy butterfly but the depiction of a human soul or a society, the artist's perfection of nature leads him and his readers toward that escape from incomprehensible change of which the ancients made their myth of the Golden Age.

At Merry Mount and at Blithedale, those who would transform life into eternity spend their days in pageants, masquerades, and song. The imagery of these mimetic arts in Arcadia allies them to the perfection which their performers vainly seek. Their error is to assume that the escape from time made possible by art is an option allowed in life as well. At Blithedale the society of dreamers had undertaken to create a perfect community. Had they succeeded, this accomplishment would indeed have been their "Romance," in which men had taken the parts of gods in myths and evaded their fates as fallen creatures. Among
other things, *The Blithedale Romance* tells us that although man cannot so free himself in action, he can in art discover a fuller understanding of life than life itself provides. It is Coverdale, the ironic and detached narrator, who alone of the communitarians learns, through the wry discipline of his recollections, the true relations of them all to one another, to nature, and to time.

Hawthorne's romances prove more durable than the artist's crushed toy or the melted snow image of the children. These works, intermingling the marvelous with reality, have endured the skepticism or scorn of those who made the author of *Twice-Told Tales* think himself "the obscurest man of letters in America." Like the myths which they clothe with the morality and the manners of their age, these tales seem indestructible. They have become a permanent part of our inheritance.