

The Piper



THE POETS VISION

What is one to do when one wakes up sweating in the middle of the night? What can you say when your dreams are twisted and leave you with nothing but a vague sense of fear and unease? I remember the day my brother died with a clarity and vividness that would make today seem . . .

Oh Hell! I can't. I am a clod, my mind is a salami. There is no use going on like this. . . No wait. I'll try again. Once more for the Gipper.

out of the darkness came the wolf,
my throat hung in ribbons from his mouth,
needless to say I chased him, bleeding as I did so.
I was not screaming as I should have been, because I was in agony,
indeed I was,
the reason I was not screaming was because. . . well the reason should
be clear.

why had the wolf torn my throat from me? Why had the Fates been so
cruel,
so brutal to one as innocent as myself? Why had all the powers of good
deserted me during my stay in the dark realm?
Because I have a tendency to go on, that is why.
Even the gods run out of patience with mortal folly. . . .

Ach, you see! You see the absurdity of my wit, the pitiful failings of my weak attempts at art? Well what am I to do? What am I to do my friends? Stop writing you say? Oh, if it were only that easy! You have seen my failure have you not, but can't you also glimpse what is behind it? Can't you glimpse the need I have? The need to spout off this nonsense? The need to display my aborted wisdom? Can't you see my need to humiliate myself in front of you? Well if couldn't before, now you can because I have told you. Now you see the need and now you know why I cannot simply drop this pen, spit on the page and walk away. Even though I would like to. Oh God in your infinite meaningless gibberish which I am wont write! Take from me these maddened thought which rupture my soul!

I am attempting to put forth this garbage and what am I thinking of? Yes, that's right, I am thinking of garbage, nothing else. As I crouch over these warped and twisted keys what comes into my mind is not the inspirations of the poet, not the meaning that truly great writers create, but instead the perverse and lewd imaginings that the madman is like to have.

What crosses my mind as my hands grope for letters? Well then, shall I tell you dear reader? Shall I make you goggle in disbelief? Shall I make you say "Ah, the man's insane!" Shall I? Do I dare? Can I share my wretched ignominy with the outside world? Can I? Yes, sweet reader I can, I lay my abject perversity at your feet. I am thinking, believe it or not. Believe It Or Not, I am thinking of . . . pigs. Just that. . . . PIGS, PIGS, PIGS, PIGS. Big Ones, thin ones, GREAT HUGE DOUBLE DECKER ONES and even eentsy-teentsy-tiny ones. The kind that can fit in the palm of your hand, they are so small. eentsy-teentsy-tiny pigs, eentsy-teentsy pigs. Jumping on your arms-scampering up to your face-sticking their little snouts against your cheek and snorting. . . .

Oh my friends, I am raving and I know it, but still beyond all my attempts at lucidity, after all my efforts to achieve something good and grandiose, nothing fills the void but pigs. Oh you filthy, lovable, squeezable little pigs. Why pigs, you ask? Why in this enlightened age does a man of my caliber, a man wise in the ways of life, (for I am an intellectual, my friends) why does a man such as I turn again and again to pigs?

Well it is a long story my dear hearts, a story from which epics could be brought forth, could my fevered brain but settle once more into a saner realm; a realm where I reflect and let the lines trickle forth from my thoughts, as the sweet honey oozes from the jar. But no, it cannot be done, I am lost, doomed to wander about this sty of a world as little more than a shadow, a deluded shadow of the man whom I might have been.

So you see dear reader, I can give you no real answer concerning my motives. Let it suffice to say that I am an unfortunate, one of those poor souls whom you see wandering aimlessly about, tears trickling into their beards. Their bemused brains good for no noble enterprise, merely an entranced organ which cavorts with swine. Among this ragged refuse reside I. These lost souls are my brethren and among their ranks I have my place, educated though I be. For education is of no importance here, fool or genius, the ghastly splendor of our vision is such that all men may become tangled within it.

It is solace itself. The gentle snores of the pigs touch some deep, primordial chord within us, lulling us into a world of cool and slippery softness. The soft hair of the pigs caresses us as they brush by us in their dance, while we ourselves are sheltered by the seductive stillness of the damp fragrant earth. Well wrapped in this malleable mantle of mud, we cease to be the men whom once we were. Instead we become something richer and more complete. Where once we were cold and alone, now we are warm, for we have those whom we can nuzzle and will nuzzle us in return. So in essence you see, my pigs foretell an end to the chilling

starkness of grey reality, they are truly the stuff from whence dreams are made. In time, I shall be one with them mayhap, one of many gentle pigs. It is possible that I may become one of the gentlest, one of the loveliest of pigs. Perhaps even an eentsy-teentsy-tiny one.

Thus my piglets, we arrive at the end of my hysteria, since I am calmed by visions of my swine. No longer can I rage at myself for my inability to write the trite reflections of men whose hearts are made of mortar and steel. I find it better to be preoccupied with pigs and earth, rather than to struggle for the harsh necessities of our lives, those conventional goals which once achieved, will enable us to live veritable hogs; the very same hogs whom we once condemned. I will have no more of these illusory rewards, and I ask you my fellows, quite lucidly I think, who are we to say who the real pigs are? When we are more swine-like than the swine themselves, as we root through the filth for stinking fruits. The false truffles which we grub from the muck are no real jewels at all, but rather dung and desolation, loneliness and despair. A gentle pig who is true to his creed is a symbol of light in my realm, but a man who is a hog lies in darkness foulder than he knows.

It is my wish to become a real pig, a gentle pig, the genuine article. So might my quiet grunts soothe many hurts. So might I climb upon your shoulder, come close and snort against your cheek.

THOMAS ABRAMS

For A Favor, Call. . .

I found your name and number

Scrawled in a phone-booth

Surrounded by endearments and maledictions

Saliva and blood.

Your measurements were there

And the color of your eyes

And the color of your hair

Accompanied by a primitive effigy

Of you yourself

Immortalized and bastardized forever

By the ruthless prick of some gallant's penknife

(using as good a tool as he's ever like to use
bruising the only you he's ever like to bruise)
After feeling through the criticisms of your virtues

Benedictions to your breasts

Hymns praising your thighs

Condemnations of your touch

Admonishments concerning the cruelty of your eyes

I lifted the phone and left no sad whisper unspoken

Wondering all the while how many hearts had been broken.

Thomas Abrams

CIGARETTES

Waiting for time to pass
I watch you pass
beyond my imagination
And my imagination passing characters
of rich, dry form
through and beyond me

My illusory stages fade
as I remain waiting.

An image is rolled
in a thin elegant taste
I light up an identity
in advertisement
And dare my mortality

My delicate, paper-cut inspiration
is black-tar sticky
and burn-sore
My imagination rich
with class and inspiration

A firm identity
A death-wish;
You and I,
we roll in and out
of each other's lives
like smoke;
You and I
both fade from our own lives
like smoke.
Linda Ress

*The Destruction and Subsequent Reconstruction
of an Aesthetic Image*
June 1, 1979

She studies pensively

The steady edge of the blade

Paused above her submissive surface.

Slowly she begins to work,

Her craft drawn not by the calculating incision of the surgeon,

But etched out of a deeper art-gut.

She carves her smooth marble flesh

Into a single figured Pieta.

With the breathless awe of discovery

Only an artist finds in his own creation

She pulls blue cloaked sharpness across red pigments

That swell from her white arms

Like tiny heads thrusting outwards.

I stare back at the artist,

Stretch my solid limbs to the clouds

That spread the sky like salve,

And in the bounding rhythm of buried arteries

Feel the force of art that does

Not tear inward

Anymore.

Mary Anna Turner

MONARCH

I recognize what once you were,
The turgid caterpillar
Whose sight does not surpass the earth.
But who can comprehend
The deftness of cocoons
Whose silk-entombing stands
Caress a cousin of the snake
Into what the dreamers dream:
A creature conversant with the air
Where tireless wings beat quickly.
What am I to say to you?
My skin is stained with earth --
The smell of rotting places
Contains the record of my history.
But you are there to haunt despair
Touching earth upon a flower's petal
That will not dip to let your shadow near.
Yet when the sky is charged with winds
And rains that turn the air to fall
And I must find your wings
Soldered to the surface of a puddle,
I wonder if the game grew old
Or if I knew it would?
--*Chip Loughlin*

How timed and calculated
are the attitudes
of the altar people
on this soft, rainy, grey day

From serious to friendly to silent
all scheduled
and ruled
by intellect

While a baby drinks
moaning and gasping in hunger
We all drawn in the silence
like a womb
to a parallel, moaning hunger of the spirit

At mass, prayers are played and recited
each line retorted
The priest leads
Our great wait for death
And our grab for immortality

And the rain outside
On this soft, haiku-like day
falls eternally

Linda Ress

THE RELICS

Demur and dignified, Old Harold Botham was my neighbor.
On Tuesday evenings we would pass
He, tall and stately, headed for Christ Church
While I was to the corner to fetch myself some drinks.
I couldn't help but notice how he walked,
His air of unconcern stirred all my curiosity.
Like a shad that swims up river
His pointed nose was always for the church.
You couldn't talk to Harold Botham --
A certain way he had
Of looking like an antique thing
Was all that ever spoke.
But ignorance about the man
Intrigued me more than what I knew,
So one fine morning I walked off to church,

Like moss that clings to rock
Christ Church persisted in its place.
The sexton met me at the door
And glaring, swung its hinges wide:
"The people have come back to us;
We're now a church again," he boasted.
But Harold Botham hadn't come for that.

"I'd call him just a fool," he said,
And then the sexton led me down
To where the records were.
The wooden stairs were dark and steep
And the railing was cool to touch;
The rarefied air that dwelt within
Was lost of all its smell.
"I can't believe he likes this task.
You see, there's nothing here but files
Filled with yellow papers
That don't mean much anymore.
He's rooting through this church's past
As if he thinks he'll fix it!"

"But why are you concerned?" I asked,
"From what you say the man slips in
As quiet as a snake
And hopes to work unnoticed."

"You're right. But still I have complaints.
It's nothing that he does
But his presence makes me fidget.
To begin with, his interest
Seems to me unnatural.

Captive
[in memory of Caroline Gordon's short
story, *The Captive*.]

The memory does not crowd my mind as I expected.

Only strikes in and out,
in and out,
Voluntarily.

I remember that night.
I've hated that night
When on a road I was shamed and torn, wrecklessly
heartlessly,

Left.
With no one on the road but fear.

I loved life that night.
The bite of mosquitoes into my blood I embraced,
Evidence of life outside of shame,
evil, and faithlessness.

Oh, humanity, how I try to believe
That night was not really you.
Those two men were not you.
You did not make the gun at my head.
You did not put the knife into my fertile body--
cold, deep, damp...
Internal.

You did not raise such minds of
Torment, perversion, and hatred.
Oh, humanity, my hopelessness hopes.
In the wake of the night
I try,
and try to forgive.
Archie Burke

They've collected all these records
And stored them in this cellar --
Down here they're meant to stay.
But back again he comes as if he lived here.
Oh, I don't know.
The sun's been hot this summer;
Maybe he just wants the shade.
But I'll tell you something else.
He said once he was looking into people --

That these records held intentions,
Manners and dreams and disagreements.
He said the writers of these words
Unwittingly revealed themselves
And by investigation he would know them.
I wasn't satisfied and told him so.
I said if that was how it worked
We'd all be found at graveyards
Digging up new friends.
He didn't seem to like that.
He just mumbled to himself
As if I didn't understand.
You know, I should have told him
That instead of sorting records
He should talk to all the people
That come to see the priest.
That's what I mean,
His quiet strikes me deadly.
He thinks he finds what living is
While his hobby keeps him here.
He'd just as soon sit down
And blur the shine upon this table
With the dust from vestry books;
So I let him know that I take care of relics
And vacant is how relics leave you.
No matter, he'll keep coming back.
Come on, you should hear the bells,
The new ones in the steeple."
--*Chip Loughlin*

ROAD TIME

The past and the present wilt — I have fill'd them, emptied them, And proceed to fill the next fold of the future.

Walt Whitman "Song of Myself", Chapt. 51

There were 2,302,119 miles of surfaced roads and highways in the United States in 1965. Interconnecting an area the size of many other countries combined, this roadway webbing is the hope and pride of a nation whose success is reflected in the ever increasing leisure time and money we have to spend going places doing things, with business to conduct as time rolls along to an ever better future facing each American. We are proud of the roadw which outline, transport, and proclaim our nation's bounty.

Meanwhile, like a piece of loose granite that chips from the side of a mountain and rolls to its bottom, a hitchhiker stands shivering at the edge of a point of those highways. Facing the nation's unlimited potential in any direction he chooses, his thumb dangles freezing, numb to decisions. With all the choices of freedom, he must have some goal, some reason for standing there — there's no loitering on these busy roads. Time is money and we're a young, vital country with mountains to move and a future to build. By gravity's leveling, he'll wash down to red dirt if he breaks from the mountain that got where it is with direction and drive that's the power he rolls from, like a piece of loose gravel, dislodged.

I pass the time waiting and look down and notice the rocks of all shapes and all colors and textures, the aluminum beer can that lies crushed but not rusted, by that the green glass of a Coke bottle's bottom imprinted with Durham, North Carolina, 1956; I think about the quarter-million years that I once heard it takes for a reactor plant wastes to be safe, the nuclear key to the door of America's future its industries sell it these days. I look up ahead of me where now there's a truck coming forward and I watch it grow green and grow bigger and rusted and become an old '68 Chevy with a black man, an old man who goes past, eyes sidelong, and the sounds of his truck rumble slower till the gravel stops popping.

I turn into movement from standing and pointing to running now thumbward, and move this point to this point in a chain of dimensionless movements and measureless moments, combining their infinite multitude to weave space and time into patches of fabric that make up my quilt with its undefined pattern I don't claim to calculate; which gradually traces, eventually shrouds me, that shows me to be what I am by default if not by decision. Thus, in a nation that's founded in each person's right to pursue a life filled with the luxurious liberty of his own dreams' desires, where a quantity of choices seem quality's substitute, I let destiny manifest itself as it blows me, a piece of loose dust in the wind that will touch all America.

So I'm blown down the roadside to ride with an old black man chewing a cigar in his faded bib overalls while he tells me the way his life shaped him, the way that life looks to a man who has given up fighting the weight he was born under, a man with a view of the fat under-belly of the nation I drift over.

You evah notice de fokes in dey cahs zoomin pass in de oppsit direction? Aint nobody knows where de hell dey's gone, but dey sho aint lookin fowahd to't. 'Mose evy one o dem got de soures' faces, de mose strained and concentiat looks, like dey's wuhkin so hahd on sumpum, eyes daid ahaid to whevah dey's gone, like if'n dey'd ownée concentrate hahd nuf, den dey'd git dare when dey oughta git dare, 'cept dey aint nevah gone git dare when dey's needs to git dare, cose dey aint nevah gone git dare fohe git dare.

Dey's some mighty tight-ass people on dese roads. Not dat dey's really on de roads. Hell no! You jes know dey aint seen a fing dat's happ'ned de whoh way fum home to wuhk o fum wuhk back on home agin, fie days evy week, say, one houh drivin evy day, at lease. I mean, people's so greedy fo time, dey jes caint git nuf o dat stuff to relax jes one minute, allus runnin outa time o gone be late, but dare dey wastes lease fie houhs evy week tryin to squeeze outa where dey is into where dey goin. You know, it's like dey aint a fing on de road between heah an Mebane, say, so dat people done ev'n say it's tirty mile 'way — hell no, dey gonna say it's tirty minutes 'way, jes like it's gone coss dem tirty dollahs to git dare, you know. Afah all, people say time is money.

Yes, they do say that, don't they?

Oh yeah, I knows what it's all 'bout, boy. I might not know wheah everybody's headin, but dey sho tink dey's nuttin to't but gittin dare. Lots o people allus puttin out lots o sweat to be somewhat e'se. Puttin in fohty evy week to git dat paycheck an dose two days to run aroun like chickens wigout dey haids an see what dey kin fine to spen dat money on. Cause you know you gotta have some reason to sell yo soul like dat fohty houahs outta evy week. Time is money, what I mean to say, so when people sell dey souls, you bettah believe dey gonna buhn dat money t'git whut dey kin outta dat time.

Hell, gone git drunk, dat where dem people goin. Afah you been wearin yosef ragged all week buhnin dose fohty jes as fass as you kin, like you say, you know you need 'lil bit o dat slow motion med'cine to ease fings down some. I mean, you jes wanna shoof d'shit wif yo buddies an fogit bout all dat was behine you an fogit all dat's ahaid o you in jes two days, jes like all de days befoh. Afah Frude night you gone sleep late on Sa'dee an den git up an set down an watch dem muthahs kick dat pigskin, an you gone fogit all dat sweat, you gone fogit dat clock dat moves so slow all week is buhnin issef up on de weekens; you gone fogit how you gone pay fo dat nice colah TV an dat beatu you got in yo han an dat cole bitch screamin atchu bout eythin unner de sun an how she ustah be so sweet an hot, bout dem damn kids wone go t'school o e'se mebbeed dey been cheatin on dey tess agin cause dey done givah damn neithah.

Hell, I know I'd cheat if'n I went to one o dem schools. Why anybody gone make life hahd on deyseves when deys a way to make it all lil easiah, save some o dat precious time? All you afah is dat piece of papah so's you kin make some good money now, huh boy? The man wonts you be makin some o dat stuff so's you kin spen it on his close o his food o his wine, now, done he. What do dat haftah do wif cheatin? Lor knows it's hahd when you poh, an time's money, an de good Lor loves dem dat heps demseves. He woudna give you no brain if'n He didn't mean fo you to use it to make fings easiah on yosef as you kin. Hell, fohty houahs a week all yo natchul life, yo be plain stupid not to do fings de bess way you kin, save as much enahgy as you kin, like de man says. Jes look busy's all, jes as long as you aint sleepin when he be lookin atchu.

Cose, it's hahd when yo's jes a ph ol niggah like me, but I do's de bess Ikin. An I's lucky, b'lieve it o not, cose I knows dat de good Lor gimme sumpum to ease my wuhk whenevah I takes a mine to look. I's talkin bout all dat stuff on de way, you know, all dat stuff dat dese heah roads is sittin on dat evebody's riding an rushin ovah. Any time dey want, all dey gotta do is look. You do alotta lookin when you're ridin dat fumb, aintchu, boy?

Yes, I see more than I'll ever get tired of and I smell the exhaust and sometimes the honeysuckle. I also see and smell those who weren't fast enough to make it when their paths crossed the roads.

Oh yeah! you gotta be gone pretty fass in de right direction to make it in dis ol worl, e'se you gonna git runn'd ovah, son. Dis a mighty nice country, long's y ou got de sense to eidah go fass enuf to nevah be where de man kin pin you down as run you ovah, o e'se be so slow dat you be able to see yo way outta de whoh mess. But you caint be bofe fass an slow, an you gotta know which one you is bess set to be. Me, I see's when I's a young man, youngah den you, I wone evah git no big piece o de pie in dis place, no mattah how hahd I gone break my back. Hell, din I watch my diddy sweat blood all his life fo nuttin? Ownee niggahs evah git ahaid, dey play ball, you know, so I jes stahted not'cin how nice it was where I been allong, o nice 'nuf, you know.

Hey, dis is where I let you off, bro. Nice talkin wif you.

So I got out and walked towards the red and blue neon of Sybil's night outline, into the yellow lit smells and the warmth of the grease in the air, where Elvis sings "America" while I move to a bar stool beside a fat trucker all grizzled and grease haired who gives the once over while I give her my order till she turns on a squeaky white heel with the tip-teasing line through her tight white stretch outfit where the thread of my wonder slips through time and into her matronly figure. The light, grease, and music, the heat of this room captures all of men's history of huddling in caves.

I sat there and let my mind roll off the words of that last ride . . . What are poverty or wealth? Only man makes complaints because he knows nature's limits, feels the horror of his nightmares and the seduction of his dreams. What's the strength under purple mountains' majesty which seem just cover for the monumental gropings of a country with a pocket full of potential, too big to fit its britches. Poetry and Playboy, Superman and the National Enquirer are the myths that sell, the hints of immortality and the moments of forgetting.

But he didn't hook himself, or couldn't, on the paper passes offering us everything, the bait that caught the Spanish and the immigrants, the germ behind the fever of the good men for the grass that's always greener. Oh, they enslaved a continent's riches but has power proved the answer save in dreams? Seems we've yoked ourselves with Muzak to a nightmare we created.

Is there any profit in the getting? Got any spare moments, America, huh?

Maybe there was just too much manna in the Promised Land and we spread ourselves too thin. Is it fear or celebration in the greed? As that old man sits collecting moss, the seasons swirl by faster, leaves that hit the current of each passing year for everyone; leaves falling moment by moment to become a red wash in the river that is honest and consistent, always changing while the old man sits beside it . . . Or perhaps somehow he rides it while the dreamers of the country try to dam it. Time bleaches what little corners of permanence they thought they could capture and its acid burns away color, leaving etched stakes that crumble to fertilize the grass that remains or the dust that will blow over reclaimed America, where even the mountains wear down.

Elvis' flip side informs us that he did it "My Way" while we sit in silence or arguing our ways to go the same way, heroically separate yet touching in sentimental salutes to our popular fantasies, sensational stories, and spectacular eulogies filled with the rich throbbing blood of shared faith and fear, the need to believe in the glory of history, money and manners, laws and a monument's stake in eternity; the belief that a dream stands forever to outlast the dreamers.

Steve Kaplan

Introduction

Signy was one of the many famous women in Norse mythology. Her father and two brothers were killed by a man she later came to marry. Her remaining brother helped to avenge the deaths of their family by killing her husband. Signy's story has been recorded, but the story of her brother was never told.* Here, using Norse mythological characters and beings, I have created the story of Signy's brother, Sigmund.

The Ballad of Signy's Brother

Once there lived a mighty man,
On Midguard years ago,
A warrior true to his name,
Sigmund of Stan Harrow.

Mounted on his gallant steed,
Sigmund traveled on,
To find the five great jewels,
That Ymir² had formed to be won.

The first gem of glowing light,
Sigmund found on high,
In the glistening structure of vampires,
The tower of Loki-Nigh.³

The climb was hard up to the top,
But Sigmund pulled on fast,
He loosed all that which weighed on him,
E'en his golden clasp.⁴

The vampires they were waiting,
They draw his blood from him,
But Sigmund splashed them all with wine,⁵
And their faces they grew dim.

The second stone of smokey mist,
His journeys led him to,
He fought for it in Dornheim,
'gainst the storm giant Grulmumu.

The third he found across the waves,
In a horrid cave beneath the sea,
He sailed for it in gold-bowed boat,
Named for the brother god Ve.⁶

For many years Sigmund searched,
To find the fourth fine orb,
Finally he came upon it,
In the lair of the monster Kjorb.⁷

It is said that on that day,
Before Kjorb had died,
He told his slayer Sigmund,
Where the fifth great gem he would find.

Dauntless then he traveled on,
To the land that the monster had said,
A land no living man had e'er set foot in,
Niflheim, the land of the dead.

His sword in hand,
He crossed,
O'er the flaming bridge,
Called Gialler⁸ to the lost.

On the bridge,
His horse it died,
So Signy walked,
His feet on fire.

And though the pain,
Burned to his soul,
He pushed and pushed,
Onto his goal.

At the gates of the land of Hel,⁹
Sigmund stood his ground,
And waited for the coming of Garm,¹⁰
The horrid devil-hound.

The fight was fierce, but in the end,
It was Sigmund who had won,
And so he marched on through the gates,
For the deed that had to be done.

Never again was Sigmund seen,
But it is sure he died,
Though he never found the fifth great gem,
Always with us shall his fame reside.

Once there lived a mighty man,
On Midguard years ago,
A warrior true to his name,
Sigmund of Stan Harrow.

MICHAEL BRANDT GARN

Footnotes

*This is not true. Later I found that as one of the Volsung, Sigmund had many adventures.

1Midguard: Earth.

2Ymir: the Frost Giant: the first living being, slain by the all-father, Odin.

3Loki: The God of Evil, Odin's adopted son.

4Golden clasp: A gift of Sigmund's sister.

5Splashed . . . with wine: Vampires die when splashed with water, in the Norse mythos; wine had the same effect.

6Ve: Odin's youngest brother.

7Kjorb: A hydra-like monster.

8Gialler: 'Death'.

9Hel: The Goddess of Death, Loki's daughter.

10Garm: The two-headed protector of the gates of Niflheim.

COLONEL VICKERS NEAR SHARPSBURG

I move across these acres a ghost, across the soft dirt of corn
 My boots leave fossils for snows to fill and plows to bury.
 These thousands of dry plants whisper in the winds
 Swaying heavily, pregnant with unpicked ears.
 Plants the color of weathered newspapers and pie crusts
 Dashing ash wrens and brown sparrows rustle among their blades
 White and jointed stems standing in the cool shade
 The air close to the earth is still
 Here a regiment of corn plants, tall in the morning dusk
 Stand again for October frosts
 Sentinel to the day the clouds and moon
 Touching deer which stand at the western woods edge.
 Trapping the blown Autumn leaves among their roots -- two black beetles
 crawl beneath one leaf, ants ascend these plants, poking into holes for
 tiny mites, walking deep into the well where the blade joins stalk- for
 what may have fallen there.
 Dead silks cascade out every husk, burned and fragile.
 Crows and mice have pulled much of it away --
 Off into the sky beyond the sound of corn;
 Down into the soil among damp stones and worms.
 Behind sinuous parchment leaves kernels stand fat in rows on the cobs
 Cold, yellow teeth. Frozen raindrops from early spring
 Ripe, blond grain silent, listening ~~clap~~
 Learning the whisper of the blades.

Four thousand rifles explode deafeningly, barking "Antietam"
 Over the treetops I smell the smoke from a burning barn
 Hot, leaden kernels snip through the blades, many crushing into soft stalks
 Our corn regiments of flesh and face stand firm on roots black with soles
 Stalks of skin warm as pie crusts and covered with blue wool
 These plants move heavily in a wild, painful wind
 Many fall, first to their lower joints.
 The wind beats their whisper to a wail, shattered blades fall in showers
 Huge split cobs strike the earth like pumpkins
 Spilling their Autumn grains, drops of yellow blood, in pools.
 The sun moves backwards in the sky till the rifles cease
 The ground is soaked with warm, viscous, harvest
 Silver raindrops fall loud on the dry blades, a rain crow crys from the woods
 Hooting to the talking corn.
 Alone I lay looking skyward and am fast to the ground with roots of corn
 My hair sunk deep into the earth, branching strong in the soil.
 My back cradled smooth in a plow furrow beneath the gentle sway of blades
 The passing by of clouds . . . each an hour
 Some clouds as days.
 A fox comes cautiously panting, sticking his head between the fractured stems.
 His breath sweet with the smell of blood, his shoulders press against the
 plants,
 And he pushes through across my furrow into the darkness beyond the next row.
 I hear him breathing, moving off through the corn, a small cloud passes above
 I hear him no more.
 His footprints in my side fill with rain, blown leaves gather there too.
 A night air seeps down my throat to sleep in two moist, lungs
 Frost draws icy patterns upon my eyes, time grows thick on my tongue, behind
 my lips.
 I am with these plants.
 These plants father and I put out one spring, on a farm miles south, grow too
 here.
 They whisper to my mother, taking up their ears. I am at their roots.
 Smooth, golden, kernels rest in the deep lines of my father's palm
 From a steaming kettle on the fire he takes a ladle full of my soft teeth
 Into his mouth. His eyes water they are so hot.
 Move me not to dunker church
 Leave me here. I am at home in corn.

JOHN BARRAT

Death

It's very name brings unto my mind a curious fascination,
 But to see it so close makes me wonder.
 Lying so still, almost peaceful on the windswept roadway.
 So serene, with the flowing ebony mane,
 But for the mangled jaw and eye.
 There is no blood, it is hard to feel the pain.
 Do I sense a twisted smile upon my face,
 Or a grimace?
 It makes me wonder.
Michael Brandt Garn

EXTENSION ON ONE CHORD: A GLANCE AWAY FROM NOW.

It is cold in my room. My butane heater is the kind that heats the room in no time, and in no time the heat escapes through the cracks under the door and the window.

When you look out the window you see the park. The park is covered with a thick layer of snow. An old man is feeding the ducks; you can only distinguish their orange beaks and legs. Every now and then, a student crosses the bridge across the pond. Most student in this town live on the other side of the park, in very old houses. I am no longer a student, so I moved to this side recently.

It looks like it might snow again. The old man seems to have run out of breadcrumbs. The ducks follow him a bit.

Inside there is jazz, not much else. The walls are white. The colours of the paperbacks I keep on a shelf stand out in this black and white picture. In the middle of the room stands a small black table, with on it a full ashtray, a pack of Camels and a bottle of genever.

The pictures on the wall above the bed are few and also in black and white. One is a caricature of Fernando Pessoa, the Portuguese poet. Pessoa means person. There is a photograph of Beethoven that I took in Central Park when I was in America. And then there is an eight-by-ten of the Mose Allison Band.

The bottle of genever is a transparent thing.

I have just returned from R. where I spent the weekend with David, an artist. I admired the canvases he had done while in Australia, and talked jazz and poetry with him.

He liked the poem I had sent to him in Paris and explained it to me. We sat in a poorly lighted cafe on the Binnenweg and had to raise our voices to beat rock and roll. Then David talked about the colours in his paintings. We drank genever.

On the windowsill are some roses in a small glass vase. She brought those the last time she came here. Their deep red colour has faded; in a day or so I can throw them away and that will take care of all true colour.

Pascalle's clogs make a wooden sound on the steps. She knocks and enters the room and inquires if I would like to see the paper. I say no because I'm not sure I want to know what's going on at this point. Pascalle lives downstairs in a room full of plants and all kinds of gadgets.

'Would you like some coffee?' she asks.

'I would love some.'

'Black, right?'

'Right.'

Pascalle returns with the coffee on a fancy looking tray. She removes the ashtray and the bottle from the table and puts the tray down. then she sits down and looks around the room nervously with her large green eyes.

'You should get some plants,' she says.

'I had some but I couldn't care for them.'

'I'll give you some if you promise to take care of them.'

'O.K. I will.'

'When you leave, give them back to me.' She seems to realize I'm never here for very long.

She is a very restless girl and soon she leaves. The paper is still on the floor. I become aware of the music again; it is louder it seems almost. I pour some more genever in my glass.

At the Central Station I called her and asked her to come see me sometime while I am here. She told me she would soon but I had to realise that it didn't work anymore.

I think about the conversation and start feeling dizzy. The music seems still louder and throbs in my head. I get up and go to the window. Snow is coming down heavily and I can't see the pond anymore. The window seems another white wall.

I imagine the snow falling never again to cease. A fine alternative for a large scale nuclear war. Although it's pure drunkenness, the idea hurts, in a way.

The snow has stopped. Dusk is setting in and I pull my curtains shut. The music pounds in my head; it becomes harder to bear. The bottle is turning into a different shade of transparency. I know she will not come anymore. Let sleep take care of the headache.

"If Three Are Standing Near the Sky"

if three are standing near the sky
and bending to the ground
and seeing to gaze with potters eyes
the sound of water falling down

& pause to gather circumstance
(the secrets ear whispered) a time before
the murmuring three and one descends;
the sound of water falling down.

the third from sky to earth-born blue
has the brown of earths defeat with
In his hands and prints of flowers
On his feet

He sees the sky & in the sky
a 2pt ed circle turning around
(and in his mouth the taste of earth
the sound of water

falling down,

Two voices sing a third cries out &
From his from his from his hands
the sound of water
(falling

down,
the whispers of the people at his feet).

He sees the sky with marble eyes
(the gray marble vaults) grown dim (with sighs)
The 2pt ed circle turns around with
the sound of water
(falling

down,

The circle turns into the earth.
a tear is torn, a glass eye cracks
& 1/3 head is bowed to the ground
with the sound of water falling
down,

The earth/circle spun past plus 2 days
the sun woke up with golden rays
Pierced
thru the earth, as whispers fade
(the light dispelling
every shade

)And in the sky stand three above and looking down
Turning and burning and spinning around
Seeing to gaze with potters eyes
(the earth & the sun & the sea & the skies

And flowerers sprout like nail pinned feet
to radiate faint odors (sweet like
hands molding soft earth brown)
The sound of water,

falling

down

BILL MEIKRANTZ

DRAGONWHEEL
FOR Phil, Marc, and Bud

Dragonwheel
lost to me

Dragonwheel
lost to me

faraway in eastern waters

must your kraken call

shril my soul

into dream-departures never undone?

time never taken

for growth in soil of parent's blood

spent always in

the essence of your dangerous beautu

stunting my spirit

to where

home is a haze of holidays and traffic

throngs grasp my adventure

in speed insane, ceaseless

claws on track to

an expressway to my quick

(hit the brakes

at the black-and-white cyclops

with the single, searching red eye

blinking down your back)

afternoons in the park

with frisbees and steaming rice wine

sakura snow pink waves

in the wake of my sweet street machine

Oh, the Lime Green Bike!

sad is your story,

and glad again!

engine from an angel

sixty seconds to steal, your price set

she left you with her smile of blessing

pliers pulled the lock on line

'round you, Champion mine

with a license to loom
out of shadow flying

on wings of adrenelin and

into the dreams of youth

(cabbies your constant bane

careless aces of the avenues

they try to spit you

in the savage glee of their sport!

the fools)

flash your feet sharp

struttin' your stuff onto

the Sidewalk of Frightened Statues

frozen by your speed

saxophone-sung stunt

the violent timing, torn into the tar

cement singing to your slash and cut

the curb cuts back, you track across

and sling off stone

into launch.

Oh, the motion of a perfect arc!

touchdown patch a burning mark

on traffic grounds triumphant

form flung over chasms

jarring jumps to carve the frame

slide on the slipstream of

metal junks screaming by

bolts and sand sting the skin

back bent in trial

legs jerk, lift, jab

the pulsing pedals in fine street tune

pounding down the wind

Paul Swain

EXCERPT FROM "THE CUSTOM HOUSE"
BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

On Hester Prynne's story, therefore, I bestowed much thought. It was the subject of my meditations for many an hour, while pacing to and fro across my room, or traversing, with a hundredfold repetition, the long extent from the frontdoor of the Custom-House to the side-entrance, and back again. Great were the weariness and annoyance of the old Inspector and the Weighers and Gaugers, whose slumbers were disturbed by the unmercifully lengthened tramp of my passing and returning footsteps. Remembering their own former habits, they used to say that the Surveyor was walking the quarter-deck. They probably fancied that my sole object -- and, indeed, the sole object for which a sane man could ever put himself into voluntary motion -- was, to get an appetite for dinner. And to say the truth, an appetite, sharpened by the east-wind that generally blew along the passage, was the only valuable result of so much indefatigable exercise. So little adapted is the atmosphere of a Custom-House to the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility, that, had I remained there through ten Presidencies yet to come, I doubt whether the tale of "The Scarlet Letter" would ever have been brought before the public eye. My imagination was a tarnished mirror. It would not reflect, or only with miserable dimness, the figures with which I did my best to people it. The characters of the narrative would not be warmed and rendered malleable, by any heat that I could kindle at my intellectual forge. They would take neither the glow of passion nor the tenderness of sentiment, but retained all the rigidity of dead corpses, and stared me in the face with a fixed and ghastly grin of contemptuous defiance. "What have you to do with us?" that expression seemed to say. "The little power you might once have possessed over the tribe of unrealities is gone! You have bartered it for a pittance of the public gold. Go, then, and earn your wages!" In short, the almost torpid creatures of my own fancy twitted me with imbecility, and not without fair occasion.

It was not merely during the three hours and a half which Uncle Sam claimed as his share of my daily life, that this wretched numbness held possession of me. It went with me on my sea-shore walks and rambles into the country, whenever -- which was seldom and reluctantly -- I bestirred myself to seek that invigorating charm of Nature, which used to give me such freshness and activity of thought, the moment that I stepped across the threshold of the Old Manse. The same torpor, as regarded the capacity for intellectual effort, accompanied me home, and weighed upon me in the chamber which I most absurdly termed my study. Nor did it quit me, when, late at night, I sat in the deserted parlour, lighted only by the glimmering coal-fire and the moon, striving to picture forth imaginary scenes, which, the next day, might flow out on the brightening page in many-hued description.

If the imaginative faculty refused to act at such an hour, it might well be deemed a hopeless case. Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly, -- making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility, -- is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment; the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre-table, sustaining a workbasket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the book-case; the picture on the wall; -- all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse; -- whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. Ghosts might enter here, without affrighting us. It would be too much in keeping with the scene to excite surprise, were we to look about us and discover a form, beloved, but gone hence, now sitting quietly in a streak of this magic moonshine, with an aspect that would make us doubt whether it had returned from afar, or had never once stirred from our fireside.

The somewhat dim coal-fire has an essential influence in producing the effect which I would describe. It throws its unobtrusive tinge throughout the room, with a faint reddishness upon the walls and ceiling, and a reflected gleam from the polish of the furniture. This warmer light mingles itself with the cold spirituality of the moonbeams, and communicates, as it were, a heart and sensibilities of human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up. It converts them from snow-images into men and women. Glancing at the looking-glass, we behold -- deep within its haunted verge -- the smouldering glow of the half-extinguished anthracite, the white moonbeams on the floor, and a repetition of all the gleam and shadow of the picture, with one remove farther from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative. Then, at such an hour, and with this scene before him, if a man, sitting all alone, cannot dream strange things, and make them look like truth, he need never try to write romances.

But, for myself, during the whole of my Custom-House experience, moonlight and sunshine, and the glow of firelight, were just alike in my regard; and neither of them was of one whit more avail than the twinkle of a tallow-candle. An entire class of susceptibilities, and a gift connected with them, -- of no great richness or value, but the best I had, -- was gone from me.

A TUFT OF GREEN MOSS ON A CRUMBLING WALL

-James Stephens-

Think of all that has happened here on this earth, all the blood hot and strong for living, pleasuring, that has soaked back into it. For grieving and suffering too, of course, but still getting something out of it for all that, getting a lot out of it, because after all you don't have to continue to bear what you believe is suffering; you can always choose to stop that, put an end to that. And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that's shame. But you can't be alive forever and you always wear out life long before you have exhausted the possibilities of living, and all that must be somewhere, all that could have been invented and created just to be thrown away. And the earth is shallow, there is not a great deal of it before you come to the rock. And the earth don't want to just keep things, hoard them, it wants to use them. Look at the seed, the acorn, at what happens to even the carrion when you try to bury it: it refuses to, seethes and struggles too until it reaches light and air again, hunting the sun still.

-William Faulkner
Go Down Moses

Hester Prynne emerges from the darkness of the Puritan prison into the intense light of a New England summer morning; into the throng of her peers standing on a wagon track on the edge of an intractable wilderness, bearing a newness of spirit, not only in the blinking infant on her arm, but also in the incredible radiance of her whole person: her brilliant apparel, her rich complexion, her glossy heavy tresses of black hair, her haughty smile -- all creating an air of natural distinction and fortitude, but most strikingly in the fantastic spirit which she has seen fit to embroider and wear the talisman of her past actions apart from the rest of the world: The scarlet A. She stands before the dark weather-stained edifice of the Puritan prison, bright against its gloom; the rose before this "black flower" of civilization. Hester comes forth from her captivity seemingly nourished by the same wild spirit as the past saint of humanity's indwelling grace -- Anne Hutchinson. But once amid the gathering of Puritans who have come to see and marvel at this twist of character, this kink in the tenuous thread that seeks to bind them with divinity, Hester is gradually overwhelmed with a shame which all but eradicates her ties with her own genius. In the light the community stares unrelentingly at Hester, seeing not an individual but an individual act of impiety against their race and god. Says one of the somber wives of the crowd, "This woman has brought shame on us and ought to die." And thus Hester's humanity is reduced to a badge of sin. Upon the scaffold everything that was Hester becomes buried by the terrible shame leveled upon her from every direction. There is no one in the community left to whom she can take her humanity to; with whom she can share the convictions wrapped up in the golden threads and scarlet fret work invested on the letter. Alone, Hester becomes captive to this shame, stripped of all else. All that is real is the Puritan definition of the A: the badge of impurity, the shame of the race.

"These were her realities, -- all else had vanished!"

The Puritan's vision of humanity is that it is essentially corrupt. Their first public efforts in the "New World" are directed towards erecting a prison and establishing a graveyard. The prison represents a belief in the inherent degeneracy that man brings with him into the world with his fleshly manifestation. The graveyard marks the ultimacy of earthly existence. Tying these two offices of the community together is the scaffold where the individual is informed by a shame which he will carry beyond any prison, to his grave. The Puritan ideology provides no belief in the presence of an inner god, but insists on a god and a salvation who is made known by proper actions and active penance for sin. Life is a "slippery ground," to quote the famous Puritan, Jonathan Edwards,

"He that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down."

Body and mind become commodity in such a religion: more pendants that pull the spirit into alienation. In no way can the individual buoy himself up alone unless it is by the grace of god whose helping hands are not so helpful to the more weighty. In the eyes of the Puritans, Hester, who, emerging from the prison, wears her A as if it stands for arrogance or aristocracy, is in defiance of all their codes concerning the innate depravity of the individual. This heretic must be brought to suffer shame.

Off the scaffold and into the headlands of the wilderness, Hester Prynne's vital character outwardly vanishes. The vitality of Hester and her outward beauty retreat under the weighty interposition of the community. The belief in her own inner strength is completely bound within her as she takes Chillingworth's oath to remain in isolation from the only other being capable of offering her solace and support -- Arthur Dimmsdale. Thus alone, Hester lives in a metaphysical wilderness of morality; outwardly accepting shame for her actions and inwardly holding on to convictions of the great righteousness of them. The world had created a design for Hester which she could assume outwardly, but which she could never accept in her heart; However the duality of actions and sentiments leads her into a realm without direction or light.

Pearl is able to keep alive the essence of Hester's forsaken self by being the vicarious recipient of her beauty and life giving spirit. While Hester is clearly in the line of prophets of Anne Hutchinson from whose path the beautiful rose springs up reminding the poor down-trodden spirits of the world of the beauty here among them, Pearl is an off-spring of this dormant bush which adorns its own life with radiance and beauty and even reminds the bush of the life and productivity that it inwardly possesses. In being such a reminder to Hester, she is a painful thorn to Hester who has outwardly disowned the rose by assuming the Puritan penance. Although Hester inwardly tries to chain Pearl by teaching her the Puritan doctrines in attempt to bring her to the light of their teachings, she outwardly surrounds Pearl in a realm which fosters beauty and the imaginative spirit of a child. Pearl more than a little resembles Hester emerging from the prison dressed in such splendid garments which clothe the wild and creative spirit of her character. Hester is delighted by the "vitality of spirits" which Pearl exhibits; but at the same time this vitality which also attaches burrs to her letter and assails it with flowers painfully reminds her of her own inner spirit forsaken beneath the scarlet A. Pearl is ever as defiant as Hester had been in the opening scene in front of the prison. Pearl sets the "sombre little urchins" playing in the streets to flight with her wild rantings, and at the governor's house she teases the leaders of the community with her precociousness. But ever present beneath this is a wild serene beauty which finds its kindred in the wilderness among the animals of the forest and the blustery brightness of the ocean's shore. Pearl is not of the same god as the Puritan's worship. It would have been as much a crime against her own nature as Hester's acceptance of shame is against hers had Pearl answered Mister Wilson's question to her concerning her ontology with the Westminster Catechism. Pearl is of the silk of the wild rose. She is untouched by suffering out of shame and therefore is alienated from everyone in the community who all actively accept shame in their lives, particularly Hester, Chillingworth and Dimmsdale. Pearl is not capable of sympathy for Hester because her suffering lies in her living a life that condones the Puritan ethic and denies her heart. Hester herself wants for Pearl,

"what some people want throughout life -- a grief that should deeply touch her, and thus humanize and make her capable of sympathy."

Hester thinks that there is something wrong with the child that she should lack sympathy in her life, but it is Hester, missing a vital integration in her own life who keeps Pearl out of the human realm.

The outward side of Hester is so active in performing penance for the sin that from this side of her alone one could call her neo-Puritanic. Her good words take her to such extremes that even the harshest of the community begin to look upon Hester with a touch of pity, if not respect, over the years. She carries this extroverted energy to such extremes that she makes clothes for the ingratiate poor and attends to the superfluities of the wealthy instigators of her sentence. Inwardly, apart from these peaks of outward penance, Hester attains the deepest abysses of thought imaginable. Without the constrictions on her mind which fetter her actions, Hester is able to exist in a wilderness of thought far from her frontiers of her time.

"The world's law was nolaw for her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before. Men of the sword had overthrown nobles and kings. Men bolder than these had overthrown and rearranged -- not actually, but within the sphere of theory, which was their most real abode -- the whole system of ancient prejudice, wherewith was linked much of ancient principle. Hester Prynne imbibed this spirit. She assumed a freedom of speculation, then uncommon on the other side of the Atlantic, but which our forefathers, had they known of it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter. In her lonesome cottage, by the seashore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been so much seen knocking at her door."

Hester's thoughts are guided by a vision, and certainly made the sadder for it, of the task before her to unite humanity on the grounds which she has experienced and knows to be true. It involves the complete revision of society and operates on the assumption that theirs is a goodness, transcending all social standards, residing in all people; existing not in the powers of logic or analysis but in the heart. Living in a society, herself an active member of it, which stands for the nugatory nature of the human soul, Hester finds herself facing a despair that verges at times upon insanity.

"A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish. Thus Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clue in the dark labyrinth of her mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm."

Hester is unable to resolve anything in her mind alone. It is only when she sees the terrible vengeance that Chillingworth wrecks on Dimmsdale that she begins a course of action that works toward the integration of her own life and a crystallization of knowledge through experience of the sanctity of love.

Hester's relationships with Dimmsdale and Chillingworth are metaphoric, in one sense, for her whole life. She has the knowledge of the inner dynamics going on between all three of them, but yet she is unable to come to terms with it. She lives as if oblivious of Chillingworth and innocent of Dimmsdale, -- allowing Arthur nothing and foreswearing all communication with Chillingworth. The moment of release from the terrors of this duality comes for her in the forest with Dimmsdale. Here, uniting with the spirit that had led her into the realms of consciousness -- the place of freedom from the constrictions of the past and the dim future in the Puritan community, Hester is able to lose herself from all shame and integrate her beliefs into her outward life.

Dimmsdale comes to the visions of Hester as a sodden animal riding the surging waters of a flood comes to a dislodged piece of flotsam. Hester's years alone, spanning both the miserable guilt which Arthur had endured as well as the liberating knowledge which her belief entitled her to, prepared her for this moment on the brink of freedom. But Dimmsdale is overcome by the dizzying power of her visions and is swept away from any common ground with his past.

"The minister, on the other hand, had never gone through an experience calculated to lead him beyond the scope of the generally received laws; although, in a single instance, he had so fearfully transgressed one of the most sacred of them . . . As a man who had once sinned, but who had kept his conscience all alive and painfully sensitive by the fretting of an unhealed wound, he might have been supposed safer within the line of virtue, than if he had never sinned at all."

It is inconceivable that Dimmsdale, in accord with his puritan foundations could ever go beyond repentance to an actual embodiment of his ideals. Returning from the woods to the settlement, he is overcome by doubt -- mistrusting all that he has ever believed in. But he also doubts the reality of the meeting in the woods, wondering if indeed he had not sold himself to the blackman of the forest. With this incredible opening up of new horizons Arthur is able to write his discourse on a vision so new to the people of his congregation that they feel it sent directly from heaven.

The episode in the woods is an important pivotal point of Hester's life. Beside the Brook with Dimmsdale she resolves herself to the inner most beliefs that she had held onto, but added to them is a newness which she had never before encountered: the acceptance of the past. The emotional passage is at a peak when Pearl returns from the woods to where Hester and Arthur sit by the brook. In Pearl's most violently emotional moment of the book she rejects the changes that have come about . . . previously perceptive enough to detect the significance in her mother's life of Dimmsdale and Chillingworth without being informed by any outward signs obvious to the innocent, and from first consciousness being noticeably aware of the strangeness of the letter on her mother's breast which no normal child should think out of the ordinary, having known nothing else since birth, we can hardly accept Hester's explanation of Pearl's suddenly wild behavior as being caused by a mere change in Hester's outward appearance. Her distaste for Dimmsdale's kiss can not be justified by a child's natural dislike of emotion, for earlier SHE had kissed Dimmsdale when he came out in defense of his daughter and his own actions . . . Pearl is aware of all that has transpired, knowing full well of their plans to escape the world of shame without an outward display of their hearts. It is Pearl who always presses Dimmsdale to join them on the scaffold and who torments her mother with the vision of the rose forsaken. Perhaps these are Pearl's words:

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

(which might be said to apply to the best within you)

For Dimmsdale the repentance on the scaffold is all that he can bear. He dies a prophet to his people, perhaps not upholding the vision that Hester had sought for him, but in revealing himself to the world he breaks the barrier between himself and Pearl. At last Pearl experiences grief for the first time; but it is not because she has been insensitive to it, but because she had had nothing to empathize with so long as Hester and Dimmsdale had accepted the circumstances of their shame. As the tale of human suffering is brought to a close Pearl enters the realm of the world of grief, suffering and death.

For Hester the forest scene brings the realization that she will have to always bear the marks of her sin, which was not the act of adultery, but rather the concealment of her heart from the world which so desperately needed its light, resulting in the deaths of Dimmsdale and Chillingworth.

"So it ever is, whether thus typified or no, that an evil deed invests itself with the character of doom."

Delivering Pearl out of the world of the puritans, Hester returns to fulfill her mission as a prophet in the place which had defined her life, first by pride, then shame, and finally by a brief incorporating her original beliefs with the knowledge of the potential of humanity. Undaunted by the great agonies she endured throughout her life, Hester completes her final years amid the ever greying darkness of pre-dawn -- a light in the wilderness.

*The Wayside
for Nathaniel Hawthorne*

This dark outside was darker in, he knew,
Especially a night like this
When dew has seemed to smother sound
And all he heard in fleeing here
Was footsteps weary of the old complaint.
(He turned to watch his window lamp
Confront the ambiguities of dark
Remembering his Salem chamber
When merchants' laughter from the street
Would shake the stillness of the curtain.)
This path he wore along the hill
Was all he had to justify
The effort of appeasement:
The flames that light the world
He knew the shadows made
But now, like then, he sat alone
And no one cracked the door
To ask him back
Or tell him where he'd gone.
Chip Loughlin

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