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**Sign, Symbol and Allegory in Hawthorne's Stories and *The
Scarlet Letter***

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury.

I declare that the following master's thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Prague, 04.09.2010

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the master's thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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Abbreviations of the works cited:

LT	Literary Theory
TR	Transversals
OSL	The Office of The Scarlet Letter
EM	The Epistemology of Metaphor
POAS	The Puritan Origins of the American Self
AACH	Apocalypticism in American Cultural History

Introduction

In my thesis I will examine Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories *The Minister's Black Veil* and *The Artist of the Beautiful* as well as his famous romance *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of sign, symbol and allegory.

I chose these particular works as typical representatives of Hawthorne's production. *The Minister's Black Veil*, first published in 1836, is an expression of Hawthorne's "Puritan heritage recovery" period, *The Artist of the Beautiful*, which came out in 1846 is an expression of his Romanticism and his dealings with Transcendentalism, while his major work, *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850, is a remarkable and complex blend of the two strains of his thinking and art.

My thesis consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, named *Sign, Symbol, and Allegory*, I try to define what these terms mean, and to establish the difference between the first two, as some critics use the term sign and symbol interchangeably. I base my analysis on the Saussurian concept of sign, which will be outlined and contrasted with symbol. I will try to adumbrate the way in which reading of signs differs in the Puritan era and in the nineteenth century. I will characterize allegory and the patterns that enable us to recognize it, and I will mention how the understanding of what allegory is has changed in modern times.

In the following three chapters, named after the respective story titles, I will apply these terms to the chosen texts and analyse and interpret them on the level of sign, symbol and allegory in their particular contexts, with an appeal to the historical and ideological background of American Puritanism and nineteenth century Romanticism. The main focus of my interest will be Father Hooper's veil in *The Minister's Black Veil*, the butterfly in *The Artist of the Beautiful*, and the letter "A" in *The Scarlet Letter*. My procedure will start with their examination on the level of sign, continue to the more complex symbolic level, and end by examining them in terms of their participation in the wider allegorical context they are a part of.

Although Hawthorne's main emphasis in his works is on the psychological and moral aspects, his profound knowledge of historical facts is evident. His depiction of the ethos of the times, either Puritan or Romantic, is powerfully mediated by his method, which is an

expression of the 'Hawthornized' Romantic aesthetics. Throughout my work I will try to follow how signification changes in the process of reading, and the differing impact it has on the Puritans, Hawthorne, or the modern reader, and how reading of signs produces other signs, which shift signification away from their original meaning. I will try to show the indefiniteness and ambiguity of symbols, as their various connotations are often contradictory, thus making systematisation of symbols difficult. And, finally, I will try to demonstrate the fragmentary and as-if-never-completed character of Hawthorne's allegories.

My method will differ from the sources I draw on as their aim is to prove a certain point as an underlying unity in the text. Many critics commented on symbolism and allegory in Hawthorne but they usually employed these concepts in a limited way in order to suit the context of their specific argument. I will attempt to analyse Hawthorne's work by means of objective categories of sign, symbol and allegory; I will establish their definitions and suggest the boundaries between them. I will follow where my analysis will lead me. I will try to be an unbiased observer watching sign, symbol or allegory at work.

Chapter I

Sign, Symbol and Allegory

Studying the sources for my work, I found myself perplexed at the critics' differing uses of the concepts of sign, symbol, and allegory. The terms were often used as synonyms, or their meanings overlapped, which led me to confusion. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the word "symbol" started to gain today's meaning as late as the 19th century, during Romanticism. Up to that time 'symbol' was used as an equivalent word to 'sign.' For the concept of sign as we understand it today we have 20th century semiotics to thank. Therefore I would like to define these key terms before I apply them to my analysis.

Sign is a subject of study of many humanities concerned with meaning-making, such as semiotics, linguistics, philosophy of language, and literary theory. Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the fathers of modern semiotics and linguistics, suggested a model of a language sign, which is a psychic unit comprising a combination of two components: *the signifier* – the 'body' of the sign (a word, a sound of speech – "a figure designating a certain meaning"), and *the signified* – the 'spirit' (the concept – "the meaning designated by the figure")¹. Sign is not an object, but a "meaning-establishing relationship" between the two components. The signified is not a thing, but "the notion of a thing."² The Saussurian "signified" is purely a mental concept. Saussure chose to ignore the referential function of signs. The real object to which it indirectly refers is as if bracketed, for which he was later much criticised, as his concept of sign is detached from social context as well as history. The connection between the signifier and the signified is mostly arbitrary.³

¹ Martin Procházka, *Literary Theory: A Historical Introduction* (Prague: Karolinum, 2008) 6.

² Chandler, David, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2002) 20.

³ Martin Procházka writes in his *Literary Theory* that this knowledge of the arbitrary nature of sign is important for "recognizing the importance of formal elements in the work of art" (81). A work of art, e.g. a novel, can also be viewed as a sign. Then the signifier is its form, the way the author presents his topic, the way he tells the events. The signified is the story itself. Meaning cannot be separated from form, it is "generated by the internal mechanism" (81) of the form.

At present, Saussurian model is widely adopted, however, it “tends to be a more materialistic mode.”⁴ All our thinking takes place in signs, and anything that we interpret as referring to or standing for something other than itself is a sign. The interpretation mostly takes place unconsciously by relating the signs to the conventions or *codes* which are a part of our culture and which are imperative for communication. Every sign we use has acquired “a history and connotations of its own”⁵ and is a part of a code. There are multiple codes at work simultaneously. They organize signs into “meaningful systems.”⁶ As Lévi-Strauss pointed out, “the sign is arbitrary *a priori* but ceases to be arbitrary *a posteriori* – after the sign has come into historical experience it cannot be arbitrarily changed.”⁷

Every text is a system of signs organized according to codes [...] which reflect certain values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and practices. Codes transcend single texts, linking them together in an interpretative framework which is used by their producers and interpreters. In creating texts we select and combine signs in relation to the codes with which we are familiar ... In reading texts, we interpret signs with reference to what seem to be appropriate codes. This helps to limit their possible meaning.⁸

The codes I am using as a reader to understand a certain text now are not the same codes that Hawthorne used, and his codes differed from those used in the “golden age” of Puritans. Codes change in time as the culture and society develop and evolve. Therefore it is important to study the texts of the time in order to familiarize oneself with what might have been the ‘authentic’, original meanings as much as possible. Though this procedure raises the question of the possibility of authenticity as such. We may read all the existing period texts as well as all the subsequent texts and the only thing that is certain is that “each text exists in relation to others”⁹ and draws upon “multiple codes from wider contexts – both textual and social.”¹⁰ To identify and assess all of them would be far beyond the scope of my abilities, possibilities and intentions. However, I shall later have a look at the age of Romanticism, in which Hawthorne lived and wrote, as well as at the age of Puritanism, the world and codes of which Hawthorne closely and carefully studied (as Michael Colacurcio clearly showed in his

⁴ Chandler 18.

⁵ Chandler 31.

⁶ Chandler 147.

⁷ Chandler 30.

⁸ Chandler 157.

⁹ Chandler 197.

¹⁰ Chandler 197.

historical study of Hawthorne's stories, *The Providence of Piety*¹¹), and subsequently tried to recreate the essence of in his works. Sign and symbol are used in tandem to indicate different things. So what is the difference? The dictionaries tell us that sign refers to an arbitrary indication from which simple, agreed-upon meanings can be deduced while symbol refers to a greater range of meanings. Sign is often used in place of a symbol to refer to a simple, arbitrary representation of an agreed-upon meaning. Symbol comes from the Greek verb *symbollein*, to "put together" and the related noun *symbolon*, mark, token, or sign. It is a thing, image, gesture, or action that, although it is of interest in itself, stands for something larger and more complex. Symbol can be anything that represents some abstract idea by means of language or sensory perception, while its meaning is wider and deeper than the literal one. Symbol is never quite arbitrary. Within a given culture, some things are understood to be symbols. A literary symbol is a combination of an image and a concept, idea or a range of ideas. Writers often create symbols by setting up, in their works, a complex but identifiable web of associations. The signifier is usually not a conventional sign, it is a product of imagination. The literary symbol, as W. I. Tindall explains, presents "knowledge of its own reality," and although it does not always communicate this knowledge, it creates a vision of reality by its form, which "corresponds in quality to a nature of things."¹² The difference between sign and symbol is that "a sign is an exact reference to something definite and a symbol an exact reference to something indefinite."¹³ When we come across a symbol and try to explain it, we feel that there is always something which resists our interpretative attempts. "Though definite in itself and generally containing a sign that may be identified, the symbol carries something indeterminate," there is "a residual mystery that escapes our intellect."¹⁴

For communication there must be reference to actuality or to something accepted. The symbol may communicate by incorporating a sign or a traditional association. In so far as it has significance in the sense of containing a sign, it may unite author, reader, and fact, but significance is the symbol's lesser part. The greater part, remaining mysterious, carries no guarantee of communicating. [...] When we pass beyond significance, communication is uncertain or partial at best. What the reader gets from a

¹¹ Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984) All my quotations of Colacurcio in the chapter I and chapter II and chapter are from this book.

¹² W. I. Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1967) 18.

¹³ Tindall 6.

¹⁴ Tindall 11.

symbol depend not only on what the author has put into it but upon the reader's sensitivity and his consequent apprehension.¹⁵

Symbol is very often based on some kind of analogy, and thus it is related to metaphor. Aristotle definition is that metaphor "consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else [...] on grounds of analogy."¹⁶ According to this, metaphor is merely a device used for "summerizing a logical relationship, founded ultimately on resemblance between things."¹⁷ The problem is that while resemblance is based on logic, the structure and terms of metaphor go against it. And when a figure is translated into the language of logic, something is lost. It comes into existence as a product of an interaction of its individual elements as a whole (like the butterfly from *The Artist of the Beautiful*). Metaphor has the power to integrate and harmonize logical oppositions and paradoxes. It is "a condensed verbal relationship in which an idea, image or a symbol may be [...] enhanced in vividness, complexity, or breadth of implication."¹⁸ According to Feidelson, metaphor, as "the center of many overlapping circles of metaphorical meaning,"¹⁹ is the literary symbol proper. He also points out that "a symbolic category is formed by metaphorical history of the symbol [and thus] the symbol stands as a kind of synecdoche for the metaphors it has entered."²⁰

Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the first American thinkers to deal with the problem of sign and symbol on a theoretical level. "The theme of interpretation of signs [...] with the problem of interpretation, with the methods and possibilities of reading signs produced by nature and society" was the "dominant pattern" pervading American literature up to the Civil War.²¹ In chapter four of his essays *Nature* Emerson wrote that he considered language to be one of the purposes of nature, "a third use which Nature subserves man."²² Every word can be viewed as a sign and as a symbol. All the words that we use to express some intellectual or moral fact are based on some material appearance. They depend on nature. They were "taken" from the things we perceive through our senses and "given" to

¹⁵ Tindall 17.

¹⁶ Charles Feidelson Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1953) 58.

¹⁷ Feidelson 59.

¹⁸ *Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* quoted in Procházka, LT 128.

¹⁹ Feidelson 64.

²⁰ Feidelson writes in his *Symbolism and American Literature* that "synecdoche is not the logical substitution of a part for its whole: the part is not extracted, as if it were a building brick, and used as a sign. Instead, the part retains its organic character as a *part of a whole*." (65)

²¹ Ivo Vidan, "Sing and Significance in Hawthorne and Melville" *Studia Romantica et Anglica Zagrebiensia*, 44 1977: 111-127.

²² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (New York: A.L. Burt Company, Publishers) 23.

spiritual nature.²³ “Words are signs of natural facts.”²⁴ They are symbols of “spiritual facts,” as “all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols.”²⁵ Between “human thoughts” and “visible things” there is a “radical correspondence.” Due to this correspondence, language had a metaphorical character.

Nathaniel Hawthorne said through one of his characters that everything has its spiritual meaning, which is to the literal meaning what the soul is to the body. He believed there is an analogy between the outer world and the inner world, so that “the things and events of the outer world can be emblems or types of those of the inner.”²⁶ In this way, Father Hooper’s veil becomes an emblem of secret sin and the scarlet letter “A” an emblem of Adultery. Even the butterfly can be considered an emblem of the inner world of the artist, though in a complete different context. As F.O. Matthiessen says, this approach takes the pre-eminence of spirit over matter for granted, and this was a common ground for the transcendentalists as well as for Hawthorne and Melville. Yet, seeing spiritual significance in every natural fact was not a tendency specific to American idealism in particular. It was far more broadly dilated than that. It came from the Christian habit of mind that saw the hand of God in all manifestations of life, and which, in “the intensity of the New England 17th century, had gone to the extreme of finding ‘remarkable providences’” – memorable events through which God communicates with men – “even in the smallest phenomena.”²⁷ Feidelson explains that by “‘special providences’ God gave a particular direction to the process of natural events, thereby creating an effective sign of one of his ever present purposes...the Puritans saw the world as instinct with meaning by reason of God’s concurrence and susceptible of interpretation by reason of God’s salient acts.”²⁸ The Puritans believed that things like a disease, broken glass or a storm were signs of God’s volition. Their semiology was based on belief of “God’s purposefulness in order and unity of the world and his revealed message to man in the Bible.” Their everyday activities were “converted into a symbolic drama”²⁹ by spiritual images. This drama was human and divine at the same time, physical life was at the same time spiritual. Idea is united with material sign (the veil and the letter “A”), past is united with present. Every single event of one’s life was a part of God’s plan, and therefore it had “a delegated meaning.” Feidelson emphasizes the fact

²³ Nowadays, the trend is quite contrary. Chandler in his *Semiotics*, for example, maintains that there are no “‘natural’ concepts or categories which are simply ‘reflected’ in language. Language plays a crucial role in ‘constructing reality...language does not ‘reflect’ reality but rather *constructs* it” (28-29).

²⁴ Emerson 23.

²⁵ Emerson 27.

²⁶ Vidan 119.

²⁷ Matthiessen 242.

²⁸ Feidelson 82.

²⁹ Feidelson 79.

that although the symbolizing process was constantly at work in the minds of Puritans, their symbols were meagre because of their focus on “the meaning of God.” He notes that “the wearisome reiterations of ‘providences’ in the Puritan writing is actually a record of symbolic experience that never attained formal literary structure.”³⁰ They were prevented by their strictly typological thinking. Puritan hermeneutics, which has its roots in Calvinism, transforms into Emersonian Transcendentalism, and becomes “the intellectual source and the habit-forming impulse for what in the works of Hawthorne [...] became a dominant aesthetic preoccupation, the productive centre of [his] view of the world.”³¹ Vidan says that Hawthorne’s “semiology” draws “upon the Puritan culture of the 17th century,”³² based on two hermeneutic preoccupations of the Puritans: “religious typology” and the interpretation of special (“memorable” or “remarkable”) providences. The typology was a system of correspondences between the Old and the New Testaments, by which the figures and types from the Old Testament prefigured the events and persons in the New Testament. It “set two successive historical events into a reciprocal relation of anticipation and fulfilment.”³³ This typology served the New England Puritans as a method of reading Scripture, history and nature. However, these types were not considered to be allegories, because they existed in the linear historical context of time. As Perry Miller wrote, they were “factual prefigurations of what Christ finally did,” not some fictional stories, “the spirit of which might be that of Christ.” Types, unlike tropes (as “Platonic representations of one thing for another,” relating the literal to the spiritual), were considered to be true. “The type exists in history and is factual.” The type and its antitype, understood as two parts of a figure, are separate in time, but both are a part of history. Therefore the letter “A” in the sky in *The Scarlet Letter* is interpreted as “Apocalypse” or “America,” as a prefiguration, a type of what is to come. Contrary to this, the allegory, the simile, and the metaphor are nonhistorical, and what is more, they are invented by men and therefore are ‘suspicious’. The typological correspondences were very rigorous,³⁴ because the Puritans were afraid of the symbolic thinking that was necessary in order to perceive the types. For them, exegesis was not inventive or ingenious, but rather orthodox, because it was God who endowed the scripture with significance. Since they were afraid of misinterpretation, the only form of language they

³⁰ Feidelson 81.

³¹ Vidan 111.

³² Vidan 119.

³³ Vidan 120.

³⁴ Mason, I. Lowance, Jr., *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists*, Introduction (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980) 5.

were willing to use was “logical.”³⁵ Thus their interpretation was based on analytical interpretation. As Feidelson observes, since “‘trope and figure’ were merely embroidery on theological doctrine, interpretation was a simple process of reduction. [...] The method was to find a grammatical bridge between the figure and its logical equivalent.”³⁶ Whitaker claims that proceeding from the thing to the thing signified brought no new sense, but it “brought to light what was before concealed in the sign.”³⁷ “In other words, literalism precludes personal interpretation. It serves as a wall of flame to secure the pristine Word against any snare of the intellect, all flights of imagination.”³⁸ It was maintained at their time that it was dangerous to make anything of a type outside the framework of “scriptural ground,”³⁹ solely on the basis of one’s imagination, as it was God’s work to make them.⁴⁰ “The types belonged in a special and jealously guarded category; figures in general, unless plainly illustrative or decorative, became dangerous subjective fancies emulating from the types.”⁴¹

Yet, from today’s point of view, as Bercovitch argues, Whitaker’s statement intimates “subjectivism inherent in Protestant thought. For finally, the connective between the thing and the thing signified is not the sign, but the regenerate figuralist in whom the concealed full sense is already manifested ... it is he who proceeds from sign to signification, he who brings the spirit to the fact and carries the light to the meaning itself.”⁴² The ministry chose an extreme orthodoxy in approach as a compensation for the extreme subjectivism in substance. Bercovitch shows that Whitaker did not take into account another eventuality, that of “a duly reverent reader” who would find some new meaning while proceeding from the thing signified, and thus “discern signs hitherto concealed.” This is what happens with reading of the letter “A”, which assumes so many, often contradictory meanings in the process of reading. This approach would open a new system of exegesis. By such a process the Puritans

³⁵ Feidelson writes in his *Symbolism and American Literature* that Aquinas held that things have multiple meanings and that language is at one with the symbolic structure of reality. The Puritans made a drastic break with this Catholic tradition...logic was the way in which men necessarily apprehended the world.” (84)

³⁶ Feidelson 85.

³⁷ Whitaker quoted in Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP 1975) 111. All my Bercovitch quotations in this chapter and chapter II are from this book.

³⁸ Bercovitch 111.

³⁹ Feidelson 89.

⁴⁰ Mason writes in his *The Language of Canaan* that allegorical figure was thought to be deceptive as it might remind us of the historical figure. “The correspondence which it seeks to establish is not so much a relation between the past and the future, between the foreshadowing and the fulfilment, as between the earthy and the heavenly, the shadow and the reality. This type of allegory... owes much of its philosophical foundations to Platonism... However, once allowed outside the straightjacket of legitimate, instituted typological correspondences, the exegete was free to construct allegorical parallels between Scripture and almost anything else” (23).

⁴¹ Feidelson 89.

⁴² Bercovitch 111.

“discovered America in scripture” and changed “the focus of traditional hermeneutics from biblical to secular history.”⁴³ Although the Puritans insisted on their orthodoxy when they declared that “‘America’ was a figural sign, *historia* and *allegoria* entwined, they broke free of the restrictions of exegesis”⁴⁴ that they later guarded so strictly and carefully.

The term allegory derives from Greek *allegoria*, “speaking otherwise”. The dictionaries tell us that as a rule, an allegory is a story with a double meaning: a surface, literal meaning and an under-the-surface meaning. It can be read and interpreted at two levels. The form can be literary or pictorial. It usually is a story about fictional persons or events that is supposed to teach or illustrate a moral principle. The moral is not openly stated but left to the reader to derive. Through allegorical understanding, the great myths continue to be reread and reinterpreted, as the significance of the new interpretations is passed down from generation to generation. The origins of allegory are ancient, and it appears to be a mode of expression so natural to the human mind that it is universal. Its fundamental origins are religious. Allegory in the Western tradition from the Middle Ages goes back to St. Augustine – “his *Confessions* are not an allegory, but it shows what happened to the classical world as it was yielding to the Christian. His gaze was turned inward. He could not rest content with the level of external appearances, since he was obsessed by the drama of conflicting forces that was going on in his own heart. For the projection of the struggle, for the probing of hidden significances, allegory was to become the prevailing means of expression.”⁴⁵ Allegory was recognized as a hegemonic approach to the exegesis of the Bible.

Gadamer⁴⁶ points out that the contrast between symbol and allegory as we understand it now is the result of the philosophical development in the past two centuries. Even in the 18th century, the terms were used synonymously. In view of their origin, the two have something in common, which is that they both refer to something the purport of which lies in the meaning that transcends them. This way the abstract becomes accessible to the senses. By the means of an easily understandable literal level allegory expresses something more abstract and less accessible. The meaning of symbol, on the other hand, does not rely on the relationship to something else, because its being itself is meaningful. The importance of a symbol lies in its presence. Another parallel between allegory and symbol is the fact that both were widely useful in religious discourse. Allegory is used whenever an indirect expression

⁴³ Bercovitch 112.

⁴⁴ Bercovitch 112.

⁴⁵ F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford UP, 1972), 246.

⁴⁶ H.G. Gadamer, *Pravda a metoda I*, transl. David Mik (Praha: Triáda 2010) 77-86.

is considered more suitable to make people see the “higher” truth. Symbol enables us to recognize the divine, and thus brings us to the “higher” meaning as well as allegory. The difference is that symbol is of metaphysical nature, while allegory completely lacks this aspect. Symbol is a unity of sensual, or material, and the abstract, while allegory is only a means of relating the sensual to the abstract.

Hawthorne was much criticized for his use of allegory both by his contemporaries, such as Poe or Emerson, and by later critics, the most prominent of whom was Henry James. Allegory of the older mode was defined as a story that consists of a literal and figurative level of meaning, the latter of which has a function of expressing an underlying unity. From this point of view Hawthorne’s works were too realistic and the allegory in them too ‘dispersed’ and indefinite. In the age of Romanticism, when art broke free from the bonds of rationalism and the new aesthetics of genius was established, symbol became the basic aesthetic universal concept, whereas allegory started to be looked down upon as something rather mechanical, not connected to the universal idea and therefore inferior to symbol. Allegory is an expression of that which can be rationalised and conceptualised, while symbol is an “expression of the universe in its completeness,”⁴⁷ organic unity with that which it symbolizes, it is an expression of the individual and the Divine at the same time. Thus symbolism was the means by which Romanticism wanted “to express a sense of the divine world for which allegory was thought inadequate.”⁴⁸ Thus the criticism Hawthorne was subjected to understandable. For Henry James and other representatives of realism, allegory and realism were incompatible: allegory was an autotelic abstraction with disruptive effects on the story itself. James was very critical of Hawthorne for his ‘lapses’ into it. Hillis Miller assumes that allegory “means the expression of some abstract meaning by way of the story”⁴⁹ in Hawthorne’s view. Hawthorne himself was rather apologetic about his “inability to bring together realism and allegorical meaning.”⁵⁰

Despite its contempt of allegory, it was the 19th century that changed the perception of allegory in the old sense of “A equals B.”⁵¹ Allegory can have many meanings; it is open to a number of different interpretations – “or to no interpretation at all.”⁵² Some critics speculate about the possibility that “there is no such thing as a literal reading.”⁵³ To read means to decide which level is literal and which is allegorical, because the act of reading

⁴⁷ Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory*. (London: Routledge, 2010) 81.

⁴⁸ Tambling 82.

⁴⁹ Hillis Miller, *Hawthorne and History: Defacing it* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) 55.

⁵⁰ Miller 55.

⁵¹ Tambling 96.

⁵² Tambling 96.

⁵³ Tambling 28.

itself means ascribing a meaning to the literal level, which makes it allegorical as well. All thinking, and thus reading and writing too, is realized through language, and as language is figural, or tropological⁵⁴, thinking becomes allegorical, because it gives “a visual or linguistic shape to the abstract, which is perceived as personified or personifying, allegorical, creating allegory, and effacing the difference between the abstract and its embodiment as a figure.”⁵⁵ Thus the initial theoretical hypothesis of an incompatibility between realism and allegory [...] is replaced [...] by the proposition that both realism and allegory come to the same thing.” Thus Hawthorne’s allegory and allegory as such have been “rehabilitated,” but there is no agreed definition of it. One of the aims of my thesis is to uncover the workings of Hawthorne’s allegories and the way in which they can be understood. The scope of what is considered allegory today ranges from defining certain types of texts as allegorical to “claiming that all literature, and all writing, is allegorical.”⁵⁶ Allegory has “a broad set of meanings, but, since these have shifted in the last thirty years or so, there is now no consensus on how to approach it. Newer approaches, for example those associated with Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man, threaten to unsettle older senses of allegory altogether.”⁵⁷ The greatest difference between understanding allegory in the past and at present is that now we cannot assume any “underlying coherent meaning”, for the only thing there can be is “scraps of meaning.”⁵⁸

Walter Benjamin, one of the prominent critics of Romanticism, targeted the value that Romanticism ascribed to symbol. “Romanticism celebrates nature, and symbolism, which draws on elements of nature, evokes timeless, beautiful, eternal truths,”⁵⁹ yet, according to him, it ignores history⁶⁰ as well as a very important reality of life and nature as we know it, that is change, decay, and death. What Romanticism describes is an idealisation of nature. It assumes that certain values are “natural”, while in truth people ascribed value to them on the basis of ideology. As soon as nature is not understood as “an entity shaped by the values of those who invest it with symbolic significance, [...] it becomes allegorical.”⁶¹ Allegory disrupts ideology. “Allegories are the ruin of thoughts which think themselves whole and

⁵⁴ Paul de Man says that all language is tropological as it uses tropes to “present to the senses something which is not within their reach, not just because it does not happen to be there but because it consists, in whole or in part, of elements too abstract for sensory representation.” Paul de Man, “The Epistemology of Metaphor.” *Critical Inquiry*, 5.1 (Autumn 1978) 13-30.

⁵⁵ De Man, EM 14.

⁵⁶ Tambling 2.

⁵⁷ Tambling 2.

⁵⁸ Tambling 160.

⁵⁹ Tambling 116.

⁶⁰ Tambling points out that Benjamin means “the history that stands outside of chronological narrative of progress that makes up ‘official history’”(17).

⁶¹ Tambling 117.

entire, with no gaps in them [...]. These gaps within the thought suggest the presence of death, as splitting ... all thinking.”⁶² Allegory as such is “the art of fragment.”⁶³ Romanticism also became the subject of critique of deconstructionists. They see symbolism as an expression of the ideology of Western humanism and mimetic tradition, which has its roots in Plato’s *realm of ideas* and which blossomed thanks to the rise Christian religion and the Church. In the light of deconstruction, metaphors are in fact based on the ideological assumption that resemblances are natural, and one thing can thus be compared to another. In contrast, allegory knows no natural comparisons, image is not a representation, but an undecipherable “fragment.” De Man also sees a difference between symbol and allegory in relation to time. “It is the passing of time that makes symbolism impossible.”⁶⁴ While in symbol the representative and the semantic functions of language are simultaneous, in allegory, which is essentially a narrative, the simultaneity is impossible. “The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign [...] consists only in repetition [...] of a previous sign with which it can never coincide...allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, [...] it establishes its language in the void of temporal difference.”⁶⁵ Because there always is this temporal difference, a kind of gap between the word and object, language and the world, the statement and meaning do not refer to each other, even if they seem to do. They do not coincide and thus “meaning in language can never be fully determined or controlled.”⁶⁶ Allegory, then, “comes out of absence,”⁶⁷ it exists only on “the level of the signifiers”, its representations “lack reality.” Tambling points out that “if metaphor creates *resemblances*,” then “allegory creates difference and something new, because instead of asserting similarity there is taking away of meaning.”⁶⁸

⁶² Tambling 119.

⁶³ Tambling 130.

⁶⁴ Tambling 130.

⁶⁵ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 207.

⁶⁶ Procházka, LT 127.

⁶⁷ Tambling 129.

⁶⁸ Tambling 164.

Chapter II

The Minister's Black Veil

The Minister's Black veil is one of Hawthorne's most ambiguous stories. It takes place in the New England of the 1730's and 1740's, which was the time of the Great Awakening, when the Puritanism of the first ancestors was being revived once more. Hawthorne's story was a reading of those historical events, or, with respect to the research Hawthorne had done on the subject, "a re-reading of history, with all the connotations of violence involved in the concept of appropriative reading-again," transformation of history into "a parable presented in the form of a memorial record of a pseudo-historical event."⁶⁹ As Hillis Miller reminds us, it is "the text 'embedded' in history [as well as] history 'embedded' in the text."⁷⁰ Hawthorne captured the atmosphere and indicated the main issues of the time. He also outlined the psychological effects of the "awakened" Puritanism on the "unawakened" community as well as on the "awakened" Puritan himself, from the nineteenth-century perspective. And what is more, Hawthorne managed to puzzle generations of readers and critics by offering them rich material for interpretation, while investing the story with a kind of 'resistance' to interpretation. As Colacurcio points out, "the text itself seems to thwart interpretation." *The Minister's Black Veil* raises more questions than it answers.

I would like to specify the way in which I want to proceed. Since the main and most mysterious protagonist of the story (except for Parson Hooper) is his black veil, I shall focus on the veil as a sign and, later, as a symbol. First, I will examine the way in which the characters of the story "read" the veil as a sign. Second, I will try to interpret the veil as a symbol. As I proceed with my interpretation, I intend to appeal to the historical and ideological background of Puritanism and to the problems that are connected with it, which I think are important for understanding Hawthorne's work. At the same time, I will attempt to

⁶⁹ Miller 109.

⁷⁰ Miller 109-110.

have a look at the veil as a sign and symbol in terms of how it could be viewed by a modern reader.

My purpose here is to examine three of Hawthorne's stories, *The Minister's Black Veil*, *The Artist of the Beautiful* and *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of sign, symbol and allegory. I would like first to recall the definition of the terms "sign" and "symbol" and to specify my own understanding and use of those terms. The literary term 'sign' refers to a meaning-establishing-relationship between a specific object or phenomenon and the meaning signified by it. In my analysis, I will consider the veil to be the *signifier* and the meaning attached to it to be the *signified*.

I understand *sign* to be simpler than symbol because its meaning is rather specific. *Meaning* is an essential component of a sign, it cannot be separated from its form. *Symbol* (any word, or phrase, or other expression), on the other hand, is viewed as having values different from those of whatever is being symbolized. I think symbol is often used in connection with some deep problems, questions, or mysteries of human life or existence. Because whatever we want to say about these things, whenever we want to grasp their essence in words, we always feel they evade our efforts. The words seem to be clumsy and unsatisfactory, and we ascertain that we are unable to express ourselves as we wish. The only thing we can do to get closer to expressing what we mean is to look for other, indirect ways of "pointing" at the meaning. Derrida says that variety and richness of the world defy any attempts at *totalisation* through language. "At the very core of experience" there is something unrepresentable that creates an *absence*, and thus any sign we create to supplement the deficiency of a previous sign, its missing meaning, always brings a "surplus" of signification that remains unsignified."⁷¹ This *supplementarity* of signs is part of a process that can go on ad infinitum. It is an endless task, yet we must abide with it if we want to say anything at all about these things. Through the play of signs, producing suggestiveness of symbols, we can foreshadow the complexity of what we have in mind.

Last but not least, I will speak of the story in connection with allegory. I intend to look at the veil as an allegorical emblem and consider its aptitude to fulfil its allegorical function. I will also examine the story in terms of allegory of the older mode and in terms of what is understood by allegory in the present times. The concept of allegory has shifted most considerably in the modern times, as I have outlined in the previous chapter.

The story opens with a picture of "ordinary" life in an "ordinary" New England village on an "ordinary" Sabbath day in an extraordinary time. All the inhabitants of the village are

⁷¹ "Derrida and Deconstruction" 30th Aug. 2010
< <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm> >

gathering in front of the meetinghouse in preparation for a mass. We can see the bright faces of children tripping “merrily beside their parents,” or mimicking “a graver gait, in the conscious dignity of their Sunday clothes,” “spruce bachelors” looking “sidelong at the pretty maidens” who seem to be even prettier in the light of the Sabbath sunshine, and we can imagine the confusion and the pleasure of the maidens conscious of the sidelong glances, as well as the benevolence of the respectable elders who watch everything with an attentive eye. Though a picture of peace and serenity to us, it would certainly be a cause of alarm to the first Puritans. Hooper’s parishioners treat the Sabbath as “an innocent holiday, a thing Hawthorne believed it never was in the sterner seventeenth century.”⁷² However, the atmosphere of that day is disrupted when the Reverend Mr. Hooper appears. He looks as usual except for one thing that cannot be overlooked – a black veil, hanging over his face and entirely concealing his features, except his chin and mouth. The sight of him induced much amazement, wonder and perplexity. “Are you sure it is our parson?” and “I don’t like it ... He has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face” are the first reactions of his parishioners. Some of them think he has gone mad. The people hardly have any time to recover from the shock, when Parson Hooper is behind the pulpit, and ‘veil-to-face’ with them he starts the service. The combination of the veil and the service, especially the topic of the sermon, evoked the horror that accompanied almost every sight of the veil from then on. Although the sermon was the same as before in style and manner, “there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made it greatly the most powerful effort [...] from their pastor’s lips. [...] The subject had reference to secret sin and those sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest, [...] from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them.”(287) If Hooper wanted to allegorise the “secret sin” by putting on the veil, he failed to choose an appropriate allegorical emblem. Its descriptive value is too indefinite, it does not belong to any recognizable code, like the scarlet letter “A” standing for Adultery, or scales representing Justice. We learn that all the members of the congregation felt “as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought.” It certainly appeals to them emotionally, points them in the direction of something mysterious and menacing, which they are not able to “read.” However, they do understand that there is an ultimate infallible “reader” of everything, i.e. God. Thus the veil assumes symbolic rather than allegorical value, symbolizing the complicated Puritan relation to God and his inexpressible character. After the sermon, the confused people impolitely hurry out of the

⁷² Colacurcio 320.

church to shake off their uneasiness. Some walk home alone in “silent meditation,” some whisper in circles, some talk loudly and “profane” the Sabbath with “ostentatious laughter.” Some shake their heads and are sure they can solve the mystery of the veil, others claim there is not any mystery at all and try to give rational explanations. At the funeral of a young lady, the otherwise very inappropriate black veil became “an appropriate emblem” while at a wedding the veil “could portend nothing but evil.” The meaning of the veil-as-sign “seems to change from passage to passage without losing its connotative effects.”⁷³

From these situations and reactions of the people we can see various readings of the veil-as-sign: the veil as a sign of mental disease, madness, or as a sign of weakened eyes that are sensitive to light (to the ‘sober-minded’ parishioners who prefer scientific and rational explanations); as a sign of “something” terrible (to the superstitious and the “sensitive”). As a sign of mourning (at the funeral as well as in Hooper’s own words in his answer to Elisabeth when she asked him for explanation of his behaviour – though, of course, Hooper means a different kind of mourning from that of a funeral); as a prophetic sign of ominous future (at the wedding); as a sign of remorse for a particular crime committed by him (according to the rumour that spreads about Hooper as we and Hooper learn from Elisabeth, and as is Mr. Clark’s belief when Hooper refuses to unveil himself at his deathbed); as a sign of despair of human sinfulness in general (to Hooper himself and to us), or as “a sign of his commitment to that philosophy of human existence which [...] had motivated the ‘great migration’ in the first place.”⁷⁴

Before I move on to the examination of the veil as a symbol, I would like to try to find an answer to a question, which is, in my opinion, important in order to understand Hooper’s motives correctly - if that is possible at all. To someone who is not at all acquainted with the history of American Puritanism and with what it means to be a Puritan in the original sense of the word, or to one who decides to ignore such knowledge, veiling and isolating oneself for a lifetime may really seem to be nonsense, or solely a sign of some pathological obsession (though it is an obsession in a way) and nothing else. Although it can bring some new unexpected aspects to the interpretation of the veil, a little historical knowledge may throw new light on the understanding of the story. The question I want to ask is this: Why did Mr. Hooper all of a sudden put a veil on his face? He certainly must have had some dramatic, possibly drastic, but certainly decisive experience on the basis of which he resolved to do that. What was the experience?

⁷³ Vidan 113.

⁷⁴ Colacurcio 362.

I have already mentioned that the story takes place in the time of the Great Awakening. It may be deduced from the story's various references to historical figures and events (Hooper's election sermon during Governor Belcher's administration), the relaxed atmosphere of the Sabbath day, and the mention of conversions, which were not an unusual occurrence at the time. As Colacurcio shows in his book *The Province of Piety*, not only the name Hooper, but even such innocent-looking names as Old Squire Saunders, or "a young zealous divine," the Reverend Mr. Clark, are allusions to the significant personalities who promoted or opposed the strict orthodox Puritanism. The piety and ethos of their Puritan ancestors had evaporated by the time of the story. And although the Milford inhabitants preserve the original religious practises, they do not "seem to be expecting [...] a stiff, Hooker-like [...] sermon on the nature and effects of sin and their reaction to their minister's veil suggests that they have grown unaccustomed to unwonted displays of deep or eccentric piety."⁷⁵ Only the puritan "form," the moral norms, are present in their lives, not the essence of Puritanism, the piety and consciousness of depravity of all humans.

When some of Hooper's parishioners suggest that he put the veil on because his eyes were weakened by the midnight lamp and required some shade, they may be partly right, but in a sense they certainly would never think of. His eyes became sensitive to light because of the dark things he had seen in the depths of his soul. Because the experience he had – an experience that converted the thinking and lives of many of his contemporaries – was most probably something like what Thomas Hooker described in his sermon of the same name – *The True Sight of Sin*.

... a true sight of sin hath two conditions attending upon it, or it appears in two things: we must see sin (1) clearly; (2) convincingly – what it is in itself and what it is to us, not in the appearance and paint of it, but in the power of it; not to fathom it in the notion and conceit only, but to see it in application.⁷⁶

In order to discern the sin correctly it is necessary to survey one's whole life, to search one's own heart. To have a true sight of sin is to see "what it hath done, how it made havoc of [one's] peace and comfort, ruined and laid waste the very principles of reason and nature and morality" so that it makes him "a terror to himself." Before that one saw only "the history of sin, the relation of sin as it is mapped out and recorded, as a disease in the book or in a

⁷⁵ Colacurcio 321.

⁷⁶ Thomas Hooker, "A true sight of Sin." *The American Puritans*, ed. Perry Miller (New York: The Anchor Books, 1956) 153.

man's body," only "the report of it." Now he sees "the nature of it, the poison." He finds and feels "the disease in a man's self."⁷⁷ It is also important to know that the orthodox Puritans did not distinguish between sinning in deeds and sinning in thoughts. Both of these were simply sins and it made no difference whether they materialized, manifested externally or occurred only inwardly, in a form of intention or fantasy that was immediately repressed. Sin that is kept in secrecy from other people, or from one's own consciousness, can never be hidden from God. The result of this secrecy as well as sinfulness as such is separation from God and thus impossibility of salvation. Self-introspection is therefore necessary in order to recognize "the utter deceptiveness of ordinary moral appearances"⁷⁸ which is the first premise on the way to salvation.

So this is probably what happened to Mr. Hooper. He somehow conceived his own sinfulness as well as the fallenness of all human beings; he somehow revived the older insight into the problem of sin, "a kind of sinfulness so subtle and 'original' that only God and the Awakened Self can see it, but so pervasive as to effect a total alienation of the family of man."⁷⁹ So the veil that gives "a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things is only an after-image of his insight into the nature of some spiritual reality."⁸⁰ Hooper is convinced that since hidden depravity of men is incurable they never "really know each other", and that "even the closest intimates are, under the aspect of eternity, illusory."⁸¹ Thus he decided to put on a veil as a symbol by means of which he intended to dramatize his deepened consciousness and new awareness of "that essential separateness which [...] results from the sinful secrecy of the inner life."⁸² Because we know Hooper to be a preacher living and working for his community, we may conclude that he meant this symbolic gesture to "become the basis of some sort of a new spiritual unity."⁸³ However, it turns out to be the cause of many painful separations. And thus the veil becomes a symbol of human separation, and of isolation.

Hooper himself seems to be unwilling to explain his behaviour to the world around him. When we meet him for the first time he does not seem to notice the reactions of his parishioners. Yet, he is quite aware of them as can be seen from his "ambiguous" smile that "glimmers" and "lingers" on his lips in a strange contrast to the veil throughout the whole story. The smile shows he is aware of the impression he creates as well as it shows his

⁷⁷ Hooker 153.

⁷⁸ Colacurcio 359.

⁷⁹ Colacurcio 324.

⁸⁰ Colacurcio 322.

⁸¹ Colacurcio 382.

⁸² Colacurcio 334.

⁸³ Colacurcio 333.

acceptance of his own plight despite his suffering. And at the same time, his sad smile emphasizes the irony of the fact that people tremble at him alone; that they tremble at the awfulness of a mere piece of crape while they should tremble also at each other, because there is a much more real and terrible Black Veil over the heart of every human being - as he reveals in agitation on his deathbed.

Everybody is intrigued by what the meaning of the veil might be. Nevertheless, nobody ever gives or gets a clear and definite answer or explanation. Miller points out that “this absence is itself a major clue to the right reading of the story.”⁸⁴ He draws a parallel between the lack of signification of the veil and the ambiguity of its black colour. Of course, we could try to make something of the cultural associations of black with night, death, evil, but as the black veil is “blank, featureless”, it is “more the absence of signification than a clearly identifiable sign.”⁸⁵ Hooper’s act of veiling himself has such force precisely because of this. People have always been fascinated by things that are mysterious, especially when it concerns problems and question connected with the mystery of human existence and death itself, the things that are beyond the limits of our comprehensive abilities. If we recall Thomas Hooker’s definition of the true sight of sin, he explicitly says it belongs to that kind of experience which is unconveyable, and which must be experienced in its “power,” in its “application.” “Hooper’s act works because it is done in [...] the only way such an act can be effectively performed: in a silent ‘gesture’ that is not really a gesture, [...] by the proffering of a sign that is not really a sign, since its referent and its signification remain forever unverifiable.”⁸⁶ Thus the veil becomes a symbol of the unreadability and unverifiability of signs, and thus of impossibility of all reading. Even of our reading of the story.

Hillis Miller notes that all the communication and interchange of our ordinary lives relies on taking the “face” to be a “trustworthy sign of the subjectivity within, readable as an index to that subjectivity by those who know how to read.”⁸⁷ The moment Hooper appears with his veil over his face, all this readability is frozen, or suspended. We consider what we perceive of a person through our senses, such as a face, or a voice, to be “signs of the subjectivity of that person.”⁸⁸ We even use *prosopopoeia* to ascribe these familiar signs “to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead,” just to appropriate them, to ‘tailor’ them to our comprehension, to make them more like us so we can pretend to understand them. By putting

⁸⁴ Miller 67.

⁸⁵ Miller 67.

⁸⁶ Miller 96.

⁸⁷ Miller 76.

⁸⁸ Miller 74.

on the veil, Hooper has put “the originary literal version of this act of reading in doubt.”⁸⁹ The veil does the opposite of what *prosopopoeia* does. The veil takes the face away, it de-faces and disfigures. How we understand ourselves depends on how the others look “us in the face and affirm our sense of our own selfhood ... The veiled face of the other is a terrifying or ‘awful’ threat to that.”⁹⁰ When Father Hooper speaks about “a Black Veil” on every “visage,” he does not mean that there is some metaphorical veil over everybody’s face, but that the face itself is the veil. Thus “a veiled face is a veil over veil, a veiling of what is already veiled.”⁹¹ That might be what the double folding of Hooper’s veil signifies. As Miller points out, “the real face is not a valid sign but another de-facement.”⁹² He concludes that Hooper’s wearing the veil puts in question two essential assumptions that make society possible: “the assumption that a person’s face is the sign of selfhood and the accompanying assumption that this sign can in one or another way be read.”⁹³ As a result, all kinds of assumptions that we take for granted and that make our individual and social life possible can be challenged.

The consequences of Hooper’s decision to put on the veil were grave. All the normal activities of everyday life were disfigured. The idyllic Milford Sabbath day when people had no doubt they communicated ‘face to face’ with their neighbours and friends, was turned upside down. When the parson went to perform the funeral of the young maiden, he bent over her coffin and at that moment his veil hung from his forehead so if she opened her eyes, she would see the face behind the veil. A funeral guest who watched the scene claimed that “at the instant when the clergymen’s features were disclosed, the corpse had slightly shuddered.”⁹⁴ The atmosphere of the wedding he administered the same day was invested with the veil’s gloom, “a cloud seemed to have rolled duskily from beneath the veil, and dimmed the light of the candles,”⁹⁵ the bride’s countenance was of death-like paleness, the wedding knell was tolled, the communion wine was spilt, and the priest ran away from the wedding in horror of what he had seen when he had accidentally caught a glimpse of his face in a mirror. As Miller notes, a funeral becomes a resurrection and the wedding becomes a funeral under the influence of the veil.

The representatives of the congregation do not succeed in their mission to obtain an explanation of the ‘veil-business’ from Parson Hooper, because when they come to him, they just sit there “a considerable time, speechless, confused, and shrinking uneasily” from the

⁸⁹ Miller 74.

⁹⁰ Miller 76.

⁹¹ Miller 100.

⁹² Miller 94.

⁹³ Miller 92.

⁹⁴ Miller 289.

⁹⁵ Miller 290.

invisible eye of the parson. The veil seems to put “an abrupt stop to dialogue.”⁹⁶ It becomes a barrier to communication. Hooper’s ‘oath’ to wear it until the final ‘unveiling’, the Apocalypse, is “a permanent postponement of a return to open dialogue”, and thus the veil is a symbol of “perpetual deferral inextricably woven into the apocalyptic promise.”⁹⁷ Elisabeth, unlike the deputies, who did not find the courage to go to the problem directly, addresses the subject with “a direct simplicity” that makes “the task easier both for him and her.” She is the only person in the village who can take the veil for what it literally is. She can “discern nothing of the dreadful gloom that so overawed the multitude,” she sees “nothing terrible in this piece of crape, except that it hides a face which [she is] always glad to look upon.” She asks him to lay aside his veil first and then to explain why he had put it on. Simply, to reveal what is in his heart – quite a natural request of a lover. Yet, as Colacurcio points out, “beyond this she has [...] asked the symbolic Puritan mind to stand up and explain itself, in language ordinarily used by men.”⁹⁸ He answered her in a prophetic manner. “There is an hour to come [...] when we shall all cast aside our veils.” He tells her he intends to wear this veil till then. Here, as well as at the funeral, he is a prophet of the moment that will “snatch the veil from our faces.” The difference is that at the funeral he speaks of the “dreadful” hour, and to Elisabeth he describes it as something they should look forward to, because it will be the time when no veil will separate them anymore. So here the veil becomes a symbol of the division between time and eternity. What else separates us from that casting away the veil, what else separates us from eternity but “death”? But what can we know about it except its certainty and unavoidability? The veil is a symbol of death, but “death” in the sense of Paul de Man’s “displaced name for a linguistic predicament”. This “predicament” is the impossibility of reaching death through signs for it.”⁹⁹ “To be mortal is [...] to have no ascertainable beginning or end, [...] to be surrounded by what lies beyond the limits of experience.”¹⁰⁰ So maybe the horror people feel in presence of the veil is “the horror of inaccessibility of what is behind the veil.”¹⁰¹

Elisabeth is puzzled by her betrothed’s indirect and vague answers, as he “speaks in terms of ‘if’ and ‘perhaps.’”¹⁰² Elisabeth asks him to unveil his words, at least. He explains he is bound to wear this symbol all his life so that “no mortal eye can see it withdrawn,” that it must separate him from the world, and even from her. He suggests that it does not matter

⁹⁶ Miller 78.

⁹⁷ Miller 78.

⁹⁸ Colarurcio 342.

⁹⁹ Miller 117.

¹⁰⁰ Miller 117-118.

¹⁰¹ Miller 75.

¹⁰² Miller 69.

whether he hides his face for sorrow – for he, like all mortals, has sorrows dark enough to be typified by a black veil – or for secret sin – for what mortal might not do the same. His answer is not very satisfactory, yet he does what he can. Hooper probably feels that if he used elementary language, that anybody could comprehend, he would “falsify the truth that saving insight demands that we move from our ordinary level of perception and discourse.”¹⁰³ Elisabeth probably gets his point that there are some private sinful meanings that cannot be communicated, only suggested in a symbolic way. She realizes this fact after a period of meditative silence, and at that moment she begins to tremble because she can feel the terrors of it and, Colacurcio notes, in her trembling Hooper recognizes “a sign of his own complex feeling.” (More evidence that she was brought by him to a new level of spiritual awareness is her faithful presence at his deathbed, and the fact that she makes sure that his veil does not slip aside in case he is not able to do so himself.) Despite this, she is still willing to marry him on condition that he lifts the veil and lets her see his face for the last time. But from Hooper’s perspective, to do that but once would mean “to deny his gesture its absolute character.”¹⁰⁴ When he tells her that the veil must be between them here on earth, he actually refuses the possibility of true sharing, although he claims that the veil is only mortal, that it is not for eternity. He simply behaves in accordance with his persuasion that in “this life he cannot truly know – or be known by – another.”¹⁰⁵ He “has erected his premise of the absolute impossibility of intersubjectivity into a perfect defence against all relative attempts at literal self-revelation. He is trapped by the personal aspect of his prophesy, and transformed his own self into an abstraction ... he has turned himself into a sign.”¹⁰⁶

Despite her seeming ability to apprehend his meaning, Elisabeth does not become a convert in the full sense of the word. Even though he still wants her to accept him on the basis of the promise that it is only for the earthy life and that hereafter there will be no veil between them, he loses her. For her life is not entirely a matter of such absolutes as his. Elisabeth does not want to marry ‘a career of prophecy,’ a walking symbol; she wants to marry Hooper the man. Since he makes it impossible and he makes her see it, she refuses him despite his hysterical entreaties. This is not surprising at all. After the wedding incident with the wine – a symbol of union – we may expect this. Hooper’s spilling of the wine foreshadows his failure to establish an earthy communion with Elisabeth. At this point, the veil is confirmed as a symbol of separation in love.

¹⁰³ Colacurcio 342.

¹⁰⁴ Colacurcio 348.

¹⁰⁵ Colacurcio 339.

¹⁰⁶ Colacurcio 344.

Hooper loses all chance of communion when he loses Elisabeth. He becomes very isolated, he is alienated from all mankind. But, as Colacurcio suggests, perhaps he is “separated because no one else can come up to his standard of honesty or level of moral apprehension.” To judge by appearances that he now knows are deceptive is “to live by social compromises rather than by knowledge of reality as it stands in the mind of God. [...] he evidently refuses to live by any less absolute standard.”¹⁰⁷

The last attempt, and a rather an unfortunate one, to reveal the true meaning of the veil is made by “a young and zealous divine”, Mr. Clark. He reminds Hooper that now it is his last chance to explain the mystery, to put the veil aside since he has already proven his point, and thus to restore his reputation. When Hooper refuses, he is persuaded that there is some “horrible crime” hidden behind the veil, and so he totally abandons his first presumption of the symbolic meaning of the veil. It is clear that he does not understand Hooper’s point at all, despite the fact that he also is a minister who preaches about the sinfulness and depravity of all mankind. Clark is simply “a minister trapped within the linguistic confines of the literature of the Puritan tradition who slips into that special brand of moralism to which Puritanism always must repair whenever it loses touch with its own essential insight.”¹⁰⁸

However, we learn that the black veil had “the one desirable effect of making its wearer a very efficient clergyman.” He had an “awful power” over souls “in agony for sin; his gloom made him sympathize with all dark afflictions” so that he was wanted by the dying; he made converts. We learn that his converts claim they had been with him behind the black veil before he brought them to celestial light. Unlike him, they *were* brought to celestial light – they passed through all stages of conversion starting with self-introspection and ending in “the celestial light.” He, himself, really does not seem to proceed any further than the deep comprehension of human sinfulness. He gets somehow trapped within his sinful consciousness that prevents his self-development. So the veil may also figure as symbol of his entrapment. But now we move on to the ground that exceeds the problem of the true sight of sin.

The problem I have in mind is closely connected with the Puritan true sight of sin, but as it is being dealt with it grows so large that it transcends the frame of this story – it is the problem of the Self. As Puritan theory demanded that “the “true sight” should capture “sin” not in its “appearance and paint” but in its original motivating “power,” it set the moral consciousness on the alert for the Sinful Self Itself. The Puritan Self wanted to catch Itself not

¹⁰⁷ Colacurcio 316.

¹⁰⁸ Colacurcio 347.

in some particular sinful act or perception but in its very own sinful noumenon.”¹⁰⁹ Simply, the Self becomes the center of focus. So it was not only European humanism but also Protestantism, and especially Puritanism, which “shift[ed] the grounds of private identity [...] to the individual.”¹¹⁰ Yet, there is a great difference. While humanism celebrates the self as an image of God, Puritan self-introspection does not liberate the self but constricts it; “self-hood appears as a state to be overcome, obliterated; and identity is asserted through an act of submission to a transcendent absolute.”¹¹¹ So the Self was a barrier that separated a person from God. Sacvan Bercovitch calls this conflict, which was developed and amplified by the Puritans, “self-versus-God” conflict, and he adds that it became the motivating force of their activism. He suggests that it was language that created the sense of a self. He points out that most self-compounds were added to the language by the Puritans and most of them bore a negative meaning. Only words such as self-emptiness, self-trial, self-denial, self-abhorning verged on redemption. Their conception of “the soul’s pilgrimage” was a journey from “Satan, and ourselves” through “a holy despair in ourselves” towards God’s grace. The Puritans claimed that “it is self that the Scripture principally speaks against. [...] The very names of Self and Own, should sound in the watchful Christian ears as very terrible, wakening words, that are next to the names of sin and satan.”¹¹² Here lay an inner contradiction of Puritanism, or, as Bercovitch calls it, “the dilemma of Puritan identity.” They were concerned with the welfare of what they called their Own soul and at the same time they were trying to clear themselves of anything termed Own. So the advantage of self-knowledge is that it brings such terror that may “exorcise” one’s individuality. Yet, it somehow did not work “since every gesture against I-ness contains its own counter-gesture” and “the interminable-because-unresolved incantations of the “I” over itself [...] betray a consuming involvement with ‘me’ and ‘mine’ that resists disintegration.”¹¹³ Thus it was not Hooper’s veil that “threw the obscurity between him and the holy page as he read the Scriptures,” but the awareness of his sinfulness, and – a new aspect – the awareness of his Self. Colacurcio considers the Puritan invention of the Self to be “a self-entrapping structure. The thing to be overcome is very often not overcome; very often the self is less transcended than it is simply heightened or featured or frozen for continuous attention.”¹¹⁴ Hooper’s character does not

¹⁰⁹ Colacurcio 375.

¹¹⁰ Bercovitch 11.

¹¹¹ Bercovitch 13.

¹¹² Bercovitch 17.

¹¹³ Bercovitch 18.

¹¹⁴ Colacurcio 374.

seem to develop, his spiritual life does not grow, “his insight bears only repetition.”¹¹⁵ He is as if petrified in the middle of some important process, not able to go on. It seems that “the fruits of the Puritan consciousness of sin are identically that consciousness,” and the form of consciousness that is supposed to be preparatory in the Puritan ideology, begins and ends with itself.”¹¹⁶ In this sense the veil is a symbol of impossibility to grasp the Puritan consciousness and the self in its complexity. And, perhaps, it is a sign of some fatal flaw in the Puritan ideology by means of which it gradually undermines itself.

If we recall the wedding, where the appearance of veiled Hooper caused such a shock, Hooper’s inexplicable behaviour comes to our mind immediately: not only did he spill the sacramental wine, he also subsequently fled into the darkness. All this happened after he caught a glimpse of the black veil on his face in the mirror. Horror seized him, he shuddered, spilt the wine and fled. What did he see that he had not seen before? It must have been something horrible because it upset and terrified him so much that he lost control over himself. For Puritans, “the mirror radiated the divine image.” They did not seek their own reflection in it. “They felt that the less one saw of himself in the mirror, the better; and best of all was to cast no reflection at all, to disappear. Their mirror was scriptural: ‘We all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.’”¹¹⁷ A mirror used to be referred to as “the looking-glass of the law.”¹¹⁸ Only dirt disfigured that reflection. What was it that Mr. Hooper saw in the mirror that it made him disrupt the ceremony? Certainly it was not a divine image. No, it was a black veil covering most of a face he knew to be his own. The blackness of the veil reminded him of his sinfulness as well as that it is a sinfulness of his own Self; and perhaps it also reminded him of his inability to overcome this Self. “The appropriate result of this truthful look might fairly be described as ‘horror.’”¹¹⁹ And although this is probably not the first time he has had this experience, because of its suddenness and unexpectedness, he relives it once again. To see one’s self reflected in a mirror with an overwhelming feeling of terror really bespeaks a rather heavy case of obsession. Yet we must remember he is a Puritan, and events like this one were not rare at the time. Obsessions were not necessarily caused by a mental illness. It was rather that psychological disorders were often the result of them. The fact is that his “guarding of the outward appearance of the veil hiding his face becomes as important to him as the... fact of a

¹¹⁵ Colacurcio 330.

¹¹⁶ Colacurcio 330.

¹¹⁷ Bercovitch 14.

¹¹⁸ Colacurcio 340.

¹¹⁹ Colacurcio 340.

sinfulness”¹²⁰ and of impossibility of earthly communion. Another situation that supports the view that his psychological state has become obsessive might be his last hours, when it is only the veil that keeps him conscious; but I think that to speak of an obsession would be to reduce his message to something less than it really is. He might have been mistaken about certain things, but despite everything we somehow feel that a strong integrity penetrates his whole life, and that he is true to it even to the last moment.

On his deathbed, he is approaching the moment when “at the sound of the last trumpet,” all the veils will be unveiled, the moment when the apocalyptic promise will be kept. Hillis Miller writes that one of the characteristics of that promise is that it is “never fulfilled here and now. It is always a matter of imminence, of not quite yet.”¹²¹ When the young reverend Clark urges Hooper to take the veil off his face, which could be viewed as an anticipation, or a type of the apocalyptic unveiling after one dies, and which Father Hooper preached all his life so much about, he refuses with all his remaining energy. He insists on keeping his veil on even in his death. His refusal might be interpreted, according to Miller, as a possibility that this promise can never be fulfilled, as a possibility of the impossibility of unveiling.¹²² While we live, we can never experience our own death, and another’s death leaves us with no sign of what might be read as “an experience of the promised unveiling.”¹²³

When we think of Hooper alienating himself from all comforting human touch, of his inability or unwillingness to accede to any close earthly relationship, the fable’s final sentence speaking about “Mr. Hooper’s face [...] still [...] mouldering beneath the black veil inevitably implies a terrible thought that it may well turn out that what is impossible in his life is impossible absolutely”¹²⁴ and that, perhaps, there is no hereafter at all. And from this perspective the veil is not only a symbol of separation in life and love, but also in death. For in “possessing so absolutely the truth of the Self, he has somehow lost the Good of the Other.”¹²⁵ Hawthorne’s own message might be that although it is important for spiritual maturity to be well acquainted with Sin and the Self, it is a rather dangerous thing to look into one’s self too much, not to speak of making it a life-long ‘affair’. It is very important to go on, to go beyond this stage. Not into the “Puritan Community of Visible Saints,” or to the

¹²⁰ Colacurcio 331.

¹²¹ Miller 70.

¹²² Hillis Miller writes in *Hawthorne and History*: “The unveiling after death is expressed by the viewing of the face of the corpse in its open coffin or, in the earlier European culture, by the visibility of the open face of the tombstone effigy”(91).

¹²³ Miller 91.

¹²⁴ Colacurcio 350.

¹²⁵ Colacurcio 332.

“Millenium” or “Judgement”, but “into a world of personal and secular relationships.”¹²⁶ For although they can never be perfectly true, they still have significance and worth.

I would like to sum up my findings about the veil-as-symbol. It seems that there are three equally important levels on which the veil acquires its symbolic meaning. First level is that of human relationships. One of the reasons why Hooper puts on the veil is that he hopes to inspire others to inspect the depths of their consciousness and through this introspection achieve a higher spiritual state. Despite his effort to make the veil a symbol of a higher spiritual unity, he fails. As a result, he is misunderstood and dreaded, and though respected between the walls of his church, he is excluded from the warm fireplaces of his parishioners and the warmth of human affection. Thus on this level, the veil becomes a symbol of human separation and isolation in life. This meaning of the veil is enhanced by another interpretation, concerning Hooper’s statement that we cannot know each other in life because it is in our sinful nature to keep secrets from our beloved. The veil is also a symbol of separation in love, as Elisabeth refuses to marry him under the circumstances. The last sentence of Hawthorne’s story suggesting that his face may still be mouldering under the veil presents the veil as a symbol of definite separation in death.

The second level is the level of Puritan ideology. First, the veil is a symbol of division between time and eternity, as our true face will be revealed no sooner than at the moment of the last judgment. As the final unveiling has a character of something still to come, something postponed, the veil becomes a symbol of perpetual deferral in the Apocalyptic promise. In the context of Hooper’s conversion, which was supposed to take him from “the true sight of sin” to “celestial light,” but was never completed, as he was not able to overcome his sinful Self, which turns out to be an unsurpassable impediment on his way to grace, the veil is a symbol of entrapment. The Puritan concept of the Self as a barrier between God and man is itself contradictory, as the Self can never completely obliterate itself. In this respect, the veil becomes a symbol of the impossibility to grasp the Puritan consciousness and the self itself.

The third level relevant for symbols in this story is epistemological. I already spoke about the division between time and eternity, and as that which separates us from eternity is death, the veil becomes a symbol of death, but death in the sense of what we can possibly know about it, which is nothing. Thus the veil is a symbol of inaccessibility of what is behind the veil, outside the limits of our cognition. The lack of signification of the veil, the absence of a definite and univocal meaning on the level of sign makes the veil a symbol of unreadability and unverifiability of signs, and eventually of all reading.

¹²⁶ Colacurcio 385.

Now we come to the term *allegory*. Hawthorne was much criticised for his fondness of this literary device. Henry James reproached Hawthorne for the incompatibility of realism and allegory, which were two sides of the same coin in many of Hawthorne's stories and fables, and for "failing to make the material base," for example the piece of crape in *The Minister's Black Veil*, "the fit vehicle for the allegorical meaning it is meant to carry."¹²⁷ James held the view that Hawthorne had "a fatal tendency to fall into the abstraction of allegory."¹²⁸ To be thinking about allegory now depends on what particular theoretical approach we take. Some critics speak of *The Minister's Black Veil* as of an allegory of the human heart, a view which is in my opinion very questionable. Hawthorne's conception of allegory of the human heart as we can read it in his *American Notebooks* compares the human heart to a cavern:

At the entrance there is sunshine, and flowers growing about it. You step within, but a short distance, and begin to find yourself surrounded with a terrible gloom, and monsters of divers kinds; it seems like Hell itself. You are bewildered, and wander without hope. At last a light strikes upon you. You peep towards it, and find yourself in a region that seems, in some sort, to produce the flowers and sunny beauty of the entrance, but all perfect. These are the depths of the heart, or of human nature, bright and peaceful; the gloom and terror may lie deep; but deeper still is the eternal beauty."¹²⁹

This rather optimistic view of human nature or the heart does not correspond with the story I am concerned with at all. Even though we might suppose Hooper's heart before we meet him to remind of the sunny-flowery entrance place of Hawthorne's heart allegory, and we may surely discern the gloomy, hellish stage of wandering without hope, we miss the final and most important part of perfect eternal beauty, light and happiness. Hooper seems to be lost in this second stage, entrapped in the saddest of all prisons, his own heart. He even does not seem to expect anything else. At least not in this earthly existence.

To view the story as an allegory of Puritan Pilgrimage towards salvation is unsatisfactory as well. The final effect of this journey should be self-liberation, and it is clear that in Hooper's case it is rather self-entrapment. And the last sentence of the story speaking about the "awful" thought of "good Mr. Hooper's face" mouldering "beneath the Black Veil" only confirms this. If we want to speak of allegory in the sense of story at all, it is rather an

¹²⁷ Miller 54.

¹²⁸ Miller 51.

¹²⁹ Randal Stewart, ed., *The American Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne*. (New Haven, 1932) 98.

allegory of a struggle, as Bercovitch puts it, of “a Puritan Sisyphus, driven by self-loathing to Christ and forced back to himself by the recognition that his labors are an assertion of what he loathes.”¹³⁰

It appears that all attempts to find an allegory in the story somehow fall apart. What exactly Hawthorne means by allegory is not as easy to say as it seems. Hawthorne characterized this story as a “parable”. The dictionary definition reads that the term in the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition designated illustrative narrative. Interestingly, it is a translation of a Hebrew word for a metaphor, an enigmatic saying or an analogy. In Christian tradition, parable is a simple form of naive allegory, which tells a simple story and is more interested in the analogy drawn between a particular instance of human behaviour and human behaviour at large than in the actual story-telling. It usually has a mysterious tone and is useful for teaching spiritual values. More recent approaches point out that by means of a story, parable expresses a meaning that cannot be expressed in any other way, and that it actually is its own commentary. Hillis Miller¹³¹ notes that it is both, “the means of getting to” what is meant and “the blocking agent forbidding access.”¹³² The word of the title of the story, “the veil”, directs the reader at Apocalypse, as the final “unveiling” repeatedly pointed to as the story unwinds. Miller compares a genre of parable to that of apocalypse:

Parable as a genre is like apocalypse in promising such a revelation or illumination, while at the same time deferring it. [...] One difference between parable and apocalypse is that parable focuses more explicitly than apocalypse on the way the right reading of the parable itself causes a transformation, and

¹³⁰ Bercovitch 19.

¹³¹ Hillis Miller differentiates between “sacred” and “secular” parable, the former as “an article of faith,” the latter “as an article of doubt.” The former is based on the word of God, is spoken by the Word itself and translating itself into the language of human everyday life in order to be comprehensible, the latter is created by “all-too-human person.” The former arises from knowledge that pre-exists language, the latter exists only in “the realm created by language, existing and sustained in language.” Miller points out that a parabolic “likeness” is so “unlike” that interpretation and commentary is necessary, otherwise its meaning can “slip by the reader.” This interpretation becomes “a parable of a parable.” In this way all literature evokes a different story apart from the one they are telling. Miller also points out that parables have performative character, as they create something “into which we might cross over,” and as they “enact or perform, rather than simply name, that which they would try to communicate.” Though secular parables are products of “something that exists [...] only in the words, [...] this purely performative function is always contaminated by an implicit claim to be based on knowledge and to bring knowledge, even if that knowledge is the negative knowing of the apparent impossibility of ‘going over’” to the realm “across the border from any direct seeing, hearing or understanding.” J. Hillis Miller, “Parable and Performative in the Gospels and in Modern Literature,” *The Post Modern Bible Reader*, ed. D. Jobling, T. Pippin, and R. Schliefer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001) 128-141.

¹³² Miller 72.

on the way the almost universal failure to read the parable right is the sign of our distance from the final unveiling.¹³³

According to the apocalyptic promise, when we “have crossed over we will be able to see unveiled, that is, face to face”, and, accordingly, to understand a parable means “to cross over into [...] that unthinkable and unsayable realm where there is no longer any distinction between literal and parabolic language ... between history and allegory.”¹³⁴ Yet, is that ever possible?¹³⁵ Hawthorne’s completion of the story being “good Mr. Hooper’s face is dust; but awful is still the thought, that it mouldered beneath the black veil” banishes all hope of “the revelation promised by the initial designation of the story as a ‘parable.’”¹³⁶ It actually puts a question mark over the possibility of any kind of “unveiling.” Thus, as Hillis Miller aptly concludes, the story is “the indirect, veiled expression of the impossibility of expressing anything verifiable at all in parable except the impossibility of expressing anything verifiable.”¹³⁷

Or, the text might be considered to be “an allegory of *the* reader’s own situation in reading it,”¹³⁸ in trying to find some plausible and definite interpretation. The story as well as the veil resists all attempts at interpretation. So allegory in *The Minister’s Black Veil* may be defined as “a way of concealing meaning, removing familiar meanings,” making meaning “disappear behind a veil.”¹³⁹ Paul de Man writes in his *Allegories of Reading* that “allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read ... Allegories are always allegories of metaphor, and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading.”¹⁴⁰ In this light, *The Minister’s Black Veil* is definitely an allegory of the most modern kind, proving that Hawthorne’s “failure to express allegorical meaning [...] is his triumph. The distinction between realistic and allegorical narratives disappears in a sign that is at once blankly realistic and at the same time absolutely allegorical, that is, a sign for the failure of allegory.”¹⁴¹

¹³³ Miller 73.

¹³⁴ Miller 72.

¹³⁵ Hillis Miller writes in *Hawthorne and History* that “the initial hypothesis of an incompatibility between realism and allegory is erased by the actual reading. It is replaced by the proposition that both realism and allegory both come to the same thing. Both are enigmatic and indecipherable narrative expressions of outside that resides inside and contaminates that inside. This outside can by no procedures of language be given an other than enigmatic expression. The proposition is expressed, [...] as a simultaneous unmasking of the trope of prosopopeia and recognition of its ineluctable reaffirmation in the very terms used to unmask it, for example in the word unmask”(51).

¹³⁶ Miller 92.

¹³⁷ Miller 97.

¹³⁸ Miller 105.

¹³⁹ Tambling 164.

¹⁴⁰ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979) 205.

¹⁴¹ Miller 120.

Chapter III

The Artist of the Beautiful

In this chapter I would like to proceed in the same way as in the previous one, and examine the next story in terms of sign, its extensive symbolism, and allegory. Before I start, I would like to outline Hawthorne's conception of art, which, though never formulated in any kind of manifesto, was extracted from his works and comments in his journals by a number of critics. It is essential to be acquainted with the writer's conception, especially in the case of his story *The Artist of the Beautiful*, as story is concerned with the means and process of artistic creation, the lot of an artist, and the purport of art as such.

As *The minister's Black veil* is an expression of the Puritan strain of Hawthorne's thinking and art, *The Artist of the Beautiful* is an expression of "the art-life conflicts of Platonic Yankee New England."¹⁴² Though Hawthorne was a figure standing apart from the main stream of the American form of Romanticism, *Transcendentalism*, he could hardly help being influenced by its code, especially so as he breathed the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of 19th century New England, and knew its main protagonists on personal terms. Thus "this capital son of Salem, who all but began his career by working his way back into the mind of Puritanism, had embraced the identity of the man who lived among the Transcendentalists."¹⁴³ The main difference between them and Hawthorne was, metaphorically speaking, that while they stood in the sunlight and felt the joy and optimism that bright sun and blue sky always bring, Hawthorne, rather like his Hooper, preferred a somewhat darker vision, viewing the world from a shadow, protecting his eyes from being blinded, and thus seeing things which would otherwise be invisible. However, that rather describes his moral vision of the world, in which Hawthorne was even anti-Romantic, as some critics point out. As for the theory of art, though not wholly unconnected with the

¹⁴² Colacurcio 30.

¹⁴³ Colacurcio 31.

former, it is a different matter. It is a known fact that Hawthorne was an avid reader of European Romantic poetry and art theory, and German idealistic philosophy. R. J. Jacobson shows in his study of Hawthorne's understanding of art that he was an "eclectic," his "conception of creative process is a fusion of classic and romantic attitudes" by adoption of which he attempted "to validate his own imaginative insights."¹⁴⁴ Millicent Bell summed up Hawthorne's basic theoretical stance this way:

Hawthorne expresses the view that art is a presentation of the ideal that lies behind the curtain of the visible world. He seems to have given assent to the superior reality of spiritual over material events, regarding the world of facts as the "garb of external circumstances." The artist is able to glimpse this superior reality in moments of inspiration which are outside our ordinary experience. His vision is most intense at the moment of illumination; then, "like a fading coal," his knowledge of the truth of the spirit dims in the intellectual afterthought of conscious art. Hence, what is important in a work of art is not the superficialities that satisfy the external senses, but the hint of original inspiration. The imperfect sketch may be closer to the soul of the artist than the finished masterpiece. The true artist is a vessel of a higher power, and more often achieves his best results by a "wise passiveness" to these unseen influences than by deliberate efforts of the mind. The artistic act is "the bond of union with the Giver," a lesser manifestation of divine creativeness; its products have miraculous properties.¹⁴⁵

Suggestiveness of a work of art is its highest value. The immaterial idea is superior to the work of art itself. Bell remarks that it is "one of the amusing paradoxes of Transcendentalism that Emerson and Hawthorne, conscientious and expert stylists both, should give assent to the theory that made their own craft seem pointless."¹⁴⁶ It is the artist's insight, his imagination that transforms reality into art, and imagination is at the centre of Hawthorne's aesthetics. Gupta notes that Hawthorne was not interested in "a slavish imitation of nature" in his art but he sought "a substitution of nature," something that would stand for or suggest the true

¹⁴⁴ Richard J. Jacobson, *Hawthorne's Conception of the Creative Process* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1969) 10-12.

¹⁴⁵ Millicent Bell, *Hawthorne's View of the Artist* (New York: State University of New York, 1962) 51-52.

¹⁴⁶ Bell 42.

“imaginative or spiritual reality.”¹⁴⁷ For Hawthorne, “the process of idealisation” was absolutely essential to art: there would not be any art without it. It is spiritual reality that is more “real than material reality.”¹⁴⁸ Hawthorne himself writes in his story that the artist studies “nature with such tender love that she takes him to her intimacy, enabling him to reproduce her in landscapes that seen the reality of a better earth, and yet are but the truth of the very scenes around us, observed by the painter’s insight and interpreted for us by his skill.” Gupta adds that he “presents the universal beneath the particular, ‘the life within life’, the reality freed from accidents and irrelevancies”.¹⁴⁹ Imagination is not only “a beautifying and idealising faculty,”¹⁵⁰ but it also renders the artist capable of penetrating the depths of reality. Hawthorne’s conception of art is not torn from reality; to the contrary, imagination must keep balance between the spiritual truth and our everyday world. Symbolism is a way of “communication with the spiritual world.”¹⁵¹ The purpose of art is not only to please the eye but to serve humanity while keeping its autonomous status, and abiding by its own laws. Hawthorne believed that “the moral [...] should not be obtrusive” and should “be subsumed in the very texture of a work [of art].”¹⁵²

The central sign and symbol of the story is a “mechanical butterfly.” When we look at how the characters read the butterfly as a sign, we find that they are actually unable to read it. They are confused as to what it signifies. The people of the town generally consider everything that Owen Warland does outside the common behavioural patterns to be a sign of madness, a situation similar to Father Hooper’s. Hawthorne’s ironic comment on this says that resorting to “madness” is a very “efficacious [...] method of accounting for whatever lies beyond the world’s most ordinary scope...the same talisman had been applied to elucidation of all mysteries in the words or deeds of men who spoke or acted too wisely or to well.” When Peter Hovenden, who taught him the craft of clockmaking, visits Owen’s shop, and sees “a mechanical something, as delicate and minute as the system of butterfly’s anatomy.” His response is: “But what is this?” Despite his demeanour as a man of “a keen understanding” who “disbelieved so uncompromisingly in what he could not see,” and despite his being a clockmaker who understands the mechanics of his trade, he fails to see the “little chains, sand wheels, and paddles” otherwise than as a sign of witchcraft, a sign of “evil spirit.” He might intuitively feel that Owen is creating “an alternative, if not a threat, to [his]

¹⁴⁷ R.K. Gupta, “Hawthorne’s Theory of Art American Literature,” *American Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 3. Nov. 1968. p. 312. JSTOR. 30th July 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2923768> >

¹⁴⁸ Gupta 312.

¹⁴⁹ Bell 312.

¹⁵⁰ Bell 316.

¹⁵¹ Bell 319.

¹⁵² Bell 321.

rational order of the world.”¹⁵³ Everything that is outside the scope of his limited vision of the ticktacking world he classifies as either nonsense or witchcraft. The latter, ironically, undermines his image as a rational man. Annie asks Owen to explain the meaning of the butterfly to her, borrowing the word “whirligig” when referring to it, unable to find a more appropriate word, though she seemingly has a vague comprehension of his ambition. The last scene of the story does not illuminate the characters’ comprehension of the significance of the butterfly, either. Martin Procházka points out, that the “[erasure of] the difference between matter and spirit, mechanism and organism” in the final product of the butterfly “poses the problem of the reading of Owen’s work as a sign for the other characters.”¹⁵⁴ They certainly feel disbelief, wonder, even amazement, but they are not able to say much about it, because they still cannot make sense of it. It has such an effect on them exactly because they do not know its meaning. They see the material signifier, but they do not know what is signified, and thus the sign is a kind of a hieroglyph to them. According to Deleuze, a sign “signs” to us, affects us and fills us with “feelings that set it apart from other objects, and [...] makes us aware that there is much more to it than a simple presence at hand.”¹⁵⁵ This “absence of meaning” evokes various feelings that motivate us “to grasp its significance.”¹⁵⁶ Its significance “emerges in relation to what we already know, yet it assails us because it has no place in that knowledge.” It follows that such signs represent some other world with which we are not familiar. Only by our attention and search for meaning, our *apprenticeship* to the sign we can begin to understand the sign and find out more about that world too. The characters of the story in fact do not bother to find out the true significance of the butterfly. They cannot, or refuse to, admit existence of any other worlds that might be speaking to them through the signs. They attribute to the sign various meanings, but all of them are misreadings, for the sense of the butterfly escapes their grasp. Owen’s creating the butterfly is in fact a result of his apprenticeship to the signs of a world that imposed itself upon him. His final creation is the revelation of essence of the butterfly as his creation as well as his own spirit. Hovenden expresses a wish to touch the butterfly in order to “understand it better”. The effect of his physical proximity to the butterfly has deadening effects on it, as if symbolizing the evasion of meaning of the butterfly. When the child firmly grasps it in its flight, thus destroying it, the remaining “heap of glittering fragments” might signify the end of all possibility of meaning,

¹⁵³ Martin Procházka, “Mechanic?--Organic?: The Machines of Art in “The Artist of the Beautiful” *Transversals* (Prague: Literaria Pragensia 2008) 138.

¹⁵⁴ Procházka, TR 144.

¹⁵⁵ C. M. Drohan, *Toward a Material Concept of the Sign: The Semiotics of Gilles Deleuze*. p. 9. 26th Aug. 2010 < <http://www.egs.edu/pdfs/chris-drohan-material-concept-sign.pdf> >

¹⁵⁶ Drohan 11.

because what was mysterious and undecipherable while “alive” can hardly be read after it ceases to exist. Danforth’s: “That does beat all nature!” makes us believe for a second that he might be onto something, but his subsequent “But what then?” undeceives us. However, in Danforth’s admission: “That goes beyond me”, “the possibility of transcendence in the work of art is indicated, though only in an ironical form,”¹⁵⁷ as he immediately follows by saying that he sees more use in one blow of his hammer than in the years of work Owen “wasted” on the butterfly. Transcendence not in any ideological sense, but in the sense of the “transcendental nature of signs [which] consists in the fact that those who encounter them are forced to think about their meaning.”¹⁵⁸ Thus the reader of the story may view the butterfly “as a sign of something that must still be discovered, as an arbitrary beginning of the search for truth.”¹⁵⁹ For Owen, the butterfly is a sign of the Beautiful, of the fulfilment of the artistic achievement; but here the signs get so overloaded with the Romantic ideology that I would rather proceed to examining them as symbols.

It is common knowledge that the plot and the symbolism of the story are based on the tension between the typical polarities, such as craft and art, material and spiritual, understanding and imagination, time and eternity, practicality and beauty. Even today, after Derrida, we are in the grip of thinking patterns over two thousand year old, and we cannot help ourselves not to “feel” the validity of the hierarchical structure of these oppositions, and when reading the story we tend to apply a higher value to the second component of these opposing pairs. What keeps us in check is Hawthorne’s ironic narrative tone. It found its expression even in his choice of a “mechanical butterfly” as the centre around which the story revolves. Jacobson points out that Hawthorne came across Carlyle’s idea that the “organic and the mechanic could exist in balance”, and he might have meant the mechanical butterfly to be a symbol of possible harmony between the two, however short-lived. On the other hand, some critics view the combination of the words as itself suggestive of the irony which pervades the whole story. They view the opposition between the mechanical (or technological) and the organic as an oxymoron, expressing Hawthorne’s attitude to the Romantic theoretical absolutes. Throughout the whole story, Hawthorne works with symbols within the Romantic code but at the same time the undercurrent of his irony undermines or shifts their meanings.

When Owen Warland is introduced in the story, he is seen through his shop-window, bent over a delicate-looking mechanism. The first striking thing that signifies his being

¹⁵⁷ Procházka, TR 145.

¹⁵⁸ Procházka, TR 145.

¹⁵⁹ Procházka, TR 145.

different from an ordinary watchmaker is the fact that there is “a variety of watches, pinchbeck, silver, and one or two of gold, all with their faces turned from the streets, as if churlishly disinclined to inform the wayfarers what o’clock it was.”¹⁶⁰ Hovenden’s slighting remark assessing Owen’s practicality, saying that “he would turn the sun out of its orbit and derange the whole course of time,” is truly not very flattering to say of a watchmaker, but in the context of the story this criticism ironically turns to praise, because what more could an artist wish to hear from somebody who is close to an enemy. The same remark also testifies to how little Owen cared for “the measurement of time”, and thus for his trade, as “the medium of advancement and prosperity in this world or preparation for the next.” Time interests him only as an inevitable journey – a dangerous journey, as death can terminate it without recall – to the moment of fulfilment of his artistic ambitions. Through his art he is trying to grasp Beauty, the essence of which belongs to the ideal realm which is beyond the reach of time, eternal. Thus the watch or clockwork is a symbol of time in opposition to the butterfly, Owen’s final artistic product, which is a symbol of the eternal. Clockwork is a mechanism and as such a representation of the universe of logic, while the butterfly is an organism and a representation of the Romantic universe.¹⁶¹

The narrator tells us that Owen had always been “remarkable for a delicate ingenuity” and interest in the hidden mysteries of mechanism,” for “purposes of grace.” He developed “love of the beautiful, such as might have made him a poet, a painter, or a sculptor, [...] which was as completely refined from all material coarseness.” The author informs us that “the character of Owen’s mind was microscopic” in accordance with his physical frame, small delicate hands, and slender voice. By such a description he creates a certain image in his readers’ minds and must be aware of its unimpressive character, or why else would he feel obliged to remind us that “the beautiful idea has no relation to size.” Owen is an antipode of Danforth, who is described as possessing “a strong voice [...] of a bass viol”, stout figure, vast hands and an earthy strength. When he is introduced to us working in the forge “enveloped by the myriads of sparks which the strokes of his hammer scattered into the surrounding gloom,” he reminds us of the ancient blacksmith, God of fire, Vulcan. Owen is supposed to be a symbol of the spiritual, Robert Danforth a symbol of the earthly. Although it is Owen Warland with whom we are supposed to identify in the first place, we somehow feel prevented by Hawthorne’s subtle ironic manipulation. As Millicent Bell points out, a lot can be “accomplished by manipulating our conventional reaction to size” as we tend to “belittle’

¹⁶⁰ All quotations from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Artist of the Beautiful” follow 11 July 2010 < <http://www.online-literature.com/hawthorne/124/> >. As there are no page numbers, I shall insert none.

¹⁶¹ Bell 102.

what is physically diminutive.”¹⁶² Moreover, “the contrast of brute matter with spirit is insistently displayed as the contrast of ‘comely strength’ with weakness.” As a result, one cannot help thinking that Hawthorne felt, “like Annie, ‘a secret scorn – too secret, perhaps, for her own consciousness’ for the artist” and that “the artist’s destiny, as represented by the figure of Owen Warland, appears not so much tragic and important as merely pathetic.”¹⁶³ Owen himself feels ‘belittled’ in Danforth’s presence:

How strange it is [...] that all my musings, my purposes, my passion for the beautiful, my consciousness of power to create it, - a finer, more ethereal power, of which this earthy giant can have no conception, - all, all, look so vain and idle whenever my path is crossed by Robert Danforth! He would drive me mad were I to meet him too often. His hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me; but I, too, will be strong in my own way. I will not yield to him.

Immediately after this, Owen accidentally destroys his precious work, on which he had laboured for months. Why does Robert Danforth, who always likes to see Owen and whose behaviour towards him is always cordial, have such devastating effects on Owen? I think Hawthorne ‘inoculates’ Owen with an unconscious doubt, which he himself might have shared with his fictional character, concerning the sense of art. Bell notes that the relation between art and “the world of common things” troubled Hawthorne. He found it controversial and tried to contemplate the way in which the reconciliation of the two is possible. As she observes, “for Hawthorne, art was not its own justification; all his life he would resolutely call upon himself to put his writing aside for better-salaried work—chiefly because he had to, but also [...] because he suspected the morality of self-absorbed artistic creativity.”¹⁶⁴

Another possible explanation of Owen’s dread of what Danforth represents has something to do with his different conception of technology. He intuitively understands the term more in its original sense, coming from the ancient Greek thought. The word *technology* is derived from the Greek *technikon*, related to the word *techne*, which refers not only to the techniques of manufacturing but to the techniques of mind and of the arts. Heidegger says that *techne* as “a kind of knowing... ‘expertise,’ which we generally understand as more than a set

¹⁶² Bell 104.

¹⁶³ Bell 105.

¹⁶⁴ Bell also reminds us that “in the Salem Custom House [Hawthorne] was still prey to [...] doubts, imagining the disapprobation of his Puritan ancestors for the foolery of storytelling, and taxing himself for failing to see the spirit beneath the surface of his surroundings at the Custom House”(201-202).

of practical skills.”¹⁶⁵ The essence of technology has nothing to do with instrumentality, it is “revealing,” a way of coming to existence, a way in which nature, as the source of being, speaks to us and lets us know her, and in knowing her she lets us know the true and the beautiful. Thus *techne* is kind of *poiesis*, a way in which the non-present, or what is concealed, is brought forth into presence, the unconcealment. Artist as well as craftsman participate in this “bringing-forth,” through their art or craft they reveal that which has been “on its way to existence.” Art was “a unifying force that brought together religious, political, and social life,”¹⁶⁶ not a separated sphere. However, common views of technology in terms of instrumentality are based on causality, as “a means to an end,”¹⁶⁷ utilizing everything and everybody necessary. Danforth’s repetitive, unimaginative, dirty and brute physical work reminds Owen of “the stiff and regular processes” and “utilitarian coarseness” of heavy machinery. He can surely comprehend their usefulness, but when confronted with them, he turns pale and grows sick at their monstrosity and unnaturalness. It may be attributed either to his artistic sensibility in the sense of weakness, or his artistic sensibility in the sense of a deeper intuitive insight, which enables the reader to anticipate what impact dehumanised technology would have on the “spiritual element” that Owen speaks of and on the way people relate to the world.

In Hovenden’s case, it is much easier to understand the impression and effects his presence has on Owen. “There was nothing so antipodal to his nature as this man’s cold, unimaginative sagacity, by contact with which everything was converted into a dream except the densest matter of the physical world. Owen groaned in spirit and prayed fervently to be delivered from him.” Hovenden is the representative of those who believe in only what they can see, who have no understanding or patience for anything that they cannot touch. He belongs to that type of men “whose spiritual part dies out of them and leaves the grosser understanding to assimilate them more and more to the things of which alone it can take cognizance.” The only merit he acknowledges is practicality. He speaks his satisfaction when he sees the blacksmith at work in the forge by saying that he “spends his labour upon a reality,” and that it is “a good and wholesome thing to depend upon main strength and reality.” He openly shows his “contempt and indignation” for Owen’s artistic aspirations, referring to them as “nonsensical trash about the beautiful.” No wonder he caused Owen’s

¹⁶⁵ Guide to “The Question Concerning Technology” as it appears in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row, 1977. 27th Aug. 2020

< <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~zuern/demo/heidegger/guide4.html> >

¹⁶⁶ see Guide

¹⁶⁷ The Question Concerning Technology 17th Aug. 2010

< <http://www.wright.edu/cola/Dept/PHL/Class/P.Internet/PITexts/QCT.html> >

heart to shrink. In Hovenden's world, Owen and his butterfly are annihilated, their existence is deprived of any meaning and sense. Hovenden is Owen's "evil spirit." He is a symbol of sceptical materialism, which contrasts to Owen's idealism. He is a representative of that type of thinking, characteristic of certain aspects of technology, which has its roots in the "human drive for a 'precise' and 'scientific' knowledge of the world, which wants "to enclose all of our experiences of the world within the categories of understanding – mathematical equations, physical laws, sets of classifications – that we can control."¹⁶⁸ The synthesis of what Danforth and Hovenden represent anticipates this negative aspect of a technological age, in which most of the work hitherto performed by people is taken over by machines and which is defined by the development of the physical sciences, physics in particular. Heidegger stresses the point that the general belief in dependence of technology on science is illusory. In fact, "the essence of technology precedes the historical emergence of both modern sciences and modern machine production."¹⁶⁹ This approach cuts people off from the mystery of being and puts them out of touch with themselves, as they are a part of nature (meaning Being) as well, thus leaving them with a sense of emptiness. This emptiness is what scares Owen, though his grasp of it is rather intuitive than rational. Danforth and Hovenden are the representatives of the utilitarian values and approach to the world, while Owen's approach is aesthetic, poetic.

When confronted with either Danforth or Hovenden, the ideas "which grow up within the imagination and appear so lovely to it and of a value beyond whatever men call valuable, are exposed to be shattered [...] by contact with the practical." Therefore it is nothing but self-reliance that sustains the ideal artist in the "incredulous world". He must "posses a force of character that seems hardly compatible with its delicacy; he must keep his faith in himself" facing the world's indifference, disbelief, even mockery and contempt. He must be "his own sole principle" and "stand up against mankind", as it is the case with Hovenden, and occasionally even to stand up against himself and his self-doubt, as it happens when Owen is confronted with Danforth.

Hawthorne depicted the problem he himself and majority of the aspiring artists had to face in American society of the time, where "practical life was divorced from the creative impulse and unilluminated by it" and "no honorable and necessary function for art" was provided.¹⁷⁰ The inevitable consequence of this situation for an artist is a keen sense of isolation and loneliness. "To persons whose pursuits are insulated from the common business of life – who are either in advance of mankind or apart from it – there often comes a sensation

¹⁶⁸ see Guide.

¹⁶⁹ see Guide.

¹⁷⁰ Bell 202.

of moral cold that makes the spirit shiver.” The only person who could have soothed this acute sense of “aloneness,” as Hawthorne suggests, was Annie, had he been able “to gain the sympathy of the only being he loved.” But did he actually love “her”? He rather loves the Annie who is a creation of his own imagination, for in her lovely physical frame he sees an expression of the ideal beauty, she is “the visible shape in which the spiritual power that he worshipped [...] was made manifest to him.” He ascribes to her the qualities her earthly version may not have at all. He judges her according to her relation to his art and her understanding of it. When she eagerly touches his unfinished butterfly mechanism and accidentally destroys it, his reaction is so fierce that it is frightening. In a second his opinion of her is the opposite of what it was before.

“Go, Annie,” murmured he; “I have deceived myself... I yearned for sympathy, and thought, and fancied, and dreamed that you might give it to me; but you lack the talisman, Annie, that should admit you to my secrets. That touch has undone the toil of months and the thought of a lifetime. It was not your fault, Annie; but you have ruined me!”

However, he soon forgets the incident and persists “in connecting all his dreams of artistic success with Annie’s image. Hawthorne writes that if Owen had married Annie and got to know her as an ordinary woman, “the disappointment might have driven him back, with concentrated energy, upon his sole remaining object,” which I dare to doubt, because it could have driven him back to either to his drinking or the artistic stupor as well. “On the other hand, had he found Annie what he fancied, his lot would have been so rich in beauty that out of its mere redundancy he might have wrought the beautiful into many a worthier type than he had toiled for.” Bell point out that here it is not quite clear what Hawthorne means by “worthier type”, whether it concerns “the medium of art, [or] life.”¹⁷¹ Despite the fact that Owen suffers deeply when he learns of Annie’s engagement and despite the inability to proceed with his artistic work it temporarily leads him to, we know that the things we imagine we want are not always the things we really want. Humans have a great propensity to self-delusion. Owen never does anything to win the real Annie, so I infer that he is quite happy with the Annie of his imaginings, as there is no danger of her ever disappointing him, and by keeping distance from the real Annie he avoids any actual confrontation of the two of them. Fogle points out that although Hawthorne wrote in a letter that “love awakens to life,” it also

¹⁷¹ Bell 109.

binds, and therefore “love would be inappropriate to Warland, symbol of the free and soaring, whose triumph results from accepting his isolation and from perceiving the difference between the actual and the longed-for ideal.”¹⁷² He also notices that Owen Warland is quite a unique figure in the context of Hawthornian artists. Unlike the others, who meddle with “human psychology,” he is exempt from “violating the human heart, or losing respect of the human spirit,” due to “the peculiar nature of his art.”¹⁷³ He is an “unfallen nature in a fallen world,” as Fogle puts it, yet precisely because he has no experience with sin (his drinking cannot be considered a sin as it hurts nobody) and human love, which in Hawthorne’s world are essential prerequisites for true wisdom and insight, he is separated from the core of life, and so is his art.

Eventually it is the butterfly, the central symbol of the story, which is more important in Owen’s life than Annie. As Elder points out, there are four kinds of butterflies in the story.¹⁷⁴ The actual butterflies, “creatures of the sunshine” that Owen watched in his wonderings in woods and fields, which were the symbols of “the ideal which Nature has promised to herself in all her creatures, but has never taken pains to realize,” but which inspired Owen as messengers of the ideal world with a “mysterious mission for the artist,” which had the power to “recall him to the pure, ideal life”, and inspire him again “with the former purpose of his life” at the times of crises - be it his sceptical phase when he tried to devote himself to the clock-making and suppressed his true personality, his vinous period, or the time of, as Hawthorne puts it, the “vegetable existence,” when he “ceased to be an inhabitant of the better sphere that lies unseen around us,” when he lost “his faith in the invisible world,” and put his soul to sleep. Then there is “Nature’s ideal butterfly which he represented by his creation and to which his idea came nearer and nearer as his spirit mounted from earth to cloud and from cloud to celestial atmosphere.”¹⁷⁵ The third kind of butterfly is the butterfly he envisaged in his imagination and to which he “felt the impulse to give external reality” in the form of the fourth kind of butterfly, the mechanical butterfly he eventually created.¹⁷⁶ Owen Warland “longs to explore the potentiality of artistic creation, its possibility to attain an ideal or beauty which is not present in nature. This desire clearly goes beyond the limits of mimesis: if there is something to be ‘imitated’, it is the *potentiality* never

¹⁷² Richard H. Fogle, “The Artist of the Beautiful in Hawthorne,” *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A.N.Kaul. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966) 110.

¹⁷³ Fogle 110.

¹⁷⁴ Majorjie J. Elder, *Nathaniel Hawthorne Transcendental Symbolist* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1969) 67.

¹⁷⁵ Elder 67.

¹⁷⁶ Elder writes that “Hawthorne’s butterflies move up the Platonic scale of being in true Emersonian Transcendental style. The butterfly symbol of Artist Owen Warland is a moving, living organic symbol”(67).

realized in nature.”¹⁷⁷ The last scene of the story when Annie opens the box she receives as her wedding gift is described in this way:

... a butterfly fluttered forth, and, alighting on her finger’s tip, sat waving the ample magnificence of its purple and gold-speckled wings, as if in prelude to a flight. It is impossible to express by words the glory, the splendor, the delicate gorgeousness which were softened into the beauty of its object. Nature’s ideal butterfly was here realized in all its perfection; not in the pattern of such faded insects as flit among earthly flowers, but those which hover across the meads of paradise for child-angels and the spirits of departed infants to desport themselves with. The rich down was visible upon its wings; the lustre of its eyes seemed instinct with spirit. The firelight glimmered around this wonder – the candles gleamed upon it; but it glistened apparently by its own radiance, and illuminated the finger and outstretched hand on which it rested with a white gleam like that of precious stones in its perfect beauty, the consideration of size was entirely lost. Had its wings overreached the firmament, the mind could not have been more filled or satisfied.

The fluttering movements are so lifelike nobody present is willing to believe it is not alive. Annie insists repeatedly that Owen tells her whether it is “a living creature” or “a piece of wondrous mechanism.” All the three characters of the story failed to read the butterfly as a sign, as I have already mentioned, so they could hardly be expected to be able to attribute any symbolic value to the butterfly. Newberry points out that the nature of butterfly “defies conceptualisation, let alone linguistic formulation,” it is neither “a product” nor a “*Being*”; it “somehow transcends the would-be status as a representation because, when it finally takes wing, it cannot be distinguished from the object it putatively represents.”¹⁷⁸ Owen explains in an indirect way, that it might “be said to possess life, for it absorbed my own being into itself; and in the secret of that butterfly, and in its beauty, - which is not merely outward, but deep as its whole system, - is represented the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful!” Thus the butterfly is a symbol of art, of the realm of things that emerge from between the material and the spiritual, between an ideal and reality. So the

¹⁷⁷ Procházka, TR 147-148.

¹⁷⁸ Frederick Newberry, “‘The Artist of the Beautiful’: Crossing the Transcendent Divine in Hawthorne’s Fiction.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Jan. 1995, p. 87. JSTOR. 30th July 2010.
< <http://jstor.org/stable/2933874> >

butterfly is not a symbol of the unity of the mechanical and the organic, because the difference between the two actually ceases to exist. The butterfly can also be a symbol of the independent existence that the creation acquires once it has been completed. It “flies” in its own course and its author can hardly have any control over its faith. “Thou hast gone forth out of thy master’s heart. There is no return for thee.”

Owen’s fortune, “good or ill,” is to fulfil his artistic ambition. Yet, in his accomplishment Owen feels that “this butterfly is not now to me what it was when I beheld it afar off in the daydreams of my youth.” This may explain the composure in which he accepts the destruction of his butterfly by the child’s hand, which is in such contrast with his previous responses to such a “disaster”.

And as for Owen Warland, he looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life’s labor, and which was yet no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.

Thus the butterfly is a finite symbol an infinite artistic pursuit, which is also symbolized in the much more durable carved ebony of the jewel box “representing a boy in pursuit of a butterfly.” The butterfly as well as the engraved box become symbols of the pursuit of something transcending the mundane in our lives, which is even more relevant in today’s world, as there is no transcendental *signified* to which, or to whom, we could relate. Maybe Owen has come to understand that what the child did to his beautiful butterfly was nothing else but what he did to the ideal butterfly, for he chased “the flitting mystery beyond the verge of its ethereal domain” and crushed “its frail being in seizing it with a material grasp.” Maybe he sees now that it is “the inner enjoyment of the beautiful” that is of utmost importance. “Since the most finished work of art is but an imperfect copy of the artist’s vision, the vision itself is much more precious than the physical form in which it is embodied.”¹⁷⁹ Yet, if the objects of creation do not matter as much as the search and ability to create, then why are the ways of the world such that “the prophet dies and the man of torpid heart and sluggish brain lives on?” If a work of art is either unfinished by the untimely death of the artist, or if it is destroyed, will it be completed or recreated in “the hues of heaven?” Hawthorne answers the

¹⁷⁹ Gupta 323.

question he proposed by saying that it is highly probable that “such [...] designs will be perfected nowhere. This so-frequent abortion of man’s dearest projects must be taken as a proof that the deeds on earth, however etherealised by piety or genius, are without value, except as exercises and manifestations of spirit.” Then Danforth’s question, “But what then?” that he asks while pondering the miraculous butterfly, takes on a completely new level of validity. It might be Owen who eventually answers the question about the sense of art when he is presenting Annie with his gift: “it is as we go onward in life, when objects begin to lose their freshness of hue and our souls their delicacy of perception, that the spirit of beauty is most needed.” According to Frederick Newberry, Owen advises Annie to understand his gift “as an agent of mortal redemption from overreliance on a rationalist psychology.”¹⁸⁰ He fully understands “the salvific need to integrate childlikeness and imagination with adulthood and rationality.”¹⁸¹ How ironic, then, that his gift is ruined by the one to whose perception of the world is at its freshest and whose “capacity for wonder” is the greatest. The Child, which is generally revered in Romanticism for its innocence, imagination and affinity with nature, becomes the means of destruction here. Moreover, this particular child is distinguished by its “sharp and shrewd expression” and “sagacious observation,” which actually mocks the Romantic notion of a child and thus is of an anti-Romantic nature. This child could also be an expression of Hawthorne’s concern for the future of art at the hands of the little Danforths’ generation and type.

Danforth tells Owen at one point: “No child yours will have iron joints or sinews.” In the end, it is himself whom this applies to. This “man of iron, [...] thoroughly warmed and attempered by domestic influences” and Annie, now a matron who acquired some of her husband’s sturdiness for a change, produced “a little personage who had come mysteriously out of the infinite ... moulded out of the densest substance which earth could supply.” By becoming a mother Annie became “the interpreter between strength and beauty” as Owen believed her to be, though of a completely different kind than he had had in mind. Her eyes are admiringly fixed not upon the butterfly but upon her own child, and, as Hawthorne points out, “with a good reason.” Here Hawthorne again undermines Owen’s achievement towards which the whole developmental structure of the story was pointing by putting it in doubt when confronting it with the child as a creation of love, “whose claim to supernal connection is as good as the Artist’s,”¹⁸² and who is an incarnation “so sturdy and real” as to make the butterfly suddenly seem depthless and superficial.

¹⁸⁰ Newberry 91.

¹⁸¹ Newberry 91.

¹⁸² Bell 106.

Finally, let me discuss the story in terms of allegory. *The Artist of the Beautiful* is generally viewed as a masterful allegory of art. That is a given almost everybody seems to agree upon. It is described as an “aesthetic *Pilgrim’s Progress*”, in which “the artist journeys his difficult road toward salvation, struggling [...] until he reaches the Heavenly City prepared for him.”¹⁸³ Other critics consider the story to be an allegory of the process of the artist’s development and the building of the mechanism as a “metamorphosis of a butterfly,” in which “the last stage of transformation corresponds to the achievement of the artist’s pursuits and appearing of a real artist of the beautiful.”¹⁸⁴ Newberry adds that “the appearance of the butterfly in the last scene with all the transformative possibilities [it suggests] coincides with a noticeable change in Owen.”¹⁸⁵ He also points out that though the metamorphosis itself is not directly mentioned in the text, it is present in the absence of its articulation. The “life-story” of the butterfly might also be viewed as an allegory of the fate of all carefully built and constructed ideological systems, as they all end up in ruins and survive only in fragments.

I would like to point out a parallel between allegory and irony. One of the ways in which we could characterize allegory is that “it speaks one thing while implying something else.”¹⁸⁶ The same definition can be applied to irony. Thus it can be said that irony is “a form of allegorical speech.”¹⁸⁷ While reading the story, we have witnessed repeatedly that Hawthorne makes signs take on symbolic meanings and then employs them in the service of allegory. His symbols are within the conventions of the Romantic code, but the way he works with them, the tone he uses and the tensions he creates result in the exposure of the “hidden weaknesses,”¹⁸⁸ the gaps and margins of the Romantic ideology. Thus Hawthorne as well as his text in itself, maybe even beyond the author’s conscious intention, undermine the absolute status of a transcendental Romantic ideology. And it is irony in the first place that enables him to be so effective.

Irony, once acknowledged as a possibility by the reader of a text, never discharges its literary function, so to speak. Once introduced, irony will always color the proceedings: once we are skeptical, we are sceptical even about the lifting of the sceptical attitude. Irony *globally* undercuts the conditions for the surface intelligibility of the text. Since the very idea of a

¹⁸³ Fogle 99.

¹⁸⁴ 1st Aug. 2010 < <http://www.kushiro-ct.ac.jp/library/kiyo/kiyo37/hayasiartist37.pdf> >

¹⁸⁵ Newberry 90.

¹⁸⁶ Tambling 6.

¹⁸⁷ Tambling 21.

¹⁸⁸ Bell 13.

text requires that texts have real surface integrity, according to de Man, irony is the subversive trope par excellence – “a trope of tropes.”¹⁸⁹

It has “destructive force”. According to de Man, “irony disrupts, undoes [...] the apparent coherence and systematism within a narrative.”¹⁹⁰ Tambling sums up that in irony, “the text’s discontinuity with itself is constantly being advertised, so the text is [...] disconnected.”¹⁹¹ “The text itself puts in question its own modes of discursive production and articulation.”¹⁹² In this respect, Hawthorne is a very modern writer and he anticipates, perhaps unconsciously, the theoretical problems of the successive centuries.

Hawthorne’s story may also be productive and inspiring for today’s reader in the sense that it may help us understand our lives and the role of art in them. This understanding emerges especially from the climactic moment of the story when Owen opens the box and lets the butterfly fly out we witness a “‘worldmaking’ activity by which the reality issues from the constructive art of fiction... the transcendent instant of art.”¹⁹³ It opens “a new realm of unrestricted possibilities” which seems “as real as the external reality it critiques and upon which it referentially depends for its difference and point of departure.”¹⁹⁴ Newberry remarks that although the characters “may not realize that their imaginations are at play in perceiving and sustaining the life of the butterfly,” and although they are not aware of the extent into which “the fictive is [...] a part of their perceptions of the (real) world as well as it is of Owen’s,” we, the readers, are.¹⁹⁵ Like many of Hawthorne’s characters, moments and situations come when we are forced to step onto unknown ground where we cannot rely on our previous experience and instead we have to make use of our imagination, which allows us, in return, to “re-enter the everyday world prepared to create it anew.” It is this moment of “re-creation” when “the representation of the world we might know transgresses any semblance of mimetic representation and invites us into the imaginary, into the province of worldmaking from which reality is ever and always constructed” that *The Artist of the Beautiful* points to.¹⁹⁶ And, perhaps, the story of Owen Warland can be interpreted as a

¹⁸⁹ F.L. Rush, [untitled review on Paul de Man : *Aesthetic Ideology*.] *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 4, Autumn 1997. JSTOR. 5th Aug 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/430942> >

¹⁹⁰ Tambling 134.

¹⁹¹ Tambling 132.

¹⁹² Dan O’Hara, [untitled review on Jonathan Culler: *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*] *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 42, No. 3. Spring 1984. JSTOR 5th Aug. 2010. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/429714> >

¹⁹³ Newberry 81.

¹⁹⁴ Newberry 83.

¹⁹⁵ Newberry 90.

¹⁹⁶ Newberry 96.

reminder of the fact that artistic or poetic orientation to the world, which incorporates science and technology, opens a whole new rich world for us.

Chapter IV

The Scarlet Letter

In this chapter I would like to follow a similar course as I did in the previous chapter. First I shall say a few words about the genre of romance in general, then I intend to consider the work in terms of its signs, its extensive and complex symbolism, and last but not least, allegory.

The Scarlet Letter is probably the most famous and most important of Hawthorne's works. It is a romance, a specific genre that Hawthorne himself characterizes in this way:

When a writer calls his work a Romance, [...] he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former – while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.¹⁹⁷

John Stubbs defines romance as a purposeful literary form intended to mediate the emotional and intellectual experience to the reader in a “much more ordered, much more arranged [way] than the reader's chaotic meeting with reality.”¹⁹⁸ The “latitude” that Hawthorne mentions is “the writer's way of gaining a perspective,” the purpose of which is

¹⁹⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of Seven Gables* 15th Aug. 2010 < <http://biblio.org/eldritch/nh/sgpf/html> >

¹⁹⁸ John Stubbs, “‘The Scarlet Letter’: The Theory of Romance and the Use of the New England Situation,” *PMLA*, Vol. 83, No. 5, Oct. 1968. JSTOR. 18th Aug. 2010.< <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1261317> >

“structured complexity.”¹⁹⁹ Stubbs sums up the opposites which help romancers to get and maintain the artistic distance: “verisimilitude and ideality; the natural and the marvelous; and history and fiction,” which are definitely to be found in the form of Hawthorne’s romance. In *The Custom House*, the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne depicts “moonlight,” which is a metaphor for imagination, as “a medium most suitable” to spiritualize reality, to put the real and the ideal in harmony. He also prepares the atmosphere into which the reader is about to enter. The letter “A” is also introduced in the preface. The author ponders over a piece of “fine red cloth, much worn and faded.”

It had been wrought, as was easy to perceive, with wonderful skill of needlework; and the stitch [...] gives evidence of a now forgotten art, not to be recovered even by the process of picking up the threads. This rag of scarlet cloth, - for time, and wear, and a sacrilegious moth, had reduced it to little other than a rag, - on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A. [...] It had been intended, there could be no doubt, as an ornamental article of dress; but how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle [...] I saw little hope of resolving. And yet it strangely interested me. My eyes fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter, and would not turn aside. Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind.²⁰⁰

Thus in the preface Hawthorne “typifie[s] the process from which his art arose by describing what he found in the symbolical letter A.”²⁰¹ Feidelson notes that “this internal act of perception effectually ‘opens’ an imaginative reality” and the fictional world is “generated by contemplation of the symbol.”²⁰² However, the meanings are created in a way that leaves little of the act of interpretation for the reader, as the interpretation itself is “the essence of the book’s dramatic structure.” Feidelson writes that “Hawthorne’s subject is not only the meaning of adultery but also meaning in general; not only what the focal symbol means but also how it gains significance” and that “the symbolistic method is inherent in the subject, just as the

¹⁹⁹ Stubbs 1440.

²⁰⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Great Short Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* ed. Frederick Crews (New York: Harper&Row 1967) 29.

²⁰¹ Matthiessen 243.

²⁰² Feidelson 9.

subject of symbolism is inherent in the method.”²⁰³ As the letter “A” is constantly present in the story, it can be viewed as the “central fact and as a sign of values”²⁰⁴ (the values of Hester, the Puritans, or Chillingworth, and eventually Hawthorne’s as well), the significance of which emerges from “an extended interplay between several characters.”²⁰⁵ What the letter “A” signifies depends on the point of view. The interpretation depends on the differences between the Puritan, the nineteenth century, and our reading of signs. Moreover, the significance of the graphic sign “A” changes throughout the novel.

The material scarlet “A” is itself a *signifier*, the meaning of which is established or changed depending on which *signified* it relates to. When Hawthorne describes his first encounter with the letter, he speaks of it as of something which has a power to make him wonder about its meaning, in the presence of which he is filled with emotions, but the meaning of which is not readily at hand and thus must be revealed. It certainly seems to be an article of clothing, but whether it is of ornamental or ritual nature, whether it signifies honor and dignity, we do not know. The code of its use and rank are a mystery. However, we are warned of its implications when the narrator describes “a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat,”(29) and the “shudder” he feels upon placing it on his breast. This is exactly in accordance with how Deleuze describes signs.

The sign grips us and impresses upon us because we are not familiar with its meaning. In this absence of meaning, we conjure up all sorts of feelings and impressions, soliciting these in the attempt to give the sign some relation to our very being. These vague emotions and impressions are the precursors of the sign’s significant meaning, emerging amorously between the sign and all the objects we know, captivating us so as to relate them to each other, and to eventually articulate the sign in objective terms.²⁰⁶

The signs compel us to “create their meaning,”²⁰⁷ which is what the narrator does, as we witness when we continue reading, because he finds the key to the code in which we are to understand it in the form of “a small role of dingy paper [...] recorded by the old Surveyor’s pen,”(29) which introduces the history of the letter “A” in the context of the early Puritan society founded on the American soil.

²⁰³ Feidelson 10-13.

²⁰⁴ Vidan 115.

²⁰⁵ Vidan 115.

²⁰⁶ Drohan 11.

²⁰⁷ Drohan 11.

When the “goodwives” of Boston comment mercilessly on the punishment of Hester Prynne and refer to a “ignominious” mark that was put “upon a bodice of her gown”, and when Hester herself comes out of the prison with the scarlet letter “A”, elaborately embroidered in red and gold, we already know how to read it. Though its meaning is only indirectly implied, never articulated, except in the preface, it is quite clear that the Puritan world read the scarlet letter “A” as a sign of “Adultery,” one of the worst sins against God and men. This reading is enhanced even by its color, for colors bore a message in the Puritan world – red and scarlet amounted to “shamefastnesse, to a blushing at our [...] sins, as red as scarlet.”²⁰⁸ The Puritans with their sensibility to sin in any form may also have read it as “Adam” – who is a synonym for original sin and for the universal fact of human sinfulness and depravity that is prior to any human act. Paradoxically, the society that punishes Hester is itself sinful. They believe they are establishing heaven on earth, “thus denying the concept of man’s depravity”²⁰⁹ that they profess to believe in.

The Scarlet Letter “drew all eyes” and had the power that “transfigured the wearer” in a way that made her a new, strange figure even to those of the onlookers who did not see her for the first time. This sign transformed everything around her. Not only the behavior of the people who excluded her from among themselves and who made her an outcast; but it also influenced nature - the sunrays avoid her. Her future life seems to be determined by the meaning of the Scarlet Letter irrevocably. However, as it turns out, not everything is so irrevocable that it cannot be, if not revoked then at least changed. (When the narrator finds it at the Custom House, it is worn and faded.)

Hester lives with her daughter in a cottage “on the outskirts of the town” overlooking the ocean, on the verge of wilderness. This image closely corresponds with the reality of her social life. She is forced to live in seclusion, solitary and lonesome. Here the letter “A” can be read as “Alienation.” Her only link with the world of humans is her embroidery, by which she earns a living for Pearl and herself, and the selfless service of giving comfort to her neighbors who happen to be in need of it.

She was self-ordained a Sister of Mercy...The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her,- so much power to do, and power to sympathize, -that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. (138)

²⁰⁸ Sacvan Bercovitch, POAS 11.

²⁰⁹ Erlich 166.

Hester, a victim of her “circumstances”, became, to put it in Emersonian language, the maker of her circumstances. She managed to transfigure the meaning of the sign by her life and her selfless work for the poor and the afflicted – “the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world’s scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too”(225). The wiser part of the community accepted the “woman with embroidered badge”(139) as their Hester, “the town’s own Hester,” the “emergency” Hester. Thus the “A” becomes a sign of “Able” or “Admirable”.

Emerson says that the force of character is cumulative. We see Hester wandering “without clew in the dark labyrinth of mind” when she is lost and desperate in her involuntary isolation, and in the end we find her as a mature, independent and strong woman who decides to accept and live her lot of her own free will. Being forsaken and alone in a hostile world with a child to take care of, she is forced to develop new abilities, such as self-reliance, in order to survive. She assumes “a freedom of speculation.” As she spends so much time in solitude, “thoughts [visit] her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England”(141). She puts herself “in communication with the internal ocean”²¹⁰ that gradually enables her to look at things and human institutions with new eyes, “criticising all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band”(171). She reexamines the quality of human relationships, and contemplates the position of women and becomes conscious of the fact that “the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew,” that “the very nature of the opposite sex ...is to be essentially modified” and that a woman herself “shall have undergone a still mightier change”(142).

When she returns to America after her disappearance, she resumes the scarlet letter and her role in the society as a comforter of people, and especially of women, who come to her with their sorrows and wretchedness and ask her for advice; she is their confidant and soother. Emerson invites us to “speak [our] latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost”. Hester preaches her firm belief that “at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it [...] a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness”(225). Hester becomes a prophetess, though she refuses to consider herself to be one. She thinks, at least the narrator assures us about it, that she is too stained with sin and sorrow for that; because “the angel, the apostle of the coming revelation” must be, in her opinion, a pure and lofty woman who is wise “not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy.” However, since we are not Puritans, we know that there had been sinners

²¹⁰ Ralph V. Emerson, “Self-reliance,” *Essays* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1941) 24.

who “worked up” to the angels. From our perspective, the “A” really signifies the “Angel”, the “Apostle”.

There is another point of view, in which the “A” is the sign of “Angel”, this time within the code of the Puritan typology. When the red meteor in the sky appears in the form of the letter A, the Puritans connect it with the death of Governor Winthrop, and interpret it accordingly. “For, as our Governor Winthrop was made an angel this past night, it was doubtless held fit that there should be some notice thereof”(136). And when we consider the Puritan typological thinking, the “A” gains yet more significance. It can be read as “America” – the Promised Land where God’s chosen people will establish a New Jerusalem. Or as a prophetic sign meaning “Apocalypse,” generally understood in the biblical context as the moment of horrific destruction connected with God’s Last Judgment, or, more optimistically, as the moment of fulfilment of the millennial role of the Puritans. Or it can be viewed as a revelation, “a sudden act of uncovering some principal or eternal truth.”²¹¹ When the meteor lights the scaffold scene with Dimmesdale, Hester and Pearl, where they “stood in the noon of that strange and solemn splendor, as if it were the light that is to reveal all secrets,”(132) the letter A he sees in the sky can be considered a type of the revelation of his true relation to Hester and Pearl that is to happen at the end of the book. It is a sign of his “Private Apocalypse, a revelation addressed to [him] alone.”²¹² The apocalyptic reading can be related to Hester, too, in the sense of the revelation she prophesies, of the new truth that will give “another moral interpretation to the things of this world than they had ever borne before,” and thus bring about a new world of happier relations between men and women. These readings, as Procházka points out, break the hermeneutics “determined by sacred texts and conventional signs,”²¹³ and thus the story acquires an “anti-apocalyptic nature.”

The hope Hester brings to her fellow sufferers is neither the apocalyptic prophecy of the eternal life after the end of this world, nor its ideological version in the form of the American millennium. It is the hope that life on earth, and life in America, can be made more joyful and happier through human, not divine, love.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Martin Procházka, “Apocalypticism in American Cultural History,” *Literaria Pragensia*, Vol. 14.28. 2004: 77-109.

²¹² Procházka, AACH 99.

²¹³ Procházka, AACH 99.

²¹⁴ Procházka, AACH 101.

I should not leave out Dimmesdale's stigma in the shape of the letter A. To him it is an outward sign of his hidden sin; a sign of his hidden guilt, and, to us us, a sign of his remorse, a sign of his spiritual ailment made manifest. When Chillingworth finds out about it he understands it to be "a sign of shame connected with the secrets of privacy"²¹⁵ of the human heart.

Finally, let me get to a more recent view of the way the letter can be read on the level of sign. Some critics read "Art" as the signified of the "A." John Hart argues that it is Hester's "creative ability" that differentiates her from the other members of her community, and what saves her. It gives her joy and power to "express, as well as sooth, [her] passions," which activity is, however, nothing but "piling sin on sin."²¹⁶ If it is art that vents her guilt, "what will save her publicly from the greater sin of having expressed through Art the very emotions that got her into trouble?"²¹⁷ Moreover, although her elaborate "A" letter "takes on a moral significance," as Nina Baym points out, "by making the letter beautiful Hester is denying its social meaning," she "subverts [its] literal meaning,"²¹⁸ and thus, metaphorically speaking, slaps the face of those who imposed it on her. As such, its beauty is a sign of her "masked defiance of the authorities."²¹⁹

Let me conclude here by borrowing the words of Diehl comparing the letter "A" to "the initiatory letter of an alphabet of meanings that is as much determined by the novel's characters-as-readers as by the authorial presence who initially uncovers by way of creating the sign,"²²⁰ and saying that "by escaping the boundaries of the story, the A achieves status as a sign that draws us back to the origins of Hawthorne's romance."²²¹

This book is a work of symbolism as well as allegory. Matthiessen reminds us that "allegory and symbolism can arise from the same thinking."²²² Feidelson characterizes Hawthorne as a "symbolist in spite of himself."²²³ The extensive symbolic material of *The Scarlet Letter* is intriguing. Beside the symbolical meanings of the letter itself, there are many other symbols to be found. Moreover, the whole romance is interwoven with symbolical

²¹⁵ Martin Procházka, et al., "Late Romanticism: Hawthorne & Melville." *Lectures on American Literature*, (Praha: Karolinum, 2007) 90.

²¹⁶ John E. Hart, "'The Scarlet Letter'-One Hundred Years after," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3. Sep. 1950. JSTOR. 18th Aug. 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/361424> >

²¹⁷ Hart 385.

²¹⁸ Nina Baym, "Passion and Authority in the Scarlet Letter," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Jun. 1970. JSTOR. 18th Aug. 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/363242> >

²¹⁹ Baym 220.

²²⁰ Joanne F. Diehl, "Re-reading the Letter: Hawthorne, the Fetish, and the (Family) Romance," *New Literary History*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Spring 1988, p. 657 JSTOR. Accessed 18th Aug. 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/469094> >

²²¹ Diehl 667.

²²² Matthiessen 248-249.

²²³ Feidelson 9.

imagery. It is this imagery that makes the book so poetic and creates a web of underlying meaning. I will start with simple symbols with definite connotations. In this sense, we may speak of symbolic signs (the characters' names; the letter "A"; mirrors, streams, pools; the forest and the Old World); then there are geometric forms; serpent imagery; color imagery; light and shade imagery, chain and circle imagery. Next I will concentrate on more complex symbols (the rosebush, the prison and the cemetery heart imagery), and last but not least I will pay attention to the symbols that lose their definiteness, become ambiguous, and as a consequence, lose their symbolic validity (Pearl). As Waggoner points out in his essay,²²⁴ the imagery often denotes some positive or negative values, moral or natural good and evil. Almost all the material symbols of the empirical world point to the spiritual world and connect the two.

Waggoner distinguishes three chief symbols in *The Scarlet Letter*: a rosebush, a prison-house, and a cemetery. Although these three symbols are complex, I must speak about them before I discuss the simpler ones because these three symbols "serve to give a structure to the story on the thematic level."²²⁵ Another important thing is that "the cemetery, the rose, and the prison with their associated values and the extensions of suggestion given them by the image patterns that intersect them [...] suggest a symbolic pattern within which nearly everything that is most important in the novel may be placed."²²⁶ The prison and the cemetery are introduced in the first chapter in Hawthorne's critical comment:

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another as the site of a prison. (42)

The three most important situations that give structure to the book take place on a scaffold in front of the jail. And although the cemetery is in the background, it reappears from time to time so that we do not forget its presence. It is one of Chillingworth's favorite places, since it was the place where he gathered some of his 'finest' weeds, those that "sprung up out of a buried heart" lying deep down in the grave. Cemetery has an extended meaning here, because Chillingworth's favorite pursuit is digging in the Minister's tortured heart – "a grave,

²²⁴ H. H. Waggoner, "The Scarlet Letter", *Interpretations of American Literature*, ed. Ch. Feidelson, Jr. and P. Brodtkorb, Jr. (New York: Oxford UP 1959) 3-29.

²²⁵ Waggoner 4.

²²⁶ Waggoner 5.

in which corpses are buried.”²²⁷ However, the cemetery is mostly in the background of the story, as if to remind us of our mortality. The only time that the cemetery becomes the center of focus is at the end of the romance, as the place where the tombstone with the strange inscription is. Waggoner remarks that a cemetery, standing for death, alludes to a natural evil, while prison is connected with moral evil. So the cemetery and the prison represent negative values, although the evil connected with them is of different character. Positive value is represented in the rose, which may be considered to be a natural good: the rose stands outside good or evil in the moral sense, “it is the product [...] of the laws of its being, so it can be admired but not judged.”²²⁸ Similarly, this characteristic applies to Pearl, who also stands beyond any moral judgment. Almost all other symbols, either simple or complex, are somehow connected with the values represented by these three symbols.

The letter “A” is an analogy to rose in a way because it is a symbol of return to the power of nature and love (which is obvious from the fact that neither Dimmesdale nor Hester is able to stop loving the other). This return is not in accordance with what is socially and morally acceptable and because of that the letter “A” may also be understood as a symbol of division between the natural and the social. It is also a symbol of division between Hester and Dimmesdale, between them and the community, as well as a symbol of the internal division in Dimmesdale (his love for Hester and his love for God).

The names of the main characters are symbolic. Hester implies the Old Testament Esther with her strength, dignity, and defense of the oppressed. Dimmesdale stands for weakness and “dimness” of character, Chillingworth denotes coldness and worthiness (in his past life), and Pearl, as in St. Matthew’s “pearl of great price,” suggests the “incomparable value of the hope of heaven.”²²⁹ Hester’s giving such a name to her daughter indicates the fact that Pearl is “of great price” to her, “purchased with all she had;” she is her “life” and “happiness” as well as her “punishment” and “torture.” Pearl is the scarlet letter, “only capable of being loved.” Dimmesdale says when he intervenes for Hester and Pearl to be allowed to stay together that the child “was meant [...] to keep the mother’s soul alive, and to preserve her from blacker depths of sin into which Satan might else have sought to plunge her”(98).

Mirrors, streams and pools distort (the curved mirror made by armor), or reflect (natural mirrors) the truth, especially the truth hidden deep in the human heart. Revelations of mirrors are important. The brook in the forest reflects the elfish beauty of little Pearl and her forefinger pointing at the Minister’s heart. Matthiessen reminds us of what Hawthorne says of a mirror:

²²⁷ Waggoner 18.

²²⁸ Waggoner 5.

²²⁹ Waggoner 20.

“a mirror ‘is always a kind of window or doorway into the spiritual world’.” Hawthorne writes that he is “half convinced that the reflection is indeed the reality – the real thing which Nature imperfectly images to our grosser sense.” He also emphasized that “memory too is a mirror,” and by that “his habit of symbolizing extended that metaphor diversely.”²³⁰ The mirror in *The Scarlet Letter* becomes a glass of introspection. When Hester stands on the scaffold, the actual world vanishes from her eyes, and reminiscences, as “an instinctive device of her spirit,” relieve her by intermingling with recollections of her present position. Her memory is a *dusky mirror* in which she sees “phantasmagorical forms” of her better and happier past life. Arthur Dimmesdale looks at his face “in a looking-glass by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it” during his vigils. What he saw we do not know, but probably it was what he held to be true about himself. He “thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself.” And when Chillingworth tells Hester about his revenge on Dimmesdale, admitting he is a fiend, he lifts “his hands with a look of horror, as if he beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognize, usurping the place of his own image in a glass. It was one of those moments – which sometimes occur only at the interval of years – when a man’s moral aspect is faithfully revealed to his mind’s eye”(149).

Let me now proceed to the color and light and shade imagery. The metaphorical use of colors is explicit in Hawthorne’s hope that the wild rose beside the prison door may serve “to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow” (43). Before I start attributing colors to values, I need to mention that Waggoner divides all images into three groups: images that are used literally and have no symbolic meaning; images that are literal as well as symbolical; and images that have only symbolic value and cannot be taken literally. To the first group of images belongs, to give an example, the red color of the scarlet letter as described for the first time in the romance. It is a mere description without any meaning but the literal.

An example belonging to the second group of images can be found in the description of the setting of the first chapter. The prison is “gloomy.” This word denotes literal as well as figurative color. Prisons are gloomy or dark not only in appearance. The word itself awakens gloomy and dark emotions. Another example is the second allusion to the letter.

But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer, - so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld it for the first time, - was that

²³⁰ Matthiessen 259.

Scarlet Letter, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself. (47)

In this case the color gains “a moral connotation from its context.”²³¹ The Scarlet Letter is a sign of Hester’s ignominy. If the letter had any other color, it would lose this connotation. This is shown when Pearl imitates the letter “A” on her own bosom. She makes it from eel-grass, and its color is “freshly green.” The letter is thus commented to be of “no purport.”

Another example of this kind of image is when the beadle, appealing to people to open a passage and let Hester go to the scaffold, blesses “the righteous Colony of the Massachusetts,” because “iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine”(48) there. This can be understood in two ways. On a literal level, Hester, the trespasser, is just being dragged out from the darkness of the prison into the sunshine – and this is an instance of “‘iniquity’ which has been hidden or unknown being made public, brought into the (figurative) light.”²³²

The last example of this type of image is Chillingworth’s face “darkened with some powerful emotion,” when he recognized that the person standing on the scaffold with a child in her arms is Hester. Waggoner notes that no emotion can darken the face literally, but it is a symbolic effect of darkness – which is evil and feared – that is important here. It also is the first hint at Chillingworth’s darkness.

The example of the last type of image with the purely symbolic meaning is in the first chapter. Hawthorne calls prison “a black flower of civilized society.” The word “black” is only figurative (the prison is described as dark but not literally black), but again, the black color is representative of negative values in Western thought. It is the same with Chillingworth’s dark intelligence, “blackness” of Hester’s sin, or with the last sentence of the first chapter where the author speaks of the “darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.”

The colors that are present in these three types of images are associated with “natural good (beauty and health), natural evil (ugliness, death), moral and spiritual good (holiness), and moral evil (sin).”²³³ They symbolize positive or negative values, either natural or moral. The most frequent color is red and its tones. The red color is ambiguous, its symbolic patterns are associated with natural good (sunlight and wild roses, Hester’s complexion, Pearl as a child so closely connected with nature is dressed in red, Indian costumes) and moral evil (the scarlet letter, Pearl as a result of sin dressed in red, light of “infernal fires” in Chillingworth’s eyes).

²³¹ Waggoner 7.

²³² Waggoner 8.

²³³ Waggoner 8.

Black, brown, gray are most often connected with moral and natural evil, green (the green letter on Pearl's bosom) and yellow (barbaric finery of Indians) with natural good (life, beauty. Dimmesdale, "a mixed figure of lofty aspirations and base conduct,"²³⁴ is associated with light as well as dark colors. He has "a white, lofty, and impending brow, and brown, melancholy eyes."²³⁵ He dresses in black and walks in the "shadowy bypaths." He varies between good and evil. Hester wears a gray dress and she has a dark hair and eyes. It is a known fact that Hawthorne put the dark female beauty in opposition to the blond beauty of the snow-white maiden of New-England. The dark aspect of beauty was connected with sensuality and with night, the secret and the forbidden, while the fairness was connected with day, innocence, and chastity. The two types of "women stand to each other in relation of the damned to the saved," the dark one as a symbol of evil, the fair one as a symbol of good. Yet, Hester's darkness (eyes and hair) is not quite negative, because of the glints of sunlight in her hair. And Pearl's glistening dark curls cannot be considered to symbolize anything negative at all. Thus these symbolic values that black color connotes are in their case ambiguous.

Some critics emphasize the traditional, even archetypal associations of light and dark in the romance. Light is associated with positive values – light of life, goodness; darkness with negative values – darkness of death, sin. When Governor Bellingham examines Pearl's religious education, he concludes that she is "in the dark." Waggoner underlines that this expression signifies much more to the reader than merely the insufficiency of Pearl's instruction. There is sunlight suggesting truth and health, "analogous to the spiritual Light of Revelation, which in Hawthorne's scheme of values should 'illuminate' nature, and to the light of grace."²³⁶ Mr. Wilson is connected with light. His appearance is in accordance with his character. He has a pure character, white hair and his light-gray eyes. There is also the light of his lantern when he returns at night from the deathbed of Governor Winthrop, illuminating a circle around him, so that it looks as if he "had caught upon himself the distant shine of the celestial city"(128). However, the scope of light is wider than it is usually expected. If we return to the situation when the Puritans tried to drag iniquity out into the sunshine, light is connected with "an uncharitable violation of the human heart." There is also the meteor light that can be interpreted literally and figuratively as well, and the figurative "red light" ("infernal fires in Chillingworth's eyes"). The latter usage contrasts with Pearl's connection to fire. She is "a flame" – which refers to her beauty, the brightness of her costume, and to her vividness and vitality.

²³⁴ Waggoner 9.

²³⁵ Waggoner 9.

²³⁶ Waggoner 9.

Waggoner argues that “the color imagery is functional in the context.”²³⁷ He says that the colors do not serve only to describe the characters and the settings but are themselves protagonists of the story and that the predominance of the images that have no other than the literal meaning keeps the images of both literal and symbolic meaning as well as those that are purely symbolic from “losing force by becoming abstractly figurative” and therefore “the novel never becomes allegory.”²³⁸ A good example is the already mentioned situation in which Pearl imitates her mother’s letter and makes one for herself from eel-grass. Pearl’s letter is green. For Hester, the green color has no symbolical meaning; it has no purport in comparison with her own scarlet letter. But to the reader, the abstract meaning of her scarlet letter accentuates the symbolism of the literal greenness of the letter “A” – Pearl’s close connection to nature. “The colors are never completely fixed in the degree of their literalness or the extension of their symbolic values [...] which helps to keep what Hawthorne calls his ‘mesh of good and evil’ a true mesh, with the strands intricately interwoven.”²³⁹

The chain and circle imagery is related to isolation (Hester, Chillingworth), to a forced and unescapable connection to something negative, or it is related to radiance (Pearl). Every time this imagery appears in connection with Hester, “it has the effect of increasing the guilt of the Puritan people and decreasing, or qualifying, Hester’s.”²⁴⁰ The chain and circle imagery defines Hester’s position within the society where she lives. The scarlet letter “had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.” (47) There is a sort of magic circle around her, so she is always alone. No wonder she “casts off the fragments of a broken chain.” Her isolation is not of her own choosing, it was imposed on her by the rules of her society. As she is guilty of adultery, they are guilty “of lack of charity.” Another instance of chain imagery is the figurative chain “of iron links” that bound her to the place of her shame and prevented her from fleeing to a distant place where she would be able to make a new identity. Chillingworth carries along “a circle of ominous shadow moving along with his deformity.” A different kind of circle is connected with Pearl. It is a circle of absolute radiance that is always around her and that illuminates “the darksome cottage floor.”

Serpent imagery is only used in relation to Chillingworth, with whom words like “writhing” and “twisting” are associated. His figure is “low” instead of short, he does not walk but he “creeps” along the ground. To the Puritans, the serpent was the devil. To associate

²³⁷ Waggoner 10.

²³⁸ Waggoner 11.

²³⁹ Waggoner 12.

²⁴⁰ Waggoner 20.

anyone with a serpent was to put him in straightforward connection with devil, with Satan. So the serpent imagery prepares the reader for Chillingworth's transformation into a fiend, or 'almost-a-fiend' (the only thing that distinguishes him from Satan is a "trait of wonder" in his ecstasy when he discloses the letter on Dimmesdale's chest) after the years of "constant analysis of a heart full of torture, and deriving his enjoyment thence, and adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he analyzed and gloated over."(145)

Places such as the forest and the Old World have their role in the symbolism of the book. When Hester plans her flight with Dimmesdale, they have a choice to flee to the forest, a symbol of nature, of "an Edenic release from fallen guilt and sin"²⁴¹ (representing a natural good) and The Old World, a symbol of culture, of a more just and less strict society where they would be able to live together as a wife and husband (thus representing social good).

Now I will examine the more complex heart imagery. The heart is often related to "a grave in which corpses are buried;" a chamber; a hearth, in which "one is wise to keep the fire;" and "the place where the devil is apt to set his mark."²⁴² In his work, Hawthorne often gives the human heart attributes like "black, mysterious, dismal, dim, gloomy, shadowy, obscure, and dreary."²⁴³ In the *Scarlet Letter*, these attributes are given to the forest, as in the scene in which Hester and Pearl are walking together. A stream in the depths of it "whisper[s] tales out of the heart of the old forest,"(159) bringing the heart's secrets out into the light. And when Hester meets Dimmesdale in the forest and they decide to "follow the dictates of their hearts", then "the wood's heart of mystery" becomes a 'mystery of joy.'²⁴⁴

Waggoner notices analogy between the Puritans' conduct in the scene in which the Puritans drag Hester out into the sunshine and force her to reveal the name of her child's father (Hawthorne often speaks of heart as a dungeon) and Chillingworth's prying into the chamber of the Minister's heart and examining it under the pretence of seeking the truth. In Hawthorne's view, one should be true, but should never force others to be true against their will. In Hawthorne's world, such conduct is called "a violation of the human heart." For "there can be no outrage, methinks, against our common nature—whatever be the delinquencies of the individual—no outrage more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame." He speaks his opinion through Mr. Wilson, who answers Chillingworth's proposal to guess the father of Pearl by analyzing Pearl's nature, saying:

²⁴¹ Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 146.

²⁴² Waggoner 18.

²⁴³ Waggoner 19.

²⁴⁴ Waggoner 19.

Nay; it would be sinful, in such a question, to follow the clew of profane philosophy...Better to fast and pray upon it; and still better, it may be, to leave the mystery as we find it, unless Providence reveal it of its own accord. (99)

Flower and weed imagery is the last imagery pattern with symbolic connotations I want to mention. Weeds and unnatural flowers stand for both natural evil and moral evil. Various kinds of weeds grow around the “black flower” of civilization, the prison. The character most ‘naturally’ associated with weeds and “vegetable wickedness” is Chillingworth. As a physician combining his European knowledge of pharmacy with many new secrets of the wilderness he learnt from the Indians, he goes looking for herbs even in the cemetery to find his “black weeds” which were rooted in buried hearts. And at the end of the tale, we learn that after Dimmesdale’s death, Chillingworth “positively withered up, shriveled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun”(222).

The Puritans are also referred to in connection with weeds and black flowers. When Pearl played sometimes, “the ugliest weeds of the garden” were the Puritan children, whom she “smote down and uprooted.” Waggoner points out that knowing Pearl’s “apparently infallible instinct for the truth,” it is clear that there is more behind her play than mere childish fancy.

Another person associated with weeds or black flowers is Hester. Pearl picks up burrs in the graveyard and arranges them “along the lines of the scarlet letter that decorated the maternal bosom, to which the burrs, as their nature was, tenaciously adhered”(114). The fact that the burrs cling to the letter is significant, although it happens in accordance with the laws of nature. Another time Pearl throws wildflowers at Hester’s scarlet letter. Thus Hester is not associated with weeds exclusively, but with “natural” flowers too. In the scene where Hester is standing on the scaffold in front of the crowd, there are only two vivid colors to be seen among the gray, brown and black around her: the red of the scarlet letter and of the rose. So there is a relation between her scarlet letter and the red rose, between the token of shame and natural beauty. Both burrs and flowers are appropriate as to their relation to the scarlet letter. The contrary connotations symbolize the ambiguity of her character, and show her love to be both good and bad at the same time. Here Waggoner remarks:

Hawthorne was too much of a Protestant to share the Catholic attitude toward “natural law”: the imagery here [...] suggests that moral law and nature’s ways do not perfectly coincide, or run parallel on different levels; they cross, perhaps at something less than a right angle. At the point of their

crossing the lovers' fate is determined. No reversal of the implied moral judgment is suggested when nature seems to rejoice at the reaffirmed love of the pair in the forest: "Such was the sympathy of Nature – that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated to human law, nor illuminated by higher truth – with the bliss of these two spirits! Love, whether newly born, or aroused from a death-like slumber, must always create a sunshine."²⁴⁵

Pearl is often associated with the scarlet letter on Hester's dress, but mostly she is associated with flowers. She is called "a lovely and immortal flower which had sprung [...] out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion."⁽⁷⁶⁾ Flowers are among the puppets Pearl plays with; she gathers them to decorate herself. Her prettiness is described to be "flowerlike." When asked by Mr. Wilson who made her, she answers that she "had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door"⁽⁹⁵⁾. Here is a direct analogy between Pearl and rose. Rose symbolizes beauty and passion, and so does Pearl. Another important association between Pearl and roses is the analogy between the rosebush bearing "delicate gems" and Pearl as "the red-clad gem of her mother's bosom."²⁴⁶

St. Matthew used the parable of the "pearl of great price" to suggest the incomparable value of the hope of heaven.²⁴⁷ Hester's giving such a name to the child symbolizes her initial situation of bitter rebellion against the position she found herself in. It also symbolizes Hester's love for her daughter. Pearl is of "great price" to her, "purchased with all she had," she is the most valuable and dearest thing in the world to her. She is her "life" and "happiness" as well as her "torture" and "punishment." Hester says Pearl is "the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved." She would die without her. Thus Pearl is a symbol of Hester's love, but love "distinguished from the Puritan order of symbolic signs, including language."²⁴⁸ Pearl seems to stand outside the framework of the gloomy Puritan world, outside the framework of moral good and evil, as the Puritans define it. Martin Procházka writes that "the symbolic power of Hester's love consists in marking the openness of history, the downfall of the doctrines of predestination and Manifest Destiny." He also points out that her love for Pearl does not correspond with "the economic scheme of Christian morality and eternal life."²⁴⁹ She is different from anything that Hester knows, thus causing Hester tormenting doubts about the "being which [she has] brought into this world"⁽⁸²⁾. She "lacks reference to the world into

²⁴⁵ Waggoner 16.

²⁴⁶ Waggoner 15.

²⁴⁷ Matthew 13: 45-6.

²⁴⁸ Procházka, AACH 97.

²⁴⁹ Procházka, AACH 98.

which she was born”²⁵⁰ Dimmesdale experiences Pearl as something ‘different’ too, her touch fills him with vital energy and a new sense of being he never experienced before and which he cannot name. She is “*the otherness* that cannot be assimilated as a sign of American identity. Thus Hawthorne’s symbolism indicates Pearl’s *non-identity* [...], and her differential role in the story as the means of questioning all identities, especially those of Hester, Dimmesdale and of the Puritan community.”²⁵¹ Thus she is a symbol of that which cannot be conceptualized, she is a symbol of the gap between nature and culture. Maybe this is why Pearl might be the agent that will “relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow”(43), as it is symbolized by the wild rosebush beside the jail at the beginning of the story. She might be the only person in the tale whose fate will not be gloomy, though the truth about her future lot is not confirmed, only suggested.

As for allegory, as Waggoner points out, “if *The Scarlet Letter* is allegory at all, it cannot be allegory of the older mode, with its clear-cut abstractions, for if it were, surely there would not be so much disagreement about its meaning.”²⁵² If we do want to find allegory here, we must look for smaller, isolated fragments of it within the scope of the story as such, or we must reinterpret what we mean by the term. In this work the allegory is “dispersed, freed of fixed moral meanings, and then reconstituted.”²⁵³ Let me introduce a few examples.

The characters demonstrate allegoric features, yet they never become truly allegorical. Not even Pearl, generally considered the character closest to it. She is an “allegorical projection”²⁵⁴ of Hester’s sin and the wild part of her mother’s personality, but when she is publicly acknowledged by her father and thus symbolically incorporated into society (which she, ironically, soon leaves), she ceases to be a fragment of somebody else’s personality, as Baym puts it, and becomes a human being – thus dissolving any allegory that there ever was.

The romance as a whole can be regarded allegorically in a wider scope of Christian tradition and morality. Beautiful and picturesque, Hester with an infant at her bosom standing on the scaffold is an allegory of Divine Maternity. Hester’s transformation into an exaggerated and gigantic scarlet letter in the distorting “mirror” of the glittering armor bespeaks the fact that she has become an allegory of adultery “by the transfer of one ‘explicit’ meaning of the graphic sign – the letter A – to [her] body.”²⁵⁵ As these two contradictory allegories concern the same person, they can be valid only as fragments.

²⁵⁰ Hart 386.

²⁵¹ Procházka, AACH100.

²⁵² Waggoner 4.

²⁵³ Ruland and Bradbury 146.

²⁵⁴ Baym 229.

²⁵⁵ Procházka, *Lectures in American Literature* 90.

The story can be interpreted allegorically as “the faltering process of Christian Pilgrims who have broken [...] divine laws and who find their way back to grace through suffering.”²⁵⁶ Hester’s adultery is publicly revealed and publicly punished. She lives isolated and despised, at least initially. She lives in penance, yet not in penitance. Despite all the authorial comments, it is evident she does not repent her sin. The elaborate embroidery of the sign confirms she is deeply convinced that what they did “had a consecration of its own”(167). As soon as an occasion to cast the sign off comes up, Hester readily does so without hesitation, as she feels that she is true at last. Somehow the ease of this gesture does not follow the conventional pattern of expected development, and the allegory of the repentant sinner does not reach its fulfillment. If the allegory seems fulfilled when she returns and resumes the letter of her own will, her decision to do so is definitely outside the scope of the traditional religious allegorical interpretation.

Another point of view we can take is to understand the story as an allegory of the Fall and predestination of sin. Gloria Erlich writes that the actual sin committed by Hester and Dimmesdale is omitted in the romance because Hawthorne wanted to create an analogy to the Original sin that precedes even the first conscious act of human beings and thus dooms them to sin despite all the efforts on their part.²⁵⁷ She interprets Hester as Eve, who promises the “undisputed Satanic figure”²⁵⁸ of the story, who happens to be her estranged husband, not to reveal his identity, thus enabling him to work quietly on the ruin of her Adam – Arthur. No matter how much Dimmesdale struggles to redeem himself, Chillingworth turns “his effort into a new fall.” Hester, like Eve, becomes the agent of evil, betrayed into giving the devil access to the soul of man and thus is a tool of Chillingworth’s diabolic revenge.²⁵⁹ He violates the sanctity of the individual and thus he commits the Unpardonable sin. Erlich concludes by saying that in this way the first or original sin is [...] shown to be the type or pattern of all future sin; the edenic pattern of Satan, man, and woman continually recurs.²⁶⁰ However, even here the allegory is broken, because as the reader sees it, none of the characters is really evil.

All of Hawthorne’s main characters are good people trapped by circumstance, all are helping others despite themselves, all are doing harm for what might justifiably be considered the best of reasons: Hester for love, Dimmesdale for

²⁵⁶ Karl Wentersdorf, “The Element of Witchcraft in ‘The Scarlet Letter,’” *Folklore*, Vol. 83, No. 2, Summer 1972, p.150. JSTOR. 18th Aug. 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1259446> >

²⁵⁷ Gloria Ch. Erlich, “Deadly Innocence: Hawthorne’s Dark Women,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Jun. 1968. JSTOR 18th Aug. 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/363358> >

²⁵⁸ Erlich 167.

²⁵⁹ Erlich 170.

²⁶⁰ Erlich 167.

duty, and the Puritan magistrates for moral order. Even Chillingworth, that least ambiguous of villains, is essentially a good man who has been wronged, who lies in order to find truth, who prods his victim to confess, [...], and who, in leaving his wealth to Pearl (gratuitously), provides the basis for whatever there is of a happy ending to the story.”²⁶¹

Hester’s life story could also be viewed as an allegory of emancipation (feminist point of view), as she develops her individuality, independence and self-reliance; an allegory of redemption (Christian point of view), as she works so hard for the good of others that even the sternest of the stern do not believe God could judge her harshly and the import of the emblem she wears is completely changed; or an allegory of reconciliation (in terms of her return). When Hester was forced to stand on the scaffold with the letter “A” “with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed”(46), she felt agonized and ashamed, yet filled with inner rage and bitterness. In the following years she uses “penance as a refuge from penitence,” feels sorry for herself and considers the society “the enemy of the self.”²⁶² After seven years, her passions are subdued but her thoughts develop in such a direction, that had she articulated them out loud, she would have “suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for attempting to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment”(141). After Dimmesdale dies, as if there was nothing to hold her there any longer, she leaves with Pearl for Europe. Yet, after a period of time she returns. The reason is never explicitly stated. The answer that the narrator gives us, that “there was a more real life for Hester, here, in New England, [...]. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence”(224) is neither illuminating nor sufficient. I am convinced that the genuine reason for her return can be traced to the scene in which Hester is listening to the unusually impassioned voice of Dimmesdale at the foot of the scaffold, as if magnetized: “There was a sense within her [...] that her whole orb of life, both before and after, was connected with this spot, as with the one point that gave it unity”(209). Her return confirms that she had found a way to reconcile her own integrity with the events of her life. However, that return cannot be understood in terms of Puritan logic, but rather “outside” it. Thus, concerning her relation with the Puritan society, the reconciliation allegory is only partial, it is never completed. True, she returns, but the fact that she resumes the letter “A” of her own free will despite the fact that nobody either forces or expects her to do so, might be interpreted as a statement of her difference from them. It might be a manifestation of her belief that she

²⁶¹ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Office of the Scarlet Letter* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 15.

²⁶² Bercovitch, OSL 6.

“cannot identify herself, nor can be identified by others, with the Puritan discourse and American ideology.”²⁶³ Her focus is on improvement of relationships between people, especially men and women, here on earth, in terms of everyday life, not some lofty, abstract ideological designs. As Bercovitch writes, Hester “neither reaffirms nor disavows her adultery, neither undermines the social order nor alters it, neither reinstalls the old norms nor breaks with them,”²⁶⁴ (at least she never articulates openly whatever is in her mind), yet she has that incredible power to “make general symbol her own,”²⁶⁵ to change the meaning of everything she touches. I believe that she hopes, by this ability of hers, to help to redefine society’s understanding of all human relationships, and thus make them more loving, respectful and forgiving.

On a still deeper level, *The Scarlet Letter* can also be read as “an allegory of an ostracized artist,”²⁶⁶ as “a protest against the traditional Puritan view of the artist as a worthless idler, [...], and in particular against the outright condemnation of imaginative fiction as evil.”²⁶⁷ Wentersdorf points out the moment in the preface of the book when the narrator puts the letter on his breast and the feelings of pain it evokes in him. He concludes that the pain the “public stigma of being an artist” and “the red badge of an adulteress”²⁶⁸ cause to their respective bearers is the same, as is the bitter pride they cherish for the emblem. Thus, Hester’s love for Dimmesdale could be an allegory of Hawthorne’s passion and “devotion to his work, in defiance of the disapprobatory attitudes of the society.”²⁶⁹ The 17th century Boston becomes an allegory of the 19th century New England as its prefiguration (in terms of the artist’s position), and the 19th century becomes allegorical, too, “because though past events are fixed, their meanings are not.”²⁷⁰

Paul de Man says that allegory starts from “the loss of reality that marks the beginning of the poetic states of mind,”²⁷¹ and that “allegorical representations themselves lack reality, because they exist only on the level of the signifier.”²⁷² This is exactly in accordance with Hawthorne’s description of the conception of the romance in the preface, and with the character of the book. There is a number of allegories, or rather allegorical fragments, in *The Scarlet Letter*. As Tambling notes, “allegorical interpretation, while perhaps revealing a truth

²⁶³ Procházka, AACH 100.

²⁶⁴ Bercovitch, OSL 5.

²⁶⁵ Bercovitch, OSL 152.

²⁶⁶ Wentersdorf 151.

²⁶⁷ Wentersdorf 150.

²⁶⁸ Wentersdorf 151.

²⁶⁹ Wentersdorf 152.

²⁷⁰ Tambling 154.

²⁷¹ quoted in Tambling 129.

²⁷² Tambling 129.

that allegory seems to seek, can never reach it.”²⁷³ It never completes. It is a mode that shows ambivalence. This romance is a work of meanings that are revealed and concealed, and in this sense it is a work of allegory. Allegory, by saying one thing and meaning another, “hides as much as it shows.”²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Tambling 170.

²⁷⁴ Tambling 167.

Conclusion

In my thesis I have attempted to examine Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories *The Minister's Black Veil*, *The Artist of the Beautiful*, and his romance *The Scarlet Letter* on the level of sign, symbol and allegory, with respect to the historical and ideological background of Hawthorne's Puritan predecessors and the Romanticism of his own times. I focused on Father Hooper's veil in *The Minister's Black Veil*, the butterfly in *The Artist of the Beautiful*, and the letter "A" in *The Scarlet Letter*. I started by considering them on the level of sign, my next step was to examine them on a more complex symbolic level, and last but not least I probed their participation in a wider allegorical context in the respective stories. Throughout my thesis I tried to follow how signification changes in the process of reading and how new readings produce other new signs.

In the first chapter *Sign, Symbol, and Allegory*, I tried to lay down definitions of these terms, as their meanings often overlap or are blurred. For my model, I chose the Saussurian concept of sign as a relationship that establishes meaning between the material *signifier* (the veil, the mechanical butterfly and the scarlet letter "A") and the mental concept, the *signified* that the signifier evokes in the mind of its "readers," be it the Puritans, the narrator or the modern reader. I also pointed out the fact that the way in which the signs are read is determined by the *codes*, i.e. sign systems, which are conditioned by a culture and its conventions. These sign systems develop over time as the society by which they are established and used changes, so obviously signs are read differently in the codes of Puritanism, Romanticism or the present day. It is true that Saussurian signs are arbitrary, but this only concerns their origin. During their "lifetime" they acquire their history, as everything else does. Therefore I thought it was important for better understanding of the stories to get acquainted with certain aspects concerning the Puritan or Romantic culture as they relate to the works I was analysing whenever I thought it appropriate.

The degree of signification of the signs I dealt with was various. The sign with the "strongest" degree of signification seemed to be the letter "A," as it was immediately identified by the characters of the story as a sign standing for adultery and as such standing for sin. However, this univocal reading was only possible because its meaning had already been established within the Puritan codified sign system. In *The Custom House*, preface to *The*

Scarlet Letter, when the narrator happens to find the worn and faded letter, the thing is just a piece of cloth to him, its original significance is unknown to him. When he starts pondering over its material, structure and purport, the sign starts to communicate with him by eliciting feelings within him, thus filling him with awe. The sign here transforms from the Saussurian concept based on a rational linguistic basis to a sign of Deleuze, which gets hold of us emotionally and makes us invest time and energy in an attempt to unravel its meaning, which is exactly what the narrator does. Deleuze writes that “signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an abstract knowledge. To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if they emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. There is no apprentice who is not ‘the Egyptologist’ of something. [...] Vocation is always predestination with regard to signs. Everything which teaches us something emits signs, every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs.”²⁷⁵ The sign we do not recognize always speaks to us from a different world, the codes of which are unknown to us; thus in order to understand the sign we must first get familiar with that “new” world and its codes.

The worlds are unified by the formation of sign systems, emitted by persons, objects, substances; we discover no truth, we learn nothing except by deciphering and interpreting. But the plurality of worlds is such that these signs are not of the same kind, do not have the same way of appearing, do not allow themselves to be deciphered in the same manner, do not have an identical relation with their meaning. The hypothesis that the signs form both the unity and the plurality of the Search must be verified by considering the worlds in which the hero participates directly.²⁷⁶

During the reading, the codes of the Puritan, Romantic and the present day world mingle and new meanings are created from their interaction. Thus the letter “A” acquires new meanings. Hester herself manages to change the way her letter is read by her contemporaries from Adulteress to Able and Admirable, and later to Angel and Apostle. The letter in the sky caused by the meteoritic light is read as Apocalypse. The Puritans understand it as the fulfilment of their historical role, but this reading is challenged by different readings of the same sign, this time outside the Puritan code, be it Dimmesdale’s private Apocalypse or the Apocalypse as a revelation of a new world based on more loving and respectful relationships

²⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) 4.

²⁷⁶ Deleuze 5.

which Hester dreams about. The sign can also be read as America or as Art. Reading the “A” as a sign produces other signs, which shift signification away from its original meaning.

The minister’s black veil and the mechanical butterfly are signs with weaker significance, as their reading is problematic and more vague. The veil as it is read by the confused parishioners is a sign of madness, sign of something terrible, sign of remorse for a sin, sign of weakened eyes, sign of mourning, sign of despair over human sinfulness, a prophetic sign of impending future, or a sign of a devotion to the orthodox Puritan beliefs. However, there is no univocal agreement about its meaning. The meaning is rather guessed than read. In this case, it is more fitting to speak of a lack of signification than of a sign’s meaning. It seems that the veil is a signifier that cannot find its way to its signified. As for the mechanical butterfly, the characters within this story also have a problem to read it as a sign and seem quite confused. They borrow substitutive *signifieds* from their code system that obviously fail to create a proper meaning. They read the construction of the butterfly as a sign of witchcraft, or a plaything. The butterfly as a completed work of art does not enlighten them either, because art as a symbiosis of human imagination and mechanical knowledge does not belong to any code they know. They do feel the butterfly is “signing” to them but its signification lies beyond the scope of their comprehension. It is a sign of a world that only Owen managed to access through his hard work and artistic faculties.

Another point I discussed in my thesis is the indefiniteness and ambiguity of symbols, as their various connotations are often contradictory, thus making their systematisation difficult. In *The Minister’s Black Veil*, the veil assumes its symbolic meaning on three levels. On the universal level of human relationships the veil becomes a symbol of all kinds of separation and isolation: isolation and separation in life, in love, and in death. On the level of Puritan ideology the veil becomes a symbol of separation between time and eternity, of the incessant postponement of the apocalyptic promise, a symbol of entrapment of Puritan subjectivity on its way to grace due to their conception of the Self, and a symbol of the impossibility of grasping these concepts. On the epistemological level, the veil becomes a symbol of death in the sense of “a linguistic predicament,”²⁷⁷ of the inaccessibility of what is beyond the scope of our cognition. The lack of clear signification of the veil becomes a symbol of the impossibility of reading or verifying certain signs that puts the possibility of all reading in doubt.

The symbolism of the mechanical butterfly is based on the traditional polarities between craft and art, material and spiritual, utilitarian and aesthetic, understanding and

²⁷⁷ H. Miller 117.

imagination, and time and eternity within the framework of the Romantic code that is continually challenged by Hawthorne's irony. The butterfly as a symbol of eternity and a symbol of the miniaturized Romantic universe is undermined by the fact that it is eventually destroyed. Owen as the butterfly's maker is belittled by the ironic authorial comments concerning his behaviour and appearance. The differences between craft and art, and technological and aesthetic disappear in the recovery of the ancient conception of technology in the sense of a poetic *revealing* of what was hitherto concealed into presence, which the butterfly symbolizes. Thus, the butterfly becomes a symbol of a new kind of art that is yet to come, an art that is created as an 'assemblage' of what the previous era considered to be mutually exclusive polarities. The butterfly is also a symbol of the independent existence that every artistic creation acquires when it is 'released' into the world and of the impossibility to control its 'life.'

Of the three stories I discuss, the symbolism of *The Scarlet Letter* is most extensive and complex. The symbolisation starts with simple symbolic signs and symbolic imagery and goes to complex symbols that are mutually energized and enriched by the underlying web of values and connotations. Mirrors, streams and pools, the forest and the Old World, the names of the characters, and the letter "A" (as a symbol of love and nature and a symbol of what is felt as naturally good in contrast to the social conventions) belong amongst the symbolic signs with quite definite connotations. Then there are different kinds of imagery: color imagery, light and dark imagery, chain and circle imagery, serpent images. All these symbols are somehow connected to the three major complex symbols, the prison, the cemetery and the rose that give the romance its structure and represent the values of natural or moral good and evil. Flower and weed imagery, and heart imagery also belong to the group of symbols with more complex connotations.

The most problematic symbol of the romance is Pearl herself. There is an analogy between Pearl and the rose, and Pearl and her mother's scarlet letter, enhanced by the colour, light, flower and weed imagery and the values thereby represented, yet she is always something more and something different than these connotations imply. She is a symbol of Hester's love, as her name signifies by the allusion to St. Matthew, yet Hester's love surpasses the concept of love of the Puritan world. This kind of love is disturbing as well as fulfilling and completely unselfish. Pearl herself is a symbol coming from the space between nature and culture, a symbol that cannot be assimilated or conceptualised by the Christian codes. She is a symbol of 'otherness.' This quality may be the reason why she might become the only relief of the gloomy ending of the romance, although her destiny remains

unspecified or maybe precisely because of this. Pearl is the most ambiguous and indefinite symbol and, as such, she loses her symbolic validity in the original Puritan context of the romance.

What is characteristic about Hawthorne's symbolism in all three works is that the complexity and suggestiveness of his symbols are produced by the interaction of numbers of signs that carry their connotative meanings and shift them in many directions, thus creating their ambiguity and vagueness. As a result, the symbols are never fully coherent with any particular ideological 'ground,' be it the Puritan religious ideology or Romanticism, both of which presuppose unity, integrity and wholeness of interpretation: the assumptions that Hawthorne's symbolism undermines.

My last aim was to ascertain the nature of allegory in Hawthorne's work. For about a hundred years he was reproached for his allegories, but recently this attitude has considerably changed with the new approaches to allegory, and thus his allegorizing has been rehabilitated and much appreciated. Even Hawthorne himself felt his lapses into allegory as a failure he could not help. However, his perhaps instinctive use of it is a proof of his deep artistic insight, in which he was much ahead of his time. For the Romantics, allegory was too mechanical and unworthy, as it was not in touch with the sublime; and for the realists, it was too abstract and incompatible with otherwise realistic portrayal of characters and events in Hawthorne's works. The problem seems to have been the concept of allegory that was old-fashioned. The old conception presupposed a corresponding story on a figurative level with unmistakable abstractions that runs parallel to the literal story. A lot of approaches that interpreted Hawthorne's works allegorically simply ignored everything that did not correspond with their chosen conception (e.g. *The Minister's Black Veil* as an allegory of human heart). There are numerous allegories in Hawthorne's works, mostly present as fragments dispersed throughout the text that can be interpreted from different or even conflicting points of view (for example, we have Hester standing on the scaffold with her child in her arms as an allegory of sin and holy motherhood at the same time). Other allegories are never complete (for example, the allegory of the Fall and predestination of sin in *The Scarlet Letter*, or the allegory of the Puritan Pilgrimage towards salvation in *The Minister's Black Veil*). Another example of Hawthorne's work with allegory (demonstrated in *The Artist of the Beautiful* or *The Minister's Black Veil*) is noticeable in the way he makes signs take on symbolic meanings and then employs them in the service of allegory. His symbols belong to either the Romantic or Puritan (or Christian) code, but the way he treats them exposes the inconsistencies within either of these ideological systems and thus

undermines their absolute status. Hawthorne's irony (in *The Artist of the Beautiful*) is important too, as irony is related to allegory by the fact that it speaks of one thing while it means something else. Thus, irony is a powerful means of destruction of whatever it is applied to, as it points to all the incoherencies in the text's apparent unity and thereby undermines it from within. The common trait of most of Hawthorne's allegories is that they disrupt, undermine, question or take the meaning away, and in this respect he as a very modern writer.

The contribution my thesis brings to the study of Hawthorne, consists in my attempt to analyse his work by means of objective categories of sign, symbol and allegory. It was first necessary to establish their definitions and suggest the boundaries between them. I followed where my analysis led me, without trying to arrive at any univocal and all-inclusive conclusions. In this, my method is unlike many of the sources I drew on, which had a different procedure, as their aim was to prove a certain point. My method differs again from the Deconstructive approaches, which start where the others finish. Their method consists in deconstructing those certain 'proven' points. I borrowed the post-structuralist conception of allegory as "an ironic tropological disposition of discourse itself,"²⁷⁸ and applied it to the generally accepted allegorical interpretations of Hawthorne to show their insufficiency. Unlike the post-structuralists, I did not examine the workings of the language tropes as such within a text (Paul de Man), or the relation between literature and history based on which the acts of reading and writing are historical events with performative character (Hillis Miller). I tried to work as a neutral observer who wants to see what happens when sign, symbol or allegory get to work in the wonderful world created by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

²⁷⁸ Joel Black, "Allegory Unveiled," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1983) JSTOR. 5th Sept. 2010
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RESUME

Témou tejto diplomovej práce je Znak, symbol a alegória v diele amerického spisovateľa prvej polovice devätnásteho storočia Nathaniela Hawthorna. Ako typické ukážky jeho tvorby, ktorá je zvláštnou zmesou puritánskeho dedičstva a amerického romantizmu som si vybrala dve poviedky, Pastorov závoj (The Minister's Black Veil), Umelec krásna (The Artist of the Beautiful) a jeho slávnú romancu Šarlátové písmeno (The Scarlet Letter). Práca pozostáva z úvodu, štyroch kapitol, z ktorých tri sú pomenované podľa jednotlivých diel, ktorými sa zaoberám, a záveru. V prvej kapitole pod názvom "Znak, symbol a alegória" definujem a vymedzujem tieto pojmy. Pre svoj rozbor som si zvolila Saussurovu koncepciu znaku, ktorá definuje znak ako základnú systémovú jednotku jazyka, ktorá sa skladá z materiálnej, vizuálnej, alebo akustickej zložky, tzv. označujúceho, a mentálneho konceptu, ktorý označujúce vyvolá, tzv. označovaného. Zmyslotvorný vzťah medzi týmito dvoma zložkami sa nazýva *znak* a svojou podstatou je úplne náhodný. Saussure znak obmedzil len na svet jazyka ako taký a ignoroval skutočnosť, že znaky odkazujú na mimojazykovú realitu. Každý znak je súčasťou nejakého *kódu*, t. j. systému znakov, ktorý je kultúrne podmienený, keďže znaky sú arbitrárne len apriórne a postupne získavajú svoju konkrétnu „minulosť“ a konkrétne konotácie. Tieto kódy sa menia spolu s tým, ako sa mení a vyvíja kultúra, ktorej sú súčasťou. Kvôli lepšiemu a autentickejšiemu pochopeniu textov je dôležité oboznámiť sa s kódmi doby, v ktorej boli napísané aj s kódmi doby, ktorá je ich predmetom. Preto sa v tejto časti práce snažím zhruba priblížiť určité aspekty doby romantizmu, v ktorej Hawthorne písal, i doby puritanizmu, nerozlučne späté so začiatkom americkej histórie. Symbol, na rozdiel od znaku, má širší a zložitejší význam a nikdy nie je úplne arbitrárny. Aj keď je obyčajne konkrétny a obsahuje identifikovateľný znak, nesie v sebe aj niečo neurčité, niečo, čo sa intelektuálnemu uchopeniu vymyká. Väčšinou sa zakladá na nejakej analógii, rovnako ako metafora. Symbol je, dá sa povedať, centrum navzájom sa prekrývajúcich metaforických významov a konotácií a vo vzťahu k metaforám, do ktorých vstúpil sa dá chápať ako synekdocha.

Prvým americkým mysliteľom, ktorý sa zaoberal problémom znaku a symbolu na teoretickej rovine bol Ralph Waldo Emerson, duchovný vodca Transcendentalizmu,

americkej formy romantizmu. Problém interpretácie znakov, interpretácia ako taká, metódy a možnosti čítania znakov vytváraných prírodou a spoločnosťou boli v tej dobe hlavným predmetom záujmu. Medzi myšlienkami a zmyslovým svetom existuje súlad, a na základe tohto súladu má jazyk metaforický charakter. Nathaniel Hawthorne veril, že medzi vnútorným svetom človeka a vonkajším svetom existuje podobnosť a tak veci a udalosti vonkajšieho sveta sú symbolmi sveta vnútorného. Veril, že duchovný svet je materiálnemu nadradený a materiálny svet je jeho výrazom. Tento názor prirodzene nebol vlastný len transcendentalizmu, ale pochádza z kresťanského nazerania na svet, ktoré vidí prejav božej vôle v bežných životných udalostiach. Je však pravda, že v puritánskej hermeneutike tento prístup ku skutočnosti nadobudol nebývalé rozmery. Božiu prozreteľnosť videli aj v tých najnepatnejších udalostiach a všetko pre nich malo biblický význam. Každá udalosť ich života bola súčasťou božieho plánu. Hawthornovi sa pri jeho tvorbe stala inšpiráciou predovšetkým puritánska hermeneutika, ktorá sa sústredila na náboženskú typológiu a výklad božej prozreteľnosti. Typológia znamená systém podobností medzi Starým a Novým zákonom, na základe ktorého boli udalosti a postavy Nového zákona chápané ako predznamenané v Starom zákone, takže boli navzájom vo vzťahu očakávania a jeho naplnenia. Túto interpretačnú metódu používali nielen pri výklade písma, ale aj histórie a prírody. Dôležité je, že táto typológia nebola nikdy považovaná za alegóriu, keďže bola chápaná doslovne a nie obrazne, ako skutočná udalosť existujúca v čase. Puritáni chovali nedôveru k všetkému, čo by ich mohlo odkloniť od ich ortodoxného prístupu k biblii.

Chápanie alegórie sa od dôb jej prvopočiatkov zásadne zmenilo. Pôvodne bola alegória príbehom s doslovným a skrytým významom, ktorý sa dal interpretovať na dvoch rovinách a jej cieľom bolo poučiť. Jej pôvod je prastarý, ale doba jej slávy je spojená s kresťanstvom, keďže sa stala hlavnou metódou výkladu biblie. Rozdiel medzi alegóriou a symbolom ako ho chápeme dnes pôvodne neexistoval, je dôsledkom vývoja v priebehu posledných dvoch storočí. Rozdiel medzi nimi spočíva v tom, že symbol má metafyzickú povahu, zatiaľ čo alegória tento aspekt postráda. Symbol sa chápe ako jednota zmyslového a abstraktného, kým alegória je prostriedok ako zmyslové vzťahovať k abstraktnému.

V období romantizmu, keď sa umenie dostalo spod nadvlády racionalizmu, sa symbol stal ústredným estetickým pojmom, zatiaľ čo alegória sa dostala do podradného postavenia ako niečo mechanické, čo nie je v kontakte s univerzom. Alegória nebola adekvátnym prostriedkom na vyjadrenie cieľov romantikov. Nakoniec to však bolo 19. storočie, čo zmenilo jej chápanie. Alegória bola rehabilitovaná, ale nedá sa povedať, že pre to, čo pod týmto pojmom chápeme dnes, sa dá nájsť nejaká definícia. Alegória dnes zahŕňa širokú škálu

významov, od tých, ktoré ako alegóriu chápu len určitý typ textov až po tie, ktoré tvrdia, že všetky texty sú alegorické. Niektoré poňatia úplne podkopávajú jej staršie chápanie. Najväčším rozdielom v chápaní alegórie kedysi a dnes je to, že dnes nemôže mať koherentný zmysel na obraznej rovine ako celok, existuje len ako fragment zmyslu. Niektorí kritici, ako je napr. Walter Benjamin, kritizujú romantizmus za to, že prostredníctvom symbolizmu evokuje predstavu večnej, nadčasovej pravdy a ignoruje históriu a také skutočnosti života ako je zmena, rozklad a smrť. To, čo romantizmus oslavuje, je idealizácia prírody. Romantizmus predkladá určité hodnoty ako „prirodzené,“ zatiaľ čo v skutočnosti je im táto „prirodzenosť“ prisúdená nie na základe skutočnosti, ale ideológie. To, čo rozkladá ideológie je alegória. Romantizmus je aj predmetom kritiky Dekonstruktívnej. Symbolizmus vidia ako výraz ideológie západného humanizmu a dôsledok mimetickej tradície. Zatiaľ čo metafora ako stavebný kameň symbolu vytvára podobnosti, alegória zdôrazňuje rozdiel a prináša nový aspekt, a tým je odoberanie významu.

V druhej kapitole pod názvom *The Minister's Black Veil* som pri rozbere rovnomennej poviedky využila definície z predošlej kapitoly. Načrtla som historické a teologické pozadie príbehu, ktorý sa odohráva v období tzv. *Awakening* (Veľkého precitnutia) v prvej polovici 18. storočia. Hawthorne tu vystihol atmosféru doby a naznačil jej hlavné problémy. Podarilo sa mu zachytiť psychologický dopad náboženského precitnutia, ktoré sa vracalo k Puritanizmu v jeho ranej forme a sile na „neobrodenuú“ komunitu. Oživenie prísnej formy Puritanizmu rozdelilo obyvateľstvo a navzájom ho odcudzilo. Precitnutie prichádza po dôkladnom sebaskúmaní, ktoré veriaceho privedie k skúsenosti, ktorú nazývali *the true sight of sin* (skutočné nazrenie hriechu) a je to nesmierne dôležitý krok na ceste k spaseniu. Umožňuje človeku nazrieť vlastnú hriechosť a skazenosť v ich absolútnosti. Hlavným predmetom Hawthornovho záujmu nie je len vedomie hriechosť, ale predovšetkým puritánske vedomie ako také je. Hlavným aktérom je v skutočnosti onen závoj zakrývajúci tvár duchovného pána Hoopera, s ktorým sa jedného dňa objaví pred bohoslužbou, čím úplne vyvedie z miery všetkých svojich farníkov. Práve onen závoj som si zvolila ako predmet svojho rozboru na rovine znaku a symbolu.

Závoj sám sa stáva *označujúcim*, formou, zatiaľ čo spôsob, akým je chápaný ostatnými postavami, je ono označované. Význam je tvorený vzájomným vzťahom medzi týmito dvoma zložkami. Závoj ako znak je veľmi problematický. Farníci nevedia, ako znak čítať. Interpretujú ho preto rôzne. Pre niektorých je znakom duševnej choroby či šialenstva. Je znakom zraku citlivého na svetlo, znakom „niečoho“ hrozného, znakom smútku, vešteckým znakom hrozivej budúcnosti, znakom ľútosti nad spáchaným hriechom či znakom

zúfalstva z ľudskej hriešnosti ako takej, alebo je znakom oddanosti puritánskej ortodoxnej vierouke. Význam závoja ako znaku sa mení každou pasážou a zároveň si zachováva náznak ostatných významov. Môžeme len hádať čo bol hlavný dôvod toho, že sa otec Hooper zaviazal do konca života si zakrývať tvár, ale určité vysvetlenie sa rysuje v spojení závoja a témy jeho prvej kázne spoza neho. Týkala sa skrytého hriechu a nepoznateľnosti tajomstiev, ktoré pred sebou skrývame a odkazovala na posledný súd, keď budú všetky závoje strhnuté. To nás odkazuje do troch rovín symbolických významov závoja, ktoré sa mi podarilo identifikovať. Prvá rovina je rovina ľudských vzťahov, na ktorej sa závoj stáva symbolom ľudskej odlúčenosti a izolácie v živote, pretože aj keď sa Hooper svojim konaním pokúsil inšpirovať ľudí, aby preskúmali hĺbky svojho vnútra a dosiahli tak vyšší stav duchovnosti, vyvolával v nich hrôzu. To viedlo k jeho vylúčeniu zo srdca farníkov a srdečnosti medziľudských vzťahov. Tento význam závoja je ešte umocnený Hooperovým názorom, že poznať sa navzájom je nemožné i medzi najbližšími. Závoj je tiež symbolom odlúčenia v láske, keďže kvôli nemu prichádza o Elisabeth. Posledná veta tejto poviedky o Hooperovej tvári tlejúcej pod čiernym závojom naznačuje, že chvíľa, v ktorej budú strhnuté závoje zo všetkých ľudských tvárí možno nikdy nepríde, pretože čo nie je možné počas pozemského bytia, nie je možné vôbec nikdy. S odvíjajúcim sa príbehom sa čierny závoj stáva aj symbolom odlúčenosti v smrti.

Druhou rovinou, na ktorej symboly získavajú svoj význam, je puritánska ideológia. Tu sa závoj stáva symbolom rozdielu medzi časom a večnosťou, keďže naša pravá tvár bude odhalená až pri poslednom súde. A pretože ono odhalenie má charakter niečoho, čo je neustále akoby odložené, niečoho, čo len príde, stáva sa závoj symbolom neustáleho odkladu apokalyptického prísľubu. V kontexte vnútorného precitnutia, ktoré začína nazrením hriešnosti v celej jej hrôze a končí dosiahnutím „božského svetla,“ sa v Hooperovom prípade závoj stáva symbolom „ustrnutia.“ Problém hriechu je totiž nerozlučne spätý s problémom vlastného Ja. Ja sa stalo pre puritánov bariérou, ktorá oddeľovala človeka od Boha. Na ceste k bohu sa ho preto človek podľa puritánskej doktríny musel zbaviť. Muselo byť prekonané, vymazané. Niečo také bolo prirodzene nemožné. Puritáni sa neustále zaoberali problémom vlastného Ja, ktoré však odolávalo všetkým pokusom namiereným proti sebe. Stalo sa štruktúrou, ktorá chytila do pasce samu seba. A to sa stalo i pánu Hooperovi. Nepodarilo sa mu priviesť seba samého do „svetla nebeského“, pretože „skamenel“ v štádiu hrôzy nad hriešnosťou svojho Ja. Jeho Ja zároveň odolalo všetkým jeho pokusom o potlačenie seba samého. Závoj tak môže vystupovať aj ako symbol nemožnosti uchopiť puritánske vedomie. A to nás privádza na tretiu rovinu, a tou je rovina epistemologická. Tu je závoj symbolom

smrti v zmysle jej nepoznateľnosti, ako aj symbolom neprístupnosti toho, čo je za hranicami našich poznávacích schopností. A nakoniec aj nedostatok jasného a jednotného významu závoja ako znaku symbolizuje nečitateľnosť a neverifikovateľnosť znakov a tým aj akéhokoľvek porozumenia.

V poslednej časti tejto kapitoly som sa venovala alegórii. V minulosti niektorí kritici vykladali túto poviedku na základe Hawthornovej alegórie srdca, čo sa mi nezdalo relevantné s ohľadom na celkové vyznenie príbehu. Chápať ju ako alegóriu puritánskeho pútnika na ceste k spásе taktiež nie je uspokojujúce, keďže cieľom takejto púte by malo byť sebaoslobodenie a nemala by viesť k ustrnutiu, ako sa to stalo v prípade pána Hoopera. Pokiaľ chceme nájsť alegóriu v zmysle príbehu, je Hooperov životný príbeh alegóriou sifyfovského zápasu s vlastným ja na ceste k bohu. Ukázalo sa, že je ťažké definovať, čo Hawthorne myslí pod pojmom alegórie. Modernejšie prístupy hovoria o alegórii ako o prostriedku, ktorý prostredníctvom príbehu vyjadrí to, čo sa nedá vyjadriť žiadnym priamym spôsobom a tak sa alegória stáva svojim vlastným komentárom. Je tým, čo nám význam sprostredkováva a zároveň nám k nemu zahradzuje cestu. Nakoniec by sa alegória dala prirovnať aj k situácii, v ktorej sa nachádza sám čitateľ, keď sa snaží nájsť nejakú hodnovernú interpretáciu, pretože ako závoj sám, tak i tento príbeh odoláva pokusom o výklad.

V úvodnej časti tretej kapitoly som priblížila Hawthornovu estetickú koncepciu, ktorú sám Hawthorne síce nikdy neformuloval na teoretickej úrovni, dá sa však vyvodiť z jeho diela. Na rozdiel od predošlej poviedky patrí *Umelec krásna* (*The Artist of the Beautiful*) medzi diela komentujúce Hawthornovu vlastnú dobu a jej nezhovievavý prístup k umeniu. Táto poviedka je výrazom Hawthornovho romantizmu. Aj keď Hawthorne nie je úplne typickým predstaviteľom tohto umeleckého smeru, zvlášť pokiaľ ide o jeho morálnu víziu sveta, bol ním do veľkej miery ovplyvnený. Bol nadšeným čitateľom európskej romantickej poézie a teórie umenia, i nemeckej idealistickej filozofie. Jeho poňatie kreatívneho procesu je zmesou klasických a romantických prístupov. Stredom jeho estetiky je obrazotvornosť, ktorá pretvára realitu v umenie. Nejde mu imitáciu reality a prírody, ale o zachytenie vyššej, duchovnej reality, ktorá je skutočnejšia a pravdivejšia než realita materiálna.

Hlavným znakom a symbolom je v tejto poviedke „mechanický motýľ“, vtvor mladého hodinára Owena Warlanda. Všetky postavy však majú veľký problém motýľa ako znak prečítať. Podobne ako v prípade závoja pána Hoopera považujú motýľa za znak Owenovho pomateného rozumu. Hovenden, ktorý Owena do remesla uviedol, považuje ešte nehotovú konštrukciu motýľa za znak čiernej mágie a Annie, Owenova tajná láska, ho chápe

ako hračku, aj keď si uvedomuje, že jeho význam presahuje jej chápanie. V poslednej scéne poviedky, keď Owen príde s dokončeným motýľom ako darom do domu Annie a jej manžela, kováča Dantfortha, je zrejmé, že význam motýľa im stále uniká. Motýľ sa pre nich stáva hieroglyfom, znakom v Deleuzovskom zmysle, ktorý ich síce oslovuje a emocionálne podnecuje, núti ich zamyslieť sa, ale jeho význam rozlúštiť nedokážu. Motýľ, už ako dokončené umelecké dielo, je ukážkou umenia, ktoré je symbiózou mechanickej zručnosti, vedomostí a ľudskej obrazotvornosti a fantázie. Vyvoláva v nich emocionálnu odozvu, ale jeho skutočný zmysel je za hranicou ich chápania. Snažia sa ho pochopiť len prostredníctvom toho, čo sami poznajú a tak sú odsúdení k neúspechu, keďže tento motýľ ako znak pochádza zo sveta, do ktorého sa vďaka umeleckým schopnostiam, intuícii a tvrdej práci podarilo vstúpiť len Owenovi.

Symbolika mechanického motýľa je založená na tradičných polaritách medzi remeslom a umením, hmotou a duchom, užitočným a estetickým, rozumom a obrazotvornosťou, časom a večnosťou chápaných v duchu Romantizmu, ktorý je však vďaka Hawthornovým ironickým komentárom neustále vystavovaný pochybnostiam. Motýľ je ako symbol večnosti a nadčasovosti i ako miniaturizovaný symbol Romantického univerza podkopaný tým, že je zanedlho po svojom vzniku zničený. Ironické autorské komentáre na neimponujúci vzhľad a čudácke Owenovo chovanie ho ako predstaviteľa tvorivého umelca do značnej miery znevažujú. Rozdiel medzi remeslom a umením, medzi technikou a estetikou sa stráca v starodávnom poňatí techniky v zmysle odkrývania či sprítomňovania toho, čo bolo v “zakrytosti” do “nezakrytosti,” prítomnosti, ktoré Owenov motýľ symbolizuje. Motýľ sa stáva symbolom nového druhu umenia, ktorého je predzvesťou. Toto umenie budúcnosti vzniká ako montáž tvorená tým, čo bolo v minulosti považované za vzájomne nezlučiteľné. Motýľ je tiež symbolom nezávislej existencie, ktorú nadobúda každý umelecký výtvor v okamžiku svojho dokončenia a v tejto súvislosti symbolizuje i nemožnosť akokoľvek ovplyvňovať jeho ďalší osud, ktorý sa obvykle ubera úplne iným smerom, než jeho autor povodne zamýšľal.

Umelec krásna sa obvykle považuje za alegóriu umenia. Vykladá sa v kresťanskom duchu ako estetická púť za spasením, alebo ako alegorický proces umeleckého vývoja, ktorý korešponduje s premenou motýľa. Okamžik, v ktorom sa motýľ vznesie, je zároveň vyvrcholením umelcovej snahy. Význam príbehu však spočíva skôr v pripomínaní, že umelecký a poetický prístup k svetu pochádzajúci zo Starogréckeho myslenia, ktorého súčasťou je i technika, nám otvorí nové obzory a umožní hodnotnejší život a autentické prežívanie skúseností.

V poslednej kapitole som sa venovala Hawthornovej romanci Šarlátové písmeno *The Scarlet Letter*. Postupovala som rovnakým spôsobom ako v predošlých dvoch kapitolách, ale najprv som charakterizovala niektoré žánrové aspekty romane, ktorú toto dielo do istej miery predstavuje. Pod romancou sa u Hawthorna obvykle chápe literárna forma, ktorá sprostredkováva emocionálnu a intelektuálnu skúsenosť v omnoho zovretejšej a usporiadanejšej forme, než je bežná ľudská skúsenosť každodennej reality, ktorá má skôr chaotický charakter. Často sa v nej prelínajú nadprirodzené prvky s realitou, a história s fikciou. V predhovore Šarlátového písma rozprávač popisuje svoje prvé stretnutie s kusom červeného, starého, vyblednutého a bohato vyšívaneho písma A, ktoré ho určitým spôsobom oslovovalo, napĺňalo určitými pocitmi, akoby komunikovalo svoj skrytý význam, ktorý však bol analytickým rozumom neuchopiteľný. Tento prvý kontakt cez zmyslové vnímanie otvára imaginatívnu realitu celého diela.

Písmeno A je v ňom ústredným znakom i symbolom. Jeho význam na úrovni znaku sa neustále mení. Písmeno A ako materiálny predmet je označujúce, a jeho význam vzniká alebo sa mení v závislosti na označovanom, ktoré mu prisudzujú jednotlivé postavy, rozprávač, alebo čitateľ sám. Pri prvom stretnutí s Hester písmeno okrem významu, ktorý je zo slova samého zrejmý, označuje hriech a ľudskú hriešnosť všeobecne. Je tiež znakom odcudzenia (Alienation), keďže ju vyčleňuje z bežného ľudského spoločenstva. Neskôr sa Hester svojim životom podarí zmeniť význam písma A na znak schopnosti (Able - schopná) a obdivuhodnosti jej charakteru (Admirable - obdivuhodná). V dôsledku svojej osamelosti a odcudzenia od ľudí sa jej podarí vymaniť sa z konvenčných spôsobov myslenia a pozerat' sa na svet a jeho inštitúcie novým kritickým pohľadom. Na jeho základe začína pomáhať ľuďom v núdzi a ťažkej životnej situácii. A tak písmeno A získava význam nový, A ako anjel (Angel) a neskôr, keď začne hlásať potrebu nových a lepších vzťahov medzi ľuďmi, a hlavne mužmi a ženami, aj ako apoštol (Apostle). Okrem toho sa písmeno A, vytvorené svetlom meteoritu na nočnej oblohe dá čítať v súlade s puritánskym typologickým výkladom ako Amerika, zasľúbená zem, kde bohom vyvolený ľud založí nový Jeruzalem. Môže tiež označovať apokalypsu, ktorá je síce v tradičnom kresťanskom myslení chápaná ako katastrofa obrovských rozmerov spojená s koncom sveta, v puritánskej typológii sa však vykladá aj ako naplnenie Milénia a role puritánov v ňom. Tiež sa dá chápať ako zjavenie, odhalenie nejakej večnej a základnej pravdy, prípadne Hesterinej pravdy o príchode sveta založeného na nových a lepších vzťahoch. Ďalší možný spôsob čítania písma A je umenie (Art), keďže písmeno vo svojom materiálnom prevedení je výrazom Hesterinho umenia s ihlou.

Tento príbeh je zároveň veľkým symbolickým dielom. Svoj rozbor som začala jednoduchými symbolmi s jednoznačným významom, skôr by sa dalo hovoriť o symbolických znakoch. Jeden z týchto symbolov je aj písmeno A: symbol moci lásky a prírody a symbol rozporu medzi tým, čo je prirodzené a spoločenskými konvenciami. Ďalej do tejto kategórie patria mená postáv, ktoré sú taktiež symbolické, zrkadlá, potoky a tône, básnické obrazy farieb, svetla a tieňa, metaforika reťaze a kruhu, metafora hada. Táto metaforická symbolika je veľmi poetická, pretkáva celé toto dielo a dotvára význam zložitejších symbolov. Takmer všetky symboly sú spojené s morálnym alebo prirodzeným dobrom alebo zlom, ktoré sú reprezentované tromi hlavnými symbolmi: ružou, väzením a cintorínom. Tieto tri symboly zároveň slúžia ako základná štruktúra, na ktorej je tento príbeh postavený. Ďalšiu skupinu symbolov tvoria symboly so zložitejšími konotáciami, ako sú metafory srdca a metafory buriny a kvetov.

Perla, Hesterina dcéra, predstavuje tretiu kategóriu, je symbolom, ktorý je najkomplikovanejší, až problematický. V celom diele sa tiahne paralela Medzi Perlou a ružou, rovnako ako medzi Perlou a umelecky vyšívaným červeným znakom hriechu na matkiných šatách. Meno Perla odkazuje na "perlu veľkej ceny" z Matúšovho evanjelia. Tým, že Hester takto svoju dcéru pomenovala, vyjadrila svoj vzťah k nej. Perla je symbolom Hesterinej lásky, ale je to láska, ktorá sa nedá vyložiť rečou puritánskeho sveta. Perla sama do neho nezapadá. Jej povaha, chovanie, vitalita, to všetko Hester prekvapuje i znepokojuje. Je symbolom toho, čo sa nedá pojmovovo uchopiť, symbolom toho, čo sa nachádza medzi kultúrou a prírodou. Možno preto sa môže stať prvkom, ktorý odľahčí pochmúrny koniec tohto príbehu, aj keď o jej ďalšom osude nevieme nič určitého.

Nakoniec som písala o alegórii v tejto romanci. Pokiaľ sa tu o alegórii dá vôbec hovoriť, nejde o alegóriu staršieho typu, ale skôr o alegorické fragmenty. Alegória v Šarlátovom písmene rozptýlená a zbavená daných morálnych významov. Na hlavných postavách sa síce dajú nájsť určité alegorické aspekty, ale nikdy sa úplnou alegóriou nestanú. K alegorickým fragmentom patrí Hester ako odraz na lesklej ploche brnenia pretvorený do gigantického písmena A, aj Hester stojaca na pranieri s Perlou v náručí ako alegória posvätného materstva i alegória hriechu zároveň. Jeden alegorický význam tak podkopáva ten druhý. A napriek tomu, že sa tieto dva významy u nej stretávajú, význam jej postavy je mimo nich. U Dimmesdala sa tieto dva alegorické významy stretávajú tiež a vytvárajú dynamiku jeho postavy. Ak sa rozhodneme dívať sa na tento príbeh ako na alegóriu o hriešnikoch, ktorí sa snažia cez utrpenie znovu nájsť božiu milosť, alegória sa rozpadá, pretože Hester rozhodne nepripomína pokorného kajúcneho hriešnika. Ďalšia možná

alegorická interpretácia sa týka mýtu o Páde a o predurčenosti hriechu. Hester je tu Evou, ktorá uzavrela s dobrým úmyslom pakt s “diablom“ (svojim manželom Chillingworthom) a tak mu dala nástroj na zničenie duše Adama (Dimmesdala). Chillingworth sa dopustil tzv. neodpustiteľného hriechu, ale i tu vzniká pochybnosť, pretože tým, že Chillingworth odkázal svoj majetok Perle a umožnil jej tak život v inom než puritánskom svete, vniesol do pochmúrneho záveru romancy prísľub šťastného konca. Ani jedna z postáv nie je vo svojej podstate zlá, každá sa snaží určitým spôsobom konať dobro a pokiaľ sa niečoho zlého dopustí, je to vždy s vedomím, že tak koná z určitého pochopiteľného dôvodu. Životný príbeh Hester sa dá vyložiť ako alegória emancipácie (z feministickej perspektívy), alegória spasenia (z kresťanskej perspektívy) alegória uzmierenia (z perspektívy Hesterinho návratu). To, že sa Hester vrátila spať do Nového Anglicka sa však nedá chápať ako uzmierenie v rámci puritánskej logiky, ale mimo ňu, ako uzmierenie Hester samej so sebou a s udalosťami jej života. Vráti sa síce z vlastnej vôle, ale to, že začne zase nosiť šarlátové písmeno v dobe, keď sa to od nej už nevyžaduje, sa vymyká vzorcom chovania a je prejavom jej odlišnosti od spoločenstva, v ktorom žije. Ani táto alegória tak nie je dokončená, úplná.

Šarlátové písmeno by sa tiež dalo vyložiť ako alegória ostrakizovaného umelca, ako protest proti spôsobu, akým Hawthornovi súčasníci nazerali na jeho povolanie. Medzi Hesteriným písmenom a spoločenskou stigmou, ktoré nosí spisovateľ, je smutná analógia. Boston sedemnásteho storočia sa tak stáva alegóriou Nového Anglicka v devätnástom storočí. Z tohto hľadiska by Hesterina láska k Dimmesdalovi mohla byť chápaná ako alegória Hawthornovej vášne pre tvorivú spisovateľskú prácu vzdor nepriateľskému prístupu spoločnosti. V tomto diele teda môžeme nájsť mnoho alegorických fragmentov, pretože alegória ako taká sa nikdy nedokončí. Je to kniha skrytých i odkrytých významov a v tomto zmysle je i alegóriou. Tým, že nám niečo hovorí, zároveň niečo skrýva.

Hawthornova metóda je pozoruhodná tým, ako pracuje so znakmi, ako s ich pomocou buduje symbolické významy, a nakoniec ich uplatní v službe alegórii. Spôsob, akým so symbolmi zaobchádza, odhaľuje skryté nedostatky v myšlienkovom systéme, ktorého sú súčasťou a tým podkopáva jeho nárok na absolútnu pravdivosť. V tom mu je veľkým pomocníkom práve irónia. Iróniu spája s alegóriou to, že obe tvrdia jednu vec, zatiaľ čo naznačujú inú. Dá sa teda povedať, že irónia je druhom alegorickej reči, ktorá má tú vlastnosť, že v momente, keď ju človek rozpozná, zmocní sa ho a od tej chvíle je akékoľvek následné čítanie textu dvojznačné. Má moc zvnútra rozkladať všetko, čoho sa dotkne a odhaľovať vnútorné rozpory tam, kde na prvý pohľad žiaden rozpor nie je. Poznávacím znakom Hawthornových alegórií je to, že narušujú, spochybňujú a podkopávajú texty,

ktorých sú súčasťou, a tak sa dá povedať, že význam nespoluvytvárajú, ale odoberajú. A aj v tomto zmysle je Nathaniel Hawthorne práve v súčasnej dobe veľmi aktuálnym a prínosným autorom.

Prínos mojej práce na Hawthornovskú tému spočíva v pokuse o analýzu jeho tvorby na základe objektívne daných kategórií znaku, symbolu a alegórie, ktoré som najprv definovala a rozlíšila, keďže pri práci so sekundárnou literatúrou som veľakrát zistila, že jej autori používajú tieto pojmy príliš voľne a často ich zamieňajú. Snažila som sa nechať sa viesť tam, kam ma moja analýza nasmerovala. Zvolila som si úlohu nestranného pozorovateľa, ktorý sa snaží zistiť, čo sa stane, keď sa znaky, symboly a alegórie z Hawthornovho pera pustia do práce.