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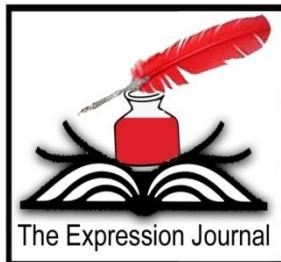
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## THE BLEND OF THE MARVELOUS AND THE NATURAL AS REFLECTED IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S SELECT NOVELS: AN APPRAISAL

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### Abstract

This paper examines the blend of the marvelous and the natural in the romantic, symbolic, allegoric and ambiguous world of Nathaniel Hawthorne where his treatment of sin and evil gives a peculiar atmosphere to his novels and stories by which he consequently decided to devote himself by the publication of notable works like *Twice Told Tales*, *Moses from an old Manse*, *The Snow Image*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *The Blithe Dale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*. Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American writer, is best known for his novels and short-stories. Most of his works are based on New England and his works have the impact of dark romanticism. He has tried almost equal hand to write novels and short-stories. He has a non-fictional work titled *Our Old Home* which was published in 1863. Present paper throws light upon the realistic background of the puritan society and artistic distance of romance.

### Key-Words

Marvellous, Natural, Blend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fictions, Putanism, Dark Romanticism.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's basic reputation was that of a short-story writer and sketch-writer till the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850. *Twice Told Tales* (1835) reprinted with enlargement in 1842 and *Moses from an Old Manse* (1846) had built up his reputation as a writer of fine and delicate craftsmanship. With the publication of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* it is said, the American novel came of age. By his artistic and literary skill, Hawthorne merited comparison with such reputed writers as Thackeray, Dickens, Balzac, George Eliot, Proust, Emile, Zola, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Henry James, Hawthorne's literary descendant did him singular service with his *Hawthorne* (1880) and T.S. Eliot, the famous to Hawthorne. His reputation as one of the greatest writers got established with certainty in the American literature scenario.

Hawthorne was born on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1840 in Salem, Massachusetts. Coming of a distinguished Puritan family which had played an active role in the history of Massachusetts, he had all the puritan traits both good and evil. His early years were spent as a partial dependent of his uncles due to his father's death even while he was four years old in 1808. After his schooling he joined college in New Brunswick, Marine in during the year 1820-21 and graduated from that college in 1825. He bought out his first book namely *Fanshawe*, a gothic romance in 1828. Being not fully satisfied as a writer with this first book, he was encouraged by Horatio Bridge to become a full-time writer and he consequently decided to devote himself to this task. He has to his credit publication of such notable works as 1. *Twice Told Tales* (1837), 2. *Moses from an Old Manse* (1846), 3. *The Snow Image*, (1853), 4. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), 5. *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), 6. *The Blithe Dale Romance* (1852) and 7. *The Marble Faun* (1860). Such a reputed writer had left four uncompleted romances besides many notebook and writings.

Hawthorne's world is romantic, symbolic, allegoric and ambiguous. No doubt, his treatment of sin and evil gives a peculiar atmosphere to his novels and stories. He took pains never to write a novel which aims as the probable and ordinary course of man's experience but a romance which, according to him, is the meeting place of the actual and the imaginary. He defines romance distinguishing it from a novel saying that a novel presents actions as seen in sunlight, whereas a romance furnishes action as seen in the moonlight, half concealing and half revealing. There is no photographic reality or minute fidelity to truth but truth to life colored by the 'marvelous'. According to Hawthorne, the romance is a curious admixture of the actual and the imaginary and his works 'The Scarlet Letter' and 'The House of the Seven Gables' are the finished works of his theory of romance. John Coldwell Stubbs writers thus:

"Hawthorne considered romance an approach to human experience, not a flight from it, yet an approach much more ordered, much more patterned than the reader's Chaotic meeting with experience in his daily life or even in a novel" (P6)

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In this novel *The Scarlet Letter*, the atmosphere is not a normal one but a twilight one. The description of Pearl as "the elfish child" and Chillingworth, whose horror at finding his wife on the pillory described like "like a snake gliding through its features" (61) has been given a peculiar touch- a touch which is singular to Hawthorne's romances. Miss. Hibbins is likewise a character who is given a supernatural touch. The forest in her refuge since she is a 'witch'. She is brought to the world of reality by being created as a sister of Governor Bellingham. In the "Introductory Chapter", the custom House stands for the real facts or actuality. Hawthorne wants to give a semblance of truth to his work by writing about the custom House with the realistic description of the officers there in the realistic background of the puritan society and the actual reactions of people towards the adulterous Hester. Commenting on Hawthorne's use of romance, John Caldwell avers:

"Hawthorne's used romance to debate about human experience. The distance of the romance gave Hawthorne a form in which he could experiment with develop the self conscious use of artifice" (Stubbs 7)

'His major effort as a romancer was to blend his idealized pattern of meaning with the appearance of reality to achieve this artistic distance of romance.

The blend of the marvelous and the natural was very important to Hawthorne. He points out that there was a balance of the marvelous and the natural existing inherently in New England superstitions mainly because the New England's experience of settling a harsh law gave his old world superstitions a sordid material touch. As a romancer, he wanted to nurture this balance. His *The Scarlet Letter* was one perfect creation of his historical romance. Though the marvelous elements in *The Scarlet Letters* are ambiguous, the romance is filled with the superstitions of the New Englanders of the seventeenth century. Roger Chillingworth, Pearl and Mistress Hibbins are given supernatural dimensions as stated earlier and the letter 'A' takes on supernatural properties to the extent that Hester comes to regard it almost a talisman or binding charm. Essentially one could consider Roger Chillingworth a sorcerer. He gives himself the suggestive title of an alchemist. He could also be described as a doctor of skill, because of his scientific background and his study of herbs in America but he is essentially. Considered a doctor dabbling in "black art or Satan's emissary" (P 131). Early in the romance, Hester fears the notion he makes for pearl and this focuses our attention on Chillingworth's use of black plants from a deadman's heart to increase Dimmesdale's alive only to prolong him torture. Chillingworth is, in moral terms, what the townist takes him to be an evil sorcerer sent from the devil. More specifically Chillingworth is identified with the Black Man of the Forest. The Black Man was a part of the common superstition of the period. The Black Man records the names of those who give their souls to the devil. Hester equates him with the Black Man, when she asks in the prism "Art thou like the Black Man that wants the forest round about us? Has thou enticed me into a bond that will prove the ruin of any soul?"

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(P77). This notion is reinforced at Governor Bellingham's house when mistress Hibbins announces that she has promised Hester's soul to the Black Man. In the same vein, Pearl warns Hester against Chillingworth. She tells her mother or yonder old Black Man will catch you? (139) Alone with her daughter, Hester confesses that the scarlet letter is his mark. Here she refers to sin in general but her choice of metaphor keeps the connection in the reader's mind between Chillingworth and the Black Man. Externally too, Chillingworth grows Dimmesdale's 'dark fiend' and Dimmesdale comes to think of him as "the dark and terrible old man" sent as an agent to bring him to the final confession. Hawthorne describes Chillingworth trying to stop Dimmesdale's confession in similar terms:

"At this instant old Sir Roger Chillingworth trust himself through the crowd-or perhaps, so dark, so disturbed, and evil was his look, he rose up out of some other region-to snatch back his victim from what he sought to do" ( P 264)

Chillingworth, the human actor, is given an elaborate supernatural or marvelous extension taking the reader to a romantic world. Pearl is also set as a distance of the marvelous. When the convex mirror at Governor Bellingham's house distorts Pearl's figure, Hester, burdened with guilt, feels "as if it could not be the image of her own child but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl's shape" (108) on the relationship of the transitory and heavenly realms, sees Pearl standing on the opposite bank of a stream as a representation of purity and grace from the heavenly realm. Many of the supernatural interpretations or attributes given to Pearl are products of the minds of those looking at her. The same is also true of the marvelous attributes of the scarlet letter which gives various shades of thoughts, interpretations and suggestions, lending ordinary things a colorful touch. The townspeople, watching Hester return to Prison whisper that they see 'a lurid gleam', from the letter. It seems to them to cast a 'spell' because of what it represents and because of how striking Hester fashioned it too be. The meteor which marks the sky with an 'A' is taken by Dimmesdale as a sign of his guilt, while to others of Boston, it signifies only 'Angel'. The townists at the end of the romance either see or do not see 'A' or Dimmesdale's chest, depending on the attitude each one brings to the event:

"The supernatural elements arise from the minds of the onlookers. This is the traditional solution to the problem of balancing the marvelous and the natural" (Stubbs 24)

*The House of the Seven Gables* may be appropriately designated as a romance because of the strong supernatural flavor it has, because of the marked elements of mystery in it, though it does possess that essential quality of great art namely the truth of human nature and human character or 'the truth of human heart'. The colonel built the house of seven gables on the land which included the site of old Maule's hut. Before his death, Maule cried out "Good will give him blood to drink" (Hawthorne 14). The colonel subsequently died under mysterious circumstances. The Colonel, of course, died a natural death but Hawthorne does

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not say the fact but shrouds it in the mysterious superstitious notions of the people who believed that old Maule's curse had taken effect. Not only that, it was believed that the spirit of old Maule would never rest in grave and apartments of the house of seven gables. After the death of the Colonel, it was even believed that the curse which old Maule had uttered from the place of his execution would become a part of the Phycheon inheritance. If one of the family did but gurgle in the throat, a bystander would be likely enough to whisper "He has Maule's blood to Drink" (P 25). Hawthorne, in this novel, connects the superstitious beliefs of the people with the hereditary disease of the Pyncheon family to produce an atmosphere of interest". The superstitions and legends associated with the house are Hawthorne's main vehicles for carrying the actual wrongs between the two families from the past into with which he presents the superstitions tends to mock them as quaint beliefs from the past, that are not acceptable in the present. He uses the marvelous as a means to irony. John Caldwell Stubbs writes:

"In *The House of Seven Gables*, Hawthorne used the intermingling of the past the present as his means for distancing. The legend of the Phycheon – Maul fends parallels and influences the action in the contemporary era. It also provides a historical extension to the action and therefore helps create artistic distance. To achieve artistic distance, he used three balances of verisimilitude and idealization; the natural and the marvelous; and the history and fiction" (P 34)

*The House of the Seven Gables* is a romance in as much as it attempts to connect a bygone time with the very present. Hawthorne conceived the story of the old house with its, 'mysterious terrible past', weighing heavily on the back of the present. Here in this novel, his definition of romance is fully followed. In Hawthorne's best tales, a believer in definite allegorical truth confronts a world of mystery, of ambiguity and irreconcilable conflict. While commenting on Hawthorne's use of allegory, Samuel Chase Coale avers:

"one other aspect of the romancer's art is, of course his use of allegory to convey spiritual and psychic states or conditions in insoluble conflict with one another" (Coale 12)

Thus, Hawthorne, whether his experiences are real or imaginary, he presents them in a detached and objective way.

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