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Journey into Moral Darkness: “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” as Allegory

ARTHUR T. BROES

LARGELY IGNORED a decade ago, “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” has suddenly become one of the most widely analyzed of all Hawthorne’s short stories. Although critics have been unanimous in according the story a prominent place among his works, they have been equally unanimous in their inability to agree on either the general nature or particular merit of the tale. Mrs. Q. D. Leavis, one of the first critics to recognize the importance of the work, saw it as a perceptive socio-historical document, “a prophetic forecast of the rejection of England that was to occur in fact much later.”¹ A few years later Simon O. Lesser offered a psychoanalytic interpretation of the tale, looking upon it as a successful treatment on an unconscious level of the son’s rejection of the father-figure.² Daniel G. Hoffman has argued more recently that the story deals with nothing less than “an eighteenth-century colonial re-enactment of the ancient ritual of the deposition of the Scapegoat-King.”³ Beneath

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¹“Hawthorne as Poet,” *Sewanee Review*, LIX (Spring, 1951), 199. Echoing Mrs. Leavis, Daniel G. Hoffman has remarked that the story treats “the most important political and cultural problem of the American republic: self-determination and its consequences” (“Yankee Bumpkin and Scapegoat King,” *Sewanee Review*, LXIX [Winter, 1961], 48).

²“The Image of the Father,” *Partisan Review*, XXII (Summer, 1955), 372–381. Franklin B. Newman, applying similar Freudian terminology, sees it as an effective allegorical dream-vision dealing with “a process of disillusionment and recognition, centering around the quest for the Kinsman” (“‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux’: An Interpretation,” *University of Kansas City Review*, XXI [March, 1955], 210).

³*Op. cit.*, p. 48. Hoffman specifically identifies Major Molineux with Frazer’s Scapegoat King, “a ritual role invested with two functions, the expulsion of evil and the sacrificial death of the divine ruler whose declining potency is renewed in his

this wealth of historical, psychoanalytic, and mythic interpretations, Hawthorne's allegorical indebtedness in this tale has gone largely unnoticed. As I shall attempt to point out, "Major Molineux" is essentially an eclectic work, made up of traditional allegorical episodes and patterns borrowed from Dante, Spenser, and Bunyan. Hawthorne once counseled his sister Elizabeth: "You should not make quotations; but put other people's thoughts into your own words and amalgamate the whole into a mass."⁴ In this tale he has followed his own advice rather closely, deftly weaving disparate elements together to provide a sombre vision of moral and spiritual reality.⁵

A summary of the simple plot does little to convey the allegorical complexities of the story. Robin, a youth of eighteen, comes to town in the middle of the night from his home in the country to seek his uncle, Major Molineux. A wealthy man apparently of civil and military prominence, the Major, on a visit to Robin's family a year or two earlier, indirectly promised to provide for the boy when he came of age. Robin, seeking to take advantage of the implied offer, wanders through the "crooked and narrow streets" of the dark town in an unsuccessful search for his kinsman. In response to his earnest enquiries as to his uncle's whereabouts, the youth receives only threats and hostile rebuffs. Wearing by his fruitless efforts, he is at last informed by a passer-by, whose face is grotesquely painted in colors of red and black, that his uncle will be coming by shortly. The promise is fulfilled. Surrounded by a shrieking, savage-like band of men holding flaming torches, the Major appears shamefully covered with tar and feathers. Although he inexplicably laughs at the Major's humiliation, Robin appears broken in spirit by this

young successor." He admits the difficulty of suggesting "that this modern anthropological theory was available to Hawthorne in 1832," but sidesteps this problem—in a not altogether satisfactory fashion—by stating that "we can infer his intuitive understanding of the primitive ritual which he used metaphorically in describing the downfall of Major Molineux" (p. 53).

⁴ Quoted by Manning Hawthorne, "Aunt Ebe: Some Letters of Elizabeth M. Hawthorne," *New England Quarterly*, XX (June, 1947), 214.

⁵ Of all the critics willing to come to grips with this baffling work, only Seymour L. Gross appears to have recognized that it is primarily concerned with "the apprehension of the nature of moral reality" ("Hawthorne's 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux': History as Moral Adventure," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XII [Sept., 1957], 106). Despite Gross's emphasis on the moral aspects of the story, even he has failed to indicate fully its allegorical elements and, as a consequence, has minimized the concluding pessimistic implications of the work, which has at its moral center the theme which was to occupy Hawthorne throughout his life—the initiation of man into the evil of the universe.

sudden "shock of recognition." He asks a gentleman who has befriended him for the location of the ferry so that he may return to the country, but is persuaded by the stranger to remain in the city for at least a few days. "You may rise in the world without the help of your kinsman" (p. 641),⁶ his newly found benefactor tells him as the tale concludes.

In his discussion of the allegorical hero, Edwin Honig has stated: "Before we know *who* he is, we discover *what* he is. We are asked to recognize him first by physical signs: his clothing, his burden, the paraphernalia he carries."⁷ Hawthorne makes the same request of the reader in his initial description of Robin: "Under his left arm was a heavy cudgel formed of an oak sapling, and retaining a part of the hardened root; and his equipment was completed by a wallet, not so abundantly stocked as to incommode the vigorous shoulders on which it hung" (p. 617).

Seymour Gross has already clearly indicated the symbolic significance of the oaken cudgel. This object "is both the emblem of the life Robin has left behind him in the quietly uncomplicated rustic town in which he has been reared, and of the inadequacy of such a life as preparation for an assault on the city of night."⁸ Of the wallet, however, Gross says nothing.

With his wallet on his back, Robin bears a sharp resemblance to Bunyan's pilgrim, Christian, who journeys to the Celestial City with a similar burden. F. O. Matthiessen has pointed to "the extraordinary frequency with which memories of *Pilgrim's Progress* asserted themselves at moments when Hawthorne was creating his own intense crises,"⁹ and it appears likely that Hawthorne had Christian in mind when he describes the boy in his troubled pilgrimage.¹⁰ Hawthorne, however, gives his borrowed materials an ironic twist. Robin, unlike Christian, has not arrived at the Celestial City, but only the fiery city of the damned.

⁶ All page references to "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" are from the Riverside edition of *The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. G. P. Lathrop (Boston, 1883), III.

⁷ *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (Evanston, 1959), p. 81.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁹ *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), p. 273. For the most comprehensive treatment of Hawthorne's knowledge and use of Bunyan, see W. Stacy Johnson, "Hawthorne and *The Pilgrim's Progress*," *JEGP*, L (1951), 156-166.

¹⁰ As if to substantiate this identification Hawthorne repeats the Bunyan-like description of the youth later in the tale: "All eyes were now turned on the country lad, standing at the door, in his worn three-cornered hat, gray coat, leather breeches, and blue yarn stockings, leaning on an oaken cudgel, and bearing a wallet on his back" (p. 622).

Little attention has been paid to Robin's initial encounter with the ferryman, a meeting which sets the allegorical direction for the remainder of the story. The boy persuades the boatman, who is individualized only by the lantern he holds in his hand, to take him across the river into the town in which his uncle resides only after he promises to pay an extra fare. After the crossing, the ferryman refuses to accept the price originally agreed upon and demands an additional sum, which Robin reluctantly pays. This disagreement recalls a similar episode in the Third Canto of Dante's *Inferno*: Virgil, Dante's guide, argues with Charon, the boatman of the river Styx, over Dante's entrance into the regions of the damned. Charon contends that Dante has no right to seek passage since he is not yet dead. Virgil has his way, however, and Dante, who has fallen into a swoon, awakens to find himself on the other side of the river. A similar dispute occurs in Lucian's fourth *Dialogue of the Dead*, in which Hermes, who guides the souls of the dead to the underworld, demands payment from the ferryman for repairs he has performed upon his boat.

We know enough of Hawthorne's life and writings to suggest that there is more than an accidental parallel here. He was undoubtedly acquainted with the *Satires* of Lucian as a result of his classical education at Bowdoin and his later independent reading in the classics, while the references and allusions to Dante, interspersed throughout his fiction and notebooks, reveal a close familiarity with the Florentine poet.¹¹ The parallel becomes even more apparent when one realizes that the town the boy enters is a worldly hell, in many ways as terrifying as the one visited by Dante. The townspeople, who respond to Robin's enquiries with threats and curses, are as spiritually dead as the damned souls who people Dante's *Inferno*. In his innocence of the world's corruption, the youth is still morally alive, and therefore, like Dante, has no business in this unholy city of the dead. The ferryman, in his allegorical Charon-like capacity, recognizes this fact and is therefore reluctant to take him across the river.

¹¹ Hawthorne's classically oriented curriculum at Bowdoin is described in Randall Stewart's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New Haven, 1948), pp. 16–17. For evidence of Hawthorne's continued interest in the classics, following his departure from college, see Marion T. Kesselring's "Hawthorne's Reading, 1828–1850," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LIII (1949), 55–71, 121–138, 173–194. For Hawthorne's references to Dante, see *Works* (Riverside edition) II, 109, 197; V, 437; VI, 350; X, 475. J. Chesley Mathews has traced Dante's influence upon Hawthorne in "Hawthorne's Knowledge of Dante," *University of Texas Studies in English*, XX (1940), 157–165.

Lesser contends that "Robin is never so intent on finding his illustrious relative as he believes he is and as it appears."¹² He attributes Robin's failure to ask the ferryman for directions to a subconscious desire not to find the Major, the symbol of parental domination from which he is trying to escape. Such a view is possible only if one is prepared to ignore the many repeated and determined efforts that Robin does make to locate his uncle, and to concentrate excessively on the one or two occasions in which he acts in a somewhat unconcerned, but nevertheless normal, youthful fashion. Robin's failure to question the boatman can be explained satisfactorily on either a literal or allegorical level without recourse to such psychoanalytic probing which, as Gross has pointed out, has "very little to do with Hawthorne's story."¹³ From a realistic point of view, this oversight can be attributed to the natural confusion of a country boy entering the city for the first time. Allegorically, the Charon-like ferryman, whose function it is to direct the damned souls to Hell, would hardly be qualified to lead Robin to the Major, who is, as we shall see, the only morally alive person in the town.

William Bysshe Stein was the first to attach any significance to Robin's encounters in the city. Each of these meetings, he states, is somehow "connected with the attainment of salvation, the New Jerusalem."¹⁴ The distorted personalities of the people whom Robin meets suggest that these encounters have no such positive, Christian significance, but rather a more sinister, demoniac implication. In a discussion of the relationship between Hawthorne's "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" and the *Faerie Queene*, Stewart has stated that "it seems unlikely that he could have created Lady Eleanore, the embodiment of Pride, without remembering Spenser's famous pageant [of the Seven Deadly Sins]."¹⁵ It appears equally improbable that he could have written "Major Molineux" without this procession in mind, for the strange creatures who pass before Robin's uncomprehending eyes are nothing less than thinly veiled, if not always fully developed, representatives of these vices.¹⁶ The

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 377.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁴ "Teaching Hawthorne's 'My Kinsman Major Molineux,'" *College English*, XX (November, 1958), p. 84.

¹⁵ "Hawthorne and *The Faerie Queene*," *Philological Quarterly*, XII (April, 1933), 199.

¹⁶ Hyatt H. Waggoner has already suggested the allegorical significance of some of these figures. Such an interpretation, he states, "is essentially valid and could be worked out in detail" (*Hawthorne: A Critical Study*, Cambridge [Mass.], 1955, p. 46).

ferryman, on this allegorical level, is not only an earthly Charon but in his demands for more money becomes the embodiment of the sin of avarice.

Robin enters the town “with as light a step as if his day’s journey had not already exceeded thirty miles and with as eager an eye as if he were entering London City, instead of the little metropolis of a New England colony” (p. 618). This statement carries with it a double irony. The youth can approach his task with such confidence because, in his brashness and naivete, he is unaware of the ordeal that awaits him. In a sense it also makes little difference whether it is London or a New England town that he is entering, for the forces of evil are to be found everywhere in the world. Hawthorne is again seeking to stress the universal implications of his story. “Major Molineux” is ultimately concerned, not with the isolated, unsettling experience of one eighteen-year old in an inhospitable small town, but with the experience of every man, who must sooner or later come to the knowledge of evil.

In the town Robin first asks directions of an old man who issues deep-throated coughs with a “particularly solemn and sepulchral intonation.” He rebukes the boy, who has laid hold of his coat, with the words: “Let go my garment, fellow! I tell you, I know not the man you speak of. What! I have authority, I have—hem, hem—authority; and if this be the respect you show for your betters, your feet shall be brought acquainted with the stocks by daylight, tomorrow morning!” (p. 619). With his repeated and stilted emphasis upon authority, the old man is not only a victim, but the personification of another of the Seven Deadly Sins—the sin of pride. If the “sepulchral hems” that punctuate his hostile reply to the youth’s question are, as Hawthorne tells us, “like a thought of the cold grave obtruding among wrathful passions” (p. 619), it is because he is indeed, as a result of his pride, already spiritually dead.

The barber’s assistants, who have taken a few minutes from their work to watch this exchange, burst into “an ill-mannered roar of laughter” (p. 619), as the surprised and hurt youth rushes away. Their amusement is apparently produced by the realization that the old man is ill-suited to act as Robin’s guide. “Laughter,” as Hawthorne states in “Ethan Brand,” “when out of place, mistimed, or

Hawthorne apparently did not feel compelled, however, to develop this allegorical framework completely. I can find no evidence of the sin of envy, unless we are willing to see the townspeople’s treatment of the Major as the manifestation of their envy of him.

bursting forth from a disordered state of feeling, may be the most terrible modulation of the human voice." Seldom in Hawthorne's fiction does a laugh reveal a genuine warmth of heart. The laughter that echoes through the streets in "Major Molineux" reveals such a want of feeling, expressing only the emptiness of those who have discovered the evil in man and the universe.¹⁷ In the course of the evening Robin is to make a similar discovery—an awareness purchased at the price of his own innocence.

Robin finds himself "entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets" (p. 620), symbolic of the twisted moral fabric of the town itself. Surveying them, he can see no house that he believes would be worthy of his kinsman. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Evangelist informs Christian and Faithful that "you will soon come into a Town that you will by and by see before you: and in that Town you will be hardly beset with enemies. . . ."¹⁸ The town that Evangelist warns them of is the town of Vanity, and the many hostile encounters Robin experiences in his quest suggest that this is the town at which he himself has arrived. In both *The Scarlet Letter* and "Young Goodman Brown" the wilderness is the dwelling place of the forces of evil, but in "Major Molineux" Hawthorne has reversed polarities. The farm and the country which Robin has left are associated with innocence and the remnants of the moral order that still survive, while the city is symbolic of the moral tangle of the universe.¹⁹

As he continues to wander through the streets, he comes upon an inn, where he sees a group at supper around a well-filled table. Greeted in a friendly courteous fashion by the innkeeper as he enters the inn, Robin believes that he has found at last someone who is aware of his kinship with the Major. Ironically, it is not this relationship, but his brotherhood in the community of fallen man that the tavernkeeper apparently recognizes. In response to the youth's request for directions to his uncle's house, the innkeeper, "breaking his speech into dry little fragments," threatens him with arrest as a run-away indentured servant (p. 623). The malice of this fellow is

¹⁷ Waggoner, in fact, has argued that laughter is "the dominant image" throughout the tale (*ibid.*, p. 49).

¹⁸ *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. J. B. Wharey (Oxford, 1928), p. 93.

¹⁹ Gross has spoken of the dark, symbolic significance of this city: "as is sensed almost immediately, this is no mere New England metropolis, at least not to those who have been initiated to its crooked and narrow streets. The city, like the forest in 'Young Goodman Brown,' is a dark and terrifying moral labyrinth, through whose tortuous passageways stalk hatred, revenge, sin and retribution" (p. 100).

understandable; he is another full-fledged citizen of this dark city; and as owner of the tavern, with its overly filled tables of food, he becomes generally representative of the sin of gluttony.

Robin leaves the inn with malevolent laughter again ringing in his ears. It carries the same dark significance as it had earlier—the tavernkeeper is no better qualified than the old man to answer Robin's question. As he turns the corner, he comes upon a wide street filled with people who are dressed in "embroidered garments of showy colors, enormous periwigs, gold-laced hats, and silver-hilted swords" (p. 624). Such opulence suggests that Hawthorne is consciously presenting a vision of Bunyan's *Vanity Fair* with its "Lust, Pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as Whores, Bawds, Wives, Husbands, Children, . . . Souls, Silver, Gold, Pearls, Precious Stones, and what not?"²⁰ Robin walks down this street peering into the faces of each of these passers-by "with stronger hopes than the philosopher seeking an honest man, but with no better fortune" (p. 624). The comparison is appropriate; in this town of *Vanity* there are no honest men. Robin subconsciously realizes that all of these people are as ill-suited to give directions as those whom he had encountered previously and therefore does not bother to ask them to direct him to his uncle's home.

The youth soon finds himself on another sordid, dimly lit street. In the light of a half-open door he catches a glimpse of a young girl, who informs him that this is the home of the Major. She beckons him to enter in what is obviously an invitation to sexual pleasure. As Robin is about to succumb to the blandishments of this pretty young woman, an obvious representative of the sin of lust, a watchman, whose "heavy yawn preceded" his appearance, threatens the youth with the stocks if he does not head for home.²¹ Hawthorne's repeated emphasis on the dull, sleepy qualities of this briefly introduced sentry draws attention to the lethargic aspects of his character and equates him, in the symbolic framework of the story, with another of the Seven Deadly Sins—the sin of sloth. As the watchman turns the corner Robin belatedly asks him for directions, only to hear the same mocking laughter that he has heard before: this in-

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

²¹ Hoffman contends that Robin flees as the young girl returns downstairs after the watchman's departure because "he cannot yet face the knowledge that Major Molineux, his Kinsman (and father), has had carnal knowledge of a woman" (p. 55). Unless we are willing to accept the girl's earlier declaration at face value—and the characters of the people of this town have given us little reason to do so—there is no evidence to support this contention.

dolent creature is no more qualified to answer his question than those to whom he has spoken earlier.

The streets by this time have become darker and more empty as the city comes increasingly to reflect the growing moral darkness that threatens to engulf the boy. He meets two groups of men who pause to speak to him in a language he does not understand. When he fails to reply they “bestowed a curse upon him in plain English” (p. 628). Robin cannot understand the infernal tongue in which these lost souls are speaking because this is the language of the damned, and he has not as yet been initiated into their dark brotherhood. In the violence and bitterness of their replies, they personify, if only collectively, the sin of wrath.

Wearied by his fruitless search, Robin determines to force the next passer-by to give him the information he is seeking. This person proves to be a grotesque creature he had glimpsed earlier in the tavern. His bulging forehead, twisted features and eyes that glowed “like fire in a cave” make his identification with the devil inescapable. When Robin encounters him on the street, however, his features have undergone another frightening transformation. One side of his face is now “black as midnight,” while the other side “blazed an intense red” (p. 629). We are never told whether this is a natural or supernatural transformation. Hawthorne does inform us, however, that “the effect was as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage” (p. 629), and in the latter part of the tale this stranger does assume a satanic role when he leads the “paraders” as they escort the Major out of town.

This devil-like creature informs the boy that the Major will pass in an hour, and the youth sits upon the steps of a nearby church to await his arrival. He reflects upon the nature of the man he has just seen, “but having settled this point shrewdly, rationally, and satisfactorily, he was compelled to look elsewhere for his amusement” (p. 630). Like Spenser’s Redcross Knight, to whom he bears a marked and perhaps not unconscious resemblance, Robin is too sure of his ability to comprehend and withstand the evils of the world and suffers, in the course of his encounters, the same rude awakening as the Knight.²²

²² Both Gross and Hoffman have indicated Robin’s shortcomings. Hoffman has perceptively noted: “Robin, the shrewd youth from the backwoods, proves to be the Great American Boob, the naïf whose odyssey leads him, all uncomprehending, into the dark center of experience” (p. 56).

Robin interrupts his thoughts to look through the window of the ominously empty church which is, as Gross has stated, a “church of the city of night.”²³ The youth notices that “one solitary ray [of moonlight] had dared to rest upon the open page of the great Bible” (p. 631). The church, the Bible and this feeble, heavenly light are the only evidences in the tale that the world has not been abandoned to the forces of darkness. As he looks into the gloomy and silent church, Robin feels the loneliness of one who has been cut off from his spiritual roots. His sudden reflection that Major Molineux might be already mouldering in his shroud is appropriate, for the Major, in a symbolic sense, is indeed already “dead.” As the night progresses the boy begins to sense that the spiritual values the elderly gentleman comes to represent have disappeared from the world.

Dejected in spirit, Robin recalls the happy moments of his life in the country when his father would read the Bible to his family gathered about him “in the golden light that fell from the western clouds” (p. 632). The warm light of this idyllic scene, carrying with it all the conventional implications of human and divine love, has now disappeared; only the weak, cold light of the moon gives continued proof of the presence of God in the universe. Robin, in his reverie, sees the family enter the house, but when he prepares to follow them, “the latch tinkled into place, and he was excluded from his home” (p. 632). Hawthorne is saying here, in the language of symbol and allegory, that man, as a result of the Fall, cannot remain in the state of innocence symbolized by this prelapsarian vision of the country, but must sooner or later come to a knowledge of evil.

The vividness of this dream makes Robin ask: “Am I here or there?” (p. 633). Even after he has awakened, the dream-like conflict between town and country continues: “But still his mind kept vibrating between fancy and reality; by turns, the pillars of the balcony lengthened into the tall, bare stems of pines, dwindled down to human figures, settled again into their true shape and size, and then commenced a new succession of changes” (p. 633). Robin’s confusion is understandable. Honig has drawn attention to the inner conflicts that assail the dreamer in allegory: “The dreamer brings with him the whole burden of personal problems which the conscience has made acute. He thus stands perplexed on the threshold between two worlds, strangely aware that some significant ac-

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

tion impends.”²⁴ Robin finds himself similarly troubled, delicately balanced between the childhood world of innocence and the adult world of evil and corruption. Like Honig’s archetypal hero, Robin senses, if only dimly, the importance of his forthcoming meeting with the Major.

Through his sleep-filled eyes, Robin sees another person passing and peevishly asks him when the Major will be coming by. The boy explains his situation to the man and, with his characteristic lack of modesty, adds that he is a shrewd youth deserving of his uncle’s favor. The stranger wryly agrees and offers to wait with the boy, expressing an eagerness to witness the meeting. Critics have unanimously regarded this person as a “helper-figure” who aids Robin in his quest for maturity.²⁵ An entry in Hawthorne’s journal, however, would seem to suggest a more sinister identification: “The various guises under which Ruin makes his approaches to his victims: . . . to the young heir a jolly companion. . . .”²⁶ Although written after the completion of “Major Molineux,” this reflection indicates Hawthorne’s continued concern over the conflict between appearance and reality. Stewart has pointed to Hawthorne’s Spenserian practice of creating Archimago-like villains, “all of whom are marked by a venerable age and an apparently innocent demeanor.”²⁷ Such is Hawthorne’s description of the stranger: “He was himself a gentleman in his prime, of open, intelligent, cheerful, and altogether prepossessing countenance” (p. 633). He suggests that a man may speak with “several voices” (p. 636), and does this very thing. His invitation to Robin—a young heir who is never to come into his fortune—to remain in the town is ironically nothing less than an invitation to spiritual ruin.

As the Janus-faced stranger had promised, Major Molineux suddenly appears surrounded by a howling mob, among whom are the creatures Robin has met earlier. Despite his brief appearance the Major plays a central role in the story. Mrs. Leavis has suggested that he is a “representative in New England of the British civil and military rule” of which the colonists have determined to rid themselves.²⁸ Hawthorne’s historical introduction to the tale, in which

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

²⁵ The term is Stein’s (p. 85). Gross has called him a “kindly stranger” (p. 105), while Newman has termed him a “spiritual father” (p. 207).

²⁶ *The Heart of Hawthorne’s Journal*, ed. Newton Arvin (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 12–13.

²⁷ “Hawthorne and *The Faerie Queene*,” p. 200.

he mentions the expulsion of six governors by the colonists from Massachusetts Bay during the reign of James II, apparently gives credence to this view. More than one critic, however, would agree with Edward Wagenknecht that "as an artist Hawthorne was not interested in history for history's sake."²⁹ Following this opening paragraph, Hawthorne makes few historical references and allows the time and place of the tale to become vague and indistinct.³⁰ In this manner he is able to stress the universal implications of Robin's experience. If the Major does hold a political office, we are never informed of this fact. We will have to look beyond the historical to the allegorical level of the story, if we are to understand his full significance.

Malcolm Cowley has called the Major an "impostor,"³¹ but there is no evidence in the story that he has deceived anyone. In fact, as Roy Harvey Pearce has recently indicated, Major Molineux is "a man who, for all that we and Robin know, is totally innocent of the things for which he is tormented and destroyed."³² Robin's momentary vision of the Major staring at him from the Gothic window of the church first suggests his positive moral significance; and the description of him as he passes before the eyes of the horrified Robin emphasizes his basic dignity. He is "an elderly man, of large and majestic person, and strong, square features betokening a steady soul" (p. 638). The regal manner and bearing of the old gentleman stand in marked contrast to the rude and cruel behavior of the characters Robin has previously encountered in the quest for his kinsman. The attention devoted to these noble qualities of the Major suggests that Hawthorne intended him to represent more than a political scapegoat in the quarrel between colonists and the crown. In the light of the previous events of the tale, this old man, whose

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

²⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne: *Man and Writer* (New York, 1961), p. 34. R. W. B. Lewis complements this point of view with his statement that Hawthorne "enlarged upon his historical materials" (*The American Adam* [Chicago, 1955], p. 14).

³⁰ Waggoner has argued that the "historical level of the tale is not merely stated and then dropped, as the corresponding level is in some of the later tales. It is carried through from beginning to end with fullness and consistency" (*Hawthorne: A Critical Study* [Cambridge, 1955], p. 46). This position appears difficult to understand since Hawthorne makes only a few scattered, indirect references to either the time or place of the tale after the opening paragraph. Waggoner's statement would be more appropriate to tales such as "The Gray Champion" or "The May-Pole of Merry Mount."

³¹ "Editor's Note" in *The Portable Hawthorne* (New York, 1948), p. 28.

³² "Robin Molineux on the Analyst's Couch: A Note on the Limits of Psychoanalytic Criticism," *Criticism*, I (Spring, 1959), 87.

head has "grown gray in honor" (p. 639), becomes nothing less than a symbol of moral good and order in a world from which these virtues seem to have largely disappeared.

Robin suddenly laughs louder than all of the revellers, at the humiliation of his uncle. This laugh apparently symbolizes his recognition of the triumph of evil, an awareness echoed by Young Goodman Brown in his declaration: "Come, devil; for to thee is this world given." The Major's humiliation indicates that the moral order, which he symbolizes, if not already dead, is in its final stages of disintegration.

After the procession has disappeared the stranger asks Robin if he has "adopted a new subject of inquiry." The youth replies that he has, "thanks to you, and *to my other friends*" (p. 641) [emphasis mine]. The people who treated him so cruelly during the night have now, by some strange metamorphosis, suddenly become his "friends." This statement, although ignored by all of the critics of the tale, goes far to explain the enigmatic conclusion. Like Goodman Brown, who "felt a loathful brotherhood" towards the demonic worshippers of the forest, Robin also acknowledges a similar kinship with the sinners of this town. His identification of the friendly stranger with these other new-found "friends" suggests that this fellow is a devil's advocate who has been fully successful in his mission. He is quite right when he tells the boy that he will be able to advance in the world without the aid of his uncle. In fact Robin could have expected little aid from his kinsman in this respect; it is only with the help of the forces of darkness that man can rise most rapidly in a world largely given over to evil.

Critics of the story have generally stressed the beneficial, therapeutic effects of Robin's experience. Gross reflects the critical consensus when he states that the youth's "experience is not the end, but rather the beginning of life."³³ The conclusion of the tale offers little support for such optimism; with maturity has come only an awareness of evil. Robin has not escaped this corruption, but only identified himself with it. Written during the period of Hawthorne's self-imposed isolation from the main stream of life, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" reveals the "Puritanic gloom"

³³ *Op. cit.*, p. 108. Hoffman expresses a similar, if tentative, optimism: "In 'My Kinsman,' then, there is a qualified, half-skeptical hope that when the town wakes up from its collective nightmare, tradition will be re-established in accordance with the new dispensation of absolute liberty which the Devil's league had won in the darkness" (p. 60).

first noted in him by Melville. In this tale Hawthorne has borrowed freely and skillfully from the allegorical writings of Dante, Spenser and Bunyan to present an essentially cheerless view of the world. In his later works he was to suggest the possibilities of spiritual regeneration, but in this story there are few flashes of light to illuminate Robin's journey into moral darkness.