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DONALD McKAY, Builder of the *Flying Cloud*, the *Sovereign of the Seas*, the *James Baines*, and the *Lightning*.

DAGUERREOTYPE BY SOUTHWORTH AND HAWES (Boston)

American Renaissance

ART AND EXPRESSION
IN THE AGE OF EMERSON AND WHITMAN



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METHOD AND SCOPE

'There is a moment in the history of every nation, when, proceeding out of this brute youth, the perceptive powers reach their ripeness and have not yet become microscopic: so that man, at that instant, extends across the entire scale, and, with his feet still planted on the immense forces of night, converses by his eyes and brain with solar and stellar creation. That is the moment of adult health, the culmination of power.'

—EMERSON, *Representative Men*.

'Men must endure
Their going hence even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all.'

—marked by Melville in his
copy of *King Lear*.

THE starting point for this book was my realization of how great a number of our past masterpieces were produced in one extraordinarily concentrated moment of expression. It may not seem precisely accurate to refer to our mid-nineteenth century as a *re-birth*; but that was how the writers themselves judged it. Not as a re-birth of values that had existed previously in America, but as America's way of producing a renaissance, by coming to its first maturity and affirming its rightful heritage in the whole expanse of art and culture.

The half-decade of 1850-55 saw the appearance of *Representative Men* (1850), *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Pierre* (1852), *Walden* (1854), and *Leaves of Grass* (1855). You might search all the rest of American literature without being able to collect a group of books equal to these in imaginative vitality. That interesting fact could make the subject for several different kinds of investigation. You might be concerned with *how* this flowering came, with the descriptive narrative of literary history. Or you might dig into its sources in our life, and examine the economic, social, and religious causes *why* this flowering came in just these years. Or you might be primarily concerned with *what* these books were as works of art, with evaluating their fusions of form and content.

By choosing the last of these alternatives my main subject has become the conceptions held by five of our major writers concerning the function and nature of literature, and the degree to which their practice bore out their theories. That may make their process sound too deliberate, but Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman all commented very explicitly on language as well as expression, and the creative intentions of Hawthorne and Melville can be readily discerned through scrutiny of their chief works. It has seemed to me that the literary accomplishment of those years could be judged most adequately if approached both in the light of its authors' purposes and in that of our own developing conceptions of literature. The

double aim, therefore, has been to place these works both in their age and in ours.

In avowing that aim, I am aware of the important books I have not written. One way of understanding the concentrated abundance of our mid-nineteenth century would be through its intellectual history, particularly through a study of the breakdown of Puritan orthodoxy into Unitarianism, and of the quickening of the cool Unitarian strain into the spiritual and emotional fervor of transcendentalism. The first of those two developments has been best sketched by Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of New England Theology* (1932). The whole movement will be genetically traced in Perry Miller's monumental study of *The New England Mind*, the first volume of which (1939), dealing with the seventeenth century, has already extended the horizons of our cultural past. Another notable book could concentrate on how discerning an interpretation our great authors gave of the economic and social forces of the time. The orientation of such a book would not be with the religious and philosophical ramifications of the transcendental movement so much as with its voicing of fresh aspirations for the rise of the common man. Its method could be the one that Granville Hicks has inherited from Taine, and has already applied in *The Great Tradition* (1933) to our literature since the Civil War. An example of that method for the earlier period is Newton Arvin's detailed examination (1938) of Whitman's emergent socialism.

The two books envisaged in the last paragraph might well be called *The Age of Swedenborg* and *The Age of Fourier*. Emerson said in 1854, 'The age is Swedenborg's,' by which he meant that it had embraced the subjective philosophy that 'the soul makes its own world.' That extreme development of idealism was what Emerson had found adumbrated in Channing's 'one sublime idea': the potential divinity of man. That religious assumption could also be social when it claimed the inalienable worth of the individual and his right to participate in whatever the community might produce. Thus the transition from transcendentalism to Fourierism was made by many at the time, as by Henry James, Sr., and George Ripley and his loyal followers at Brook Farm. *The Age of Fourier* could by license be extended to take up a wider subject than Utopian socialism; it could treat all the radical movements of the period; it would stress the fact that 1852 witnessed not only the appearance of *Pierre* but of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; it would stress also what had been largely ignored

until recently, the anticipation by Orestes Brownson of some of the Marxist analysis of the class controls of action.¹

But the age was also that of Emerson and Melville. The one common denominator of my five writers, uniting even Hawthorne and Whitman, was their devotion to the possibilities of democracy. In dealing with their work I hope that I have not ignored the implications of such facts as that the farmer rather than the businessman was still the average American, and that the terminus to the agricultural era in our history falls somewhere between 1850 and 1865, since the railroad, the iron ship, the factory, and the national labor union all began to be dominant forces within those years, and forecast a new epoch. The forties probably gave rise to more movements of reform than any other decade in our history; they marked the last struggle of the liberal spirit of the eighteenth century in conflict with the rising forces of exploitation. The triumph of the new age was foreshadowed in the gold rush, in the full emergence of the acquisitive spirit.²

The older liberalism was the background from which my writers emerged. But I have concentrated entirely on the foreground, on the writing itself. I have not written formal literary history—a fact that should be of some relief to the reader, since if it required a volume of this length for five years of that record, the consequences of any extension of such a method would be appalling. Parrington stated in his *Main Currents of American Thought* (1927): 'With aesthetic judgments I have not been greatly concerned. I have not wished to evaluate reputations or weigh literary merits, but rather to understand what our fathers thought . . .' My concern has been opposite. Although I greatly admire Parrington's elucidation of our liberal tradition, I think the understanding of our literature has been retarded by the tendency of some of his followers to regard all criticism as 'belletristic trifling.' I am even more suspicious of the results of such historians as have declared that they were not discussing art, but 'simply using art, in a purpose of research.' Both our historical writing and our criticism have been greatly enriched during the past twenty years by the breaking down of arbitrary divisions between them, by the critic's realization of the necessity to master what he could of historical discipline, by the historian's desire to extend his

1. See A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Orestes A. Brownson* (1939), and Helen S. Mims, 'Early American Democratic Theory and Orestes Brownson' (*Science and Society*, Spring 1939).

2. See Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860* (1924), and E. C. Kirkland, *A History of American Economic Life* (1936).

domain from politics to general culture. But you cannot 'use' a work of art unless you have comprehended its meaning. And it is well to remember that although literature reflects an age, it also illuminates it. Whatever the case may be for the historian, the quality of that illumination is the main concern for the common reader. He does not live by trends alone; he reads books, whether of the present or past, because they have an immediate life of their own.

What constitutes the secret of that life is the subject of this volume. It may be held that my choice of authors is arbitrary. These years were also those of Whittier's *Songs of Labor* (1850), of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* (1855), of work by Lowell and Holmes and Simms, of Baldwin's *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi*, of T. S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*. Nor were any of my authors best sellers. The five hundred copies of Emerson's first book, *Nature* (1836), had been disposed of so slowly that a second edition was not called for until 1849; and though his lecturing had made him well known by then, the sales of none of his books ran far into the thousands. Thoreau recorded in his journal that four years after the appearance of his *Week on the Concord and Merrimack* (1849) only 219 copies had been sold; so he had the publisher ship the remainder back to him and said: 'I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor?' After that *Walden* was considered a great risk, but it managed to go through an edition of two thousand. Whitman set up and printed *Leaves of Grass* for himself, and probably gave away more copies than were bought, whereas Longfellow could soon report (1857) that the total sales of his books had run to over three hundred thousand, and *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio* (1853), by the sister of N. P. Willis, sold a hundred thousand in its first year. Although *Typee* (1846) was more popular than Melville's subsequent work, it never came within miles of such figures. Hawthorne reported that six or seven hundred copies of *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) had been disposed of before the panic of that year descended. To reach a wider audience he had to wait until *The Scarlet Letter*, and reflecting on the triumphant vogue of Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854), the ceaseless flux of Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth's sixty novels, he wrote to Ticknor in 1855: 'America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should

be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter*, and other books neither better nor worse?—worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand.'

Such material still offers a fertile field for the sociologist and for the historian of our taste. But I agree with Thoreau: 'Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.' And during the century that has ensued, the successive generations of common readers, who make the decisions, would seem finally to have agreed that the authors of the pre-Civil War era who bulk largest in stature are the five who are my subject. That being the case, a book about their value might seem particularly unnecessary. But 'the history of an art,' as Ezra Pound has affirmed, 'is the history of masterwork, not of failures or mediocrity.' And owing to our fondness for free generalization, even the masterworks of these authors have been largely taken for granted. The critic knows that any understanding of the subtle principle of life inherent in a work of art can be gained only by direct experience of it, again and again. The interpretation of what he has found demands close analysis, and plentiful instances from the works themselves. With a few notable exceptions, most of the criticism of our past masters has been perfunctorily tacked onto biographies. I have not yet seen in print an adequately detailed scrutiny even of 'When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,' or of *Moby-Dick*. And such good criticism as has been written has ordinarily dealt with single writers; it has not examined many of the interrelations among the various works of the group.

My aim has been to follow these books through their implications, to observe them as the culmination of their authors' talents, to assess them in relation to one another and to the drift of our literature since, and, so far as possible, to evaluate them in accordance with the enduring requirements for great art. That last aim will seem to many only a pious phrase, but it describes the critic's chief responsibility. His obligation is to examine an author's resources of language and of genres, in a word, to be preoccupied with form. This means nothing rarefied, as Croce's description of De Sanctis' great *History of Italian Literature* can testify: form for De Sanctis 'was not the "form" pathologically felt by aesthetes and decadents: it was nothing else than the entire resolution of the intellectual, sentimental, and emotional material into the concrete reality of the poetic image and word, which alone has aesthetic value.'

The phases of my somewhat complex method of elucidating that concrete reality can be briefly described. The great attraction of my subject was its compactness:³ for though I made no attempt to confine my study of these authors to the strait jacket of a five-year segment of their careers, the fact remained that Emerson's theory of expression was that on which Thoreau built, to which Whitman gave extension, and to which Hawthorne and Melville were indebted by being forced to react against its philosophical assumptions. The nature of Emerson's achievement has caused me to range more widely in my treatment of him than in that of the others. *Representative Men* has no more right to be called his masterpiece than *Nature* (1836) or *The Conduct of Life* (1860). He wrote no masterpiece, but his service to the development of our literature was enormous in that he made the first full examination of its potentialities. To apply to him his own words about Goethe: he was the cow from which the rest drew their milk. My discussion of his theory has always in view his practice of it, and its creative use by the others. My prime intention is not Sainte-Beuve's: to be 'a naturalist of minds,' to relate the authors' works to their lives. I have not drawn upon the circumstances of biography unless they seemed essential to place a given piece of writing;⁴ and whenever necessary, especially in the case of Melville, I have tried to expose the modern fallacy that has come from the vulgarization of Sainte-Beuve's subtle method—the direct reading of an author's personal life into his works.

The types of interrelation that have seemed most productive to understanding the literature itself were first of all the obvious debts, of Thoreau to Emerson, or Melville to Hawthorne. In the next place there were

3. I have avoided, therefore, the temptation to include a full length treatment of Poe. The reason is more fundamental than that his work fell mainly in the decade of 1835-45; for it relates at very few points to the main assumptions about literature that were held by any of my group. Poe was bitterly hostile to democracy, and in that respect could serve as a revelatory contrast. But the chief interest in treating his work would be to examine the effect of his narrow but intense theories of poetry and the short story, and the account of the first of these alone could be the subject for another book: the development from Poe to Baudelaire, through the French symbolists, to modern American and English poetry. My reluctance at not dealing with Poe here is tempered by the fact that his value, even more than Emerson's, is now seen to consist in his influence rather than in the body of his own work. No group of his poems seems as enduring as *Drum-Taps*; and his stories, less harrowing upon the nerves than they were, seem relatively factitious when contrasted with the moral depth of Hawthorne or Melville.

4. I have provided a Chronology of the principal events in the five authors' lives on pages 657-61.

certain patterns of taste and aspiration: the intimate kinship to the seventeenth-century metaphysical strain that was felt by Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville; the desire for a functional style wherein Thoreau and Whitman especially were forerunners of our modern interest. That last fact again suggests one of my chief convictions: that works of art can be best perceived if we do not approach them only through the influences that shaped them, but if we also make use of what we inevitably bring from our own lives. That is an unorthodox postulate for literary history. But if we can see *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* much more accurately by uncovering Melville's extraordinary debt to Shakespeare, and come closer to Hawthorne's intentions by observing that his psychological assumptions were still fundamentally the same as Milton's, it seems equally clear that Henry James and Eliot can cast light back on Hawthorne, and that one way of judging *Leaves of Grass* is by juxtaposing it with the deliberate counterstatement made by Whitman's polar opposite, Hopkins. I have, therefore, utilized whatever interrelations of this type have seemed to grow organically from my subject. I do not expect the reader to be willing at this point to grant any relevance to the juxtaposition of Whitman with the painters Millet and Eakins, or to that of Thoreau with the theories of the forgotten sculptor Horatio Greenough. It will be my responsibility to demonstrate those relevances.

The phase of my subject in which I am most interested is its challenge to pass beyond such interrelations to basic formulations about the nature of literature. In the chapter, 'Allegory and Symbolism,' Hawthorne and Melville have been its center, but I have attempted, so far as I was able, to write also an account of these two fundamental modes of apprehending reality. In the concluding chapter, 'Man in the Open Air,' the concern was to bring all five writers together through their subject matter, through their varied responses to the myth of the common man. But these serious responses can be better defined if set into contrast with the comic myth of the frontier, especially in its richest expression by George Washington Harris' *Sut Lovingood*. And the function of myth in literature can be clarified by the rediscovery of its necessity by the age of Joyce and Mann. As a final descriptive instance of my method, I have conceived of the two central books on Hawthorne and Melville as composing a single unit in which the chief value would be the aspects of tragedy that could be discerned through its representative practice by these two writers. I have made no pretence of abstracting a general theory of tragedy, but have

crystallized out certain indispensable attributes that are common also to the practice of both Shakespeare and Milton.

After this description of my method, it is obvious that the division into four books is merely to indicate the central emphasis of each. This division, with the index, should make it easy for a reader particularly concerned with a single writer to concentrate on his work alone. Since volumes of criticism are now conventionally supposed to be short, I might have concealed the length of mine by printing it as four separate books, spaced, say, a year apart. But that would have defeated one of my main purposes: to make each writer cast as much light as possible on all the others. Moreover, our chief critical need would seem to be that of full-length estimates. I saw no use in adding further partial portraits to those of Parrington and Van Wyck Brooks, but wanted to deal in both analysis and synthesis. That required extensive quotation, since a critic, to be of any use, must back up his definitions with some of the evidence through which he has reached them. Only thus can the reader share in the process of testing the critic's judgments, and thereby reach his own. I trust that the further division into sixty-odd short essays will help the reader to skip wherever he wants. However, when dealing with the work of one writer, I have made as many transitions as practicable to that of the others.

It may be of some help to the reader to know from the start that the structure of the volume is based on recurrent themes. In addition to the types of interrelation I have mentioned, the most dominant of these themes are: the adequacy of the different writers' conceptions of the relation of the individual to society, and of the nature of good and evil—these two themes rising to their fullest development in the treatment of tragedy; the stimulus that lay in the transcendental conviction that the word must become one with the thing; the effect produced by the fact that when these writers began their careers, the one branch of literature in which America had a developed tradition was oratory; the effect of the nineteenth century's stress on seeing, of its identification of the poet with the prophet or seer; the connection, real if somewhat intangible, between this emphasis on vision and that put on light by the advancing arts of photography and open-air painting; the inevitability of the symbol as a means of expression for an age that was determined to make a fusion between appearance and what lay behind it; the major desire on the part of all five writers that there should be no split between art and the other

functions of the community, that there should be an organic union between labor and culture.

The avenue of approach to all these themes is the same, through attention to the writers' use of their own tools, their diction and rhetoric, and to what they could make with them. An artist's use of language is the most sensitive index to cultural history, since a man can articulate only what he is, and what he has been made by the society of which he is a willing or an unwilling part. Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville all wrote literature for democracy in a double sense. They felt that it was incumbent upon their generation to give fulfilment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America's political opportunity. Their tones were sometimes optimistic, sometimes blatantly, even dangerously expansive, sometimes disillusioned, even despairing, but what emerges from the total pattern of their achievement—if we will make the effort to repossess it⁵—is literature for our democracy. In reading the lyric, heroic, and tragic expression of our first great age, we can feel the challenge of our still undiminished resources. In my own writing about that age, I have kept in mind the demands made on the scholar by Louis Sullivan, who found a great stimulus for his architecture in the functionalism of Whitman. 'If, as I hold,' Sullivan wrote, 'true scholarship is of the highest usefulness because it implies the possession and application of the highest type of thought, imagination, and sympathy, his works must so reflect his scholarship as to prove that it has drawn him toward his people, not away from them; that his scholarship has been used as a means toward attaining their end, hence his. That his scholarship has been applied for the good and the enlightenment of all the people, not for the pampering of a class. His works must prove, in short (and the burden of proof is on him), that he is a citizen, not a lackey, a true exponent of democracy, not a tool of the most insidious form of anarchy . . . In a democracy there

5. Santayana has said that the American mind does not oppose tradition, it forgets it. The kind of repossession that is essential has been described by André Malraux in an essay on 'The Cultural Heritage' (1936): 'Every civilization is like the Renaissance, and creates its own heritage out of everything in the past that helps it to surpass itself. *A heritage is not transmitted; it must be conquered; and moreover it is conquered slowly and unpredictably. We do not demand a civilization made to order any more than we demand masterpieces made to order. But let us demand of ourselves a full consciousness that the choice made by each of us out of the past—out of the boundless hopes of the men who came before us—is measured by our thirst for greatness and by our wills.*'

can be but one fundamental test of citizenship, namely: Are you using such gifts as you possess for or against the people?' These standards are the inevitable and right extension of Emerson's demands in *The American Scholar*. The ensuing volume has value only to the extent that it comes anywhere near measuring up to them.

accidents and irrelevancies.⁷ But Hawthorne did not forget where the artist's material must be found. Even in the midst of one of his wrong-headed disputes 'about the propriety of adopting the costume of the day in modern sculpture,' he contended that 'either the art ought to be given up (which possibly would be the best course), or else should be used for idealizing the man of the day to himself.' That was not to be the doctrine of the naturalistic novelists, but it had been followed by many great artists from the Greeks to the eighteenth century. Hawthorne's idealization was never at the cost of distorting the 'usable truth' of his own surroundings; or of forgetting the superiority of nature over art. He expressed the contrast between what he believed to be the true attitude and the false one when he described how a sunset in Edinburgh had irradiated a cluster of old houses into a spelled realm of the picturesque, quite obliterating the fact that 'layer upon layer of unfortunate humanity' were massed there in squalor. 'The change symbolized the difference between a poet's imagination of life in the past—or in a state which he looks at through a colored and illuminated medium—and the sad reality.' Save for his personal fondness for Longfellow, Hawthorne had no respect for that kind of poet. 'The ideal' that Hawthorne wanted to project in art was 'the real': not actuality transformed into an impossible perfection, but actuality disengaged from appearance.

3. The Crucial Definition of Romance

OTHER terms that Hawthorne used in the account of his imaginative life also demand attention. His desire to provide a neutral ground where the Actual and Imaginary may meet' happens to contrast significantly with a note of Whitman's that 'imagination and actuality must be united.' To most tastes to-day that difference in phrasing corresponds closely to the

7. Cf. Butcher's comment on the Aristotelian doctrine of how art discovers the universal beneath the particular: 'It passes beyond the bare reality given by nature, and expresses a purified form of reality disengaged from accident, and freed from conditions which thwart its development. The real and the ideal from this point of view are not opposites, as they are sometimes conceived to be. The ideal is the real, but rid of contradictions, unfolding itself according to the laws of its own being, apart from alien influences and the disturbances of chance.'

difference between the two men's ability to project in their pages human characters of flesh and blood. Of the five chief writers treated in this volume, Hawthorne and Whitman certainly stand farthest apart. At the time when the poet sent one of the first copies of *Leaves of Grass* to Emerson, and when Thoreau was reported to have carried another around Concord 'like a red flag,' Hawthorne was settled in England, and there is no evidence that he ever glanced within the book's covers. There are not many more signs of Whitman's acquaintance with Hawthorne's work. When Hawthorne was made surveyor of the port of Salem, Whitman greeted the appointment with great approval in *The Eagle*, not on the ground of enthusiasm for any specific tales, but because their author had always been a Democrat, and had graced the party by his talents. Forty years later when Whitman was ready to oblige Traubel with opinions on any subject, irrespective of the state of his knowledge, he volunteered that Hawthorne would prove more lasting than Howells, but that there was 'a morbid streak' in him to which the poet could not accommodate himself. When 'someone kicked,' Whitman granted that Hawthorne had been a genius, even 'a master, within certain limits. Still . . . I do not read him with pleasure.'

When Whitman wrote in an early notebook, 'Let facts and histories be properly told, there is no more need of romances,' he was probably not thinking especially about Hawthorne, whose use of the term was peculiar to his own practice. But the poet would have been highly suspicious of Hawthorne's 'neutral territory.' It would have struck him as too suggestive of a drawn battle, as a sign that its author had not completely absorbed and mastered his material. Melville, in his increasing desperation while trying to compose *Pierre*, felt that it was impossible to write 'without apparently throwing oneself helplessly open' to experience. That suggests his more passionate relation to life than Hawthorne's. It also shows his lack of the artist's 'hard coldness,' which would have prevented his becoming so involved in his personal suffering that *Pierre* turned out to be a gigantic failure. But by the same token it attests why Melville's exposure of himself to what Lawrence was to call 'the sheer naked slidings of the elements' carried all his work, from *Moby-Dick* on, into a realm of emotional forces quite out of Hawthorne's range.

As usual Hawthorne was the first to note his own limitations. At the end of his account of how all vividness of imagination had deserted him during his tenure in the customhouse, he made his statement that a

better book than he would ever write had doubtless lain hidden in what had struck him as the 'dull and commonplace' routine. 'It was a folly, with the materiality of this daily life pressing so intrusively upon me, to attempt to fling myself back into another age . . . The wiser effort would have been to diffuse thought and imagination through the opaque substance of to-day, and thus to make it a bright transparency; to spiritualize the burden that began to weigh so heavily; to seek, resolutely, the true and indestructible value that lay hidden in the petty and wearisome incidents, and ordinary characters, with which I was now conversant.'

The resolve to do this was what caused him to choose, as the settings for his next two books, the existence with which he was most familiar, an old house in Salem and the dramatic interlude of his experience at Brook Farm. The prefaces to these books outline his definition of a romance, which bears only tangential relation to any of the other usages then current. This definition, which is the most important text for his conception of reality, needs to be read in strictest relation to his circumstances at the time. Out of that context, as it has usually been taken, a sentence like this from the preface to *The Blithedale Romance* would seem such an evasion of the artist's responsibility as to forfeit his book all serious consideration: 'In short, his present concern with the socialist community is merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives.'

But behind that remark lay an incident: the humorous sketch of his companions in the customhouse had called down upon Hawthorne's head a storm of vilification. Consequently, when he proceeded to draw far more extensively on things he had observed near at hand, he wanted to take every precaution to make clear that he was not copying actual people, not even Margaret Fuller in Zenobia. He begged for the license in creating atmosphere which the European reader took for granted, but which the too literal-minded American public denied. In making this plea he had already had a bitter encounter with the dilemma that Cooper, once he had set himself to be a social satirist in *Homeward Bound*, had found to be that of the American author. In contrast with Europe, where bitter personalities excited disgust and society was deemed fair game, the individual here was constantly assailed, but no word was tolerated against the existing order—as Hawthorne had quickly discovered as a result of

his mildly ironic remarks on having been turned out of the surveyorship by the Whigs' resumption of power. No wonder that he ended his preface to *The Seven Gables* with the covering disclaimer that he 'would be glad . . . if, especially in the quarter to which he alludes,' his book might be read as 'having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex.' These protective remarks had been necessitated by the fact that his relative weakness in invention had obliged him to borrow many suggestions, even though no whole character, from people he had observed. The nearest he came to a dangerous likeness was through using as a basis for Judge Pyncheon some traits of the politician who had been most instrumental in ousting him from his job.

But, more importantly, his prefaces also formulated his positive distinctions between the novel and the romance. The former, as Trollope was to reaffirm, '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.' In contrast, Hawthorne went on to say, the writer of a romance could assume 'a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material.' If he thought fit, he might 'so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture.' He might even, though he had best handle these ingredients sparingly, make some use of the strange and marvellous. This suggests Hawthorne's way of finding beauty in a moonlit room, beauty that could not exist 'without some strangeness in the proportion,' as the romantic movement had followed Bacon in affirming. Hawthorne's share of this feeling had come to him especially from his sense of the resistances that the artist's imagination had to overcome in a land where, as he was to say in the preface to *The Marble Faun*, actualities were so 'terribly insisted on.'

In his dedication of *Our Old Home* to Pierce in 1863, he had to admit that by then 'the Present, the Immediate, the Actual,' in the sense of the horrible fact of the war, had proved too potent for him. It had taken away not only his 'scanty faculty,' but even his 'desire for imaginative composition'—remarks that recall how James was to find it impossible to continue *The Ivory Tower* after August 1914. Hawthorne had previously hoped that the notebook sketches he had made of English life should serve merely as a background for 'a work of fiction . . . into which I ambitiously proposed to convey more of various modes of truth than I could have grasped by a direct effort.' The furthest he got with

this 'abortive project' was in his notes for *The Ancestral Footstep*, the germ of whose idea, the return of an American to rediscover the older European life, bears a curious resemblance to that of the other book James was to leave unfinished at his death, *The Sense of the Past*.

The significant words in this last description of Hawthorne's aim are 'various modes of truth,' for these stem straight back to the crucial points he made about the romance in the preface to *The Seven Gables*, that 'as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws,' and that 'it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart.' Again in the context of the time, it must be remembered that though the major drift of fiction had set towards realism, the term had not yet been applied to the novel in English.¹ Hawthorne was therefore taking advantage of the unsettled standards of taste to make a plea for the assumptions that came to him from his past, for what could not be expressed by the 'direct effort,' for the freeing of the inner life through the mode of symbolizing. We have already seen how Emerson equated 'in-direction' with the symbol, and Whitman was to follow Emerson's use of that word very closely. In one of the chapters of *The Confidence Man*, Melville was to tuck away a defense of his own method of heightening everyday life, which stemmed at least partly from Hawthorne. Melville found it strange that, in a work of fiction, 'severe fidelity to real life should be exacted by anyone.' In contrast, the readers for whom he aims will sit down as 'tolerantly as they sit at a play, and with much the same expectations and feelings. They look that fancy shall evoke scenes different from those of the same old crowd round the customhouse counter, and the same old dishes on the boarding-house table.' Was he thinking in that sentence of *The Scarlet Letter*, and even, possibly, of the contrast in *Moby-Dick* between the earth-bound scenes at Peter Coffin's Spouter Inn and the wild drama of Ahab?

And as, in real life, the proprieties will not allow people to act out themselves with that unreserve permitted to the stage; so, in books of fiction, they look not only for more entertainment, but, at bottom, even for more reality, than real life itself can show. Thus, though they want novelty, they want nature, too; but nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed. In this way of thinking, the people in a fiction, like the people in a play, must dress as

1. The earliest Oxford English Dictionary quotation for 'realism' in relation to art of literature is from Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1856).

nobody exactly dresses, talk as nobody exactly talks, act as nobody exactly acts. It is with fiction as with religion; it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie.

By this extension of the tendency of Hawthorne's prefaces, Melville formulated more exactly the kind of heightened reality they both wanted in their fiction. He also indicated how different their conceptions finally were from those, say, of the classic sculptors whom Hawthorne admired. Hawthorne himself, after a round of galleries, suggested the divergence: 'I am partly sensible that some unwritten rules of taste are making their way into my mind; that all this Greek beauty has done something towards refining me, though I am still, however, a very sturdy Goth.' (Incidentally, this was one of the two passages marked by Melville in *The French and Italian Notebooks*, which he acquired shortly after their publication, in 1872.) What Hawthorne implied by his contrast between Greek and Goth is subject to further definition, which will bring us even closer than we have yet come to the way his imagination apprehended reality. It will bring us also to the central reason why the mode of symbolizing, whether it remained richly allusive or whether it froze into a conventional and arbitrary allegory, was basic to the kind of Christian thought that conditioned Emerson and Thoreau as well as Hawthorne and Melville, and was still latent in Whitman's Quaker strain. That generalization does not mean that any of the group, except probably Melville, would have agreed with what Hawthorne experienced in his first full impression of a Gothic cathedral. When Emerson and Thoreau considered architecture, we have seen them primarily concerned with the primitive origin of its forms, with how man might have found the first hint for a nave in an aisle of trees. But Hawthorne, by the very fact of not looking for these universal analogies, but by remaining a provincial, uncovered the deeply buried and almost sole link between an American and the medieval world—a world that had still persevered in many of the folkways of our first settlers, as it had in the overhanging second story, leaded windows, and quaint carvings, 'conceived in the grotesqueness of a Gothic fancy,' of Hawthorne's house of the seven gables.

In visiting Lichfield Cathedral, he had not been the passionate pilgrim, since he had been drawn to the town chiefly by his interest in Johnson's birthplace. Nevertheless, as he looked at its bewilderingly varied form, it

seemed, to his 'uninstructed vision' to be 'the object best worth gazing at in the whole world . . .'

A Gothic cathedral is surely the most wonderful work which mortal man has yet achieved, so vast, so intricate, and so profoundly simple, with such strange, delightful recesses in its grand figure, so difficult to comprehend within one idea, and yet all so consonant that it ultimately draws the beholder and his universe into its harmony. It is the only thing in the world that is vast enough and rich enough.

Not that I felt, or was worthy to feel, an unmingled enjoyment in gazing at this wonder. I could not elevate myself to its spiritual height . . . Ascending but a little way, I continually fell back and lay in a kind of despair, conscious that a flood of uncomprehended beauty was pouring down upon me, of which I could appropriate only the minutest portion. After a hundred years . . . I should still be a gazer from below and at an awful distance, as yet excluded from the interior mystery. But it was something gained, even to have that painful sense of my own limitations, and that half-smothered yearning to soar beyond them. The cathedral showed me how earthly I was, but yet whispered deeply of immortality.

Citing this passage, Herbert Read has remarked that 'this sense of an almost giddy vertiginous gulf between human finiteness and the infinity of the Absolute, whether in art or in religion, is the peculiar Northern or Gothic sensibility.' This cleavage, as it was felt by Hawthorne, and by Melville in pressing his analogy between the operations of art and religion, was not the vague desire of the moth for the star. In their shared conviction that art 'should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie,' their roots were in the deepest Christian experience. The essence of Hawthorne's greatness, as Melville saw it, was that he breathed 'that unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity in all things.' The range of implications that Melville compressed into that phrase will emerge only as we examine the development of his own handling of tragedy; but the fact that he became a tragic writer was owing to his widening sense of the gulf between the ideal and actuality, between the professions and practice of both democracy and religion. This sense was what separated him, as much as Hawthorne, from the transcendentalists, who bridged the gap between the finite and the Absolute by their assurance of 'the infinitude of the private man.'

Perhaps the chief reason why both Hawthorne and Melville succeeded in creating so few living characters, in contrast with Fielding and Jane

Austen, or even with their own contemporaries Thackeray and Dickens, was that the Americans were more concerned with human destiny than with every man in his humor. Certainly it is true that long before he had seen a Gothic cathedral, Hawthorne had wanted to establish in the 'laws' of his romances a related manner of multiple symbolizing of spiritual meanings. He too had wanted 'strange, delightful recesses,' liberties from literal verisimilitude. For the main concern of the romance was not external details, exactly presented settings, turns of speech, or characterizing gestures. It was 'the life within the life.'

PRACTICE

FROM this point forward in this chapter the concern is no longer with elucidating why allegorical habits of mind were natural to Melville as to Hawthorne, but with appraising some of Hawthorne's most characteristic work by means of various comparisons, chiefly with Melville and James. No longer theory, but practice.

The briefest way of estimating the effectiveness of allegory is suggested by Brownell's declaration that the form 'justifies itself when the fiction is the fact and the moral the induction.' *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels* are created as such true stories, so absorbing in themselves that the allegorical machinery does not grate on us. Their analogies present themselves naturally, not with the labored ingenuity of Spenser's siege of the House of Alma, the attack of the forces of evil on the soul's domain in the body, the description of which is elaborated even to the 'twice sixteen' glistening warders who guard the gate of the mouth.

Hawthorne possessed little of Bunyan's common solidness. The difference between them runs curiously parallel to the American's own repeated comment on the change between the early Puritans and their nineteenth-century descendants, clearly observable in the less substantial frame, the alteration from the ruddy English complexion to Yankee sallowness, the increased nervous sensibility. Only occasionally is Hawthorne's procedure as matter-of-fact as when he introduces 'The Maypole of Merrymount,' one of the very earliest of his historical tales, with the remark that the events, 'recorded on the grave pages of our New England annalists, have

4. Full Circle

'Make-belief is an enervating exercise of fancy not to be confused with imaginative growth. The saner and greater mythologies are not fancies; they are the utterance of the whole soul of man and, as such, inexhaustible to meditation. They are no amusement or diversion to be sought as a relaxation and an escape from the hard realities of life. They are these hard realities in projection, their symbolic recognition, co-ordination and acceptance. Through such mythologies our will is collected, our powers unified, our growth controlled. Through them the infinitely divergent strayings of our being are brought into "balance or reconciliation." The "opposite and discordant qualities" of things in them acquire a form; and such integrity as we possess as "civilized" men is our inheritance through them. Without his mythologies man is only a cruel animal without a soul—for a soul is a central part of his governing mythology—he is a congeries of possibilities without order and without aim.'

—RICHARDS, *Coleridge on Imagination*

THOREAU'S ability to create myth ran on a deeper level than his amused fancies about Franklin. Those fancies were the instinctive product of his sense of the age's plenitude. He would have liked Mann's description of myth as 'the holiday garment,' 'the recurrent feast which bestrides the tenses and makes the has-been and the to-be present to the popular sense.' Thoreau's own superabundant life let him find a river god in a logger on the Penobscot, it let him read in Homer about 'such a fire-eyed Agamemnon as you may see at town meetings.' He was following there one of Emerson's most fruitful leads. The birth of a first son (1836) had given Emerson's life at Concord its final consecration. He felt that he had at last reached the solidity of life's fundamental pattern: 'A wife, a babe, a brother, poverty, and a country, which the Greek had, I have.' Emerson continued these thoughts in a passage that he later incorporated into 'History': 'Our admiration of the Antique is not admiration of the old, but of the natural. We admire the Greek in an American ploughboy often.' Thoreau might have said that, but there turned out to be this crucial distinction: there was a great deal of admiration of the antique in Thoreau's practice, in the precision and toughness of language that

the Greeks and Romans had taught him to be his goal. Emerson's heart, as Santayana has said, 'was fixed on eternal things,' his Now was that of the metaphysicians, and—despite his earnest desire that it should be otherwise—had very little relation to an actual present or past. Thoreau possessed more of the past, not through his mind, but as an experienced linguistic discipline. Therefore he inevitably possessed a more concrete present as well.

He re-created a basic myth because he was able to assimilate his conscious analogies into re-enacting what Emerson had perceived but could not put his muscle into, the union of work and culture. As Odell Shepard has discerned, 'This man who read his Homer in a hut by a woodland lake can show us better, perhaps, than any other teacher we have yet had how to coordinate whatever is peculiarly American with the tradition of the ages.' The day after Thoreau had settled by Walden he felt that he had found 'the very light and atmosphere in which the works of Grecian art were composed, and in which they rest.' He was glad on summer nights to sit on the shore of his Ithaca, 'a fellow-wanderer and survivor of Ulysses.' But the reason why his allusions did not become merely literary, the reason why he accomplished his rare coordination, lies in the way he reacted to his reading. Cato's *De Re Rustica* did not remain quaint for him. He described it thus (1851): 'A small treatise or Farmer's Manual of those days, fresh from the field of Roman life, all reeking with and redolent of the life of those days, containing more indirect history than any of the histories of Rome of direct,—all of that time but that time,—*here* is a simple, direct pertinent word addressed to the Romans. And where are *the Romans?*' Thoreau's answer was that the Romans are ordinarily 'an ornament of rhetoric,' but that 'we have here their *New England Farmer*, the very manual those Roman farmers read . . . as fresh as a dripping dish-cloth from a Roman kitchen.' It was as if he read the letters of Solon Robinson, and how much was paid to Joe Farrar 'for work done.'

Thoreau thus became an actor in the great cyclic drama, but did not give up his New England accent. He had not perceived more than Emerson of the New England character. For Emerson had caught its essence when observing the struggle between 'sage and savage' in Ezra Ripley (1834): 'These old semi-savages do from the solitude in which they live and their remoteness from artificial society and their inevitable daily comparing man with beast, village with wilderness, their inevitable

acquaintance with the outward nature of man, and with his strict dependence on sun and rain and wind and frost, wood, worm, cow and bird, get an education to the Homeric simplicity, which all the libraries of the Reviews and the Commentators in Boston do not countervail.' Thoreau had the immeasurable benefit of such thought from the day he listened to *The American Scholar*. He could give it sturdier expression. His words ring with the authority of having experienced both halves of his comparison when he says that Minott tells his long stories with the same satisfaction in the details as Herodotus. In his sympathy with the seasons as well as with the farmers' often grim effort to wrest subsistence from them, Thoreau learned that 'the perennial mind' did not die with Cato, 'and will not die with Hosmer.' This mind was nothing rarefied; it was an integral part of the functioning of the human organism. What interested Thoreau most in literature was the expression of this mind, the insight it gave into collective existence: 'it is the spirit of humanity, that which animates both so-called savages and civilized nations, working through a man, and not the man expressing himself.' Thoreau had come to that fundamental understanding while studying the Indians, just as Mann came to it at the close of his essay on Dürer, in whose deep humanity he had found 'history as myth, history that is ever fresh and ever present. For we are much less individuals than we either hope or fear to be.'

Thoreau's accent is no less that of a New Englander for betraying an awareness of both the Romans and the Indians. Living in an age of waning Christianity, he became convinced that there was no important difference between his countrymen's religion and that of the ancient world: 'The New Englander is a pagan suckled in a creed outworn.' Thoreau's light-hearted worship of Pan set the tone for his *Week*. But much of his praise of Jupiter in place of Jehovah was designed simply to shock, and some of it is merely frivolous, gaining its license from the accepted fact of the Christian background. He struck his most autochthonous vein when he noted the difference between English and American time, how here he could penetrate almost immediately to a savage past. He was not a savage himself, more the villager than the hunter, but he felt in his world no unbridgeable gap between these roles. His sense of closeness to the Indian strengthened his hold on the primitive, and kept him from writing Victorian idylls. He was most nearly an antique Roman when he said: 'Superstition has always reigned. It is absurd to think that these farmers, dressed in their Sunday clothes, proceeding to church, differ

essentially in this respect from the Roman peasantry. They have merely changed the names and number of their gods. Men were as good then as they are now, and loved one another as much—or little.'

The source of vigor in Thoreau's New England festival was his knowledge that 'the husbandman is always a better Greek than the scholar is prepared to appreciate.' The old customs still survive, even while antiquarians grow gray in commemorating their past existence. 'The farmers crowd to the fair to-day in obedience to the same ancient law, which Solon or Lycurgus did not enact, as naturally as bees swarm and follow their queen.' Thoreau's quality there, as we have found it in *Walden*, is more cultivated than wild. It is more lyric and pastoral than heroic, though this, like the question of whether he belonged to the village or to the forest or to the borderline between, is simply a matter of degree. He saw the classical present in his own surroundings just as Sarah Jewett was to do when she envisaged the Bowden family reunion in its procession across the field to the picnic grove as though it was a company of ancient Greeks going to worship the god of the harvests: 'We were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence and simple progress; we carried the tokens and inheritance of all such households from which this had descended, and were only the latest of our line.' Unlike Thoreau's, Miss Jewett's tone is generally elegiac. Robert Frost has more of Thoreau's dramatic immediacy, but since the forests have now receded and the cities have encroached on the farms, Frost's scope as a poet of nature has inevitably been contracted to the more purely personal.

The heroic quality is absent from *North of Boston*, if by that quality you mean what Thoreau could sense in Whitman, that he was 'something a little more than human.' Thoreau was not blind to the element of brag, but when he called on Whitman in Brooklyn (1856), he felt at once, 'He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has ever seen.' It is hardly necessary to dwell on Whitman's creation of myth, since it is so explicit throughout the whole breadth of his work. He looked at the past in a more reckless mood than Thoreau: 'As if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical! As if men do not make their mark out of any times! As if the opening of the western continent by discovery and what has transpired since in North and South America were less than the small theatre of the antique or the aim-

less sleepwalking of the middle ages! That was the opening blast of his 1855 preface, though he presently added:

In the name of the States shall I scorn the antique?
Why these are the children of the antique to justify it.

Whitman set out more deliberately than any of his contemporaries to create the kind of hero whom Emerson had foreshadowed in his varying guises of the Scholar and the Poet. Looking back over his career in his final preface, he said that *Leaves of Grass* had been impelled by his desire to realize his own personality, both physical and spiritual, in the midst of its momentous surroundings, 'to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book.' He had said long before, 'I have but one central figure, the general human personality typified in myself.' He had felt from the time of his first *Leaves* that if his book was to be true to its American origin, it must be 'a song of "the great pride of man in himself."' What saved Whitman from the last extreme of egotism was his insistence on the typical and his boundless store of fellow-feeling. His one quarrel with Thoreau was his 'disdain for men (for Tom, Dick, and Harry): inability to appreciate the average.'¹ If the poet had discovered himself to be at the creative center of life, with all its potential energies radiating out from him, this discovery was the property of all. Whitman wanted his book to compel 'every reader to transpose himself or herself into the central position, and become the living fountain.' He took his final pleasure in reflecting: 'I have imagined a life which should be that of the average man in average circumstances, and still grand, heroic.'

His work inevitably assumed cosmic proportions. He said that from the press of his foot to the earth sprang 'a hundred affections' that eluded his best efforts to describe them. But the language of his poems does not

1. The difference between their temperaments could hardly have been revealed more characteristically than in their first meeting. Thoreau reported: 'I did not get far in conversation with him,—two more being present,—and among the few things which I chanced to say, I remember that one was, in answer to him as representing America, that I did not think much of America or of politics, and so on, which may have been somewhat of a damper to him.' Years later Whitman generalized: Thoreau 'couldn't put his life into any other life—realize why one man was so and another man not so: was impatient with other people on the street and so forth . . . We could not agree at all in our estimate of men—of the men we met here, there, everywhere—the concrete man. Thoreau had an abstraction about man—a right abstraction: there we agreed.'

suggest contact with the soil so much as with the streets of Brooklyn. When he thought of the past, his instinctive analogy was:

Lads ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes no less to me than the gods of the antique wars.

When he envisaged his 'stock personality' in its most godlike stature, he made it come to life by breaking into slang:

Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands,
Say, old top-knot, what do you want?

Otherwise his cult of himself as the bearded prophet could lead into pages of solemn straining for effect. The dichotomy that we observed in both his diction and his content expresses itself again in the contrast between Whitman's actual and ideal selves. Tocqueville foresaw his problem when he observed that the poet of democracy, having given up the past, thus ran the risk of losing part of the present in his excessive preoccupation with the future destinies of mankind. Lawrence's distinction between the poetry of the future and the poetry of the present is likewise partly relevant. Lawrence held that the first may possess the crystallized perfection of things to come, whereas the second, lacking this, seeks to catch the present in all its confusion, and is 'plasmic.' Whitman possessed none of the power of thought or form that would have been necessary to give his poems of ideal democracy any perfection, and to keep them from the barrenness of abstraction. He created his lasting image of the common man and 'the pending action of this Time and Land we swim in' when he remained the instinctual being who found no sweeter fat than stuck to his own bones.

He was never conscious of the dichotomy, but he described its consequences in his surprised and hesitant admission as an old man that Thoreau, though not 'so precious, tender, a personality' as Emerson, was 'one of the native forces' and so possibly 'bigger.' The heroic stature that Whitman recognized in Thoreau was the result of Thoreau's having lived up to his own dictum that 'it is the faculty of the poet to see present things as if . . . also past and future, as if distant or universally significant.' By so doing Thoreau made actual the classical present instead of merely perceiving it like Emerson. Whitman had neither Thoreau's lucidity nor firmness. By cutting himself loose from any past, he often

went billowing away into a dream of perfectibility, which tried to make the human literally divine and was hence unreal. But because he was more porous to all kinds of experience, he gave a more comprehensive, if confused, image of his fluid age than Thoreau did.

The cult of perfection was an inevitable concomitant of the romantic cult of the future. The attitude behind both received its most searching contemporary analysis from Hawthorne. He sensed that Emerson's exaltation of the divinity in man had obliterated the distinctions between man and God, between time and eternity. Although no theologian, Hawthorne did not relax his grip on the Christian conception of time. This had been obscured by Thoreau and Whitman no less than by Emerson in their exhilaration over the fullness of the moment. Hawthorne knew that he lived both in time and out of it, that the process of man's history was a deep interaction between eternity and time, an incessant eruption of eternity into time. And he knew the tragic nature of such conflict. In spite of the capacity of man's soul to share immediately in eternal life, his finite and limited nature made it inevitable that nothing perfect could be realized in time.² Hawthorne's understanding of human destiny ran counter to all the doctrines of progress. It made him cling fast to the quality of actual existence even though he was aware of its impermanence; it made him insist that 'all philosophy that would abstract man from the present is no more than words.' It made him profoundly conscious that the moments of greatest human import were the moments of moral crisis, for then men and women entered most nearly into the eternal nature even as they were aware of their limitations.

Such a reading of destiny came to Hawthorne through his resistance to what he could not deem otherwise than transcendental fads. It enabled him to criticize, in *The Blithedale Romance*, one phase of the contemporary myth, the quest for Utopia. However inadequately worked out some of his social criticism may be, there is no questioning the acuity with which he saw the weaknesses of Brook Farm. He could not help feeling that its spirit was essentially that of a picnic, of an escape to a woodland paradise. As he watched the community's competition with the outside market-gardeners, he soon realized that with relation to 'society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood.'

2. Cf. above, pp. 254-5. Our present awareness of this strain of thought has been increased by the rediscovery of Kierkegaard, and by Karl Barth's 'theology of crisis.'

These views might well have seemed captious to George Ripley, who gave his heart's blood to prove that such experiments could lead the way to a more just organization of society as a whole. Where Hawthorne's criticism runs no risk of being obscurantistic is in his portrait of Hollingsworth, man the reformer. There Hawthorne could make articulate his understanding of what happened when a man failed to distinguish between time and eternity, between his fallibility and his longing for the ideal. Hollingsworth was desperately earnest in his scheme for reforming criminals 'through an appeal to their higher instincts,' but he had no faint inkling of the complexity of man's nature. He was warped by his single thought, to which he would brook no opposition, and was interested in other people only to the extent that they accepted his plan. He became an incarnation of the terrible egotism that mistakes its own will for the promptings of God.

Emerson had more opportunity to study reformers than Hawthorne, since they were always swarming around him, but he never saw the problem they presented with such deadly lucidity. He found many of them bores, but he was partial to their trust in uplift, and relied on compensation to atone for their want of balance. When Thoreau and Whitman thought of a reformer, they, like Emerson, remembered the heroic affirmation of John Brown, of whom Hawthorne said: 'Nobody was ever more justly hanged. He won his martyrdom fairly and took it firmly.' But both Whitman and Thoreau could have learned something from the example of Hollingsworth. Their images of the rising common man are far more compelling than anything Hawthorne conceived through Holgrave. But Whitman's belief in the poet as his own Messiah escaped Hollingsworth's tragedy only by the counterpoise of his generous warmth. And although Thoreau evaded the literal-minded apostles of improvement, his weakest element lay in the impossible perfection he demanded from mankind. ('I love my friends very much, but I find that it is no use to go to see them. I hate them commonly when I am near them.') So far as there was a defect in his valiant self-reliance, it emerged when he turned his back on other men, and sought for truth not in the great and common world but exclusively within himself.

What Hawthorne found through his descent into the caverns of the heart was the general bond of suffering. His discovery gave Melville his only clue through the labyrinth of the age's confusions. He plunged deeper into the blackness than Hawthorne had, and needed more com-

plex images to express his findings. He developed one by likening Ahab's buried life, 'his whole awful essence,' to the mystic grandeur of an ancient statue far beneath the modern surface of existence. The primitive spoke to Melville with different meanings than it did to Thoreau. He might joke about Hercules as an antique Crockett, but he did not so often think of the presentness of the past as of the pastness of the present, of its illimitable shadowy extensions backward to the roots of history, to the preconscious and the unknown. 'Ten million things were as yet uncovered to Pierre. The old mummy lies buried in cloth on cloth; it takes time to unwrap this Egyptian king. Yet now, forsooth, because Pierre began to see through the first superficiality of the world, he fondly weens he has come to the unlayered substance. But, far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficialities.' That is akin to Mann's reflection on the bottomless well of the past, on the incertitude of the researcher as he lets down his plummet into unfathomable depths. But the author of *Pierre* did not possess Mann's humanistic patience. He had become identified with his hero's agony: 'By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid—and no body is there! appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!'

Such a mood could lead only to nihilism. But the passion with which Melville made his demands upon life had given him previously an instinctive awareness of the significance of myth. He had commented in *Moby-Dick* on the loss of poetic mythology 'in the now egotistical sky.' He had sensed the primal vitality of the stories that are preserved in the popular memory, and that help keep alive the hidden strivings of the human spirit by giving them concrete shape. He had sensed too the destructive quality of the enlightened mind if by its criticism it served merely to divorce man from his past by dispelling the reality of the myths, by reducing them to a remote and naïve stage of racial development. Though Melville did not articulate his theory of history, he affirmed its values by finding figures of tragic stature on board a whaler, and in Ahab all the majesty of a Biblical king. Melville knew that beyond the bright circle of man's educated consciousness lay unsuspected energies that were both magnificent and terrifying. He wanted to rouse his country to its 'contemporary grandeur.' His detailed recording of

the whaling industry sprang from his comprehension that the living facts of ordinary existence were the source of whatever heroic myths Americans could live by.

His choice of material was hardly thus deliberate, but by taking the segment of human activity that he knew best, he re-enacted through it the major significances of myth. He had been attracted to whaling as the great adventure of his day, around which had clustered such widely current legends as the one Emerson had reported in his journal (1834) after a trip from New Bedford to Boston: 'A seaman in the coach told the story of an old sperm-whale, which he called a white whale, which was known for many years by the whalers as Old Tom, and who rushed upon the boats which attacked him, and crushed the boats to small chips in his jaws, the men generally escaping by jumping overboard and being picked up. A vessel was fitted out at New Bedford, he said, to take him. And he was finally taken somewhere off Payta Head by the *Winslow* or the *Essex*.' That was the subject for an adventure story, but the way Melville transformed his version shows the principal function of myth, its symbolizing of the fundamental truths. In his narrative of whaling Melville could see how this industry typified man's wresting a livelihood from nature and extending his power over the globe by peaceful commerce rather than by war. He could trustingly visualize the whale ship as a means of communication, battering down ancient prejudices, opening doors in the Orient, even, as we have noted, leading the way to the liberation of South America from autocratic domination and to the establishment 'of the eternal democracy' there.

But that was scarcely Melville's main theme. The dark half of his mind remembered what effect the white man had left on the South Sea islands; and as he meditated too on the brutal savagery in the conquest of the whale, his imagination stirred to the latent possibilities in the story Emerson had heard. He grasped intuitively the process that Whitehead has described: 'We inherit legends, weird, horrible, beautiful, expressing in curious, specialized ways the interweaving of law and capriciousness in the mystery of things. It is the problem of good and evil. Sometimes the law is good and the capriciousness evil; sometimes the law is iron and evil and the capriciousness is merciful and good.' Melville could not say directly whether the law was good or evil. He had been born into a world whose traditional religion was in a state of decay, and whose grim Jehovah often struck him as being only the pro-

jection of man's inexorable will to power. But as Melville responded to the Christian belief in equality and brotherhood, he poured out his praise to 'the great God absolute, the centre and circumference of all democracy.'

Melville did not achieve in *Moby-Dick* a *Paradise Lost* or a *Faust*. The search for the meaning of life that could be symbolized through the struggle between Ahab and the White Whale was neither so lucid nor so universal. But he did apprehend therein the tragedy of extreme individualism, the disasters of the selfish will, the agony of a spirit so walled within itself that it seemed cut off from any possibility of salvation. Beyond that, his theme of the White Whale was so ambivalent that as he probed into the meaning of good and evil he found their expected values shifting. His symbols were most comprehensive when they enabled him to elicit 'what remains primeval in our formalized humanity,' when they took such a basic pattern as that of his later discernment of Abraham and Isaac in Captain Vere and Billy. When the Pacific called out the response of his united body and mind, he wrote the enduring signature of his age. He gave full expression to its abundance, to its energetic desire to master history by repossessing all the resources of the hidden past in a timeless and heroic present. But he did not avoid the darkness in that past, the perpetual suffering in the heart of man, the broken arc of his career which inevitably ends in death. He thus fulfilled what Coleridge held to be the major function of the artist: he brought 'the whole soul of man into activity.'

Chronology

- 1803 Emerson born, at Boston, May 25.
 1804 Hawthorne born, at Salem, July 4.
 1817 Thoreau born, at Concord, July 12.
 1819 Whitman born, at West Hills, Long Island, May 31.
 Melville born, at New York City, August 1.
 1821 Emerson graduated from Harvard, and spent the next seven years school-teaching and studying in the Harvard Divinity School.
 1825 Hawthorne graduated from Bowdoin, in the same class with Longfellow and Franklin Pierce, and went back to live in Salem.
 1828 Hawthorne published anonymously *Fanshawe, A Tale*.
 1829 Emerson accepted the call to become pastor of the Second Church of Boston, and was married to Ellen Tucker.
 1831 Emerson's wife died.
 1831 Whitman was working as a printer's devil on Long Island and in
 -34 Brooklyn.
 1832 Emerson resigned his pastorate, and went to Europe for a year. He began his career as a lecturer on his return.
 1834 Emerson made his home at Concord.
 Because of his family's lack of resources after financial reverses and the death of his father, Melville had to leave the Albany Academy and become a clerk.
 1835 Emerson married Lydia Jackson.
 1836 Emerson published *Nature*.
 1836 Whitman taught school on Long Island, and worked for various
 -41 papers.
 1837 Hawthorne published *Twice-Told Tales*, a collection of the stories he had been writing during the past nine years.
 Emerson delivered *The American Scholar* as the Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard.
 Thoreau graduated from Harvard, and started his journal.
 Melville shipped as a sailor on a merchantman for Liverpool.
 1838 Emerson delivered his Divinity School Address.
 Thoreau taught school at Concord, read his first lecture before the Concord Lyceum, and made his first trip to Maine.