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Nathaniel Hawthorne Weaves Dreams into Reality in
Much of His 19th Century Prose

Nathaniel Hawthorne, a master of American fiction, often utilizes dreams within the annals of his writings to penetrate, explore and express his perceptions of the complex moral and spiritual conflicts that plague mankind. His clever, yet crucial purpose for using dreams is to represent, through symbolism, the human divergence conflict manifested in the souls of man during the firm Christian precepts of the Era in which he lived. As a visionary in an extremely conservative Puritanical society, he carefully and successfully manages to depict humanity's propensity for sin and secrecy, and any resulting punishment or atonement by weaving dreams into his tales. The dreams he refers to in many of his writings are heavily symbolic due to his Christian foundation, and they imply that he views most dreams as a pigmentation of reality. Hawthorne's ability to express and subsequently bring to fruition the true state of man's sinful nature by paralleling dreams with reality represents not only his religious beliefs but also his true mastery of observation regarding the human soul.

An examination of Hawthorne's own narrative in his short story, *The Birthmark*, published in 1850 during the latter part of the period of Puritanism expands his observations of mankind with keen insight.

Truth often finds its way to the mind close-muffled in robes of sleep, and then speaks with uncompromising directness of matters in regard to which we practice an unconscious self-deception, during our waking moments. (par.15)

The prophetic statement was made by Hawthorne to open the reader's mind and perhaps inject an introspective glimpse of his perspective that dreams do indeed contain precursors or warnings of future conscious realities. He also contends that people often purposely disregard the contents of their dreams and do not face the realities that they are confronted with while in unconscious moments of slumber. Hawthorne's writings are marked by intrinsic depth and a sincere desire to crawl inside of the characters he has created. He accomplishes this objective by allowing them to dream. He makes his presence known by frequently commenting openly throughout his prose and interject a narrative of his assertions. Hawthorne historically has his characters confront reality following a dream, or he reveals that the whole ordeal that his characters have faced are, in fact, dreams. Hawthorne nudges the reader to conclude that dreams can sometimes solve conflicts that are many times categorically denied while one is awake. Hawthorne expresses the fact that dreams are possibly warnings and that often mankind does not heed them. His profound statement about dreams suggests that by paying attention to the sleeping imagination, a person might reconcile adverse moral behavior and establish more balance and clarity of reality while they are awake.

The Bible was a direct source of reference for Hawthorne. He grew up reading and studying religious concepts. In the Book of Job, Elihu's speech to Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar expresses Hawthorne's belief in God's "answer" to mankind's sinfulness.

For God speaks again and again, in dreams, in visions of the night when deep sleep falls on men as they lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that, and gives them wisdom and instruction, causing them to change their minds, and keeping them from pride, and warning them of the penalties of sin, and keeping them from falling into some trap. (Book of Job 33:14-

18)

Elihu's speech and other similar biblical scripture were part of Hawthorne's personal conceptual beliefs. His foundation consisted of these early Puritanical Christian precepts. These teachings reveal the significance as to the reason he believed dreams to be a reflection of the waking mind and subsequent approaching events. The Bible was considered the law among Puritanists and sacred biblical history is threaded with incidents of dream prophecy. The mystery that surrounds human existence and the need to trust God was imbedded in Hawthorne's own infrastructure at a profound level. Hawthorne believed that mankind simply did not have enough knowledge to explain why things happen the way they do, and that people do not so much need answers to life's problems, as they need God Himself. Hawthorne created angles in his writings by identifying sin and secrecy that were imbued in the ecclesiastical and hypocritical conventionalities of his day and paralleled this with biblical prophecy and references. Hawthorne was raised on the biblical teachings of Christ and he astutely perceived that doubt and temptation marred moral instincts in mankind. It is apparent that Hawthorne believed that God, through a person's spiritual self, approaches them while they are asleep to impress upon them His instructions. Hawthorne's tendency to project his ideals into his characters by having them dream encourages his readers to recognize God's laws.

Julian Hawthorne, son of Nathaniel, recognized and documented his father's utilization of dreams by writing volumes of notes pertaining to many of his short stories. In Julian Hawthorne's, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*, Volume I, Chapter 9--Notes for Stories and Essays, Julian takes note of the specific injection of dreams in his father's tales.

To write a dream which shall resemble the real course of a dream, with all its inconsistency, its strange transformations, which are all taken as a matter of course; its eccentricities and aimlessness, --with nevertheless a leading idea running through the whole. Up to this old age of the world, no such thing has ever been written. (Par. 4)

Hawthorne lived in an era of Christian premise which disallowed him to verbally voice observations and subsequent opinions of his perceptions regarding man's sinful and secret nature. The Puritanistic attitudes were firmly rooted in the communities of his day. These attitudes were regarded with a stern morality, that anything pleasurable or luxuriously indulgent was sinful. He cleverly wove dreams into his writing to expose, without compromising his Christian stature, that hypocrisy and sin was rampant in the hostile Puritan environment. It is important to note that Hawthorne could not openly voice his observations of mankind for fear of persecution. The dreams he wove into his stories were a shrewd outlet for his convictions. Hawthorne was at the forefront of a pioneering effort to couple biblical laws with creatively written stories as an art form. It is historically known that Hawthorne is one of the first major American writers of fiction to focus on the interior lives of his characters and express his biblical views through what was considered the deeper psychology of art. His son, Julian, clearly recognizes this logic and specifically details the fact that his father uses dreams as a way of revealing these concepts.

In many of Hawthorne's chronicles it is apparent that he significantly believes that dreams are a window into a person's soul. His writings reveal many major truths that people do not openly admit; their proclivity to give in to evil through secrecy and denial and ignore God laws in the process. His personal beliefs were that there was an existence of an active evil, most likely the devil, and that people were predestined to be constrained by him. Throughout much of his prose, Hawthorne's dreams can be considered a pious warning for his characters to recognize what propels them to commit sin in their waking moments or perhaps advise them of impending evil and sin. It is also through this use of dreams, that Hawthorne gently coerces his readers to explore their own inner souls and search for truths within the confounds of their dreams. He recurrently allows

the reader to make a personal decision as to the purpose for the story. This can be compared to how one makes a personal decision to follow God's Holy laws. Hawthorne's divine implications are paramount in exposing the conflicts that mankind encounters when choosing between good and evil. Through the expression of dreams, he masterfully generates reverent introspection and opens the window into the human soul. It is known that dreams provide a person with a unique view of themselves that often comes from a deeper and wiser part of their psyche. It can be concluded that a person should seek to counterbalance their dreams with conscious waking perceptions. This is akin to Hawthorne's style of writing and his unique way of presenting human truths. It is perhaps best to agree with the French writer, Michel de Montaigne that, "Dreams are the true interpreters of our inclinations..."