DECEIT, DESIRE AND THE SCARLET LETTER

Deceit, Desire and the Scarlet Letter

by Henry A. Dubroof
M.A. Thesis
Department of English

Deceit, Desire And The Scarlet Letter is an analysis of The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The basis for this analysis is the critical method developed by René Girard in Deceit, Desire And The Novel, an analysis of works by Cervantes, Stendhal, Proust, Dostoievski and other modern novelists.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Each chapter is a treatment of one of the major figures: Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingsworth, Hester Prynne, Pearl and the author-narrator. The major premise is that beneath the surface of The Scarlet Letter, where the forces of sin and virtue are opposed, lies an underground in which Hawthorne reveals the process of metaphysical or triangular desire which touches all human relationships in his world.

The five chapters are bracketed by a brief introduction and conclusion.

Mensonges, Vérité Et La Lettre Ecarlate

par Henry A. Dubroof
M.A. Thesis
Department of English

Mensonges, Vérité Et La Lettre Ecarlate est une analyse de La Lettre Ecarlate par Nathaniel Hawthorne. La base pour cette analyse est la methode de critique exposé par M. René Girard dans son livre, Mensonges Romantiques et Vérité Romanesque, où on trouve une analyse des oeuvres de Cervantes, Stendhal, Proust, Dostoievski, et les autre romanciérs moderns.

Cette thèse est divisé en cinq chapitrès. Chaqu'un est un discours sur un personnage important du roman, c'est-a-dire, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingsworth, Hester Prynne, Pearl et l'auteur-narrateur. La premiére hypothèse de l'analyse est qu'au-dessous de la surface du roman, ou on trouve l'opposition des forces de bon et de mal, il y'a une region sous-terrain, où M. Hawthorne a révelé un proces de désire métaphysique, imitatif et triangulaire qui enchaîne toutes les relations humaine dans son roman.

En plus des cinque chapitrès on trouve une introduction et une conclusion toutes brèves.

FOR

William W. Watt

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PREFACE

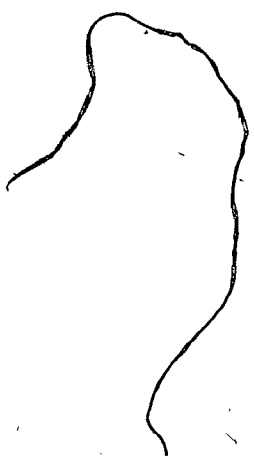
The critical technique formulated by René Girard in Deceit, Desire And The Novel has yet to be used to analyze The Scarlet Letter or any of Nathaniel Hawthorne's works. However, there has been a great deal of important and successful work on Hawthorne, which approaches his work (as Girard does with other novelists) largely on the novelists' own terms.

Among the most valuable resources listed in the bibliography, Northrup Frye in Anatomy of Criticism, for fiction in general, and Hugo McPherson in Hawthorne As Myth-Maker, with particular reference to Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter, offer innovative interpretations based on the internal composition of the novel. Among the 19th Century critics, Henry James and Anthony Trollope are extremely valuable for their insight into particular aspects of The Scarlet Letter. Among the historians, Perry Miller, on the Puritans, and Arthur Schliesinger, Jr., for contemporaneous matters, are the recognized experts.

Of course, it would be impossible to give too much credit to René Girard. Deceit, Desire And The Novel is a brilliant work. It has made this thesis possible. I have attempted

to apply Girard's method in the thorough-going manner that the method deserves. I only hope that I have been successful.

I must thank my thesis advisor, Professor Don Bouchard for his invaluable assistance over the past three years. Additionally, I would like to thank the reference staff at the UMass/Amherst Library for their help in locating sources, and the Holyoke Street School for providing time and a great deal of support for the project. I must also thank Renee Schultz for her help.



INTRODUCTION

> "Our will requires a goal; it would sooner have the void for a purpose than be void of purpose."[1]

This thesis is an analysis of The Scarlet Letter based on the approach to novelistic structure developed by Rene Girard in Deceit, Desire And The Novel, a structuralist interpretation of a wide range of novels from Don Quixote to the fiction of Dostoyevski. No attempt is being made to prove that the novels treated by Girard necessarily influenced Hawthorne or informed his writing of The Scarlet Letter. Rather, Girard's interpretative method has been employed to facilitate a substantially complete analysis of Hawthorne's masterpiece. The analysis is divided into five interrelated essays and a brief conclusion.

At this point, I want to offer an orientation to the critical methodology adapted for this analysis from Girard's work. In the Girardian mode there are two species of novels; those which reflect the world in which they are located, and those which reveal aspects of human relationships in that

world. It is the latter species of novel, the novel which reveals, rather than reflects, which interests M. Girard. These he has called novelistic novels.[2]

Within the framework of modern novelistic writing, Girard, the author of Deceit, Desire And The Novel, has identified a single phenomenon which links novelistic heros from Don Quixote to Dimitri Karamozov. This phenomenon is called metaphysical desire. Metaphysical desire can be loosely defined as illusory intellectual or mental pursuits which the hero of a novelistic work substitutes for passionate actions or for genuine actions which would lead to personal happiness. The result is personal paralysis. Usually, there are other persons, either present in the text or outside of it who serve as models for the illusory pursuits of the heros. For this reason, the contagion of metaphysical desire is also known as imitative desire.

As we investigate further the processes of metaphysical desire, it becomes increasingly obvious that metaphysical desire always takes a triangular form. The three corners of the triangle are easily identifiable. The subject or hero of the novelistic work and the object or goal of the hero's metaphysical desire form the base of the triangle. Then, radiating above, (or below) the base there is the mediator, the person who serves as the model for the desire

of the hero/subject. Because they are pursuing the same object, a relationship is inevitably established between subject and mediator, and between mediator and object. The "legs" of the triangle are the relationships between mediator-subject and mediator-object.

When the working out of triangular desire occurs with the mediator (usually an historical figure or an ancestor) not literally present in the text, M. Girard has called this process external mediation.

When the working out of triangular desire occurs with the mediator present as an active participant in the text, the process is called, internal mediation. Love triangles, for example, almost always involve instances of internal mediation. Double mediation occurs when the hero and mediator are so bound up in the pursuit of a single object that it is impossible to tell who is acting through imitation and who is mediating.

Girard's methodology also allows us to explore the values of passion and novelistic meaning. Briefly, he asserts that modern novelistic writing reveals a world where a hero is often locked into a paralyzing underground of triangular desire--but, passionate actions, actions based on feeling, always point to self-knowledge, redemption and meaning. The germ of novelistic meaning is generally found in the conclusion of the novel; actions of passion throughout a text

foreshadow the phenomenon of meaning in the novelistic underground.

In this analysis of The Scarlet Letter, an attempt will be made to discover and map-out the underground world of Hawthornian Puritanism which is revealed in the text. The effort takes the form of five interrelated essays, followed by a brief conclusion.

The first essay, "The Sign Language of Sin and Virtue," is a discussion of the surface qualities of The Scarlet Letter with particular emphasis on the signification of the scarlet letter. The second, third and fourth chapters, with the respective titles of "Mr. Dimmesdale's Malady," "Internal Mediation In The Scarlet Letter," and "Two Worlds," are attempts to fully explore the roles played by the four main characters, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingsworth, Hester Prynne and Pearl, in terms of the deepest structural dynamics of the text. The focus is shifted in the fifth chapter, "The Revelation of The Scarlet Letter." Here I will try to pinpoint those techniques used to establish narrative values both within the introduction to The Scarlet Letter called "The Customs' House" and in the rest of the text.

Like virtually all studies of Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter, this thesis will be largely concerned with clarifying and interpreting the ambiguities that exist in crucial passages. However, my argument does not draw heavily on approaches

to this work by others. Aside from the application of Girard's analytical method, the thesis works within the novel itself; other references have been surveyed and used, when necessary, but these are not often central to my argument.

After approaching and interpreting specific features of the text as phenomena which point towards deeper and less ambiguous structures, the thesis turns toward identification and examination of those structures and the processes which make them work. Finally we turn to the narrator and the values located in the introduction and text.

This project has operated from the outset on the assumption that a masterwork of fiction, like The Scarlet Letter does not merely reflect a picture of an imagined world. Rather, it reveals universal aspects of the dynamics of human relationships.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SIGN LANGUAGE OF SIN AND VIRTUE

> "Adulteress. Alpha. Abel, Adam. A. America."[1]
>
> "The absence of the transcendental signifier extends the domain and interplay of signification ad infinitum."[2]

In few other novels does a single sign, in this case the first letter of the alphabet, play so large a role. The role of the letter "A" in The Scarlet Letter is not explicitly defined by the narrator in the text itself, nor does its meaning loom up from immediately below the surface of the text in the same way that the language of monetary affairs, for example, functions to reveal the essential corruptness of French society in The Red And The Black. In this opening chapter we will be arguing that the sign in The Scarlet Letter performs a definite function. It defines the possibility for interpersonal relationships in the world of Hawthornian Puritanism.

Early on in the novel we are told that the Puritan world is a place where "religion and law are almost identical."[3]

In such a culture, one would assume that the highest moral values would be virtuousness or piousness; these would meet with approval. The basest moral values, crime and sin, would be punished. And, one readily finds the articulation of these conventional moral values among the masses of the Puritan community in The Scarlet Letter. For them, the letter "A" signifies in the very narrowest (and most transcendental) sense. The letter and indeed Hester herself, signify sin in the absolute. A relationship is immediately and inextricably established between Hester and the Puritan masses. She is the sinner and they are the virtuous people. What is more, their bloodthirsty desire to see Hester punished for her breach of conventional morality is almost boundless.

> "If the hussy stood up for judgement before us five, would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? Mary, I trow not!"[3]
>
> "At the very least they should have put the brand of hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead."[4]
>
> "This woman has brought shame upon us all and must die."[5]

Reluctantly accepting the judgement of the "overmuch merciful" officialdom, they express a further concern. Not only the sign, but also Hester's entire intercourse with the community must have no fixed signification save as a sign of sin.

> It were well...if we stripped Madam Hester's rich gown off her dainty shoulders; and as for the red letter, which she hath stitched so curiously, I'll bestow a rag of mine own rheumatic flannel, to make a fitter one.[6]

> Why look you, she may cover it with a brooch or such like heatherish adornment, and so walk the streets as brave as ever![7]

Throughout the rest of the text, the letter signifies absolute sin or absolute depredation for those who wish it to do so. For these members of the Puritan community, the Scarlet Letter takes on multi-sensory properties of incarnate evil.

As Hester is led back to prison to serve her term of confinement the narrator tells us that "it was whispered, by those who peered after her, that the scarlet letter threw a lurid gleam along the dark passage-way of the interior."[8] Another example of the effect of the letter on the perceptions of the community is found in the first sketch of Hester's life in her cottage.

> The vulgar...had a story about the scarlet letter which we might readily work up into a terrific legend. They averred that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth, tinged in an earthly dye-pot; but was red-hot with infernal fire, and could be seen glowing all alight, whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night time.[9]

Even in the final chapters of The Scarlet Letter the "A" continues to define what is sin for the Puritan public.

> ...the inhabitants of the town (their own interest in this worn-out subject languidly reviving itself, by sympathy with what they saw others feel) lounged idly to the same quarter, and tormented Hester Prynne, perhaps more than all the rest, with their cool, well-acquainted gaze at her familiar shame.[10]

Among those for whom the scarlet letter signifies a conventional moral relationship is Mistress Hibbins, the necromancer and sister to Governor Bellingham. She labors, for the entire novel, under the illusion that the "A" signifies that Hester is an agent of Satan, just like herself. Her brief comment to Hester in the market-place on Election Day reveals much about the power of the sign language of sin within the framework of conventional Hawthornian Puritanism.

"I know thee Hester, for I behold the token."[11]

* * *

The scarlet letter is the focus for the definition of sin and virtue, but that is only one facet of relations in the text. Equally important to this discussion of The Scarlet Letter and equally focused on Hester's magnificent emblem is the relationship between the Puritan leaders and the common people. Having demonstrated that conventional moral values are readily found among the general populace, we look for the source of those values among the Puritan leaders.

Within the text of The Scarlet Letter we see the Puritan leadership deliberating largely in relationship to Hester

and the "A", and, indeed, the letter provides the clue to understanding how moral values are maintained and established in the Puritan community. According to conventional thinking, the letter is the signifier of sin. Thus, the appearance and discourse of the Puritan leaders must signify consummate virtue. A brief examination into the way that virtue is established in the conventional Puritan world, yields some interesting results.

> There he [Reverend John Wilson] stood, with a border of grizzled locks beneath his skull-cap; while his gray eyes, accustomed to the shaded light of his study, were winking, like those of Hester's infant, in the unadulterated sunshine.[12]

> He [Governor Bellingham] wore a dark feather in his hat, a border of embroidery on his cloak, and a black velvet tunic beneath; a gentleman advanced in years with a hard experience written in his wrinkles. He was not ill fitted to be the head and representative of a community, which owed its origin and progress...to the stern and tempered energies of manhood, and the somber sagacity of age...[13]

On first appearance the Puritan leaders are as grim as the community they lead; their aspect as unrelenting as the great Endicott himself.[14] But, the text has a great deal more to say about the Puritan leaders, particularly Wilson and Bellingham. Beneath the veneer of strictly conventional "virtue" we find that moral values are in a confused state among the colonial leaders. One is certain that the vague dissatisfactions expressed by the townswomen in the market-

place would turn rapidly to revolutionary rage, were they able to truly interpret their leaders' behavior.

One can readily see the confusion of values in the appearances of Wilson and Bellingham. Reverend Wilson may look fearsome, but his fearsomeness is not as thorough-going as it appears. He is, "...the eldest clergyman of Boston, a great scholar, like most of his contemporaries in the profession; and withal a man of kind and genial spirit."[15] This last quality, we are told was, "in truth, rather a matter of shame than self-congratulation with him."[16] Later, we are told that "however stern he might show himself in the pulpit, or in his public reproach of such transgressions as that of Hester Prynne,..."[17] his real preference is for "good and comfortable things."[18]

Similarly, Governor Bellingham's private lifestyle betrays little of the stern virtue he displays in public. His dwelling is a house of light. The front of the edifice "glittered and sparkled as if diamonds had been flung against it by the double handful."[19] The narrator continues his description, saying that "The brilliancy might have befitted Alladin's palace rather than the mansion of a grave old Puritan ruler,"[20] and he even summarizes the point.

> The impression made by his aspect...was hardly in keeping with the appliances of worldly enjoyment wherewith he had evidently done his utmost to surround himself.[21]

Of course, the status of the Puritan leadership is maintained by strict laws governing ornamentation and other "worldly" or "sinful" things.

> Deef ruffs, painfully wrought bands, and gorgeously embroidered gloves were all deemed necessary to the official state of men assuming the reins of power; and were readily allowed to individuals dignified by rank or wealth, even while sumptuary laws forbade these and similar extravagances to the plebian order.[22]

No second thoughts are given to the hiring of Hester to help maintain the order. Her needlework is seen on all the leaders, babies, corpses--everyone, literally.[23] The narrator is surely indulging in not a little irony when he tries to claim that the fact that Hester is never asked to make a bride's veil "...indicates the ever-relentless vigor with which society frowned upon her sin."[24]

The conclusion is obvious. The Puritan order is maintained through a network of gilded ruffs, fine mansions and needlework surfaced over with a veneer of sternness and virtue. These comprise a system of signs that have nothing to do with inherent values of sin and virtue, except in pretense. Within this system, the scarlet "A" as a signifier of sin, is very potent. It keeps the plebian heads turned away from the elements of the comfortable.

Anything that can serve as a sign to support the social order is readily accepted by the Puritan leadership. The problem of Hester's daughter Pearl is a clear example.

John Wilson states the problem. How will Pearl best serve the Puritan community?

> The point hath been weightily discussed, whether we, that are of authority and influence, do well discharge our consciences by trusting an immortal soul....to the guidance of one who hath stumbled and fallen among the pitfalls of this world.... Were it not, thinkest thou, for thy little one's temporal and eternal welfare that she be taken out of thy charge, and clad soberly, and disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth?[25]

When he examines Pearl, the truth of his argument is seemingly confirmed.[26] However, on appeal from Hester, Reverend Dimmesdale has no difficulty finding a "higher" truth. While his argument that Pearl is at once a joy and a punishment, is not all-convincing, the idea that the child's clothing "forcibly reminds us of that red symbol which sears her [Hester's] bosom," carries the day.[27] The potency of Pearl, when dressed in the same material as the letter, as a sign of sin, is unmistakeable.

"'There is the likeness of the scarlet letter,'" say the children of the town, "'let us fling mud at them.'" But the dauntless Pearl rushes at the children, "causing... the hearts to quake within them."[28] The effect is only different in degree from the effect of John Wilson's discourse to the Puritan masses on the subject of the letter.

> So forcibly did he dwell upon this symbol ...that it assumed new terrors in their imagination and seemed to derive its scarlet hue from the flames of the infernal pit.[29]

It is no wonder that Reverend Wilson and Governor Bellingham finally accept Arthur Dimmesdale's argument that Pearl should stay with Hester. Though Wilson swears that "the little baggage hath witchcraft in her,"[30] the decision is not based on questions of conventional sin or virtue. The Puritan leaders maintain their positions not only through magnificent appearances and lofty discourse, but also by manipulating, to the fullest extent, the meaning of signs. So, in Pearl, the charade gains a new element, the show goes on, the primitive advertising mechanism gains a new effect. The sign language of sin and virtue is an instrument for maintaining order in this proto-modern community.

* * *

Is there anyone in The Scarlet Letter whose relationships are defined by anything outside the grand deception of Puritan values? One such person is Hester. A more subtle realization is that Hester only gains the possibility of achieving her intellectual freedom at the moment she puts on the "A" and becomes the sign of sin. Can we now begin to map out an Hawthornian "underground" where the sign of sin signifies the possibility of freedom from the conventional Puritan world? The text provides us with the answer.

At first, the scarlet letter serves to put distance between Hester and the community:

> Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact implied and often expressed that she was banished and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from moral interests, yet close beside them like a ghost that revisits the familiar fireside and can no longer make itself seen or felt....[31]

Then, as she understands that she has become objectified to the extent that she is a one-dimensional sign in the Puritan cosmology, Hester begins to see in a new way. When her field of subject/object relationships is reversed, the self-deceptions of conventional Puritanism become obvious to her.

> Walking to and fro, with those lonely footsteps, in the little world with which she was outwardly connected, it now and then appeared to Hester,--if altogether fancy, it was nevertheless too potent to be resisted,--she felt or fancied, then, that the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense. She shuddered to believe, yet could not help believing, that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts. She was terror-stricken by the revelations that were thus made.[32]

As she becomes more accustomed to living in her own "sphere" Hester begins to exercise her imagination through an activity which the narrator calls "speculation." Eventually she realizes that moral values in the Puritan world are completely up-side-down. The process of deception in the conventional world is all-pervasive, she concludes.

> She assumed a freedom of speculation... which our forefathers, had they known, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter.[33]

> Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerning her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative....[34]

> As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew.[35]

When the narrator says, at the close of the passage about Hester's speculation, that "the scarlet letter had not done its office,"[36] there is apparent reason for rejoicing. At least one member, albeit a quasi-member of the Puritan community, apparently has escaped the bondage of the sign language of sin and virtue.

* * *

How does the world of The Scarlet Letter compare to the world of the modern novel or the "novelistic" novel defined by Girard in Deceit, Desire and the Novel?[37] At the very least, the "novelistic" world of Stendhal and the world of The Scarlet Letter have surface qualities that are remarkably similar in Girardian terms.

For example, we could, without doing disservice to either author replace the word "Stendhal" for "Hawthorne" in such a statement as, "All of Stendhal's social and political thought is imbued with the concept that it is harder to live

life as a free man than a slave."[38] As an accurate statement about the status of values in the world of Hawthornian Puritanism we could without question choose to borrow the following passages on Stendhal.

> Men who cannot look freedom in the face are exposed to anguish. They look for a banner on which they can fix their eyes.[39]

> All of Stendhal's art is aimed at persuading us that the values of vanity, nobility, money, power, reputation only seem to be concrete....[40]

Although we have demonstrated three ways in which Hawthornian Puritanism is a world marked, in Girardian terms, by a "crumbling of traditional values," where the community members "take refuge in shallow behavior and imitation,"[41] in this initial Chapter we have not carried our analysis of The Scarlet Letter beyond the critical perimeter established by a Romantic critic such as Lloyd Morris, in Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Rebellious Puritan.

> Although superficially an Historical Romance of Puritan times it was an extraordinarily realistic study of the world as it is, in which Nathaniel had justified the self-reliant individual, and expressed contempt for the society which hedges that individual about with conventions devoid of spiritual validity.[42]

What is innovative about our approach to the text, is that the stage is now set for us to discover in The Scarlet Letter, "cousins" to the relationships met with in other

novelistic novels. To say merely that The Scarlet Letter reflects the hypocrasy of conventional society makes it out to be a singularly romantic work.[43] This is not the whole truth. In The Scarlet Letter, aspects of interpersonal relationships are revealed with the same intensity as in other novelistic works from Don Quixote to The Brothers Karamozov. In order to fully understand the process by which these relationships are revealed, it is necessary to examine the major characters closely. In a major text like The Scarlet Letter it is not always easy to see precisely what is appearance and what is reality.

FOOTNOTES: PREFACE

[1]This fact was verified through surveys of Ricks et.al., Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Reference Bibliography 1900-71 With Selected 19th Century Materials and the MLA International Bibliographies, 1972-75.

FOOTNOTES: INTRODUCTION

[1]Neitzsche, Fredrich, On The Genealogy of Morals, p. 231.

[2]Rene Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, pp. 39-40, 52.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

[1]D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 91.

[2]Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign & Play," The Structuralist Controversy, p. 249.

[3]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Complete Works In Twelve Volumes, Vol. 5, p. 75.

[4]Ibid., p. 74.

[5]Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[6]Ibid., p. 91.

[7]Ibid., p. 112.

[8]Ibid., p. 91.

[9]Ibid., p. 112.

[10]Ibid., pp. 292-293.

[11]Ibid., p. 287.

[12]Ibid., p. 87.

[13] Ibid., p. 86.

[14] See "Endicott And The Red Cross" or "The Maypole of Merrymount," The Complete Works, Vol. 1, Twice-Told Tales.

[15] Nathaniel Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 135.

[16] Ibid., p. 128.

[17] Ibid., p. 86.

[18] Ibid., p. 135.

[19] Ibid., p. 126.

[20] Ibid., p. 127.

[21] Ibid., p. 125.

[22] Ibid., p. 106.

[23] Ibid., p. 106.

[24] Ibid., p. 107.

[25] Ibid., p. 137.

[26] Ibid., p. 139. The Governor agrees. "This is awful," he says when Pearl cannot name her "maker."

[27] Ibid., p. 141.

[28] Ibid., p. 128.

[29] Ibid., p. 91.

[30] Ibid., p. 143.

[31] Ibid., p. 108.

[32] Ibid., p. 110.

[33] Ibid., p. 201.

[34] Ibid., pp. 199-201.

[35] Ibid., p. 201.

[36] Ibid., p. 201.

[37] Rene Girard, Deceit, Desire And The Novel, p. 10.

[38] Ibid., p. 64.

[39] Ibid., p. 65.

[40] Ibid., p. 18.

[41] Ibid., p. 62.

[42] Lloyd Morris, The Rebellious Puritan, p. 230.

[43] Girard, op. cit., p. 7.

CHAPTER TWO

MR. DIMMESDALE'S MALADY

> "They deemed the young clergyman a miracle of holiness."[1]
>
> "Wherever there is a heart and an intellect, the diseases of the physical frame are tinged with the peculiarities of these."[2]

The most closely guarded secret of The Scarlet Letter is the precise nature of Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale's sickness. To all who observe him there is, from the moment of his first appearance on the scaffold in the market-place, something physically amiss.

> ...there was an air about this young minister, --an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look,--as of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence....[3]

The disease is indefagitable; caused, seemingly, by the ravages of a guilty conscience and fear of sin, its effects become more serious and more obvious.

> He looked now more careworn and emaciated than as we described him at the scene of Hester's public igominy; and whether it were his failing health or whatever the cause might be, his large

> dark eyes had a world of pain in their troubled and melancholy depth.[4]

The ravages of the sickness are powerful in the extreme. After a terror-stricken and chill night, the climax of which involves Dimmesdale, Hester and Pearl standing together on the scaffold, we are provided with a further description of the illness.

> ...Hester Prynne was shocked at the condition which she found the clergyman reduced. His nerve seemed absolutely destroyed.[5]

At his lowest moments, Dimmesdale's entire physiology is deeply affected by the disease.

> He looked haggard and feeble, and betrayed a nerveless despondency in his air....[6]

> There was a listlessness in his gait, as if he saw no reason for taking one step further, nor felt any desire to do so....[7]

As he contemplates release from his "psychic" burden by sailing away with Hester and Pearl, his health revives somewhat.

> It was the observation of those who beheld him now that never, since Mr. Dimmesdale first set his foot on the New England shore, had he exhibited such energy as was seen in the gait and air with which he kept his pace in the procession. There was no feebleness of step as at other times, his frame was not bent....[8]

But, we are told that his strength "seemed not of the body."[9] The minister's health gives way totally at the finish of his Election Day sermon and he is overwhelmed.

> The glow, that they had just before beheld burning on his cheek, was extinguished, like a flame that sinks down hopelessly among the late-decaying embers. It seemed hardly the face of a man alive....[10]

Fighting with all his soul against the forces which are ravaging his body, Reverend Dimmesdale bears his chest to the Puritan public and, with a "flush of triumph," passes on to the next world. Has virtue triumphed, at least for a moment, over sin? Is Dimmesdale finally justified?

One traditional view of Arthur Dimmesdale is that he pays the sinner's wages, but that his suffering is exaggerated "for effect."

> Every erring soul may not suffer in the extremity of Dimmesdale's agony, but if suffers enough, and the inevitability of its suffering was never more convincingly exhibited than in this vivid picture....[11]

A more enlightened opinion is that Dimmesdale represents an obsessive type of personality that cannot shake off guilt.

> With the man, the minister, the lover, the reader finds that he can have nothing in common, though he is compelled to pity his sufferings.[12]

Or, we may consider that the root of the minister's sickness is sheer and simple cowardice.

> He is a hypocrite but only through timidity, and in all, a tragic and pathetic figure, one of those weak and incomplete beings who have not even the courage to lie.[13]

Conventional writers on Hawthorne have not paid copious attention to the curious effect that the disease has on Dimmesdale's role in the community of Hawthornian Puritans. If we choose to place emphasis on changes in the relationship between the minister and the community during the course of his sickness, then we can trace the progress of an affliction that has very little to do with modern medicine, drgus, necromancy, sin or guilt. In the discussion that follows, it is axiomatic that physical appearances and issues of "sin" and "virtue" have only a limited relationship to the good minister's disease.

The narrator explains to us at the moment of his first appearance in the text, that young Arthur Dimmesdale has a great potential for success as a minister in the new land. "His eloquence and religious fervor had already given the earnest of high eminence in his profession."[14]

> The young pastor's voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep and broken. The feeling that is so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy.[15]

The first tinges of disease do not seem to hinder his development.

> The young divine...was considered by his more fervent admirers as little less than a heaven-ordained apostle, destined, should he

> live and labor for an ordinary term of life, to do...great deeds for the now feeble New England Church.[16]

And, as the sickness progresses, a curious phenomena occurs. Dimmesdale's reputation is enhanced.

> While thus suffering under bodily disease, and gnawed and tortured by some black trouble of the soul...Mr. Dimmesdale had achieved a brilliant popularity in his sacred office. He won it, indeed, in great part, by his sorrows.[17]

> His fame, though still on its upward slope, already overshadowed the soberer reputations of his fellow clergymen....[18]

> These fathers, otherwise so apostolic, lack Heaven's last and rarest attestation of their office, the Tongue of Flame.[19]

After appearing in the night with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold, we are told that, "The next day...he [Dimmesdale] preached a discourse which was held to be the richest and most powerful, and the most replete with heavenly influences, that had ever proceeded from his lips."[20]

At the moment when the action in the text is ready to climax, the narrator drops a clue toward explaining the strange success of Arthur Dimmesdale. The Election Day procession passes, and we note that the minister has assumed a new role in the community.

> Next in order to the magistrates came the young and eminently distinguished divine, from whose lips the religious discourse of the anniversary was expected. His was the profession,

> of that era, in which intellectual ability displayed itself far more than in political life; for--leaving a higher motive out of the question--it offered inducements powerful enough, in the almost worshipping respect of the community, to win the most aspiring ambition into its service. Even political power--as in the case of Increase Mather--was within the grasp of a successful priest.[21]

We can now draw an important conclusion from our discussion of Arthur Dimmesdale's metamorphosis as a preacher. At the root of his sickness is a metaphysical and imitative desire--he clearly expresses in his actions that he wished to become a Puritan Divine. And, what is more, because he is too vain to turn aside from the goal, Dimmesdale actually succeeds, seemingly, in achieving his objective. Shall we give a name to Reverend Dimmesdale's vain desire? We will henceforth call his particular strain of metaphysical affliction, spiritual opportunism.

* * *

We have now passed into the Hawthornian underground, and it is possible to once again see how The Scarlet Letter reveals aspects of relationships, particularly those that have a triangular form. In the case of Dimmesdale, we have identified respectively a subject and object in Dimmesdale and the status of a Puritan Divine. We can speak of Dimmesdale being propelled through the text by his spiritual opportunism. Above and around this linear projection of subject and object

there is a third element, comprised of the historical personages, themselves. Increase and Cotton Mather, Solomon Stoddard, et. al, have a very special relationship to Arthur Dimmesdale.

Does the "hero" of The Scarlet Letter have any metaphysical cousins among the novelistic works discussed by Girard in Deceit, Desire And The Novel? The answer is an unqualified yes.

For example, Don Quixote is clearly interested in modeling himself after Adamis of Gaul. "I reckon," says the hero of Cervantes' novel, "that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry."[22]

Julien Sorel's admiration for Bonaparte is established early on in The Red And The Black. In fact, he keeps a portrait of his hero under his mattress.[23]

Finally, Emma Bovary is plainly the imitator of the novel heros of her sentimental youth.[24]

Girard has a useful term to describe Adamis, Napoleon, the sentimental heros and Puritan divines. He calls these characters mediators.[25] Because these mediators are not present within the various texts, this particular process of triangular relationship is called external mediation. We have now identified and defined a novelistic structure, but we do not wish to imply a rigid formulation, such as found in Waggoner's "Orders" of The Scarlet Letter[26] or in the

"models" of Levi-Strauss.[27] Triangular desire, whether it involves external mediation or internal mediation, where the mediator is present within the text itself, is a fluid and ever-changing process in the novelistic world.

Some of the ambiguity of The Scarlet Letter vanishes when we apply the lesson of triangular desire, to Dimmesdale's behavior. After Hester reveals to the minister that Chillingsworth is her husband, the minister undergoes a "transformation." It enters Dimmesdale's head that he can "cure" himself by making blasphemous utterances--of course this quixotic notion is a false one. Dimmesdale has not realized that to cure himself his thought must enter a new dimension; merely reversing the moral polarity of his behavior will not do,[28] especially since he has already decided to conceal his identity and pursue his metaphysical goal by preaching the Election Day sermon.[29] His scatter-brained bumbling reminds us of an idea found in the works of Dostoyevski.

> People of long ago (and I swear I have always been struck by this) were very different from people of our time; they were like another kind of human species....In those days a man had, as it were, one idea only; our own contemporaries are more nervous, further developed, more sensitive, capable of following two or three ideas at the same time. Modern man is broader, and it is this, I would say, which prevents him from being a single, unified being as in past centuries.[30]

In Stendhal the sickness is called vanity, in Flaubert, Bovaryism, in Proust, snobbery[31]--in Hawthorne, we have chosen to call it spiritual opportunism. The affliction manifests itself in our hero and in the triangular relationship that exists between Arthur Dimmesdale and the object of his spiritual opportunism, with the figure of the Puritan divine, the mediator, radiating over the text like a harbinger, facilitating the process by which the minister works out his desire. Desire, in Dimmesdale's case, because there is the issue of a "broken law" contains a strong element of self-hatred. The hero's every painful look inward propells him inexorably toward his goal.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

[1]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 152.

[2]Ibid., p. 174.

[3]Ibid., p. 88.

[4]Ibid., p. 140.

[5]Ibid., p. 193.

[6]Ibid., p. 226.

[7]Ibid., p. 226.

[8]Ibid., p. 297.

[9]Ibid., p. 297.

[10]Ibid., p. 299.

[11]W.C. Brownell, American Prose Masters, p. 102.

[12]Anthony Trollope, "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review, No. 254, p. 218, Sept. 1879.

[13]Regis Michaud, The American Novel Today, p. 40.

[14]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 88.

[15]Ibid., p. 90.

[16]Ibid., p. 172.

[17]Ibid., p. 173.

[18]Ibid., p. 174.

[19]Ibid., p. 171.

[20]Ibid., p. 191.

[21] Ibid., p. 283.

[22] Cited by Girard, op. cit., p. 1.

[23] Stendhal, Scarlet and Black, p. 77.

[24] Girard, op. cit., p. 8 & p. 63.

[25] Ibid., p. 3.

[26] Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study, p. 175.

[27] Girard, op. cit., p. 175.

[28] Hawthorne, op. cit., vol. 5., p. 255.

[29] Ibid., p. 255.

[30] Cited by Girard, op. cit., p. 94.

[31] Ibid., p. 73.

[32] Ibid., p. 15.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERNAL MEDIATION IN THE SCARLET LETTER

"Ne do thow nevere switch a
crueltee;
To hiden fro thi friend so
great a care!"[1]

"...Never delerium and tortures
like these...."[2]

Thus far we have talked about The Scarlet Letter as a novel of external mediation. The time has arrived for us to identify triangular relationships that manifest themselves within the text itself. These relationships are not difficult to pinpoint if we begin by asking an appropriate question, for example, "Is there anyone present in the text who facilitates or mediates or seems to block the process of Arthur Dimmesdale's desire?"

There is, of course, one character in The Scarlet Letter who delights in twisting the fragments of Reverend Dimmesdale's shattered psyche. As we again gain entrance into the Hawthornian underground, we perceive that The Scarlet Letter reveals a black comedy of psychic processes. For, Roger Chillingsworth does indeed mediate Arthur Dimmesdale's spiritual opportunism,

and we will look closely at the process. Although, in the world of conventional Hawthornian Puritanism they are great rivals and enemies, in the Hawthornian underground, no one does more than Roger Chillingsworth to advance the opportunism of his rival, or shall we say, "victim." In order to analyze the black comedy which is revealed in the underground world of The Scarlet Letter, we will use the term internal mediation to describe the process of triangular relationships where the mediator, as in the case of Roger Chillingsworth, is present within the text of the novel.

One clue or key to understanding the process of internal mediation with particular respect to The Scarlet Letter lies in our ability to recall what is signified by the scarlet letter which Hester wears. For, the conclusion drawn about the "A," that is, that it demonstrates the breakdown of transcendental signification in the proto-modern Puritan community, carries us deep into the Hawthornian underground. Qualities of conventional "good" and "evil" in the relationship between Dimmesdale and Chillingsworth are just as illusory as the qualities of "sin" and "virtue" are in the relationship between Hester and the community, and the Puritan masses and their leaders.

If the relationship between Chillingsworth and Dimmesdale ultimately is devoid of connotations of transcendental "good"

and "evil," then what is revealed? The answer is not difficult to find. What is revealed in the relationship between "leech" and "patient" is the process by which the modern contagion, metaphysical desire, is spread in the novelistic world. For, we see by the light of the Hawthornian underground, that Roger Chillingsworth's actions are the mirror images of Dimmesdale's opportunism. The reciprocal forms of opportunism that are reflected back and forth between "hero" and "mediator" demonstrate the illusory nature of all triangular desire, and power both characters toward illusory goals.

To fully explore their illusions, we must closely examine the process of internal mediation by which illusion takes on the appearance of reality for the actors in the Hawthornian underground.

* * *

Arthur Dimmesdale evidences the strongest symptoms of internally (and externally) mediated metaphysical desire in the persistence with which he undertakes his journey of self-punishment. It is one of the most incredible "underground journeys in the history of novelistic writing.

> His inward trouble drove him to practices more in keeping with the old, corrupted faith of Rome, than with the better light of the church in which he had been born and bred. In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes,

> this Protestant and Puritan divine had plied it on his own shoulders; laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly because of that bitter laugh. It was his custom, too, as it has been that of many other pious Puritans, to fast--not, however, like them, in order to purify the body and render it the fitter medium of celestial illumination, but rigorously, and until his knees trembled beneath him, as an act of penance. He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness; sometimes with a glimmering lamp; and sometimes, viewing his own face in a looking-glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself.[3]

The narrator is quick to point out that the quality of rhetoric that the hero applies to himself is of a similar genre as the whip.

> He had spoken the very truth and transformed it into the veriest falsehood. And, yet, by the constitution of his nature he loved the truth, and loathed the lie, as few men ever did. Therefore, above all else, he loathed his miserable self![4]

And, the process of self-laceration continues without relent. Preaching, being Dimmesdale's singular form of dandyism, he punishes himself on the pulpit week after week. Even in his interview with Hester, Dimmesdale at first refuses to release himself from his self-inflicted bondage.

> Wretched and sinful as I am, I have had no other thought than to drag on my earthly existence in the sphere where Providence hath placed me. Lost as my own soul is...I dare

not quit my post, though an unfaithful sentinel,
whose sure reward is death and dishonour,
when his dreary watch shall come to an end![5]

As the hero of The Scarlet Letter prepares for his final sermon on Election Day, even the narrator appears to have wearied of the minister's infinite ability to set absolutely self-destructive objectives. The narrator advises that he is "holding nothing back from the reader" when he reveals that Dimmesdale is secretly delighted about the opportunity to preach. He complains to the reader about his hero, calling him "miserably deceived" and "pitiably weak."[6]

The text of The Scarlet Letter clearly demonstrates that the process of internal mediation facilitates the progress of Arthur Dimmesdale's self-punishment. Once approached by Chillingsworth in a way that cuts to the core of the minister's illness, "...saintly men, who walk with God on earth, would fain be away, to walk with him on the golden pavement of the New Jerusalem,"[7] the good minister immediately puts his hand over his heart, and the flush of pain crosses his brow. They become fast friends. Like a coy mistress, the hero cannot ever quite bring himself to break off his relationship with his bitter enemy. "There was a strange fascination," we are told, "for the minister in the company of the man of science...."[8] Eventually, they even take up lodgings together.

Being little interested in anything, save his deception and his eternal punishment, Dimmesdale is unable to comprehend what is happening.

> Trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared. He therefore still kept up a familiar intercourse with him, daily receiving the old physician in his study; or visiting the laboratory....[9]

After a torturing intercourse with Chillingsworth on the subject of sin, Dimmesdale criticized himself for breaking off the conversation.[10] Again and again, Dimmesdale returns to the physician "rival" if only for the torment he derives from the "treatment."

> True, he looked doubtfully, fearfully,--even at times, with horror and the bitterness of hatred,--at the deformed figure of the old physician...his slightest and most indifferent acts...were odious in the clergyman's sight....[11]

> He took himself to task for his bad sympathies in reference to Roger Chillingsworth... and did his best to root them out.[12]

> He...continued his habits of social familiarity with the old man, and thus gave him constant opportunities for perfecting the purpose to which--poor, forlorn creature that he was, and more wretched than his victim--the avenger had devoted himself.[13]

The relationship between Dimmesdale and his enemy not only further the punishment which the minister blindly believes he deserves, it also covertly advances the hero towards his

metaphysical goal. Dimmesdale-Chillingsworth is a relationship based on a process of deception that is remarkable for its completeness. And, as we shall see, it is the hero who triumphs precisely at the moment when all is lost. Not until the final scene of internal mediation between them does Chillingsworth have any inkling that his desire to punish Arthur Dimmesdale has been exactly what Dimmesdale has wanted.

* * *

A further analysis of the underground world of The Scarlet Letter reveals a process of internal mediation defined in terms of the mediator, in this case, Roger Chillingsworth.

> ...all...the relations betwixt him and Mr. Dimmesdale, not merely the external presence, but the very inmost soul, of the latter, seemed to be brought out before his eyes, so that he could see and comprehend its every movement. He became, thenceforth, not a spectator only, but a chief actor in the poor minister's interior world.[14]

Through his powers of concealment and his thirst for revenge, Roger Chillingsworth becomes the facilitator of Dimmesdale's self-punishment. Indeed, Dimmesdale's punishment becomes Chillingsworth's pleasure.

> The victim was forever on the rack; it needed only to know the spring that controlled the engine; and the physician knew it well![15]

In one of his moments of crowning achievement, Chillingsworth steals a glance at the minister's bare chest. It is a moment of ectasy in which he "threw up his arms towards the ceiling and stamped his foot on the floor!"[16]

In the process of this meditation, Chillingsworth becomes Dimmesdale's shadow. He lodges with the minister, engages him regularly in conversation and follows him to the scaffold on the night of Reverend Dimmesdale's tormented vigil. For every step forward in the progress of the minister's disease, there is an incident in which Chillingsworth tightens the machinery of the rack by another notch.

However, the consequences of rack-tightening are equally disasterous for the perpetrator of the punishment as well as the victim. The physician, as we shall show, is victimized by a metaphysical desire for unattainable "justice" that is expressed in his jealousy, envy and impotent hatred of his "victim."[17]

The physical manifestations of the disease are evident enough in the textual description of Chillingsworth's declining health.

> Hester...was shocked, as well as wonder-smitten, to discern what a change had been wrought upon him within the past seven years. It was not so much that he had grown older... but the former aspect of an intellectual man, calm and quiet, which was what she best remembered in him, had altogether vanished, and

> been succeeded by an eager, searching, almost fierce, yet carefully guarded look.[18]

We can readily observe, in Chillingsworth, evidence of a nervous disorder that reminds us, not only of Dimmesdale's affliction, but also of the description of modern man found in Dostoyevski. In his interview with Hester, the truest facts are laid before the reader about the effect of the relationship on the mediator.

> I tell thee, Hester Prynne, the richest fee that ever physician earned from monarch could not have bought such care as I have wasted on this miserable priest! But for my aid, his life would have burned away in torments within the first two years after the perpetration of his crime and thine. For, Hester, his spirit lacked the strength that could have borne up, as thine has, beneath a burden like thy scarlet letter. Oh, I could reveal a goodly secret! But enough! What art can do, I have exhausted on him. That he now breathes, and creeps about on earth, is owing all to me![19]

It is the physician's singular fate to be so caught up in metaphysical desire that he cannot bring himself to drop his deception. The role of mediator is totally integrated into his psyche.

> "Hast thou not tortured him enough?" said Hester, noticing the old man's look. "Has he not paid thee all?"
>
> No!--no! He has but increased the debt![20]

As with all goals set under the process of the modern contagion, Chillingsworth's goal turns out to be sheer illusion.

Dimmesdale's moment of triumph on Election Day seals the old man's fate. Without the subject, the mediator has no purpose.

> Nothing was more remarkable that the change which took place, almost immediately after Mr. Dimmesdale's death, in the appearance and demeanor of the old man known as Roger Chillingsworth. All his strength and energy--all his vital and intellectual force--seemed at once to desert him; insomuch that he positively withered up, shrivelled away and almost vanished from human sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun.[21]

We should not be surprised that the narrator wonders if the two characters "philosophically considered" are not "essentially the same."[22]

* * *

In Deceit, Desire And The Novel, Girard has provided a critical vocabulary for us to clarify further the particular manifestations of relationships of internal mediation found in the novelistic world.

> "Metaphysical desire is always contagious. It becomes even more so as the mediator draws nearer to the hero. Contagion and proximity are after all, one and the same phenomenon. Internal mediation is present when one 'catches' a nearby desire just as one would catch the plague or cholera, simply by contact with an infected person.[23]

In Girard's analysis of Cervantes, an episode is discussed which precisely parallels the triangular relationship between Dimmesdale and Chillingsworth.

> In the world of internal mediation, the contagion is so widespread that everyone can become his neighbor's mediator without ever understanding the role he is playing. This person who is a mediator without realizing it may himself be incapable of spontaneous desire. Thus he will be tempted to copy the copy of his own desire...We all know that every desire redoubles when it is seen to be shared. Two identical but opposite triangles are thus superimposed on each other. Desire circulates between the two rivals more and more quickly and with every cycle it increases in intensity like the electric current of a battery being charged.[24]

> ...brother-enemies therefore always follow the same paths, which only increases their fury. They remind us of the two aldermen in Don Quixote who run over the mountains, braying, in search of a lost donkey. Their imitation is so good that the two companions constantly rush up to one another, believing that they have found the lost beast. But the beast is no longer alive; the wolves have devoured it.[25]

At the moment when Roger Chillingsworth becomes an "actor" in the interior world of Arthur Dimmesdale, their roles have become so entangled that it is impossible to say precisely who is mediator and who is subject. The term double mediation is introduced to describe this particular relationship.

> This devil's game of tennis symbolizes perfectly the reciprocal character which imitation assumes in double mediation. The players are opposed but alike, and even interchangeable, for they make exactly the same movements. The ball they hit back and forth to one another represents the oscillation of desire between the subject-mediator and the mediator-subject. The players are partners,

> but yet they agree only to disagree. No one wants to lose and yet, strangely, there are only losers in that game....[26]

This passage, written as an analysis of Altisidora's description of the underworld, from the second part of Don Quixote,[27] describes precisely the game of social familiarity played for years by Dimmesdale and Chillingsworth after they are housed under the same roof. Their rivalry is essentially sexual, they have both been lovers of Hester, but they insist on playing out the rivalry in the impotent underground of metaphysical desire. Double mediation also describes the compelling process which drives the hero-mediator and the mediator-hero towards illusory goals.

> ...each one holds the Other responsible for the misfortune which falls upon him. This is truly double mediation, equal cause of suffering for all; it is a sterile conflict from which the players, who have come together of their own accord, cannot withdraw.[28]

* * *

Using the scarlet letter as the clue, we have been able to penetrate the veil of moral values such as good and evil, in the relationship between hero and mediator in The Scarlet Letter. Once the veil is lifted it is easy to unravel the underground processes involved in the relationship. The fires that burn in the physician's eyes and on the minister's breast

are manifestations of one affliction, metaphysical desire. The disease is spread through an ever-widening pool of deceptions which eliminate the possibility of spontaneous action. Because they cannot act spontaneously, the operants are inextricably bound to goals which are absolutely unattainable. In the Hawthornian underground of double mediation, it may be helpful to taxonomize Dimmesdale's deceptions as indicating a "masochistic" personality, and Chillingsworth's deceptions as indicating a "sadistic" personality, but, ultimately, both men are the abject servants of metaphysical desire. Dimmesdale becomes the prostletyzing snob; Chillingsworth, the embodiment of jealousy, envy and impotent hatred. Neither man is strong enough to be free when acting within the terms of double mediation; feelings and actions are related only through tortuous deceptions.

The tyrannic reign of metaphysical desire in the underground world of The Scarlet Letter certainly seems to extend upward into the Puritan world at-large. After all, it is the Puritan masses who swallow the deceptions of the underworld, believing that Chillingsworth is one of Satan's instruments and that Arthur Dimmesdale is their heaven ordained apostle. We can now re-read the opening passage of the text and find there a small but potent image of a grim world drained of spontaneous desire, where uniformity and interchangeability

are the ascendant "virtues," and where all the elements of the modern totalitarian state are laid out before us.

> A throng of bearded men, in sad-colored garments, and gray, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods and others bareheaded, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.
>
> The founders of a new colony... have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion...as a jail.[29]

Where else, but in the great democratic Utopia of the new world.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

[1]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Complete Works, p. 391.

[2]Arthur Rimbaud, A Season In Hell and The Drunken Boat, p. 37.

[3]Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 171 (Vol. 5).

[4]Ibid., p. 171.

[5]Ibid., p. 257.

[6]Ibid., p. 256.

[7]Ibid., p. 159.

[8]Ibid., p. 68.

[9]Ibid., p. 171.

[10]Ibid., p. 170.

[11]Ibid., p. 170.

[12]Ibid., p. 186.

[13]Ibid., p. 184.

[14]Ibid., p. 171.

[15]Ibid., p. 168.

[16]Ibid., p. 168.

[17]Girard, op. cit., p. 6.

[18]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 208.

[19]Ibid., p. 209.

[20]Ibid., p. 209.

[21]Ibid., p. 299.

[22] Ibid., p. 302.

[23] Girard, op. cit., p. 100.

[24] Ibid., p. 102.

[25] Ibid., p. 102.

[26] Ibid., p. 103.

[27] Ibid., p. 102.

[28] Ibid., p. 103.

[29] Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 67.

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO WORLDS: APPROACHING HESTER AND PEARL

> "Her soul had penetrated into unknown regions."[1]
>
> "Desire is triangular in the child, just as it is in the snob."[2]

Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingsworth move in an ever-widening circle of deception and self-deception: their actions are a microcosm of relationships in the conventional world of Hawthornian Puritanism. On the periphery of this world resides Hester Prynne, who, as we have already demonstrated, breaks through the illusory code signified by the sign language of sin and virtue.

Does Hester "symbolize" the empty negation of artificial values in the Puritan world? Is she a she-devil who uses her special status in the community to torment her ex-lovers, Dimmesdale and Chillingsworth? When the romantic critic[3] on The Scarlet Letter penetrates the surface-tension between signifiers of sin and virtue, he is often quite lost. He creates another tension, which reduces the meaning of the novel to nothingness or to the meaningless opposition of tension and counter-tension.

In this chapter we will show that absolute values exist in the world of Hawthornian Puritanism, although they are not located in the conventional world of sin and virtue. The narrator is not playing games when he comments that the scarlet letter, "...had the effect of a spell, taking her [Hester] out of the ordinary relations with humanity and enclosing her in a sphere by herself."[4] To locate Hester's "sphere" we must again enter the Hawthornian underground.

Finding the single term which describes those elements which belong neither to the conventional Puritan world, nor to the empty manuverings of underground metaphysical desire, is not an easy task. In order to create a space for these phenomena, Girard has used the word "passion" to describe actions in the novelistic world of Cervantes, Stendhal and Proust[5] which takes place outside the process of triangular desire. We shall use the word "passion" or "passionate person" or "actions based on feelings" to identify those phenomena in the underground world of The Scarlet Letter.

Although we are not quite ready yet to begin making generalizations, we would probably not be mistaken in surmising that in the novelistic world it is the singular fate of men and women to live in an underground where passion and metaphysical desire exist continuously and simultaneously. Certainly, it is only the act of passion which has real value

in the novelistic world. No matter how hard he tries to trick us, we can always read in the narrator's "ambiguity" the novelistic truth of actions based on feelings and the illusion (or shall we say falsehood) of metaphysical desire.

It is not surprising that Hester has two reasons for staying on in Boston after her release from prison. The first involves the process of conventional Puritan "truth."

> What she compelled herself to believe--what, finally, she reasoned upon, as her motive for continuing a resident of New England--was half a truth, and half a self-delusion. Here, she said to herself, had been the scene of her guilt; and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul and work out another purity than that which she had lost; more saint-like because the result of martyrdom.[6]

The second reason is never clearly spelled out, but it exists nonetheless. The narrater tells us that it has to do with a feeling of Hester's that is "irresistable and inevitable."[7] It "compels human beings to linger around the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime...."[8] The narrator also speaks of a "passionate and desperate joy" with which Hester's feelings for Arthur Dimmesdale seize her.[9] There is a similar development in The Red And The Black. After her affair with Julien Sorel is broken off, Mme. Renal becomes a deeply religious person. Her passion is not abated, but re-directed, and we can find a revealing analysis of her behavior in Deceit, Desire And The Novel:

> In the early Stendhal and in some of his essays we find an opposition...between the lucid skepticism of honest people and the hypocritical religion of everyone else. In his great world this opposition has disappeared. It has been replaced by a contrast between the hypocritical religion of the vain and the 'true' religion of the passionate.[10]

Hester's art, her needlework, seems to have double sources in passion and penance. In designing Pearl's dress she allows "the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play,"[11] even though she spends much of her time making "course garments for the poor."[12] One might go so far as to say that in the scarlet letter and the clothing which she designs for Pearl, Hester tries to communicate "passion" to the Puritan community.

Metaphysical desire leads to imitation, mediation and hypocracy. Hester's passion leads to art and to a curious phenomenon which the narrator calls speculation or imagination.[13] Although passion disappears from Hester's outward appearance,

> ...there seemed to be no longer anything in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester's form though majestic and statue like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace....[14]

it is preserved in the speculation which takes over her mental life, if only of the memory it creates of the emptiness of metaphysical desire.

> A tendency to speculation, though it may keep a woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her....[15]

"As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew."[16]

"A woman never overcomes these problems by an exercise of thought."[17]

Passion is continually soft-pedaled or made ambiguous by the narrator, but it is passion that cuts through the process of triangular desire in The Scarlet Letter. Passionate acts, as in the case of Dimmesdale's mid-night vigil on the scaffold, are not the sole property of Hester, although their locus is in her "sphere." Acts of passion are neither systematic nor devoid of tragic overtones. They arrive like lightening bolts and illuminate the Puritan underground with vivid color.[18]

Thus, it is Hester who breathes life into the Puritan "fashion" with her needlework, brings a moment of truth to Chillingsworth, and, as we shall see, inspires Dimmesdale to commit acts of passion through which he is ultimately redeemed. Her exhortation to Arthur is a communication from the "scarlet" realm of The Scarlet Letter.

"Exchange this false life of thine for a true one...Preach! Write! Act!"[19]

* * *

The wide ranging discussion about versimilitude in the representation of Pearl has done a great deal to prevent traditional critics from penetrating the surface of the text.[20]

It is a first premise of this analysis that the novelistic truth of Pearl has very little to do with questions of either versimilitude in character portrayal or the values of sin and virtue in the conventional world of Hawthornian Puritanism.

As we approach closer to Pearl, the inner workings of triangular desire are revealed to us. Although Pearl is able to desire spontaneously, her desire, like the desire of the adults in The Scarlet Letter, is an imitative one. Pearl's world remains unspoiled, not because desire is absent, but because she never feels the presence of the mediator.[21]

As in the other sections of our analysis, we can use the letter "A" as the clue to what is revealed in the relationships between her and Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale that is signified by the "A" her identity remains a secret to her. Hester and the minister (though the latter to a much lesser extent,) mediate Pearl's search for identity. Once again we gain entrance to the underground world of The Scarlet Letter.

For every manifestation of metaphysical desire on the part of Pearl,

> ...putting up her little hand, she grasped at it [the letter] smiling not doubtfully, but with a decided gleam....[22]

Hester reacts with a moment of inquietude.

"It was as if an evil spirit possed the child and had just peeped forth in mockery."[23]

"From that epoch...Hester never felt a moment's safety."[24]

But, Pearl's desire for knowledge is unceasing. Time after time Pearl ups the metaphysical ante with an outrageous demonstration of interest in the scarlet "A".

> In the afternoon of a certain summer's day, after Pearl grew big enough to run about, she amused herself with gathering handfuls of wild-flowers, and flinging them, one by one, at her mother's bosom; dancing up and down, like a little elf, whenever she hit the scarlet letter.[25]

We can easily see how triangular desire gives rise to misunderstandings in the world of Hawthornian Puritanism. Hester, understanding Pearl's actions as part of her penance, conceals her initial impulse.

> Hester's first notion had been to cover her bosom with her clasped hands. But, whether from pride or resignation, or a feeling that her penance might best be wrought out by this unutterable pain, she resisted the impulse, and sat erect, pale as death, looking sadly into little Pearl's wild eyes. Still came the battery of flowers, almost invariably hitting the mark....[26]

The game continues. Pearl exhausts her supply of "weapons" and, temporarily, her appetite for the knowledge of the "A". Hester retreats to a dismal labyrinth of doubt as to whether or not Pearl is "a demon offspring...on earth through the mother's sin, and to promote some foul and wicked purpose."[27] The same process of mediation that governs the behavior of Dimmesdale and Chillingsworth also governs the triangular relationship between Hester and Pearl.

We should not be surprised that Pearl's fascination with the scarlet letter is as all-pervasive as Arthur Dimmesdale's preoccupation with sin or Chillingsworth's thirst for justice. The "A" is the fortress from which Pearl sallies forth to pursue the Puritan urchins;[28] it is the reflection of the scarlet letter in the governor's armor which attracts Pearl's attention in the Governor's Hall.[29]

As Pearl becomes older, her desire becomes more adult-like. It is finally through a process of imitation that she communicates to Hester her desire to comprehend the secret of the scarlet "A".

> Pearl took some eel-grass, and imitated, as best she could, on her own bosom, the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother's. A letter--the letter A-- but freshly green instead of scarlet![30]

A short conversation orients Hester to Pearl's desire.

> The though occurred to Hester that the child might really be seeking to approach her with child-like confidence, and doing what she could, and as intelligently as she knew how, to establish a meeting-point of sympathy.[31]

Immediately, two revealing and remarkable events occur. First, in Hester's eyes, Pearl is no longer seen as a fiend but as a friend, a person who can be trusted.[32] Secondly, Hester deliberately deceives Pearl. She tells her daughter that she wears the scarlet letter "for the sake of its gold

thread."[33] The amazing pattern of triangular desire repeats itself over and over again, throughout all of The Scarlet Letter, all of novelistic writing. Desire gives rise to mediation which gives rise to deception. And the game continues.

The difference between internal mediation in the case of Pearl-Hester and in the instance of Dimmesdale-Chillingsworth lies in the tone of the process, and not in its form. At the moment when Hester and the minister have finished their conversation in the forest we find a clear demonstration of our hypothesis about the ultimate relatedness of all triangular desire.

Pearl is seemingly unable to recognize the identity of Hester, who has removed the "A" from her breast. Both Dimmesdale and Hester are in a position to mediate Pearl's desire to know who the woman is.

But, Dimmesdale does not understand the process of internal mediation. He complains that the child is acting like a witch. He is powerless, however, and becomes upset, complaining to Hester that the delay "has already imparted a tremor to my nerves."[34] Hester, who knows how to mediate in a much subtler way, breaks down the code, and, while the minister is stating his preference for Mistress Hibbins as opposed to Pearl, she fastens back the "A" onto her bosom. Pearl returns.[35]

Ultimately, Pearl's quest for identity is rewarded with truth, but not until the final moments of the tale. After he

bares his breast on the scaffold, Pearl kisses the dying Arthur Dimmesdale. She recognizes the true relationship between them and the previously blocked entrance opens to the adult world. "A spell was broken," says the narrator, and he continues:

> The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it.[36]

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

[1]Stendhal, The Scarlet And Black, p. 92.

[2]Girard, op. cit., p. 36.

[3]D.H. Lawrence, Studies In Classic American Literature, p. 92.

[4]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 74.

[5]Girard, op. cit., p. 33.

[6]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 104.

[7]Ibid., p. 103.

[8]Ibid., p. 103.

[9]Ibid., p. 107.

[10]Girard, op. cit., p. 62.

[11]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 127.

[12]Ibid., p. 127.

[13]Ibid., p. 198.

[14]Ibid., p. 200.

[15]Ibid., p. 237.

[16]Ibid., p. 237.

[17]Ibid., p. 237.

[18]Henry James, Hawthorne, p. 190.

[19]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 239.

[20]Sample comment: "The tedious reiteration of what she stands for betrays Hawthorne at his most barren." F.O. Mathiesson, American Renaissance, p. 262. For similar view see Gorman, Hawthorne, p. 89.

[21] Girard, op. cit., pp. 34-36.

[22] Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 121.

[23] Ibid., p. 122.

[24] Ibid., p. 122.

[25] Ibid., p. 123.

[26] Ibid., p. 124.

[27] Ibid., p. 125.

[28] Ibid., p. 117.

[29] Ibid., p. 125.

[30] Ibid., p. 214.

[31] Ibid., p. 215.

[32] Ibid., p. 215.

[33] Ibid., p. 217.

[34] Ibid., p. 251.

[35] Ibid., p. 53.

[36] Ibid., p. 303.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE REVELATION OF THE SCARLET LETTER

> "I approached the very gates of death and set one foot on Proserpine's threshold...."[1]
>
> "Methought I was enamour'd of an ass."[2]

The ambiguity of The Scarlet Letter is rooted in the affective memory of the narrator. It is the narrator who has the final and ever so subtle control over what is revealed in the text. For acts of passion in the Hawthornian underground, the narrator has provided us with the memory of a sign; a scarlet "A" on the breast of Hester, an "A" which illuminates the sky on the night Arthur Dimmesdale forsakes the ruminations of his study for the scaffold. Only after having understood the value of these signs as clues to the nature of relationships in The Scarlet Letter can we penetrate to the depth of novelistic insight which we find in the final pages of the text, beginning with the climactic chapter of the novel called, appropriately and ambiguously enough, "The Revelation of The Scarlet Letter."

The "revelation" in the chapter-title implies far more than the mere ripping open of a shirt-front. By carefully analyzing the final pages of The Scarlet Letter and comparing the ending with the novelistic endings examined by Rene Girard, we discover a means to draw back, if only for an instant, the veil of ambiguity which encloses the true meaning of Hawthorne's novelistic masterpiece.

* * *

Against the better judgment of the narrator,[3] Arthur Dimmesdale proceeds to provide the Bostonians with an Election Day sermon that brings his career to a pinnacle of triumph. The effort fractures the fragile stamina of the minister and the narrator tells us that,

> The crowd...looked on with awe and wonder. This earthly faintness was, in their view, only another phase of the minister's celestial strength; nor would it have seemed a miracle too high to be wrought for one so holy, had he ascended before their eyes, waxing dimmer and brighter, and fading at last into the light of heaven.[4]

But, miraculously, Dimmesdale clings to life by the barest thread. Casting aside the ever-meddling Chillingsworth, he brings Hester and Pearl to the scaffold with him. The peril still exists that Dimmesdale will die without revealing the secret of his own true identity. However, with a convulsive motion, he tears away the clothing on his breast. This is the

first revelation of the novel's ending, and a worthy act of passion.

With Arthur Dimmesdale's convulsive motion, the relationship between Hester, Pearl and the minister is laid open before the community, but the process of revelation does not end here. In order to witness the full process, we must again enter the Hawthornian underground.

In the second phase of revelation, Pearl, as we have already seen, breaks through the previously blocked passageway to underground knowledge. She kisses the minister on the lips and undergoes a rite of passage into the adult world. Her tears are, perhaps, an acknowledgement of the universal presence of the mediator.

There is an even greater moment of revelation to follow, when Hester Prynne asks her lover to "look into eternity."[5] In his final speech, which is made in response to Hester's request, Arthur Dimmesdale is brought into a new realm of knowledge, a knowledge about triangular desire itself. In looking for "eternity" Arthur seems to have discovered the Hawthornian underground.

That the moment of death becomes a moment of enlightenment for the hero of The Scarlet Letter, is not difficult to demonstrate. First of all, an incredible philosophical contradiction occurs. In the mind of the minister, the torments

of the past are transformed into divine acts of mediation and mercy.

> He hath proved his mercy most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat![5]

For a brief moment, Dimmesdale, who has always denied it, is even willing to allow for the possibility of his own redemption.

> I fear! I fear! It may be that, when we forget our God--when we violated the reverence for each other's soul,--it was thensforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in a everlasting and pure reunion. God knows; and He is merciful![6]

Is the "affliction" which Dimmesdale acknowledges metaphysical desire itself? His statement that had any of his "agonies been wanting" he would have been "lost forever,"[7] reveals that he has a clear memory of the progress of the disease. What is more, at the very instant that he prepares to take leave of the world, the hero of The Scarlet Letter renounces all desire. He thanks God for bringing him to "this death of triumphant ignominy before the people,"[8] and places himself in the hands of divine mediation. "Praised be his name! His will be done! Farewell!"[9]

The Puritan audience is mystified. Whereas the Election Sermon is greeted with a shout of triumph,[10] the revelation of The Scarlet Letter elicits murmurs of awe and wonder, and,

after a few days, wide ranging debate over what was revealed.[11] The narrator faithfully reports that guilt, drugs, torture and even surgery are placed as the cause of an "A" which is rumored to have been revealed. Others, the narrator tells us, deny that anything at all was revealed on the scaffold, especially with regard to relationships between the minister, the woman and the child.

Only an unconventional reading of the final moments in the life of the hero leads to an understanding of novelistic truth in the triumph of the hero over metaphysical desire. As a final "proof" of this reading, we can examine the final moments of Dimmesdale's novelistic cousins in the worlds of Cervantes, Stendhal and Dostoyevski.

Don Quixote clearly renounces his past:

> My judgement is free and clear and no longer covered with a thick blanket of ignorance woven by my sad and constant reading of detestable books of chivalry. I recognize their extravagance and trickery.[12]

And, in The Red And The Black,

> Julien...utters works which clearly contradict his former ideas. He repudiates his will to power, he makes a break with the world which fascinated him; his passion for Mathilde disappears; he flies to Mme de Renal and refuses to defend himself.[13]

The affinity between Stendhal and Hawthorne is so great, that we find the narrator of The Red And The Black downplaying

Julien's revelation in the same tone that Hawthorne's narrator makes ambiguous Dimmesdale's final moments. Stendhal's narrator tells us that a "lack of exercise was beginning to affect his [Julien's] health and give him the exalted and weak character of a young German student."[14]

Thirdly, in the novels of Dostoyevski, we witness the redeeming conversions of Raskolnikov and Dimitri Karamozov in Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamozov, respectively.

The analysis can be pushed even further if we follow the lead of Girard. For Dimmesdale, like Don Quixote, Julien Sorel, and the Dostoyevskian heros, "triumph over metaphysical desire in a tragic conclusion and thus becomes capable of writing the novel."[15] Dimmesdale's final image is a more detached image; it is an image which he shares with the narrator himself.

The function of the final pages of The Scarlet Letter is to unite the hero and the narrator for a single instant in a renunciation of metaphysical desire. The Chillingsworth-like grip that the narrator holds over his hero's suffering is lifted[16] as is the curse of metaphysical desire. Only after this moment can the narrator proceed forth with his "moral."

"Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!"[17]

The moment of revelation brings into the novelistic world the truth of redemption and renunciation, but it does not remove

either the possibility of banal moralizing or of sadness in the conventional world. The moral flows forth, and the narrator follows the story of "sad and lonely" Hester to her grave alongside Arthur Dimmesdale, leaving us with only one "ever-glowing point of light," The Scarlet Letter.[18]

* * *

The moment of revelation in The Scarlet Letter in which the narrator and hero are fused momentarily in their renunciation of metaphysical desire, calls instantaneously to mind the author-narrator's "remarkable"[19] introduction to The Scarlet Letter, "The Custom House." "The Custom House" has its own hero, who is the narrator. And it has its own moment of revelation, in which the narrator renounces his own metaphysical desire and becomes capable of writing The Scarlet Letter.

Of course, the narrator's revelation is couched in ambiguity. He states that although he wishes to open an intercourse with his readers, he will keep "the inmost me, behind its veil."[20] He sets himself up largely as editor of the text, and claims that the introduction is meant to serve as an explanation of the discovery of the manuscript.

Once again we must focus on the "A" and penetrate to the familiar territory of the Hawthornian underground. Immediately, the conventional world of the Custom House rises to the surface.

The lazy, gourmandizing Inspector is opposed to the gallant old Inspector. And, underneath, the narrator labors under the illusions of metaphysical desire. Through his office as Surveyor he will cast aside his status as an "idler" and pursue, just like his ancestors, a successful career in the business of transoceanic trade.[21]

Miraculously, the scarlet letter and the papers of surveyor Pue fall into the narrator's hands, but the narrator is in the impotent hands of metaphysical desire. "My imagination was a tarnished mirror," he tells us, his characters lack "the glow of passion," and retain "the rigidity of dead corpses."[22]

The mediation of the ancestors represents a powerful force in the underground world of "The Custom House." The narrator cannot resign his position, nor can he find in the house of "convention" any source for imagination. The fate of the Customs officer is the rocking-chair and the idle tale.

Even when the administration changes, the narrator is trapped in his underground. He anticipates he has "a reasonable chance of retaining office."[23] The axe falls anyway, but the narrator remains oblivious to real opportunity. He raises angry questions of "murder" and "decapitation" and the always illusory "Justice,"[24] in his loss of the Custom House post.

The narrator's suffering is as drawn out as his hero's, and, fortunately, the decapitation of the narrator is only metaphorical. The tone of "The Custom House" is comic, but the moment of revelation is present, just as it is in the tragic climax at the close of the tale. From beyond the metaphorical grave, the narrator renounces his desire,[25] and becomes capable of writing the tale.

"Peace be with all the world! My blessings on my friends! My forgiveness to my enemies! For I am in the realm of quiet!"[26]

Then, the mists of memory move into the narrator's vision. Salem becomes "an over-grown village in cloud-land."[27] The narrator takes from his experience in The Custom House, exactly what he gives to the reader at the close of his tale--

"On A Field, Sable, The Letter A, Gules."[28]

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

[1]Apuleius, The Golden Ass, p. 214.

[2]Shakespeare, The Complete Works, p. 215.

[3]Hawthorne, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 245. Of course the narrator is being ironic. He is also helping to create the novelistic "space" for the "Revelation."

[4]Ibid., p. 304.

[5]Ibid., p. 304.

[6]Ibid., p. 304.

[7]Ibid., p. 304.

[8]Girard, op. cit., p. 297.

[9]Ibid., pp. 304-307.

[10]Ibid., p. 299.

[11]Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 307.

[12]Ibid., p. 17.

[13]Girard, op. cit., p. 292.

[14]Ibid., p. 293.

[15]Ibid., pp. 296-297.

[16]Ibid., p. 298.

[17]Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 303.

[18]Ibid., p. 312.

[19]Ibid., p. 17.

[20]Ibid., p. 18.

[21]Ibid., p. 25.

[22] Ibid., p. 60.

[23] Ibid., p. 62.

[24] Ibid., p. 63.

[25] Ibid., p. 64.

[26] Ibid., p. 65.

[27] Ibid., p. 65.

[28] Ibid., p. 312.

CONCLUSION

The passageway by which The Scarlet Letter enters the mainstream of novelistic writing is an underground passage. Hawthorne's underground world is as subtly and densely drawn as the interior world of Cervantes, Stendhal, Dostoyevski and all the great novelists. Although his world is closest in qualities of tone to Stendhal, whose masterpiece, The Red And The Black, was written in the same decade as The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne's underground is distinguished by a closeness of internal mediation that is practically unparalleled in novelistic writing. One might well argue that the motif of the scarlet "A" is overworked, or that the narrator's deviousness is pedantically stated. These are valid criticisms. But the crucial fact remains. The Scarlet Letter does not reflect the surface of "brought to life" Puritanism. It is not a political tract. It does reveal aspects of human relationships in a formulation that penetrates to the deepest depths of the human heart.

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